The Quest for the Holy: The Religious Perspective of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the religious content and context of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. There has long been a heated critical debate about Malory's interest in religion, and this thesis demonstrates that *Le Morte Darthur* engages frequently and seriously with religion in general and with a specific manifestation of religion in particular: that is, fifteenth-century lay chivalric Christianity.

This thesis is divided into an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a historical and critical context for the discussion that follows. The first chapter explains the text's engagement with fifteenth-century lay chivalric Christianity in particular, and demonstrates that *Le Morte Darthur* gets more religious as it proceeds. Chapter 2 explores the role of holiness in the character development of Lancelot and Galahad, and argues that the father and son represent two alternative models of holiness. The third chapter demonstrates the thematic importance of penance throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, with particular attention paid to Guinevere, Lancelot, Arthur, and Gawain. The fourth chapter focuses on the Grail Quest, and demonstrates that Malory chose to use a symbolic and religious source for his retelling of the Grail story, despite having other options. Chapter 5 uses sections of *Le Morte Darthur* with no known source to argue that Malory's religious preoccupation is his own, and not inadvertently imported from his sources. The conclusion makes a case for the significance of the study.

"The Quest for the Holy: The Religious Perspective of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" offers a critical analysis of one of late medieval literature's central text, addressing deeply concerns that have more frequently been merely alluded to. More

broadly, it joins critical discussions about conflicting loyalties, individualism and collectivism, ideology, politics, theology, and political theology.

thesis, and without her encouragement and support I would never have even begun. Even more importantly, she gave me enormous emotional support through frustrations and triumphs, late nights and early mornings. To her, and to our daughters Guinevere and Maggie, this thesis is dedicated.

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List of Abbreviations

I use the following abbreviations for in-text citations of editions of Malory:

C – Malory, Thomas. *Caxton's Malory: Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. James W. Spisak and
       William Matthews. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983.

F – Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. P.J.C. Field. Cambridge: Brewer, 2013.

V – Malory, Thomas. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. 3rd ed. 3 vols. Eds. Eugène
       Vinaver, and P J. C. Field. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

I also use the following abbreviations for in-text citations:

aMA – Alliterative *Morte Arthure* as found in *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition.* Ed.
       Mary Hamel. Garland Medieval Texts, 9. Garland, 1984.

sMA – Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* as found in *Le Morte Arthur: A Critical Edition.* Ed. P. F.
       Hissiger. Mouton, 1974.

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When religious and political duties conflict, what must the faithful and loyal citizen do? Although *Le Morte Darthur* struggles and vacillates on the subject, Sir Thomas Malory ultimately sees the religious or spiritual duties of piety as incompatible with the social or political requirements of either subjects or rulers. Malory concludes that it is impossible to be both a good secular king or knight and a faithful subject of God.

Critical Perspectives on *Le Morte Darthur*

From the perspective of literary history, *Le Morte Darthur* has become the central text of Arthurian literature. One of very few medieval texts still widely read by non-specialists, it is a stated or unstated major source for virtually all Arthurian literature written in English since, and virtually all interpretations of Arthurian literature written before it are now mediated through it. So, for example, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is an adaptation of *Le Morte Darthur*. The Lerner and Lowe musical *Camelot* and its film version are both adapted from T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, itself an

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1   All biblical quotations from the Douay-Rheims translation.

adaptation of *Le Morte Darthur*. Even Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which in its plot bears little similarity to *Le Morte Darthur*, is structured like *Le Morte Darthur* in episodes attached to the adventures of particular knights; indeed, it conspicuously avoids any plot overlap with *Le Morte Darthur*. *Le Morte Darthur's* influence on *The Faerie Queene* is clear in its absence.

Le Morte Darthur was written—or at least completed—while its author was by his own account "a knyght presoner" (F 144.3; V 1: 180.22),[2] and is part translation of French sources like the *La Queste del Saint Graal* (circa 1230), part abridgement of English sources like the alliterative *Morte Arthur* (circa 1400), part original. It represents Malory's attempt to collect the various strands of Arthurian narrative with which he was familiar, in English and in French, in poetry and in prose, in chronicle and in romance. So in *Le Morte Darthur* we find sections like "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius," a politically triumphalist section adapted primarily from a fourteenth-century English alliterative poem, and "Sir Tristram de Lyones," which is adapted and translated primarily from a thirteenth-century French prose romance, not to mention "Sir Gareth of Orkney" which has no known source. These sources are quite different in character and intention, and those differences find their way into *Le Morte Darthur*. An abiding question, then, is

2   Eugene Vinaver's *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (V) has been the standard academic edition of Malory since its publication. I have no doubt that Peter Field's excellent new edition of *Le Morte Darthur* (F) will be the standard academic edition in the future, and I use it as my primary source for Malory, but I provide references to where the same passages is found in V. Where there is a disagreement between the editions, I have followed Field, and the V citation is provided as a reference.

how successful Malory was at synthesizing his various sources into a coherent whole—or indeed whether there is in *Le Morte Darthur* any attempt at such a synthesis of sources at all.

There are any number of ways to theorize the relationship between texts. The most distinctively medieval way is the *quadrifaria*. Quadrifaria refers to the four modes of medieval allegory, used especially in biblical exegesis of the Hebrew scriptures: 1) literal or historical, 2) typological, 3) tropological, and 4) anagogical. The literal meaning of a text is mostly self-evident in this system. The typological is the degree to which a text alludes to or allegorically represents a biblical text. In the context of biblical exegesis typological reading is especially used when passages from the Hebrew scriptures represent or prefigure events in the life of Christ. The tropological meaning of a text is the text's moral allegory, and the anagogical is the text's allegorical representation of mystical spirituality. In the context of dialogism the typological sense is the most clearly relevant. In a typological reading the various texts exist alongside each other, and each informs the others. So, for example, Noah's ark, Moses' basket, and Jesus' manger are all figures of each other, so that the significance of each image is deeper and clearer in the light of the others. So, using the quadrifaria as a lens for textual analysis necessitates both reading the text on its own grounds and at the same time reading it in the light of related texts.

The quadrifaria is a medieval approach to textual interaction. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century theoretical approaches to textual interaction include for example Harold Bloom's Freudian-based ideas of *influence*, wherein new poets are driven to both

imitate and metaphorically to kill their predecessors[3]; T. S. Eliot's idea of a *tradition* within which authors write;[4] Gerard Genette's metaphor of the 1981*palimpsest*, the never-fully-erased residue of older texts that remain in the new;[5] Linda Hutcheon's biological metaphor of *adaptation*;[6] and Hans Robert Jauss's ideas of the reception being mediated by the cultural milieu of the reader,[7] to take only a few examples. While each of these theoretical approaches has its merit, and each illuminates certain perspectives the others overlook, two of the most compelling and comprehensive theories are related: Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of *dialogism*,[8] and Julia Kristeva's *intertextuality*.[9] Both of these theoretical approaches offer a way of describing how a text like *Le Morte Darthur* may interact with other texts without being bound to demonstrating a direct line of influence which may not be there. They also both also provide a way of talking and thinking about the interaction between the sections of *Le Morte Darthur* that neither necessitates an absolute uniformity of vision nor implies complete disjuncture. Kristeva is Bakhtin's direct intellectual descendant, producing the first translation of Bakhtin into French, and my engagement with dialogism also goes a long way to accounting for intertextuality.

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3   See Bloom (1973).

4   See Eliot (1921; 1967).

5   See Genette (1997).

6   See Hutcheon (2006).

7   See Jauss (1982).

8   See Baktin (1981).

9   In her later writing Kristeva substitutes *transposition* for *intertextuality*, because *intertextuality* "has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources'" (Kristeva [1984] 60).

For Bakhtin literature is fundamentally and crucially social and communicative, which means that it always anticipates a response. In a monological text—Bakhtin's example is the epic—there is only one voice speaking and that voice asserts its authority to attempt to control the ideological perspective and its response. In a dialogical text the author shares space with others. In the narrowest sense this means that an author like Dostoyevsky (to use the same case as Bakhtin does) allows his characters to have ideas of their own and to articulate them explicitly as well as implicitly. The author does not share an ideological perspective with the characters, but the ideological perspective of the characters is allowed to assert itself on equal footing with that of the author. In a dialogical novel no world view unifies or is superior to, or has more authority than the others.

Bakhtin's conception of dialogism is both broader and narrower than is intertextuality. While Kristeva, in her use of the term intertextuality, is defining "text" very broadly—anything content-bearing can be a "text," including images, faces, etc.—intertextuality still centres on texts. Bakhtin is not focusing on texts; he is focusing on language. Bakhtin's dialogism is deeply tied to intent, while Kristeva moves away from criticism of authorial intention. For Bakhtin what makes language inherently dialogical is that when we use language we fill someone else's words with our own intention. Intention, then, can never be dismissed or ignored in a Bakhtinian framework. Without authorial intention there is no dialogism. But on the other hand, for Bakhtin, intention is far from the only thing that determines meaning. Dialogism means that other factors and other intentions also come into play. And for Bakhtin the best, most interesting, most

dialogical pieces of literature are those in which the author intentionally allows space for other intentions and for other readings.

Bakhtin's emphasis is philosophical, linguistic, and sociological in his discussion of dialogism. In her discussion of intertextuality Kristeva adds a psychological component to Bakhtin's ideas. This is important for an understanding of what Kristeva brings to, and attempts to remove from, Bakhtin's dialogism. For Bakhtin, the multiplicity of meanings exists in language and in society. For Kristeva, the focus shifts toward the mind of the reader. In that sense, while intention is crucial for Bakhtin it is largely irrelevant for Kristeva. At the same time, Kristeva's intertextuality externalizes and objectifies subjectivity by focusing on a text. The reader responds ambivalently to a text because the ambivalence is present in the text itself. Catherine Batt argues that Malory is interested in creating an intertextual relationship between the various literary traditions he is drawing on.[10] Both Hodges and Batt contend that Malory has no real investment in cohesion, and an intertextual or dialogical reading of *Le Morte Darthur* would suggest not only that the text coheres despite its inconsistencies, but also that its divisions are even more profound than is usually acknowledged. While I would argue for more cohesion than Hodges and Batt see in *Le Morte Darthur*, I agree with them that dialogism and intertextuality both help us to approach and interpret the text.

10 See Batt (2002), xvii-xix.

A Tale of Two Editors: Caxton and Vinaver

The idea of *Le Morte Darthur* as a coherent whole arguably originates with Malory's first editor William Caxton, who also read and edited *Le Morte Darthur* as a spiritually-oriented book. In the prologue to his edition, which was the source text for all editions and discussions of Malory until the early twentieth century, Caxton writes that in *Le Morte Darthur* readers shall find:

> ioyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble and renomed actes of humanyte, gentylness, and chyualryes. For herein may be seen noble chyualrye, curtosye, humanyte, frendlynesse, hardynesse, loue, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne. (Caxton [1485; 1983] 3)

He advises readers to "Doo after the good and leue the euyl ... [because] al is wryton for our doctryne" (Caxton [1485; 1983] 3). Caxton does not present *Le Morte Darthur* as an uninterrupted parade of virtue; it would be a dull text if it were. He prepares readers to encounter cowardice, murder, hate, and sin as well as many virtues. But Caxton contextualizes the entire narrative within a moral landscape. Caxton's *Le Morte Darthur* is essentially didactic. The good is a positive example to readers, and the evil is a negative one. Caxton applies Romans 15:4 "For what things soever were written, were written for our learning" to Malory, simultaneously sanctifying literature and also grounding Scripture in a literary context. From an intertextual perspective we can say that Caxton's introduction is an intertext that both defines and is defined by Malory's text. Caxton's introduction also makes it clear that *Le Morte Darthur* has an intertextual relationship with an entire tradition of moralistic texts up to the fifteenth century.

Despite Caxton's framing, there is no intrinsic reason why questions of moral right and wrong should be religious questions at all. Certainly Eugène Vinaver, editor of the standard academic edition of Malory and foremost Malory scholar for most of the twentieth century, concludes that Malory's chivalry was an ethical system but not a religious one.[11] But Caxton's preface takes it for granted that morality is fundamentally Christian, and presents the text that follows as both moral and moralistic. So Caxton's purpose is that *Le Morte Darthur* educates English readers in how to be chivalrous, gentle, friendly, and good. And this moral purpose is also doctrinal. Caxton wants the book to help lead its readers into heaven:

> for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but t'exersyse and folowe vertu, by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renomme in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and transytorye lyf to come unto everlastyng blysse in heven; the whyche He graunte us that reygneth in heven, the Blessyd Trynyte. Amen.
>
> (Caxton [1485; 1983] 3)

In his use of "we" in this passage quoted above, Caxton locates himself as one of those who is being taught by the text, not as the teacher. The text warns him also not to fall into vice. Caxton begs the question of Malory's moral and doctrinal purpose. He presents Malory as having the same didactic, moral, and doctrinal purpose that Caxton himself has: of educating readers in virtue, thereby ensuring their place in heaven. By positioning

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11 See the introduction to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, in which Vinaver makes this argument repeatedly (Vinaver [1990] pg. xxvii-xxviii, xxxii).

himself as a naive reader, Caxton credits his interpretation as unequivocal authorial intention.

Vinaver already had a new Caxton-based edition of *Le Morte Darthur* underway, commissioned by the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, when Walter Oakeshott discovered and identified the Winchester manuscript in Winchester library in 1934.[12] Oakeshott ceded the privilege of editing an edition based on this newfound source to Vinaver, who had to begin his work anew. One of Vinaver's explicit goals in his new edition based on the evidence of the Winchester manuscript was to present Malory without Caxton—or at least to counteract some of Caxton's editorial influence. The prospect had never before been possible. So in Vinaver's account the eight separate tales of Malory "fell into Caxton's hands" and he united them "as a matter of practical expediency," "editorial economy," and "by force of circumstance" (Vinaver xxxviii). Vinaver concludes that "It was Caxton's idea, not Malory's, to publish these works under one general title" (Vinaver xxxix), a title that "was inappropriate as a general description[, as] Caxton knew full well" (Vinaver xxxix). The presentation of Malory's volumes as a single book is "subterfuge" (Vinaver xl) and the editors who have used the title *Le Morte Darthur* are those who "have allowed themselves to be misled" (Vinaver xl). The result is a text that loses "diversity and richness of tone, expressive of the author's real design" (Vinaver xli). Vinaver's language here makes it clear that he is critical of Caxton's editorial vision, to say the least.

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[12]   For Vinaver's account of the finding of the manuscript and his reaction to it, see Vinaver Commentary ([1990] vii-viii). For Oakeshott's account see Oakeshott (1963).

Vinaver seeks to correct Caxton's misrepresentation of Malory, and understands Malory to be interested primarily in chivalry as a secular, martial ideal. When Malory addresses religious themes most directly in the Grail Quest, Vinaver argues that the religious concerns belong to Malory's source, and that Malory himself secularizes the tale because he is indifferent to religion. In his commentary in *The Works*, Vinaver observes that although "Malory has become associated in our minds with such qualities as 'humanity' and 'gentleness'" (Vinaver xxvii), the association is misguided—Vinaver refers to it as a "confusion" (Vinaver xxvii)—which has led to misinterpretation of Malory and of his themes. Readers who come to the text with a preformed expectation of finding gentleness and humanity find what they are looking for and fail to read in Malory what is really there: that is, an interest in the practical politics of knighthood and warfare.

For Vinaver the assumption of unity in the text and the assumption of piety in the text are linked, and he denies both. In the Grail section Vinaver perceives Malory as downplaying the religious in favour of worldly glory. Vinaver judges Malory's Lancelot to be "far less conscious of his ultimate failure to achieve the quest than of his relative success in it" (Vinaver 1537). In contrast to his source, which "was a treatise on grace, with hardly a page or a line not intended for doctrinal exposition" (Vinaver 1539), Malory seems to Vinaver to be indifferent to grace and to doctrine in general. The contrast with Malory's source is striking to Vinaver, and in his view reveals Malory's real interests.

Recent Critics on Malory's Religion

Critical debates over Malory's religion are still very much alive. Among more recent scholars, K. S. Whetter has argued, in the tradition of Vinaver, that Malory's action

upon his source is to secularize it. He claims that "Malory's juxtaposition of Christian and secular values continually valorizes rather than condemns earthly chivalry" (Whetter [2013], 159). Fiona Tolhurst (2013), Sandra Ihle (1983), and Jill Mann (1996), all argue, to a greater or lesser degree, that Malory's attitude toward religion was ambivalent. Most argue that in *Le Morte Darthur* Malory is trying to find some middle ground between the value he places on earthly chivalry and some kind of recognition of holiness. Tolhurst calls this "secularized salvation [which] reflects both his strong interest in earthly life and his concern that knights of the world achieve salvation" (Tolhurst [2013] 132). Malory is by no means indifferent to salvation, but he finds it within a secular context. Ihle similarly argues in her book *Malory's Grail Quest* that Malory "locates religious standards within the requirements of chivalry, so that adherence to the chivalric code … becomes synonymous with true Christianity" (Ihle [1983] 123). In her contribution to *A Companion to Malory*, Mann emphasizes how the holiness of the Grail quest comes at the expense of the wholeness of the community.

Taking the position that Malory is straightforwardly religious in his orientation, Megan Arkenberg (2014) argues in her article "A Mayde, and Last of Youre Blood," that Malory is indeed making a theological point in "The Sankgreal," connecting piety to barrenness by way of Galahad's lack of sexuality. In the commentary to his new edition of Malory (2013), Field repudiates Vinaver's claims about Malory's secularism. Vinaver makes much of the phrase 'erthly worship,' which is found in Malory but not in the source manuscript of the *Queste* that Vinaver was familiar with. But Field shows that an equivalent French phrase is actually in some manuscripts, and was therefore likely what Malory found in his source (Field 2.549). Critics like Dhira Mahoney and Alfred Kraemer

who most emphatically argue that Malory's religious dimensions are significant have tended to focus on the Grail Quest—implicitly accepting Vinaver's argument for the compartmentalization of the sections of *Le Morte Darthur*.[13] Religion matters to Malory in the Grail Quest, but not elsewhere. Kenneth Hodges (2005) argues that the religion of *Le Morte Darthur* is contained to the Sankgreal, and his interest is more focused on the political consequences of that religion. [14]

There has never been a book-length study of the religious themes of *Le Morte Darthur* as a unified whole, but there have been many studies focusing on religious themes of specific passages of Malory—especially the Grail quest and the healing of Sir Urry. Recent examples include Kraemer's book, which focuses exclusively on the Grail quest. Armstrong has recently argued that in the Grail episode Malory "retains the spiritual focus and orientation of his source" (Armstrong [2013] 112). While the religious themes are not her main focus, Batt (2002) argues that Malory's spiritual perspective is less explicit but no less sincere than those of his sources in the Grail quest. Blanton (2010) has argued for the sincerity of Guinevere's conversion at the end of her life. Clark (2014) has emphasized the prayerful content of some of Malory's colophons. Holbrook (2013) analyses the Trinitarian theology of Lancelot's prayer in the healing of Urry, and

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13 Mahoney's focus for "The Truest and Holiest Tale: Malory's Transformation of *La Queste Del Saint Graal*" is, as is evident by the title, entirely on the Grail quest. Likewise Kraemer's *Malory's Grail Seekers and Fifteenth-century English Hagiography*, which treats the Grail quest as stand-alone text.

14 Hodges's central argument in *Forging Chivalric Communities* (2015) is that Malory presents conflicting versions of chivalry without attempting to reconcile them. A sacred chivalry is, by Hodges's account, only one of several versions of chivalry on offer in the text.

Olsen (2013) argues for the sincerity of Lancelot's penance. All of these scholars have recently weighed in on the debate for Malory's religious emphasis, but all have focused their attention on isolated passages of *Le Morte Darthur*.

The other way that Malory's religious themes have been often explored has been in collections of essays like the valuable volume edited by D. Thomas Hanks Jr. and Janet Jesmok, *Malory and Christianity* (2013), which by design features essays making both complementary and contradictory arguments. For example, Hanks's own offering to the collection argues that Malory's language suggests a sincere faith. Hanks rests much of his argument upon Malory's colophons, and my section on the colophons in chapter 5 is in many respects a development from Hanks. In contrast to Hanks, and also in *Malory and Christianity*, K. S. Whetter's essay takes the opposite position and argues that *Le Morte Darthur's* perspective is secular at its core. Karen Cherewatuk's and Janet Jesmok's essays both focus on religious rituals in Malory, but Cherewatuk draws on the evidence of funeral rituals to argue for an underlying religious worldview, while Jesmok uses the religious rituals in the final book of *Le Morte Darthur* as evidence that "Malory's religion is usually grounded in *this* life, not the next" (Jesmok [2013] 92). In this thesis, I undertake to reexamine Malory's religious themes throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, and I reach the conclusion that in *Le Morte Darthur* religious devotion and political loyalty are incompatible.

Background Check: The Religious Context of *Le Morte Darthur*

The religious perspective of *Le Morte Darthur* does not arise in a vacuum, but is part of a conception of secular piety that develops through the later Middle Ages. Malory is writing in the first or second generations after a profound sea change in the literary-religious climate in England. Following centuries of popular lay vernacular theological writing, instigated by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the writings of John Wycliffe and the increasingly radical and heretical Lollard movement led to a reactionary assertion of control by clerical leaders, most fully realized in the 1409 *Constitutions* of Arundel. Nicholas Watson (1995) argues persuasively that the *Constitutions* created a situation in which "all but the most pragmatic religious writing would come to be seen, by the early fifteenth century, as dangerous: a perception that led inexorably to a by and large successful attempt to inhibit the further composition of most kinds of vernacular theology" (Watson 825). Arundel's *Constitutions* "forbid the study not simply of Wycliffe's books but of all recent texts that have not been approved unanimously by a panel of twelve theologians" (Watson 827). In other words, Arundel's *Constitutions* produce a literary rupture-point. Pre-Wycliffe vernacular theology was acceptable in a way that post-Wycliffe vernacular theology was not, regardless of its orthodoxy. We should therefore not be surprised if we must read between the lines to find religious content in a fifteenth-century text.[15]

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15   Hicks ([1928] 40) and Lustig ([2014] 70) both consider Malory to have Lollard sympathies.

Tell the Truth: Confession in the Later Middle Ages

While Arundel's *Constitutions* deny theological agency to lay Christians, the

earlier church institution of confession asserted it. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215

made yearly confession mandatory for all Christians, which created a popular need for

guidance in confessional practice. This need was partially met—and partially expressed—

in vernacular literature of the Middle Ages. For example, the Wife of Bath's prologue is

arguably a secular confession,[16] and through it Chaucer demonstrates both how the

confessional subject existed in the fourteenth century, but more importantly that "by the

fourteenth century, the discourse of confession has become the privileged language of the

subject" (Root 92).

Jerry Root sees Peter Abelard's articulation of the doctrine of confession as both

emblematic and formative of the later doctrine of confession and the associated emphasis

on self-knowledge and intention that confession would later require.[17] Abelard draws a

sharp distinction between "animi uicium" and "peccatum" (Abelard [1971] 4), the first

being the condition or inclination toward the second which is its execution. In his own

words, "Vitium … est quo ad peccandum proni efficimur" ("Vice … is that by which we

are made prone to sinning" Abelard [1971] 4). The importance of this assertion here is

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16 See Root (1997) 103-118. Root argues at length that the Wife of Bath uses the discourse of confession
    to authorize her to speak about her own experience in a secular context.

17 Abelard's *Ethics* is subtitled *Scito te ipsum*, or "know yourself" a clear echo of the Delphic motto γνῶθι
    σεαυτόν.

that sin is an act of will, not an inner weakness. It is, in Abelard's terms, consent to the mental vice.

The later confessional manuals, such as the fourteenth-century *Book of Vices and Virtues* (which is a translation of the thirteenth-century *Somme le Roi*), reproduce the emphasis Abelard had placed on intention by organizing sin in terms of the seven deadly sins, which are the source of all other sins in that they are the mental or internal states from which action—even action of the mind—comes. So we have here a formulation of the self—of the subject—in which the interior condition of strength or weakness, of virtue or vice, is the precondition within which the will and the reason act either to consent to vice and therefore to sin or else to resist vice and therefore to remain sinless. The subject then must confess not only the deeds but the nature and degree of consent to vice which actions entailed. This demands self-knowledge of a particular kind. One must have some kind of sense of the virtuousness or viciousness of one's nature, and not all natures are the same. All human beings are inclined toward sin, but not all are inclined equally toward the same sins in the same degrees; Abelard draws an analogy with a lame man whose lameness exists even when he is not limping. The person's inherent nature inclines him or her toward certain sins, even when he or she is not sinning.

The late medieval discourse of confession is an exercise of self-examination and self-presentation for the purpose of achieving salvation. Confession after 1215 was understood to be a sacrament. It is simultaneously the means by which the sinner achieves salvation and the means by which God enacts that salvation. The discipline of confession became ubiquitous—a universally familiar and common experience of self-

representation. That is why Chaucer, writing in the fourteenth century, can present the Wife of Bath's prologue in confessional terms. The Wife of Bath presents an account of herself that expresses intention in a way that makes sense after Abelard, and that in its approach and structure recalls what we should expect of confession. Although she is speaking to a secular audience and in a secular context, and although she presents much of her language in terms of self-defence and explanation rather than contrition, she still structures her self-representation after the model of manuals of confession, particularly on the topic of lust. Root stresses that the Wife of Bath's assertion of the authority of her own experience, while still subversive, is less unexpected than modern readers of Chaucer might assume (Root 103-104). Confession as a practice of self-representation depends upon the ability to speak authoritatively about one's own intention and actions, based on one's own experience. The sacrament of confession controls the gloss of that experience in particular ways as indicated in the confessional manuals; not all interpretations are acceptable. Nevertheless, confession necessarily also gives real authority of speech and of interpretation to the confessing subject.

Margery Kempe is an example of just such a confessing subject. *The Book of Margery Kempe* begins by defining itself as a comfort "for synful wrecchys, wherin þei may have gret solas and comfort to hem and undyrstondyn þe hy and unspecabyl mercy of ower sovereyn Savyowr Cryst Jhesu, whos name be worschepd and magnyfyed wyþowten ende" (Kempe 1). Kempe is a middle-class laywoman. The authority she takes upon herself (to speak about herself, to interpret God's actions and workings in her life, to suggest the effect of her life and her own interpretation of it for wretches and sinners) draws on two late-medieval conventions or traditions. The first is mysticism, and the

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second is the tradition of confession. In late medieval England interpretation of God's

word was officially restricted to men, which left the interpretation of the body, experience

and the senses increasingly up to women.[18] This is why women dominate the mystical

tradition. Yet the ability and authority women have to interpret feelings and experiences

is an authority bred from the tradition of confession as a necessary sacrament. All

women—and all men—were expected to have experience interpreting their actions and

feelings to some degree. Confession is the impetus for both autobiography and for

mysticism.

> Appropriately, Margery Kempe begins her story with an attempt at a confession:
>
>> sche sent for hyr gostly fadyr, for sche had a þyng in conscyens whech
>>
>> sche had nevyr schewyd beforn þat tyme in alle hyr lyfe. … And, whan
>>
>> sche cam to þe poynt for to seyn þat þing whech sche had so long
>>
>> conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and gan scharply to
>>
>> undyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyd hir entent, and so sche wold no
>>
>> mor seyn for nowt he mygth do. (Kempe 6-8)

Though Kempe's attempt at confession is frustrated here, the narrative itself is her

successful account of herself, her sins, her intentions, and her redemption. In other words,

it demonstrates that the language and ideology of confession continued to be a central

discourse of representation—including, plainly, literary representation—of the subject in

the fifteenth century. Kempe receives criticism and threats, and is accused of being a

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18 See Watson (1995), Root (1997), and Jantzen (1994), each of whom make this point in more depth.

Lollard, but the discourse of confession gives her the license and space to speak both as a character within the story and as the author of the narrative itself.

Wycliffe and the Lollards

Kempe is not the only author of her period who was accused by her contemporaries of being a Lollard. Most of the major writers in England in the late Middle Ages have been suspected of Lollardy or Lollard sympathies by those hostile to Lollardy, or conversely, claimed by those sympathetic to it. The Lollard movement was critical of clergy, and therefore all literature critical of clergy in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries can seem to have Lollard leanings. Chaucer's criticism of monastic orders in *The Canterbury Tales* strikes some readers as suspicious.[19] Langland's *Piers Plowman*, for its hostility toward friars, has likewise seemed to some readers to be sympathetic to Lollard ideals. [20] According to Anne Hudson, "Bale ascribed a work entitled *Petrum Agricolam* to Wyclif himself" (Hudson [1988] 398). Thomas Hoccleve scolds John Oldcastle for usurping the authority of the clergy by arguing theology as a layman: "Lete holy chirche medle of the doctryne/ Of Crystes lawes and of his byleeue, And lete all otheir folk thereto enclyne/ And of our feith noon argumentes meeue" (Hoccleve 64.136-140). Despite this reproach, Hoccleve arguably does the exact same thing. When Hoccleve argues that "The disciples of Cryst had hardynessse/ For to

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19 See, for example, Frances McCormack (2004), Craig T. Fehrman (2007), Alistair Minnis (2008), Andrew Cole (2006).

20 See, for example, Cole (2006), Johnson (1992), and most notably, John Bale (1548), who in *Illvstrivm Maioris Britannicae Scriptorvm* listed *Petram Agricolam* as actually having been written by Wycliffe.

appeare. They nat wolde hem hyde/For fere of deeth, but in his cause dyde" (Hoccleve 70.279-381), what is that if not an argument about faith? So while he has rarely been accused of Lollard sympathies it is easy to imagine Hoccleve running afoul of anti-Lollard laws, and easy to see how both his theology and his approach to the self have been influenced and shaped by Lollardy. Katherine C. Little, in her book *Confession and Resistance*, argues that the popularity and ubiquity of Lollardy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries specifically complicates the nature and meaning of confession. Little's central thesis is that the Lollards "challenge orthodoxy not only in terms of doctrine … but also by reforming the language given to church members to understand and speak about themselves … set[ting] aside the traditional cultivation of interiority concentrated on the confessional and provid[ing] alternative models of Christian identity based on scripture" (Little 1). While the cultivation of confessional discourse and the ideas of Lollardy thrived concurrently, they represent opposing movements within the religious context of the late Middle Ages.

Two Swords

Wycliffite theology includes a reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Two Swords.[21] As articulated by Pope Gelasius I in the late fifth century, the doctrine states

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21 King Arthur, of course, has two swords of his own: the first is the sword in the stone, which Arthur breaks in a battle against King Pellinore (F 42.4; V 1: 50.30), and the second is Excalibur, which Arthur receives from the Lady of the Lake (F 43-44; V 1: 53). The meaning of Arthur's swords is a central conceit of Hodges' *Forging Chivalric Communities*, especially the second chapter (Hodges [2005] 35-61). Hodges argues that each of Arthur's swords represents a kind of chivalry, with the first standing

that "Two there are ... by which this world is ruled: The consecrated authority of priests and the royal power" (Gelasius 179). The "two swords" of the doctrine refers to Luke 22:36-38:

> Then said [Jesus] unto them, "But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a scrip; and he that hath not, let him sell his coat, and buy a sword. ... But they said: Lord, behold here are two swords. And he said to them, It is enough.

In the later Middle Ages and throughout the English Reformation the doctrine of Two Swords was used to interpret this passage as a prophetic commentary on the administration of a Christian state.

Gelasius argues that God rules the world but ordains and administers his justice by the use of two swords: the secular sword of royal power and the sacred sword of priestly power. Gelasius writes to the Byzantine Emperor: "though first to the human race in dignity, you submit devoutly to those who are preeminent in God's work, and inquire of them the causes of your salvation" (Gelasius 179). The two "swords" are not equal, either in scope or in power.

The inequality of the swords was rather more stridently asserted by Pope Boniface VIII in his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302), in which he argues that both swords "are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the

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for "might means right" (Hodges [2005] 41) and the second for "blood feud" (Hodges [2005] 43), and the sword that Arthur recovers after it has been stolen by Morgan representing "justice" (Hodges [2005] 48).

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former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church" (Boniface VII). Boniface presents a hierarchy in which God has granted authority directly to the Pope, who then has the power to grant (or withdraw) authority to kings. The temporal sword, in Boniface's view, is subject to the church, and thus kings are subject to the authority of the Pope.

Boniface's late-thirteenth-century claim to hold both swords was a source of ongoing theological interest, including that of the fourteenth-century theologian John Wycliffe. Stephen E. Lahey has made the case that Wycliffe's theological perspective on the relationship of church and state, and on the rightful control of and use of the two swords, is grounded in Wycliffe's ontological position. Lahey stresses that Wycliffe was a realist about universals, and that for Wycliffe "God's absolute transcendence entails no real relation is possible between God and Creation. Only a relation following from some act of God in Creation can make the connection" (Lahey 68). This implies, among other things, that God's lordship is both an effect of and is in some sense contingent upon God's ongoing action and intervention in the world. Any claim to hold both swords is a claim to act on behalf of God, which in Wycliffe's ontological scheme implies usurping God's place. There is no mediator or intercessor between God's lordship and any member of humanity. God's action in the world is direct, because for Wycliffe,

> Dominium Dei mensurat, ut prius et presuppositum, omnia alia
>
> assignada: Si enim creatura habet dominium super quidquam, Deus prius
>
> habet dominium super idem; ideo ad quodlibet creature dominium sequitur
>
> dominium divinum, et not econtra."

(God's dominion is the measure of, as prior to and the presupposition of, all other dominion which is assigned: For if a creature has dominion over anything, God has dominion first over the same; so it is that any creaturely dominion follows divine dominion, and not vice versa. Wycliffe *[1890]* I,iii,16.18-22).

In political terms this leads Wycliffe to the conclusion that the King has been granted temporal authority by God and is ultimately answerable only to God; God's ministers are not licensed to speak for God or take upon themselves authority that lawfully belongs to God. Their authority is a spiritual one that depends upon submission to both the temporal authority of the King and to the role within creation assigned by God. The Pope, in Wycliffe's ontological scheme, should have the authority to pray and to give spiritual counsel and to interpret theology according to Scripture's leadings.

True authority, from a Wycliffite perspective, comes only from God. Popes, priests, knights, and kings exercise dominion, but do so lawfully and justly only in so far as the exercise coincides with God's true dominion. Kings have temporal lordship of a kind, but it is true lordship only when it acts according to the principles of divine lordship. Priests, likewise, have spiritual lordship which nevertheless depends upon submission to God in order to be valid. From Wycliffe's perspective, when the church, by means of a priest, bishop, or pope, attempts to assert its authority over the king it effectively relinquishes its spiritual authority by stepping outside the bounds of God's dominion. When the church attempts to be the state, it fails even to be the church. Faithful kings can correct an unfaithful priesthood by outlawing heresy, and faithful priests can correct an unfaithful state by prayer and exhortation. A faithful lay citizen is bound

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primarily to be loyal to the dominion of God, which since it is unmediated can be interpreted and acted upon by a faithful lay citizen. In theory, for Wycliffe, a lay citizen is not bound to follow the unjust, unlawful, false authority of either a state or a church that is not in a state of grace in submission to God. In practice, however, Wycliffe stresses that a state of grace is a mystery known only to God. No Christian can with confidence speak to the grace or lack of grace experienced by any other. Lacking the ability to accurately discern whether a king, pope, knight, or priest is in the state of grace which validates their authority and dominion, Wycliffe concludes that faithful Christians should submit to the dominion of those to whom authority has been granted. For Wycliffe, furthermore, the office of both spiritual and temporal Lords suffices for God to provide unmediated blessing to the people regardless of the lack of grace experienced by the man fulfilling the office. A priest out of grace has no true authority or dominion, has no ownership of anything, and is condemned by God, but is nevertheless able to administer the true sacraments because God does not allow the sinfulness of the man to harm the people to whom the office ministers. Likewise, a king out of grace has no true authority or power or ownership of the land, his laws are invalid, he is a usurper and a tyrant as far as his relationship to God is concerned. But the temporal power of the tyrant still protects a citizen as long as that citizen adheres to the tyrant's laws which are established as a means of grace from God to the people in defiance of the king. In practice commoners are compelled to loyalty and obedience to kings and clergy whether their lords are in a state of grace or not.

Wycliffe's ontologically-justified theological philosophy does not fully coincide with Lollardy as it existed in the fifteenth century. Anne Hudson argues that in Lollardy

"is found a sequence unusual in medieval times, of a heresy that began as a product of academic speculation but that moved out of the academic world to become a popular movement" (Hudson [1988] 62). Hudson argues persuasively that Wycliffism and Lollardy are often functionally the same, but if any distinction can be made it is that Wycliffism is the academic speculation, and Lollardy is the popular movement. Late fourteenth-century accounts of them often depict the Lollards as revolutionaries without loyalty to either church or state—and this perspective seems partially justified by the association of Lollardy with the failed Oldcastle revolt of January 1414. The Lollards were certainly not loyal to the authority of the church, but as we have already seen, loyalty to church and to state were often divided. Denial of loyalty to one does not imply denial of loyalty to the other. In fact, as Helen Barr notes,

> when one turns to what the Wycliffites actually wrote themselves … rather than what was written about them, it is clear that Lollard texts are unanimous and univocal in their declaration of obedience to secular authority. The king must be obeyed, even if he be a tyrant, and members of civic society must be ordered according to the normative tripartite division into lords, clergy and labourers. (Barr 197)

The tripartite division of medieval society is related to the Doctrine of the Two Swords. Two of the three estates—the lords and the clergy—wield the swords of authority over the third: the labourers. Lollard thinking maintained this three-part division, but did not hold all the parts in equal moral esteem. In contrast to a stream of medieval thought that considered labourers to be marginal and degenerate members of society, Lollard ideology

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lionized peasants, reasoning that their poverty made them more faithful apostles of Christ than did the wealth of the other two estates—especially the clergy.

Two early fifteenth-century Lollard texts set out the Lollard worldview: "Sixteen Points on which the Bishops accuse Lollards," and "Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards." Of the twelve conclusions in the second text several are directly relevant here. The ninth conclusion, that "þe articlis of confessiun þat is sayd necessari to saluaciun of man" depend upon a "feynid power of absoliciun" ("Conclusions" 27.114-116), speaks directly to the practices and principles of confession. We see here that the objection of the Lollards is not so much to the discourse of confession in itself as to the mechanisms of absolution. In fact, the grounds upon which confession is to be considered unnecessary is the ease of confessional language and the people's mastery of it. In keeping with Wycliffe's ontological perspective, confession need not, for the Lollards, be mediated by a priest. All Christians are able to—and should—make their confession directly to God. The primary objections in the "Twelve Conclusions" to the discipline of confession are that it "enhaunsith prestis pride" ("Conclusions" 27.116), and that it "ȝeuith [priests] opertunite of priui calling other þan we wele now say" ("Conclusions" 27.116-117). Later the text addresses commercialization of the church and the hypocrisy wherein the church will "selle þe blisse of heuene" ("Conclusions" 27.124-125), but the first objection to the practice of oral confession is that it enhances the priest's pride and entices the priest to sin. This objection to oral confession in practice resonates well with the account of confession described by Margery Kempe above, wherein the priest blocks Margery's legitimate and full contrition and absolution instead of facilitating it.

The sixth conclusion, which is also prefaced by a concern about "michil pride" ("Conclusions" 26.62) is that "a kyng and a bisschop al in o persone, a prelat and a iustise in temperel cause, a curat and an officer in wordly seruise, makin euery reme out of god reule" ("Conclusions" 26.62-64). This conclusion is the direct opposite of Pope Boniface's assertion that the body of Christ must have one head—himself—not two heads "like a monster" (Boniface). While Boniface argues that the body of Christ requires a single head for the sake of unity and cohesion, Wycliffe countered that the head of the body of Christ is neither the pope nor the king. The head of the body of Christ is Christ. Since Christ's dominion is unmediated the theological result is that every part of the body of Christ is under the direct authority of Christ himself. The two swords are wielded by hands, not by a head, and, to continue Boniface's metaphor, a body with two hands is not monstrous, but is rather the norm. The Lollards argue that the separation of temporality and spirituality is a deliberate and important part of the divine ordering of the world: "temperelte and spirituelte ben to partys of holi chirche, and þerfore he þat hath takin him to þe ton schulde nout medlin him with þe toþer, quia nemo potest duobus dominis seruire" (26.65-67).

The first of the "Twelve Conclusions" is that "qwan þe chirche of Yngelond began to dote in temperalte aftir her stepmodir þe grete chirche of Rome, and chirchis were slayne be apropriacion to diuerse placys, feyth, hope and charite begunne for to fle out of oure chirche" ("Conclusions" 24.7-10). The "qwan" shows that the English church was not always steeped in temporality, but that it is a latter-day development. It is a symptom of the church's decline. This theological nostalgia—an appeal to the bygone days of true faithfulness—is a common sentiment in reformers. It repositions the radicals

as conservative; they are the ones who are seeking to conserve and preserve the church as it once was: to protect it from the decay and corruption of new practices. Furthermore, the idea of hope, faith, and charity flying out of the church depends upon a Wycliffite idea of the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. For Wycliffe, the visible and temporal institution of the church is not the Body of Christ. According to a Wycliffite ontological perspective the unfaithful church is not the church at all.

The text "Sixteen Points on which the Bishops accuse Lollards" likewise makes a number of doctrinal assertions, this time in response to accusations made against the Lollards. The fourth accusation is: "þat þer is no pope, neþer was any siþ þe tyme of seint Peter þe pope" ("Sixteen Points" 19.10-11). The Lollard response to this accusation is:

> we beleuen þat oure lord Iesu Crist was and is cheffe bischoppe of his chirche, as seint Peter seiþ, and schal be vnto þe dai of dome. And we supposen þat þer han ben may hooli faderris, popis, siþen seint Petrus tyme, þouȝ þis name 'pope' be not seid in Goddis lawe, as seint Clement, sent Clete and oþer many moo. And so we graunten þat þe pope of Rome shulde next folowe Crist and seint Peter in maner of lyuynge, and, if he do so, he is worþily pope, and, if he contrarie hem moost of al oþer, he is most anticrist. ("Sixteen Points" 21.87-95)

We do not here see the practical restraint of Wycliffe (especially the early Wycliffe) who argued that in practice it is impossible to discern the true grace-centred dominion of a good and faithful pope from the false and empty posturing of a false pope, because God gives the state of grace directly to the Christian and the knowledge of whether a Christian exists in grace or not is God's alone. Here, based on the same ontology of dominion, the

implication is that ordinary lay Christians—and certainly Lollards—are able to discern

the worthiness of a pope. The assertion as stated in the context of the eighth accusation is

that "if [popes] make any lawes contrarie to Cristis lawe, men ben as grettly boundon to

aȝenstande þoo wicked lawes as þei ben bounded to keþe þer good lawes" ("Sixteen

Points" 22). Since, as the *Tractatus de regibus*, a late fourteenth-century Lollard

reworking of Wycliffe's Latin *De Officio Regis*, makes clear, "þer is none powere but

ordeyned of God, he þat aȝeynestondus powere, aȝeynestondus God, for he aȝeynestondus

þo ordinaunce of God" (*Tractatus* 129), priests are compelled to be obedient to the

authority of temporal powers—kings, princes, knights. A pope who attempts to overcome

or countervene the good and divinely granted dominion of a king makes a law "contrarie

to Cristis lawe" (*Tractatus* 22), and demonstrates that he is not a pope—that is, not a

successor of St. Peter and of Christ. The pope, according to this reasoning, is a priest, and

the good and lawful duty of a priest is "to teche and preche þe puple, and not onli þat but

also to preie and to mynyster þe sacramentis of God, and lyue welle" ("Sixteen Points"

22). In the *Tractatus de regibus,* the author points out that although "Mony syche wordis

spekis Goddus lawe of kyngus" (*Tractatus* 129), the Bible "spekis not of popis nouþer

gode ne yuel" (*Tractatus* 129). This in itself is enough for Lollard doctrine to prefer and

to privilege kings and their authority over popes. Kings have both the authority and the

responsibility to rule according to and to enforce temporal law, even over priests and

popes who are fully subject to that authority. The authority of kings according to Lollard

doctrine, then, includes authority over priests and popes, but it does not include moral

authority to "punysche here mennys synnu … by resone of iurisdicciouns, for worldely

and gostely ben algatys departud" (*Tractatus* 130). Priestly authority is founded on

spiritual grounds and does not exist if the priest is not faithful—and both submission to the king and earthly poverty are marks of faithfulness, since priests should follow the example of Christ fully or else they are not priests at all.

Arundel's *Constitutions*

Archbishop Arundel responded to the Lollards in part through his 1409 *Constitutions*, which Anne Hudson argues were designed "to control three things: Preachers, books, and the universities" (Hudson [1988] 82). Nicholas Watson argues persuasively that Arundel's *Constitutions* should not be understood simply as Lollard persecution, but as "the linchpin of a broader attempt to limit religious discussion and writing in the vernacular" (Watson 824). Central to Watson's argument is that there is a notable decrease in vernacular theology and in spiritually or theologically challenging literature in England in the fifteenth century. Watson and Hudson both argue that the relative secularism of fifteenth-century literature compared to fourteenth-century literature is an effect of Arundel's *Constitutions*, which are themselves a response to Lollardy.

The legislation was not enforced in the radical way that Watson suggests it could have been. Hudson points out:

> though the powers available to the bishops, through traditional
> constraints as well as through the legislation enacted in the face of the
> Wycliffite threats, were formidable, it is evident that they were exercised
> only sporadically. Even if the record of investigation is now very

incomplete, it seems clear that many who were technically in default of

Arundel's *Constitutions* escaped without suspicion" (Hudson [1988] 445).

Yet Watson's central argument is that the *Constitutions* need not have been strictly

enforced to have a stifling effect upon thought and writing in the fifteenth century, and

they need not have been the explicit motivational factor discouraging a writer from

addressing theological topics in the vernacular. Rather, the *Constitutions* created an

ideological association that contributed to a cultural shift. The censorship was mostly

self-imposed, not through paranoid fear of persecution but through ideological

manipulation. The *Constitutions* changed the demand, the means of production, the

educational context, and the culture changed itself as a result.

Setting Down the Track: The Plan for this Study

The analysis below of the particularly fifteenth-century English flavour of *Le

Morte Darthur's* Christianity pays special attention to confession. Chapter one also shows

how the religious and spiritual themes of *Le Morte Darthur* pervade the text, and are

especially evident when *Le Morte Darthur* is read as a single unified text. *Le Morte

Darthur* becomes more spiritually focused as proceeds, and this effect is cumulative. In

"King Uther and King Arthur" the religious aspects provide primarily a cultural setting,

but by the end of *Le Morte Darthur* the religious values have become the text's informing

worldview.[22]

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22 There is no universal consensus about whether Malory wrote the tales in the order in which they

currently appear—Vinaver hypothesized that he did not, and that "The Tale of the Noble King Arthur

Although the religious focus exists throughout the text and increases as the text proceeds, it is at its most evident in the Grail section which is the focus of chapter two. With particular attention on Lancelot and Galahad, this chapter demonstrates how the Grail knights are exemplars of piety: Galahad of purity, and Lancelot of redeemed piety. In the Grail section, Malory offers a model both for the characters within the text and for his readers. The Grail section demonstrates how to be holy, and is in dialogical relation with all other models of holiness throughout the text.

Towards its end, *Le Morte Darthur* increasingly focuses upon a holiness achieved through penance, and this is the focus of chapter three. Both Lancelot, who by the end of the text has become its *de facto* main character, and Queen Guinevere, end the text in formal penance. King Arthur's end is less formally penitential but still clearly focuses on achieving God's forgiveness. Many minor characters end the book in penance as well, including the only surviving Grail knight, Sir Bors. All of this penance constitutes a religious interpretation of the events of the rest of the book. The political chivalry, earthly warfare, and secular romance that make up the main action of *Le Morte Darthur* are exactly what the main characters must repent of as the story ends.

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and Emperor Lucius" was written first (Vinaver [1990] lv). The order of the tales is the same, however, in both the Winchester manuscript and in Caxton's printed edition. There is therefore no solid evidence for any alternative order, nor is there any solid evidence for a composition order that differs from the presentation order. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, then, I surmise that either a) the book was composed in the order in which it is presented or b) all aspects, including the colophons, were designed to be experienced in the order in which they now appear.

The fourth chapter examines the sources that Malory rejects, showing that they demonstrate his themes just as much as the sources he uses do. In "The Sankgreal" in particular, there are three major sources with which we know Malory was familiar, but which he chose not to use: the French prose *Perlesvaus*, the French prose *Tristan*, and John Hardyng's English *Chronicle*. Each of these texts contains a version of the Grail Quest, and each was familiar to Malory, yet he used none as his source for his retelling. The *Perlesvaus* is religiously focused, but depicts religious and political interests as contiguous. The French prose *Tristan* de-emphasises the spiritual themes of the Grail Quest, intertwining it with Sir Tristan's chivalric endeavours so as to make it simply one more marvellous achievement of the Round Table. John Hardyng's *Chronicle* is a literal account which downplays the mystical and symbolic aspects of the Grail Quest. All three represent worldviews that Malory rejects in favour of his spiritually-oriented, mystical, and symbolic text.

Malory's choice of which sources to reject is revealing, but so, of course, are those sections of *Le Morte Darthur* which have no source, or no known source. These sourceless sections are the focus of chapter five. The longest section of *Le Morte Darthur* for which no source is known is "Sir Gareth of Orkney," which is a foretaste of "The Sankgreal" and which features, in its central knight Sir Gareth, a prefiguration of Sir Galahad. The next major sourceless section is the healing of Sir Urry, a passage that closes "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere." The healing of Sir Urry is, with the exception of "The Sankgreal," the most evidently religious section of *Le Morte Darthur*, and it grounds its religious perspective in Lancelot's character growth. Finally, the colophons or explicits that link the sections of *Le Morte Darthur* to one another and are

clearly written in Malory's own voice, show once again that the religious focus of *Le Morte Darthur* increases as the text goes on. Each of these sourceless sections of *Le Morte Darthur* demonstrates that far from being a vestige or slavish reproduction of his sources, Malory's religious interest is his own. The religious perspective belongs to *Le Morte Darthur*.

The discussion focuses squarely on *Le Morte Darthur,* and its scope excludes most other texts, even *The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*, which Field has theorized was also written by Malory.[23] For a fuller account of Malory's religious conception, *Dame Ragnell* would be a valuable addition. The discussion also considers only those Arthurian texts which are directly relevant to *Le Morte Darthur* as sources or as rejected sources, although a larger and less tightly-focused study would need to consider the religious assumptions and implications of Arthurian literature more widely: this is certainly a possible next step for research in this area. For a deeper historical context, a study of other fifteenth-century texts and their religious assumptions would also be invaluable, as would be a comparison of fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth-century popular texts. Any of these perspectives would be valuable, but are outside the self-imposed boundaries of this project.

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23 See Field (1993), *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory,* p. 2, Field (1999) "Malory and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*" p. 284-294.

Chapter 1
The Search for the Holy: Malory and Fifteenth-Century Christianity

Le Morte Darthur is fundamentally grounded in fifteenth-century Christianity.

Malory's text grapples with religious and spiritual themes throughout, and becomes more

spiritually oriented as it goes on. Even in its first book, the religious underpinnings are

evident. This chapter demonstrates how rooted Malory is in fifteenth-century Christian

doctrine. It traces the spiritual trajectory of *Le Morte Darthur*, showing how seeds of an

engagement with secular piety are sown from the beginning of "King Uther and King

Arthur,"[1] how they take root even in the apparently secular "King Arthur and the

Emperor Lucius" and continue to grow throughout the whole book, flowering in "The

Sankgreal" and yielding their harvest in the conclusion of "The Morte Arthur." This

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1   I am adopting the editorial section titles used by Field in his 2013 edition. The number and nature of the

section divisions of *Le Morte Darthur* is up for debate and ultimately beyond the scope of this project.

For present purposes I consider a "section" to be anything given its own title in Field's edition. These

do not correspond exactly to either Vinaver's eight tales or to Caxton's twenty-one books, but are much

closer to Vinaver. Field has nine major sections, which correspond to Vinaver's eight except that Field

divides "Sir Tristram de Lyones" in two. Field has forty-two titled subsections, while Vinaver has

forty-three. The choice to follow Field's sections implicitly gives preference to the Winchester

manuscript over Caxton's edition, since Field follows Winchester's organizational scheme. I have

chosen to use Field, rather than an edition based on Caxton, as my primary text for three reasons: 1)

because Field's edition is the most recent and exhaustive academic edition of *Le Morte Darthur*, 2)

because in later chapters I will be directly discussing the colophons, most of which only appear in the

Winchester manuscript, and 3) because by Caxton's own account the structure of his edition was his

own addition, not something he found in the text.

religious engagement is one particularly fitted to religion as practiced in England during

the fifteenth-century and its concerns, and it is especially apparent if we read *Le Morte*

Darthur as a single text.

Unity and the Structure of the Text: Caxton and Vinaver

Whether or not to conceive of *Le Morte Darthur* as a single unified text was the

major issue of debate in Malory studies from the mid- to the late-twentieth century. The

central symbolic figures in this debate are Caxton, the editor and publisher of the first

printed edition of Malory, and Vinaver, editor of the first modern edition based on the

Winchester manuscript of Malory, which predates Caxton's print edition. Caxton

published his edition in 1485 and is usually credited with giving the text the title *Le Morte*

Darthur. Vinaver first published his edition in 1947, with the provocative title *The Works*

of Sir Thomas Malory, arguing that what Malory wrote was not a single book but a series

of eight tales. The effect of Vinaver's structural interpretation on subsequent discussion

of the perceived themes of the work(s) is profound; from its publication until the

publication of Field's new edition in 2013 Vinaver's has been the standard academic text

of Malory.

Vinaver argues that Malory, or "whoever produced the work contained in [the

Winchester] manuscript clearly never thought of it as a *single* work, but as a series of

eight separate romances" (Vinaver xxxix). Although Vinaver's title *The Works of Sir*

Thomas Malory is polemical, and he insisted upon the existence of eight discrete

romances or tales, he was of course a nuanced enough thinker to recognize that it is not a

simple dichotomy: either eight romances or one book. Early in the life of the ongoing academic controversy surrounding the unity of Malory's works, C. S. Lewis pointed out that the idea of a single artistic unit called "a book" is anachronistic:

> Malory was a medieval author. If it were possible to question him directly, in what form should we put our question? It would be no use asking him how many books he thought he had written; he would think we meant the material volumes or 'quairs'. If we asked him, 'How many tales?' he might enumerate more than eight. ... I do not for a moment believe that Malory had any intention either of writing a single 'work' or of writing many 'works' as we should understand the expressions. He was telling us about Arthur and the knights. Of course his matter was one—the same king, the same court. Of course his matter was many—they had had many adventures. (Lewis [1963] 21-22)

The clearest indication that Malory's conception of what exactly a "book" is differs from a modern conception is the division between the two books focused on Sir Tristram. For Malory, "Book" clearly meant "codex": the physical object. Vinaver's point was an insistence on how the books should be interpreted by modern readers, as he readily acknowledged. Vinaver believed that presenting *Le Morte Darthur* as a single book gave modern readers an inaccurate idea of what Malory had written. By labelling his edition *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* and insisting on the division into eight tales, he thought he was more accurately representing what Malory wrote. Vinaver interprets each tale as, in some important sense, distinct from all the others.

The structure of eight distinct tales does not erase the possibility of thematic unity between the tales; it is still possible to read the tales and their interests in concert. However, construing Malory's text as a series of tales rather than one unified work also encourages a separate interpretation of each tale. This form of reading may be necessary but perilous, since it allows a reader to overlook subtle thematic strands in favour of those individual texts where a theme rises to clear prominence. For example, if the "The Sankgreal" is read as a distinct and independent episode, then one might conclude that spiritual matters are otherwise unimportant to Malory, because they are so rarely explicitly addressed outside of the Grail Quest. If the Grail Quest is self-contained, those concerns—no matter how relevant they may be to the Grail Quest—are largely irrelevant to the other tales. But in fact the Grail Quest is among other things a part of the arc of Lancelot's character development. The Grail episode forms the heart of Lancelot's story, coming as it does in the middle, not the end. Dorsey Armstrong has argued that

> what appears at first to be instability (as demonstrated by Lancelot's failures, misunderstanding, and 'backsliding' into sin and error) over the course of the Grail Quest, is in fact a delicate, deliberate, and necessary balancing act in which Lancelot's superiority as a courteous man of arms is consistently offset by his lack of spiritual understanding. (Armstrong [2003] 150)

Lancelot grows in repentance and in maturity throughout the whole of *Le Morte Darthur*, and the Grail quest contributes to his final redemption but is not the only factor. Tolhurst argues, for example, that "the healing of Sir Urry [which takes place at the end of "Sir Launcelot and Guinevere"] indicated the author's attitudes toward spirituality and

salvation while moving Lancelot up the ladder of perfection" (Tolhurst 146). Lancelot's

character growth demonstrates the thematic unity of *Le Morte Darthur*, and its focus

throughout on piety.

Fifteenth-century English Lay Chivalric Christian Piety

The piety in *Le Morte Darthur* is grounded specifically in fifteenth-century

English lay chivalric Christian spirituality. There are a lot of adjectives there, and before

arguing how Malory fits in that category we need to be clear on what differentiates

fifteenth-century Christianity, or English Christianity, or lay Christianity from any other

kind.

Fifteenth-century Christianity is increasingly political and practical. One hallmark

of the fifteenth century is the growth of the importance of the nation. We can see this in

the context of church history. The late fourteenth to early fifteenth century is the time of

the Western Schism, where first two and then three Popes held power simultaneously.

The Schism led to a strengthened conciliar idea: "the concept that the Pope is not the

absolute master of the Church. In normal conditions he or the *Ecclesia Romana* in the

narrower sense governs the visible Church" (Fink 424). The Pope, in other words, is

answerable to others. Even though the Schism was eventually resolved, it is easy to see

that the Schism and its repercussions led to diminished ecclesiastical authority and

increased secular authority, especially at the beginning of the fifteenth century. While on

one hand the Schism resulted in diminished ecclesiastical and increased national-political

authority, it is also true that political powers of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth

century used the church for political influence, and this helped cause the Schism. So the Romans supported an Italian pope for reasons of Italian nationalism, and the French supported a pope in Avignon for the same reasons. We can also see nationalistic tendencies in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century theology. John Wycliffe and Jan Hus[2] both argued on theological grounds for state or national authority over ecclesiastical authority. Wycliffe and Hus are both inseparable from a fifteenth-century growth in nationalism.

2   Jan (or John) Hus was a Czech priest who was excommunicated as a heretic for supporting Wycliffe, and for arguing against indulgences and the Pope's authority to call for crusades. He was protected for a time by King Wenceslas of Bohemia, who wanted "to present his Kingdom as free from heresies" (Fink 448). In 1415 Hus was burned as a heretic, and his death sparked the Hussite Wars that helped to entrench a division between Bohemia and Germany. It seems to me impossible to separate Hus from the Western Schism, since it is ultimately the Schism that set the precedent that allowed Hus to argue that the Pope was a heretic. As for Wycliffe, he lived in the fourteenth century, not the fifteenth, and his theology was neither supported nor tolerated by the English state of his day. Eamon Duffy (1992) has argued extensively that a preoccupation with Lollards, who "rejected [the] central tenets and preoccupations" (2) of fifteenth century Christianity, is a distraction. But the Lollard movement associated with Wycliffe was still active through the fifteenth century, and its influence can be seen in the English Reformation, especially in the theology of William Tyndale. Queen Mary passed laws against Lollardy in the 1550s. In other words, no matter how much the state or the church may have fought against it, and no matter how marginal they may have been, Wycliffe's ideas were a part of English Christianity throughout the fifteenth century. Sometimes this manifests as Lollard ideas directly, and at other in self-conscious denunciations of Lollardy. Either way, it is a part of the religious landscape, and is connected to a growing nationalism.

Fifteenth-century Christianity exhibits a growth of practical piety: contemporarily called "*devotio moderna.*" This spiritual movement, whose best-known proponent is Thomas à Kempis, is distinctly modern "in its orientation to practical experience, in its activation of the affective powers, and in its instruction for self-control" (Iserloh 426). *Devotio moderna* is characterized by an "estrangement from theology in favour of virtue made good in humdrum day-to-day living" (Iserloh 426).

A fifteenth-century Christian need not have been invested in the politics of the papacy to register the relative political weakness of the Pope compared to national princes. She or he need not have been a Lollard to be influenced by a growing English nationalism and a weakening of ecclesiastical powers. She or he need not have been a member of a communal living house to experience the growing "chasm between theology and piety" (Iserloh 426) that *devotio moderna* represents. Because the liturgy of the church was in Latin, it was "in no position to introduce the faithful to Christian doctrine" (Iserloh 574). Most people would not have understood it, and even for many of those with enough education to understand Latin it would be difficult to discern theological nuances. Throughout the Middle Ages, "people were for the most part left to learn the Christian faith by life and experience in a Christian environment" (Iserloh 579). So when that environment changed, so, naturally, did a lay conception of Christianity. In a Krisevaen sense the cultural environment is a kind of "text" and can be read as such. The cultural understanding of Christianity is a Kristevaen intertext with *Le Morte Darthur*, in that both texts inform and partially create each other.

The fact that Malory and most of his characters are knights adds an additional dimension. Richard W. Kaeuper has convincingly demonstrated that knightly piety does

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not fully overlap with lay piety in general: "knights could at will practice the pious forms of their fellow laymen (alms, pilgrimage, fasting, and religious foundation); but to the degree that it was useful, they could follow their own exclusive and carefully crafted channel of piety, one highly compatible with their violent ideal of prowess winning honor" (Kaeuper [1999] 35-36). The religious context of *Le Morte Darthur* is one in which piety has ambiguity and flexibility.

Chivalric Piety

Three medieval writers on chivalry—St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Geoffroi de Charny, and Ramon Llull—together show how the chivalric theory is intertwined with piety. St. Bernard, writing in the eleventh century, sees knighthood and priesthood as parallel kinds of warfare, and perceives the then-newly-formed Templars as successfully embodying both. The fourteenth-century Geoffroi de Charny understands chivalry as a calling similar to religious orders which requires its own kind of piety. Finally Ramon Llull, in his late thirteenth-century *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, conceives of chivalry in even more strongly religious terms than de Charny does: as an order founded by God and maintained by faith.

Llull, de Charny, and St. Bernard each demonstrate the pietistic underpinnings of chivalry, and all three build an association between knighthood and priesthood, and offer knighthood—or in St. Bernard's case a certain kind of knighthood—as an alternative kind of piety to holy orders. This coincides with the perspective of Walter Hilton, who in his fourteenth-century work *The Scale of Perfection* writes that "ther ben in Holi Chirche two maner of lyves, as Seynt Gregor seith, in the whiche Cristene men shul be saaf. That on is

callid actif lif, that other contemplatif lif. Withoutin the ton of thise two may no man be saaf" (Hilton 32). For Hilton, contemplative life and active life are both paths to God. Although Hilton explicitly states that both active life and contemplative life need not be practiced by one person, that a Christian must show one of these two, he nevertheless suggests a hierarchy. According to Hilton, "werkes, though thei ben actif, not for thi they helpen mykel and ordaynen a man in the bigynnynge to come to contemplatif lif, yif thei ben usid bi discrecion" (Hilton 33). The active Christian life fulfilled leads to a contemplative life, which is preferable.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux bases much of his *In Praise of the New Knighthood* on the idea that there are two kinds of warfare: the first "against flesh and blood" (Bernard 33) and the second "against a spiritual hosts of evil in the heavens" (Bernard 33). Spiritual warfare is the vocation of priests, and it is waged through prayer and study. Bernard's division of the two kinds of warfare is a mirror image of the idea of active and contemplative life. While Hilton is focused on piety as alternatively active or contemplative, Bernard rhetorically frames two kinds of activity: either pious or not. Unlike Hilton's conception, Bernard does not even attempt to frame the two kinds of warfare as equal in virtue. Spiritual warfare is superior. For Bernard warfare against flesh and blood is morally ambiguous at best. It is sometimes necessary, but those who engage in it have usually done so at the risk of their own souls. The exception to this is the titular "New Knighthood" of the Templars, who are a new development in the world, because they engage in both spiritual and fleshly warfare. Bernard does not go so far as to say that the Templars are superior to those who engage solely in spiritual warfare, but he certainly asserts that they are superior to the old kind of knighthood, which ignored spiritual

warfare. In his discussion of the two kinds of warfare Bernard evokes the Doctrine of the Two Swords, arguing that Templars have "powerfully gird [themselves] with both swords" (Bernard 33-32).

While Bernard considers the Templars to be unprecedented in the world for their participation in both kinds of warfare, Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry* frames both chivalry and piety differently. The *Book of Chivalry* conceives of chivalry in general in fundamentally religious terms. At several points, de Charny compares the order of Knighthood to the order of Priesthood:

> pour ce doit chascuns bien savoir et penser que en touz les mestiers qui en ce monde sunt, ne de quoy nul se doient ne puissant mesler, ne religieux ne autres, n'ont tant besoing de estre net de conscience comme genz d'armes doivent ester.
>
> (And because of this each person ought to be aware and bear in mind that in all the callings there are in the world, whether religious or secular, in which anyone should or might be engaged, no men have so great a need for a clear conscience as is required of men-at-arms. (de Charny 164.216-219)[3]

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[3] The edition of *The Book of Chivalry* listed in my bibliography is a bilingual edition, with facing translation by Elspeth Kennedy. I have used Kennedy's translations here. For all citations from *The Book of Chivalry*, even page numbers correlate to the text in French, and odd page numbers correlate with Kennedy's facing translations.

De Charny makes two rhetorical moves here: firstly he muddies the distinction between religious orders and knighthood. Elspeth Kennedy translates "ne religieux ne autres" as "whether religious or secular" (de Charny 167.228), but de Charny's French word "autres" is not as specific as "secular."[4] It is conspicuously vague: what other orders does de Charny have in mind? It is also unclear in de Charny's phrasing whether knighthood is part of "religieux" or of "autres" here. De Charny's second rhetorical move, and his real purpose here, is to place the emphasis of knighthood on spiritual and moral peril. To de Charny, it is spiritual and moral fortitude that knights need most, not physical strength. Specifically, de Charny suggests that knights have a greater need of a clear conscience than monks do. He continues, in the same vein:

> Que vous devez savoir que les autres orders de religion furent et sont faites et ordenees pour server et prier Nostre Seigneur pour eulz et pour les trespassez et en vie, et sanz avoir regart ne delit es choses mondaines … et sanz nul peril de leurs corps ne a grant travail d'aler aval les champs pour eulz armer ne en doubte d'estre tuez.
>
> (For you should know that the other orders, that is the religious orders, were and still are established and ordained to serve God and to pray to Him on behalf of themselves and of others, whether living or dead, and to take no account of nor delight in worldly things … they are spared the physical danger and the strenuous effort of going out onto the field of battle to take up arms and are also spared the threat of death. (de Charny 166.225-234)

4   Which would be "seculier."

Of particular note here is the phrase "les autres orders de religion." Kennedy's translation is "the other orders, that is the religious orders" (De Charny 167.236-237), and although that is a possible reading, I think Kennedy is going to some lengths to make clear a distinction that de Charny leaves quite ambiguous. An equally possible reading of de Charny's French is simply "the other orders of religion." So de Charny may here categorize chivalry as a religious order. But even if he does not—even if we accept Kennedy's reading—de Charny certainly understands chivalry to be fundamentally comparable to religious orders. For de Charny chivalry requires its own kind of piety.

Ramon Llull, in his *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, conceives of chivalry in even more clearly religious terms than de Charny does. Just as St. Bernard differentiates two kinds of warfare and Geoffroi perceives priesthood and knighthood as parallel, Llull also sees the priest and the knight as parallel figures: he refers to the priest as a "spiritual knight," a counterpart to the "temporal knight" (Llull 125). But Llull does not see chivalric piety as spiritually subordinate to priestly piety. His conception is not, as St. Bernard's is, of a special order of knights who are a paradoxical thing: warrior-monks. Rather, Llull conceives of knighthood as inherently salvific, and fundamentally religiously oriented. Llull presents the primary duty of a knight as "to uphold and defend the holy and catholic faith" (Llull 67). The *Book of the Order of Chivalry* begins with a fable about the origins of chivalry: God chose one man in a thousand, "the most kind, wise, loyal, strong, with the noblest soul, the most knowledgeable and with the best manners of them all" (Llull 55) to maintain "charity, loyalty, justice and truth" (Llull 55) on earth. The order of knighthood, then, is appointed by God, and knights are explicitly God's agents. Knights are "defenders and upholders of the office of God and of the faith

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by which we will attain salvation" (Llull 67). While St. Bernard considers pious knights to be an exception and de Charny sees knightly piety as a wise defence mechanism in light of the threat of death, Llull's ontological approach to chivalry is similar to Wycliffe's approach to the church: knights who do not follow the Order of Chivalry in spirit are not knights at all. Llull underscores this by explaining that entry into chivalry is a spiritual process, grounded in faith. Llull's description of how a squire becomes a knight features confession, fasting, a mass, and a sermon "that explains the fourteen articles upon which the faith is founded, and the ten commandments, the seven sacraments of the Holy Church and everything else that pertains to the faith" (Llull 119). According to Llull, a knight needs not only a clean conscience—achieved through confession and penance—but also religious knowledge, as represented by the sermon.

Llull, Bernard, and de Charny each reveal that piety was a part of the theoretical conception of chivalry. If *Le Morte Darthur* is to deal with chivalry at all, it must contend with the religious aspects of the chivalric order—as it does. But, as should not be surprising after the *Constitutions* of Arundel, Malory's engagement with religion is relatively subtle compared with theologically dense texts like the thirteenth-century French *Queste del Saint Graal*. Malory's context is fifteenth-century English lay Christianity, not thirteenth-century French monastic Christianity.

So then, we have developed a picture. Fifteenth-century English lay chivalric Christian piety is nationalistic, preoccupied with the relationship between political and ecclesiastical powers, unconcerned with or ignorant of theological niceties, and focused on Christians developing their inner lives but also on doing good in the world and winning honour. By this metric, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* fits very well within its

particular kind of Christianity.[5] It should be neither surprising nor troubling that Malory

removes the theological exegesis of some of his sources, like the French Quest, which

according to Vinaver has "hardly a page or a line not intended for doctrinal exposition"

(Vinaver 3: 1539). That is not a mark of decreased piety, but of a different kind of piety.

Hugo de Groot and Thomas à Kempis would be frustrated and impatient with the

theological weeds of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, though no one could seriously accuse

them of lacking piety.

The Spiritual Trajectory of *Le Morte Darthur*

When viewed as a thematically coherent whole, *Le Morte Darthur* becomes more

explicitly spiritually oriented as it goes on, with the first three sections presenting the full

scope of Christian activity in the world. "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" establishes *Le

Morte Darthur* as happening within a Christian framework, both through its allusions and

also through the person of Merlin and in the central miracle of the Sword in the Stone.

The Sword in the Stone especially is explicitly marked in the text as God's action in the

world, which in turn establishes Arthur himself as divinely sanctioned. "Balyn le

Sauvage," the second section, includes *Le Morte Darthur's* first allusion to the Grail

quest and Galahad, introducing King Pelleas and the miraculous sword that will

eventually be Galahad's but not yet explaining or contextualizing the religious ideas of

the Grail quest. Finally, Malory's treatment of "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius"

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5 This argument builds on the conclusions of Tolhurst (2013), Armstrong (2013), and Hodges (2007), but
   takes those conclusions further.

reveals thematic shifts from his primary source to suggest a growing spiritual orientation. The Grail quest as found in "The Sankgreal" is obviously where Malory engages most explicitly with Christianity, but the themes revealed there come to their conclusion in "The Morte Arthur" and are the fruition of ideas begun much earlier.

Sowing the Seeds: "Uther Pendragon and Merlin"

"Uther Pendragon and Merlin" establishes the knightly piety of *Le Morte Darthur* through a number of superficial allusions, and through the tale's miraculous basis in the person of Merlin. This section is not obviously religious in its focus, but it provides a context for a later engagement with the religion, and provides a contrast that allows the growth of explicit religious themes later in the text.

The trappings of Christendom in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" set the scene. Uther makes his promise to fulfil Merlin's desire by being "sworne upon the four evvangelistes" (F 3.12; V 1: 8.40). Igraine swears to the truth of her story by saying that she "shal ansuer unto God" (F 5.1-2; V 1: 10.26-27). Merlin, in his need, asks help of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and at the Archbishop's request the lords of the realm come to church to pray for a miraculous revelation of the new king. Arthur's knighthood begins when Arthur offers his sword upon the altar where the Archbishop is (F 11; V 1: 16). Some of the kings who doubt Arthur do so on the grounds that they think Merlin is "a wytche" (F 13.1; V 1: 18.14). King Lot, in his fear of King Bors, cries out "Jesu defende us" (F 25.12; V 1: 32.3). Throughout the tale, religious feasts are used as markers of time: Christmas, Candlemas, and Easter are all mentioned as dates that pass before Arthur is finally accepted as king at Pentecost.

None of these references to faith should be surprising, and few of them are significant on their own. King Lot crying to Jesus is as easy to read as an empty figure of speech as an earnest appeal for divine intervention, and Arthur offering his sword upon the altar may be as much empty ritual as it is an expression of religious devotion. But together they establish that the world of Uther and Arthur is a Christian world. The superficial markings of religion may not suggest a deep thematic concern but they do indicate a context. At a minimum, in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin," lay Christian belief is the unexamined milieu.

But we can say more than the minimum. Merlin's ability to perceive and interpret God's will and the miracle of the Sword in the Stone both make the religious components of "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" important to its theme. The fact that Merlin is an agent of God suggests that all of Merlin's actions are in fact God's actions. The existence of the Sword in the Stone as miraculous, rather than marvellous, more broadly demonstrates God's providence over the action of "Uther Pendragon and Merlin."

Merlin can Perceive God's Will

As D. Thomas Hanks Jr. notes, Malory "carefully aligns Merlin—a major shaper of events early in the *Morte*—with God" (Hanks [2013] 13). When Merlin chastises Arthur for his bloodthirstiness he does so in the name of God: "God ys wroth with the for thou wolt never have done" (F 29.27-28; V 1: 36.29). Merlin speaks in God's name again when he reveals Arthur's incest: "God ys displesed with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme: ... for hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be punysshed for your

fowle dedis" (F 36.15-23; V 1: 44.16-27). Later Merlin warns Arthur: "God be nat thy

frende" (F 40.26; V 1: 49.9-10). In all of these cases Arthur accepts Merlin's

chastisement and learns from it. God's wrath toward Arthur receives no further explicit

mention, which may suggest that Arthur has learned and grown. The wrath is still there,

deferred, but the lesson is taken. In any case, Malory's Merlin speaks and works on behalf

of the authority of God.[6]

If there is any doubt as to the truth of Merlin's claims to be working and speaking

on God's behalf, it is dispelled by the miracle of the sword in the stone. This is explicitly

a divine miracle, not a magical event. Merlin advises the Archbishop of Canterbury to

send for "alle the lordes of the reame and alle the gentilmen of armes, that they sholde to

London come by Cristmas upon payne of cursynge" (F 6.30-32; V 1: 12.15-17) to pray

for a miracle. The archbishop is a rare exception in *Le Morte Darthur* to the pattern that

the clergy we encounter are almost always hermits. In *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval*

Europe, Richard Kaeuper points out that in general hermits are "ideal purveyors of

religion to the practitioners of chivalry [because of the] somewhat marginal position of

pious hermits within the ranks of the clergy" (Kaeuper [1999] 58). Interaction with

hermits rather than clergy firmly entrenched in the ecclesiastical hierarchy means that

knights can maintain both piety and spiritual independence. We should not overlook the

importance of the divergence from this pattern here. Merlin appeals to the Archbishop of

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6   Bonnie Wheeler (115-116) argues that far from a divine mouthpiece Merlin is fundamentally
     untrustworthy, pointing out that Merlin is complicit in the incest for which he condemns Arthur.
     Thomas Wright characterizes Merlin as being "equally capable of the miraculous feats of heroes and
     gods or the undignified failings of devils and men" (33).

Canterbury because he wants exactly the opposite of what hermits usually provide: that is, he wants to be clearly and firmly within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The fact that Merlin approaches the Archbishop gives the whole enterprise official institutional legitimacy. Conversely, the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury takes Merlin's advice gives Merlin institutional religious credibility.

And that advice itself is steeped in a religious attitude that assumes the sovereignty and benevolence of God, and the efficacy of religious rites. Merlin does not act unilaterally, but defers to the archbishop just as much as he later defers to Arthur. Merlin "counceilled" (F 6.30; V 1: 12.14) the archbishop, who then acts "by the advys" (F 7.2; V 1: 12.22) of Merlin. So Merlin clearly recognizes the archbishop as a social authority. But because Merlin's plan depends both upon the merciful and miraculous intervention of Jesus, and upon the archbishop's trust of that intervention, the text also emphasizes the archbishop's spiritual authority. Although he takes Merlin's advice, the archbishop acts because he "trusted that God wold make hym knowe that shold wynne the swerd" (F 7.34-35; V 1: 13.15-16). And the "lordes and gentilmen of armes" (F 7.3; V 1: 12.22-23) respond to the archbishop in earnestness: "many of hem made hem clene of her lyf, that her prayer myghte be the more acceptable unto God" (F 7.4-6; V 1: 12.24-25). Malory's knights sometimes display an individualistic strain that Kaeuper takes pains to demonstrate is one of the paths of a particularly knightly piety, but here we see them engaging in conspicuously communal and institutional piety. This is a nation desperate for fear of the lack of a rightful king, calling to a God in whose power they believe. And the call is answered.

The Sword in the Stone as a Miracle

The sword in the stone appears in the churchyard "ayenst the hyghe aulter" (F 7.10-11; V 1: 12.30). The location of the sword would establish it as miraculous rather than magical, even if its appearance in the context of prayer did not. The sword also appears "whan matyns and the first masse was done" (F 7.9-10; V 1: 12.29), but the archbishop commands the lords: "pray unto God still, that no man touche the suerd tyll the hyhe masse be all done" (F 7.19-20; V 1: 12.39-40), and they do. This delay before attempting to pull out the sword speaks to the sincerity of the prayer. The archbishop and the lords continue to pray to God even after he has shown them what they asked for, because prayer in this context is a spiritual discipline rather than simply a means to an end. It is from this context of earnest Christian prayer that Arthur's kingly authority arises. Malory here establishes Arthur as king by divine right, just as elsewhere in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" he establishes Arthur as king by heredity, by consent of the people, and by strength of arms. In both its miraculous underpinnings and its details, "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" begins *Le Morte Darthur* in a Christian religious context.

Foreshadowing the Grail: "Balyn le Sauvage"

The next section, "Balyn le Sauvage," is full of religious foreshadowing. The episode at the beginning of "Balyn le Sauvage" in which a damsel comes to Camelot with a sword that can only be pulled out of its scabbard by "a knyght, and he muste be a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (F 48.1-3; V 1: 61.34-62.2) is not obviously religious foreshadowing. It is most clearly a parallel to the Sword in the Stone, and Arthur

naturally is the first to attempt the sword. Pulling swords out when nobody else can is, after all, Arthur's special area of expertise. But the damsel with the sword also foreshadows both the sword in the floating stone which appears at the beginning of "The Sankgreal" and the healing of Sir Urry which closes "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere." Both of these later events, like the task of unsheathing the damsel's sword here, feature Arthur's knights all attempting in their turn to succeed in a miraculous task that will help someone who has come to Arthur's court for aid and will also prove their own worth. Unlike in the healing of Urry, however, the successful knight here is not at all reluctant. The obstacle to Balin's attempt is not his own sense of his unworthiness; it is the presumption of other knights that Balin has little worth. And unlike either Arthur's sword in the stone or Urry's healing, Balin's sword is not explicitly couched in divine action. The sword is magical, not miraculous.

The distinction between magic and miracle blurs, however, in the context of Galahad and the sword in the floating stone. After Balin's death, Merlin has his sword "put into a marbil stone stondynge upryght" (F 74.21-22; V 1: 91.34-35). In a piece of explicit foreshadowing Malory concludes "Balyn le Sauvage" by telling us that this same sword

> by adventure ... swamme downe by the streme unto the cité of Camelot. ...
> And that same day Galahad the Haute Prynce com with Kynge Arthure,
> and so Galaad brought with hym the scawberde and encheved the swerde
> that was in the marble stone hovynge uppon the watir. And on
> Whytsonday he encheyved the swerde, as hit ys rehersed in the Booke of
> the Sankgreall. (F 74.24-30; V 1: 91.36-92.7)

The sword links "The Sankgreal" to "Balyn le Sauvage," and the link is both causal and narrative. These are not just two stories with shared characters and settings. The action of "Balyn le Sauvage" has effects in "The Sankgreal." The sword reappears in the opening movement of "The Sankgreal," embedded in a stone floating in the water, just as Merlin foretold, and Galahad appears with it.[7] When Galahad pulls the sword from the floating stone Arthur and his knights are astonished, but Galahad replies: "hit ys no mervayle, for thys adventur ys nat theyrs [referring to the good knights who failed] but myne. And for the sureté of thys swerde I brought none with me" (F 671.21-23; V 2: 862.29-31). Galahad's action for the rest of "The Sankgreal" depends on the sword that came from Balin, as Galahad explains:

> Now have I the swerde that somtyme was the good knyghtes Balyns le
> Saveaige, and he was a passynge good knyght of hys hondys; and with
> thys swerde he slew hys brothir Balan, and that was great pité, for he was a
> good knyght. And eythir slew othir thorow a dolerous stroke that Balyn
> gaff unto my grauntefadir Kynge Pelleans, the whych ys nat yett hole, nor
> naught shall be tyll that I hele hym. (F 671.28-24; V 2: 863.3-9)

The sword is a symbolic representative of the story threads that also get carried on to "The Sankgreal," and the importance of that story continuity is such that Malory reminds us of the importance of the narrative connections represented by the sword. But the sword's significance changes from its first appearance to its second. When the sword

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7 See Evans ([1985] 34-39) for more on connections between Balin and Galahad.

reappears, it has been re-contextualized from magical to miraculous. The sword, like *Le Morte Darthur* in general, moves toward holiness.

"Balyn le Sauvage" provides another piece of foreshadowing of the Grail quest when Balyn wounds King Pellam with a "mervaylous" spear. This wound is mystical, and we are told that "Kynge Pellam lay so many yerys sore wounded, and myght never be hole tylle that Galaad the Hawte Prynce heled hym in the queste of the Sankgreall" (F 68.15-17; V 1: 85.21-23). Although the account of Pellam's wounding is different in "The Sankgreal" than it is here in "Balyn le Sauvage," the prediction is accurate; Galahad does eventually heal the maimed king. The difference in accounts of Pellam (called Pelleas in "The Sankgreal")[8] is another indication of the text's growing preoccupation with piety. In "Balyn le Sauvage" the wounding is portentous, in that it turns Pellam's country into a wasteland, and marvellous, in that it is done with the spear of Longinus, but the wounding itself is physical and mundane. Pellam is chasing Balin and Balin grabs the first convenient weapon:

> And whan Balyne was wepynles he ran into a chamber for to seke a
> wepyn, and so fro chamber to chamber, and no wepyn coude he fynde, and
> allwayes Kyng Pellam followed afftir hym. And at the last he entered into
> a chamber … and thereby stoode … a mervaylous spere strangely wrought.
> So whan Balyn saw the spere he gate hit in hys honde. (F 67.29-68.3; V 1:
> 84.30-85.8)

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8   The name change seems to be a case of Malory forgetting what he has written elsewhere. In *La Queste del Saint Graal* Pellam and Pelleas are two different people, but in Malory they are the same.

The account in "The Sankgreal" has Pelleas wounded by a spear that appears on its own to wound him in punishment for drawing a sword that is not meant for him (F 756.20-32; V 2: 989.33-990.14). The changes in the account make it more mystical, rooted not in an accidental use of a magical artifact, but in divine protection of a holy one.

"Balyn le Sauvage" includes one more piece of spiritual foreshadowing in the remarks of Balan about the future of the tomb that he shares with Balin. Balan says that once their story is written on the tomb, "there wille never good knyght nor good man see our tombe but they wille pray for our soules" (F 73.25-27; V 1: 91.1-2). Balan here articulates the orthodox religious perspective that "the purpose behind erecting a tomb or funeral monument was to elicit prayers" (Cherewatuk 83). The tomb of Balin and Balan is not only an earthly memorial; it is a spiritual aid, and the spiritual value of prayer for the dead is two-fold. First, prayer is beneficial to the object, and Balan and Balin's souls receive a benefit from the prayers of knights who see their tomb, and second it is beneficial to the one who prays. Tombs like Balan and Balin's remind good knights and good men to pray, which is itself a good. Balan and Balin's tomb is the first of several allusions in *Le Morte Darthur* to the necessity of praying for the souls of the dead, the most notable of which are Lancelot's offer to set up chantries to pray for Gareth's and Gaheris' souls.[9] As part of his penance for killing Gareth and Gaheris, Lancelot offers to establish chantries to continually pray for them. We will have much more to say about this offer in chapter 3, but for now it is sufficient to note that as with Balin and Balan,

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9   For more on prayers for the dead in Malory see Cherewatuk (2013).

Gareth and Gaheris can be memorialized in prayer. Famously, Malory interrupts "Sir Tristram de Lyones" to assert "that all maner jantylmen hath cause to the worldes ende to prayse Sir Trystram and to pray for his soule" (F 539.7-8; V 2: 683.2-3). This exhortation to prayer implicitly asserts the historical reality of Sir Tristram, and makes his section of *Le Morte Darthur* into a virtual memorial. But if *Le Morte Darthur* is a funerary monument to anyone it is a monument to Malory himself, and Malory repeatedly requests that his readers pray for his soul, most notably in the text's final words: "what I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule" (F 940.24-25; V 3: 1260.24). "Balyn le Sauvage" foreshadows all of these spiritual concerns, and signals the growing spiritual focus of *Le Morte Darthur*.

The End of the Beginning: "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius"

The alliterative *Morte Arthure* (*aMA*), Malory's source for "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius," illustrates the danger of allowing imperial covetousness to blind an established leader to domestic discontent, and dramatizes the language of holy war being misused for secular ends. Matthews points out that in his war against Rome "Arhtur had been warring not only against the pagan forces of Lucius but also, and in defiance of medieval doctrine, against the Church and the pope himself" (Matthews [1960] 134). Although Vinaver believed that Malory held this source in particularly high esteem and that it had "a decisive influence both on the formation of his style and on his subsequent choice of material" (Vinaver [1990] lv), by changing the ending and re-contextualizing the story Malory alters the source's main themes. Malory's version is about a young king

establishing his place in the world, and its engagement with the crusades forms a preview of *Le Morte Darthur*'s other crusade analogue, "The Sankgreal."

To understand the true scope of Malory's alterations, however, we must first identify further variations that are discernible between Caxton's edition and the Winchester manuscript. "King Arthur and Lucius Emperor of Rome" is the section with the most disparity between Caxton's edition and the Winchester Manuscript. Caxton's edition is substantially shorter. The section in the Winchester Manuscript features an introduction, which summarizes the action of the previous book, and contextualizes the Roman war episode as happening "sone aftier com Sir Launcelot de Lake unto the courte, and Sir Trystrams come that tyme also" (F 145.5-6; V 1: 185.4-6). There is no mention of either Lancelot or Trystram in Caxton (C 121). In addition, in Winchester Arthur angrily interrupts the messengers from Lucius, who cower before him before continuing their threat (F 145.25-146-7; V 185.9-186.15). Caxton elides the interruption entirely (C 121). Before Arthur leaves in Winchester he asks his parliament "counseyle me" (F 152.7), and they suggest that he leave his realm in the care of Sir Baudwen and Sir Constantine. Caxton compresses the scene, skips the counsel, and has Arthur simply appoint the two knights (C 152). In addition to the significant abridgement, Caxton's text also has many differences in character, especially linguistically. Caxton's Arthur leaves Constantine and Cador "rule of the royame and Gweneuer his quene" (C 124.13-14). Winchester's language is more ambiguous: "in the presence of all the lordis the kynge resyned all the rule unto thes too lordis and Quene Gwenyvere" (F 152.14-15). My own reading of Winchester is that Guinevere is one of the rulers, not one of the ruled, but the Middle English tendency to split conjoining phrases makes it an ambiguous passage. Caxton

chooses an interpretation and removes the ambiguity. The Winchester version contains much clearer residue of its alliterative source than does Caxton's. Arthur's dream, for example, is given in Winchester as "As the kynge was in his cog and lay in his caban, he felle in a slumberyng and dremed how a dredful dragon dud drenche muche of his peple, and come fleying one wynge out of the weste" (F 153.4-6). Caxton's version of the same section is "And as the kyng laye in his caban in the shyp, he fyll in a slomerynge and dremed a merueyllous dreme. Hym semed that a dredeful dragon dyd drowne moche of his peple, and he cam fleynge oute of the Weste" (C 124.25-27). The consideration of these differences is a perennial subject for discussion in Malory studies.[10] Caxton cut Malory drastically in this section. Vinaver pays particular attention to this section in his commentary:

> Malory treats [*aMA*] with far more respect than most of his other sources.
> The chief attraction of the poem lies for him in the record of Arthur's
> heroic exploits, which he expands and elaborates as best he can, so as to
> make Arthur appear as the true embodiment of heroic knighthood.
> (Vinaver xxx)

In comparison with Caxton's treatment of *aMA* in his edition of *Le Morte Darthur*, the degree of presence of *aMA* in the Winchester manuscript is striking. It is far from clear, however, what degree of respect Malory has for this source, or to what aspect of *aMA* it is

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10 See for example, David Clark (2014), James Wade (2014), Ruth Lexton (2011), all of whom address
     differences between Winchester and Caxton. Sally Shaw (1963) makes an early case that Caxton's
     changes to the Roman War enhance didactic chivalry and religion.

due, or what, precisely, we can conclude from Malory's close adherence to or deviation from his source texts.

By Vinaver's own account, for example, "Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreall* is the least original of his works" (Vinaver 1534). For Vinaver the unoriginality of "The Sankgreal" means that the religious preoccupation of that section belongs properly to the source, and not to Malory himself. He accounts for the perceptible religious focus of "The Sankgreal" by saying that "The *Queste* was, of course, too solid and too elaborate a structure to be so easily upset, and the few alterations made by Malory could neither conceal its purpose nor obliterate its character" (Vinaver 1537). But there is a logical inconsistency at play here. Vinaver argues that "The Sankgreal" is unoriginal because Malory remained close to his doctrinally preoccupied source there, and that this proves that the religious interest is the source's and not Malory's. The logic supporting this argument is that Malory's own position is not being expressed when he does not deviate from his source. According to the same logic, Malory's closeness to *aMA* cannot possibly reveal an affinity for the source's perspective. Alternatively, if Malory's use of *aMA* proves that he is interested in politics and military action, then his use of *La Queste del Saint Graal* must also show that he is interested in doctrine. Malory is, of course, as entitled to be capricious as any other author, but to use his lack of deviation from his source to show his affinity for his source's perspective at one time and his indifference to it at another seems logically inconsistent.

Vinaver's analysis, that "the noble king is above all a political and military leader, conscious of his responsibility for the welfare and the prestige of his kingdom" (Vinaver xxxi), highlights what seems to me to be a substantial difference between Malory's

version and his source. In *aMA,* the king's attention to the prestige of his kingdom comes at a cost to his concern for its welfare.[11] The text introduces him as a conqueror: "Qwen that the Kynge Arthur   by conquest hade wonnyn/ Castlels and kingdoms   and contreez many" (*aMA* 103.26-27), and though this introduction is not explicitly critical, it frames Arthur as expansionist. As Matthews has argued, "the poet's attitude toward the king is ambiaalent" (Matthews [1960] 127). When the Arthur of *aMA* proposes to leave England he gathers a parliament "with all þe perez of þe rewme,   prelates and oþer" (*aMA* 125.637) whom he informs of his intentions and to whom he proposes Mordred as "a soueraynge" (*aMA* 125.644). He tells the peers: "ascent ȝif ȝowe lykes" (*aMA* 125.644), but the text records neither assent nor dissent.

When Arthur assigns Mordred as his regent, Mordred attempts to refuse:

Þan Sir Modrede full mildly   meles hym seluen,

Knelyd to þe Conquerour   and carpes þise wordez:

'I beseke ȝow, sir,   as my sybbe lorde,

Þat ȝe will for charytE   cheese ȝow anoþer,

For if ȝe putte me in þis plytte   ȝowre pople es dyssauyde;

To presente a prynce astate   my powere es symple" (*aMA* 126.679-684)

11   For a tradition scholarly tradition that reads the *aMA* as a critique of war, see Matthews (1960), Göller (1981), DeMarco (2005).

Mordred's reluctance to take on the crown is ironic, since he will eventually usurp the throne, but it also illuminates a central theme of the poem.[12] Mordred's power is indeed too "simple" to present a princely estate. The people are deceived. And the reason why Arthur does not heed this warning is in the line before Mordred's speech. Arthur is a conqueror before he is a king, and his "impatience to be gone on his conquests abroad leads him to pay no heed to either Mordred's protests or Guenever's love-inspired forbodings" (Matthews [1960] 143). The conflict between good kingship and conquest is central to *aMA*, as the text's tendency to re-brand Arthur as a conqueror makes clear. Arthur's responsibility for governing his realm transforms into a desire for conquest as the text goes on, and his decision to leave his land in Mordred's hands against Mordred's wishes and without real regard to council is presented in language full of ironic foreboding.

Malory's Arthur instead assembles the parliament to inform them of his intention "to passe many perelles ways and to ocupye the empire that myne elders afore have claymed" (F 152.5-7; V 1: 194.21-23), and asks "I pray you, counseyle me that may be beste and moste worshyp" (F 152.7-8; V 1: 194.23-24). On parliament's advice Arthur appoints Guinevere, Cadore of Cornwal, and Constantine as co-rulers in his absence. Malory's Arthur makes appropriate provision for the governance of his land, and therefore has a land to return to. This is not a mere plot requirement, brought on by Malory's decision to defer Mordred's rebellion until later in the book: Malory could have

12   For more on Mordred reluctance to take on the crown in the *aMA*, see Armstrong (2008), esp. pp. 85-87.

directly substituted Guinevere or another knight for Mordred here without changing Arthur's attitude, or indeed he could have intensified the dramatic irony by having Mordred remain faithful here, only to betray Arthur later. But instead, Malory re-characterizes Arthur, because while both Malory's Arthur and the *aMA's* Arthur are, at this point in their respective narratives, good kings, what makes a good king is different in each text. *aMA's* good king is decisive and masterful, and it is those very characteristics that lead that Arthur to his tragic end. Malory's good king takes counsel. Malory is respectful of this source but only where it serves him. He uses it, but for his own purposes.

In Malory, the Roman war is successful, but seems to have little lasting impact on the politics of England or of the world. For a section with primarily a plot or a world-building significance this would be strange. But if the purpose of "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" is thematic or is character-based, then the lasting political impact on the world is largely irrelevant. Malory at this point in the text is creating an emotional landscape for Arthur, and he doesn't return to the realpolitik consequences of Arthur's success in Rome for the same reason that he does not explain the specifics of horse husbandry—not because it is uninteresting but because it is separate from his narrative purpose. Another section of *Le Morte Darthur* which has surprisingly little lasting political impact is the other section where the whole of the Round Table fellowship joins together: "The Sankgreal." Ruth Lexton reads "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" as an account of the success (albeit strictly political success) that comes from community, while "The Sankgreal" is "politically isolating and inherently anti-community" (Lexton [2014] *Contested Language* 58). Her comparison of the two sections is apt—they are

companions for each other, and together reflect on the relative merits of military

collective action and personal piety.

The Spiritual Heart of *Le Morte Darthur*: "The Sankgreal"

It is in "The Sankgreal" that Malory's religious themes materialize most

explicitly. The apparent shift of focus towards spirituality in "The Sankgreal" is not a

symptom of a separate tale with distinct concerns, but of the development of concerns

that are held throughout. *Le Morte Darthur* is searching for an ideal. Felicity Riddy, in

her book *Sir Thomas Malory*, offers a persuasive argument that Malory's reading of his

French source for "The Sankgreal" is characteristic of a fifteenth-century lay attitude, in

contrast to the source's thirteenth-century monastic attitude. Malory's tendency to abridge

his source, in the abbreviation of hermit's speeches, for example, "is often seen as the

result of a layman's impatience with theological niceties, but may also represent a

reaction against too explicit a literary mode" (Riddy 115). Malory's abbreviation or

outright removal of the interpretation of allegories does not necessarily imply a disregard

for their significance.[13]

The hole/holé/holy wordplay in Arthur's speech at the beginning of the quest lays

out the theme of "The Sankgreal." Arthur laments: "nevyr shall I se you agayne holé

todydirs" (F 672.26-27; V), and the word "holé" carries the two meanings of whole in the

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13 For more on Malory's fifteenth-century transformation of his thirteenth-century source, see Tolhurst
    (2013), especially p. 148. See Batt ([2002] 133-134) for an argument against overzealous readings of
    the significance of Malory religious context.

sense of healthy and of wholly together in the sense of all together at the same time.[14] It also carries the third meaning of "holy;" in the context of the Sankgreal the homonym is too appropriate to be ignored. The knights abandon wholeness in search of holiness. The whole thrust of the Grail quest is divisive, rather than uniting. This division is both literal and symbolic. The knights are pursuing different ideals from one another, and represent different aspects of the spiritual life. The Grail promotes contemplation, personal and private piety, and isolation. This divisive effect applies to the characters' physical proximity; they all head off in different directions to undertake the quest, and the knights expend as much energy trying to find Galahad as trying to find the Grail, especially at first.

It applies to the characters' social status, as Lancelot soon learns: "'Sir, I say you sothe', seyde the damesell, 'for ye wer thys day in the morne the best knyght of the worlde. But who sholde sey so now, he sholde be a lyer, for there ys now one bettir than ye be, and well hit ys preved'" (F 672.8-11; V 2: 863.20-23). The divisive effect applies to the moral themes of the episode, and of *Le Morte Darthur* as a whole. In Malory, and especially in the Grail quest, "the holy does not make whole, but divides, and it is reflected in the way that the *Sankgreal* expresses frustration as well as desire" (Riddy 136). In contrast to the monastic kind of active spirituality of his source, Malory's spirituality in his Grail quest is fifteenth-century lay spirituality, focusing on introspection, *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, Pentecost, and division.

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14 Lambert ([1975] 64) draws attention to the narrative pun that connects the Healing of Urry with Arthur's "holé togydirs" speech. Mann ([1996] 219) takes up and expands upon Lambert's point.

Though it is neither possible nor desirable to deduce Malory's own theological concerns from his biography, such as it is, we can see contemporary religious issues in *Le Morte Darthur*. Batt, for example, argues that "The Sankgreal" "dramatizes some of the transitional aspects of fifteenth-century figurations of social organization and spiritual responsibility" (Batt 134). Fourteenth-century Western Christian Britain existed with dramatically different assumptions from sixteenth-century protestant Britain. Malory obviously does not foreshadow the Protestant Reformation in England, nor foresee the dramatic conflict between Henry VIII and the authority of Rome that is on the horizon. However, because he lived in the same historical context that eventually produces Henry VIII, the same social and religious issues are at play. What Batt identifies as "concerns with responsibility, the rule of law, divine and human, and the reach of a determining fate" (Batt 134), which exist in the distinction between Sir Galahad and the Grail knights on the one hand and Sir Gareth and the secular knights on the other, with Lancelot caught in between, are of particular relevance on the brink of the English Protestant Reformation. These ideas are dramatized, not confronted, and it is only in hindsight that we can recognize which aspects of "The Sankgreal" are particular to fifteenth-century interests.

As has already been noted, "The Sankgreal" is introspective in its character, particularly in comparison with "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius." The primary conflicts in "The Sankgreal" are internal. Sir Bors's most memorable conflict, for example, is the conflict between saving a maiden from rape and saving his brother from death (F 735.32-736.21; V 2: 960.16-961.12). Bors is not himself in any physical danger, and neither battle is physically threatening to him. The conflict is moral and spiritual. In fact, the greatest physical threat to Bors is posed by his brother Lionel when Lionel

reappears, angry with Bors for choosing to rescue the maiden instead of him. And the

threat that Lionel poses to Bors is only as great as it is because Bors refuses to fight his

brother to the uttermost: "Whan Sir Bors sye that he must fight with his brother other ellis

to dye, he wyst nat what do do … kneed he adowne agayne tofore Sir Lyonelles horse

feete" (V 744.8-12; V 2: 970.4-9). The Grail knights, and especially Lancelot, move

increasingly toward a contemplative rather than an active life throughout "The

Sankgreal." The introspection and the emphasis on contemplation in the Grail quest

reflects the increasing popularity throughout the fifteenth-century of fourteenth- and

fifteenth-century mystics and their focus on "the active life as a necessary precursor to the

cultivation of more exclusively inward kinds of holiness" (Riddy 123).

It is in "The Sankgreal" that the direction of Lancelot's life begins to change. In

"The Sankgreal" Lancelot begins to recognize the limitations of the active life, as for

example when by God's instruction Lancelot boards a ship with Percival's dead sister,

and sails in it for "a moneth and more" (F 770.24; V 2: 2.1011.26-27). Or a little later,

when after leaving the ship Lancelot finds himself forbidden to exercise his active

strength:

> Than herde he a voice say, "O man of evylle fayth and poore beleve!
>
> Wherefore trustist thou more on thy harneyse than in thy Maker? For He
>
> myght more avayle the than thyne armour, in what servyse that thou arte
>
> sette in."
>
> Than seyde Sir Launcelot, "Fayre Fader, Jesu Cryste! I thanke The of
>
> Thy grete mercy that Thou reprevyst me of my myssedede. Now se I that
>
> Thou holdiste me for one of Thy servvauntes."

Than toke he hys swerde agayne and put hit up in hys sheethe, and

made a crosse in hys forehede." (F 773.2-10; V 2: 1014.21-30).

Apart from the emphasis on trusting in God rather than on himself, there is also a strong

contemplative subtext to the imagery of Lancelot sheathing his sword. Since his sword is

symbolic of both Lancelot's reliance upon his own strength and also his activity,

sheathing his sword suggests passivity. And as Lancelot puts his sword away he makes

the sign of the cross on his forehead, symbolizing that it is Christ, rather than Lancelot's

sword, who will keep Lancelot safe, and as a sign of contemplation, that Lancelot's mind

is devoted to Christ. Lancelot becomes less active and more contemplative as he attends

more to holiness. The same trajectory is implied in the character arc of Galahad and

Percival within the Grail quest, and of Bors, Ector de Maris, Guinevere, and many others

outside it. All characters who end their lives in a hermitage are moving from activity

toward contemplation.

The date of Pentecost for significant events in *Le Morte Darthur* places additional

emphasis on the theme of the active and contemplative lives. Arthur is established as

King at Pentecost: "some of the grete lordes had indignation that Arthur shold be kynge,

and put it of in a delay tyll the feest of Pentecoste" (F 10.20-22; V 1: 15.37-39). His

coronation a few years later, after he establishes himself, also takes place at Pentecost:

"Thenne the kyng remeved into Walys and lete crye a grete feste, that it shold be holdyn

at Pentecost after the incoronacion of hym" (F 11.26-27; V 1: 17.3-5). Pentecost is the

date of Sir Urry's healing: "by fortune [Urry's mother] com nyghe the feste of Pentecoste

untyll kynge Arthurs courte" (F 861.28-29; V 3: 1145.1032-33). Knights, especially

Lancelot, habitually promise to return to court by Pentecost (F 142, 204, 217; V 1: 178, 1:

268, 1: 282). These are only a few examples; Pentecost is mentioned at least twenty-seven times in *Le Morte Darthur* (Kato 958).

The link of Arthurian chivalry to the Pentecostal coming of the Holy Ghost puts a focus on the ways that God is expected to act upon and through his followers. The early fifteenth-century priest John Mirk, in his sermon on the vigil of Pentecost, explains that at Pentecost the Holy Ghost "flyeth from the soule that is combred wyth dedly synne" to "hem that ben in good lyf to god and to man and haue mercy in herte and compassion of hem in al her need" (quoted in Holbrook 60). The Holy Ghost is the source of spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy. The Holy Ghost both gives active and miraculous power and also gives mystical visions. Medieval penitential handbooks like *The Book of Vices and Virtues* make it clear that piety is a gift of the Holy Ghost: "þilke Holy Gost þat techeþ þe hertes þat he be oure attourney and teche vs and schewe vs how he, bi þe seuene ȝiftes, doþ awey and destroieþ þe seuene dedly synnes and setteþ in þe herte and noresscheþ þe seuene vertues" (*Vices* 125.31-35). The Holy Ghost, then, is the divine actor behind both *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, behind penance and piety. Pentecost, the feast honouring the coming of the Holy Ghost, is a significant feast for the knights of the Round Table only if the knights of the Round Table are in some sense divinely supported.

Tolhurst points out that Malory's language surrounding the Grail, while invoking the idea of the Eucharist, is careful to do so in general and vague terms, and thus avoids association with the Lollards. As we have noted in the introduction, Arundel's *Constitutions* had a practical effect on authorial self-censorship. Explanation of the nature of the Eucharist was dangerous, "since Lollards had questioned church teaching about it

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and the church had responded by burning as heretics those with unorthodox beliefs about the meaning of the sacred meal" (Tolhurst 150). Yet despite this self-censorship, the Grail Quest still engages with Wycliffite ideas. The knights are challenged on spiritual grounds by spiritual agents who nevertheless assert no political power against the King. From within this framework the knights are not necessarily precluded from spiritual perfection—certainly not from seeking it—but their political, martial, worldly, and temporal powers do not in any way guarantee spiritual authority.[15]

The Beginning of the End: "The Morte Arthur"

In "The Morte Arthur" the markers of secular piety established in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" remain. Some of the verbal appeals to God can be interpreted as hollow figures of speech. Gareth and Gaheris' vow "So God me helpe" (F 870.27; V 3: 1161.28) does not necessarily reveal any deep religious devotion, for example. Gawain

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15   In contrast, the intercession of the Pope in the episode of the feud between Lancelot and Gawain illustrates a thoroughly un-Wycliffite sensibility. The Pope sends bulls to Arthur, "chargyng hym uppon payne of entirdytynge of all Inglonde that he take hys quene agayne and accorde with Sir Launcelot" (F 896.7-9; V 3: 1194.17-23). The Pope here positions himself as the source of mediation between England and heaven, and attempts to use his position as mediator to exert political influence over Arthur. Arthur, as a faithful King, feels himself constrained, but from a Wycliffite perspective the Pope's position here would be groundless. He would not have the spiritual authority to excommunicate all of England, because communion with God and with fellow Christians is not mediated through the church. From a Lollard viewpoint, the Pope's church is not the means by which the English people gain access to God; it is the visible manifestation of that access as it is already occurring.

and Bors both say "God spede you" as a parting phrase: Bors for a literal parting (F 874.1; V 3: 1165.3) and Gawain for a rhetorical one (F 871.30; V 3: 1162.24).

Lancelot, trapped in Guinevere's room without his armour, says that he may escape "by the grace of God" (F 874.21-22; V 3: 1165.27). The discourse of the scene continually returns to God. He cries "Jesu mercy!" (F 875.1; V 3: 1166.8), refers to Guinevere as "Moste nobelest Crysten queen" (F 875.5; V 3: 1166.13), asks that if he should die she "woll pray for [his] soule" (F 875.9; V 3: 1166.17), and enters the battle crying "God deffende me from [the shame of escaping]! But Jesu Cryste, be Thou my shylde and myne armoure" (F 875.30-33; V 3: 1167.4-6). For Whetter, this is a sign of Lancelot that Lancelot's actions and his language do not accord: "Lancelot's language is Christian—but his actions and adulterous love are not" (Whetter 162), but in my estimation the sincerity especially of these last two examples lends sincerity to the previous. Lancelot is not swearing; he is calling out to God for help and for mercy, and the fact that he does so while in the depth of his sin is a mark of the pathos of the text rather than of the hypocrisy of the character.

Guinevere, for her part, says that if Lancelot dies she then will accept her own death "as mekely as ever ded marter take hys dethe for Jesu Crystes sake" (F 875.19-20; V 3: 1166.27-28). On one hand, when Guinevere imagines herself as a martyr it suggests a replacement of Jesus in Guinevere's mind with Lancelot. Guinevere casts herself as a martyr, but she dies not for Jesus' sake, but for Lancelot's. By extension of the metaphor, Lancelot becomes an ersatz God for Guinevere, with the subtext that he is what is keeping her from the God—a parallel to the way Guinevere is explicitly what keeps Lancelot from God.

72

But on the other hand, Guinevere's phrase grounds the whole of their experience in Christian terms, echoing what Malory has already established in "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere," that virtuous love is a mirror of divine love (F 841; V 3: 1119).[16] That Lancelot and Guinevere's love is, in Malory's reckoning, virtuous may be counter-intuitive, since their love is adulterous, and emblematic of a lack of loyalty to their king. But *Le Morte Darthur* is characterized by a moral and religious complexity that allows for an action to be virtuous in one sense and sinful in another. Guinevere is virtuous in her love for Lancelot and vicious in her love (or lack of love) for Arthur. Even within her love for Lancelot, Guinevere is virtuous in her loyalty and devotion to him, in her willingness to sacrifice her own well-being for his, yet at the same time vicious in her jealousy—particularly surrounding Elaine. For the most part, though, and certainly by the time of "The Morte Arthur," Lancelot and Guinevere's love is self-sacrificing, it is sincere, it is unselfish. What Malory recognizes is that not only is it possible to be both sincerely Christian and also sinful, it is not possible in this world to be otherwise. That is the why Galahad, who is not sinful, cannot continue to live in the world, lest the world corrupt him. It is also the meaning of the ending of Guinevere and of Lancelot, whose penance requires retreat from the world in a different sense. That is the meaning of the religious themes of the text as a whole. Fulfilment of one aspect of Christian duty means neglect of another. The social, political and religious demands that come to bear are contradictory. It is not possible to satisfy them all.

16   See Hanks (2013) and Olsen (2013) for more on Lancelot and Guinevere's love as amirror of God's love.

It is not only Lancelot and Guinevere whose Christian expressions have a sense of real sincerity in "The Morte Arthur." Bors expresses his loyalty to Lancelot by saying that "all ys wellcom that God sendyth us, and as we have takyn much weale with you and much worshyp, we woll take the woo with you as we have takyn the weale" (F 878.6-9; V 3: 1169.24-26). Far from a hollow linguistic tic, this is an articulation of Christian humility. Bors, speaking on behalf of Lancelot's affinity, expresses loyalty to Lancelot, as we would expect him to. But that loyalty is couched in theological terms, taken from the Book of Job: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Bors's sentiment reproduces both the language and the spirit of the biblical verse. Without the first half of Bors's statement, his pledge of loyalty would still be sound and moving, but adding the first part, that "all ys wellcom that God sendyth us" both gives theological grounds for Bors's position and also suggests that God, not Lancelot, is responsible for Lancelot's past worship. This theologically-grounded perspective is the stated reason why Lancelot has an army with which to fight against Arthur.

Lancelot's approach to politics is also religiously grounded. In his attempt to make peace Lancelot offers penance to Gawain. For killing Gareth and Gaheris, Lancelot will walk barefoot from Sandwich to Carlisle (a journey of approximately 350 miles), founding "an house of relygious" (F 900.33; V 3: 1199.33) every ten miles, in which a convent will "synge and rede day and nyght in especiall for Sir Gareth sake and Sir Gaharys" (F 900.34-35; V 3: 1199.35-1120.1). Lancelot's purpose in this offer of personal penance and the founding of thirty-five convents is to show that he is contrite, ritually to debase himself before both Gawain and God, and to do what he can practically

to decrease the damage.[17] That third aspect is the reason for the offer of prayer day and night for Gareth's and Gaharis's sakes. This is a confirmation of the sentiment expressed by Balan in "Balyn le Sauvage": "there wille never good knyght nor good man see our tombe but they wille pray for our soules" (F 73.25-27; V 1: 91.1-2).

As in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin," the action in "The Morte Arthur" is supported by a central miracle: in this case the ghostly visitation of Gawain to Arthur. Gawain characterizes his appearance to Arthur as a miraculous act of God's intervention: "God hath sente me to you of Hys speciall grace to gyff you warnyng" (F 921.11-12; V 3: 1234.13-14). In "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" Arthur's kingship is first established by the intervention of God, who places the sword in the stone outside the church. Here again Arthur is confirmed to be divinely ordained as king. God acts to protect Arthur and his kingship. But God's action does not ultimately prevent Arthur's downfall, because, just as in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin," human passions work against God's desire. In "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" it is King Lot and his allies who work against God, and they are ultimately unsuccessful. In "The Morte Arthur" it is the mistrust on both sides that undermines God's will—successfully. As the two sides prepare to talk Arthur warns his men "that and they se ony swerde drawyn, 'loke ye com on fyersely and sle that traytoure, Sir Mordred, for I in no wyse truste hym.'" (F 922.305; V 3: 1235.10-12). Sir Mordred similarly warns his men: "And ye se ony maner of swerde drawyn, loke ye com on fyersely and so sle all that eve before you stondyth, for in no wyse I woll nat truste for thys tretyse" (F 922.6-9; V 3: 1235.13-15). The snake that bites the knight's foot (V

17 Chapter 3 will explore some problems with Lancelot's attempt at penance here.

922.14; V 3: 1235.20-21) is a strong allusion to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, who, according to God's judgement in the Garden, will bruise the heel of Eve's son (Gen. 3:15). Symbolically, the devil is among the armies, undermining the peace. Yet as in Genesis, the serpent cannot do more than inspire. The armies undo the peace themselves because of their mistrust. Arthur's beginning as a king comes when the people of England listen to the message of God sent by a miracle in the sword in the stone, and it ends when they fail to listen to the message of God sent by miracle through the ghost of Sir Gawain.

And just as the Archbishop of Canterbury featured in the religious life of the nation in "Uther Pendragon and Merlin," he does so again in "The Morte Arthur." The Archbishop, "whych was a noble clerke and an holy man" (F 915.27-28; V 3: 1227.29-30), chastises Mordred for attempting to marry Guinevere, and then retreats into a contemplative life "for well he understood that myschevous warre was at honde" (F 916.17-18; V 3: 1228.22-23). As a minor note the remark that the archbishop is a holy man is an implicit acknowledgement that not all clergy are noble or holy. Robert L. Kelly has argued for the thematic importance of the Archbishop's withdrawal from public life (Kelly 113-114). The Archbishop calls the nation to penance though his actions, just as he called it to prayerful supplication after the death of Uther. In both cases the call is a spiritual orienting of both the nation and the text. Penance is important in *Le Morte Darthur* because it is the means by which sinful people may approach God. [18]

18 Malory doesn't tell us whether this is the same Archbishop, but whether it is or is not, the allusion remains.

"The Morte Arthur" is a return to earlier characters, themes, and even sources. As implied by its title, "The Morte Arthur" is an adaptation of both the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (*sMA*) and, to a lesser extent, the *aMA*. Here Malory returns to the source that he used in "King Arthur and Lucius." In "King Arthur and Lucius," however, the emphasis is largely secular and political—as it is in both the *aMA* and the *sMA*. In "The Morte Arthur" the spiritual concerns are intertwined with and eventually supersede political ones, as Arthur's conflict with Mordred eventually gives way to Guinevere's and Lancelot's deaths in holy orders. If "King Arthur and Lucius" establishes that solidifying and expanding borders is a good beginning for a King, "The Morte Arthur" suggests that penance and quietism together constitute a good end.

Le Morte Darthur is rooted in fifteenth-century English lay Christianity. The confession motif, the text's emphasis on the relationship between contemplative interiority and active Christian life, and the exploration of the respective pressures of social, political, and spiritual responsibilities and demands are all particularly fifteenth-century lay Christian concerns whose expression grows throughout *Le Morte Darthur.* The text is not uniform in its engagement with religious themes, but there is a distinct trajectory throughout *Le Morte Darthur* away from purely political and towards religious concerns. The shift of the text's emphasis towards religious themes does not imply, however, that the earliest sections of *Le Morte Darthur* are uninterested in religious themes. Rather, the shift is itself part of the narrative. The contrast between the spiritually focused final sections of *Le Morte Darthur* and the comparatively secular earlier books exists for effect. The difference is development. As a result, Malory's religious context

permeates *Le Morte Darthur.* His religious focus increases throughout the text, but it is present even from the beginning.

Chapter 2
How to Bake a Pie(ty): Galahad and Lancelot

Malory's Grail knights—Sir Galahad, Sir Percival, Sir Bors, and Sir Lancelot—
are defined by their holiness. Like saints, their holiness sets them apart and makes them
examples both to the other characters within their story and to readers who can recognize
in "The Sankgreal" the structure of a saint's life. The Grail quest is not a saint's life, but
hagiography is an intertext for the Grail quest, as Kraemer argues: "Malory's Grail story,
viewed in the context of fifteenth-century Englihs hagiography, raises his reader's
expectations for the narrative to resolve the conflict evident in Lancelot … by anticipating
his later conversion and saintly death" (Kraemer 104). We have already seen that
Malory's first publisher Caxton presented *Le Morte Darthur* as a moral exemplar for
readers. In "The Sankgreal," and in the characters of the Grail knights in particular, the
text sets forth a model that is not only chivalric and moral; it is above all spiritual.

Although all three of the main Grail knights—Galahad, Percival, and Bors—
represent holy knighthood to a certain degree, Galahad is the pinnacle of saintly chivalry.
Galahad's relationship with his father Lancelot is especially useful to demonstrate his
specific kind of piety, and its grounding in identity. Lancelot fills an ambiguous place
among the Grail knights; he is not truly one of them, but neither is he distinct from them.
This ambiguity is a manifestation of an internal conflict within Lancelot that is not
resolved in "The Sankgreal." Eventually Lancelot does choose to pursue holiness, and his

experiences in the Grail quest are a part of what brings him to that choice.[1] Although he is still wrestling with sin in "The Sankgreal," by the end of *Le Morte Darthur*, Lancelot is no less a representation of holiness than Galahad is.

Galahad and Lancelot function within *Le Morte Darthur* as exemplars for holy purity and redeemed holiness, respectively. Before the Grail quest, Lancelot is a representative of earthly chivalry. During the Grail quest, Galahad reveals the superiority of holy knighthood over secular knighthood in the imagination of *Le Morte Darthur*. Because he is Lancelot's son, Galahad establishes the relationship between secular and sacred as linear and causal. But the holiness of the Grail quest is not contained within "The Sankgreal." Galahad's success and Lancelot's failure in the Grail quest drive both Lancelot and the text toward an increased prioritization of holiness derived from redemption. Lancelot ends *Le Morte Darthur* by withdrawing into religious life, because that is what the logic of *Le Morte Darthur* requires.

The World is Not Enough: Lancelot and Earthly Chivalry

Sir Lancelot spends much of the text as a representative of earthly chivalry. To the degree that Lancelot is a focus of the text, he is one of the means by which the text enacts its themes, and to the degree that he is successful as a knight, Lancelot represents chivalry in general. More specifically, however, Lancelot is often the symbolic representative of a

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1   Radulescu (2013) argues that Lancelot's penitence at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* is a development from the healing of Urry (Radulescu 190), itself a development from the Grail quest (Radulescu 186). Kelly (2001) makes a case that Lancelot's offer of penitence to Gawain after the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris is a response to the Grail quest (Kelly 114-115)

particularly earthly kind of chivalry. In the beginning of the Grail quest, for example, the

maiden sent by the hermit Nacien refers to Lancelot as "the best knyght of the worlde" (F

672.14-15; V 2: 863.27). Radulescu has recently argued that Lancelot's status as best

knight of the world is under threat throughout the "Sankgreal." She makes a case that the

function of the healing of Urry is to re-establish Lancelot "as the best Arthurian knight"

(Radulescu 286), after his relative failure in the Grail quest. For Radulescu "best knight of

the world" is a straightforward title, and the complexity arises from doubt about whether

Lancelot deserves it. But in Lancelot's case, the phrase "of the world" is not a superlative,

it is a qualifier. This is not another way of saying that Lancelot is the best knight

anywhere. Lancelot is not the best knight; he is the best worldly knight. He is the best "of

ony synfull man of the worlde" (F 672.18-19; V 2: 863.30-31). So the maiden not only

ranks Lancelot's ability, she also defines the scope of his importance.

In his despair during the Grail quest Lancelot exclaims:

> whan I sought worldly adventures for worldely desyres, I ever encheved
>
> them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no
>
> quarrell, were hit ryght were hit wronge. And now I take uppon me the
>
> adventures to seke of holy thynges, now I se and undirstonde that myne
>
> olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me, that I had no power to stirre
>
> nother speke whan the Holy Bloode appered before me. (F 695.8-14; V 2:
>
> 896.2-9)

Both prior to and during the Grail quest Lancelot is a representative of a secular ideal of knighthood.[2] But although he is always a standout among Arthur's knights, Lancelot is not always at the apex. Lancelot is overshadowed in the Grail quest by Bors and Percival as well as by Galahad. Lancelot is not granted a clear sight of the Grail as Bors and Percival are, and he correctly diagnoses his own position: "no man in thys worlde excepte he have lyved bettir than I have done to enchyeve that I have done" (F 775.33-35; V 2: 1018.5-6). Lancelot's reduction in status is a matter of his sphere of action, not only of having a new point of comparison in the person of Galahad. He has achieved less than Bors or Percival. When he turns his focus onto holy things, Lancelot's success and prowess in the secular sphere are no longer enough. Kraemer comments that during the Grail quest "Lancelot has neither chastity nor true chivalry, for he seems to worship earthly rather than heavenly things" (Kraemer 97). The above passage demonstrates that during the Grail quest Lancelot begins to recognize this very problem. Lancelot's situation is an inverse of Matt 6:33: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." Rather than gaining all things when he starts to seek the kingdom of God, Lancelot loses his earthly worship.

This makes sense in the context of medieval chivalric piety—especially as described by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In the Grail quest the knights are required to shift between St. Bernard's two kinds of warfare: from struggle against flesh and blood to a

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2   See Hodges ([2005] 7ff.) for an argument that the knights in *Le Morte Darthur* represent different chivalric values which Malory is contrasting. See Beverly Kennedy (199) for an argument that Lancelot is the primary worshipful knight of Arthur's court.

struggle against spiritual hosts of evil. As Lancelot makes clear, his struggle in the Grail

quest is no longer an adventure of "worldly adventures for worldely desyres" but is

instead a struggle to "seke of holy thynges" (F 695.8-14; V 2: 896.2-9). Prowess in one

kind of warfare does not translate into success in the other.

The emphasis on Lancelot and on his earthly prowess and spiritual poverty during

the Grail quest dramatizes Lancelot's internal conflict.[3] Lancelot's participation in the

Grail quest is in some senses a failure; he does not, as Percival, Bors, and Galahad do, see

the Grail unveiled with his own eyes. He does not accompany Galahad to the Kingdom of

Sarras. He does not continue the quest to its end. He is defeated in battle by Galahad and

by the unnamed black knight at the river Mortays (F 722; V 2: 934). He loses his helm

and his sword and his horse (F 694; V 2: 894). Despite these external failures, though,

Lancelot's primary conflict within the Grail quest is internal. In that context his success

as a knight of earthly chivalry is a liability rather than an asset. Lancelot's failures in the

Grail quest dramatize the conflict within a character who is inflexible, rather than

unstable.[4] Or rather, his instability is a symptom of inflexibility. The ground has shifted

under his feet but Lancelot does not alter his stance. The core of Lancelot's difficulty in

the Grail quest is that his strengths have become weaknesses and he is therefore in

conflict with himself.

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3   Molly Martin discusses Lancelot's internal conflict at length in *Vision and Gender in Malory's Morte
    Darthur* (2010): see especially p. 128.
4   On Lancelot's inflexibility see Armstrong ([2003] 150).

Lancelot is not the only "worldly" knight, either in the Grail quest or elsewhere in Malory. Sir Tristram is also a worldly knight, and is arguably Lancelot's main rival both for primacy among Arthur's knights, and for the focus of the text. Lancelot and Tristram represent different conceptions of chivalry—conceptions that Malory defines in opposition to each other. Lancelot is with King Arthur, and by extension the Arthurian knights. Even when he is alone, Lancelot is a representative of Arthur and of the Round Table, and King Arthur's international renown is based partly on Lancelot's prowess. Tristram, on the other hand, is rarely present at court. He is a representative of Cornwall, as we can see by how often other knights comment on his Cornish origin. Sir Kay, for example, mocks him by saying that he "harde never that evir good knight com oute of Corwayle" (F 382.26-27; V 2: 488.12-13). Sir Dynadan comments that Tristram "bere[s] a shylde of Cornwayle, and for the cowardyse that ys named to the knyghtes of Corwayle by youre shyldys ye bene ever forborne" (F 398.24-26; V 2: 28-30). The contrast between Lancelot and Tristram becomes clear in their respective involvements in the Roman War. Tristram stays home from Arthur's Roman War, while Lancelot accompanies Arthur as an invaluable ally, who for example together with Sir Cador and Sir Bors "slowe of noble men of armys mo than an hondred" (F 166.32; V 1: 215.19-20) during a single battle during the Roman war. As Hodges points out, "Launcelot is the companion of Arthur and involved in national politics, while Trystram tends to stay away from Arthur's court … and his concerns are more local" (Hodges 8). Tristram is a Cornish knight, and part of his purpose in *Le Morte Darthur* is to stand as a representative of one of the constituent

nations that make up Britain.[5] Tristram is a regional knight while Lancelot is a national one.

Sir Gawain likewise contrasts with Lancelot, as becomes increasingly clear toward the end of *Le Morte Darthur* when the two engage in repeated single combat. Gawain is more worldly than Lancelot is within the Grail quest, and elsewhere in *Le Morte Darthur* he is consistently associated with worldly virtues such as heredity and family loyalty, and also as a courtly lover. Gawain's interactions with and works on behalf of Arthur are subsumed within a clan or family-based ethic, because unlike Lancelot, Gawain has a family connection to Arthur.[6] For most of the text, the concepts of political loyalty and familial loyalty overlap for Gawain, but the feud between Gawain and King Pellinore makes it clear that when there is a conflict, family loyalty takes precedence for Gawain. Gawain is willing to kill Pellinore, who as a fellow member of the Round Table is clearly a political ally, because Pellinore killed Gawain's father King Lot. Gawain thinks and acts primarily on a clan level,[7] Tristram on a regional level, and Lancelot on a national one.

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5   On the nations of Malory's Britain, see Armstrong and Hodges (2014).

6   Extratextually, Gawain is conventionally taken to be broadly speaking a representative of the British literary tradition while Lancelot is a representative of the French tradition. See Batt (2002), Hodges (2005) for more.

7   While Gawain is associated with Orkney, and he therefore has a certain amount of regional identity, his primary allegiances are based in blood rather than in geography. Tristram is consistently associated with Cornwall as a place.

The identity of Lancelot as a representative of political, national chivalry, adds an extra resonance to the meaning of Galahad as his son. Galahad does not merely supersede his father, with all the Freudian implications that entails, nor does he merely surpass the knight who had formerly been the greatest knight in the world. Galahad, the Grail knight, who is symbolically linked to a chivalry of holiness, both follows and surpasses Lancelot, the preeminent knight of secular nationalism, because holiness itself both follows and surpasses the secular nationalism that prioritizes the nation over either Christendom or personal piety. When Galahad arrives at Arthur's court it signals a shift toward a sphere of action in which Lancelot is no longer preeminent.

It's a Matter of Priorities: Galahad and the Place of Holiness

Despite its symbolic and structural importance, Galahad's arrival at Arthur's court is a bizarre moment in *Le Morte Darthur*, since Galahad is something of an interloper in the text. Galahad temporarily replaces Lancelot as the preeminent knight of Malory's fictional Britain, and also of Malory's text. He is not the first knight to do so: Tristram and Gareth also temporarily take Lancelot's place. Gawain functions as a foil and antagonist for Lancelot all through *Le Morte Darthur*, and especially in "The Sankgreal" and "The Morte Arthur." But Galahad is different from any of these knights, both because of what he represents and because other knights replace Lancelot only by implication, while Galahad is Lancelot's explicit successor.

Tristram and Gareth both ultimately establish themselves as parallel to, not greater than, Lancelot. They both, and especially Tristram, broaden the narrative world of *Le*

Morte Darthur by showing that Arthur and his knights have an influence beyond their immediate context. Both demonstrate how King Arthur's virtue attracts virtue. They take focus away from Lancelot without diminishing him, because both have meaning without Lancelot. The story of Tristram and Isolde is an obvious analogue to Lancelot and Guinevere, as even the characters within the story acknowledge. Isolde herself says "there be within this londe but foure lovers, and that is Sir Launcelot and Dame Gwenyvere, and Sir Trystrames and Quene Isode" (F 340.3-5; V 1: 425.29-31). But the effect of that analogue is to enrich both stories through comparison. This is why Lancelot can be so disappointed in Tristram when he marries the second Isolde: "Fye uppon hym, untrew knyght to his lady! ... from this day forthe I woll be his mortall enemy" (F 348.22-29; V 1: 435.11-19). Lancelot's reaction here seems extreme; he has no specific loyalty to Isolde or responsibility for her. It should be possible for Lancelot to disapprove of Tristram's actions without becoming his "mortall enemy." But Lancelot identifies with Tristram and recognizes that others identify them with each other. So Tristram's betrayal of Isolde is for Lancelot emotionally evocative of Lancelot betraying Guinevere, and he reacts emotionally. Lancelot injects his judgement into Tristram's story and as a result we have perspective on both Lancelot and on Tristram.

Sir Gareth, of course, has additional significance as the protégé of Lancelot whom Lancelot accidentally kills when he rescues Guinevere. Gareth is knighted by Lancelot (F 229; V 1: 299) and Malory ends Gareth's tale by emphasizing the relationship between Gareth and Lancelot: "Lorde, the grete cheere that Sir Launcelot made of Sir Gareth, and he of hym! For there was never no knyght that Sir Gareth loved so well as he dud Sir Launcelot, and ever for the moste party he woulde be in Sir Launcelottis company" (F

285.26-29; V 1: 360.28-31). Gareth attaches himself to Lancelot from his first appearance until his last, and he clearly models himself after Lancelot. Yet despite this affinity, Lancelot ultimately kills Gareth:

> as Sir Launcelot thrange here and there, hit mysfortuned hym to sle Sir Gaherys and Sir Gareth, the noble knygt, for they were unarmed and unwares. As the Freynsh booke sayth, Sir Launcelot smote Sir Gaherys and Sir Gareth uppon the brayne-pannes, wherethorow that they were slayne in the felde. (F 885.4-9; V 3: 1177.31-1179.3)

Although Gaheris and Gareth both die, it is Gareth who receives the emphasis both by the characters and by the text itself. Gareth and Gaheris had joined the knights guarding Guinevere out of loyalty to Arthur, but had both insisted on doing so unarmed out of loyalty to Launcelot. Ironically, although Gareth and Gaheris are unarmed and are therefore not party to a direct attack on Lancelot, the very fact that they are unarmed makes it impossible for Lancelot to recognize them, which in turn leads directly to their deaths.[8] The irony of Lancelot killing Gareth is full of pathos for the characters, especially Lancelot and Gawain, but it is also full of symbolic meaning. The text sets

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8 In a Kalamazoo talk and as-yet-unpublished article he was kind enough to share with me, Stephen Atkinson argues that Lancelot's killing of Gareth and Gaheris is obviously accidental—pointing out that not even Gawain suggests that it is deliberate. Atkinson discusses the technique of a mounted knight fighting against unmounted opponents, the helmet's lack of visibility, and Gareth and Gaheris's lack of identifying heraldry.

Gareth as the successor of Lancelot in earthly knighthood, and by killing Gareth, Lancelot symbolically kills his own future.

But Galahad doesn't broaden the narrative world of *Le Morte Darthur*, he narrows it, and unlike Tristram or Gareth the existence of Galahad explicitly diminishes Lancelot. Galahad is not a foil for Lancelot throughout the text as Gawain is, nor even for Lancelot during the Grail quest. As a foil for Lancelot, Bors is a better fit than Galahad is. Bors has committed a sexual sin (F 728.5-6; V 2: 947.24-25) but has moved past it, but Galahad has never sinned in the first place.[9] So why is Galahad here? If Malory alters his sources out of favouritism for Lancelot, to "omit important passages which might reflect discredit on his hero [and] insist on his past greatness, and assign[n] to him a role which he could never have played in the original version" (Vinaver [1990] 1536), why not simply make Lancelot the hero of the tale?[10]

I suggested earlier that Malory expresses real ambivalence about which kind of life is preferable, a religious or a secular one. In "The Sankgreal" the text begins to come to a conclusion, which reveals itself in a comparison of best knights. Within "The Sankgreal," Galahad is frequently named "the worthyest knyght of the worlde" (F 678.28-29; V 2: 877.28-29) or "the beste knyght of the worlde" (F 672.14; V 2: 863.27). These praises, however, are somewhat ambiguous because they echo or mimic those applied to Lancelot (F 672; V 2: 863). Outside of "The Sankgreal," Merlin calls King Pellinore "one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde and the strengyst man of armys" (F 38.27-28; V 1:

9   See Hodges ([2005] 118), Kraemer (87).

10   For a claim that Malory does alter his source to favour Lancelot, see Vinaver ([1990] 1536-1537).

46). Sir Balin's success removing the sword from around the damsel's waist demonstrates that he has virtue the other knights do not, and the damsel calls him "a passynge good knyght and the beste that every y founde, and moste of worship withoute treson, trechory or felony" (F 49.30-32; V 1: 64). During his quest after Arthur's wedding Sir Gawain hears that Sir Pelleas "is the beste knyght I trow in the worlde and the moste man of prouesse" (F 130.20-21; V 1: 166), and at the end of Gawain's quest the text reports that Sir Marhaut "was named one of the beste knyghtes lyvyng" (F 143.4-5; V 1: 179). Sir Tristram, as we have already noted, is explicitly a rival to Launcelot for greatness, and Sir Blamour calls him "the beste knyght that ever I founde" (F 325.5-6; V 1: 409). Although most of these "bests" are limited by their contexts, they also have a cumulative effect of undermining the absoluteness of "best knight" as a judgement.

At other points in the text Sir Kay is temporarily implied to be the best knight: "there was noen that dud so welle as he that day" (F 18.1-2; V 1: 23-24), as are Kings Bors and Ban, a little later: "youndir I se the most valiante knyght of the worlde, and the man of moste renouwne, for such too brethirne as ys Kynge Ban and Kynge Bors ar nat lyvynge" (F 26.6-9; V 1: 32-33).We have already noted that, like Sir Tristram, Sir Gawain is a contender for title of "best knight" if only by virtue of his frequent comparisons with Launcelot, and we have also already noted that Sir Lamerok is assumed to be the equal of Lancelot and Tristram (F 245; V 1: 316). The Red Knight of the Red Lands includes Gawain among a list of Arthur's best knights of whom he is not afraid: "Sir Launcelot, Sir Trystrams, Sir Lameroke, othir Sir Gawayne" (F 247.29-30; V 1: 319), and when he defeats the Red Knight of the Red Lands Sir Gareth is implied to surpass them all (F 247; V 1: 319). Sir Palomides is usually overshadowed by Tristram,

but at one point, inspired by his love for Isolde, he surpasses all other knights: "all people gaff hym the pryse as for the beste knyght that day, and he passed Sir Launcelot othir ellys Sir Trystram" (F 581.23-24; V 2: 738.25-27). Sir Percival, by virtue of being one of the Grail knights, is implied to be at least one of the best knights, and a hermit on the Grail Quest tells Percival that he is "so trew as knyght as the order of shevalry requyrith, and of herte as [he] ought to be" (F 708.4-6; V 2: 914). The text seems to have an overabundance of best knights.

The conflict is resolved dialogically, in a Bakhtinian sense, by wideness and ambiguity of the terms "best" and "worthiest." Best at what? Worthiest of what? Each of these "best knights" is judged the best according to different scales, at different times, in different contexts, according to different people. For example, Merlin says that "there lyvith nat a bygger knyght than" King Pellinore, (F 42.34; V 1: 51.28-29), and Pellinore earns a seat next to the Sege Perelous at the Round Table because he is most worthy to sit there (F 80.34-35; V 1: 102.8-9). But Pellinore is first introduced as a bully,[11] against whom a squire comes to Arthur's court to ask for justice (F 38.10-14; V 1: 46.19-22). On his first meeting with Arthur he nearly kills Arthur without offering him mercy, and when Merlin tells him who Arthur is Pellinore tries to kill Arthur "for drede of hys wratthe" (F 42.22; V 1: 51.16). He sired Sir Tor on a peasant woman "half be force" (F 80.6-7; V 1:

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11 Although Pellinore's custom of challenging all knights who pas s by (F 40) is recognizably the chivalric game of pas d'armes, the text is clearly critical of it and of him. See Arthur's rebuke of Pellinore: "For what cause abydist thou here that there may no knight ryde thys way but yf he juste with the? I rede the to leve that custom" (F 40.30-2l; V 1: 49.14-16) and Pellinore's response: "Thys custom … have I used and woll use, magre who seyth nay" (F 40.33-34; V 1: 17-18).

101.14). In the episode where Tor's lineage is revealed Tor's cow-herd family are kind, supportive, and loyal, in contrast to Pellinore's indifference. This makes Tor's connection to Pellinore an ambiguous blessing, no matter what Merlin says, especially, as Hodges points out, "since Torre had succeeded in becoming a knight without knowledge of it" (Hodges 50). Pellinore's virtue is, to put it mildly, impeachable. The effect of Tor's association with Pellinore is as much to diminish Pellinore as to raise Tor. What worthiness Pellinore has arises from his martial prowess and his lineage. This is one definition of "worthy," presented by the text as not only a definition of the word but as a model of knighthood.

Like Pellinore, Sir Balin is a "best knight" according to only one narrow set of criteria. Balin is implied to be the best knight in the world—or at least in Arthur's court— by his successful achievement of the sword from the damsel's scabbard (F 49; V 1: 63). Balin can do what no other knight can. But although Balin is without treachery, he does not live up to Arthur's chivalric code. Balin is a knight whose version of chivalry means that cutting off the head of an unprepared woman under protection of his host does not constitute treachery. The reason Balin is simultaneously a model of virtue and also a pariah is that Balin is living up to a different standard of chivalry than Arthur is. Yet according to the standard to which he is living, Balin is at the apex. And Balin's kind of greatness is not as martially defined as Pellinore's is. Although Balin has great martial prowess, he is never labelled the strongest man in the world as Pellinore is, nor is he of so high a lineage. Both Pellinore and Balin are among the best knights, but clearly not for the same reasons.

Tristram is a regional knight, Lancelot is a national knight, and Galahad is a holy knight. Each can be the "best" within his own sphere without impugning on the merits of the others. Tristram, Lamerok, and Lancelot are repeatedly categorized by the text as equal in skill and strength, as when La Cote Male Tayle's enemies praise his strength by saying that his deeds "had bene to muche for Sir Trystramys de Lyones other for Sir Launcelot de Lake" (F 366.12-13; V 2: 464.3-4); when Sir Persaunte asserts "all the worlde seythe that betwyxt thre knyghtes is departed clerely kynghthode, that is Sir Launcelot du Lake, Sir Trystrams de Lyones, and Sir Lamerok de Galys" (F 245.13-15; V 1: 316.23-26; fol. 125); or when Gawain is added to the roster: "Sir Launcelot, Sir Trystrams, Sir Lameroke, othir Sir Gawayne" (F 247.29-30; V 1: 319.8-9). Tristram and Lancelot receive much more textual attention than Lamerok does, but the comparison does not reduce Tristram or Lancelot, it helps us to understand Lamerok. Since we know what it is for Tristram and Lancelot to be the best fighters in the world, we do not need to see Lamerok fighting to know his quality. He is in the same category as Tristram and Lancelot; that is enough. In the same way, knights who are "best" for reasons other than only strength and skill are placed next to, not necessarily over or against each other. This is Hodges's interpretation of *Le Morte Darthur* generally. Many different kinds of chivalry exist in tension without any resolution to that tension (Hodges 7ff.). This understanding is generally useful, except that Malory provides a possible resolution to that tension when he pits one "best knight" directly against another. Gareth fights Lancelot to a standstill (F 228) and this puts Gareth on equal footing with Lancelot. If Gareth defeated Lancelot outright then the footing would not be equal; Gareth would be better than Lancelot.

Galahad defeats Lancelot in battle (F 692 V 2: 892). When he does so, he establishes the superiority of his sphere—of his kind of knighthood. Galahad surpasses Lancelot not only in holiness but also in worldly martial prowess. Galahad has virtues Lancelot does not have, and Galahad's virtues include Lancelot's. Although Galahad's departure from the world suggests that sacred knighthood is ultimately untenable, his defeat of his father reveals that it is still superior to secular knighthood.

His Father's Son: Galahad's Identity

Galahad exists to exemplify holiness, to establish it as something that happens after secular success, not concurrent with it, and to spur Lancelot towards his redemption. As such, Galahad's significance in the text is as bound up in his identity as it is in his actions. He need not do much in order to be significant, especially to the degree that his identity is rooted in his background.

Through Galahad, Malory locates the relationship between sacred and secular in time. Galahad only comes to the court after the fellowship of the Round Table is otherwise complete. He alone is able to sit in the Siege Perilous, the final empty seat at the Round Table. The implication is that the sacred ideal of holiness, as represented by Galahad, can be achieved only after secular needs, as represented by the completion of the Round Table, have been met. The management of the world comes first chronologically, and once that management has been achieved, the calling of spiritual quietism is possible, and even necessary. The structure of the text suggests both an ideological hierarchy and a temporal priority. The text's hierarchy follows the model of

chivalric piety. Ramon Llull and Bernard of Clairvaux both present priests and knights in parallel. Llull refers to the priest as a "spiritual knight," a counterpart to the "temporal knight" (Llull 125), while Bernard refers to spiritual and physical war, and argues that the Templars are the first knights to have waged both kinds of war at once (Clairvaux 33). Both Bernard and Llull present spiritual warfare as more important and greater than physical warfare, and Llull by implication presents it as being chronologically later, because his narrator is a hermit and a former knight.

The setting of "The Sankgreal" at Pentecost proclaims it as a religiously-oriented story, and also as a beginning. The text itself explains the narrative meaning of Pentecost: "At the vigyl of Pentecoste, *whan all the felyship of the Table Rownde were com unto Camelot*" (F 665.3-4; V 2: 853.1-2, emphasis mine). Pentecost is when the fellowship of the Round Table are all together. This fellowship is an important part of the setting of "The Sankgreal," because it is only when the Round Table is together that the Grail quest is possible—it is only when the fellowship is gathered that Galahad arrives. As we saw in chapter 1, the Grail quest emphasizes division, but it is able to do so partly because it begins from a place of unity and completeness.

When Galahad arrives at Camelot, the knights find that the Siege Perelous has been magically engraved with his name. Throughout the history of the Round Table, the Siege Perelous has been forbidden, but Galahad is able to sit there. The significance here is partly to demonstrate Galahad's superiority to the rest of the knights, but we should also note the degree to which the mechanism of the Siege Perelous provides a linear time frame to Galahad and the quest for holiness. The seat does not appear for Galahad; it has been present at the Round Table since at least "The Wedding of King Arthur": "But in the

Sege Perelous there shall nevir man sitte but one" (F 80.29-30; V 1: 102.1-2). Galahad literally fills an empty space in the community of the Round Table. Galahad has two major plot roles in "The Sankgreal." The most memorable is that he achieves the Grail and so symbolizes holy knighthood, but here we see the other: he completes the Round Table. The existence of the Siege Perelous as a precursor for the Grail quest sets up a precondition that must be met in order for the Grail quest to happen, and that precondition is satisfied in Galahad.

Galahad is Lancelot's son. This is the defining feature of his identity. It is as Lancelot's son that he accomplishes the second of the two aspects of his purpose in the text. And yet, as Cory Rushton has observed: "paternity in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and in romance texts in general, is seldom straightforward" (Rushton 136). There are few knights in the text who are both recognized as fathers and accepted as sons. Arthur himself is neither. Galahad is illegitimate, and at first unknown to his father. Moreover, Galahad is the product of adultery, at least in the intention of Lancelot. Galahad is Elaine's son, but Lancelot believes that he is sleeping with Guinevere when he sleeps with Elaine (F 623-624; V 2: 794-796).[12] Despite his status as unknown, Galahad's identity—unlike the identity of Sir Tor, another illegitimate son of a prominent Round Table knight, for example—is never a mystery to the reader. He is announced as Lancelot's son from his very first mention in the text. After the brothers Balin and Balan accidentally kill each

12   See Batt (120-123) for a discussion of Lancelot's victimhood and culpability. Batt refers to Elaine's deception of Lancelot as "sexual betrayal" (120) and points out that Lancelot uses "the idiom of rape" (120) to describe his experience.

other, Merlin makes this prophecy over Balin's sword: "There shall never man handyll thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be Sir Launcelot, other ellis Galahad hys sonne" (F 74.9-11; V 1: 21-23). This first mention of Galahad gives three important details about Galahad that begin to answer the question of why he, rather than Lancelot, is the Grail knight: Galahad is Lancelot's son, he is a candidate for "beste knyght of the worlde," and he is a rival to his father.

Lancelot could be the best knight of the world. Balin's sword is implicitly linked to the Grail quest, and the suggestion is that Lancelot had an opportunity to be the Grail knight. In this early passage, the text draws attention to the question of why Lancelot is not the Grail knight before Lancelot, Galahad, or the Grail appear directly. A major part of the reason Galahad is the Grail knight is precisely that he is not Lancelot. Merlin's prophecy establishes that Lancelot can be the greatest knight in the world if he so chooses, but that if he fails, his son will take his place. And the emphasis on the sword highlights the importance of choice. When the sword appears, embedded in a stone recording its prophesied best user, and floating in the river near Camelot, Arthur asks Lancelot to pull it out:

> So when the kynge had sene the littirs he seyde unto Sir Launcelot, "Fayre sir, thys swerde ought to be yours, for I am sure ye be the beste knyght of the world."
>
> Than Sir Launcelot answered full soberly, "Sir, hit ys nat my swerde; also I have no hardines to sette my honde thereto, for hit longith nat to hange be my syde." (F 668.16-21; V 2: 856.16-23)

Lancelot chooses not to attempt the sword, and in that choice he cedes his identity as greatest knight. Lancelot's statement that the sword is not his is not so much self-knowledge as it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Had Lancelot attempted the sword it is not clear that he would not have succeeded, and so become the Grail knight. Had he chosen at this point or before it to pursue holiness, then there is every possibility that he would have succeeded: "had nat Sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughts and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the queen sas he was in semynge outewarde to God, there had no knight passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall" (F 790.12-15; V 2: 1045.13-16).

Galahad inherits the title of greatest knight and the role of Grail knight from Lancelot because Galahad comes after Lancelot: "after" in three distinct ways. He appears later in the text than Lancelot does, he is located later in narrative time than Lancelot is, and as Lancelot's son, his existence depends on Lancelot. He is the effect and Lancelot is the cause.

The order of appearance in the text suggests a primacy and priority that the Grail quest then upends. Hodges argues that the Grail quest is at its core concerned with reversal. In the Grail quest, son supersedes father, Bors fights for a younger sister against an older (F 732-734; V 2: 956-957), Percival sees a vision of a faithless old woman and a faithful young one (F 706; V 2: 912-913). The Grail "favors renewal and the reversal of strict law" (Hodges 120). This pattern of reversal is reminiscent of biblical reversals: the preference of Jacob over Esau, of Joseph over his brothers, of Ephraim over Manasseh, of David over his brothers, Jesus' assertion that "the last [shall] be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16), and of course the substitution of the new law for the old, which is the allegorical meaning of Percival's vision. Percival sees two ladies, one upon a lion and the

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other on a serpent, the older of whom asks Percival to be her man. Percival's vision is interpreted by a good man:

> She which rode upon the lyon, hit betokenyth the new law of Holy Chirche, that is to undirstonde faith, good hope, believe and baptyme. For she semed yonger than that othir hit ys grete reson, for she was borne in the Resurrection and the Passion of Oure Lorde Jesu Chryste. … And she that rode on the serpent signifieth the olde law, and that serpent betokenyth a fynde. (F 708.13-24; V 2: 915.6-18)

This vision establishes the idea of spiritual reversals in the foreground of the text. However, this theme of reversal does not work without an established priority. Galahad's outstripping of Lancelot is not significant unless Galahad both comes after Lancelot and is also greater than him.

Galahad's parentage is established in his first mention in the text, and the narrator re-establishes its importance later, in "Sir Tristram de Lyones": "Now leve we Sir Trystram de Lyones and speke we of Sir Launcelot du Laake and of Sir Galahad, Sir Launcelottis sonne, how he was begotyn and in what maner" (F 620.2-4; V 1: 1-4). Again Galahad's status as Lancelot's son is immediately established, and Lancelot is mentioned first. This is in part simply economical storytelling; we know who Lancelot is and expect to hear more of him during "Sir Tristram de Lyones." But it is also a reiteration of the fact that Lancelot is the cause of Galahad. As Armstrong points out, "Galahad derives his special status in equal parts from his virginity and his bloodline, while Lancelot both partially fails and partially succeeds in the Grail Quest due to his position as Galahad's father. Without Lancelot, the Grail Quest would not even be possible" (Armstrong 162).

This is not to say that Galahad's achievements are really Lancelot's, but that secular achievement is not an end in itself: it is a precursor to holiness. Galahad is established as Lancelot's son here before he is given any other identity.

Galahad is the product of a union between Lancelot and Elaine, a moment of Lancelot's unfaithfulness—in fact if not in intention—to Guinevere. Lancelot's relationship to Guinevere is itself sinful; in their sexual relationship both Lancelot and Guinevere are guilty of adultery, since Guinevere is married. Lancelot's inordinate love for Guinevere is the reason for his failure in the Grail quest and for his (temporary) loss of status. He is not the best knight in the world because of his sin with Guinevere. But although that relationship is from a certain perspective a bad one, the text is far from uniformly critical of it. Lancelot and Guinevere are both held up as paragons of a certain kind of love in *Le Morte Darthur*, especially in "Sir Tristram de Lyones," where Isolde compares herself to them. The narrator reflects approvingly on Guinevere, remarking that "whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende" (F 842.10-11; V 3: 1120.12-13), and Sir Ector eulogizes Lancelot by calling him "the trewest lover, of a synful man, that ever loved woman" (F 939.17-18; V 3: 1259.14-15). So when Lancelot is unfaithful to Guinevere, he is undermining a set of values that many of the characters within the text, including the narrator, respect highly.

The fact of Galahad's existence is evidence of Lancelot's failure to live up to the moral demands of chastity. But although this is a failing that the text takes seriously, virginity is such a rare commodity in the world of *Le Morte Darthur* that the text has trouble scraping together two examples in Galahad and Percival. There is a theological purpose to this; the spiritual purity that virginity represents is so rare that it should be

more remarkable that one example is found than that only two are. The point is that Lancelot's sexual activity is not in itself necessarily remarkable. It marks him as a sinner like every other, and it is easy for the text as well as for its readers to position Lancelot and Guinevere's sexual relationship as a failure of one ideal in favour of another. Guinevere is not a faithful wife but she is a faithful lover. Lancelot is not a faithful knight, but he is a faithful lover. If Galahad were Guinevere's son (leaving aside the practical difficulties that would raise, especially for Guinevere) then the best and most holy knight of the world would be the product of the truest love in the world. Symbolically it would be an affirmation of the value of Lancelot and Guinevere's love, and would suggest something like "all love leads to God."[13]

But in fact Galahad is Elaine's son, born not only outside of the holy sacrament of matrimony, but also outside of the secular sacrament of true love. This suggests that neither true love nor faithfulness to the secular ideal of romance engender holiness. The possibility for holiness comes after secular excellence, but does not spring from it. Rather, holiness necessitates a rejection of secular ideals, even those secular ideals like faithfulness in love which are generally affirmed by the text.

Galahad's centrality to "The Sankgreal" is the beginning of explicit engagement with holiness in *Le Morte Darthur*. Religious themes are present earlier in the text, but it is in "The Sankgreal" that they come to the fore. Though this is apparent in the plot of

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13   I'm obviously alluding here to Hanks (2013), whose argument is very influential on mine, but with whom I would quibble here. I would split hairs and say that while all good love comyth of God, clearly in *Le Morte Darthur* not all love leads to God. Olsen (2013) also argues that Malory "affirms the nature and quality of [Lancelot and Guinevere's] virtuous love."

"The Sankgreal," the point is nicely encapsulated in the very first words of the section: "At the vigyl of Pentecoste" (F 665.3; V 2: 853.1). The Winchester manuscript emphasizes this even further by rubricating the word "Pentecost" (see fig. 1). The usual practice in the Winchester manuscript is to write names, and occasionally places and important objects like the Sankgreal, in red ink. The rubrication is partly a search mechanism: a reader who is interested in Gawain can (relatively) easily find him on any page, and a reader searching for a particular passage can (relatively) easily locate it.[14] The rubrication of "Pentecost" here is interesting, then, since not all dates are rubricated. "May" doesn't merit red ink in the famous "May passage," for example, nor does "Pentecost" at the beginning of "Sir Gareth of Orkney." So either Pentecost is in red here for emphasis, or the scribe concluded that Pentecost was a memorable aspect of this section, which would help a reader to locate it at need. Either way, the manuscript reinforces the idea that Pentecost matters to "The Sankgreal."

"The Sankgreal" is the first section of *Le Morte Darthur* to begin with a reference to a Christian holy day. "Sir Gareth of Orkney" starts during Pentecost but is contextualized as happening "In Arthurs dayes" (F 223.2; V 1: 293.3), so that the later reference to Pentecost is present but not foregrounded. The second-to-last sub-section of "Sir Tristram de Lyones" likewise takes place at Pentecost. This section contextualizes the story as being "afore the tyme that Sir Galahad was begotyn or borne" (F 620.5-6; V 2: 791.5-6). The story of the begetting of Galahad provides nearly as clear a religious context as "The Sankgreal" does, because that section of "Sir Tristram de Lyones" lays

14   See Meale (1996) for an analysis of the function of the rubrication in the Winchester Manuscript.

the groundwork for "The Sankgreal." It is fitting that Galahad's begetting begins with a foretaste of "The Sankgreal" and that it begins with an allusion to a holy day, for it is in the character of Sir Galahad that holiness primarily resides in "The Sankgreal."

The Grail quest is a quest of holiness, and Galahad is the preeminent Grail knight. He is therefore the preeminent knight of holiness. Although Percival and Bors accompany him to the end, the Grail quest is fundamentally completed by Galahad. At the conclusion of the Grail quest the focus is on Galahad throughout:

> Now at the yerys ende, and the selff Sonday aftir that Sir Galahad had borne the crowne of golde, he arose up erly and hys felowis, and cam to the paleyse, and saw tofore hem the holy vessell, and a man knelyng on his kneys in lyknesse of a bysshop that had aboute hym a grete felyship of angels, as hit had bene Jesu Cryste hymselff. And than he arose and began a masse of Oure Lady, and so he cam to the sakerynge, and anone made an ende. He called Sir Galahad unto hym and seyde, "Com forthe the servaunte of Jesu Cryste, and thou shalt se that thou hast much desired to se." (F 787.3-12; V 2: 1034.10-20)

The mysterious man soon reveals himself to be Joseph the son of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph of Arimathea is a disciple of Jesus who in the Bible took responsibility for Jesus' burial. Joseph of Arimathea is associated with the Jesus' physical relics. According to legend Joseph left Israel for Britain, making him a historical and spiritual link to Jesus. Joseph the son of Joseph of Arimathea addresses Galahad exclusively in this passage. It is Galahad, and only Galahad, who can see the Grail. Percival and Bors's status derives

from the fact that they are worthy to accompany Galahad, and their accomplishment is as much that they are Galahad's companions as it is achieving the Grail directly.

Both the Grail quest and Galahad himself breed divisiveness. The Grail quest separates the knights of the Round Table from each other, both literally in space and also symbolically by stratifying them into degrees of spiritual worthiness. In the Grail quest holiness is a substitute for wholeness.[15] Galahad likewise divides, even by his existence. One sign of Galahad as a representative of ersatz wholeness is the way the knights fruitlessly seek to join him. In the beginning of "The Sankgreal" many of the knights are explicitly searching for Galahad, rather than searching for the Grail itself. Gawain and his comrades have purpose as long as they are following Galahad, but after "they loste the way that Sir Galahad rode ... everych of hem departed from other" (F 690.28-30; V 2: 891.14-16). This is both a depiction of the literal division that the Grail quest creates and also symbolic. Gawain and the other knights cannot follow in Galahad's footsteps. They are not able to replicate his moral or spiritual path. But it is striking that both knights and narrator assume that they have to. There is no other path to holiness. The only way to find the Grail is to follow Galahad. Gawain made the vow to find the Grail, but even by the beginning of the quest he is seeking Galahad rather than the Grail directly. So Galahad is almost immediately established as a substitute goal of the quest, one that makes the divisiveness of the quest especially clear. The knights want to be with Galahad, but they cannot. They want to be together, but the goal of their quest is literally riding away from them. The more successful Grail knights also follow Galahad. The text summarizes

15   See Lexton ([2014] 70).

Lancelot's adventures as "Sir Launcelot was ryddyn aftir Sir Galahad" (F 699.2-3; V 2: 905.1-2), not ridden after the Grail. Sir Percival's purpose in his first adventure of the Grail is to follow Galahad, to the point that when he loses his horse he follows Galahad on foot: "as fast as Sir Percyvale myght he wente aftir hym on foote, cryyng" (F 703.26-27; V 2: 910.2-3). Lancelot and Percival both follow Galahad for reasons that are never made entirely clear. It is ambiguous whether Lancelot and Percival believe that finding Galahad is a means of finding the Grail, or whether they simply want to bear him fellowship. Either way, the knights' assumed path to success in the Grail quest is fellowship, but that is exactly what the knights lack for most of the adventure.

Perhaps more significant than either his success in the Grail quest or the behaviour of the other knights towards Galahad is the fact that it is his coming to Arthur's court that initiates the Grail quest in the first place. He is the catalyst. Both literally and symbolically the quest for holiness in *Le Morte Darthur* begins with Galahad.

Holy Continuity!: The Religious Emphasis of the Post-Grail Sections

The quest for holiness may begin with Galahad, but it does not end with him. The structure of the final sections of the text reveals that the priority of *Le Morte Darthur* is holiness, even after "The Sankgreal." The last two sections of *Le Morte Darthur*, "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" and "The Morte Arthur," seem to be less religiously focused than "The Sankgreal," but this is a false impression, in part because the final two sections do not stand on their own; they both depend for their meaning on the lessons and consequences of the Grail quest.

I have argued that the trajectory of *Le Morte Darthur* is increasingly towards the spiritual, but after "The Sankgreal," its most explicitly religious section, the text takes an apparently secular turn. On its face, "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" is primarily concerned with the tension between Lancelot's personal desires and his political loyalties, and "The Morte Arthur" is primarily concerned with the denouement of King Arthur's court, and with the treacheries of Mordred. Yet each of these tales explores consequences as a central theme. "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenivere" begins by not only referring back to "The Sankgreal" but by establishing the events of "The Sankgreal" as the context and the cause of the events that follow. Guinevere's affection for Lancelot is explicitly stated to have increased as a result of Lancelot's participation in the Grail quest: "than was there grete joy in the courte, and in especiall Kynge Arthure and Quene Gwenyvere made grete joy of the remenaunte that were com home" (F 790.5-7; V 3: 1045.4-6). Lancelot's love for Guinevere is once again set up as a rival for his holiness: "had nat Sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the queen as he was in semynge outewarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall. But ever his thoughtis prevyly were on the queen" (F 790.12-14; V 2: 1045.13-14). He fails in the Grail quest because of his love for Guinevere, yet loves her "more hottir" (F 790.16; V 2: 1045.18) after the quest than he did before.

It is only in "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" that we have a confirmation that Lancelot and Guinevere have a physical adulterous relationship, because Lancelot's failure to achieve holiness has the effect of temporarily weakening his willingness even to work toward holiness. He takes comfort by embracing his failure. Guinevere, for her part, has felt the danger of losing Lancelot and that danger both strengthens her love for him

and also undermines her caution and sense of decorum. She is willing to risk more to be with him and less willing to be without or away from him than she was before the quest. The search for holiness deepens and complicates the feelings of both Lancelot and Guinevere, and by leading to a stronger relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere it weakens the political relationship between Lancelot and Arthur and also the marital and political relationship between Guinevere and Arthur. A few lines after the passage quoted above, Lancelot makes an implicit link between the Grail quest, their relationship, and the political atmosphere:

> I was but late in the quest of the Sankgreall, and I thanke God, of Hys grete mercy and never of my deservynge, that I saw in that my queste as much as ever saw ony synfull man lyvynge, and so was hit tolde me. And if that I had not had my prevy thoughtis to returne to youre love agayne as I do, I had sene as grete mysteryes as ever saw my sonne Sir Galahad, other Percivale, other Sir Bors. And therefore, madam, I was but late in that queste, and wyte you well, madam, hit may nat be yet lightly forgotyn, the hyghe servyse in whom I dud my dyligente laboure.
>
> Also, madame, wyte you well that there be many men spekith of oure love in thys courte, and have you and me gretely in awayte, as thes Sir Aggravayne and Sir Mordred. (F 791.7-18; V 2: 1046.4-17)

The fact that he brings up the Grail quest at all shows that Lancelot (and, for that matter, Malory) believes that the impact of the Grail quest should extend outside the boundaries of the Quest itself. Lancelot makes it clear that, at least as far as he is concerned, it is his love for Guinevere that has prevented him from succeeding in the Grail quest. Yet

Lancelot's emphasis on forgetting and remembering demonstrates that he is not motivated by pure regret. Neither is he belatedly trying to achieve the failed quest. Rather he is explicitly trying to learn and apply the lessons of the Grail quest to the rest of his life. He wants the Grail quest to be a transformative experience.[16]

The mention of Aggravaine here locates this tale firmly in a position as a precursor to "The Morte Arthur." Aggravaine comes up again at the end of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere": "every nyght and day Sir Aggravayne, Sir Gawaynes brother, awaited Quene Gwenyvere and Sir Launcelot to put him bothe to a rebuke and a shame" (F 868.32-34; V 3: 1153.31-33), and "here I go unto the *Morte Arthur*—and that caused Sir Aggravayne" (F 869.12-13; V 3: 1154.13-15). Aggravaine features again at the beginning "The Morte Arthur": "all [the final destruction] was longe uppon two unhappy knyghtis whych were named Sir Aggravayne and Sir Mordred" (F 870.10-11; V 3: 1161.9-10). Aggravaine's presence establishes a causal thread through these three sections even if nothing else does.

Mordred is motivated to hurt Arthur. As Arthur's illegitimate and incestuous son he has reason to both have ambitions toward the crown and also to suspect that those ambitions may not be realized. The fact that Mordred usurps Arthur's throne in the final section of *Le Morte Darthur* makes his implied motivation more apparent. Furthermore, as the son whom Arthur tried to kill years ago, Mordred has reason to personally resent

16   For more on Lancelot as a model of penance, see Radulescu (190-197), and Aktinson ([1981] 349).

Arthur. Aggravaine's malice, by contrast, focuses on Lancelot and Guinevere directly. He claims to be motivated by concern for Arthur's honour:

> Sir Aggravayne seyde thus opynly, and nat in no counceyle, that manye knightis myght here, "I mervayle that we all be nat ashamed bothe to se and to know how Sir Launcelot lyeth dayly and nyghtly by the Quene— and all we know well that hit ys so—and hit ys shamefully suffird of us all that we shulde suffir so noble a kynge as Kynge Arthur ys to be shamed." (F 870.17-23; V 3: 1161.16-23)

This concern for Arthur's honour is not really personal loyalty to Arthur. Rather it is a legalistic attachment to the platonic idea of honour. Aggravaine believes that Arthur, by virtue of his nobility, merits treatment that he is not receiving. The dishonour that attaches itself to Arthur is also attached to his knights, and Aggravaine attaches shame to himself and the rest of the knights as well.

In "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" and "The Morte Arthur" all of the main characters choose how to react to what has come before. And what has come before is not only the war between Mordred and Arthur, or the war between Lancelot and Arthur, or even the quest for the Holy Grail; it is the whole of the book. Their reaction is uniformly to reject the political and secular concerns of the book and to embrace the religious and sacred ones. Sir Bedevere, the knight who is with Arthur when he dies, takes the place of the Bishop of Canterbury when the latter is recalled to service (F 939.33; V 3: 1259.31-33). Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Gahalantyne, Sir Galyhud, Sir Galyhodyn, Sir Blamour, Sir Bleoberys, Sir Vyllyars le Valyaunt, and Sir Clarrus all "wold not abyde in this royame [but instead] al lyved in their cuntreyes as holy men" (F 940.5-6; V 3: 1260.3-4) after

Constantyn is crowned king. This lists nine knights who leave England —withdrawing from their fellowship and living in holiness in their own places, like the biblical disciples who spread out after Pentecost. If we add Sir Bedevere, who does the same thing in the realm as these nine knights do out of it, the total is ten. When Lancelot is added to the reckoning we have an account of eleven knights who leave their secular service in favour of holy lives. Sir Thomas Malory himself makes twelve. Although Malory is not of the Round Table nor does he clearly withdraw into religious orders, he is certainly linked to the Round Table knights and admires them, and he ends the book by withdrawing into a hope for holiness. Twelve is a biblically significant number, both the number of Jesus' disciples and of the tribes of Israel.[17] It represents completeness in both the Old and the New Testaments. The twelve disciples are themselves a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and biblically the number twelve represents human completeness, the completeness of God's work on earth, or the perfection of earthly government.[18] These twelve representative knights of the Round Table all withdraw from secular lives into explicitly sacred ones, and I include Malory in this list because he ends the book by describing himself, not as a loyal servant of the King or as a valiant knight, but as "the

17 Of the twelve, four are especially singled out: "Syr Bors, Syr Ector, Syr Blamour, and Syr Bleoberis wente into the Holy Lande, thereas Jesu Cryst was quycke and deed" (F 940.10-12; V 3: 1260.8-10). The two sets of brothers are the equivalents of the biblical disciples Peter, Andrew, James and John, who stand out among the twelve and go where Jesus is.

18 See Daniel Pfieifer (2015) p. 445-448 for an account of the symbolic meaning of the number twelve in a biblical and first-century Jewish context.

servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght" (F 940.30; V 3: 1260.28-29). Malory, like the knights in his book, makes a choice in the end.

Holiness Kills

The incompatibility of sacred and secular is not always a matter of choice, or at least not always a matter of peacefully withdrawing to religious life. Galahad, Percival, and Percival's sister all die at the end of the Grail quest. Galahad's death is symbolic and dramatic:

> And therewith he kneled downe tofore the table and made hys prayers. And so suddeynly departed hys soule to Jesu Cryste, and a grete multitude of angels bare hit up to hevyn evyn in the syght of hys too felowis.
>
> Also thes too felowis saw com frome hevyn an hande, but they sy nat the body, and so hit cam ryght to the vessell and toke hit, and the speare, and so bare hit up into hevyn. And sythen was there never man so hardy to sey that he hadde seyne the Sankgreal. (F 788.1-8; V 3: 1035.13-21)

This death is sudden, and extremely distressing to the witnesses: "whan sir Percivale and Sir Bors saw Sir Galahad ded they made as much sorow as ever ded men—and if they had nat bene good men they myght lyghtly have falle in dispayre" (F 788.9-11; V 3: 1035.22-24). But it should not be surprising to readers. Galahad has been otherworldly and even ethereal from his first appearance in the text. The emphasis on Galahad's

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virginity associates him with death, since virginity necessarily means non-procreation.[19]

Moreover, he is a teleological character. From the first time that he is mentioned in the

text, during the book of Balyn le Sauvage, Galahad has a singular purpose. He is "Galaad

the Hawte Prynce [who] heled [king Pellam] in the queste of the Sankgreall" (F 68.16-17;

V 1: 85.22-23). In narrative terms, once Galahad has achieved his purpose it only makes

sense for him to die. As Galahad's soul is taken into heaven so is the Grail, because its

purpose in the text is inexorably linked to his. Just as Galahad is rarely mentioned in the

text without a simultaneous reference to "The Sankgreal," so it is rarely mentioned

without reference to him. Just as he has no purpose in the text without it, so it has no

purpose without him. Galahad's final purpose in the text is to inspire Percival and Bors:

"as sone as he was buryed Sir Percivale yelded hem to an ermytayge oute of the cite, and

toke religious clothyng. And Sir Bors was allwey with hym" (F 788.13-15; V 2: 1035.26-

28).

  Galahad dies willingly. After he has finally seen the Grail, he asks God for

permission to die:

> And than he began to tremble ryght harde when the dedly fleysh began
>
> to beholde the spirituall thynges. Than he hylde up his hondis towarde
>
> hevyn and seyde, "Lorde, I thanke The, for now I se that that hath be my
>
> desire many a day. Now, my blyssed lorde, I wold nat lyve in this

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19 See Arkenberg (especially 3) for an argument about the link between virginity and death in *Le Morte*

  Darthur.

wrecched worlde no lenger, if hit myght please The, Lorde." (F 787.13-18;

V 2: 1034-21-27)

This entreaty by Galahad is doubly important. His appeal to God to let him die is clearly resonant with Jesus' words from the cross: "It is consummated" (Jn 19:30) and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). Like Jesus, Galahad has completed his work, and like Jesus he dies at his own request. Galahad is a Christ-figure throughout the text. He must be a Christ figure to represent holiness within a Christian context. But while Jesus dies to redeem the world, Jesus' trajectory is not departing from the world but returning to it, both in the short term in the resurrection and later in the promise of a second coming. By contrast, Galahad dies to leave the world behind him. When he asks to die, Galahad does not ask to see God more closely, he asks that he no longer live in "this wrecched world." Galahad's holiness makes him unsuitable for the world and disappointed with it. This is, remarkably, a departure from the French *Queste del Saint Graal*. In that text, the French Galaad prays "vos pri ge que vos en cest point ou je sui et en ceste grant joie soffreze que je trespasse de ceste terriene vie en la celestiel" ("I pray you that at this point where I am and in this great joy you suffer that I pass from this terrestrial life to the celestial."; *Queste* 278). There is in the French no sense of wretchedness, or of Galaad despising the world here. There is an implied hierarchy— Galaad wants to move from the earthly to the heavenly—but it is a suggestion of progressing along a path all in the same direction, rather than turning from one thing to another. Malory's text—in this passage at least—is more critical of the world than his source is.

Galahad is not the first Grail figure to die. A little earlier in "The Sankgreal" Sir Percival's sister—who peculiarly is unnamed—dies of blood loss. As she accompanies Galahad, Percival, and Bors on the Grail quest, they encounter "a jantyllwoman" (F 767.10; V 2: 1002.15) who has a malady whereof "no leche cowde remedye her, but at the laste an olde man sayde, and she myght have a dysshfulle of bloode of a maydyn, and a clene virgyne in wylle and in worke, and a kynges doughter, that bloode sholde be her helth for to anoynte her withall" (F 767.13-16; V 2: 1002.19-23). Percival's sister volunteers to bleed, although Galahad warns her that she may die. Percival's sister responds "and I dye for the helth of her I shall gete me grete worship and soule helthe, and worship to my lynayge" (F 767.23-24; V 2: 1002.30-32). Percival's sister here is another image of Christ, since she dies willingly and her blood brings healing.[20] She does not display a personal contempt for the world as Galahad does, but once again it is her purity and holiness that lead to her death. She is a willing martyr, but also a victim of circumstance. Her blood is needed because of her virginity "in wylle and in worke" (F 767.15; V 2: 1002.21), and her virginity like Galahad's is a symbol of death and also of spiritual purity. So her purity is the direct cause of her death, and once again holiness is incompatible with life in the world.

After Galahad's death, Sir Percival "yelded hym to an ermytayge oute of the cité, and toke religious clothyng" (F 788.13-14; V 2: 1035.27-28). Percival's retreat from the world is another example of how Percival follows Galahad's lead. Percival spent most of the Grail quest chasing Galahad, and he continues to chase him into death. Arkenberg

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20 See Batt (2002) 135.

argues that "Malory presents Galahad as an object of desire that it is death to obtain" (Arkenberg 15), and Percival is an excellent example of this. Percival spends most of the Grail quest desiring Galahad, and when he achieves Galahad—or company with Galahad—he soon dies. But although Arkenberg persuasively links Galahad to both virginity and to death in Freudian terms, Galahad is also the text's symbol of holiness. So if obtaining Galahad is death, so equally is obtaining holiness, and this we also see in Percival.

Percival is less holy than his sister or Galahad—he is sexually tempted (F 711; V 2: 918-919) while Galahad is not, for example—but he also retreats from secular life. The language, that Percival "yielded" to a hermitage, is conventional but also suggestive. The primary meaning here is "to betake oneself, repair,"[21] but "yield" is already a connotatively rich word in Middle English. To yield is "to relinquish voluntarily" ("yelden," def 1a), as Percival voluntarily relinquishes his social stature as a knight of King Arthur's court. Yielding means "to entrust (oneself) to the care of God or Christ" ("yelden," def 1a), as Percival certainly does when he enters a contemplative religious life. To yield is "to turn over; hand over" ("yelden," def 1a), as Percival by implication turns over his life to the control of God. To yield is "to open (a gate)" ("yelden," def 1a). To yield in battle is to surrender ("yelden," def 1b), and the subtext for a former warrior, like Percival, is that he has willingly accepted defeat and his battling has come to an end. His military life ends in a symbolic defeat, which also casts God as the adversary. Religious and political life engage in battle, and Percival surrenders to religious life.

21 See *Middle English Dictionary* s.v. yelden for various meanings.

Yielding is paying, as in taxes ("yelden," def 2a), and it is also fulfilling an obligation or fulfilling a vow ("yelden," def 2b). Percival pays himself to the hermitage as something owed to it. In agriculture yielding is being fruitful, productive, or profitable ("yelden," def 6), and the profit of Percival's life is the hermitage. To yield is "to acknowledge oneself to be" as in to yield oneself guilty ("yelden," def 10), and in this sense Percival yields himself to be a hermit; he reveals something in himself that was present all along. Most suggestively of all, to yield is "to release (one's soul, spirit, life, etc.) at death" ("yelden," def 1a). Percival's passage into the hermitage is a kind of death—his life as he has known it is over, and by his own choice.

The hermitage is outside of the city because the city is a centre of human worldly activity. Percival cannot take on religious clothing and still live in the city, any more than he can take up religious clothing and continue to be a knight, because he cleaves to a model of piety "buttressed by the asceticism that always registered as authentic piety in medieval consciousness" (Kaeuper [1999], 59). There were, of course, plenty of urban clerics and religious houses; but Percival joins a hermitage outside the city. Kaeuper notes that hermits were "closely integrated with the world around them; they were part of lay society" (Kaeuper [1999], 59), but we should not misinterpret this integration. Hermits are part of lay society, but they are on the periphery and they are critical of that society. Liz Herbert McAvoy notes contemporary criticism for urban anchoritism in texts like the *Speculum Inclusorum*, which McAvoy interprets as being critical of the "diluting 'band-wagon' of urban anchoritism" (McAvoy 65). Hermits and anchorites may have been a part of lay society, but there is a perceived difference between hermits in the city and out of it. Percival leaves the city. Maurice Keen in his extensive study of chivalry

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characterizes chivalry as "an ethos in which martial, aristocratic, and Christian elements were fused together" (Keen [1984] 16). The possible spiritual dimensions of knighthood are suggested throughout *Le Morte Darthur*—it is these possible spiritual dimensions that make the Grail quest seem possible at all. Raymon Llull, author of the thirteenth-century *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, seems to have considered chivalry itself to be a holy order. Malory apparently does not, since if it were there would be no need for Percival to take on religious clothing. Percival lives "a yere and too monethis ... a full holy lyff" (F 788.18-19; V 2: 1036.1-2) and then he too dies. Like both his sister and Galahad, Percival's holiness makes him unfit for the world.

Sir Bors, the Grail knight who survives, is the least of the Grail company, since he is not wholly pure. He is represented in Gawain's dream as one of three white bulls which represent himself, Galahad and Percival. While Galahad and Percival are "withoute spotte" (F 728.17; V 2: 946.23), however, Bors has one spot, which signifies that he "trespassed but onys in hys virginité. But sithyn he kepyth hymselff so well in chastité that all ys forgyffyn hym and hys myssededys" (F 728.5-7; V 2: 946.24-26). Bors' impurity is presented in an apophasis. It is mentioned as if it does not matter, as if it were all forgiven, and as if he were now the equal of Galahad and Percival, but this is only a pose. Bors may be held equal in purity by a forgiving God, but he is not held equal in purity by the text which remarks upon his one trespass often. Bors is more pure and more holy than the other knights of the Round Table, but he still not as pure as Percival, who is himself not as pure as Galahad. And therefore it makes sense that Bors is the one Grail knight who returns to Arthur. The more pure the knight, the more holy the knight, the less he can remain in the world.

Every major character who is still living at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* abandons secular life in favour of dedication to a religious one. Galahad and Percival die because holiness is unsuited for the world. Lancelot fails in the Grail quest because secular success is incompatible with holiness. Lancelot forgets what he had learned in the Grail quest immediately afterwards because sacred knowledge is untenable in a secular context. The main characters retreat from political life at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* because political life is incompatible with holiness. It is not possible, in *Le Morte Darthur*, to be both a good citizen and a good Christian, let alone to be an agent of both the state and of God.

The Healing of Urry and Lancelot's Self-Knowledge

It is Lancelot's own recognition of this—of the inferiority of his kind of knighthood, of his kind of virtue, of the incompatibility of his desires for Guinevere, for political efficacy, and for holiness—that is the emotional underpinning of the healing of Sir Urry. The miraculous healing of Urry shows that Lancelot has learned from the Grail quest, about the nature of holiness and about himself.

The healing of Urry, following soon after the Grail quest, is a parallel to the achievement of the sword from the floating stone that immediately preceded the quest. The quest is bookended by miracles performed by the best knight of the world. In both cases several knights attempt the miracle,[22] and in both cases Arthur tries to persuade a

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22 The number of knights who attempt the miracle is vastly different, with 3 attempting the sword and 110 attempting the healing, but I would argue this is a difference of quality, not of kind.

reluctant Lancelot to attempt it. Before the Grail quest Lancelot refuses to attempt the

miracle; he will not try to pull the sword from the stone (F 668.19-25; V 2: 856.21-27).

Arthur accepts Lancelot's hesitation, but will not accept Gawain's, and Gawain fails (F

668.32-33; V 2: 857.7-8). Lancelot's refusal to attempt the miracle of the sword may be

read as either humility (genuine or false), or as a sign of spiritual awareness; he knows, as

Gawain does not, that the sword is dangerous for him, like taking communion is

spiritually dangerous for the unconfessed. Whether from true humility or not, Lancelot's

refusal is couched in self-negation. Lancelot repeatedly says that he knows he was "never

none of the best" (F 672.16-17; V 2: 863.28-29). After the Grail quest Lancelot is still

reluctant, but he is eventually persuaded to attempt the miracle, after all have failed. In

the healing of Urry Lancelot's humility is more sincere than it was before the Grail quest,

as is evidenced by his obedience to Arthur.

Whetter, in reference to the ending of *Le Morte Darthur*, argues that "Lancelot

himself turns to religion only out of love for Guinevere" (Whetter 173), but we can see

here in the healing of Urry, as we also saw during the Grail quest, that Lancelot's turn to

religion is a slow and gradual one. The final turn at the end of his life grows out of a

whole personal history.[23] The Grail quest has changed Lancelot, not only in ability, but in

what he is willing to attempt, and despite his failures in the quest, he no longer claims to

know that he was never one of the best knights. These two miracles—or at least

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23 Kelly (2001) makes a strong case for Lancelot's spiritual growth following the Grail quest, as do
    Atkinson ([1981] 350), and Radulescu (182-190), the latter of whom both see the healing of Urry as a
    coda to the Grail quest that marks Lancelot's growing spirituality.

Lancelot's attitude toward them—seem inverted. Lancelot should be harbouring a suspicion that he is the best knight in the world before the quest, and after it an assurance that he is not. But his failure in the Grail quest is not a straightforward comeuppance for Lancelot, and his spiritual growth in the last section of *Le Morte Darthur* comes in fits and starts. Before the Quest, Lancelot has nothing to prove to himself. He may not be the best knight in the world; that is only an abstract consideration at that point. But after the Quest the possibility of confirmation that he is the best knight of the world and refutation that he is are both emotionally weighty prospects, because his identity is now at stake.

After he successfully heals Sir Urry, Lancelot weeps while the rest of the court rejoices. Some critics, most notable among them Robert Lumiansky (Lumiansky 231), have interpreted these as tears of relief. Lancelot had expected that his sin would prevent him from performing a miracle. He is afraid that when he fails to perform the miracle the other knights will be suspicious about why and will discover Lancelot's infidelity with Guinevere. When he successfully performs the miracle, he is relieved that his secret is safe. I think it more likely that Lancelot is experiencing a complex mixture of conflicting and overwhelming emotions. He is simply joyful that Sir Urry has been healed and that he has been a part of that healing. At the same time he recognizes his own unworthiness to perform a miracle and weeps in a moment of real self-knowledge as a result. His weeping is an expression of guilt. He interprets his achievement of the miracle as superior to his many martial achievements, and he therefore feels humility and gratefulness. Lancelot's tears during the Grail Quest are the result of his spiritual progress,[24] and here after the

24 See J. Cameron Moore (8), Olsen (47), Batt (156-157).

Grail quest Lancelot's tears recall the pattern that was established during the Quest. The rest of the court rejoices because they do not recognize the significance of Lancelot's miracle. They see it as an affirmation of his greatness, but he interprets it, correctly, as a sign of grace.

The healing of Urry comes immediately after Lancelot's (relative) failure on the Grail quest, and it is strange to have an affirmation of Lancelot's greatness immediately after a story in which he fails and is superseded—one in which he is shown again and again that he could have been great if only he had made different choices. As an affirmation of approval the healing of Urry is misplaced. But the Grail quest was about religious purity, while Lancelot's religious journey is one of fall and redemption. In the successful achievement of the miracle, Lancelot sees the possibility of that spiritual journey's end.

For Lancelot, the healing of Urry is a moment of spiritual enlightenment. The healing of Urry takes what was abstract and theological in the Grail narrative—especially the Vulgate narrative that is Malory's source—and makes it personal. Lancelot weeps "as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn" (F 868.1-2; V 3: 1152.35-36). This is too evocative and poetic a phrase to simply accept as a hyperbolic way of saying "very hard." There is another instance in *Le Morte Darthur* of someone weeping "as he had bene a chylde" (F 283.25; V 1: 358.19-20). In this other case it is King Arthur who weeps like a child, weeping for joy and relief upon being reunited with Gareth and Gawain. Arthur's weeping as a child signifies his vulnerability, and suggests that Lancelot's later weeping is also joyful. Lancelot's comparison to a child suggests Mark 10:15, where Jesus tells his disciples that anyone who wishes to enter the kingdom of God must be like a little child.

This comparison suggests not only that Lancelot is embodying child-like virtues of honesty, obedience, and faith, nor that Lancelot has been brought to a position of weakness and dependence upon God, but also very simply that Lancelot wishes to enter the kingdom of God. Lancelot, who has been reliant upon his own power and has been "more harder than ys the stone, and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge-tre" (F 694.30-32; V 2: 895.35-27), now becomes "as he had been a chyld." His weeping like a child is a sign that his spiritual state has changed, or at least is capable of change. Lancelot weeps not only like a child, but like a child that had been beaten, because he is chastised.[25] The healing of Sir Urry is not a victory or a sign of Lancelot's greatness; it is a reminder of the weakness and spiritual frailty of the best knight of the world.

Why Lancelot and Guinevere Can Never Be Together

In *Le Morte Darthur* secular and sacred are ultimately incompatible with each other. Lancelot and Guinevere both end *Le Morte Darthur* by withdrawing from secular life. Although it might seem like they are repenting specifically for their relationship with each other, they also symbolically represent the assertion that secular life and sacred life cannot happen at the same time. Lancelot in particular cannot continue to be a political or secular figure and also undertake penance. As Andrea Hopkins notes in *The Sinful Knights*, her study of penitential romance, penance has three essential parts: "contrition,

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25   See Lewis (19-20), Batt (157), and Olsen (47), all of whom also make this point.

confession, and satisfaction" (Hopkins [1990] 60). Lancelot cannot stop at feeling bad

about his sin, he must confess it to a priest and then do something about it. And these

three parts are inextricable: "contrition is not effective unless accompanied by confession

and satisfaction, equally confession is not effective without contrition" (Hopkins [1990]

63). So if Lancelot confessed and made satisfaction for his sins but continued in them, it

would demonstrate a lack of contrition. Confession is ineffective when it is rote. On the

other hand, satisfaction usually consists of "prayer, fasting, and alms-giving" (Hopkins

[1990] 64). Fasting in this context entails "abstinence from food and drink, from sexual

activity, and from worldly pleasures and worldly thoughts" (Hopkins [1990] 64). In

Lancelot's case, he fasts from the company of Guinevere, and from his worldly stature.

Lancelot's abdication of his rank and stature fits a pattern that Hopkins draws attention to:

that in romance literature the knight's penance is typically harsher than usual. Lancelot's

earlier attempt at penance by walking across England also follows this pattern.[26] But in

one point Lancelot's eventual successful penance breaks with the pattern Hopkins

observes in penitential romances. In the romances, penance is "experienced only once"

(Hopkins [1990] 197). Lancelot's penance in this sense is much more realistic and

psychologically grounded than is the pattern of romance. Lancelot undertakes penance

several times, and when it is finally effective, part of its harshness is the fact that it is

unending. His penance necessitates withdrawing from secular life. That is the mistake he

has made so many times before and that he at last avoids: he has always tried to be sorry

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26 Hopkins makes this point repeatedly. See Hopkins (21, 117, 194, 197).

but to continue to sin, or else to repent but still enjoy his status. But at last he understands, as he explains to Guinevere:

> Now, my swete madame ... wolde ye that I shuld turne agayne unto my contrey and there to wedde a lady? Nay, madame, wyte you well that shall I never do. ... God deffende but that I shulde forsake the worlde as ye have done! For in the queste of the Sankgreall I had that tyme forsakyn the vanytees of the worlde, had nat youre love bene. And if I had done so at that tyme with my harte, wylle, and thought, I had passed all the knyghtes that ever were in the Sankgreall except Sir Galahad, my sone. (F 933.14-29; V 3: 1252.30-1253.17)

Lancelot here recognizes forsaking the vanities of world as the means to spiritual greatness. This recognition comes only after Guinevere categorically rejects the possibility of resuming their affair. Although Guinevere's love is included as one of the "vanities of the world," and although it is the one that he was least able to forsake, the term is plural. Because of Guinevere's love, Lancelot says, he did not forsake the vanities of the world. Lancelot is not here, as Bors was, perfect except for one sin. He is held back from perfection in any number of ways because of the temptations of the world, the chief of which is Guinevere.

Guinevere likewise withdraws from the vanities of the world, as we are told that she "lyved in fastynge, prayers, and almes-dedis, that all maner of people mervayled how vertuously she was chaunged" (F 929.4-6; V 3: 1243.8-10). As with Lancelot, this is more than penance. She is able to live virtuously because she abandons the secular and political

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life, and because she abandons her private relationship with Lancelot. Guinevere's

conversion is wholehearted, and it inspires Lancelot to make a similar conversion.[27]

Lancelot and Guinevere mutually recognize at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* that

the removal of the political obstacles to their love does not make it possible for them to

live happily with each other. The recognition is painful, and it originates with Guinevere,

not with Lancelot, but neither of these diminishes its sincerity or significance. On the

contrary, her spiritual growth is her own, not merely a spur for Lancelot's. The spiritual

growth in Lancelot that makes this recognition possible for him is the focus of his

character development through at least the last three tales of *Le Morte Darthur*, and more

subtly through the previous tales as well. The differences between the floating sword and

the healing of Urry—two bookends of the Grail quest—show how Lancelot is changing.

The Grail quest reveals that sacred and secular are ultimately incompatible through the

person of Galahad, and the post-Grail sections of *Le Morte Darthur* play that

incompatibility out in Lancelot and Guinevere. As a result, by the end of *Le Morte

Darthur*, Lancelot is no longer the knight of earthly chivalry, but is instead a model of

redeemed holiness.

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27   See Martin (2010), p. 177ff.

Figure 2.1
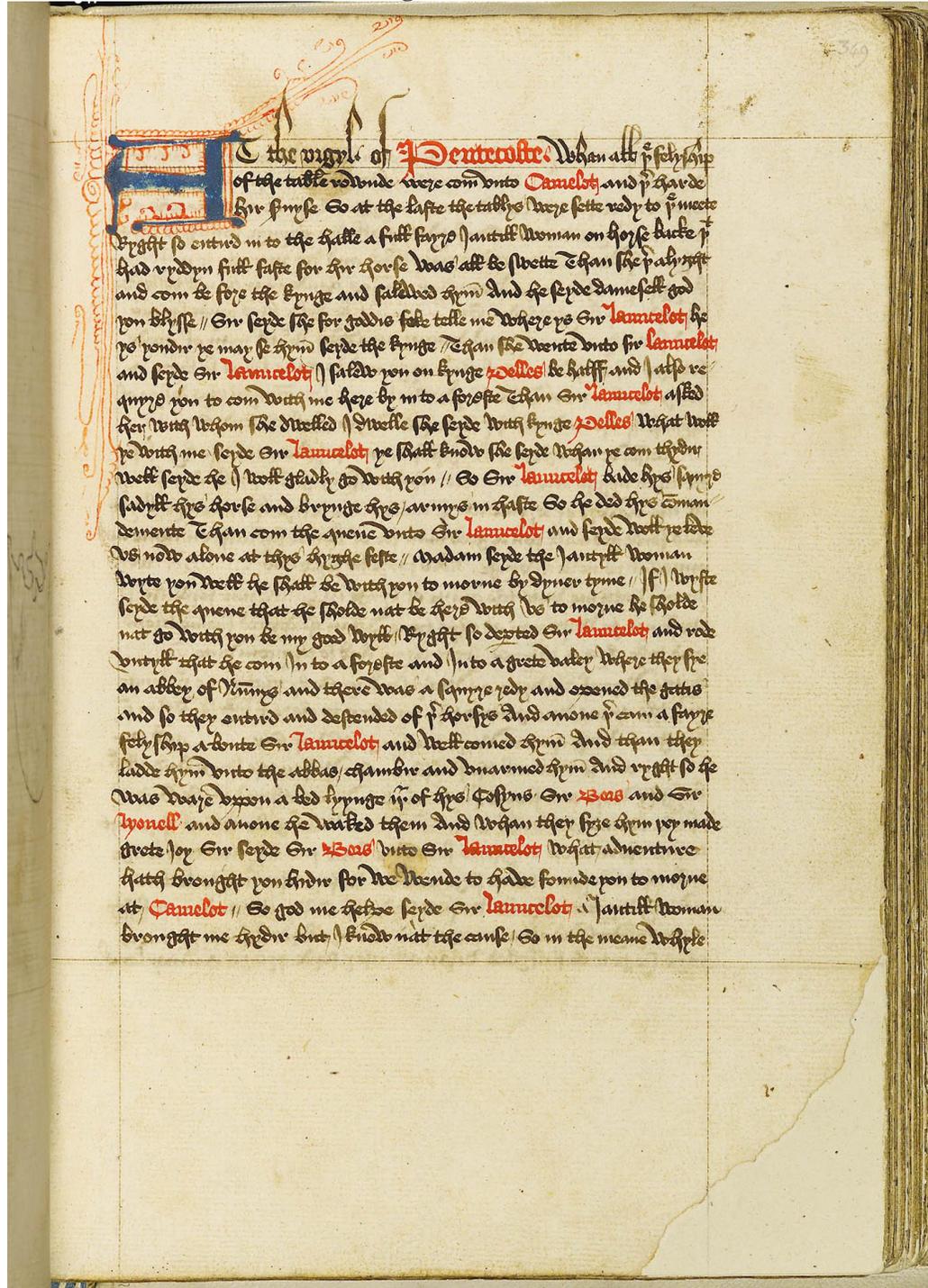
Figure 1: The first page of "The Sankgreal" in the Winchester manuscript.
© The British Library Board, Add. MS. 59678, fol. 349r

Chapter 3
I Said I Was Sorry: Penance in Malory

Towards the end of *Le Morte Darthur*, the focus is increasingly upon a holiness achieved through penance, and this ending provides an interpretive context for the entire book. Malory's penitential ending is derived from the penitential endings that are common among his sources but is also notably different from them. In particular, Malory adapts the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* as the major source and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as a minor source for the ending of his account. Both of these sources have dramatic endings; in both, as the titles suggest, Arthur dies. Yet these two texts orient themselves quite differently with respect to Christian devotion, and Malory' choices about which to adapt and when are what create the position of *Le Morte Darthur.* The ending of the alliterative *Morte* focuses on politics, but the religiously preoccupied ending of the stanzaic *Morte* is the one Malory draws on most directly for the conclusion of his text.

The stanzaic *Morte Arthur's* spiritually focused perspective is what informs the conclusion of Lancelot's penitential arc. Lancelot's arc makes it clear that in *Le Morte Darthur* penance and self-knowledge are intertwined. Like Lancelot, Guinevere ends *Le Morte Darthur* in a posture of penance that creates a context within which to explain her character as it exists through the rest of the book. Guinevere's penance is also her clearest moment of agency in *Le Morte Darthur*. Arthur himself does not follow as clear a penitential arc as Lancelot and Guinevere do, but he does end by regretting his military and political power and symbolically choosing spiritual purity instead. Finally, these examples of penance given and received stand in contrast to Sir Gawain, who spends

most of the book as a representative of secular knighthood, and ends it having finally—after his death—recognized the spiritual value of penance and forgiveness. The characters' endings in penance cast a religious and moral judgement upon the action of the rest of the book.

In a discussion of penance in *Le Morte Darthur* we should bear in mind Kaeuper's note from *Holy Warriors:* that during the late Middle Ages "a range of theological views—rather than straightforward agreement—persisted on ideas about confession and penance … [so that] older and newer views could coexist, even in the same minds" (Kaeuper [2009], 171). So if Malory's representation of penance is not altogether consistent, this is perfectly consistent with a tradition wherin "those who wrote about knighthood could draw selectively upon [all] theological opinions" (Kaeuper [2009], 171). The religious perspective of penance begins with Malory's choice of sources.

The Road Not Taken: Penance and the two *Morte Arthures*

One of the ways that *Le Morte Darthur* creates its viewpoint is in the way that it chooses and curates its sources. Two of Malory's major sources share a title: *Morte Arthur(e)*. Though both texts are about the decline, fall, and death of King Arthur, they approach the topic very differently from one another. They are so different in both plot and in characterization that it is difficult to reconcile them as accounts of the same thing—that is, of the death of the same character. The first, an alliterative poem most likely written near the end of the fourteenth century, is the direct source for Malory's "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" section. The second *Morte Arthur* Malory used as

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a source is a stanzaic abridgement and translation of the French prose *La Mort le Roi Artu.* The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* was most likely written circa 1400, and it is a major source for Malory's two final sections: "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" and "The Morte Arthur."

The similarity of titles here is confusing: the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, the "Morte Arthur" section of Malory's larger book which is itself usually titled *Le Morte Darthur* (following Caxton). For practical purposes I will refer to the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as *aMA*, to the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* as *sMA*, to the final section of Malory's book as "The Morte Arthur" and to Malory's whole book as *Le Morte Darthur*.[1] The similarity between these titles, however, is more than a linguistic or practical nuisance. The titles which refer to the death of Arthur are all significant because they reveal the central themes of the respective texts. Although "The Morte Arthur" is thematically different from *Le Morte Darthur* of which it is a part, both are ruminations on loss: loss of power, the loss of status, loss of life. Likewise, both the *aMA* and the *sMA* are about the end of King Arthur and of everything he represents for each respective text—of a golden age of English chivalry. Moreover, the intertext between texts exists in the reception of the texts, not only in their production. So once readers recognize the shared titles, *Morte Arthure*, *Morte Arthur*, and *Le Morte Darthur*, the texts become

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1   Malory's text labels "The Morte Arthur" alternatively as "The Moste Pyteuous Tale of the Morte Arthure saunz Gwerdon" (F 869.14-15; V 3: 1154.14-15), and "Le Morte Darthur" (F 940.20; V 3: 1260.19). Most critics have agreed with Vinaver that Caxton is the one who applied the title *Le Morte Darthur* to the whole book.

dialogically linked. As Bakhtin would point out, the connection exists in the language. It does not matter whether it is Malory or Caxton who suggested the link by providing the title for Malory's book. Once the title exists, so does the connection. Although Malory's "Morte Arthur" section is based directly on the French *Mort le Roi Artu* and the *sMA*, Field rightly notes that "verbal echoes show that [Malory] sometimes had the alliterative *Morte Arthure* in mind as well, particularly towards the end" (Field 2.768). The *aMA* is not a major source for the "Morte Arthur" section it should likewise be on our minds as we read the end of *Le Morte Darthur*.

The *aMA* is largely a politically-oriented book, concerned with the effects and consequences of war. In *aMA* it is while Arthur is away in Rome fighting Lucius, instead of when he is away in France fighting Lancelot as in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur,* that Mordred usurps the throne (*aMA* 227.3522-228.3554).[2] This difference means that in *aMA*, unlike in Malory's adaptation in "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius," Arthur's Roman war has disastrous effects. The *aMA* is more focused on Arthur personally than Malory is, and after Arthur's death the *aMA* continues for only seventeen lines. It devotes only the most cursory attention to the fates of any of Arthur's surviving knights: "The baronage of Bretayne thane, bechopes and othire,/ Graythes them to Glachenbery with gloppynnande hertes/ To bery thare the bolde kynge" (*aMA* 250.4328-251.4330)*.

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2   In both Malory and *aMA* Mordred spreads a rumour that Arthur is dead. In Malory he attempts to marry Guinevere, and in *aMA* he actually does marry her.

The Arthur of the *aMA* makes an official confession and takes the Eucharist (*aMA* 250.4314-4326),[3] as well as briefly managing the affairs of state by commanding that his cousin Constantine take the throne after his death. He then, with almost his last breath, commands the infanticide of Mordred's children:

> And sythen merke manly   to Mordrede children,
>
> That they bee sleyghely slayne   and slongen in watyrs—
>
> Latt no wykkyde wede waxe   ne wrythe one this erthe!
>
> I warne fore thy wirchipe, wirke alls I bydde. (*aMA* 250.4320-4323)

The plan to kill children is reminiscent of the biblical King Herod, who ordered children born in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus' birth to be killed because they posed a threat to his reign. Arthur is not ordering a massacre, here, but he is ruthlessly pragmatic, as the *aMA*'s Arthur is wont to be. Arthur offers a metaphor: "Let no wicked weed wax ne write on this erthe." The biblical resonance here is with Matt 13:24-30, the Parable of the Tares. In the parable, an enemy sows weeds among the wheat in the night. The lesson of the biblical parable, however, is exactly the opposite of Arthur's conclusion here. In the parable the landowner lets the weeds grow up until the harvest so that the good wheat will not accidentally be destroyed along with the weeds. So Arthur here acts counter to the lessons of Scripture, and ends his life in scheming, not in penitence.

Here we must digress for a moment to clarify a difference between penance and penitence. Although they are closely intertwined, the first is a theological undertaking, the second a psychological state of mind. In theological terms, Arthur probably ends *aMA*

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3   See Cherewatuk (2013) for an extended discussion of funeral rites in Malory.

well. He calls for a confessor (*aMA* 250.4316). The text says that Arthur "saide 'In manus' with mayne   one molde whare he ligges" (*aMA* 250.4326), and it is reasonable to conclude that "*In manus*" refers not only to the prayer "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my soul," but as a metonymy to all the appropriate prayers at death. We can reasonably deduce that Arthur makes a full confession and is given appropriate absolution. So it is an overstatement to argue that the text's ending is apathetic about religion. But Arthur's state of mind is relevant here, both in thematic and in theological terms. This Arthur may end his life with a confession but the last direct dialogue we get from him is a plot of infanticide. He expresses regret, not for his sins but for his mercy. He may end his life in penance, but he does not end it in penitence. And that distinction is relevant even to the penance. Confession is ineffective if it is not accompanied by sincere repentance, and Arthur's final act undermines the sincerity of his contrition.

The instruction to cast Mordred's family into the sea also has an analogue in *Le Morte Darthur*. During "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" Arthur begets Mordred, and on Merlin's advice he "lette sende for all the children that were borne on May Day, begotyn of lordis and borne of ladyes, for Merlyon tolde Kynge Arthure that he that sholde destroy hym and all the londe sholde be borne on May Day" (F 46.7-10; V 1: 55.19-22). This passage has a possible source in the post-Vulgate *Suite du Roman de Merlin*, although in that version Arthur considers killing the children but is warned against it in a dream (*Merlin* 60). In the *Merlin* Arthur sends the infants to sea and so leaves them in God's hands, and God saves them. In Malory's version, Arthur puts the infants in a ship deliberately to kill them, and God does not save these children. While the *Suite* is vague about how exactly Arthur collects the infants, Malory tells us that Arthur "lette sende for

all the children ... begotyn of lordis and borne of ladyes ... in payne of dethe" (F 46.7-11;

V 1: 55.19-23). Malory places extra stress on the helplessness of the infants: "and som

were foure wekis olde and som lesse" (F 46.14-15; V 1: 55.27-28). Malory's version

makes Arthur less sympathetic and more ruthless. That ruthlessness is so unlike Malory's

usual characterization that it seems likely that Malory had another source for this

passage—one that he respected and considered to be authoritative—or else it would not

be here. The text itself announces its source as "towarde the ende of the *Morte Arthure*"

(F 46.19; V 1: 55.33). There is no such passage toward the end of any text known as

Morte Arthure, but that the sole surviving manuscript of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is

most likely shorter than the version Malory worked from.[4] Even if Malory did work with

a fuller version, however, it seems unlikely that any version of the *aMA* would give an

account of Mordred's birth and upbringing at the end. The most satisfying explanation is

that Malory has moved Arthur's child-murder from the end of his life to the beginning of

his career, merging it with the May Day episode.[5]

By transposing Arthur's ruthlessness rather than expunging it, Malory achieves

three things that are worth noting in this context. First, the May Day passage provides

some psychological motivation not only for Mordred but also for the English people who

support Mordred. If Arthur is an ideal king then it is difficult to understand how Mordred

is able to rally popular support. The narrator explains it as an aspect of the wicked

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4   See Ralph Norris (33) for this argument.

5   Field Commentary ([2003] 2: 44) cites an unpublished paper by Edward Donald Kennedy that makes

     this argument.

changeability of Englishmen: "Alas! Thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme" (F 917.5-6; V 3: 1229.13-14). But if we recall that Arthur tried to have Mordred killed then Mordred's antagonism toward Arthur has a cause, and if we recall that Arthur did actually kill a number of other children then a popular resentment is much more comprehensible. Malory emphasizes this in the context of the death of the May Day children: "many lordys and barownes of thys realme were displeased for hir children were so loste" (F 46.20-21; V 1: 55.34-35). The May Day passage also gives the whole of Mordred's life a sense of fatedness akin to Greek tragedy; by attempting to avoid his fate Arthur assures it. Thirdly, by moving Arthur's infanticide[6] from the end of his life to the beginning, Malory sets up a redemptive and penitential narrative arc for Arthur.

Arthur's penitential arc, however, provides a contrast with the major penitential arc of *Le Morte Darthur*: Sir Lancelot's. Lancelot's fatal sin is adultery with Guinevere, but Arthur commits a triple sin. He not only commits adultery by sleeping with King Lott's wife, he also commits incest by sleeping with his half-sister, and infanticide by ordering the death of the May Day children. Arthur doesn't know that Lot's wife is his half-sister when he sleeps with her, so one of his sins is unintentional. He also doesn't specifically order that the children be killed, only that they be set upon a ship, which then crashes "by fortune," so the third sin is indirect. These may be mitigating circumstances that make Arthur's sins less severe than Lancelot's from a certain perspective. But that perspective doesn't seem to be the text's—it certainly doesn't seem to be Merlin's perspective, nor

6   Although Mordred survives the shipwreck, the other children do not.

God's perspective, if Merlin is to be trusted when he tells Arthur: "ye have done a thynge

late that God ys displeased with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have

gotyn a childe that shal destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme" (F 36.14-17; V

V 1: 44.16-19). And even if we accept these as mitigating circumstances, there remains a

strange dissonance at play here. Lancelot sleeps with a King's wife, which indirectly

causes the downfall of the kingdom, so he ends his days in perpetual penance. Arthur also

sleeps with a King's wife and it indirectly causes the downfall of the kingdom, but he

does not end with a clear formal penance.

   Le Morte Darthur does enact a more penitential ending for Arthur than either *aMA*

or *sMA* does, and it adopts the *sMA's* penitential themes for the other characters. If the

aMA represents a path for Arthur's end that Malory rejected, the *sMA* much more closely

represents the path that Malory took.[7] The *sMA* is Malory's direct source for both "The

Morte Arthur" and for much of the "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere." In both the

sMA and in *Le Morte Darthur*, Lancelot and Guinevere end their lives in holy orders,

doing penance for their sins—by which they mean their actions for the majority of the

text.

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7   Hopkins argues that Malory's ending has a dramatically different (and more tragic) tone than the

    hopeful *SMA* does: "The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* … can be said to end happily. … There is no such sense

    of redemption and consolation at the end of Malory's *Morte Darthur*" (Hopkins [1990] 9). Kelly

    disagrees, saying that Hopkins has "not understood the thematic links between the Archbishop of

    Canterbury and the central characters and events of the narrative" (Kelly 130).

Guinevere: Subjectivity Through Penance

For most of *Le Morte Darthur*, Guinevere is a source of temptation for Lancelot, and of weakness for Arthur. The text often casts Guinevere as an object, for Lancelot, Arthur, Mordred, Meleagaunt, and Mador, to fight over. It is through penance that Guinevere achieves her own subjectivity. Guinevere's penitence at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* is insightful and sincere. When she sees Lancelot for the last time, after she has joined a convent, Guinevere laments:

> Thorow thys same man and me hath all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste nobelest kynghtes of the worlde, for thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lorde slayne. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, wyte thou well I am sette in such a plyght to gete my soule hele. (F 932.29-33; V 3:1252.8-13)

Guinevere recognizes the effects of her actions, and in no way disputes her culpability. Yet her concern is for the state of her soul and to make amends to God. She does not attempt to continue in her sin, nor does she negotiate for political effect. This is not a plea bargain. Although the narrative of "The Morte Arthur" focuses more on Lancelot and the other men than it does on Guinevere, as *Le Morte Darthur* has all along, it is both satisfying and revealing that Guinevere has this moment of agency and uses it for redemptive penance.[8]

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8   See Blanton (2010) for more on Guinevere's agency and penance.

For much of "Sir Lancelot du Lake," Guinevere is relegated to a plot device. She features early in the tale in a way that establishes her presence as plot-significant and as motivational for Lancelot:

> Sir Launcelot encresed so mervaylously in worship and honoure ... wherefore Quene Gwenyvere had hym in grete favoure aboven all other knyghtis, and so he loved the quene agayne aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her frome the fyre thorow his noble chevalry. (F 190.12-18; V 1: 253.12-19)

There is some development of Guinevere's character and agency here—she favours Lancelot for his martial achievements as she has previously favoured Sir Kay (F 103.12; V 1: 128.17-18), and she is implied here to have instigated their relationship. Queen Guinevere favours Lancelot, and "so he loved the quene agayne." His love is a reciprocation of hers—or at least of her favour. But this is small agency since it immediately leads to Guinevere as the object of Lancelot's protection and the motivation for his action. Guinevere motivates Lancelot rather than having clear motivation of her own.

Later in "Sir Lancelot du Lake," Guinevere appears again more as a plot device than as a character. The four queens who bewitch Lancelot remark: "can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Quene Gwenyvere" (F 194.14-15; V 1: 257.26-28). So Guinevere is here the object of Lancelot's love, and the obstacle to the queens' desire for Lancelot. Guinevere's agency, and even sentience, is irrelevant. Later, Lancelot orders defeated knights to yield unto Guinevere (F 209.21; V 1: 274.9). Again, Guinevere is not a character in this interaction, she is an object. Guinevere early in the text is the object of

Lancelot's affection, a symbol of his imperfection as a knight, a symbol of the authority of the state, but not often a fully realized character with her own agency.

A notable exception—a time when Guinevere is a subject rather than an object—is when Guinevere acts as a moral authority—such as in her first direct act in *Le Morte Darthur*. Although Guinevere appears as an object of Arthur's desire earlier, she doesn't actually speak until the end of "The Wedding of King Arthur." When she does, it is to criticize King Pellinore's moral judgement: "'A, Kynge Pellynor,' seyde Quene Gwenyvere, 'ye were gretly to blame that ye saved nat thys ladyes lyff'" (F 97.1-2; V 1: 119.22-23). Merlin adds his voice here and reveals that the lady Pellinore failed to help was his own daughter. Guinevere's moral judgement, in other words, is sound. Pellinore attempts to demur, but Merlin supports Guinevere. Merlin, who has already been established as a moral as well as a mystical authority, one supported by both the official religious authority of the church and the unofficial religious authority of personal mystical revelation, is not only providing insight into the facts; he is also supporting Guinevere's moral authority.

In "Sir Lancelot du Lake," Queen Guinevere exercises that moral authority in both a literal and a symbolic way. Near the end of "Sir Lancelot du Lake," Lancelot encounters a knight named Sir Pedivere, who surprises Lancelot by cutting off his lady's head while she is under Lancelot's protection (F 220; V 1: 285). When Lancelot fails to prevent Pedivere from beheading his wife, he instructs Pedivere: "take this lady and the hede, and bere it uppon the; and here shalt thou swere uppon my swerde to bere hit allwayes uppon thy bak and never to reste tyll thou com to my lady Quene Gwenyvere" (F 220.19-22; V 1: 285.29-32). Lancelot uses his physical authority, as represented by his sword, to

impose punishment upon Pedivere. Guinevere is a symbolic moral authority here; she is

the goal to which Pedivere must work if he is to be free of his burden. When Pedivere

comes before Guinevere, she turns from a symbolic to a practical authority:

> "Sir knyght," seyde the quene, "this is an horryble dede and shamefull,
>
> and a grete rebuke unto Sir Launcelot, but natwithstondyng his worshyp is
>
> knowyn in many dyverse contreis. But this shall I gyff you in penaunce:
>
> make ye as good skyffte as ye can, ye shall bere this lady with you on
>
> horsebak unto the Pope of Rome, and of hym resseyve youre penaunce for
>
> your foule dedis." (F 220.30-35; V 1: 286.4-10) [9]

Guinevere is the only secular figure to give out penance in *Le Morte Darthur*. This

suggests that Guinevere has a moral—or more accurately a spiritual—authority of her

own. Moreover the principle agency here has shifted. A sentence previously Lancelot was

a real authority and Guinevere a symbolic one. Lancelot ordered Pedivere to perform a

task, which was to present himself to Guinevere. In the context of Lancelot's order,

Guinevere is the endpoint of Pedivere's quest. But Guinevere transforms the order—or

rather, she overrules it. Instead of a symbolic endpoint for Pedivere's punishment from

Lancelot, Guinevere makes herself into a mediator of God's pardon. Instead of an

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9   Lexton interprets this as Guinevere's engagement in "the production and maintenance of masculine

     worship" ([2014] 91) and suggests it as evidence of how profoundly the society depends upon worship.

     I would suggest that although Guinevere is concerned with Lancelot's worship, her primary interest

     here is in Pedivere, and not in his worship, but in his spiritual welfare.

endpoint she has become a midpoint and the Pope has become the symbolic figure to which Guinevere appeals.

When Pedivere reaches Rome, the Pope "bade hym go agayne unto Quene Gwenyvere" (F 221.4-5; V 1: 286.15). This strange back-and-forth is reasonable from a certain point of view—the penance that Pedivere must undergo is the journey; the destination is immaterial. Lancelot sends him to Guinevere, Guinevere sends him to the Pope, and the Pope sends him back to Guinevere, and all the time Pedivere must carry the head of his dead wife. But the fact that Guinevere is both a midpoint and the endpoint in Pedivere's journey is significant. If the Pope were the endpoint of Pedivere's redemption it would be clear that the Pope was a final authority. The Pope would clearly be the one who is able to make a final judgement and dispense final absolution. We would see both Lancelot and Guinevere deferring authority to the Pope. But in fact the endpoint is Guinevere. The back-and-forth makes it unclear which of the two—Guinevere or the Pope—is the higher authority.

After he receives his absolution from both the Pope and Guinevere, "Sir Pedyvere fell to grete goodnesse, and was an holy man and an hermyte" (F 221.6-7; V 1: 286.17-18). This end for Pedivere makes him a template in the text for successful penance. He receives his penance and it is effective, both for the remission of his sins and for the amendment of his life. Kraemer argues that the convention of the repentant sinner becoming a saint provides Malory's fifteenth-century audience with expectations about Lancelot's end (Kraemer 104). But readers need not be familiar with the convention from any other sources. It is clearly present here in the early part of *Le Morte Darthur* itself— in the middle of an interaction involving both Lancelot and Guinevere.

Guinevere's moral authority and its spiritual foundation both add depth to her eventual penance at the end of *Le Morte Darthur.* Guinevere's penance is not a sudden and unprecedented change of heart; it is an accord of action with knowledge. These passages of moral authority demonstrate that Guinevere knows what is right. These fleeting passages of moral authority for Guinevere also add depth to her character: they complicate her role in the text and prevent her from being a mere stock character or archetype. In her penance at the end of "The Morte Arthur," Guinevere is an influence for good on Lancelot, since it is her penance that inspires his, but more importantly she is a fully realized subject of her own. As she makes a confession and does penance she is a more fully developed character than she has yet been.

The development of Guinevere's character is intertwined with her penance because penance necessitates subjectivity.[10] After the Fourth Lateran Council made confession into a yearly (at least) obligation for all Christians, there was a need to provide handbooks for priests, instructing them on how to conduct this new sacrament, and handbooks for laypeople, teaching them what to confess, how, why, when, and to whom.[11] There was also a new social need to provide an intellectual and imaginative private space for people—a space from which they could speak coherently about their sin. A central part of confession was an examination and confession of intent. Peter Abelard stressed the importance of intention in establishing the nature of a sin, and St. Augustine

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10 Little, especially 17-47, argues that confession is a narrative of self-definition.

11 Nicole Rice offers a helpful account of how "the required practice of penance linked all Christians" (2) after 1215 in her introduction to *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*.

emphasized the intention to amend life as central to penitence. The Christian world after 1215 needed to be able to imagine and to articulate private desires and intentions in coherent language.

Confession as a sacramental practice depended (and depends) on the confessing subject's ability and willingness to examine not only his or her own actions but also the motivations behind those actions. Before a confessing subject can receive penance and be absolved he or she must faithfully confess the truth of his or her sin, which necessarily involves a frank evaluation of the intentions behind the actions, and an open acknowledgement of both action and intention. For example, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* suggests the nature of the relationship between mental vice, intention, and sin in its treatment of the seven deadly sins. From the seven deadly sins "comen alle manere of synnes, and þerfore þei ben y-cleped heued vices, for þei ben heuedes of alle euelees and of alle synnes, be þey dedly or veniale" (*Vices and Virtues* 11). The seven deadly sins are the sources of all the other sins in that they are the mental or internal states from which action—even action of the mind—comes. Sincere confession is not possible without recognition of the mental source of the sin. The *Ancrene Wisse* explains that proper confession "schal beo Wreiful. Bitter mid sorhe. Ihal. Naket. Ofte imaket. Hihful. Eadmod. Schoemeful. Hopeful. Wis. Soþ. Willes. Ahne. Studeuest. Biþoht bi uore longe" (*Ancrene Wisse* 156). The mental state of the penitent is crucial to confession, the first stage of penitence.

All of this confessional theory is important for understanding Guinevere and her character, because confession is a means by which a character can articulate herself and assert her subjectivity and it is also an act for which subjectivity and agency are

prerequisites. As Virginia Blanton points out, Malory's use of action verbs as he describes Guinevere absconding to Amesbury emphasizes Guinevere's agency: "she stale away," "she went to Amysbury," "she lete make herselffe a nunne,'" she "wered whyght clothys and blak," "she lyved in fastynge, prayers, and almes-dedis" (F 928-929; V 3: 1243).[12] The portrait is of Guinevere as self-determining. A Guinevere whose only role in the text is to move the plot forward or to motivate the men does not and cannot confess, because confession necessarily involves self-knowledge. A Guinevere who exists as a physical manifestation of Lancelot's sin cannot enact penance, because penance is by definition moving away from sin. When she is functioning as an archetypal temptress, Guinevere cannot confess. It is, of course, possible for Guinevere's function to change; the temptress character can be reformed and become an inspiration to good instead. But if she exists only to inspire Lancelot toward his own penance, then Guinevere does not need to articulate her penance as fully and as persuasively as she does. All that is required for Guinevere to be an inspiration to Lancelot is that she join a cloister, an effective way to make herself unavailable. When she gives a full and thoughtful confession Guinevere shifts the agency onto herself. Only as a fully realized character with agency and subjectivity can Guinevere make the penance she does at the end of *Le Morte Darthur,* because that penance reveals her character and gives her agency.

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12 Blanton discusses Guinevere's life in Amesbury at length. Her discussion of Guinevere's entry into the convent is 59-60. My examples are Blanton's.

Lancelot: If At First You Can't Confess, Try Try Again

Like Guinevere, Lancelot's experience of penitence and his movements towards and through penance demonstrate the development of his character. Of all of the characters in *Le Morte Darthur*, Lancelot most clearly follows the trajectory of formal penance, which begins with confession.[13] The character arc of Lancelot is a penitential one. Lancelot's sinfulness in *Le Morte Darthur* is represented by his affair with Guinevere, and our growing knowledge of that affair signifies Lancelot's growing self-knowledge—which is to say, his growth towards penitence.

At first Lancelot denies an affair with Guinevere. Early in his first tale Lancelot meets four queens, one of whom is Morgan le Fay, and they recognize both him and the state of his heart: "thou art Sir Launcelot du Lake, … [and] there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is Quene Gwenyvere" (F 194.12-15; V 1: 257.24-28). Lancelot's reaction is defensive—and specifically defensive of Guinevere: "as for my lady Dame Gwenyvere, were I at my lyberté as I was, I wolde prove hit on you or on youres that she is the treweste lady unto hir lorde lyvynge" (F 194.26-28; V 1: 258.5-6). A little later he and Guinevere are both accused again: "hit is noysed that ye love Quene Gwenyvere, and that she hath ordeyned by enchauntemente that ye shall never love none other but hir" (F 206.3-5; V 1: 270.22-24). Lancelot's reaction to the second accusation is a bland dismissal: "I may nat warne peple to speke of me what hit pleasyth hem" (F 206.8-9; V 1: 270.28-29). Malory leaves the nature of Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship ambiguous

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13 For an argument that Malory carefully follows the formula of official penance for Lancelot see Besserman (133) and Cherewatuk ([1995] 68-73).

here.[14] However, in "Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere," when we know that Lancelot is guilty, he makes an impassioned denial that we can recognize as false. In that later tale Lancelot even offers the same defence as that which he offered to Morgan le Fay and the other queens: that is, that he will prove Guinevere's faithfulness in combat. It is reasonable to conclude that the same is happening here, even though it is not explicitly stated. Although we might not know it yet, Lancelot's denials are no longer reliable.

We are not told anything directly about Lancelot's truthfulness here because our knowledge of Lancelot's interior life increases as we go through the text, as his knowledge of himself increases. While Lancelot is trapped by his own lack of self-knowledge—by his refusal to acknowledge the truth even to himself—we are also denied knowledge of him. At this point the narrative perspective is objective. We are given no access to Lancelot's internal life. We know what Lancelot says and what he does, but not what he feels, or thinks, or even what he is doing when the narrative focus is not on him. Later, Lancelot's claim, before the Grail quest, "I know I was never none of the best" (F. 672.16-17; fol 352 V), is an expression of humility that on one hand is evidence of his spiritual growth. In this self-negation, Lancelot follows the pattern of humility laid out by

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14 Hanks ([2013] 16) concludes that Lancelot is truthful here and that Guinevere and Lancelot do not consummate their relationship until after the Grail quest. Nolan argues that Malory's purpose here was "to raise the question of his hero's honour as it relates to his love for Guinevere" ([1996] 179). Beverly Kennedy notes how Malory suggests here that Lancelot is "a virgin wholly devolted to chastity" (Kennedy [1993] 127), since his supposed love of Guinevere is what keeps him from loving other women.

St. Benedict's Rule. By St. Benedict's ordering, Lancelot here displays the sixth degree of humility: "in every occupation assigned him he consider himself a bad and worthless workman, saying with the Prophet, 'I am brought to nothing and I am without understanding; I have become as a beast of burden before You, and I am always with You'" (Benedict 27), and the seventh degree: "that he consider himself lower and of less account than anyone else, and this not only in verbal protestation but also with the most heartfelt inner conviction" (Benedict 27). On the other hand, in this claim of humility, Lancelot contradicts a trustworthy speaker who is linked to holiness. The mysterious damsel who seems to be an emissary of Nacien the hermit, responds: "Yes … that were ye, and ar yet, of ony synfull man of the worlde" (F. 672.18-19; V). Lancelot has claimed knowledge that he does not have, and denied a truth about himself, because he fails to recognize that he certainly is the best knight of the world—for a certain definition of "best." What Lancelot "knows" may be an expression of humility, but it is not an expression of truth.

As the Grail quest progresses we are given some glimpses of Lancelot's emotional and mental state, because he is beginning to earnestly inquire after his own motives and actions instead of protecting himself through an assumption of his own strength.[15] Lancelot's first sincere confession happens early in the "Sankgreal":

> "Sir," seyde the good man, "hyde none olde synne frome me."

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15 For an argument that the shift from ordeal to confession as a method of dealing with sin demonstrates a shift of emphasis onto the heart and the interior life see John Baldwin 205-209. Lancelot exemplifies this shift in the way he moves from fighting to prove his goodness to confessing his sinfulness.

"Truly," seyde Sir Launcelot, "that were me full lothe to discover, for thys fourtene yere I never discoverde one thynge that I have used, and that may I now wyghte my shame and my disadventure."

And than he tolde there the good man all hys lyff, and how he had loved a quene unmesurabely and oute of mesure longe. (F 696.13-19; V 2: 897.11-16)

This is not only the first sincere confession we have heard from Lancelot; it is explicitly marked by Lancelot as the first time that he has confessed this sin. This is most likely as a confession of a physical relationship that has already been going on for years, but Lancelot's emphasis is not upon the chronology of the sin, it is upon his mental state and on the motivation for his sinful actions—as it should be. He attempts to recognize the ways that his mindset has alienated him from God and from God's service: "never dud I batayle all only for Goddis sake, but for to wynne worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought I thanked never God of hit" (F 696.22-24; V 2: 897.19-22). The emphasis is not on Lancelot's actions but on his motivation.

This section ends with a rare description of Lancelot's mental state: "and than Sir Launcelot repented hym gretly of hys myssededys" (F 698:19; V 2: 899.11-12). This seemingly simple statement of repentance is significant because of how very rarely we are granted direct access to Lancelot's thoughts and feelings. Even during the healing of Sir Urry, when Lancelot is overcome by emotion and weeps, the narrator gives us no direct account of what he is thinking or feeling. We only know what he does and how that appears. But repentance, as related here, signifies not only an outward show of contrition, but also an inward change of mind.

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When, after he makes his confession, Lancelot asks the hermit to "counceyle" him (F 696:25; V 2: 897.23), we should recognize the request not as a request for strategic advice, but as an appeal for spiritual counsel. He is asking how to proceed—how to avoid sinning, in the future, but also how to atone for the sins of the past. He is asking, in other words, what penance he should do. The hermit responds "Ye shall ensure me by youre knyghthode ye shall no more com in that quenys felyship as much as ye may forbere" (F 696:26-28; V 2: 897.24-26). This is not only practical advice for the amendment of Lancelot's life; it is also a condition of Lancelot's penance.

Lancelot readily agrees, but after his failed achievement of the Grail he "forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste" (F 790.11-12; V 2: 1045.11-12). The text appropriately interprets Lancelot's behaviour from within the framework of confession and penance. Lancelot's sin is a symptom of a lack of sincere accounting for his own mind. He forgot. The text laments: "had nat Sir Launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the quene as he was in semynge outewarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall. But ever his thoughtis prevyly were on the quene" (F 790.12-15; V 2: 1045.12-17). A key word here is "prevyly." Lancelot's inward thoughts do not accord with his actions. The lack of integrity between the outward and the inward man is exactly the fault that the hermit from the beginning of the Grail quest warns Lancelot against: "loke that your harte and youre mowth accorde" (F 696:31; V 2: 897.29). Significantly, the original warning by the hermit is not found in the *Queste del Saint Graal,* nor is the reiteration of it found in either the *sMA* or *La Mort le Roi Artu.* In the hermit's warning before the Grail quest Malory stresses the importance of synchronizing heart with mouth. In the text's lament

after the quest, the stress is on a disparity between heart and action. Both emphasize

Lancelot's internal inconstancy, and together they show that his heart does not accord

with either his words or his deeds. The whole focus on according of heart with words and

deeds here seems to be Malory's own addition. The distinction between heart, mouth, and

action is a common figuration in confessional discourse and pastoral manuals.[16] Malory's

use of the figure places the stress on Lancelot's internal inconsistency. It is not that

Lancelot changes his mind or that he is inconstant because his allegiances waver. Rather,

his parts are out of accord with each other, and this is both a psychological issue and,

more importantly, a religious one. Internal inconsistency in character is marked here as a

spiritual affliction.

Lancelot's other significant attempt at penance dramatizes spiritual immaturity.

After he kills Gareth and Gaheris, Lancelot makes an offer to Gawain; Lancelot will

perform penance:

> if hit may please the kyngis good grace and you, my lorde Sir Gawayne.
>
> I shall firste begyn at Sandwyche, and there I shall go in my shearte, bare-
>
> foote; and at every ten myles ende I shall founde and gar make an house of
>
> relygious, of what order that ye woll assygne me, with an hole covente, to

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16 See, for example, the "Summa brevis," which explains that "all sins are sins of thought, word, or deed"

(quoted Goering 150); cfr. Mabillon's *Ordo Romanus* XIV, chp. 71, where the rubric for confession is

given as a confession "quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, delectatione, consensu, verbo, et opera" ("That I

have sinned in thought, pleasure, consent, word, and deed"; PL 78: 1185B). In Ordo XIV the words are

pronounced by the Pope (Papa).

synge and rede day and nyght in especiall for Sir Gareth sake and Sir

Gaherys, and thys shall I prefourme from Sandwyche unto Carlyle. And

every house shall have suffycyent lyvelode, and thys shall I perfourme

whyle that I have ony lyvelod in Crystyndom, and there ys none of all thes

religious placis but they shall be perfourmed, furnysshed and garnysshed

with all thyngis as an holy place ought to be. (F 900.30-901.5; V 3:

1199.30-1200.6)

Here we have what seems like a genuine and fulsome offer of penance. Certainly it

succeeds in impressing most of its audience: "all the knnyghtes and ladyes that were there

wepte as they were madde, and the terys felle on Kynge Arthur hys chekis" (F 901.9-10;

V 3: 1200.7-8). Despite this positive reaction, however, there are important problems with

Lancelot's speech, considered as an act of penance. In the first place, Lancelot directs his

penance to Gawain rather than towards God. He is offering to make a show to persuade

Gawain of how regretful he is. And although his regret seems to be genuine—there is no

reason to doubt it—Lancelot's offer here is not evidence of spiritual contrition but is

rather a political alternative to war. The reaction of the knights and ladies only highlights

that Lancelot is engaging primarily in politics. The crowd finds him moving, as is his

intention. Secondly, Lancelot does not follow through with his offer here. This is related

to the first problem; Lancelot doesn't follow through on this offer because Gawain rejects

it. But Lancelot's need to make spiritual penance for murdering Gareth and Gaheris is not

dependent on Gawain's acceptance or refusal of his apology. The fact that Gawain has the

power to refuse the offer means that it is a plea bargain rather than an act of true penance.

Lancelot is trying to use penance to avoid the political and social consequences of his wrongdoing. Theologically speaking this displays a remarkable symmetry—the essence of penance is working for the remission of sin, the natural consequence of which is death.[17] Penance spiritually speaking is a means of avoiding the consequences of sin. Lancelot here is using it as a way to avoid the earthly consequences of social wrongdoing. He is willing to make reparations for a deed done accidentally but not willing to do true penance because he is not willing to make a confession that is "Wreiful. Bitter mid sorhe. Ihal. Naket..." (*Ancrene Wisse* 156). He is still defending himself. Gawain easily goads Lancelot back into threats of defensive violence: "seyde Sir Gawayne, 'thou arte bothe false to the kynge and to me.' 'Sir,' seyde Sir Launcelot, 'he beryth nat the lyff that may make hit good'" (F 901.16-19; V 3: 1200.19-22). This is a threat against the person Lancelot is ostensibly here to make amends to, as well as an allusion back to the "Sir Lancelot" section, where Lancelot made what we have good reason to suspect was a false claim: "as for my lady Dame Gwenyvere, were I at my lyberté as I was, I wolde prove hit on you or on youres that she is the treweste lady unto hir lorde lyvynge" (F 194.26-28; V 1: 258.4-6). We should recognize it here as a marker of insincerity.

At the end of *Le Morte Darthur*, Lancelot makes a final true confession.[18] Since this of necessity involves self-knowledge, we have far more access to Lancelot's interior life at this point in the narrative than we have had at any previous point. We know what is going on in Lancelot's head at the end of *Le Morte Darthur* because he knows, and is able

17 See Braswell (4) for an account of confession and penance in medieval English literature.

18 On the sincerity of Lancelot's penance, see Corey Olsen 47-49.

and willing to confess it. After the death of Guinevere Lancelot sees her buried, and at the sight "swouned, and laye longe stylle" (F 936.25-26; V 3: 1256.21-22). The hermit assumes that Lancelot is overcome by grief at the death of his lover, and admonishes him for holding on to the illicit love. Lancelot responds:

> whan I remembre me how by my defaute and myn orgule and my pryde
>
> that they were bothe [ie Arthur and Guinevere] layed full lowe, that were
>
> pereles that ever was lyvyng of Cristen people, wyt you wel, ... this
>
> remembred, of their kyndenes and myn unkyndenes, sanke so to myn herte
>
> that I might not susteyne myself. (F 936.35-937.5; V 3: 1256.29-38)

We can see that Lancelot has adopted a penitential mindset that necessitates ongoing self-examination. He begins by remembering the effects of his sin, and then he explains how that remembrance affects him emotionally. He explains to the hermit what he is feeling and why. Lancelot is able to articulate his emotions because it is necessary for him to understand them in order for him to make a right confession. It is not enough for him to weep over his sin, he needs to understand what it is that is making him weep, to transform that sorrow into a desire to amend his life, and recognize that to be what he is doing.

When, at the end of his life, Lancelot achieves true redemption through true repentance he recognizes at last that real penance means he cannot continue to sin or to enjoy the benefits of his sin. Guinevere tells him that she believes that he will "turne to the worlde agayne" (F 933.21-22; V 3: 1253.8-9) and that no matter what penance he does it will never earn him an amendment with her: "that [kiss] shal I never do" (F 934.3; V 3: 1253.27). He still undertakes penance because the purpose of his penance is not to impress Guinevere or to convince her that he is a good man. The purpose of his penance

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is to reconcile himself to God. In contrast with his earlier offer to Gawain, Lancelot is not

placing his penance in the hands of any human being, but is directing it towards God.

Regret, Contrition, Penance, and King Arthur

Malory's King Arthur ends the book without clear formal penance, but like

Lancelot, he directs his final thoughts toward God. In this, Malory departs from both of

the "Morte Arthur" sources. Malory uses *sMA* as his source for Arthur's death, much

more than he uses *aMA*. The *aMA*, for example, doesn't include the casting away of

Excalibur, nor does it continue to give an account of Guinevere and Lancelot, all of which

the *sMA* does. *aMA* brings Arthur to Avalon, but doesn't feature the three queens on a

mysterious boat, as *sMA* does. But Malory's approach to Arthur's penance follows neither

sMA nor *aMA*. The *aMA* features elements of formal confession in preparation for death.

Arthur instructs his men: "Doo calle me a confessour   with Christe in his armes!/ I will

be howselde in haste" (*aMA* 250.4314-4315), and he ends his life in prayer: "He saide 'In

manus' with mayne   one molde whare he ligges,/ And thus passes his speryt,   and

spekes he no more" (*aMA* 250.4326-4327). The *aMA* features the barons and bishops of

England singing a Requiem mass on behalf of their King: "Throly[19] belles thay rynge

and requiem syngys;/ Dosse messes and matins   with mourande notes" (*aMA* 251.4332-

4333). The tone of all of this is mournful, even regretful, but not contrite. Arthur says his

appropriate prayers and is unhappy to be dying, and his people say the appropriate

prayers for him and mourn his death. In contrast, the *sMA* is full of regret—not just

19 Loudly

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mournfulness that Arthur is dead, but melancholy over mistakes made, both by Arthur and by others. The *sMA* features Arthur throwing away his sword (*sMA* ll. 3445-3497) and boarding a boat bound for Avalon (*sMA* ll. 3510-3519) and it features the hermit who is a former Archbishop of Canterbury (*sMA* ll. 3558-3559) and Bedivere's retreat into a life of prayer (*sMA* 3550-3557). It does not, however, include Arthur's request for prayer on his behalf, nor does it offer any suggestion of Arthur's possible return.

Malory's ending is penitential in two important ways that neither of the "Morte Arthur(e)" sources are. Malory's ending for Arthur speaks to the penitential ending of the text as a whole, first in the casting away of Excalibur, and second in the claim that Arthur "shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse" (F 928.24-25; V 3: 1242.25). These moments are significant in relation to each other—Arthur throws away the sign of his military and political power in exchange for a promise that he will one day achieve a spiritually symbolic task analogous to the Holy Grail—but each is also revealing on its own.

Arthur's reasons for throwing away Excalibur are never made entirely clear. Hodges hypothesizes that the sword is the symbolic reason for the enmity of Morgan le Fay. Morgan, he argues, "cannot revert to a healing sister as long as the law, symbolized by the sword, remains between her and Arthur" (Hodges 55). Recall that early in Arthur's career Morgan stole Excalibur (F 119; V 1: 150) and that although Arthur eventually recovered the sword, the scabbard "wolde nat be found" (F 120.18; V 1: 151.26-27). The lost scabbard, according to Merlin "ys worth ten of the swerde" (F 44.32; V 1: 54.3-4) because it has healing properties: "whyles ye have the scawberde upon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded" (F 44.33-34; V 1: 54.4-5). The scabbard, with its

healing powers and its yonic symbolism, is associated with Morgan le Fay and female

power, while the sword with its phallic symbolism is associated with Arthur and male

power. While Arthur has the sword—and especially while he has *only* the sword—he

cannot reconcile with his sister. According to this reading, Arthur's determination to have

Bedivere throw the sword into the lake is possibly an (ineffective) act of self-

preservation. Arthur is desperate to rid himself of the sword so that Morgan will come

and heal him.

Alternatively, however, throwing away the sword represents a penitential movement

away from the law—from political and secular power. When Arthur's disciple twice fails

to follow his instructions, the biblical resonance is with Jesus in the Garden of

Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-45). Jesus, preparing for his own death, is twice disappointed by

followers who cannot follow his commands. The biblical disciples fall asleep and

Bedivere is tempted by avarice, but the episode in *Le Morte Darthur* is clearly an echo of

the biblical scene. However, unlike Jesus in Gethsemane Arthur is not sinless, and his

physical wounds are symbolically linked to spiritual wounds. In the Garden of

Gethsemane Jesus is physically whole and is preparing to be wounded, while Arthur is

physically wounded and preparing to be made whole. He boards the boat with the three

queens, telling Bedivere: "I wyl into the vale of Avylyon to hele me of my grevous

wounde—and if thou here nevermore of me, pray for my soule" (F 927.5-7; V 3:

1240.33-35). Here we see a small but important departure from Malory's sources, the

sMA and the French *La Mort le Roi Artu*. In neither of the sources does Arthur ask for

prayer for his soul, but in *Le Morte Darthur* Arthur is a penitent sinner who must prepare

his soul for death. That is what he is doing when he discards the symbol of his earthly power.

The prediction, near the end of the text, that Arthur "shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse" (F 928.24-25; V 3: 1242.25) suggests an afterlife for Arthur that follows the schema discussed in chapter two: preoccupation with the sacred as a successor to preoccupation with the secular. If Arthur returns, according to Malory, it will not be to rescue Britain from political peril but to accomplish a spiritually symbolic task. We should also note that Malory is famously cagey about the possibility of Arthur's return. He reports the rumours of Arthur's future return, but refuses to commit to them as authoritative:

> Now more of the deth of Kynge Arthur coude I neer fynde, but that thes
> ladyes brought hym to hys grave and such one was entyred there, which
> the ermyte bare wytnes that sometime was Bysshp of Caunturbyry; but yet
> the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that he was verily the body of Kynge
> Arthur.
>
> For thys tale Sir Bedwere, a Knyght of the Table Rounde, made hit to
> be written; yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that Kynge
> Arthure ys nat ded, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another
> place; and man say that he shall com agayne, and he shall whynne the Holy
> Crosse. Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so, but rather I wolde sey: here
> in thys worlde he changed hys lyff. And many men say that there ys
> wrtytten upon the tumble thys vers: "Hic iacet Arthurus, Rex quondam
> Rexque futurus." (F 928.16-28; V 3: 1242.15-29)

The potential that Arthur will win the Holy Cross raises a question about how directly responsible Arthur is for the exploits of his knights. If we consider that in some sense Arthur achieved the Grail, which seems to be the implication of the whole of the text, and of this suggestion that Arthur will return to win the Holy Cross, then Galahad's completion of the Grail quest is an achievement for Arthur. Galahad achieved the Grail, but since he did so while a vassal of Arthur, then by induction Arthur also achieved the Grail. It is not clear, then, whether this prophecy suggests that Arthur will personally win the Holy Cross, or if he will be the leader of those who do—if others will win the cross on Arthur's behalf as happened with the Grail. And since the achievement of the Grail is clearly a spiritual achievement in *Le Morte Darthur*—and presumably so is the hypothetical achievement of the Holy Cross—this suggests that Arthur benefits spiritually from the actions of others. Within this frame of reference it makes sense that Arthur's relationship with the sacred happens in the context of the Church and of organized religion rather than personal piety. For an organized church community the idea of shared spiritual benefit is reasonable. Spiritual life is not about individuals in isolation but about a community that is sometimes arranged hierarchically.

Arthur is established as king in the first place thanks to convergence of heredity, as the legitimate son of Uther; of popular support, as "all the comyns cryed at ones, 'We wille have Arthur unto our kyng!'" (F 10.33-34; V 1: 16.12); of mystical fatedness, as symbolized by Merlin; of military strength, as represented by the war against the eleven kings; and finally of divine sanction, as both the appearance of the sword in a churchyard and the presence and precedence of the Archbishop of Canterbury over Arthur's crowning demonstrate. Before the first appearance of the sword in the stone, Merlin advises the

Archbishop of Canterbury that on Christmas Jesus "wold of His grete mercy shewe some myracle" (F 6.34; V 1: 12.18-19). The sword then appears miraculously "in the grettest chirche of London" (F 7.7; V 1: 12.26). It appears in a churchyard because the Church supports Arthur's claim for kingship, both in its incarnation as a secular power with political influence and also in that the divine action that establishes Arthur is official, organized, codified, communal. Galahad, Bors, Percival, and Lancelot are advised by hermits and inspired by mystical visions. Arthur is advised by the Archbishop and inspired by an officially authorized miracle that appeared in the greatest church of London. It is Arthur in his role as the agent of the church who might return.

Arthur's connection to the formalized church doctrine manifests itself in his most explicit penitential act: the exhortations for others to intercede on his behalf. Insofar as penance suggests more than mere contrition, it is the remission of sin. Penance is not only feeling sorry, it is a way of dealing with sin. And the sin need not necessarily be one's own. Arthur's final words, addressed to Sir Bedivere, are "if thou here nevermore of me, pray for my soule!" (F 927.6-7; V 3: 1240.34-35). After Bedivere finds the body of Arthur at the hermitage, the fact that he becomes the first of Arthur's knights to adopt "fastynge and prayers ... to pray for my lorde Arthur" (F 927.30-32; V 3: 1241.24-27) demonstrates that Bedivere, at least, takes Arthur at his word. Prayer for the dead is therapeutic for the one who prays, symbolizes a connection with the dead, and was a crucial part of mourning. But it also serves a purpose for the dead. Bedivere's prayers for Arthur's soul are his means of attempting to assure salvation for the dead king, which is only possible because of the spiritual unity of a universal church. Bedivere and Arthur are both part of the same organized penitential system.

The Archbishop, Minor Characters, and National Penance

The final tale of *Le Morte Darthur* links individual penitence with the health of the realm, especially through the character of the Archbishop of Canterbury.[20] After Mordred usurps the throne of Britain, the Archbishop of Canterbury retreats from his position into life as a hermit, and "retreat" is an appropriate term here. The Archbishop recognizes that his spiritual conflict with Mordred is lost, and he leaves the arena of struggle:

> So the bysshop departed, and ded the cursynge in the moste orguluste wyse that
>
> myght be done. And than Sir Mordred sought the Bysshop off Canturbyry for to
>
> have slayne hym. Than the bysshop fledde, and tooke parte of hys goodes with
>
> hym, and wente nyghe unto Glassyngbyry. And there he was a preste-hermyte in a
>
> chapel, and lyved in poverte and in holy prayers, for well he undirstood that
>
> myschevous warre was at honde. (F 916.12-18; V 3: 1228.16-23)

If this is a political conflict then the Archbishop cedes the victory to Mordred when he leaves. The Archbishop may exert some spiritual power in this scene by "cursynge" Mordred, but Mordred has the political power to do as he chooses: namely attempt to marry Guinevere. In theory, marriage is a perfect overlap of politics and religion: both a political alliance and a religious sacrament. By rejecting the Archbishop's judgement within the context of his intent to marry Guinevere, Mordred symbolically rejects the religious sphere. The Archbishop excommunicates Mordred, but since Mordred has

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20 Kelly argues extensively that through character of the Archbishop the war motif is intertwined with the

   penance motif. (113ff.)

already rejected the religious sphere he has already symbolically excommunicated himself. Any political influence the bishop had is gone. This means that the Archbishop has ceded power, and as he does so he becomes a private rather than a public figure. That is the meaning of his transition from bishop to priest-hermit—a transition that foreshadows Lancelot's eventual transition into the same role. The Archbishop, who represents the most perfect unity of political and religious vocation possible, abandons the political dimension of his identity when the tension between the two becomes too great.

Like a good military retreat, this is strategic. The Archbishop removes himself to a position of safety and power; his real power is spiritual, not political. And the retreat is temporary. When circumstances make it possible the Archbishop return: "thys Kyng Constantyn sent for the Bysshop of Caunterburye, for he herde saye where he was. And so he was restored unto his bysshopryche, and lefte that ermytage" (F 939.31-34; V 3: 1259.30-32) The Archbishop's retreat into a hermitage is a retreat from the political arena into the spiritual. He retreats to prayer and poverty. Prayer is spiritually useful. The understanding is that through prayer a human being can exert spiritual influence. The Archbishop prays and God acts. This is what it means that the Archbishop's retreat is a strategic one. He recognizes that he cannot influence Mordred's behaviour directly, so he retreats to a position of safety and power to pray, and that prayer is effective in a way that the Archbishop's political influence is not.

The text says that the bishop lived in prayer and poverty "for well he undirstood that myschevous warre was at honde" (F 916.17-18; V 3: 1228.22-23). The implication is that the bishop's prayer and poverty are related to the war. One simple explanation is that the bishop lives away from the court because he is afraid of the physical peril that comes

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along with war, but the text makes it clear that the bishop's life is under threat from Mordred, war or not. So the life of poverty and prayer is not merely an escape from war. It is the bishop's way of preparing for the war.

Prayer, asceticism, the retreat into a hermitage: these are strategic acts of spiritual warfare. But they are also acts of penance.[21] The Archbishop initiates a period of penitential self-denial for himself, but also on behalf of the realm. On the one hand this is penance for the past—and that is the strongest evidence that it is symbolic penance on behalf of the realm, for the Archbishop has no specific sins to repent of (or at least none that we know of). At the same time, however, the Archbishop's retreat prepares for the renewal of the world. When the penitential period ends the Archbishop will be ready—both physically and, more importantly, spiritually—to resume his place.

As a priest, the bishop is in the peculiar position of acting on behalf of the people as intercessor with God. The bishop is not enacting penance for his own personal sins; he is doing it on behalf of the nation for its sins. The sins of the nation are what he calls mischievous civil war. Malory refers to war as "myscheveous" a few lines before his famous exclamation: "Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was?" (F 916.34; V 3: 1229.6-7). The repeated use of the word "myschyff" makes the link between the bishop's prayers and the narrator's ruminations clear. The "myschyff" of the nation—the sin for which the bishop is enacting penance—is the choice of Mordred over Arthur.

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21 Ronald K. Rittgers 377-380 offers an account of the important link between penance and suffering in medieval theology. The Archbishop giving up his physical comfort is penitential.

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Any ambiguity about the bishop's life in the hermitage as a symbolic penance is resolved with the arrival of Sir Bedivere:

> Than Sir Bedwere tolde the ermyte all as ye have harde tofore, and so he belaffte with the ermyte that was beforehande Bysshop of Caunturbyry. And there Sir Bedwere put uppon hym poure clothys, and served the ermyte full lowly in fastyng and in prayers. (F 928.1-4; V 3: 1241.32-1242.2)

Bedivere reaches the hermit-bishop in a state of both grief and shame. He mourns the passing of Arthur and everything that that represents, and he also repents of his two-time failure to follow Arthur's commandments to cast away the sword, and his failure to protect Arthur more generally. Bedivere is also fulfilling Arthur's final request that Bedivere pray for Arthur's soul; as we have already seen, prayer for the dead is a form of penance on their behalf. Or, to be more precise, the prayer is not itself penance, but its purpose is to replace or supplement the penance that the dead person did not do when he or she was alive.[22] Bedivere joins the bishop in a life of fasting and prayer because he is representative of the penance of Arthurian knights in general.

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22 See the papal bull "Laetentur coeli": "if those truly penitent have departed in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by the worthy fruits of penance for sins of commission and omission, the souls of these are cleansed after death by purgatorial punishments; and so that they may be released from punishments of this kind, the suffrages of the living faithful are of advantage to them, namely, the sacrifices of Masses, prayers, and almsgiving, and other works of piety" (Denzinger 693).

"Laetentur coeli" was issued on July 6, 1493, so Malory could not have known it when he wrote *Le*

The bishop returns to his bishopric after the coronation of King Constantine because with the establishment of a new king the period of national penance is over and the relationship between the crown and the official church can be re-established. As Kelly argues, "penitence redeems the nation as well as individuals" (Kelly 114). Despite the nation's redemption, however, Bedivere remains a hermit for the rest of his life, both because he is fulfilling Arthur's request and also because the formal and official church in its formal and official relationship with the secular power is still spiritually united with its symbolic representatives outside of the structures of secular government. The penance ends, but it is also ongoing.

Sorry, Not Sorry: Sir Gawain and the Refusal of Penance

During the "Sankgreal" especially, Gawain is a representative of secular knighthood. He initiates the Grail quest, but fails utterly because he does not display any understanding of what the Grail quest is. As Gawain begins the Grail quest he meets a hermit who advises him to confess and do penance. Gawain refuses the hermit's instruction: "I may do no penaunce, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne" (F 691.31-32; V 2: 892.19-20).[23] On one level Gawain is acting here as a representative of a form of chivalry wherein knighthood *was* a form of penance. During

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Morte Darthur, which was completed in March 1470, but I include it here as an example of doctrine broadly contemporary with Malory and his readers.

23 See Felicia Ackermann (2006) for an extended analysis of this passage and of Gawain as an example of "spiritual sloth."

the second crusade the expectation of knights shifted from one in which killing was necessary but regrettable, and should be countered with formal penance, to one in which killing on crusade was itself a form of penance which could counteract previous sins.[24] Gawain does not argue that killing is penance, but he does consider knight-errantry to be itself a spiritual discipline, and its hardships to be all the penance necessary to him. Gawain's perspective is in line with the argument laid out by Geoffroi de Charny, who argued that "there is no religious order in which as much is suffered as has to be endured by these good knights who go in search of deeds of arms in the right way" (de Charny [1996] 177). De Charny, as we have already seen in chapter one, considers knighthood to be a religious order. In Gawain he apparently has a disciple.

On another level Gawain is symbolic of secular knighthood—and in particular of a chivalric code that prioritizes family. As nephew to King Arthur, Gawain's status within the Round Table community is more explicitly founded on secular political relationships than any other knight. This is not to say that Gawain's place is unearned or illegitimate, but that its legitimacy is grounded in heredity and political hierarchy. This is clear in Gawain's earliest appearance in *Le Morte Darthur,* in the early part of the "Wedding of King Arthur" section.[25] Gawain asks, as a gift, that Arthur make him a knight "that same day that ye shall wedde Dame Gwenyvere" (F 78.7-8; V 1: 99.10-11). Arthur responds, "I woll do hit with a good wylle … and do unto you all the worship that I may, for I muste

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24 See Keen (1984) 44-63, especially 46.

25 Gawain is named earlier, along with Gaheris, Aggravayne and Gareth, as one of the four sons of "Kyng Lottis Wyff of Orkeney" (F 33.31; V 1: 41.13).

be reson ye ar my nevew, my sistirs son" (F 78.9-11; V 1: 99.12-14). Gawain's

relationship with knighthood is inseparable from his relationship to Arthur.[26] This is a

contrast with Sir Tor, whose story immediately follows Gawain's introduction, and whose

relationship to King Pellinore is incidental to his knighthood, since Arthur knights Tor

and makes him a knight of the Round Table before he learns that Tor is Pelinore's son (F

79.22; V 1: 101.6). The comparison between Tor and Gawain is inevitable because of

their close proximity in the text, but it is made even more explicit when the narrator

remarks: "So the kynge made Gawayne knyght, but Sir Torre was the firste he made at

that feste" (F 80.24-25; V 1: 101.32-33).

The same passage establishes Gawain's status as head of a faction of Round Table

knights. Gawain tells his brother Gaheris that he plans to kill King Pellinore, "for he

slewe oure fadir Kynge Lott" (F 81.3; V 1: 102.13). Gawain's worldview is mediated by

family and clan connections, and loyalty to the Round Table and to his fellow Round

Table knights is secondary to family loyalty. This perspective and its accompanying

symbolic weight makes sense of Gawain's unwillingness to do penance on the Grail

quest. Gawain cannot do penance without transforming his purpose in the text. If Gawain

accepts penance then he re-orients himself into a relationship primarily between God and

himself rather than a family. Lancelot and Guinevere both explicitly seek penance, and

Arthur symbolically suggests it, but Gawain refuses it.

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26 On the familial nature of Gawain's knighthood, see Beverly Kennedy (164), Mapstone (109-110).

Just as significant as his refusal to be a penitent, however, is Gawain's refusal to accept penance from others. Lancelot's offer of penance to Gawain bespeaks a misdirection of guilt on Lancelot's part, but it also reveals Gawain's orientation to confession and penance. When Lancelot places the power to accept or reject his penance in Gawain's hands he is simultaneously offering a personal apology, offering a political alternative to war, and situating Gawain as a stand-in for a priest in an act of confession and an offer of penance.

At the personal level Gawain's response is unsurprising; it is even touchingly full of pathos in the pain it reveals: "I have ryght well harde thy langayge and thy grete proffirs. But wyte thou well, lat the kynge do as hit pleasith hym, I woll never forgyff the my brothirs dethe" (F 901.11-14; V 3: 1200.13-16). At a political level, however, Gawain's response is remarkably inflexible. Lancelot presents Gawain and Arthur with an opportunity to prevent war, to publicly reconcile, to publicly censure Lancelot, and to establish political dominance over him. Gawain previously managed to be a part of a knightly fellowship with Pellinore, who he believes killed his father.[27] When he sees Pellinore being honoured by Arthur, Gawain tells his brother Gaheris: "Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, which grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir Kynge Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym" (F 81.2-4; V 1: 102.12-14). Gawain does eventually kill Pellinore, and although it instigates an ongoing feud between Gawain's clan and Pellinore's (F 482; V 3: 608), Gawain does not goad Arthur into war with Pellinore or

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27 Lamerok claims that Gawain is mistaken, that it was Balin le Saveage who killed King Lott (F 487.1-3; V 2: 612.28-30.).

Pellinore's family. He does not attempt to expand the feud beyond his own family. In contrast, here Gawain's personal grief overwhelms common sense political considerations. Gawain's reaction to Pellinore and the death of his father is motivated by honour and duty, but his reaction to Lancelot is emotional. Gawain doesn't accept Lancelot's attempt at peace because Gawain's feelings are still raw. There is nothing political here, only personal spite.

Gawain's personal orientation here causes him to overlook the spiritual implications of Lancelot's offer and of his own refusal. Lancelot offers to establish chantries to sing and read for Gareth and Gaheris. This is not only a potential source of penance for Lancelot; it is an offer of penance on behalf of Gareth and Gaheris. The singing and reading on their behalf that Lancelot's chantries would undertake would, according to the fifteenth-century doctrine of purgation and of intercession for the dead, work towards the remission of Gareth and Gaheris's sins, reducing their time in purgatory. Gawain's refusal of the offer suggests either that he values his own anger and vengeance over the welfare of his brothers' souls, or that he does not trust the efficacy of penance for the remission of sins. This coincides neatly with his refusal to do penance during the Grail quest. Gawain, as the knight symbolically linked with secular chivalry, rejects clerically-delimited penance that does not consider his own knightly actions themselves to be penitential.

Gawain's perspective changes in the end, however. The emotionally-charged letter that Gawain writes on his death-bed asks Lancelot to "pray some prayer more other les

for [his] soule" (F 918.33-34; V 3: 1231.19-20).[28] Here Gawain makes his request for clerically-mediated intersession on his behalf, much as Arthur later will to Bedivere. Lancelot returns to England too late to offer military help (F 931; V 3: 1250), but fulfills Gawain's request and provides him with spiritual help by praying for his soul and doing penance on his behalf. Lancelot mourns for Gawain, but also "prayed the people to pray for the soule of Sir Gawayne" (F 931.25; V 3: 1250.29-30) and sings a Requiem mass with the priests there. This signifies a shift in Lancelot; he is no longer useful in war, and has instead become useful in prayer. Or, to put it another way, he is no longer useful in secular warfare, and has instead become useful in spiritual warfare. Gawain's shift to a spiritual perspective marks a similar shift in the world around him.

Gawain and Arthur both ask that someone pray for their souls. For both the request is sincere and literal; it is a final marker of penitence. Thomas Malory also asks "all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book ... whan I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule" (F 940.24-25; V 3: 1260.23-24). This is penitential language.[29] A soul is in need of prayer because it is separated from God. By asking that his readership pray for his soul, Malory is categorizing himself as separate from God—his soul is imperilled. But the acknowledgement of separation from God and the desire to reduce the separation is the essence of penance. Malory does not make his readers into his priests—

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28 For an argument that the emotion of Gawain's letter is a sign—in keeping with confessional manuals—that his confession is sincere see Cherewatuk (2013) 83.

29 See Hanks (2103) for more on the penitential language of Malory's prayers in the explicits, especially pages 10-12.

he does not confess to us. But he does position himself as a penitent who asks for intercession on his behalf. This posture unites Malory with the knights of *Le Morte Darthur*—especially Gawain and Arthur.

Penance is a central concern of *Le Morte Darthur*. The overwhelming narrative arc of "The Morte Arthur" is penitential and the ending of "The Morte Arthur" unavoidably colours the whole of *Le Morte Darthur*.[30] The penitential theme holds whether the character opposes penance, like Gawain, expresses informal regret and contrition like Arthur, enacts symbolic penance like the Archbishop and Bedivere, or enacts personal formal penance like Guinevere and Lancelot. Malory's choice to use the *sMA* rather than the *aMA* as his major source for the ending of *Le Morte Darthur,* and his choice to follow the characterization of the *sMA* rather than the *aMA* for most of his text, both signal and confirm the religious focus of the end of *Le Morte Darthur*. Not all endings necessarily determine the meaning of the text; an ending does not erase the text that comes before it. But endings do necessarily interpret what has come before them. Penance is by its nature a response to what has come before, and Malory's penitential ending constitutes more than just the characters repenting of their sins. Characters and author are both repenting for the sins of the text and for the action of much of the text.[31] Like his characters—and especially like Gawain and Arthur—Malory ends the book by symbolically renouncing

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30 Kelly (2001) has fruitfully explored the penitential ending of *Le Morte Darthur*, especially with regard to Lancelot and to the Archbishop. My discussion of penitence in Malory is indebted to him.

31 Malory's penitential ending is as much a retraction as Chaucer's (equally penitential) ending of *The Canterbury Tales* is. This does not mean that either Malory or Chaucer pragmatically wishes that the text would not exist, but that the text includes its own self-negation.

the secular and embracing the sacred. That is the meaning of Malory's request for prayer. *Le Morte Darthur* is an extended journey through secularism, by way of penance, into the sacred.

Chapter 4

Don't I Know You From Somewhere: Malory's Unused Sources for the Grail Quest

The sources Malory rejects demonstrate his purpose in "The Sankgreal" as much as the sources he does use. Malory declares his spiritual theme most strongly in "The Sankgreal" section of *Le Morte Darthur,* and that theme is even clearer when we consider Malory's choice of sources. The primary source for "The Sankgreal" is *La Queste del Saint Graal*, a religious and spiritually oriented text. These spiritual preoccupations persist in Malory's retelling. Although Malory demonstrates elsewhere in *Le Morte Darthur* that he is willing to deviate from his sources when it suits him, "The Sankgreal" deviates less from its major source than any other section of *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory chooses to stay close to this source because it conforms to his vision for his text.[1] By adapting *La Queste del Saint Graal*, Malory chooses a text which operates largely in a symbolic mode, focuses on spiritual or religious themes, and presents sacred and secular interests as being at odds with one another.

When we say that *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and as a consequence *Le Morte Darthur*, operates in a symbolic mode, this does not suggest that only symbolic readings are possible, nor does it preclude symbolic readings of other Grail texts. It simply means that the text heavily favours a symbolic reading. We might say that a mimetic text or passage is one "in which ethical significance is intrinsic to the actions portrayed rather

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1   For an argument that Malory's chose the *Queste* because of his affinity for its religious themes, see Moorman ([1964] 186-187).

than symbolically expressed by them" (Mann 213).[2] This does not mean that no interpretation is possible, but simply that the text does not seem to require it. A symbolic text is one in which either the literal meaning is less important than the symbolic meaning, or where the text interprets its own meaning, as when a hermit or other holy figure interprets the actions of the Grail knights. The hermits' interpretations themselves often span several layers of the quadrifaria.[3] They sometimes offer prophetic interpretations of the knights' literal lives and actions, they sometimes offer a typological reading that relates the knights' quests to scriptural exegesis, they sometimes offer a tropological reading that interprets the moral allegory of the knights' quests, and they sometimes offer an anagogical reading in which the knights' actions and experiences mystically represent spiritual truths.

Malory's choices relate directly to his conception of the sacred, and even his unused sources can show that. Malory almost certainly knew John Hardyng's *Chronicle*, which is much more mimetic than *La Queste del Saint Graal.* He was definitely familiar with the French prose *Tristan,* which contextualizes the Grail quest as simply one more among many achievements by the Round Table. He most likely knew the French *Perlesvaus*, in which political and religious interests overlap exactly. These three sources,

2   In her "Malory and the Grail Legend," Jill Mann offers a reading of a section of "The Sankgreal" in which Melyas accompanies Galahad. Mann argues that the Melyas section is "not designed to present a series of ethical choices which function as examples for everyday life; rather, like the final vision of the Grail, it manifests a spiritual reality on a physical plane, even though the relation between the spiritual and the physical remains inaccessible" (213). We might call this an anagogical reading.

3   See p. 3 of my Introduction.

each of which has its own perspectives and emphases in relation to the Grail quest, represent worldviews that *Le Morte Darthur* deliberately rejects.

Choice and *La Queste del Saint Graal*

La Queste del Saint Graal is Malory's primary source for "The Sankgreal." Malory chooses this particular source because it articulates a theme and a worldview that he also wants to express in *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory remains close to his source here, and for a writer who is doing as much (or more) translating and anthologizing as he is doing composing, the choices of which sources to use and how much and when to deviate from that source are crucial. All writing consists of greater or lesser amounts of pastiche, since in order to write intelligibly in the first place a writer must at the most basic level use words that others have already used. Malory's *Morte Darthur* in one sense is a pastiche made up of invented stories, loose adaptations, free translations, strict translations, abridgements, and direct quotations. The shape of the final text is the product of which approach is used where. So when Vinaver famously argues that "Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreall* is the least original of his works" (Vinaver 1534) we should understand this to mean that it deviates less from Malory's primary source than other parts of *Le Morte Darthur* do. But this very observation reaffirms that elsewhere Malory is willing to abandon his sources, or to switch from one to another, when it serves his purpose. It is both logical and also conducive to an equitable reading, then, to posit that Malory's

grounds for choosing his sources are artistically informed—that the choice of a source is itself an artistic act.[4]

Once he has chosen *La Queste del Saint Graal*, Malory does not deviate much from it. Vinaver concludes that "apart from omissions and minor alterations, [Malory's Grail section] is to all intents and purposes a translation of the French *Queste del Saint Graal*, the fourth branch of the thirteenth-century Arthurian Prose Cycle" (Vinaver 1534). In the commentary to his 2013 edition of Malory, Field reaffirms this conclusion, noting that Malory "follows the *Queste* from beginning to end without omission or interpolation, something he does not do with any of his other sources. He also stays closer to the wording of the *Queste* than to that of any other source, not infrequently following it word for word" (Field Commentary 2.549). Vinaver, and a critical tradition following him,[5] argues that Malory moves "to secularize the Grail theme as much as the story will allow" (Vinaver 1535). Recently Field disputed this conclusion, pointing out that despite Vinaver's conclusion that Malory's use of the term "erthly worship," to describe the motivating goal of the Grail knights shows that Malory is himself earthly in his concerns, some manuscripts of the *Queste* use the equivalent French term "oneur terriens" at the same point in the narrative.[6] Malory's "secularizing" therefore, is at least sometimes

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4   See for example Dhira Mahoney (1985) 110; Mary Hynes-Berry (1981) 106; Molly Martin (2010) 134; Edward D. Kennedy (1981) 45; Dorsey Armstrong (2013) 111.

5   See especially Mary Hynes-Berry (1981), P. E. Tucker (1953), C. David Benson (1996), Terance McCarthy (1981).

6   See Field Commentary (2013) 2: 549.

simply what Malory found in his source.[7] More generally, though, the claim that Malory wanted to secularize the Grail "as much as the story will allow" is a strange one, since there is no external force constraining Malory to any particular version of "the story." If Malory really wanted to secularize the Grail theme he could have chosen a different source altogether: one that was not itself so thoroughly religious. Nobody is forcing Malory to use this source at all, let alone to deviate from it as little as he does. Malory stays closer to his source in "The Sankgreal" than he does anywhere else in *Le Morte Darthur.* It is difficult to take that as evidence that he was at odds with the source's central theme. As Field quips in in his headnote to the "Sankgreal": "critics have sometimes maintained that the *Queste* was uncongenial to [Malory]: perhaps they meant it was uncongenial to them" (Field Commentary 549).

Malory does not necessarily need to use *La Queste del Saint Graal* as the source for his retelling of the Grail quest. There were at least three other viable options available to him that include accounts of the Grail quest. We should thus recognize "The Sankgreal" not only as a translation of *La Queste del Saint Graal*, but also as a rejection of Hardyng's *Chronicle*, of the French prose *Tristan,* and of the French *Perlesvaus*. Each of these three texts contains the story of the Grail, Malory knew them all, and they are all

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7   For some arguments that Malory did not secularize his source, see Moorman (1965), Armstrong (2014), Tolhurst (2013).

more thematically alike than any of them are like either *La Queste del Saint Graal* or the *Le Morte Darthur*.[8]

The shared perspective of Malory's "The Sankgreal" and *La Queste del Saint Graal* is that the sacred calling symbolized by the Grail quest is incompatible with the secular success of Arthur's court, but that it is nevertheless a necessary calling.[9] One straightforward piece of evidence of this is in the structure of "The Sankgreal" and its relationship to the rest of *Le Morte Darthur*. In *Le Morte Darthur*, the Grail quest only begins after the Round Table is complete. It is the completeness of the fellowship of the Round Table that triggers the arrival of the Grail in the first place, and the fellowship of the Round Table is completed by the arrival of Galahad. Arthur memorably and

8   Edward D. Kennedy makes a similar argument ([1981] 45-48). Kennedy's attention is most focused on Hardyng, and he mentions the French Tristan and the Perlesvaus only in passing. Notwithstanding the attention he draws to differences between Malory and his three rejected sources, Kennedy argees with Vinaver that in Malory the Quest "has nothing to do with [the Arthurian Court's] collapse" (Kennedy [1981] 47).

9   Dhira Mahoney (1985) has argued that the *Queste*'s vision is of "a progression into more and more refined revelation, till the vision of the ineffable in this world shades imperceptibly into union in the next" (124), while Malory's is of Galahad's "translation from one world into the next, with a sharp awareness of the division between them" (124). She concludes from this that "Malory presents the spiritual pursuit of perfection as complementary to rather than competitive with the pursuit of earthly glory" (124). I would suggest (and have elsewhere) that there is a hierarchy in Malory, that spiritual perfection and earthly glory are not presented as equal alternatives. In any case, though, Mahoney's main point is that in Malory the choice is one or the other; a knight cannot have both. If this perspective of incompatibility is present in *La Queste del Saint Graal* then Malory enhances it.

prophetically emphasizes the wholeness of the Round Table before the beginning of the Grail quest:

> "Now," seyde the kynge, "I am sure that at this quest of the Sankegreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne holé togydirs. Therefore ones I woll se you all holé togydir in the medow of Camelot, to juste and to turney, that aftir youre dethe men may speke of hit that such good kynghtes were here, such a day holé togydirs."[10]

Galahad is the last knight to join the Round Table—he completes the fellowship—and he is also the knight who completes the Grail quest.

Accessing the Grail: Sir Lancelot

In its style, "The Sankgreal" is also less accessible than other parts of *Le Morte Darthur*, in that it demands a figurative reading in a way that the rest of *Le Morte Darthur* does not. The Grail quest includes many events that are interpreted within the text by hermits or other religious figures. Early in his Grail quest, Lancelot hears a mysterious voice saying "Sir Launcelot, more harder than ys the stone, and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge-tre! Therefore go thou from hens, and withdraw the from thys holy places" (F 694.30-33; V 2: 895.25-28). Lancelot finds a hermit, who interprets these words as well as other circumstances in Lancelot's life:

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10 In what Field has concluded was a scribal error the Winchester manuscript includes an additional "holé togydirs" in this passage that Vinaver's edition reproduces (F 672.25-30; V 2: 864.5-12).

Now have I shewed the why thou art harder than the stone and bitterer

than the tre; now shall I shew the why thou art more naked and barer than

the fygge-tre. ... So thou, Sir Launcelot, whan the Holy Grayle was brought

before the, He founde in the no fruyte, nother good thought nother good

wylle, and defouled with lechory. (F 697.21-33; V 2: 898.21-35)

The hermit offers a symbolic reading of the events of Lancelot's life. He interprets

Lancelot's life for Lancelot and for the reader, explaining and decoding the symbols in

conjunction with biblical exegesis. In this passage, which is virtually identical to the

equivalent passage in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, the Grail quest leads Lancelot to

personal spiritual knowledge, but it is coded in three ways: Lancelot does not

immediately understand what he is being censured for, the spiritual disapproval comes in

the form of simile, and Lancelot must find a spiritual authority to decode it. The hermit's

interpretation makes it clear that the three accusations, "more harder than ys the stone,

and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the

fygge-tre" are not merely poetically repetitive ways of saying the same thing. They each

have a specific meaning which is revealed through the symbolism of the image. The three

images are all typological: "the stone" suggests Exodus 17, in which Moses draws water

from a stone. The bitter wood suggests wormwood, which in Revelation 8 falls into the

sea and turns the waters bitter, but also the bitter tree of the cross from which springs the

sweet fruit of redemption. The fig tree, the only allusion explained in the text, suggests

the fig tree cursed by Jesus for producing no fruit in Mark 11. All three allusions suggest

the possibility of a good result springing forth from Lancelot: the water from the stone,

the redemption from the bitter wood of the cross, and figs from the fig tree all point to

Galahad. The hermit, then, is offering an explanation of Lancelot's life, but simultaneously an interpretation of three passages from the Bible, and finally an interpretation of *Le Morte Darthur*. And the audience of these three interpretations is first Lancelot, and then the text's readers.

Much of "The Sankgreal" exists in this mode. Soon after the episode with the fig tree, Lancelot falls asleep at the foot of a cross, and sees a vision: "there com a man afore hym all bycompast with sterris, and that man had a crowne of golde on hys hede. And that man lad in hys felyship seven kynges and too knyghtes, and all thes worshipt the crosse, knelyng upon theire kneys, holding up theire hondys towarde the hevyn" (F 717.7-11; V 2: 928.20-24). This vision, like Lancelot's experience of the fig tree is soon explained by a holy man, who interprets the seven kings as Lancelot's seven ancestors, and the two knights as Lancelot and Galahad. Again, the good man is doing a multi-layered interpretation. He is explaining the symbolism of Lancelot's dream, and simultaneously explaining Lancelot's history and its spiritual significance. He explains both to Lancelot and to us (not for the first time) that Lancelot is special. And in this passage Lancelot receives confirmation that Galahad is his son, which confirms that his life and lineage continue to be symbolically and spiritually informed. Lancelot's genealogy here and its connection to Joseph of Arimathea—himself linked to Jesus as the owner of the crypt in which Jesus was buried—itself symbolizes both Lancelot's closeness to and his estrangement from God. He is part of God's symbolic family, but at a distance. The symbolism of the seven generations depends on recognition of seven as a biblical number of perfection or completeness, as in the seven days of creation. That is why the image is expressed in terms of seven generations until Lancelot and Galahad, not

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in terms of eight generations until Galahad. After the seventh generation, the work is complete. Again in this passage Lancelot's life, his spiritual visions, and biblical exegesis all comment upon each other.

Later, Lancelot encounters knights dressed all in black whose blackness "betokenyth the synnes whereof they be nat confessed" (F 721.20; V 2: 933.26-27). Lancelot's failure in that case to interpret the knights symbolically is to his detriment. He reads them literally and fights with the black knights because they are weaker. It is only afterwards, with the help of a recluse interpreter, that he understands their symbolic meaning. The recluse tells Lancelot: "when thou saw the synners overcome thou enclyned to that party for bobbaunce and pryde of the worlde, and all that muste be leffte in that queste; for in thys queste thou shalt have many felowis and thy bettirs, for thou arte so feble of evyll truste and good believe" (F 721.24-27; V 2: 933.31-934.3). Here the symbolic meaning of the events Lancelot encounters both reflect and in some sense create the action of the rest of the quest. Lancelot's reaction to the black knights is symbolic of his reaction to sin, but also of his place in the Grail quest.

Not all of Lancelot's experiences in "The Sankgreal" are decoded by holy men—fewer are decoded in *Le Morte Darthur* than in *La Queste del Saint Graal*. But even without the interpretation, many of Lancelot's experiences in "The Sankgreal" are clearly symbolic. Sir Lancelot's second section in "The Sankgreal," for example, ends with Lancelot being attacked by a mysterious knight:

> And there [Lancelot][saw a river that hyght Mortays. And thorow the water he must nedis passe, the which was hedyous. And than in the name of God he toke hit with good herte. And whan he com over he saw an

armed knyght, horse and man all black as a beare. Withoute ony worde he

smote Sir Launcelottis horse to the dethe. And so he paste on and wyst nat

where he was becom. And than he toke hys helme and hys shylde, and

thanked God of hys adventure. (F 722.15-21; V 2: 934.26-935.4)

Although this passage is never interpreted by a convenient holy man, [11] the recent

appearance of the previous black knights makes the natural interpretation that the silent

black knight represents evil or sin. In the French source, the name of the river is

"Marcoise,"[12] and the river divides the waste land into three at this point. Lancelot does

not know where to go, and when the mysterious knight kills his horse he waits for

clarity, which eventually arrives in the form of the Grail ship. In *La Queste* the river is a

site of Lancelot's indecision and God's providence. A tropological reading might

suggest that the river represents Lancelot's dependence on God. The mysterious knight

kills Lancelot's horse and forces him to continue on foot. The river is both the obstacle

to Lancelot's progress, when that progress is of his own doing, and at the same time the

means of his progress, when that progress is God's doing. In *Le Morte Darthur* the

knight who kills Lancelot's horse is still mysterious, but the context makes it much

more symbolically connotative of sin. If we associate the mysterious knight with sin,

then the meaning of the river in *Le Morte Darthur* perhaps has the added meaning that

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11 No interpretation is offered by the text, but the name of the river is suggestive. A mortise is a hole or a
    gap, and at this point there is a gap in the textual interpretation.

12 I have not found any explanation of the significance of the name "Marcoise," and it does not suggest
    anything especially compelling in either French or English, except perhaps the echo of "croix."

Lancelot's sin is a barrier to his spiritual progress. Crucially, however, in neither text is the river passage straightforwardly mimetic—that is, it is self-consciously symbolic and allusive. The key to interpreting "The Sankgreal" is orthodox exegesis.

Personal History and the Desire for Faith: Sir Percival

Percival also experiences several strange, surreal encounters that are later explained to him by a holy figure. As he is first beginning the quest, Percival meets a recluse, who is called "Quene of the Wast Landis" (F 699.27; V 2: 905.28) and who turns out to be Percival's aunt. The existence of the Waste Lands in "The Sankgreal" is itself symbolic—or more accurately, mythological. The meaning of the Waste Land in the Grail quest has been much discussed,[13] and it is outside the scope of this project to add much to that discussion. What is relevant to the argument here, though, is that the fact that Percival's aunt is the "Quene of the Wast Landis" gives Percival a familiar, personal, relationship to the Grail, much as Lancelot's ancestors did for him. Percival's aunt explains Percival's personal history, telling him that his mother "ys dede, for aftir [Percival's] departynge from her she toke such a sorrow that anone as she was confessed she dyed" (F 700.6-8; V 2: 906.4-6). Tropologically, this suggests that Percival must choose where his loyalties and commitments lie. When he chose to become a knight he

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13 See, for example, Lexton ([2014] 46), who argues that the Waste Land is a literalization of political failure, Amy Kaufman (87) who suggests that the Waste Land is a literalization of the Lacanian "other," Richard Barber, especially 205-210, not to mention the opening of Dante's *Inferno,* James Frazer's *Golden Bough,* Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance,* William Nitze's *Fisher King in the Grail Romances*, or T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and the criticism that developed from it.

left his mother behind. Symbolically his mother is dead because he cannot return to her. Typologically it reveals how Percival's chivalric identity will end when he adopts the holy life of a hermit near the end of "The Sankgreal."

Soon after leaving his aunt, Percival sees a half-naked old man in a monastery with a gold crown on his head. The old man is covered in "grete woundys, both on the shuldirs, armys, and vysayge" (F 702.1; V 2: 908.3), and he continually prays "Fayre swete fadir Jesu Cryste, forget nat me" (F 702.3; V 2: 908.6). One of the monks explains to Percival that the old man is King Evelake, whom God has promised will not die until the knight who will achieve the Grail has kissed him. Evelake is a link between Arthur's knights and Jesus, since Evelake was converted by Joseph of Arimathea, and the possibility that he will be healed by Galahad both establishes Galahad's spiritual exceptionalism, and contextualizes his spirituality in terms of miraculous healing. It is one of the miraculous healings to which Lancelot's eventual healing of Sir Urry is an allusion. Additionally, though, Percival's encounter with King Evelake, whom he cannot himself heal, establishes Percival as Galahad's John the Baptist, preparing the way for him—not only for Evelake and the monks within the text, but also for us as we read the text. Percival continues on, and eventually encounters Galahad, who saves him from an attack by "about twenty men of armys" (F 703.1; V 2: 909.8-9). Percival's horse is slain, but Galahad rides away and Percival cannot follow on horseback. Even here, where the action is relatively mundane, the spiritual symbolism readily presents itself: Percival is not equipped to follow Galahad, but follows him on foot anyway.

In one memorable episode Percival meets a gentlewoman who is "the fayryst creature that ever he saw" (F 711.10-11; V 2: 918.11). The woman tells Percival "I shall

nat fulfylle youre wylle but if ye swere frome henseforthe ye shall be my trew servaunte, and to do nothynge but that I shall commaunde you" (F 711.16-18; V 2: 918.17-20). Percival agrees, and the woman tempts him to have sex with her, until Percival crosses himself and she disappears, whereupon he exclaims:

"Sitthyn my fleyssh woll be my mayster I shall punyssh hit."

And therewith he rooff hymselff thorow the thygh, that the blood sterte about hym, and seyde, "A, good Lorde, take thys in recompensacion of that I have myssedone ayenste The, Lorde!" (F 712.6-10; V 2: 919.14-17)

The whole episode, especially Percival's decision to stab himself in the thigh to mortify his sexual desires, begs for a symbolic reading, and the text offers one. Soon afterwards a good man appears to explain to Percival what has happened:

'Thou arte a foole, for that jantillwoman was the mayster fynde of helle, which hath pousté over all other devyllis. And that was the olde lady that thou saw in thyne avision rydyng on the serpente.'

Than he tolde sir Percivale how Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste bete hym oute of hevyn for hys synne, whycch was the moste bryghtist angell of hevyn, and therefore he loste hys heritaige. '... Now, sir Percivale, beware and take this for an insample.' (F 712.29-713.3; V 2: 920.3-13)

The good man interprets both the knight's life and Scripture, explaining each in the light of the other, and moving freely from a typological interpretation in which Percival's experiences explain Scripture, to an analogical one in which both Percival's life and Scripture explain God's plans for the world in general and for Percival in particular. As with Lancelot, Percival's experiences in the Grail quest are symbolic—

and not only symbolic from our perspective as Malory's readers. The events of Percival's life have a specific symbolic meaning which Percival should understand and which the holy man can explain to him. And as with Lancelot, the explanation is both relevant to Percival's particular life and is also a scriptural exegesis. The fact that Percival not only has symbolic experiences but also meets interpreters who are able to explain their meaning shows that the Grail quest cannot be read in mimetic terms only. Even Percival himself is not permitted to read his own life literally.

Difficult Choices: Sir Bors

Most of Lancelot and Percival's experiences are supernatural events whose interpretation by a religious agent seems reasonable. Sir Bors, however, has a series of similar experiences that are in one sense more mundane and as a result also more symbolic:

> And so a litill frome thens he loked up into a tre and there he saw a passynge grete birde uppon that olde tre. And hit was passyng drye, withoute leyffe; so she sate above and had birdis which were dede for hungir. So at the laste he smote hymselffe with hys beke which was grete and sherpe, and so the grete birde bledde so faste that he dyed amonge hys birdys. And the yonge birdys toke lyff by the bloode of the grete birde. (F 732.4-11; V 2: 956.6-13)

Although this has the logic and import of a dream, it is not one. Bors sees this bird in his waking life. Later, Bors receives an interpretation of this event from a holy man:

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> Oure Lorde shewed Hym unto you in the lyknesse of a fowle, that
> suffirde grete anguysshe for us whan He was pute uppon the Crosse, and
> bledde hys herte blood for mankynde; there was the tokyn and the lyknesse
> of the Sankgreall that appered afore you, for the blood that the grete fowle
> bledde reysyd the chykyns frome dethe to lyff. (F 741.23-28; V 2: 967.6-
> 11)

The abbot, in the same speech, goes on seamlessly to interpret a dream of Bors: "by the

blak birde [in Bors's dream] myght ye understande Holy Chirche whych seyth, 'I am

blacke,' but he ys fayre. And by the whyght birde may men undirstonde the fynde" (F

742.4-7; V 2: 967.24-25), and further goes on to correct a bad interpretation and

connect it all to Bors's choices:

> Also, whan the fynde apperith to the in lyknesse of a man of religion
> and blamed the that thou lefft thy brothir for a lady, and he lede the where
> thou semed thy brothir was slayne – but he ys yette on lyve – all was for to
> putte the in erroure, and to brynge the into wanhope and lechery, for he
> knew thou were tendir-herted. (F 742.12-16; V 2: 967.32-968.4)

Here we have a moral but mostly literal interpretation of Bors's life. The abbot knows

what has happened to Bors, and apparently by divine inspiration he knows the

motivations of the fiend who has been tempting Bors. This interpretation is symbolic in

that the abbot's interpretation of Bors's life for Bors's benefit is simultaneously the text's

interpretation of itself for our benefit, and as a result we are symbolically united with

Bors. The abbot continues:

> ... Also, the dry tre and the whyght lylyes: the sere tre betokenyth thy
> brothir Sir Lyonell, whych ys dry withoute vertu, and therefore men oughte
> to calle hym the rotyn tre, and the worme-etyn tre, for he ys a murtherer
> and doth contrary to the order off kynghthode. And the too whyght floures
> signifieth too maydyns; the one ys a knyght which ye wounded the other
> day, and the other is the jantillwoman whych ye rescowed. (F 742.20-26; V
> 2: 968.8-15)

Here the abbot's interpretation turns wholly symbolic. The tree, which is not a dream
but is a waking event in Bors's adventures, has a doubly symbolic meaning: first in that
it represents Lionel—it has a literal equivalent, and second because Lionel himself—as
the abbot here explains—has a symbolic relationship with his brother Bors. Lionel is a
symbolic counterpoint to Bors: he is the rotten tree to Bors's healthy one.

The whole of the abbot's interpretation, which is not much changed, though
slightly abridged, from *La Queste del Saint Graal* (184-187), is significant for the
theme of "The Sankgreal" and its symbolic mode. Bors must choose to protect the
virginity of a maiden rather than to protect his brother's life both because purity is given
a higher importance here than fellowship is, and also because virginity is symbolic of
moral and religious virtue in general. Even more important than the content of the
interpretation, though, is the fact of it and its fluidity. The abbot moves nimbly between
interpreting Bors's life, interpreting Bors's dreams, and interpreting Bors's choices.
Within the context of "The Sankgreal" all events and actions carry a secondary meaning
beyond the literal, one that can even be interpreted by certain elect characters within the
narrative frame.

Quest for the Meaning of The Grail

Even aside from all of these specific instances, the search for the Grail itself

demands a tropological reading in "The Sankgreal." The purpose of the quest, the results

of success or failure, even the nature of the Grail, are never clearly laid out. The literal

impetus of the quest lies with Gawain. Having seen the Grail once, veiled, Gawain vows:

"never shall I returne unto the courte agayne tylle I have sene hit more opynly" (F

674.20-21; V 2: 866.9-11).

Arthur accuses Gawain of betraying him for taking on the quest and inspiring the

rest of the Round Table to do likewise: "A, Gawayne, Gawayne! Ye have betrayed me,

for never shall my court be amended by you" (F 676.14-15; V 2: 870.12-13). Gawain is

explicitly motivated by a desire for adventure and to increase his reputation. But acting

against the wishes of his king is detrimental to a knight's worldly reputation, and there is

no reason to assume that the Grail, a mystical object, is findable. Unlike Gawain's

previous quests there is no trail to follow, no foe to defeat, no wronged person to defend.

The very notion of the quest resists a mimetic interpretation. And in literal terms it is

bizarre that Gawain should encounter no adventures in his wanderings, and more bizarre

still for a hermit to interpret Gawain's life as if it is a parable.

Symbolically, however, all of this is easy enough to explain. Gawain, a secular

knight, seeks spiritual enlightenment without understanding what it really is, and in so

doing departs from his secular king. Since he seeks sacred things for their secular value,

he cannot find them, and a spiritual adviser explains this to him. Gawain works out an

inverse of the biblical principle "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his

justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33), and is denied the kingdom of God because he seeks first for worldly things.[14]

The symbolic emphasis is not a necessary feature of the Grail quest in general. The Grail quest—even assuming that it is an unavoidable part of the Arthurian story—is not necessarily symbolic at all, let alone explicitly symbolic even to the characters within the text. But the specific version of the Grail quest that Malory adapts, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, is profoundly symbolic. Because Malory chooses this text to adapt, that symbolism is also a feature of *Le Morte Darthur*. As Felicity Riddy argues: "by turning to the *Queste* Malory has committed himself to a narrative method in which the literal and physical are not what they seem and require to be reinterpreted in moral and spiritual terms" (*Malory* 114). Malory's choice of *La Queste del Saint Graal* as his primary source is a choice to emphasize the figurative, the moral, and the spiritual.

Hardyng's *Chronicle*: Literally one of Malory's Sources

It is not as if Malory had no other options. If he wanted to stay in a mimetic mode—or even if he wanted to be more literal than the *Queste* is—he could for instance have drawn on John Hardyng's *Chronicle*. We know with certainty that Malory had access to the *Chronicle*.[15] There is evidence that Malory consulted to Hardyng's Grail section as well. Arthur's memorably repeated phrase "holé togydirs" seems to be taken from Hardyng: "I trowe nomore to see you eft agayne/ Thus hole together, and so goodly

14 For an argument that Malory's Lancelot achieves salvation by seeking worldly things, see Jesmok.

15 For an account of Malory's likely familiarity with Hardyng's *Chronicle*, see Norris, esp. 155.

knightes" (Hardyng 134). Yet Malory takes very little from Hardyng's Grail section other than that phrase.[16]

The reason that Malory does not rely more heavily upon Hardyng's *Chronicle* is that Hardyng interprets the Grail in a way that is incompatible with Malory's project. Hardyng's *Chronicle* represents spiritual endeavours as subordinate to political ones, even during the Grail quest. This is especially apparent in details from Hardyng's Grail quest surrounding Arthur and Galaad,[17] any or all of which Malory might have adopted into his version, but none of which he did.

Practically Perfect in Every Way: Hardyng's Arthur

Hardyng's Arthur is able to sit in the Siege Perilous:[18]

> [Galaad] sate hym downe in the siege pereleous
>
> Of the table rounde, where none durst sitte afore
>
> But Ioseph, that was full religious,
>
> That made it so ere Galaad was bore,
>
> And kyng Arthure that satte therein therfore. (Hardyng 131-132)

Hardyng's Arthur is able to sit in the Siege Perilous partly because Hardyng idealizes Arthur to an unusual extent, even within an Arthurian context in which Arthur's habitual role is as emblematic of chivalry and as the greatest British monarch.

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16 On Malory's use or non-use of Hardyng's *Chronicle* see Norris (155) and Riddy ([1987] 114).

17 Hardyng's spelling of "Galahad." I refer to Hardyng's character as "Galaad" and to Malory's as "Galahad" throughout.

18 See Kennedy (1981) 45.

Hardyng's Arthur is able to sit in the Siege Perilous since he is better than his knights and is thus able to achieve everything they are able to. In the person of Arthur Hardyng locates perfect knighthood, perfect kingliness, and perfect Christianity, and those perfections are complementary. To the degree that Christianity—or spirituality—matters at all in Hardyng it is perfectly congruent with knighthood, which is fully and perfectly contained by kingliness.

Second, in Hardyng's account Arthur expresses a desire to join the Grail quest:

> O God, if deth wold brest myne hert on twayne,
>
> Who shall maynteyne my crowne & my ryghtes,
>
> I trowe nomore to see you eft agayne
>
> Thus hole together, and so goodly knightes;
>
> Would God I might make myne auowe & hightes,
>
> To passe with you in what land so ye go,
>
> And take my parte with you both in well and wo. (Hardyng 134)

Just as he does in Malory, in Hardyng Arthur recognizes the danger that the Grail quest poses to his knights and to the fellowship of the Round Table, and as he does in Malory, in Hardyng Arthur stays behind while his knights embark on the quest. Unlike in Malory's characterization, however, in Hardyng Arthur wishes that he could join his knights on the Grail quest.

Neither Arthur can join the Grail quest because he has a political responsibility as a king that he cannot abandon to act as a knight-errant; at least not while remaining the exemplary king that Hardyng portrays him to be. But Malory's Arthur has additional symbolic reasons for not participating in the Grail quest. As the representative of secular

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government he would be inappropriate for a quest for private piety as represented by the Grail and the Grail quest. The Grail promotes isolation and introspection—it represents a kind of piety that is private, in that it is oriented to the individual over the community. Only a tyrannical government could disregard the community, and thus Arthur as the representative of that government cannot join an individual and private quest for holiness. He would have to give up one or the other. In Hardyng's version, the Grail is "a heraldic emblem that harks back through history [and] becomes the insignia of the chivalric Order of the Holy Grail" (Riddy [2000] 407), and as such the pursuit of the Grail is inappropriate to Arthur as a result of his social position and responsibilities, but not ideologically or imaginatively incompatible with him as it is in Malory's account.

An English Saint: Hardyng's Galaad

Hardyng's *Chronicle* explicitly links Galaad's shield with Saint George's.[19] Hardyng refers to Galaad's shield "the whiche afore saint George armes were" (Hardyng 136). Like Spenser after him,[20] Hardyng links sainthood with nationality, and links both with knighthood. Hardyng's Galaad is a successor of Saint George because he is a perfect English knight, and perfect Englishness is coequal with sainthood.

Malory's Galahad is symbolically (and often literally) segregated from the rest of the fellowship, and he is, like his father Lancelot—indeed like many of Arthur's

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19 Riddy (2000) argues that for Hardyng the shield, not the Grail, is the most important artifact of this quest. See especially 401-402.

20 In Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* (I.X.548-459), Redcrosse Knight is both the allegorical knight of holiness and is also Saint George, the patron saint of England.

knights—only loosely connected to Englishness. Lancelot, of course, is French in Malory's account, and is the heir to a kingdom of his own.[21] Hardyng's Lancelot, on the other hand, is secondary in the *Chronicle* to his son, and has no explicitly delineated background. And even if he were assumed to be from France, as Lancelot conventionally is, in Hardyng's *Chronicle* France is a conquered realm under control of Britain, unlike in *Le Morte Darthur* where it is an independent ally. So Hardyng's Galaad is a British knight, the son of a British knight (Hardyng 131), and the grandson of a British King, who finds the Grail in Britain (in Wales) (Hardyng 135), using a holy relic of the patron saint of England. To the degree that Hardyng's Galaad is a symbolic character, he is symbolic of English virtue, of the unity of Britain, and—possibly—of the natural superiority of England within Britain. In all of these symbolic senses Galaad is a symbol easily leveraged for practical political purpose.

Malory's Galahad is born in Arthur's realm, but most of his adventuring happens abroad, he assumes a foreign kingship, and he never returns to Britain after leaving it. Galahad's shield "was made for Kyng Evelake in the name of Hym that dyed on the Crosse" (F 680.32-33; V 2: 880.1-2).[22] The geography of Evelake's kingdom is unclear,

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21 Armstrong and Hodges (2014) argue that Malory's Lancelot would not have been in what Malory considered France, but they conclude he is also "never quite wholly English" (154). See Armstrong and Hodges (2014), especially 135-155 for an analysis of Lancelot's national identity.

22 Hodges ([2005] 112-113) argues that the red cross on Galahad's shield would have been recognizably an English symbol to Malory's contemporary readers, so an explicit association was not necessary. Riddy argues the opposite, that the red cross was still relatively ambiguous as a symbol in the fifteenth

but the shield is made for him after he meets Joseph of Arimathea in "a cité whych hyght Sarras" (F 680.20-21; V 2: 879.24). The shield is marked by the blood of "Joseph, the sonne of Joseph of Aramathy" (F 680.27; V 2: 879.32). Joseph of Arimathea is linked to Britain, as the traditional apostle who links British history to biblical history, but since Galahad's shield is several steps removed from Joseph, Malory does not use Joseph of Arimathea as Hardyng does to shore up nationalist ideas. If Joseph of Arimathea injects nationalist significance into the story to a fifteenth century reader—and it is likely that he would—it is a nationalism that Malory does nothing to leverage. Galahad takes the shield and the quest to Sarras, where he sees the Holy Grail and where he is made "kynge by all the assente of the hole cité" (F 786.32-33; V 2: 1034.4-5). In Sarras Galahad dies and is taken up to heaven, and if he has a symbolic link with a place it is Sarras, not England. Ultimately, though, Galahad's symbolic association is not with any earthly kingdom, but with heaven where he begs God to be allowed to go.

The *Chronicle* as a rule is a literal rather than a symbolic text, and the Grail section is no exception. As a consequence, Galaad finds the Grail with relative ease and comparatively little fanfare: "But when that [Galaad] had laboured so foure yere,/ He founde in Walys the Saintgraal full clere" (Hardyng 135) and then goes to Sarras to establish a knightly order of the Holy Grail. The lack of emphasis on the Grail proper is because although Hardyng recognizes the importance of the Grail, it is difficult to make sense of it in a literal mode. Riddy notes that throughout the *Chronicle* "Hardyng seems

century, and "the process whereby it and St. George settled down to represent Englishness was a gradual one" (Riddy [2000] 402).

to have no very clear conception of what the Grail is: during its first appearance in the *Chronicle*, at the feast when Galaad comes to court, it flies round the hall like a trapped bat" (Riddy 128). The relevant passage in the *Chronicle* reads: "As with that noyse the saynt Graall precious/ Flowe thryse about within the hall full ofte,/ Flytteryng full fast aboue theim high on lofte" (Hardyng 132). Since the symbolic and allegorical meanings of the Grail are incoherent to the kind of narrative Hardyng is engaged in, he de-emphasizes the Grail in favour of emphasis on the practical and literal work of establishing a chivalric order. And this is another detail that Malory could have adopted but does not. Hardyng's choice here retroactively establishes a symbolic meaning for the Grail that fits nicely with the literal mode of the *Chronicle*. It is the insignia of an order and as such has a symbolic meaning with a straightforward practical significance. The Grail quest in Hardyng's account fragments the fellowship but then repairs it again, leaving them ready for the conquest of Rome, which in Hardyng comes after the Grail quest.[23]

Hardyng's *Chronicle* could never have been Malory's primary source for the Grail quest; it is too short. But it could have inspired him to expand it. It could have been the source for any of these four details, any or all of which Malory could have used to supplement *La Queste del Saint Graal* and modify its theme. Malory takes none of these elements from Hardyng, because the emphasis on the literal achievement of a politcally-

23 See Lexton (2014): "Placing the Grail quest before the conquest of Rome, Hardyng deploys the
    maintenance of Christian faith and the Church to justify Arthur's actions in the past and the English
    designs on Scotland in the present" (29).

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oriented quest that results in the establishment of an earthly chivalric order is
incompatible with the purpose of "The Sankgreal."

Secularism and the French Prose *Tristan*

The French prose *Tristan* is the one of Malory's sources he most explicitly avoids
for the Grail story. We know that Malory had access to the French prose *Tristan*, because
he used it as a source for "Sir Tristram de Lyones," which is the largest and central
section of *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory explicitly states that he will not use the Grail
episode from *Tristan*: "here ys no rehersall of the Thirde Booke [of Sir Trystram]. But
here folowyth the noble tale off the Sankegreall" (F 664.111-13; V 2: 845.31-33). Malory
evidently had access to *Tristan*, but he did not use it as a source for his Grail story. As a
possible source, *Tristan* has the notable advantage of providing narrative stability. It is a
continuation of what has come before, and therefore it thematically, stylistically, and
structurally provides continuity with the previous section of *Le Morte Darthur*. It is a
source that Malory apparently liked well enough, since he used it as the primary source
for the largest section of *Le Morte Darthur*. Why abandon it as a source when he comes
to the Grail?

Although there are many possibilities, all theories for why Malory abandoned
Tristan fall into one of two logical options: either he could not use it, or he did not want
to use it. Malory may have only had a French *Tristan* for a limited time. It is possible that
by the time he came to write the Grail quest, he no longer had access to the book, and he
was therefore forced to use a different source to tell the same story. Alternatively, Malory

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may only ever have had access to part of *Tristan*. His remark that "here ys no rehersall of the thirde booke" may indicate that he did not have the third book. He knew that what he had was incomplete, but he was forced to look elsewhere for the conclusion of the story.

These two possibilities essentially amount to the same thing. Whether it was caused by temporal or by material poverty, the argument is that Malory did not have the necessary resources to continue using *Tristan* as a source. This possibility is lessened by the fact that Malory seems to have been familiar with the third, unused, book of *Tristan*. For example, Malory reports in "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" that King Mark "slew the noble knyght Sir Trystram as he sate harpynge afore hys lady, La Beall Isode, with a trenchaunte glayve. ... And La Beall Isode dyed sownyng uppon the corse of Sir Trystram, whereof was grete pité" (F 865.6-15; V 3: 1149.28-1150.4). The details Malory provides about Tristram's death here suggest that he knew the third book, since they are found only there, and in no other manuscripts or versions of the story of Tristan.[24] If he did not have access to the text itself, Malory at least knew the plot of the *Tristan* section that he did not use as a source. The most likely alternative is that Malory could have used *Tristan* as a source for the Grail quest, but chose not to.

By choosing *La Queste del Saint Graal* instead of *Tristan* for his source, Malory rejects a secularized version of the Grail quest in favour of a sacred one. *Tristan* is based on *La Queste del Saint Graal.* As such, it is not dissimilar to the *Queste* in its emphases and perspectives. Riddy includes *Tristan* beside Hardyng's *Chronicle* as a text that would have allowed Malory "to cast his version of the Grail quest in the literal mode of the rest

24   For this case laid out with its evidence see Field Commentary (2013) 548.

of the *Morte Darthur"* (*Malory* 114), meaning that Malory rejected *Tristan* for essentially the same reason he rejected Hardyng. I do not think *Tristan's* Grail quest is particularly literal, however. Galaad's quest, for example, begins with the adventure of the cemetery, which is immediately interpreted for him by the prior of an abbey: "Sire, vous m'avés demandé la senefiance de ceste aventure que vous avés hui menee a cief, et je le vous dirai volentiers" ("Sir, you have asked me the significance of this adventure that you have achieved today and I will tell you willingly"; *Tristan* 6: 289.8-10).[25] The adventures of the Grail quest in *Tristan* have spiritual significance which is interpreted for the questing knight by a holy man. The same adventure happens and the same interpretation of it is offered in both *La Queste del Saint Graal* (36-41) and in *Le Morte Darthur* (F 682-683; V 2: 881-882), although Malory's version is much abridged. In any case *Tristan* is evidently not written in a completely literal mode. *Tristan* does differ substantially from both *La Queste del Saint Graal* and from *Le Morte Darthur,* principally in that it inserts Tristan and his companions into the quest, and so lengthens it considerably.

Bifocals: The Dual Focus of the French Prose *Tristan*

The insertion of Tristan into the Grail story creates a split focus.[26] While the narrative of the *Tristan* is focused on Galahad it is focused on the Grail quest and, consequently, on the sacred. While it is focused on Tristan it is focused on Tristan's rivalries for the affections of Yseut. Tristan interrupts the Grail quest for an extended

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25 All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

26 For an argument that Tristan's exclusion from the Grail quest signifies his status as a regional rather than a national knight, see Hodges (2005), esp. 88.

period, an entire volume of Philippe Ménard's nine-volume edition. The Grail quest begins in Ménard's sixth volume and ends in his eighth, but Tristan's interruption to the quest lasts for most of Ménard's seventh volume. This may be what Riddy means when she says that *Tristan* is written in a literal mode. Insofar as the narrative focuses on Tristan it concerns literal adventures of a knight fighting rivals for the affections of his lady without an obvious or self-interpreted allegorical meaning. The hiccough in this interpretation, however, is that while Tristan is battling another knight who also loves Yseault (*Tristan* 6: 309-334) he is not engaged in the Grail quest. Tristan's sections occur within the Grail story, but they are not really a part of it. Tristan and *Tristan* both leave the Grail quest, only to return to it later. As long as Tristan is not present, *Tristan* retells *La Queste del Saint Graal*, but where it follows Tristan it departs from the quest entirely.

The bisected focus contextualizes the Grail quest in *Tristan* as simply one among many endeavours by the knights of the Round Table. *La Queste del Saint Graal*, by contrast, is solely concerned with the Grail quest and its successes and failures. In Malory's account we have two possible ways of conceiving of the Grail quest. If we adopt Vinaver's framework and conceptualize "The Sankgreal" as a single tale, then it is a tale with a single focus, and that focus is the Grail. Although the journeys of the knights meander, the focus of the text does not. If we approach *Le Morte Darthur* as a single artistic unit, then *Le Morte Darthur* lacks a clear single focus, but the Grail quest has a pivotal place in the text as a whole. *Le Morte Darthur*, understood as a single ongoing narrative, contextualizes the Grail quest as the final achievement of the united Round Table. It is both the culmination of all that has come before and also the fore-bearer of all that comes after. "The Sankgreal" also refocuses *Le Morte Darthur* on Lancelot, after an

extended section that has been focused on Tristram. Whether we read "The Sankgreal" as a discrete artistic unit or as a part of the whole *Le Morte Darthur*, the divided focus of *Tristan* is an impediment.

Tristan Versus Lancelot

In addition to the split focus, *Tristan* is unfit for Malory's purpose because the character of Tristan is a rival for Lancelot. Tristan is a rival for Lancelot not in that Lancelot and Tristan are personally at odds in either *Tristan* or in *Le Morte Darthur*, but rather in that Tristan is a rival for the attentions of Malory and of his readers. Including Tristan in the Grail quest means diluting the emphasis on Lancelot. But one of the most effective elements of *Le Morte Darthur* as it stands is the development of Lancelot's character throughout the text, and especially its final sections.

In "The Sankgreal," "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere," and "The Morte Arthur" Lancelot moves from ineffective contrition, to resignation, and finally to earnest repentance. Lancelot's contrition during "The Sankgreal" seems earnest at the time, and Malory reports that "Sir Launcelot repented hym gretly of hys myssededys" (F 698.10; V 2: 899.11-12), but his later relapse belies the efficacy of his repentance. In "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" it seems that Lancelot has given up fighting temptation: "Sir Launcelot began to resorte unto Quene Gwenyvere agayne, and forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste" (F 790.10-11; V 2: 1045.10-12). It is not until the end of "The Morte Arthur" that Lancelot again takes up "perfeccion" (F 935.9; V 3: 1255.1) in his penance, and that penance is all the more meaningful because it was a long time coming. Lancelot stands out as one of the central knights in the first sections of *Le*

Morte Darthur, but in the final sections he becomes the narrative's most important character. "The Sankgreal" as it exists is as much a character study of Lancelot as it is anything else. The Grail knights, Galahad, Percival, and Bors, represent holiness; the failed knights Gawain, Uwaine, Ector, and Lionel represent secular knighthood; and Lancelot represents the tension between the two. Lancelot is neither a holy Grail knight nor a sinful secular knight. Both groups, then, inform and define Lancelot by contrast. Lancelot's significance in the Grail quest is doubled since Galahad, the preeminent Grail knight, is his son. But if Tristram were included in the Grail quest then Lancelot would be dislocated, first because Tristram is a real alternative to Lancelot for the title of "best knight of the world," and second because Tristram's dominating presence through "Sir Tristram de Lyones" would, when coupled with "The Sankgreal," make Tristram the protagonist of *Le Morte Darthur.* Furthermore, the secular Tristram would throw off the symbolic balance of the *Sankgreal.* As it stands, Lancelot is central in "The Sankgreal" not only in the sense that he is centrally important, but also in the sense that he represents a median. He is neither as holy as Galahad nor as worldly as Gawain. If Tristram were included in the Grail quest, he would add another level of worldliness. Gawain is worldly compared to Lancelot and Galahad, but he does seek holiness in a way that Tristan of the *Tristan* does not. So the inclusion of Tristram in the Grail quest would cast Gawain as the median knight, caught between the holy-seeking Lancelot and the holy-ignoring Tristram.

The French prose *Tristan* is not unconcerned with holiness; its Grail section is, after all, an adaptation of *La Queste del Saint Graal.* But it is in fact far closer to what Vinaver represents *Le Morte Darthur* to be than *Le Morte Darthur* itself is. *Tristan*'s Grail quest is a secularized version of *La Queste del Saint Graal*. Its additions to the

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Queste, especially the lengthy interlude in which Tristan and his companions have their own adventures only to rejoin the Grail quest later, are secularizing. The effect is to make the Grail quest into one more in a litany of impressive deeds performed by the Knights of the Round Table. Malory's Grail quest, in contrast, is the hinge of the story and a pivot for Lancelot's character. Malory opts to use a spiritually-focused source that emphasizes the Grail as spiritually transformative, and spends the rest of his narrative exploring the transformation.[27]

Conflicting Purposes: The Place of Religion in *Perlesvaus*

Perlesvaus is by far the most contestable of Malory's unused Grail sources. While it is undeniable that Malory used *Tristan* as a major source, and extremely likely that he often used the *Chronicle* as a minor one, it is less certain that Malory knew *Perlesvaus.* Although the Perilous Chapel episode in *Le Morte Darthur* is analogous to the same episode in *Perlesvaus,* the fact that it is the only direct reference to *Perlesvaus* in Malory has led some to speculate that perhaps Malory never had direct access to *Perlesvaus* while he was writing *Le Morte Darthur*, but that he reproduced the Chapel Perilous from memory, based on an earlier reading. Perhaps Malory had read *Perlesvaus* once before and retained an imperfect memory of it, and that memory occasionally manifests itself in details like knights' names. Or perhaps Malory never read *Perlesvaus* at all; it has been

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27 See Armstrong (2003), 143.

suggested that the Chapel Perilous episode in "Sir Launcelot du Lake" has its source in a manuscript of the French prose *Lancelot* that itself had adapted a portion of *Perlesvaus*.[28]

The theory that Malory's source already included the Chapel Perilous, as a part of what Malory considered to be the French prose *Lancelot*, is the least convincing of these. Albert Hartung (1973) observed that the introductory section to the Chapel Perilous episode in Malory—a section not found in the introduction to *Perlesvaus*—does in fact come from another part of *Perlesvaus*. The relevant section in *Perlesvaus* reads:

> Ainsi com [Gavain] chevauchoit pensis, il ot devant lui en la forest
> venir.i. brachet glatissant, e s'en vient contre lui grant aleüre. Si com il ot
> aprochié Monseigneur Gavain, il met le nés en terre e trueve une trace de
> sanc qui tote ert novele.
>
> (As [Gawain] rode in thought, there came before him in the forest a
> baying brachet, and it came to him very quickly. When it had approached
> Sir Gawain it put its nose to the ground and there found the scent of new
> blood. (*Perlesvaus* 84.1530-1533)

Malory, in the section that leads into the Chapel Perilous has a passage with many similar details— too many to be disregarded:

> Now leve we them there and speke we of Sir Launcelot that rode a grete
> whyle in a depe foreste. And as he rode he sawe a blak brachette sekyng in
> maner as hit had bene in the feaute of an hurte dere. And therewith he rode

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28 See Norris (2008), 48-50, for an argument that Malory reproduced part of the *Perlesvaus* from memory, and Robert Wilson (1932) for an argument that he only ever had indirect, second-hand access to it.

aftir the brahette and he saw lye on the grounde a large feaute of blood. (F

213.26-30)

In both texts the knight—Lancelot in Malory's version and Gavain in the *Perlesvaus*

version—follows the brachet to a grieving widow, who sends the knight on a quest for

vengeance. Malory changes the relevant knight from Gawain to Lancelot, but this kind

of change is by no means unusual for him. The wording here is too similar to be

unrelated[29]—evidently Malory also knew at least this section of *Perlesvaus.* Field has

persuasively argued that Malory used *Perlesvaus* as a source for the names of a handful

of minor characters, including Sir Bryan de les Iles, and the damsel Hallewes, and has

argued from this and other minor details that Malory knew at least the majority of the

text.[30] Barbara Nolan remarks that "it is worth noting that the treatment of Lancelot's

love for Guinevere in the *Perlesvaus* corresponds strikingly to Malory's" (Nolan 176),

suggesting that Malory's characterization of Lancelot and Guinevere, especially in the

earlier sections of *Le Morte Darthur*, is influenced by *Perlesvaus*. All of this suggests

that Malory was familiar with more of *Perlesvaus* than only the Chapel Perilous

episode.

Even if Malory did not have it physically in front of him, there is evidence that he

knew the text of *Perlesvaus.* It is possible that by the time he wrote "The Sankgreal"

Malory no longer had physical access to *Perlesvaus*. However, even rudimentary and

remembered knowledge of the text would leave an impression about the nature of the

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29 See Hartung for a more extended comparison of wording in the two sections.

30 See Field (1998) for more on minor similarities between the two texts.

Grail and the Grail quest that Malory could have chosen to incorporate into his version of the story, but did not.

The Chapel Perilous and Lancelot's Spiritual Development

If we accept that Malory's use or non-use of *Perlesvaus* is a matter of choice rather than a matter of material necessity, then the inclusion of the Chapel Perilous episode must be significant. It is included because something would be lost if it were not there. The Chapel Perilous episode is one of the only stories in "Sir Launcelot du Lake" in which Lancelot's victories are not physical.[31] He exhibits bravery, but it is not his strength or his fighting skill that lead to his success in the Chapel Perilous. Instead, it is the more intangible virtues of loyalty, courage, and integrity. It makes sense that the Chapel Perilous episode originally belonged in the Grail quest; it is full of symbolism. As Field observes, the story "does not name the Grail, but it stands out among adventures largely concerned with chivalry because of the prominence in it of the supernatural, and of strange vices and of destinies operating by a system of causality that is not of this world" ("Malory and the Grail"147). But in Malory's version, displaced as it is to the beginning of Lancelot's career instead of the end, the religious dimensions are largely unexplored, since this Lancelot is as yet spiritually immature.

The Chapel Perilous adventure provides continuity in the stories about Lancelot; it is a foretaste of the kind of adventures the knights will have on the Grail quest, but

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31 Another, of course, is when four queens capture him so that he will chose one of them "whyche that thou wolte have to thy paramour" (F 194.20; V 1: 257.33), which features another allusion to Lancelot's love of Guinevere.

without the Grail's portent. The damsel, like a Grail hermit, explains and interprets the

events of the Chapel—an interpretation much expanded in Malory's version from

Perlesvaus. Neither the character nor the tale yet has the spiritual maturity that they will

in "The Sankgreal," and the episode ends by emphasizing Lancelot's relationship with

Guinevere, as the damsel explains the threat that Lancelot would have faced had she

captured him: "dayly I sholde have clypped the and kyssed the, dispyte of Quene

Gwenyvere" (F 216.18-19; V 1: 281.19-20).

The similarities and the differences between the two texts are apparent in another

passage. In both "Sir Launcelot du Lake" and *Perlesvaus* Lancelot finds and enters the

mysterious Chapel, the significance of which is different in each text. *Perlesavaus*

emphasizes the religious nature of the Chapel, while *Le Morte Darthur* emphasizes the

knightly community. In Malory's account

> ryght so Sir Launcelot departed, and whan he com to the Chapell Perelus
>
> he alyght downe and tyed his horse unto a lytyll gate. And as sone as he
>
> was within the chyrchyerde he sawe on the frunte of the chapel many fayre
>
> ryche shyldis turned up-so-downe, and many of tho shyldis Sir Launcelot
>
> had sene knyghtes bere beforehande. (F 215.5-9; V 1: 280.1-6)

The version in *Perlesvaus* also features Lancelot entering the courtyard and observing

the front of the courtyard, but instead of shields of knights that Lancelot knows, the

significant detail of the courtyard in *Perlesaus* is the ancient cross:

> Launceloz se part du chevalier, e a tant chevauchié q'il est venuz a
>
> l'anuitier a la Chapele Perilleuse, qui siét en une grant valee de la forest; e

avoit un petit cemitire environ, qui bien estoit clos de totes parz, e avoit

une croiz anciane par defors entree.

(Lancelot left the knight, and rode until he came to the Chapel Perilous,

which was in a great valley of the forest; and it had a little cemetery around

it, that was well fenced in every side, and had an ancient cross outside the

entrance; *Perlesvaus* 343.8312-8316)

The connection between the two texts is clear, as is a significant difference between

them. Although in both versions the adventure takes place in a chapel, *Perlesvaus's*

version draws attention to the religious aspects of the location: "avoit une croiz anciane

par defors l'entree" while Malory's emphasizes the knights: "many of tho shyldis Sir

Launcelot had sene knyghtes bere beforehande."

In *Le Morte Darthur* Lancelot sees gigantic mysterious figures as he continues

into the chapel:

With that he sawe by hym there stonde a thirty grete knyghtes, more by

a yerde than any man that ever he had sene, and all they grenned and

gnasted at Sir Launcelot. And whan he sawe theire countenaunce he

dredde hym sore, and so put his shylde before hym and toke his swerde in

his honde redy unto batayle. (F 215.10-14; V 1: 280.6-12)

Once again the similarity to *Perlesvaus* is apparent, as in both texts Lancelot sees

mysterious and threatening people surrounding the courtyard:

Lanceloz entra le dedenz toz armez. Il se saiga e beneï e conmanda a

Dieu. Il vit eu cemetire sarqex en plusors lex, e li senbla q'il veïst gent

environ qui parloient bas les uns as autres, mes il ne pooit entendre q'il

disoient. Il nes pooit mie veoir en apert, mes il li senbloient estre molt

grant.

    (Lancelot entered, fully armed. He crossed himself and commended

himself to God. He saw many tombs all around the cemetery, and it

seemed to him that he saw people around who spoke softly to one another,

but he could not hear what they said. He could not see them very clearly,

but they seemed to him to be very big; *Perlesvaus* 343.8317-8321)

Once again the *Perlesvaus* emphasizes religion: "Il se saiga e beneï e conmanda a

Dieu." *Le Morte Darthur's* lack of attention to religion in these passages relative to

Perlesvaus is that in *Perlesvaus* Lancelot, and all of the knights, are pious from the

beginning, while in *Le Morte Darthur* Lancelot's character gradually grows into his

piety.

The Desire for Greatness: Arthur in *Perlesvaus*

    In *Perlesvaus* secular and sacred purposes are exactly synchronous. We have

already noted that in Hardyng's *Chronicle* secular and sacred are less at odds than they

are in Malory, but the effect in *Perlesvaus* is even more pronounced. *Perlesvaus* begins

with the court of Arthur in decline, because in *Perlesvaus* the successful achievement of

the Grail quest is directly connected to the prestige of the King. Arthur himself joins the

Grail quest in *Perlesvaus,* because there is no conflict of interest between the secular role

of the King and the sacred enterprise of the Grail quest. This lack of conflict means that

spiritual interests are completely politicized, and vice-versa. The practical result is that

the knights' military violence is unfettered by ideological misgivings. In all of this,

Perlesvaus articulates a worldview that is totally inconsistent with the worldview of *Le Morte Darthur*.

While in *Le Morte Darthur* the beginning of the Grail quest is the high water mark for the Round Table, in *Perlesvaus* it is a remedy for the Round Table's decline. After some contextual introduction, giving an account of the story of Joseph of Arimathea and his descendents, *Perlesvaus* begins its story in earnest with a report that Arthur "commença a perdre le talent de largesces que il soloit fere" ("Began to lose the desire[32] for greatness that he once had"; *Perlesvaus* 26.69-70). Hardyng's *Chronicle* positions the Grail quest as the pinnacle of the many achievements of Arthur and the Round Table. The French prose *Tristan* makes the Grail quest into one among many achievements of Arthur and his knights. *La Queste del Saint Graal* makes the Grail quest into the means of exposing the weaknesses in a court otherwise assumed to be virtuous and successful. *Le Morte Darthur*, as a close adaptation of the *Queste* does likewise, except that Malory places the Grail quest at the beginning of an extended downfall of the court of Arthur—a downfall of which the Grail quest is implicitly a cause. So the Grail quest in Malory functions both as the crowning achievement of Arthur's court at its greatest, and also as the beginning of the denouement not only of the story but, in the more literal sense of denouement, of the bonds of the Round Table. In each of these the Grail comes to a court

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32 In modern French *talent* more commonly means "ability," but based on the context of the story I'm asserting that the meaning here is the more obsolete "desire." See the *Dictionnaire de Moyen Français* s.v. "talent." Even in English Malory himself uses "talente" in this sense: "I have suche a talente to se Sir Trystram that I may nat abyde longe from hym" (F 479.10-11; V 2: 604.16-18).

when its powers or completeness have reached a plateau. In *Perlesvaus* the Grail quest begins during a decline that is both unexplained and mysterious. Arthur has simply ceased to be a good King, which in the context of *Perlesvaus* means that he has ceased to seek adventure and glory.

The story begins with the court in decline, and therefore the Grail and the Grail quest in *Perlesvaus* are the means by which the court is restored to its former glory. Holiness and earthly success are not only linked, there is a direct causal relationship. The pursuit of holiness in *Perlesvaus* leads directly to earthly success. Although as we have noted some critics have argued that Malory emphasises the Grail knights' hope for earthly glory, the plot structure of *Le Morte Darthur* establishes the beginning of the Grail quest as the high water mark of the Round Table and of Arthur's court. The Grail knights might hope that the Grail will lead to worship here on earth—indeed, they might be right—but in Malory the Grail quest is the beginning of the end for King Arthur and his earthly context. The worship that they achieve is worship in memory, since their earthly fellowship does not survive the Grail quest. And in Malory this link is quite evident. The fellowship is "holé togydirs" before the Grail quest, but never will be again. *Perlesvaus*, by contrast, positions the Grail as the means by which earthly worship is successfully restored. Arthur's court begins *Perlesvaus* in decline and the Grail quest restores it.

Because sacred success leads to secular success in *Perlesvaus*, political and secular duty are identical to religious duty. The most dramatic representation of this principle is that in *Perlesvaus* Arthur joins the Grail quest himself. If Arthur's desire to join the quest is significant in the *Chronicle*, his actual participation in the action here is even more so. Arthur's action begins the Grail quest, and that action is prompted by an

attempt to regain his will to greatness. Guinevere advises Arthur to seek out the chapel of

Saint Augustine, saying: "je cuit que vos avriez talent de bien fere au reperier" ("I believe

that you will have a desire to do well upon your return"; *Perlesvaus* 27.93). In an

allegorical sense there is a beautiful symmetry to the beginning of *Perlesvaus*. Inspired by

God, Arthur moves by his own will to seek out God's help to restore to Arthur the will to

act in the world. This recalls Philippians 2:12-13: "work out your own salvation with fear

and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good

pleasure." God's action and Arthur's are almost indistinguishable here; is it God who acts

by inspiring both Arthur and Guinevere to send Arthur to a chapel to pray? Or does

Arthur himself by heeding Guinevere's advice and choosing to actively seek out God in

fact make God's intervention superfluous? The very ambiguity here emphasizes the point

that within the framework of *Perlesvaus* the king's purpose and God's purpose are

identical. God's intervention in the beginning of *Perlesvaus* serves to bring (or renew)

political and social standing to Arthur.

Arthur goes to the chapel of Saint Augustine to regain his desire for greatness, and

it is in the chapel that Arthur first hears mention of the Grail:

> une granz doleurs est avenue novelement par un chevalier qui fu
>
> herbergiez en l'ostel au riche roi Pescheeur, si s'aparut a lui li sainz Graauz
>
> e la lance de coi la pointe de fer saine, ne ne demanda de coi ce servoit, ne
>
> cui on en servoit; por ce qu'il ne le demanda, sont totes les terres de guerre
>
> escommeües, ne chevaliers n'encontre autre en forest q'il ne quere sus e
>
> ocie s'il puet.

(A great sadness has newly come, through a knight who was harboured
in the house of the rich Fisher King: when the Holy Grail and the lance
whereof the point drips blood appeared to him, did not ask what it served,
nor who it served; because he did not ask, all these lands are touched by
war, neither do knights encounter each other in the forest except to fight to
the death if they can. *Perlesvaus* 38.350-355)

This confluence emphasizes that in *Perlesvaus* the needs of the King, the needs of the
realm, and the effects of the Grail are all one. The hermit's speech also emphasizes that
the effects of the Grail are political. In some versions of the Grail story the land suffers
as a result of the wounding of the Fisher King, or of the Grail knight's failure to ask
about the Grail. But here it is not the land that suffers—the wasteland is not the kind in
which nothing grows, it is a war-land. The sorrow that has fallen on the land is political
and social, and the Grail is the means by which the political order is restored.

In *Perlesvaus* Arthur's personal and political redemption are tied up in achieving
the Grail. Holiness, in other words, guarantees political wholeness. Christine Ferlampin-
Acher argues that the attitudes on display toward violence in *Perlesvaus* and *La Queste
del Saint Graal* express the theology behind the two books, [33] especially as it relates to the
crusades: "on peut opposer un *Perlesvaus* clunisien à une *Queste del Saint Graal*
cistercienne, les clunisiens prêchant plus l'extermination que la conversion des infidèles"

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33 For the relationship between *Perlesvaus* and *La Queste del Saint Graal* see Carman (1936) especially p.
    8. For an argument that *La Queste del Saint Graal* is a Cistercian attempt to "reform knightly energy
    and knightly life" see Whetter (2010), p. 110.

("We can contrast a Cluniac (Benedictine) *Perlesvaus* with a Cistercian *Queste del Saint Graal*; the Cluniacs preached the extermination more than the conversion of infidels;" Ferlampin-Acher [2005] 23). Here political will, spiritual duty, and military action were all taken to be equivalent. As a perspective on political theology the crusades neatly represent the danger of politics and of being too closely aligned with theological will, and vice-versa.

Mercy, Violence, and a Crusading Mindset

The crusading worldview behind *Perlesvaus* asserts itself in the text's relative bloodiness. In dramatic contrast with Galahad of *Le Morte Darthur*, who does not kill if he has a choice, the heroes of *Perlesvaus* do not hesitate to kill, and rarely show mercy. The knights who do kill in *Le Morte Darthur* are condemned during "The Sankgreal" as "murtherars" (F 729.28; V 2: 948.19) but in *Perlesvaus* killing is a part of battle. This highlights a profound difference in worldview between *Perlesvaus* and *Le Morte Darthur*. Spiritual faithfulness in *Perlesvaus* is politically expedient in that it encourages soldiers and knights to kill the enemies of the realm. In *Le Morte Darthur* faithfulness is often politically inconvenient because good Christian knights kill in inverse proportion to their goodness.

The spiritual perspective of *Le Morte Darthur* is incompatible with the crusading mindset of *Perlesvaus.* And the perspective of *Le Morte Darthur* is well established outside of "The Sankgreal." Throughout *Le Morte Darthur* the typical pattern is for defeated knights to surrender and be converted; nowhere is this pattern more obvious than in "Sir Gareth," the one of Malory's tales without a clear source—the one that Malory

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may have invented himself, although most scholar agree with Field that it has "a lost source" (Field Commentary 185). Although the pattern of conversion rather than killing of enemies is not given any explicit spiritual significance within "Sir Gareth," "The Sankgreal" establishes a reason. Gareth does not kill his enemies for much the same reason as Lancelot does not kill his, or Galahad doesn't kill his. To be a good knight in Malory's context is to be a holy knight, and holiness eventually leads to peace. If holiness leads to peace in *Le Morte Darthur*'s "The Sankgreal," however, it is not in a politically useful way. Holiness does not lead to a *pax romana* style peace that is the result of military dominance; it leads to the kind of peace that means refusal to fight. In his tale Sir Gareth's conversion of conquered knights is of strategic and political benefit to him, but by "The Sankgreal" the political advantages of mercy are no longer clear.

The worldview of *Perlesvaus* illuminates the worldview of *Le Morte Darthur* through contrast. *Perlesvaus* represents a perspective that Malory rejects—one in which political ends and spiritual ends are perfectly aligned, and in which mercy can be safely jettisoned when it is no longer expedient. In contrast to the knights of *Perlesvaus*, Malory's knights offer mercy even when it is politically inconvenient, and the text harshly criticizes them when they fail to do so, as when Gawain accidentally beheads a lady while trying to kill her knight (F 84-85; V 1: 106), or when Sir Lionel refuses to have mercy on his brother Sir Bors (F 744; V 2: 969). The perspective of *Le Morte Darthur* is that killing in battle moves from being a necessary evil to being an unnecessary one, without ever passing through "good" on the way. Galahad's antipathy toward killing reveals that, at least for Galahad, political interests are subservient to spiritual ones—when there is a conflict the political is what gives way. Galahad's

preeminence in the Grail quest means that he is at least the representative of the ideology of "The Sankgreal," if not necessarily of *Le Morte Darthur* as a whole. Galahad's presence in the story serves as a rift between Arthur and his court, and between the court and each other. In "The Sankgreal" holiness does not guarantee political wholeness, as Arthur notes before the beginning of the quest. It is therefore nonsensical for Arthur to personally join in the Grail quest in *Le Morte Darthur.* Malory's Grail quest is incompatible with the kind of secular chivalry represented by a king. In all ways, the synchronicity of sacred and secular in *Perlesvaus* emphasizes their mutual independence in "The Sankgreal" of *Le Morte Darthur.*Each of the sources that Malory rejects places "The Sankgreal" into relief that makes its boundaries clearer. *Perlesvaus's* sacred-secular cohesion reveals that Malory preferred to demonstrate a dissonance between holiness and political success. The secularized Grail quest of the French prose *Tristan* and its diffuse focus demonstrates that Malory chose to maintain a focus on the sacred in his version. Hardyng's *Chronicle*, in its literal storytelling and its prioritization of secular concerns over sacred ones, shows that Malory chose symbolic storytelling over a mimetic mode. By choosing *La Queste del Saint Graal* as his primary source, and by changing little from it, Malory makes it clear that his emphasis in the Grail quest is on the incompatibility of a necessary sacred calling with the demands of secular leadership.

Chapter 5
Arturus ex Nihilo: The Sourceless Sections of Le Morte Darthur

The spiritual focus of *Le Morte Darthur* is not merely imported from Malory's sources but is also apparent in passages that appear to have no known source. The longest section of *Le Morte Darthur* for which no direct source is known is "Sir Gareth of Orkney." Read on its own, this tale is not particularly concerned with Christianity. Sir Gareth takes morning mass (F 244.14; V 1: 314.23), but this religious context does not obviously translate into the themes of the section, which are all about chivalry and merit. What is less obvious is that "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is a figurative precursor of "The Sankgreal," and Sir Gareth is a prefiguration of Sir Galahad, who helps to ground the story of the Grail as the thematic centre of *Le Morte Darthur*, and who in turn is mediated by the spiritual perspective of Galahad and the Grail. Sir Urry of Hungary, another section for which Malory has no known source, is much more transparently religious than "Sir Gareth of Orkney." The story of the healing of Sir Urry and its preoccupation with the relationship between wholeness and holiness recalls the focus of the beginning of "The Sankgreal." In Sir Urry of Hungary Sir Urry of Hungary Malory makes a point of Lancelot's religious sincerity. The section is laden with Christian imagery and symbolism. Indeed, nowhere in *Le Morte Darthur* is Malory's religious concern more apparent than in Sir Urry of Hungary. Finally, Malory's religious interest is clear in the sections of *Le Morte Darthur* which most unambiguously originate with Malory. Where

he is at his most personal, he is also at his most religious: in the colophons.[1] The colophons, or *explicits,* that provide the links between sections of *Le Morte Darthur*, make it clear that the spiritual focus of *Le Morte Darthur* grows as the text goes on. All of these sections of *Le Morte Darthur* alike demonstrate that the religious focus of the text is not an accidental holdover from older texts, but is rather a distinct hallmark of this text in particular.

The Hidden Religion of "Sir Gareth of Orkney"

"Sir Gareth of Orkney" is more spiritually oriented than appears at first. Although this section has little in the way of overtly Christian themes, Malory employs Sir Gareth as a type, who prefigures other knights in *Le Morte Darthur*—most notably Sir Galahad. Numerous similarities between the beginnings of "Sir Gareth of Orkney" and "The Sankgreal" make this clear, especially the setting at Pentecost and Arthur's insistence that he witness a marvel before eating (F 667; V 2: 855). In keeping with the trend toward a stronger religious focus as the text proceeds, Gareth is a less religious version of Galahad, most notably in his attitude toward killing. In the character of Gareth, Malory explores the nature of knighthood and its perfection. In Gareth he posits a perfection that Galahad later exceeds. As such, Gareth is a relatively secular knight, but exists in a conspicuously religious context.

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1 Hanks (2013) rests much of his argument on the religious nature of the colophons.

"Sir Gareth of Orkney," La Cote Male Tayle, and Typological Reading

"Sir Gareth of Orkney" has no known source.[2] This does not necessarily mean that it is original to Malory; there are many analogous texts. In Renaud de Bâgé's *Le Bel Inconnu* for example, as in "Sir Gareth of Orkney," a knight appears at Arthur's court, and asks for a boon: "I surely cannot fail to receive the first boon I ask of you,/ whatever may be the result" (de Bâgé 9.84-85). In *Le Bel Inconnu* the knight refuses to tell his name (de Bâgé 11.115.117), and the boon he finally requests is to "go to the aid of [a] lady" (de Bâgé 17.212-214). Field lists Thomas Chestre's *Lybeaus Desconus,* Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois*, and the French *Chevalier du Papegeau*, as other texts with similarities to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" (Field 2: 186). Of the many analogues Malory was demonstrably familiar with at least one: the story of La Cote Mautaillie from the French prose *Tristan*, which Malory translates as part of his "Sir Tristram de Lyones." In both the French *Tristan* and Malory's "Sir Tristram de Lyones," La Cote Male Tayle is an unknown knight whom Sir Kay mocks and who earns the affection of an initially scornful damsel, which makes him a clear analogue for Sir Gareth.

Malory's use of Sir Gareth and Sir La Cote Male Tayle is typological. In typological biblical exegesis biblical events and characters are types, or figures of each other, each of which interprets and enriches the other. So, for example, the figures of Adam and David and Jesus each inform the orthodox Christian understanding of the others, or the twelve tribes of Israel are a type for the twelve disciples. In much the same

2   On the sources, or lack of sources, for "Sir Gareth of Orkney," see Norris (81-94), Field ([1998] 246-260).

way that biblical characters are read figuratively, and characters in Christian literature are sometimes figurative of biblical characters—Galahad in "The Sankgreal" and even more so in *La Queste del Saint Graal* is a Christ-figure who not only has real existence but also interprets Christ's real existence—Malory also builds interpretively rich patterns.[3] He employs repetition of images, events, and characters frequently in *Le Morte Darthur*, and each repetition deepens and expands the significance of both what has come before and what comes after. Gareth is a type, or a figure, of La Cote Male Tayle, and vice-versa. Each character interprets and contextualizes the other, but neither is reduced to a mere symbol of the other.

Pentecost, Miracles, and Murder: Sir Gareth and Sir Galahad

As Gareth prefigures La Cote Male Tayle, so he also prefigures Galahad.[4] The setting of "Sir Gareth of Orkney" at Pentecost makes this clear. *Le Bel Inconnu* begins in August (de Bâgé 4.14). Neither *Lybeaus Desconus* nor *Wigalois* nor the story of La Cote Mautaillie in the prose *Tristan* are set at any particular time of year. *Le Chevalier du Papegeau* begins at Pentecost, but the fair unknown knight does not appear until the Pentecost feast is over. Malory sets both Gareth's arrival and the beginning of Gareth's

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3   See Judson Allen (240-246) for an argument that Malory's "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" and "The Morte Arthur" are internally and structurally recursive. Allen does not use the term "Typological," instead calling the relationship "dystich *distinctio*," but the content of his argument is almost the same: Malory uses techniques of biblical exegesis to produce types that reinterpret each other.

4   See Batt (94) for a brief argument that Gareth anticipates Galahad.

quest at Pentecost. Pentecost is important for "Sir Gareth of Orkney" which, like "The Sankgreal," begins with an ending. Pentecost, which concludes Eastertide, is the last major feast of the liturgical year, but Easter itself is a festival about rejuvenation and renewal. Pentecost commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus's disciples, and as such it carries the symbolic meaning of a spiritual beginning. A new knight who comes at Pentecost is symbolically linked with the Holy Spirit, and his coming represents a new moment for the community of disciples, in this case symbolically represented by the knights of the Round Table. The setting at Pentecost creates a spiritual framework for Sir Gareth, and the fact that this framework is a foretaste of Galahad only strengthens it.

The beginning of "Sir Gareth of Orkney" also establishes a custom of Arthur that recurs in "The Sankgreal": that Arthur won't eat until he has "herde other sawe of a grete mervayle" (F 223.8-9; V 1: 293.10).[5] Immediately before Galahad comes to Camelot, Arthur orders food and is rebuked by Kay, who reminds him of the custom first established in "Sir Gareth of Orkney":

> "Sir," seyde Sir Kay the Stywarde, "if ye go now unto youre mete ye shall breke youre olde custom of youre courte, for ye have nat used on thys day to sytte at youre mete or that ye have sene some adventure."
>
> "Ye sey sothe," seyde the kynge, "but I had so grete joy of Sir Launcelot and of hys cosynes whych bene com to the courte hole and

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5   This custom is a stock Arthurian trope, which also appears in the beginning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

sounde that I bethought me nat of none olde custom." (F 667.30-668.2; V

2: 855.28-35)

This passage in "The Sankgreal" is strange. Immediately before, Siege Perelous has

been magically inscribed "Foure hondred wyntir and foure and fyffty acomplyvysshed

aftir the Passion of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryst oughte thys syege to be fulfylled" (F 667.14-

16; V 2: 885.12-14). Upon witnessing this, all assembled call it "a mervaylous thynge

and an adventures" (F 667.17-18; V 2: 855.16). So Arthur has clearly seen "some

adventure" this day. But the miracle of the Round Table seats is not enough to establish

"The Sankgreal" as a type of "Sir Gareth of Orkney," and Arthur agrees with Kay, and

delays his dinner.

It is fitting that at Pentecost Arthur will not eat until he has seen a marvel, since

the biblical Pentecost is a time of marvels[6] for the early church. The Holy Spirit, when it

comes upon the disciples, gives them spiritual power and creates marvels, like speaking

in tongues, or interpreting prophecy. Arthur's insistence that he also wait for marvels is

an insistence upon the miraculous nature of Pentecost, and the parallel between his court

with the biblical disciples. The reliability with which his expectation of a marvel is

6   I use the word "marvel" because Malory does here, but of course the events of Pentecost (and arguably

of the Grail) are more accurately termed miraculous than marvellous. In his influential article "The

Marvellous in Middle English Romance" John Finlayson notes: "while the distinction between miracles

and the marvellous is a real one" in the thought of medieval writers like Thomas Aquinas and Roger

Bacon, "it is worth remembering that they are not completely separate. ... Both have the appearance of

being contrary to the laws of nature, and both are, ultimately, caused by God" (Finlayson 371). In

Malory the boundary between marvel and miracle is a shifting and permeable one.

fulfilled confirms Arthur's two assertions. Pentecost is a miraculous time, and Arthur is duly treated to marvels. This formulation reveals what might not otherwise be apparent: that Gareth is himself marvellous. Gareth's association with marvels becomes explicit during the tourney, when Dame Lyones gives him a ring that allows him to change colours: "for at one tyme he semed grene, and another tyme at his gayne-commynge he semed belewe. And thus at every course that he rode too and fro he conged whyght to rede and blak, that there might neyther kynge nother knught have no redy cognyssaunce of hym" (F 274.12-16; V 1: 348.5-10).The setting at Pentecost and Arthur's refusal to eat until he has seen an adventure both establish "Sir Gareth of Orkney" alongside the "Sword in the Stone" as patterns that are fulfilled in "The Sankgreal."

The figures of "The Sankgreal" that exist elsewhere in *Le Morte Darthur* help to anchor "The Sankgreal" in the text. The more aspects of the text point to "The Sankgreal," the more evident it is that "The Sankgreal" is the thematic and interpretive centre of *Le Morte Darthur*. So "Sir Gareth of Orkney," which on its surface seems to be Malory's most stand-alone section, turns out to be tied to "The Sankgreal," and his most original section turns out to be tied conceptually and thematically to his least original.

This link demonstrates again that thinking of the sections of *Le Morte Darthur* as fundamentally distinct from one another creates a false impression. Gareth's attitude towards killing gains a new significance when seen through the lens of Galahad. Gareth's *modus operandi* in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is not to kill his defeated enemies. Gareth doesn't kill, he converts. Each defeated enemy becomes an ally or a vassal of Sir Gareth, so that by the time the tale ends Gareth's prowess has earned him quite a lot of social and material capital. By the end of the story he no longer needs to depend upon his status as

Sir Gawain's brother, or even directly on his knightly prowess. He is the master of castles and men. But "The Sankgreal" provides an additional interpretation of the events of "Sir Gareth of Orkney." What apparently has a pragmatic and social reason in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is revealed in "The Sankgreal" to have a spiritual meaning. Gareth avoids killing because mercy gives him allies, but Galahad avoids killing because to kill would make him a murderer and murder would make him unfit to see God. But since Gareth is a type for Galahad we can interpret Gareth through the character of Galahad and recognize that even for Gareth killing is an impediment to finding God.

Sir Gareth and Murder

Gareth does not always follow this pattern of sparing the lives of his opponents, however. He develops it gradually as he goes on. In his first battle he nearly kills Sir Kay, and in his second seems willing to kill Lancelot. Gareth kills neither Kay nor Lancelot, but in both battles Gareth seems to be fighting to the death. The fight with Kay begins when Kay unsuccessfully tries to show Beawmaynes up, and the fight with Lancelot has no clear motive, other than the sheer joy of activity. Gareth tells Lancelot: "hit doth me good to fele your myght" (F 228.29-30; V 1: 299.8-9). Both battles are fundamentally frivolous.

These two early battles begin to teach Gareth the restraint that he continues to learn throughout his story. Gareth's battle with Sir Kay is characterized by a lack of restraint, which ends in Gareth leaving Kay to die: "Sir Kay felle downe as he had bene dede. Than Beawmaynes alyght downe and toke Sir Kayes shylde and his speare and sterte upon his owne horse and rode his way" (F 228.10-13; V 1: 298.20-23). The fight

with Lancelot begins with the same ferocity, until finally Lancelot asks Gareth to calm down: "Beawmaynes, feyght nat so sore! Your quarrel and myne is nat so grete but we may sone leve of" (F 228.27-28; V 1: 299.6-7). Gareth approaches the battle with Lancelot in the same spirit as he approached the battle with Kay, until this reminder to show restraint, to consider the purpose of his battles and their possible consequences.

Gareth kills several knights after this interaction with Lancelot, but none with frivolity. The first two attack Gareth at a bridge, and he kills both as he defends himself against them. When Lyoness hears about this battle she remarks "they were too good knyghtes, but they were murtherers. That one hyght Sir Gararde le Breuse and that other hyght Sir Arnolde le Bruse" (F 246.17-18; V 1: 317.29-31). Gareth does not learn their names or history at the time of the battle or ever. The fact that these two knights are both "good" and "murderers" emphasizes that in *Le Morte Darthur* a "good knight" is not necessarily a moral designation, but also carries the unspoken assumption that the two knights, by virtue of being murderers, deserve death.

The third knight that Gareth kills is the Black Knight Sir Perarde. Lynet repeatedly accuses Gareth of slaying the Black Knight "thorow unhappynes" (F 234.25; V 1: 305.12) against which claim Gareth defends himself that he "slew hym knyghtly and nat shamfully" (F 234.31-32; V 1: 305.20). This division between kinds of killing is one that is upheld elsewhere in Malory. Killing the Black Knight "knightly" means killing him in the course of a battle in which neither party has yielded. This is also how Gareth kills Sir Gararde le Breuse and Sir Arnolde le Bruse. To kill the Black Knight shamefully would be to kill him when he had asked for mercy or when he was unprepared for battle.

The distinction is an important one within the fictional frame of *Le Morte Darthur*, though significantly it is one that Sir Galahad will later choose not to recognize.

The Black Knight's death gives his brothers the motive to fight Gareth. They are in fact not only motivated to fight Gareth by realistic psychological standards according to which anyone might want to kill their brother's killer, but also according to the familial or clan-based chivalry—a kind of chivalry that Gareth's brother Gawain represents in *Le Morte Darthur.* This is made clear within the bounds of "Sir Gareth of Orkney," and is the stated reason why Gareth is more devoted to Lancelot than he is to his brother: "evir aftir Sir Gareth had aspyed Sir Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe himself fro his brother Sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther, and that hated Sir Gareth" (F 285.29-32; V 1: 360.32-36). So as Gareth fights against the family of the Black Knight he is also symbolically fighting against his own family.

Mercy and Conversion in "Sir Gareth of Orkney"

The first in the series of knights that Gareth converts is the Green Knight. The religious significance of showing mercy to the Green Knight is highlighted by the fact that it is with the Green Knight that Gareth hears his first mass (F 237; V 1: 307-308). "Sir Gareth of Orkney" has more mention of a knight hearing mass than any of Caxton's book divisions except one during "The Sankgreal."

The detail of these masses is given in a perfunctory and happenstance way. Each morning, we read, Sir Gareth and his company "herde theire masse and brake theire faste" (F 237.8-9; V 1: 307.34-308.1). Only once in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" does mass happen

without breakfast. Yet the apparently rote nature of Gareth's mass is part of the point. For Gareth, and within the context of "Sir Gareth of Orkney," hearing mass is as ordinary—as expected, as habitual, as nourishing, as necessary—as breakfast is. And just as we hear more about Gareth receiving mass than we do any other knight, so also we hear more about him eating a morning meal than we do about any other knight. The repetition of masses in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is not evidence that Gareth is more spiritual than other knights are, it is evidence that in this tale we are hearing about the ordinary life of a knight-errant, and this naturally includes his spirituality.

Gareth's habit of taking mass indicates his connection with Christian communion. That is why Gareth begins to take mass after he converts the Green Knight, because that is when Gareth begins to act as a Christian knight. Gareth functions as an early model of Christian knighthood, which is later reiterated, refined, and strengthened in Galahad and "The Sankgreal." Sir Gareth's brand of knighthood is one in which a good knight avoids killing where possible. For Gareth this has a practical political advantage, but the same principle is later employed by Galahad for more explicitly religious reasons.

Good Knight, Everyone: Chivalry and Nobility in "Sir Gareth of Orkney"

It is very unclear in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" what exactly constitutes being a good knight. We have seen in reference to Sir Gararde and Sir Arnolde that a "good knight" in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is not necessarily a moral judgement. These two are good knights in the sense that they are good at the work of knighthood—that is knocking other men off their horses without falling off themselves, not in that they do good.

The word "noble" has a similar ambivalence in "Sir Gareth of Orkney." In Gareth's encounter with Sir Persaunte of Inde, for example, the evidence that Gareth is of noble blood is that he refuses to have sex with Persaunte's daughter: "'Truly,' seyde Sir Persaunte, 'whatsomever he be, he is com of full noble bloode'" (F 244.10-11; V 1: 315.19-20). Yet Sir Persaunte himself, who is also come of noble blood is willing to offer his daughter to Gareth. So Persaunte knows particularly well that social class is not a guarantee either of protection of maidens or of the defence of honour. Gareth is not willing to shame Persaunte, but Persaunte is willing to shame himself and his daughter. Nobility is an aspect of behaviour, but only sometimes. As Cherewatuk observes, "sexual self control in a man is, if not proof of, at least proper use of noble blood" (Cherewatuk 35). The distinction Cherewatuk makes is important; not all people with noble blood behave as Gareth does, but they should.

Elsewhere in "Sir Gareth of Orkney" the evidence of Gareth's nobility is his martial prowess. After he defeats another knight, that knight becomes convinced of Gareth's status as noble. But martial prowess itself is not enough to convey nobility, and certainly military ability is not coequal with honour, as the existence of the aforementioned Gararde and Arnolde, the murdering good knights, demonstrates. As with Cherewatuk's observation above about the proper use of noble blood, Lexton observes on the topic of Gareth's prowess that "combat, so much a part of the Arthurian endeavor, is demonstrated in *Gareth* to operate most effectively when it is governed by notions of courtesy—restraint, mercy, and pity—in the service of others" (Lexton 111). Again, Gareth represents not just nobility, but nobility properly employed.

Though none of the characters within the story—not even Gareth himself—fully

recognize it, what makes Gareth noble is neither his military prowess nor his bloodline,

but his devotion to the ideals of chivalry. Gareth's many positive attributes are mostly

presented uncritically as innate, inherited through his aristocratic bloodline. But as Gareth

encounters, defeats, and converts other knights with increasing reputations for prowess,

he reveals that military strength does not itself constitute goodness. And when Gareth

allies himself with Lancelot over his brother Gawain he reveals that lineage does not

determine character. Like Galahad, Gareth illustrates that knighthood in *Le Morte*

Darthur is properly employed in the service of God and the defence of the weak. The

battle with the Red Knight (V 252; F 2. 323-324) demonstrates the progression in the kind

and quality of nobility represented in "Sir Gareth of Orkney."[7] The Red Knight has

prowess and wealth and a noble bloodline, but his kind of nobility is inferior to the kind

that Gareth represents by the time he faces the Red Knight. The progression continues in

Le Morte Darthur, because Gareth is a forerunner of Galahad. "Sir Gareth of Orkney"

reveals both that the spiritual themes of *Le Morte Darthur* are not limited to its most

obviously spiritual sections, and also that the text grows in its spiritual focus as it goes on.

The Overt Religion of Sir Urry of Hungary

Unlike "Sir Gareth of Orkney," the religious aspects of Sir Urry of Hungary are

immediately apparent. Sir Urry of Hungary is one of the most explicitly Christian sections

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7   See Riddy for an argument about the progression of Gareth towards a "fuller and more inward version

of nobility" (Riddy [1987] 78).

of *Le Morte Darthur.* Like "Sir Gareth of Orkney," the episode has no known source.

While Field is convinced that "Sir Gareth of Orkney" had a source that has been lost, he

accepts the critical consensus that the healing of Sir Urry was "largely Malory's own

invention" (Field Commentary 2: 688). In Sir Urry of Hungary, Malory returns to the

theme of wholeness and holiness from "The Sankgreal," and relates a private prayer by

Lancelot that reveals Lancelot's inner character more directly than Malory is wont to do.[8]

Sir Urry of Hungary also embodies spiritual significance in the motif of the number

seven. Few passages of *Le Morte Darthur* are more straightforwardly and explicitly

religious in their orientation than is the healing of Sir Urry.

Holiness and Wholeness in the Healing of Sir Urry

As is true of the other most explicitly religious section of *Le Morte Darthur*, "The

Sankgreal," the healing of Sir Urry explores the relationship between holiness and

wholeness, and suggests that holiness and political wholeness are incompatible.

Memorably, Arthur assembles an impressive collection of "all the kynges, dukes and

erlis, and all noble knyghtes of the Rounde Table that were there that tyme" (F 862.25-27;

V 3: 1146.30-31) to search Urry's wounds in an attempt to heal him. The Round Table

knights number a hundred and ten, "for forty knyghtes were that tyme away" (F 862.29;

V 3: 1147.1). This assemblage itself is notable, and it harkens back both to the beginning

of "The Sankgreal" and to the beginning of "Balyn le Sauvage." Malory places an

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8   See Hodges (2007) and Atkinson (1981) for more on the Healing of Sir Urry and its connection to the
      themes of wholeness and holiness.

enormous emphasis on the collection of knights and on the wholeness of the fellowship by listing each knight and his attempt at healing Urry's wounds.

The knights are presented in groups of kinship or affinity, and the first group to attempt includes "Kynge Laryvaunce of Northumbirlonde, ... Sir Barraunte le Apres, that was called the Kynge with the Hundred Knyghtes, ... Kynge Uryence of the londe of Gore, ... Kynge Angwysh of Irelonde, ... Kynge Nentrys of Garloth, [and] ... Kynge Carydos of Scotlonde" (F 863.9-14; V 3: 1147.23-25). This particular grouping is made up of kings and knights who rebelled against Arthur in the beginning of his reign, in "King Uther and King Arthur" (F 15.11-12; V 1: 17). The only significant rebellious king who is missing from this list is King Lot, who died in his rebellion against Arthur but who is represented by his son Gawain and Gawain's kin—listed next. As Ruth Lexton (2014) observes: "the knights preparing to make Urry 'hole' are divided into troupes of family and affine, their formal titles heightening the impression that loyalties have been consolidated" (Lexton 155). The attempt to make Urry whole begins with Arthur's court coming together, in a way that reminds us that Arthur has already made whole what once was fractured. At the same time as the formal titles symbolically consolidate loyalties, however, they also expose divisions. Emphasizing the parts that have become a whole is also a reminder of division.

The court working together cannot make Urry whole, not least because the court is not in fact whole. Malory tells us that forty knights are missing, most notably Lancelot. When Lancelot does appear, Arthur appeals to his part of the wholeness of the Round Table to convince him to attempt the healing: "ye shall do hit for no presumpcion, but for to beare us felyshyp, insomuche as ye be a felow of the Rounde Table" (F 867.3-5; V 3:

1151.31-33). Lancelot displays chivalric obedience and Christian obedience simultaneously by submitting to the will of Arthur in the service of God, and Sue Ellen Holbrook sees this as evidence of the linking of two communities: "it will be as a member of the Round Table community that Lancelot subjects his will to Arthur and as a member of the Christian faith community that he subjects his will to God" (Holbrook [2013] 59). But when Lancelot succeeds where the other knights have failed he no longer is their fellow—or they are no longer his. Lancelot is only truly bearing the rest of the knights' fellowship if he fails. Instead, he displays the inclination toward holiness that none of the other knights does, and that finally heals Urry.

Lancelot's prayer is, as Hanks puts it, "the sufficient cause of Urry's healing" (Hanks [2013] 17). So it is not the wholeness of the table nor Lancelot's participation in it that heals Urry, it is what makes Lancelot different from the other knights. No other knights are recorded as praying before searching Urry's wounds. There may briefly be wholeness in the Round Table, but because there is no holiness, the wholeness is fleeting. Although Lexton notes that "Lancelot is as essential to the cohesion and wholeness of the Round Table as he is to Urry's physical wholeness" (Lexton 156), and Batt likewise interprets Urry "as figure of chivalric cohesion and wholeness" through whom Lancelot "remakes the integrity of the Arthurian court" (Batt 154), the opposite is also true. Lancelot's essential part in Urry's physical wholeness is exactly what breaks the cohesion of the Round Table. Lancelot is essential to the wholeness of the Round Table in the sense that he is also its breaking point. Hodges observes: "Although the court participates in Urry's healing, the body politic is not healed as easily. 'The Healing of Sir Urry' ends, not with the collective rejoicing, but with Aggravayne's plots, and the court does not

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overcome his bitter envy" (Hodges [2007] 43). To be slightly more precise, the court does

not participate in Urry's healing, and that is the point. The court attempts to heal Urry, but

the wholeness of the court cannot achieve Urry's healing, only the holiness of one of its

members can. As Jill Mann observes, in the context of Urry "wholeness is counterpointed

by separation" (Mann 220). The text emphasizes that the court is not whole until Lancelot

is present, but even after he appears his approach to the healing demonstrates his

separation from the court as much as it demonstrates his connection with them. He is the

only one who prays. The fact that he successfully heals Sir Urry while nobody else can

also marks him as distinct from the rest. Finally, Mann emphasizes that reactions to the

healing of Urry are starkly divided: "The court rejoices; Lancelot weeps. This divergence

at the very heart of the climactic moment of healing and fellowship expresses with

delicate poignancy the precariousness and the preciousness of wholeness" (Mann 220).

What wholeness the court finds in the healing of Urry is like the wholeness produced by

the Grail: ephemeral as a flash of light.

"Secretly unto hymselff": Lancelot's Prayer

Lancelot's success comes from how he differs from the other knights. Although

all the other knights have attempted to heal Urry, only Lancelot begins with an appeal to

God:

>	And than he hylde up hys hondys and loked unto the este, saiynge
>
>	secretly unto hymselff, "Now, Blyssed Fadir and Son and Holy Goste, I
>
>	beseche The of Thy mercy that my symple worshyp and honesté be saved,
>
>	and Thou Blyssed Trynyté, Thou mayste yeff me power to hele thys syke

kynght by the grete vertu and grace of The, but, Good Lorde, never of

myselff. (F 867.21-26; V 3: 1152.18-25)

In both "The Sankgreal" and in "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" Lancelot has

struggled with spiritual sincerity. Because Malory frequently reports characters' actions

and speech and only infrequently reports their thoughts or motivations directly it is easy

to doubt Lancelot's sincerity. During the Grail quest Lancelot pledges that he will

behave differently, that he will leave his sin and seek God. As soon as the Grail quest is

over, though, Lancelot forgets his promises and his perfection and regresses into old

behaviour. The result is that Lancelot may seem to be merely a hypocrite. In this prayer,

however, we see Lancelot's true character more clearly than we have yet seen it. The

key here is that Lancelot says this prayer "secretly unto hymselff." He is following the

biblical principle laid out in the Sermon on the Mount: "But thou, when thou shalt pray,

enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door pray to thy Father in secret, and thy

Father, who seeth in secret, will reward thee" (Matt. 6:6). Malory grants us access to

Lancelot's secret prayer, so that there is no room for doubt that the prayer is sincere.

Lancelot may lack stability, and he may fail to live up to his sincere desires, but we see

here that he earnestly seeks God.[9]

Like his sincerity, Lancelot's humility in "The Sankgreal" is difficult to be certain

of. He says that he knows he was never one of the best knights of the world (F 672.16-17;

V 2: 863.28-29), but it is unclear whether this is real or false humility. Certainly nobody

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9   On the significance of Lancelot's prayer being secret, see also Armstrong ([2013] 121), and Olsen (46-

   47).

except Lancelot seems to doubt that he is the best knight of the world, until the appearance of Galahad. And after Galahad's death Lancelot regains his status as the best knight of the world. It is easy to believe that Lancelot's humility is an act.

In this prayer, however, we see that Lancelot's self-negation represents sincere humility. In paradoxically the most selfish portion of his prayer, Lancelot displays true humility: "I beseche The of Thy mercy that my symple worshyp and honesté be saved" (F 867.23-24; V 3: 1152.21-22). This reveals that in Lancelot's mind his worship comes not from himself, his strength or his virtue, but from God's mercy. Lancelot prays not only that his worship be saved, but that his honesty be saved. In this context worship does not just mean fame, renown, general acclaim. Rather, Lancelot means honest worship: *deserved* renown. God can preserve Lancelot's honesty here because if Lancelot can heal Urry then it means he deserves his reputation and is therefore honest.

Next, Lancelot prays: "Thou Blyssed Trynyté, Thou mayste yeff me power to hele thys syke kynght by the grete vertu and grace of The, but, Good Lorde, never of myselff" (F 867.24-26; V 3: 1152.22-25). Although he begins by thinking of his own worship, he ends by emphasizing that the power is not of himself but of God. The ending to this prayer is an echo of Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemene: "And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; take away this chalice from me—but not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36) and of Psalm 113:9: "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to thy name give glory".

In this prayer Lancelot's language is more than usually biblical, because it is more than usually humble. And this is a statement not only about Lancelot's frame of mind, but also about the spiritual ontology of what is happening here. As Hanks argues, Lancelot

"has not earned a miraculously healing nature, as Galahad did. Instead, Lancelot has asked for and received grace" (Hanks [2013] 18). Here we have a partial explanation for Lancelot's tears. He weeps because he is aware that God has saved his worship but not his honesty—because he knows that the general acclaim is not earned, but God-given.[10]

Seven Plus Three: The Seven Wounds of Sir Urry, and the Trinity

In addition to the literal Christian content of Sir Urry of Hungary, there is also symbolic religious significance. When Sir Urry comes to Arthur's court he has been suffering from his wounds "thys seven yere" (F 862.4-5; V 3: 1146.8). Seven is a biblically significant number. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, and therefore seven is anagogical of completeness and of holiness.[11] The seven years of Urry's pain typologically suggests the seven days of creation but also the commandment from Exodus 21:2 that a servant should serve for six years, and "in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing." When Urry appears at Arthur's court in the seventh year of his suffering the time has come for his pain to end. Urry's seven wounds, "thre on the hede, and thre on hys body, an one uppon hys lyffte honde" (F 861.12-13; V 3: 1145.13-14) anagogically represent the seven deadly sins,[12] and typologically mimic the seven wounds

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10 See Lewis (19-20) and Tucker (393), who also make this point.

11 See Hodges (2007) for the most rigorous account of the significance of Urry's seven wounds that I'm aware of. Hodges argues that the seven wounds evoke the seven deadly sins.

12 By some accounts Christ has seven wounds sustained through the crucifixion: two in his hands, two in his feet, one in his side, one for the crown of thorns, and one for the lashing, but although I would like Urry's wounds to resonate with Christ's, the much more common figuration is of Christ's *five* wounds,

Balin and Balan inflict on one another (F 72.15; V 1: 89.31) .[13] Urry, then, symbolizes fallen creation.

Urry's seven wounds over seven years suggest both sin and creation; Urry's wounded body figures the creation wounded by sin and the healing of his body figures the healing of creation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. So when Lancelot heals Urry he anagogically participates in Christ's redemption of the world. This is why it is important that Lancelot's prayer be addressed to the Trinity. Holbrook has argued persuasively that in the healing of Sir Urry "the Christianity of Round Table knights is made to matter and the virtues of the healer are bound to a mystery central to their religious faith, the Trinity" (Holbrook [2013] 56). No other prayer in *Le Morte Darthur* is addressed to the Trinity. But because the crucifixion and redemption of Christ is the theological cornerstone of the doctrine of the Trinity, Lancelot's prayer must be. In Christ on the cross we have the Son abandoned and rejected by the Father. Likewise, in the crucifixion the Holy Spirit which according to Augustine is a manifestation of the relationship between the Father and the Son,[14] is absent. In theological terms the resurrection confirms that the Trinity cannot be broken, and it is through the power of the Trinity that the crucifixion and resurrection have their power to redeem the fallen world.

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so I must acknowledge that reading as unsubstantiated within a fifteenth-century English context, but nonetheless tempting.

13 For more on Balin and Balan's wounds, see Batt (63).

14 See *On the Trinity*, book VI, chapter 5.

So it is also through the power of the Trinity that Lancelot is able to enact the figurative reproduction of the redemption of the world.

After Lancelot successfully heals Sir Urry, the text tells us that "ever Sir Launcelote wepte, as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn" (F 868.1-2; V 3: 1152.35-36). There is a biblical allusion here, to Mark 10:15: "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter into it." The biblical passage equates the child-like with the holy: the kingdom of God, as the previous verse says, belongs to children. So when Lancelot weeps like a child—when he becomes more child-like—he becomes more holy. And the image specifically of a beaten child suggests Hebrews 12:6: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." While Lancelot's weeping is a sign that his spiritual state is changeable and that his former hardness can be softened, it is also a mark of spiritual favour.[15]

The healing of Urry is, more than any part of *Le Morte Darthur* outside of "The Sankgreal," religiously and theologically oriented. It examines the inner religious life of Lancelot, the collective spirituality of Arthur's court, and the Christian significance of chivalry itself, and it is a figuration of the central theological mysteries of Christianity. The fact that the healing of Urry, of all sections of *Le Morte Darthur*, has no known source makes the religious dimensions of *Le Morte Darthur* unambiguous.

15 See Batt (157) and Olsen (47), who also make this point.

The Developing Religion in the Colophons

Sir Urry of Hungary is most likely original to *Le Morte Darthur*, but the colophons are unquestionably Malory's. In the colophons,[16] Malory establishes a narrative, parallel to the main story of *Le Morte Darthur*, that dramatizes his own growing spiritual focus. The colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" begins an ongoing narrative about Sir Thomas Malory, the knight prisoner. The colophons to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" and "Sir Tristram de Lyones" both reiterate, with growing earnestness, the earlier colophon's appeal to God for deliverance. The more personal the colophons get the more religious they are. The colophons to "The Sankgreal" and "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" assume familiarity with the previous colophons, strengthening the sense that the colophons work together to form a narrative about the author. It reaches its conclusion in the final colophon: both the most personal and the most religious, where Malory makes his religious sincerity clear.

16 Because they usually include the Latin word *explicit*, they are sometimes referred to as "*explicits*," and some critics (David Eugene Clark [2014], for example) differentiate between "colophons" and "*explicits*." I use the two terms interchangeably, but in general prefer "colophon" because the existence of the English word explicit makes the use of explicit to refer to these needlessly confusing. Clark (97-99) distinguishes between longer "colophons" and shorter "*explicits*," primarily on the grounds that what he calls "colophons" include a prayer and what he calls "*explicits*" do not. Clark argues that to a listening audience the distinction between formal colophons and informal explicits would be clear. He also notes the existence of a category he calls "transitional phrases," characterized by the use of the word "leve" or "turn." Clark also argues that some of the colophons highlight religion.

The Colophons and the Division of the Text

Whatever else they are, the colophons are structural markers in *Le Morte Darthur*: they mark the endings of narrative units. The medieval Latin *explicit* means "it ends," but the *explicits* of *Le Morte Darthur* are not, in fact, endings—that is, they are not final endings. Field is correct to say that "the explicits provide endings, as the word *explicit* implies, but several of them, without so much as a line-break or a punctuation mark, also provide an opening formula for the next tale. They are in fact as much link as ending, and the closure they imply is that of a part within a whole" (Field 1:xxv). Like the explicits of most composite manuscripts, the colophons of *Le Morte Darthur* are better understood as markers of the end of narrative sub-units then as definitive endings of the text as a whole.

Vinaver has—quite rightly in my opinion—taken the colophons to reveal Malory's intention for the text. Many of the colophons exist only in the Winchester manuscript. Caxton's print edition is structured differently from the Winchester manuscript; there are far more *explicits* than there are in Winchester, but they include far less autobiographical information about Malory. It is partly on the evidence of the Winchester colophons that Vinaver bases his argument that what Malory produced should properly be understood as a collection of tales with a common subject matter rather than a single book:

> The inference [of plural works] can now be substantiated with the aid of the Winchester text. Although the manuscript is bound in one volume, it is clearly divided into several sections and each section, with the exception of the last which lacks a gathering of eight leaves at the end, is concluded by

an *explicit*. The first *explicit* is the most significant of all. In it the author bids farewell to the reader and suggests that someone else might continue his work. (Vinaver xxxvi)

Although I disagree with Vinaver about what intention to read in the colophons, it is clear that in them Malory emerges as a character within the text, and we can interpret the wishes and intentions of that character. Vinaver's argument for the colophons as evidence of Malory's intention allows us to test another claim that has its critical origin in Vinaver, namely that Malory's interest was in practical warfare and chivalry, not in the moral, spiritual, or religious aspects of Arthur's court (Vinaver [1990] xxviii-xxix). In the colophons there is evidence to suggest that Malory was indeed interested in humanity, gentleness, and most importantly, in religion. Specifically, the religious emphasis and interest of the colophons grows throughout the text, as the narrative voice of the colophons becomes more personal and more nuanced.[17]

Early in the text the colophons are simple, formulaic and impersonal. They provide links between the sections and summarize what has come before. Gradually the colophons become more complex, and as they do so they become more personal, revealing more about the character of Sir Thomas Malory. As they do so, they also become more religious in their content. Either Malory becomes more religiously focused as the text progresses, or else he has always been religious and we are simply afforded a better and better look at him. In the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" we hear

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17 See Hanks ([2013] 10-12) for a brief account of Malory's religion in the colophons. My argument here
    builds and expands Hanks's.

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some details about Malory for the first time: especially that he is a "knyght presoner" (F144.4; V 1: 180.24). In the colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" Malory repeats a request for help that he made in "King Uther and King Arthur," with emphasis. He begs for prayer and for God's help (F 288; V 1: 363). In the colophons to "Sir Tristram de Lyones" (F 664; V 2: 899) and "The Sankgreal" (F 789; V 2: 1037) Malory further intensifies his petition for God's help, but expands its intention so that it includes a petition for deliverance from sin, not only from prison. In the colophon to "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" (F 869; V 3: 1154) continues this religious intensification, which finally comes to its conclusion in the colophon to "The Morte Arthure" (F 940; V 3: 1260).

The Simple Colophons

The colophons are not all alike; in fact, each is unique. Some of them are straightforward endings of one part of the book, like that at the end of "The Wedding of King Arthur," or "Sir Launcelot du Lake." Some, like the colophon to "Balyn le Sauvage," provide a brief summary of the tale they conclude. Others, like the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur," provide some biographical information about the author: "this was drawyn by a knyght presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré, that God sende hym good recover. Amen. Explicit" (F 144.2-5; V 1: 180.21-25). Clark sees a pattern to which type of colophon is used when. I don't think the pattern as as inviolable as Clark suggests, but as a general trend, the colophons become longer and more detailed as *Le Morte Darthur* progresses, and as they do so they also become both more personal and more spiritually oriented.

We can divide the simplest colophons in *Le Morte Darthur* into two categories. The first and simplest category (See Table 5.2, row I.a) includes the colophons to "The Wedding of King Arthur," "Sir Launcelot du Lake," "Sir Lamerok de Galys," "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book," "The Tournament of Surluse," and "The Begetting of Galahad." All of these colophons in common provide an ending and a name for a section of the text, and all but one provides a transition into the next section. The colophon to "The Wedding of King Arthur" is simply: "Explicit the Weddyng of Kyng Arthur" (F 98.4; V 1: 120.28). The colophon to "Sir Launcelot du Lake" is "Explicit a Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake. Here folowyth Sir Garethis Tale of Orkeney that was callyd Bewmaynes by Sir Kay" (F 222.16-18; V 1: 287.27).[18] Whether they provide an obvious transition or not, none of these colophons has the sense of finality of the one to "King Uther and King Arthur." All suggest the end of a section rather than the end of a whole.

The second category of simple colophons (See Table 1, row I.b) includes the colophon to "Balyn le Sauvage" and the colophon to "King Arthur and the Emperor

18 See "Sir Lamerok de Galys" (F 359.8-10; V 1: 451.29-31), "The Tournament of Surluse" (F 531.5-7; V 2: 670.28-31), "The Begetting of Galahad" (F 657.29-30; V 2: 833.9-11). See also "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book" (F 440.3-4; V 2: 558.34-559.5), which is a strange case because although the manuscript gives the colophon as an unbroken *explicit*, Field has separated it into an *explicit* to "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book" on the bottom of one page and an *incipit* to "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The Second Book" on the top of the next page, while Vinaver has diminished this colophon's impact by introducing no page breaks at all. The manuscript has a page break between the end of the colophon and the beginning of the next section.

Lucius." These are nearly the same as the first category of colophons, except that they provide a very brief summary of the section that is coming to an end. The summaries—like all summaries—are also a kind of commentary, since they draw our attention to aspects of the tale that the author wishes to highlight. The colophon to Balyn le Sauvage, for example, reads: "Thus endith the tale of Balyn and Balan, too brethirne that were borne in Northhumbirlonde, that were too passynge good knyghtes as ever were in tho dayes. Explicit" (F 75.3-6; V 1: 92.16-20).The detail about Northumberland indicates the growing unity of Arthur's Britain; the King of Northumberland fought with King Lot against Arthur in the previous section. So the emphasis that Balin and Balan were born in Northumberland signals the inclusion of previously antagonistic nations into both King Arthur's and the narrative's spheres of influence.[19] The detail that they were as good knights as ever were in those days raises the question, as we have seen in "Sir Gareth of Orkney," of what constitutes a good knight. The colophon to "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" reads: "Here endyth the tale of the noble Kynge Arthure that was emperour hymself thorow dygnyté of his hondys. And here folowyth afftir many noble talys of Sir Launcelot de Lake. Explycit the Noble Tale betwyxt Kynge Arthure and Lucius the Emperour of Rome" (F 189.18-22; V 1: 247.3-9). It draws attention to Arthur's achievement through the dignity of his hands. Like the colophon to "Balyn le Sauvage," this colophon emphasizes physical prowess, and like the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" it emphasizes Arthur's military might.

19 For more on the significance of Northumberland in Malory see Armstrong and Hodges (2014), especially 82-83.

Ending and Beginning: The Colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur"

The colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" is, as Vinaver points out, the most final-sounding of the colophons save the last one:

> Here endyth this tale, as the Freynshe booke seyth, fro the maryage of
> Kynge Uther unto Kyng Arthure that regned aftir hym and ded many
> batayles. And this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams
> com to courte.
>
> Who that woll make ony more lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge
> Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a
> knyght presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré, that God sende hym good recover.
> Amen.
>
> Explicit. (F 143.29-144.5; V 1: 180.15-25)[20]

There is a real sense that the author who wrote these words thought that he was done here. It is unclear whether that implies that "King Uther and King Arthur" was written later than other sections of *Le Morte Darthur*, as Vinaver (Vinaver [1990] liv) and McCarthy ([1981] 123) have both argued or, as I think more likely, that Malory changed his mind after writing this colophon and decided to write more, or as Field ([2013] xxiv-xxv) and many others argue that this is indeed the end of a tale and what comes next ("King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius") is not a continuation but something different. But regardless, this colophon provides an unambiguous unity for

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20 The Caxton edition at this point simply has "Explicit liber Quartus. Incipit liber quintus" (Caxton
    [1485; 1983] 120).

everything that has come before it—which is presumably why Vinaver considers this the "first" *explicit* despite the *explicit* to "Balyn le Sauvage."

"Balyn le Sauvage" also seems like an ending: it has a clear *explicit.* Despite the fact that this comes before the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur," however, Vinaver does not consider "Balyn le Sauvage" to be a separate tale. Neither does he consider "The Wedding of King Arthur" to be a separate tale, although it also has a clear *explicit*: "Explicit the Weddyng of Kyng Arthur" (F 98.4; V 1: 120.28). The less-formal ending to "Uther Pendragon and Merlin" also might be considered a colophon, as it provides a degree of closure for what has come before and a link to what comes after: "as hit rehersith aftir in the booke of Balyne le Saveage that folowith nexte aftir: that was the adventure how Balyne gate the swerde" (F 46.26-27; V 1: 56.5-6). The longer colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur," though, makes it plain that these earlier sections are all included in "this tale" (F 143.29; V 1: 180.15). That, in turn, makes it clear that the earlier colophons are what Field concludes all of the colophons are: an end of one part that leads into the next part, not a definitive end.

The colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" provides a brief interpretive frame for the text: a commentary. It tells us something about the details from this section that are especially important or notable. The first highlighted detail is "the maryage of Kynge Uther" (F 143.30; V 1: 180.16), which receives a privileged place in the colophon, ostensibly as the beginning of the tale, although in fact there is a significant portion of Uther's story that happens before his marriage. This emphasis has the result of stressing Arthur's legitimacy. The colophon then turns to King Arthur, and two aspects of Arthur's life or character: first it identifies Arthur as "Kyng Arthure that regned aftir [Uther]" (F

143.30; V 1: 180.16-17), and second it notes that Arthur "ded many batayles" (F 143.31; V 1: 180.17). Both of these points of emphasis appear to confirm Vinaver's view of things: Arthur's significance is his political and his military status. He reigns, and he battles. The fact that Malory's emphasis here seems to be on Arthur's military and political record alone makes it clear that the emphasis of *Le Morte Darthur* is not static. This is a baseline against which the rest of the colophons can be measured. Yet even this baseline is not wholly secular, as the conclusion "God sende hym good recover. Amen" (F 144.3-4; V 1: 180.23-24) makes clear. What is not yet clear at this point is how serious or earnest this appeal to God is.

This colophon assumes familiarity with the Arthurian legend. For all its finality, the colophon gives a glimpse forward into the future of Arthur's court, alluding to characters the importance of whom Malory evidently expects his readers to recognize: "and this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams com to courte" (F 143.31-32l V 1: 180.18-19). This statement makes it plain that although this may be the end of this story it is not the end of stories that are told about Arthur. The allusion to Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristram without explanation reveals an assumption of familiarity. Malory does not explain who Lancelot and Tristram are because he takes it for granted that his readers will already know. This assumption of familiarity continues in the next line of the colophon, the line that most starkly supports Vinaver's reading of the structure of Malory's work: "Who that woll make any more lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams" (F 144.1-2; V 1: 180.19-21). The acknowledgement that other books exist and the implied invitation to seek them out again emphasize the expectation that these are familiar stories to his audience.

Particularly important here is Malory's address to "who that woll *make* ony more" (emphasis mine). Malory is not instructing readers to seek elsewhere to find stories about Arthur and Lancelot and Tristram. He is instructing aspiring authors that they should seek elsewhere for their sources. This does not in fact necessarily suggest that Malory himself has not made and will not make any more. On the contrary, Malory is himself included in the ranks of "who that woll make ony more" (F 144.1; V 1: 180.19-20) and the next page reveals that he follows his own advice.

The inherent problem with the finality of the colophon is that it is immediately belied by more. So either Malory changed his mind after writing this colophon and decided to write more, or else the implication is not and never was that this is the definitive end. Even if we accept the first possibility—that Malory changed his mind after writing this colophon the first time, that at the time of writing he intended never to write any more—the fundamental problem remains. Why not simply change the colophon after changing his mind? Why let such a colophon stand if it really suggests finality? The Vinaverian reading—that this colophon means the ending of something and that "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" is the beginning of a new thing rather than a continuation—does nothing to fix the inherent contradiction between the finality of the colophon and the fact that something comes after it. If when Malory says "Who that woll make ony more lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a knyght presoner" (F 144.1-3; V 1: 180.19-22) he means "I will not write more because I can't," then the existence of the next section belies the *explicit*, regardless of whether it is understood as a new book or as a continuation of the same book.

If, on the other hand, we include Malory in his own audience, then the colophons provide a metafictional drama that runs parallel to the story of Arthur, Guinevere, Gawain, Tristram, and Lancelot. The colophons make the telling of the story part of the story. The first colophon suggests the possibility that the rest of the story may not exist. Of course, this is a pose; it is fiction. We know that there is more because we can see that there are many more pages in the book. But just as our knowledge that Arthur will not be killed by King Lot and the other Kings who fight against him in the beginning of "King Uther and King Arthur" does not negate the narrative tension that comes from placing Arthur in danger, in the same way our knowledge that the text continues does not undo the narrative tension in the colophon that suggests the chance that the book may simply stop here.

This colophon connects Malory to the Round Table. It gives us some biographical details about the author: "for this was drawyn by a knyght presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré, that God sende hym good recover. Amen" (F 144.2-4; V 1: 180.21-24). Through this colophon we learn the name of the author and his identity both as a knight and as a prisoner. Malory's identity as a knight in the context of *Le Morte Darthur* is obviously significant. Although in reality fifteenth-century knighthood was far removed from the fiction of Arthur's court, Malory is implicitly in the company of the Knights of the Round Table by virtue of being a knight in this book.

The detail that he is prisoner is partly a source of tension that suggests the chance that he may not be able to write any more. Moreover, placing the author in jeopardy or hardship generates sympathy for him. We are implicitly sympathetic to him anyway because his is the voice through which we experience the story, but the detail that he is a

prisoner—that he is in need of help—increases the reader's goodwill. The last phrase of the colophon: "that God sende hym good recover. Amen" (F 144.3-4; V 1: 180.23-24) links Malory's hardship, the reader's goodwill, and the action of God. At this point in the narrative it would be easy to interpret this as nothing more than a pleasantry. It does not necessarily imply that Malory is particularly devout. But there is more to read, and the subsequent colophons show that Malory is either becoming more pious as he writes or he is revealing his piety more clearly.

A Shift in Tone: The Colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney"

The next shift toward Malory's piety happens in the colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney." This colophon is in many ways like the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur." Like the earlier colophon, the colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" mentions that Malory is a prisoner, and likewise does so in the context of an appeal to God: "And I pray you all that redyth this tale to pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende hym good delyveraunce sone and hastely. Amen" (F 288.10-12; V 1: 363.18-20).[21] There is, however, a shift in tone toward earnestness between this colophon and the earlier one. Compared to "King Uther and King Arthur," this colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" increases both the sense of the jeopardy of the author and also the urgency of the appeal to God. The speaker here feels helpless and is seeking aid in any way he can. The help

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21 Caxton's edition omits this portion, and goes directly from summarizing book seven: "Thus endeth this tale ... tyl their lyues ende" (Caxton [1485; 1983] 198.8-12) to the introduction of book eight: "Here foloweth the VIII book..." (Caxton [1485; 1983] 198.13). Caxton includes no information about Malory at this point.

that he is asking for is immediate and pragmatic; he wants literal deliverance from a physical danger. The appeal at the end of "King Uther and King Arthur" is the articulation of a desire, expressed in religious terms, but easy to understand as an expression of a wish rather than an earnest appeal to God. It has the casualness of idiom. The colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney," on the other hand, is an entreaty to the reader. It is neither a formality nor an idiom. If the previous colophon linked the reader's goodwill and God's action, this one makes that connection even more straightforwardly, and suggests that more people praying will have a practical effect upon God and therefore upon Malory's well-being.

The first effect of the shift of tone in the colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" is to engage the reader emotionally in the narrative of Malory the knight prisoner. The colophon then leverages the reader into practical purpose. The relationship between author and reader becomes immediate and reciprocal—the reader can make a real change to the condition of the author. As Hanks has noted, the emotional weight and urgency of the appeal for prayer here makes the religious dimension of the story at once more profound and more earnest (Hanks [2013] 11). The authorial voice has become more emphatic and sincere, and the aforementioned relationship between reader and author depends on a sincerity in the reader, since it is only if the reader engages with the religious context sincerely that he or she will pray for Malory, as the colophon requests.

As with the colophon to "King Arthur and King Uther" this colophon assumes familiarity, but this time it is familiarity with the previous sections of *Le Morte Darthur*. The phrasing, "pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende hym good delyveraunce" (F 288.10-11; V 1: 363.18-20) refers without explanation back to the colophon to "King

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Uther and King Arthur." Malory does not explain again who wrote this, or why he needs deliverance, or from what. Rather, he assumes that readers are familiar with what he has already told them, and he changes the emphasis. In other words, this colophon is part of a developing narrative with the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur." We need the previous colophon to make sense of this one, because it does not stand alone; it is not a discrete statement, but part of a story.

Earnest Prayer: The Colophons to "Sir Tristram de Lyones" and "The Sankgreal"

The colophons continue to increase the earnestness of their appeals to God throughout the text. After "Sir Gareth of Orkney" comes the very long section "Sir Tristram de Lyones," which ends with a colophon that continues the narrative begun in "King Uther and King Arthur." The spiritual emphasis is even stronger in the colophon to "Sir Tristram de Lyones," which leads into the "Sankgreal":

> Here endyth the Secunde Boke off Syr Trystram de Lyones, whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe by Sir Thomas Malleorre, knyght, as Jesu be hys helpe. Amen. But here ys no rehersall of the Thirde Booke. But here folowyth the noble tale off the Sankegreall, whyche called ys the holy vessel and the sygnyfycacion of the Blyssed Bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, whyche was brought into thys londe by Joseph off Aramathye.

Therefore on all synfull, Blyssed Lorde, have on thy knyght mercy. Amen.
(F 664.9-18; V 2: 845.27-846.5)[22]

Here Malory appeals directly to God for help, and the context implies an appeal for mercy on his soul rather than an appeal for immediate practical help. The meaning here is more ambiguous than the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur," in which the author's inability to continue a given story is connected to his imprisonment, and in which the future of the story itself is in jeopardy. The colophon to "Sir Tristram de Lyones" does not suggest that the text is in danger, nor does it directly connect the prayers to Malory's deliverance from prison. If the colophon to "Sir Gareth of Orkney" invites the reader in a spiritually-grounded campaign for Malory's deliverance, the colophon to "Sir Tristram de Lyones" has Malory beseech God for help more earnestly and directly than we have yet seen.

In the process of petitioning God, Malory describes himself as a sinner. In this colophon Malory draws "Sir Tristram de Lyones" to a close, and gives an account of the history of the text, "whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe by Sir Thomas Malleorré, knyght" (F 664.10-11; V 2: 845.28-29). This reaffirms Malory's identity and reestablishes his analogous relationship to Arthur's knights. The sentence about not rehearsing the third book—which would have been the beginning of the *Tristan* version of the Grail quest—does not provide any reason for abandoning of the French prose *Tristan* as a source. It

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22 Caxton's edition is missing the personal details about Malory: "Here endeth the second book of Syr Tristram that was drawen oute of Frensshe into Englysshe, but here is no rehersal of the thyrde book" (Caxton [1485; 1983] 426.35-36).

does not, for example, make any clear connection between the abandonment of this source and Malory's imprisonment. Instead of describing himself as a prisoner, Malory implicitly categorizes himself as "synfull," and declares that he is God's knight. The last sentence of the colophon: "Therefore on all synfull, Blyssed Lorde, have on thy knyght mercy" (F 664.17-18; V 2: 846.4-5) does not, as it stands, make grammatical sense. Caxton has here instead "Therfor on al synful sou[ls] blessid Lord haue Thou mercy" (C 426.39-40).[23] It seems to me that some combination of Caxton's and Winchester's readings is the logical interpretation of the meaning here; we should read something like "Therefore on all synfull [souls], Blessed Lord, [including on thy knyght], have mercy." Malory is including himself in the roster of the sinful.

It does not make sense, then, to understand this as a request only for deliverance from prison. Malory prays God to have mercy on him and on all sinful souls, even though most sinful souls do not require deliverance from prison, they require deliverance from sin. So Malory also, by implication, is asking here for God's general mercy: not (only) for deliverance from prison, but for deliverance from sinfulness.

The context further emphasizes the implication of mercy as forgiveness from sin. Malory says "therefore" have mercy. The "therefore" depends upon "the noble tale off the Sankegreall, whyche called ys the holy vessell and the sygnyfycacion of the Blyssed Bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, whyche was brought into thys londe by Joseph off Aramathye" (F 664.13-16; V 2: 845.32-846.3). Malory implores God to have mercy

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23 The square brackets indicate letters not found in Caxton but inserted by supposition. See Caxton 426, Field's Commentary Volume 2 p.548 n 664.17, Vinaver 846 n. 4-5.

because of either 1) the tale, 2) the fact that the Sankgreal was brought into Britain by Joseph of Aramathea, 3) the "Blyssed Bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste," or 4) all three. The appeal to the blood of Christ is especially compelling. If God's mercy to all sinners is predicated on the tale of the Sankgreal then that implies that God did not have mercy until the tale was written, and places *Le Morte Darthur* on equal footing with the Bible. God's mercy to all sinners being predicated on the transport of the Grail into Britain by Joseph of Aramathea makes even less sense, since there is no reason to expect that the Grail's presence in Britain should be of any particular value to Rome, for example. The appeal is to the blood of Jesus as the reason for God to have mercy on his knight and on all sinful souls.[24] This makes it clear that God's expected mercy is specifically the forgiveness of sins. Malory is not asking for God's merciful deliverance from his imprisonment, or at least, not only. He is asking for God's merciful forgiveness of sins.

Malory's request for forgiveness emphasizes the penitence motif. In addition to ending "Sir Tristram de Lyones," this colophon also transitions into "The Sankgreal" which is to follow, and sets for it the appropriate tone. The authorial voice in this colophon is that of a penitent, at the very moment the text reaches a penitential turning point. Malory accompanies his knights into "The Sankgreal," and the text's emphasis on purity, holiness, and penance thus also applies to the author.

"The Sankgreal" itself ends not only in a prayer for help, but also in a reiteration that the value of the tale itself lies in its holiness: "Thus endith the Tale of the Sankgreall,

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24   Field also emphasizes Malory`s attention to the blood of Christ. (Field [2008] 153-154).

that was breffly drawyn oute of Freynshe into Englysshe – which ys a tale cronycled for one of the trewyst and of the holyest that ys in this worlde – by Sir Thomas Maleorré, knight. O Blessed Jesu, helpe hym thorow hys myght! Amen" (F 789.14-18; V 2: 1037.8-13).[25] The primary emphasis of this colophon is on the virtue of the tale. Read in isolation this colophon only contains a very opaque appeal to Jesus for help. But knowledge of the previous colophons means that we can interpret this appeal in two ways: both as an appeal for deliverance from prison, and as a request for spiritual help.

As both Hanks and Clark have observed, this colophon, in fact, is a prayer.[26] It continues a change in intimacy begun in "Sir Tristram de Lyones" and is marked by a change in implied audience. The colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" referred to both Malory and to God in the third person, as did "Sir Gareth of Orkney," but every colophon beginning with "Sir Tristram de Lyones" refers to God in the second person. The change of persons has two implications. Firstly, as the colophons go on, Malory expresses his relationship with God in more direct and more intimate ways. More than

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25 Caxton's edition is missing the details about Malory: "...the holyest that is in thys world, the whiche is the XVII book" (Caxton [1485; 1983] 505.32-33).

26 See Hanks (10-12) and Clark (97). Neither focus specifically on this colophon, but Hanks argues that all of the colophons that end with "Amen" are "carefully written appeals to God" (Hanks 12), and Clark characterizes all of the colophons that include prayers as being different in kind from those that do not. He labels only those that include prayers "colophons," and others "explicits" (Clark 97) or "transitional phrases" (Clark 98). The difference would be, according to Clark, immediately apparent to listeners.

this, however, a reader, especially one who reads aloud, moves from petitioning a prayer for Malory to actually speaking one. The closing sentence of this colophon "O Blessed Jesu, helpe hym thorow hys myght! Amen" (F 789.18; V 2: 1037.13) is not a request for prayer, it is a prayer, spoken by the reader on Malory's behalf. Tolhurst argues that "by asking his social peers--not priests or hermits--to pray for him, Malory tips the balance toward earthly over heavenly concerns" (131), but I would counter that not only priests can pray, and not only the prayer of priests is valid or heavenly. This colophon and the colophon to "Sir Tristram de Lyonnes" are, as Hanks observes, "carefully written appeals to God, appeals so worded that the act of reading them becomes a prayer for Malory's soul" (Hanks [2013] 12).

Bringing Two Together: The Colophon to "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere"

"Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" begins with Lancelot reintegrating into the Round Table after the Grail quest, and the colophon to "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" also reintegrates the religious perspective back into the world. Malory includes another appeal to Jesus for help in the colophon to "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere": "here on the othir syde folowyth 'The Moste Pyteuous Tale of the Morte Arthure saunz Gwerdon,' par le Shyvalere Sir Thomas Malleorré, Knyght. Jesu ayedé ly pur voutre bone mercy! Amen" (F 869.14-17; V 3: 1154.16-19).[27] This prayer comes after

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27 Caxton's edition ends with "the moost pytous history of the morte of Kynge Arhtur, the whiche is the
     XX books" Caxton [1485; 1983] 554.25-26).

an account of his planned writing process that is much longer than usual, and an account of his reasons for abandoning a source: "bycause I have loste the very mater of le Shevalere de Charyot" (F 869.11-12; V 3: 1154.12-13). The account of what Malory will not write—reminiscent of the account given at the end of "Sir Tristram de Lyones"—is at least partly a reminder of what we learned in the colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur": namely that Malory's ability to write this text is constrained by his status as a knight prisoner. The narrative of Sir Thomas Malory continues here, and it reintegrates Malory's practical need into the spiritual focus that we had in the last two colophons, just as the tale of "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere" brings the spiritual focus of "The Sankgreal" back to the secular court. This does not mean that Malory's attention has shifted away from the sacred, but rather that the text's attention is now on the possibility of bringing the sacred and secular together.

Explicit: The Colophon to "The Morte Arthure"

Finally, the colophon to "The Morte Arthure" repeats and intensifies the religious appeals from the previous colophons:

> Here is the ende of *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*, that whan they were holé togyders there was ever an hondred and fifty. And here is the ende of "Le Morte Darthur".
>
> I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his kynghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge, praye for me

whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good delyveraunce, and when I am

deed, I praye you all praye for my soule.

For this book was ended the ninth yere of the reygne of Kynge Edward

the Fourth [1469-1470], by Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght, as Jesu helpe

hym for Hys grete myght, as he is the servaunt of Jesu bothe day and

nyght. (F 940.17-30; V 3: 1260.16-29)[28]

Malory here repeats the request for prayer that he made in the colophon to "Sir Gareth

of Orkney," but in more emphatic terms, making plain what was previously subtext: the

request for prayer is no longer focused only on deliverance from prison. This colophon

also reaffirms the earlier assertion that he is the servant of Jesus, but adds a causal

dimension: "Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght, as Jesu helpe hym for Hys grete might, as he

is the servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght" (F 940.28-30; V 3: 1260.26-29). The causal

relationship here is a hinge, with Jesus's help as the focal point in the middle. This book

was completed as Jesus helps Malory, or in other words it is through Jesus's help that

the book was completed. And Jesus's help comes because Malory is the servant of Jesus

day and night. In other words, the help is both past and future. The grammar could

suggest that Malory credits his completion of the book to Jesus's help, which he credits

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28 The Winchester manuscript is missing the final gathering, so this colophon exists only in Caxton's

edition. It is impossible to make any definitive statements about what Winchester's final colophon

might have included, but based on the pattern it seems likely that if Winchester's final colophon was

different from Caxton's then Winchester's was more autobiographical, personal, and pious than

Caxton's version.

to his status as Jesus's servant. At the same time it also articulates a prayer to Jesus for help, and gives Malory's status as Jesus's servant as the grounds for that help.

The colophons dramatize the author's growing interest in religion. In the colophons "Malory signals his own presence as author, and moreover his presence as a Christian author engaging in a Christian act" (Hanks [2013] 11). In addition to being structural markers, the colophons thus constitute a narrative about Malory and his growing spiritual focus as a result of his imprisonment. The colophon to "The Morte Darthur" is the most spiritually focused and the most personal of all of the colophons. It builds on and intensifies the growing religious sincerity of "The Sankgreal" and "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere." Both of these two colophons themselves build on what has come before, and assume that the reader is familiar with Malory and his situation; they assume familiarity with the previous colophons. "Sir Tristram de Lyones" and "Sir Gareth of Orkney" both have colophons that, with increasing earnestness, appeal to God for deliverance. The colophon to "King Uther and King Arthur" sets the stage for all the rest of the colophons, both by establishing Sir Thomas Malory, knight prisoner, as a character in his own book, and by suggesting that the future of the book itself in jeopardy.

The colophons make the trajectory of Malory's own religious focus clear, and demonstrate that Malory grows in spiritual interest as *Le Morte Darthur* progresses. It makes sense, then, that Sir Urry of Hungary is much more apparently religious than "Sir Gareth of Orkney," though both of these sourceless sections are conspicuously religiously oriented. Sir Urry of Hungary memorably includes a prayer by Lancelot in which it is clear that Lancelot's religious desire is sincere. It is also laden with religious symbolism. Sir Urry of Hungary is as overtly religious in its focus as the Grail quest is. "Sir Gareth of

Orkney," by contrast, is not transparently religiously oriented, despite its inclusion of details of religious life in Gareth's habitual morning mass. But "Sir Gareth of Orkney" does not stand alone. It is a type which interprets and demands interpretation from "The Sankgreal." Sir Gareth is a figurative precursor to Sir Galahad, and it is as such that the spiritual significance of "Sir Gareth of Orkney" becomes clear. *Le Morte Darthur's* spiritual focus and its religious preoccupation is not an undesired residue from Malory's religious sources; it is a characteristic of those portions of *Le Morte Darthur* of which we have most reason to believe Malory alone was the source.

Table 5.1		
Colophons in Caxton and Winchester		
Caxton Colophons[29]	Winchester Colophons[30]	Preceding Section[31]

But whanne the messager came to Kynge Ryons, thenne was he woode oute of mesure and purueyed hym for a grete hoost, as it rehercyth after in the Book of Balyn le Saueage that foloweth nexte after, how by aduenture Balyn gat the swerd.
      Explicit liber primus.
      Incipit liber secundus.
(Malory [1983] 61)
	But whan the messyge com to the kynge Royns, than was he woode oute of mesure, and purveyde hym for a grete oste, as hit rehersith aftir in the booke of Balyne le saveage that folowith nexte aftir : that was the adventure how Balyne gate the swerde.
	(F 46; V 1: 56; fol. 22r)
		Uther Pendragon and Merlin

Thus endeth the tale of Balyn and of Balan, two bretheren born in Northumberland, good knightes. Sequitur III liber. (Malory [1983] 79)	Thus endith the tale of Balyn and Balan, too brethirne that were borne in Northhumbirlonde, that were too passynge good knyghtes as ever were in tho dayes. Explicit (F 75; V 1: 92; fol. 34r)	Balyn le Sauvage
Explicit the weddynge of Kynge Arthur. Sequitur quartus liber. (Malory [1983] 92)	Explicit the Weddyng of Kyng Arthur (F 98; V 1: 120; fol. 44v)	The Wedding of King Arthur

29 Caxton colophons here are taken from the edition *Caxton's Malory: Le Morte Darthur* as edited by Spisak and Matthews. I have followed Spisak and Matthews for spelling, punctuation, and formatting.

30 Winchester manuscript colophons are taken here from Field's edition of *Le Morte Darthur*, and I have followed Field's spelling, punctuation, and formatting. Field and Vinaver do not always agree, and both make editorial choices on occasion that deviate from the manuscript.

31 This column indicates the section to which the colophon is a conclusion. I have used the section titles editorially supplied by Field, except where the colophon exists only in Caxton, where I have used the section titles editorially provided by Spisak and Matthews.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**Table 5.1**
Colophons in Caxton and Winchester</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit liber quartus.
Incipit liber quintus.
(Malory [1983] 120)</td>
<td>Here endyth this tale, as the Freynshe booke seyth, fro the maryage of Kynge Uther unto Kyng Arthure that regned aftir hym and ded many batayles. And this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams com to courte. Who that woll make ony more lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a knyght presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré, that God sende hym good recover. Amen. Explicit.
(F 143; V 1: 180; fol. 70v)</td>
<td>King Uther and King Arthur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus endeth the fyfthe booke, of theconqueste that Kynge Arthur hadde ageynste Lucius the Emperoure of Rome.
And her foloweth the syxth book, whiche is of Syr Launcelot du Lake.
(Malory [1983] 136)</td>
<td>Here endyth the tale of the noble Kynge Arthure that was emperour hymself thorow dygnyté of his hondys. And here folowyth afftir many noble talys of Sir Launcelot de Lake. Explycit the Noble Tale betwyxt Kynge Arthure and Lucius the Emperour of Rome
(F 189; V 1: 247; fol. 96r)</td>
<td>King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit the noble tale of Syr Launcelot du Lake, whiche is the VI book.
Here foloweth the tale of Syr Gareth of Orkeney, tha twas called Beaumayns by Syr Kay, and is the seuenth book.
(Malory [1983] 157)</td>
<td>Explicit a Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake. Here folowyth Sir Garethis Tale of Orkeney that was callyd Bewmaynes by Sir Kay
(F 222; V 1: 287-293; fol. 113r)[32]</td>
<td>Sir Lancelot du Lake</td>
</tr>
</table>

32   Vinaver here separates the colophon in half, leaving "Explicit a Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake"

on page 287 with the end of "Sir Launcelot du Lake" and putting "Here folowyth Sir Garithis Tale" on

page 293 with the beginning of of "Sir Gareth of Orkney." In the manuscript there is neither a page nor

a line break between the two parts of the colophon. Many scholars, including Carol Meale ([1996] 15

and elsewhere) and Stephen Shepherd in the commentary to his edition of Malory, have noted that

Vinaver sometimes changed the layout of the text without apparent licence from either W or C. In a

footnote in his edition Shepherd claims that "most of Vinaver's titles and breaks have little sanction in

either the Winchester Manuscript or in Caxton's edition" (Shepherd li)

Table 5.1 **Colophons in Caxton and Winchester**		
Here foloweth the VIII book, which is the first book of Sir Tristram de Lyones, and who was his fader and his moder, and hou he was borne and fosteryd, and how he was made knyghte. (Malory [1983] 198)	And I pray you all that redyth this tale to pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende hym good delyveraunce sone and hastely. Amen Here endyth the tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney. (F 288; V 1: 363; fol. 148r)	Sir Gareth of Orkney
Now leue we of Sire Lamorak and of Sir Tristram. And here begynneth the history of La Cote Male Tayle. (Malory [1983] 242)	Here levyth of the tale of Sir Lamerok and of Sir Trystramys, and here begynnyth the tale of Syr La Cote Male Taylé, that was a good knight. (F 359; V 1: 451; fol 186v)	Sir Lamerok de Galys
Soo here endeth this history of this book, for it is the firste book of Sire Tristram de Lyones, and the second book of Sir Tristram foloweth. Here begynneth the second book of Sire Tristram, how Syre Tristram smote doune Kyng Arthur and Sir Vwayne bycause he wold not telle hem wherfor that shelde was made. But to say sothe, Sire Tristram coude not telle the cause, for he knewe it not. (Malory [1983] 292)	So here levith of this booke, for hit ys the firste booke of Sir Trystram de Lyones. And the secunde boke begynnyth where Sir Trystram smote downe Kynge Arthure and Sir Uwayne, bycause why he wolde nat telle hem wherefore that shylde was made. But to sey the soth, Sir Trystram coude nat telle the cause, for he knew hit nat. (F 440-441; V 2: 558-559; fol. 229r)[33]	Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book
	So leve we Sir Trystram and turne we unto Kynge Marke (F 453; V 2: 572; fol. 236r)	The Round Table
	So lette hym passe, and turne we to another tale. (F 514; V 2: 648; fol. 267v)	Alexander the Orphan
	Not turne we from this mater and speke of Sir Trystram, of whom this booke is pryncipall off. And leve we the Kynge and the Quene, and Sir Launcelot, and Sir Lamerok. (F 531; V 2: 670; fol. 277r)	The Tournament at Surluse

33 Field divides this colophon, attaching "So here levith … Trystram de Lyones" to the bottom of page 440 and the end of "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book" and attaching "And the Secunde Boke … knew hit nat" to the top of page 441 and the beginning of "Sir Tristram de Lyones: The Second Book." In the manuscript there is neither a page nor a line break between the two parts of the colophon.

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Table 5.1 **Colophons in Caxton and Winchester**		
Here endeth the tenthe book, whiche is of Syr Tristram. And here foloweth the enleuenth book, whiche is of Sir Launcelot. (Malory [1983] 398)		Adventures of Tristram
Here endeth the enleuenth booke. And here foloweth the telfth book. (Malory [1983] 413)		The Birth of Galahad
	Now woll we leve of thys mater, and speke we off Sir Trystram and of Sir Palomydes that was the Sarezen uncrystynde. (F 657; V 2: 833; fol. 342v)	The Begetting of Galahad
Here endeth the second book of Syr Tristram that was drawen oute of Frensshe into Englysshe, but here is no rehersal of the thyrd book. And here foloweth the noble tale of the Sancgreal, that called is the Hooly vessel and the sygnefycacyon of the blessid blood of our Lord Ihesu Cryste. Blessid mote it be, the whiche was brought into this land by Ioseph of Armathye. Therfor on al synful souls, blessid Lord haue Thou mercy. Explicit liber XII, et incipit decimustercius. (Malory [1983] 426)	Here endyth the Secunde Boke off Syr Trystram de Lyones, whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe by Sir Thomas Malleorre, knyght, as Jesu be hys helpe. Amen. But here ys no rehersall of the Thirde Booke. But here folowyth the noble tale off the Sankegreall, whyche called ys the holy vessel and the sygnyfycacion of the Blyssed Bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, whyche was brought into thys londe by Joseph off Aramathye. Therefore on all synfull, Blyssed Lorde, have on thy knyght mercy. Amen. (F 664; V 2: 845-846; fol. 346v)	Sir Tristram de Lyones
Here leueth of the history of Syr Launcelot. And here foloweth of Syr Percyual de Galys, whiche is the XIIII book. (Malory [1983] 447)	Here levith the tlae of Sir Launcelot and begynnyth of Sir Percyvale de Galis. (F 698; V 2: 899; fol. 364v)	The Miracles
Here endeth the fourtenthe booke, whiche is of Syr Percyual and here foloweth of Syre Lancelot whiche is the fyftenth book. (Malory [1983] 457)	So levith thys tale and turnyth unto sir Launcelot. (F 713; V 2: 920; fol. 371v)	Sir Perceval
Here leueth of the story of Syr Launcelot. And speke we of Sir Gawayne, the whiche is the XVI book (Malory [1983] 463)	Here levith the tale of Sir Launcelot and spekith of Sir Gawayne. (F 722; V 2: 935; 376r)	Sir Launcelot
	Now turnyth thys tale unto Sir Bors de Ganys. (F 730; V 2: 949; fol. 380r)	Sir Gawain

<table>
<thead>
<tr><th colspan="3" align="center">**Table 5.1**
Colophons in Caxton and Winchester</th></tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And thus endeth the syxtenth book, whiche is of Syre Gawayne, Ector de Marys, and Syre Bors de Ganys, and Sir Percyual.
 And here foloweth the seuententh book, whiche is of the noble knyghte Syre Galahad
(Malory [1983] 480)</td>
<td>Now turnyth the tale unto Sir Galahad.
(F 748; V 2: 975; fol. 389r)</td>
<td>Sir Bors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now turnyth thys tale unto Sir Launcelott
(F 769; V 2: 1005; fol. 399r)</td>
<td>Sir Galahad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now leue we this story and speke of Galahad
(Malory [1983] 499)</td>
<td>Now levith thys tale and spekith of Sir Galahad.
(F 778; V 2: 1020; fol. 403v)</td>
<td>The Castle of Corbenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus endeth th'istory of the Sancgreal, that was breuely drawen oute of Frensshe into Englysshe, the whiche is a story cronycled for one of the truest and the holyest that is in thys world, the whiche is the XVII book.
And here foloweth the eyghtenth book.
(Malory [1983] 505)</td>
<td>Thus endith the Tale of the Sankgreall, that was breffly drawyn oute of Freynshe into Englysshe – which ys a tale cronycled for one of the trewyst and of the holyest that ys in this worlde – by Sir Thomas Maleorré, knight. O Blessed Jesu, helpe hym thorow hys myght! Amen
(F 789; V 2: 1037; fol. 409r)</td>
<td>The Sankgreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit liber octodecimus.
And here foloweth liber XIX.
(Malory [1983] 537)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Launcelot and Guenevere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And bycause I haue lost the very mater of La Cheualer du Charyot, I departe from the tale of Sir Launcelot, and here I goo vnto the morte of Kynge Arthur, and that caused Syre Agrauayne.
Explicit liber XIX.
And hereafter foloweth the moost pytous history of the morte of Kynge Arthur, the whiche is the XX book.
(Malory [1983] 554)</td>
<td>And bycause I have loste the very mater of *Shevalere de Charyot*, I departe from the tale of Sir Launcelot; and here I go unto the *Morte Arthur*—and that caused Sir Aggravayne. And here on the othir syde folowyth 'The Moste Pyteuous Tale of the Morte Arthure saunz Gwerdon,' par le Shyvalere Sir Thomas Malleorré, Knyght. Jesu ayedé ly pur voutre bone mercy! Amen
(F 869; V 3: 1154; fol. 449r)</td>
<td>Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenivere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here foloweth the XXI book.
(Malory [1983] 583)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Arthur's War With Launcelot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Table 5.1
Colophons in Caxton and Winchester</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>Here is the ende of The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, that whan they were holé togyders there was ever an hondred and fifty. And here is the ende of "Le Morte Darthur".

I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his kynghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge, praye for me whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good delyveraunce, and whan I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule.

For this book was ended the ninth yere of the reygne of Kynge Edward the Fourth, by Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght, as Jesu helpe hym for Hys grete myght, as he is the servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght. (Malory [1983] 599-600)</td>
<td>(F 940; V 3: 1260)[34]</td>
<td>The Morte Arthure</td>
</tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Table 5.2
Colophons of Le Morte Darthur by Type</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Type Ia: Simple</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding of King Arthur
(F 98; V 1: 120; fol. 44v)</td>
<td>Explicit the Weddyng of Kyng Arthur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Tristram de Lyones: The First Book
(F 440; V 2: 558-559; fol. 229r)</td>
<td>So here levith of this booke, for hit ys the firste booke of Sir Trystram de Lyones.</td>
</tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">   Simple (Transition)</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Lamerok de Galys
(F 359; V 1: 451; fol 186v)</td>
<td>Here levyth of the tale of Sir Lamerok and of Sir Trystramys, and here begynnyth the tale of Syr La Cote Male Taylé, that was a good knight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Lancelot du Lake
(F 222; V 1: 287-293; fol. 113r)</td>
<td>Explicit a Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake. Here folowyth Sir Garethis Tale of Orkeney that was callyd Bewmaynes by Sir Kay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Round Table</td>
<td>So leve we Sir Trystram and turne we unto Kynge Marke</td>
</tr>
</table>

34 The final folios of the Winchester manuscript are missing. As a result, our only source for this colophon

is in Caxton's edition, but both Vinaver and Field included it in their editions.

(F 453; V 2: 572; fol. 236r)	
The Tournament of Surluse (F 531; V 2: 670; fol. 277r)	So lette hym passe, and turne we to another tale.
The Tournament at Surluse (F 531; V 2: 670; fol. 277r)	Not turne we from this mater and speke of Sir Trystram, of whom this booke is pryncipall off. And leve we the Kynge and the Quene, and Sir Launcelot, and Sir Lamerok.
The Begetting of Galahad (F 657; V 2: 833; fol. 342v)	Now woll we leve of thys mater, and speke we off Sir Trystram and of Sir Palomydes that was the Sarezen uncrystynde.
The Miracles (F 698.11-12; V 2: 899; fol. 364v)	Here levith the tale of Sir Launcelot and begynnyth of Sir Percyvale de Galis.
Type Ib: Simple With Summary	
Balyn le Sauvage (F 75; V 1: 92; fol. 34r)	Thus endith the tale of Balyn and Balan, too brethirne that were borne in Northhumbirlonde, that were too passynge good knyghtes as ever were in tho dayes. Explicit
Simple With Summary (Transition)	
King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius (F 189; V 1: 247; fol. 96r)	Here endyth the tale of the noble Kynge Arthure that was emperour hymself thorow dygnyté of his hondys. And here folowyth afftir many noble talys of Sir Launcelot de Lake. Explycit the Noble Tale betwyxt Kynge Arthure and Lucius the Emperour of Rome
Type II: Complex	
King Uther and King Arthur (F 143; V 1: 180; fol. 70v)	Here endyth this tale, as the Freynshe booke seyth, fro the maryage of Kynge Uther unto Kyng Arthure that regned aftir hym and ded many batayles. And this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams com to courte. Who that woll make ony more lette hym seke other bookis of Kynge Arthure or of Sir Launcelot or Sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a knyght presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré, that God sende hym good recover. Amen. Explicit.
Sir Gareth of Orkney (F 288; V 1: 363; fol. 148r)	And I pray you all that redyth this tale to pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende hym good delyveraunce sone and hastely. Amen Here endyth the tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney
Sir Tristram de Lyones (F 664; V 2: 846; fol. 346v)	Here endyth the Secunde Boke off Syr Trystram de Lyones, whyche drawyn was oute of Freynshe by Sir Thomas Malleorre, knyght, as Jesu be hys helpe. Amen. But here ys no rehersall of the Thirde Booke. But here folowyth the noble tale off the Sankegreall, whyche called ys the holy vessel and the sygnyfycacion of the Blyssed Bloode off Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, whyche was brought into thys londe by Joseph off Aramathye. Therefore on all synfull, Blyssed Lorde, have on thy knyght mercy. Amen.
The Sankgreal (F 789; V 2: 1037; fol. 409r)	Thus endith the Tale of the Sankgreall, that was breffly drawyn oute of Freynshe into Englysshe – which ys a tale cronycled for one of the trewyst and of the holyest that ys in this worlde – by Sir Thomas Maleorré, knight. O Blessed Jesu, helpe hym thorow hys myght! Amen
Sir Launcelot and Queen	And bycause I have loste the very mater of *Shevalere de Charyot*, I departe from the

Table 5.2	
Colophons of *Le Morte Darthur* by Type	
Guenivere (F 869; V 3: 1154; fol. 449r)	tale of Sir Launcelot; and here I go unto the *Morte Arthur—*and that caused Sir Aggravayne. And here on the othir syde folowyth 'The Moste Pyteuous Tale of the Morte Arthure saunz Gwerdon,' par le Shyvalere Sir Thomas Malleorré, Knyght. Jesu ayedé ly pur voutre bone mercy! Amen
The Morte Arthure (F 940; V 3: 1260; C XXI:13)	Here is the ende of *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*, that whan they were holé togyders there was ever an hondred and fifty. And here is the ende of "Le Morte Darthur". I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his kynghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge, praye for me whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good delyveraunce, and whan I am deed, I praye you all praye for my soule. For this book was ended the ninth yere of the reygne of Kynge Edward the Fourth, by Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght, as Jesu helpe hym for Hys grete myght, as he is the servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Kristeva's concept of intertextuality both give us a useful lens through which to interpret *Le Morte Darthur,* and especially its cohesiveness as a text. Kristeva argues that the carnivalesque, her favourite form of intertextuality, occurs when "two texts meet, contradict, and relativize each other" (Kristeva [1980] 78). The meaning of each text is only comprehensible in light of the other. This, it seems to me, is exactly what happens between the most apparently irreconcilable sections of *Le Morte Darthur*.

A critical argument about *Le Morte Darthur* faces two hurdles that seem paradoxically opposite, but are in fact two sides of the same coin. The first is the question of unity. My Introduction began addressing this question, but it remains an undercurrent in Malory scholarship. If *Le Morte Darthur* is not a single text then it is difficult to develop a cohesive and coherent reading of it. It seems inevitable that any reading of *Le Morte Darthur* must remain fundamentally fragmentary, because the text itself is fractured. The second, and related, hurdle is the question of originality. We know that much of what we call "Malory's" *Le Morte Darthur* was not original to him. Whole sections, most notably "The Sankgreal" and "Sir Tristan de Lyones," derive their content from elsewhere because they are translations from French, and other sections, like "King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius" are largely taken from earlier English sources. So much of what we perceive in *Le Morte Darthur* may be an unconscious or unintended echo of ideas that made their way undetected from his sources, rather than a reflection of the

text's own perspective. An argument based on fragments derived from Malory's sources may be more fruitfully engaging with those sources than with *Le Morte Darthur* itself. I have argued that Malory's text is religious, but this argument is problematic when 1) only parts of it are, and 2) a lot of the religion comes to *Le Morte Darthur* from elsewhere. I suggest leaping over both of these hurdles at once by recognizing the intertextuality both within the text and between the text and its sources. The theoretical basis for critically reading the text as unified also helps to explain its devotional and religious dimensions.

Why Religion Matters to *Le Morte Darthur*

There can be no question that *Le Morte Darthur* has religious content, but there has been much critical disagreement about what the religion of *Le Morte Darthur* means. Vinaver seems to conclude that since Christianity was ubiquitous in the middle ages its presence is irrelevant. In fifteenth-century Britain Christianity was the normative and dominant culture, so that Christian imagery and language is commonplace. We might be tempted to consider the Christianity in *Le Morte Darthur* to be mere ideological white noise: a cultural background without specific significance. I have not found any critics who argue that *Le Morte Darthur* is actively, radically, counter-culturally anti-Christian; the most secularist readings of *Le Morte Darthur* suggest that it is a text indifferent to religion, not hostile to it. But I have argued that the text is by no means indifferent to Christianity. The crucial conflict in *Le Morte Darthur* is the ideological conflict between piety and politics.

Even C. S. Lewis, who argued as forcefully as anyone for the relevance of religion in *Le Morte Darthur*, underestimates the importance of Christianity to the world-view of *Le Morte Darthur*. Lewis considered it to be a "paradox" that the author of a book that he considered to be spiritually sensitive was also "little better than a criminal" (Lewis [1963] 7). He attempts to resolve this paradox by conjecturing that Malory's crimes were not in fact as bad as they seem to be: that the "rape" Malory is accused of might well have been abduction not sexual assault, and even that the abduction may have been a rescue from an abusive husband. That may be, but in his position that Malory's spirituality is paradoxically at odds with a violent past, Lewis understates the significance of penance and redemption in *Le Morte Darthur*. The redemption and penance arc of the final sections of *Le Morte Darthur* suggests that Malory has a clear awareness of sin. Galahad, who has nothing to repent of and no significant regrets, could not have written—or even been made to understand—Lancelot's tears over Urry's healing, or Arthur's regret-filled end, or Guinevere's penitential retreat into the convent. Still less could he have written the colophons. But the author of *Le Morte Darthur* understands violence and vice, and that understanding does not conflict with a Christian world-view. The twentieth-century Swiss theologian Karl Barth reportedly once quipped "only Christians sin."[35] Without Christianity Malory might call himself a bad man, but could not call himself "synful" (F 664.17; V 2: 846.4). Malory understands penance because he understands sin.

Le Morte Darthur gets more religious as it goes, and its engagement with the conflict between piety and politics evolves too. First the text discovers the conflict, and

35 Quoted by William Willimon, p. 270.

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then it resolves it. The earliest movements of *Le Morte Darthur* evince no discord between religion and politics. The sword in the stone appears in a churchyard, establishes Arthur as king, and is authorized by both Merlin and the Archbishop of Canterbury. All the parts work together. But by "Sir Balin le Sauvage" the various ideologies and loyalties in the text are at odds with each other. And the text resolves the conflict between piety and politics—between sacred and secular—by concluding that they are mutually exclusive and favouring the sacred calling.[36]

In the Grail quest especially, Malory lays out two models of piety: Galahad and Lancelot. Both of these models are appropriate to fifteenth-century lay chivalric piety. Galahad and Lancelot both demonstrate the divorce between secular power and piety, with Galahad dying to avoid entanglements in the world and Lancelot engaged in a protracted struggle against it. Neither Galahad nor Lancelot is drawn with a high degree of theological nuance; both enact a prioritization of personal and introspective piety over intellectual theological correctness. This doesn't just mean that neither Galahad nor Lancelot are intellectuals, but also that neither are intellectually-focused allegorical figures, but both represent a fifteenth-century mix of introspection and chivalric honour. Throughout the final sections of *Le Morte Darthur* Lancelot transforms from a symbolic representation of chivalry into a symbolic representation of penitential piety. This shift to a religious focus is most obvious in Lancelot, but it is characteristic of the text as a whole.

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36   Mahoney makes a similar argument, though she concludes that "the Tale of the Sankgreal does not negate the heroic-chivalric values of the *Morte Darthur* as a whole" (Mahoney124). Hodges ([2005] 126) argues that religious chivalry is incompatable with political chivalry, but concludes that Malory carefully avoids prioritizing any kind of chivalry over any other.

Malory's Grail knights are defined by their holiness. Like saints, their holiness sets them apart and makes them examples both to the other characters within their story and to readers. Caxton presented the *Le Morte Darthur* as a moral exemplar for readers. In "The Sankgreal" and in the characters of the Grail knights in particular, the text sets forth a model that is not only chivalric and moral; it is above all spiritual.

The 2013 volume *Malory and Christianity*, edited by D. Thomas Hanks Jr. and Janet Jesmok, attempts to address a critical gap in Malory studies by "reintroduc[ing] into Malory scholarship an extended discussion on the importance of Christianity in Malory's work" (Hanks and Jesmok [2013] 3). This study joins that developing conversation, in the hopes of further addressing that same critical gap. The introduction to *Malory and Christianity* remarks that "neither the intensity nor the nature of Sir Thomas Malory's individual religious life is discernible at this distance in time" (Hanks [2013] 3). Yet I would suggest that there are clues to Malory's individual religious life present in *Le Morte Darthur*—especially in the colophons. More to the point, though, Malory's individual religious life is only relevant to the degree that it can be discerned in the text. What we find in the colophons is a portrait of a knight who responds to personal adversity and guilt by intensifying his religious convictions.

We can see the importance of religion in *Le Morte Darthur* meta-textually in the structure of the narrative, as the text becomes more and more interested in religion as it goes on. We can see it in the development of the characters. Galahad, Lancelot, Guinevere, Arthur, Percival, Bors, Gawain, Gareth, Aggravain, Mordred, and Merlin: all of the characters of *Le Morte Darthur* dramatize the conflict—or potential conflict— between politics and piety. We can see it in how the religiously significant moments from

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the later sections of *Le Morte Darthur* are the culmination of earlier sections, so that, for example, in Galahad the text in many ways recreates Gareth, but with a new dimension. We can see it in the sections Malory apparently invented, like "The Healing of Sir Urry," in which Sir Lancelot wrestles with his own piety, and is simultaneously rewarded and chastised by God. We see it in Malory's choice of sources: he chose to use the religiously-focused *Queste del Saint Graal* as his source for "The Sankgreal," instead of using the more secular sources which were available to him. We can see it in the colophons, in which Malory displays his personal religious growth. *Le Morte Darthur* dramatizes Sir Thomas Malory's examination of the conflict between religious and political demands, and his conclusion that when all is said and done, religious obligation outweighs political duty.

The late nineteenth-century image of the Middle Ages as an undifferentiated sea of uncritical Christendom has, one would hope, been long since exploded. Not all medieval literature is necessarily religious, but the corollary of that is that we cannot dismiss the religious dimensions of medieval literature as unimportant-because-ubiquitous. The religious aspects of *Le Morte Darthur* are real and they are specific. They belong to this text, not only to its general cultural milieu, and acknowledging that is part of taking the text and its greater context seriously.

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