The Book of Kyng Arthur: The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur

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The Book of Kyng Arthur

The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur

CHARLES MOORMAN
to

R. M. LUMIANSKY

“Wher is,” he sayd, “ße gouernour of þis gyng?”

—Sir Gawain and the
  Green Knight
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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When chapter 3 of this volume was published in one of the learned journals, an eminent American Malorian wrote me that he questioned whether the problem of Sir Thomas Malory's intent in writing the *Morte Darthur*, either conscious or unconscious, could ever really be settled.

This book will provide, I hope, at least a partial answer to his question. I intend (and of my intentions at least we can all be sure) to demonstrate in so far as it is possible to do so from the evidence at hand that Malory had a clearly-defined purpose in mind—to write a single, unified history of Arthur's reign. And he further intended, I am confident, that that history was to point, as Caxton realized, a nobly conceived and convincingly executed theme—the rise, flowering, and downfall of a well-nigh perfect civilization.

Malory's history, no matter what he intended to call it (and the traditional *Morte Darthur* would probably have struck him, as it struck Caxton, as being entirely adequate), was also to be complete within itself: it was to contain all that was needed for its reader to understand the forces which
contribute to the decay and destruction of the court and to the twisted motives of the central figures; it was to assimilate whatever of the old chronicles and romances was necessary for accomplishing its purpose; and it was to adapt and change whenever adaptation and change could fit an old tale to Malory's design. In short, and this may seem heretical, I can see little difference—in method, of course, not in genius—between Malory and the writer of "historical" novels. Both use and adapt old material to tell a tale, and both are constrained to respect the larger pattern, if not always the exact narrative line, which the old material has imposed upon their creations.

I have accused myself of heresy; fifteen years ago I would not have had to use so strong a term. But Malory criticism has undergone a great revolution since 1947, and some knowledge of that change may be desirable here. Until 1947, all editions of Malory were merely edited copies of William Caxton's printed edition of 1485. But in 1934, Walter Oakeshott, then librarian of the Moberly Library of Winchester College, discovered what proved to be a manuscript copy of Malory's book containing a much fuller version of the Morte Darthur than Caxton's volume supplied and plainly antedating it.¹

The Oxford University Press consigned the editing of the new Winchester manuscript to Professor Eugène Vinaver of the University of Manchester who was then in the process of reediting Caxton for the same press and who had himself written a small volume on Malory (interestingly enough, by the way, defending the unity of the Morte Darthur) in 1929. The finished edition in three large volumes appeared in 1947, and although Professor Vinaver had worked wonders (though at times controversial wonders) with Malory's text, dividing it into eight large sections (called "tales") and convenient smaller chapters—a far more flexible arrangement than Caxton's twenty-one books—and printing conversation
in the modern style, his introductions, both to the work itself and to its eight large sections, and his notes comparing Malory's text with its sources advanced a totally unexpected and radically original view of the *Morte Darthur*.

Essentially, Vinaver maintained, absolutely contradicting his view in his 1929 volume, that Malory's *Morte Darthur* was not only not a unified work, but was not even a single work. It was instead, Vinaver stated, a collection of eight separate romances, each of which was conceived by its author as an individual tale and was intended by him to stand apart from his other romances and from any unified Arthurian history. Malory, said Vinaver, "did not try, as others have done since, to fuse all his French books into a single Arthurian epic. What he endeavored to do was to extract from them a series of short and well-defined tales." The notion, he went on, that Malory had written a single book was deliberately invented by Caxton; "not only did he rephrase the text, depriving it of some of its original flavour, but he tried to make his readers believe that the volume he published was a single work. To make it appear more homogeneous he gave it a general title, *Le Morte Darthur*, . . . deleted the colophons at the end of each of Malory's romances except the last, and ironed out certain stylistic inconsistencies."

This book stands opposed to the Vinaver thesis. It may seem at first sight that no refutation is really needed, that the connections and transitions within the *Morte Darthur*, especially in the later sections where Malory's skill had taught him to avoid the awkwardnesses of those early bridges, themselves refute the theory of Malory's having composed eight separate romances. Yet not only did the early reviewers accept Vinaver's analysis almost without question, but his influence is clearly perceptible (and indeed the truth of his thesis is simply assumed) in such later and widely-circulated works as Muriel Bradbrook's pamphlet on Malory published
by the British Council in 1958 and Roger Lancelyn Green's children's version of the story in Penguin Books. And I am sure that a great many scholars and teachers and, Heaven knows, graduate students are convinced by the authority of those three imposing volumes and by the sight of the eight romances already neatly separated before them and even by the implications of Vinaver's own title with its glaring plural, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory. More than one of Malory's editors might well lay claim to the "symple con-nynge that God hath sente" him.4

And in spite of all the criticism directed against the extremeness of his point of view,5 Professor Vinaver has given no indication that he intends to modify his theory in any material fashion; in fact, he seems at times since 1947 to have reasserted his position in even stronger terms. For example, the last tale, the Morte proper, which he had once grudgingly admitted formed with book vii a "coherent whole" (p. lxxx), he now maintains was actually composed by Malory in such a self-contained manner that "the action, freed from links with the other branches of the cycle, no longer depended for its effect upon the reader's memory of earlier episodes,"6 which is, from my point of view, rather like saying that one may read profitably only the last act of Hamlet. One may of course read either the Morte Darthur or Hamlet in this piecemeal fashion, but I doubt that he was ever intended to. And while in the recent symposium edited by J. A. W. Bennett, Vinaver admits that "occasional references to what is going to happen in a later work or to what has happened already in an earlier one" may exist and may be dug out and exhibited by "compilers of concordances" and "Ph.D. candidates" as "precious finds," it nevertheless "does not matter . . . whether they are of Malory's own making or whether they come straight from his sources,"7 since they do not affect the separate nature of the eight tales.

Yet I would hope that this small volume might be con-
sidered apart from the Vinaver thesis. Certainly no one needs an excuse to consider the unity of a writer whose book has inspired and influenced twenty generations of English authors from Spenser to Lerner and Loewe. And I do not mean this book to be taken as anything resembling a point-by-point refutation and correction of the innumerable inaccuracies and points of contention contained in the “Commentary” which accompanies Vinaver’s text, most of which are “matters of interpretation” resulting from “Vinaver’s misconstruction of the idiom of Malory’s language, sometimes from his neglect of the context of the episode he is commenting on, or sometimes simply from a misreading of Malory’s text.” These inaccuracies are being steadily corrected, item by item, in the learned journals by scholars such as R. M. Lumiansky, Thomas C. Rumble, and R. H. Wilson.

But this volume, although it most gratefully makes use of these articles and although it recognizes the fact that the case for the unity of Malory’s book will eventually rest most securely upon the detailed analysis of its many contested passages, nevertheless attempts to be more positive-minded and more generally stated than pure refutation can afford to be, and this seems to me to be the proper course to steer in a book as distinct from a series of articles. I am thus attempting here to state the case for unity in Malory in terms general enough to be meaningful and particular enough to be convincing. I have tried always to hold in mind the threat of the “single romances” theory even though I have not always applied my arguments directly to it.

For example, R. M. Lumiansky says, and rightly so, that Vinaver’s case rests “primarily, upon his interpretation of the explicit which appear at the ends of large sections in the Winchester manuscript; and secondarily, upon his reading of certain apparent inconsistencies within Malory’s work.” The first of these objections has, I hope, been
thoroughly overcome by the demonstrations by Helen I. Wroten and Lumiansky that Malory’s explicits are always more transitional than terminal in nature\(^{10}\) and by the really brilliant analysis by Thomas C. Rumble of the language of the first explicit,\(^{11}\) the only one of the seven, by the way, which even superficially seems to divide tale from tale in any definite manner. The second of Vinaver’s arguments, that which stems from inconsistencies in narrative detail, I have tried to answer in chapter 1. I hope that my general strategy will be apparent even there. That chapter destroys successfully, as I trust it does, Vinaver’s argument is really of secondary importance; its primary function is to demonstrate something quite basic about the way in which Malory goes about achieving unity in the *Morte Darthur*.

That word “unity,” the key word throughout this book, needs defining. Lumiansky distinguishes two kinds of unity applicable to Malory, “critical” and “historical.” The difference is mainly one of intent. The *Morte Darthur* may possess critical unity whether or not Malory intended it: “... Malory wrote one book which certainly should be read and examined ... as a critical unity; in this fashion both general readers and students have happily accepted the work for centuries.”\(^{12}\) Historical unity, on the other hand, demands that the writer consciously intended that critical unity demonstrated in his book, that Malory “from the beginning of his writing meant to produce a comprehensive and unified treatment of the Arthurian legend.”\(^{13}\)

Such a distinction makes possible at least three clearly-defined attitudes towards unity in Malory and probably a number of variations of each of the three: first, that the *Morte Darthur* contains neither historical nor critical unity, and this, as I understand it, is essentially Vinaver’s position; second, that the book has critical but not historical unity, that it somehow had unity thrust upon it well along in the process of composition, and this is the rather conservative
point of view put forward by a number of responsible Malorians, by R. H. Wilson, Helaine Newstead, Robert Ackerman, and D. S. Brewer. A third possibility, the one advanced by this study, is that the *Morte Darthur* evidences both historical and critical unity, that Malory did in fact plan a "comprehensive and unified treatment of the Arthurian legend," and this is the view steadily maintained by R. M. Lumiansky and Thomas C. Rumble.

It had better be admitted straight away that in the absence of external evidence, historical unity *per se* is almost impossible to demonstrate in any work of literature, especially in those of the Middle Ages, where borrowings and adaptations of traditional plots and motifs crept into every work simply because the reader expected them to be there. Much of the strength of Vinaver's argument, therefore, lies in the fact that it is simply not possible with Malory's book, as it is with, say, *The Ambassadors*, complete with explanatory New York Edition preface, to demonstrate by purely historical arguments the conscious evolution of the *Morte Darthur* from plot-germ to novel. For Malory, whether or not he would have agreed with James's seminal principle, was essentially rewriting and reshaping traditional material (albeit, I think, according to a principle of thematic growth), rather than composing directly "from nature," and his plan and method of composition, though not necessarily his aim, must thus have been vastly different from those of the contemporary novelist who may create his own fabric to suit his intent, rather than reweave another's.

This initial difficulty in approaching the question of unity in Malory is augmented enormously, moreover, by our lack of certain knowledge concerning his immediate sources. We know, of course, generally what they were. Of the eight tales, the second, "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius," was probably composed first; Malory's source for it was the fourteenth-century English alliterative poem, the *Morte Arthure*,
and in many places in this second book, the reader will detect very strongly the old alliterative beat just beneath Malory’s prose. For what is now called his first tale, “The Book of King Arthur,” Malory turned to a French source, the *Suite du Merlin* or *Huth Merlin* as it is sometimes called, which is a late rewriting of a portion of the thirteenth-century Old French Prose *Vulgate Cycle* and was a part of the Grail-oriented Pseudo-Robert de Borron Prose Cycle.14 With book 111, “The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot de Lake,” Malory turned to two incidents in the Prose *Lancelot*, a part of the thirteenth-century Old French Prose *Vulgate Cycle* proper. This vast compendium is probably of multiple authorship and consists of five parts, called “branches.” The three original branches of the work are the Prose *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Mort Artu*, each of which represents the culmination of one of the three great lines of development within the Arthurian legend: the courtly, the religious, and the chronicle. The other two branches represent expansions of these originals in the form of long accounts of the events that preceded those of the original three. Thus the *Estoire del Graal* is a preliminary to the *Queste* and the *Estoire du Merlin* a preliminary to the *Mort Artu*. Taken together, they contain, in a loose, disjointed form, nearly all of the popular Arthurian adventures, and Malory draws on them heavily in the composition of his work. There is no known source for book iv, the “Gareth.” For his fifth tale, Malory turned to some form, now lost, of the thirteenth-century Prose *Tristan*, but returned to the Vulgate Cycle *Queste del Saint Graal* for the sixth tale. The seventh and eighth books, that of “Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere” and the “Morte Arthur” itself, are drawn for the most part from the Vulgate Cycle *Mort Artu* supplemented by the English fifteenth-century stanzaic poem, *Morte Arthur*, though for many of the passages, notably “The Great Tournament” and “The Healing of Sir Urry” in book vii, there are no
sources, and "The Knight of the Cart" in book vii is derived from the Prose Lancelot.

It would seem that since even this much is known of Malory’s sources, the most obviously applicable, and one would think the safest, critical technique would be that of comparing the Morte Darthur, line by line and book by book, with its immediate sources in order to isolate and so discover in as many instances as possible the purpose of Malory’s source additions and alterations. Yet though such a procedure, taken along with other techniques, is of immense value in reading Malory, it is not always possible, nor is it ever wholly safe, to apply this method of approach without reservation to the study of the Morte Darthur. For we can never be sure of just what the book lying open before Malory looked like. We are in no instance perfectly certain of having Malory’s exact source, but only of having versions of his sources, in some cases (e.g. book ii) quite close to the book Malory used, in others (e.g. book v) hypothetical and remote. And, of course, for certain crucial passages there are no known sources whatsoever. Moreover, Malory, especially in the later books, at times uses a number of sources at once and uses them with such freedom and originality that one is never wholly sure just what is source and what is Malory. And there is always the disturbing possibility that what we think to be original passages in the midst of adaptations may themselves simply be the intrusions of unknown sources. So that even if it were possible to determine historical unity, the writer’s clear intent, in any work of fiction from source comparison alone, it would, taken by itself, hardly be a valid procedure with the Morte Darthur, where our knowledge of the sources is, to put the best possible construction on it, incomplete.

But even if there were available exact copies of Malory’s sources, we could never demonstrate historical or even critical unity by the results of source comparison alone. Vinaver
himself is perfectly willing to admit that the process of “separating all that is creditable to [Malory] from whatever he may have borrowed,” useful as such a technique is, does not answer all the questions that the critic must rightfully ask.\textsuperscript{17} D. S. Brewer is perfectly correct in maintaining that the distinction in Malory between “what is derived and what is personal . . . cannot affect our final judgment on the total work of art, which must be judged in its own right, as a whole, obeying its own laws, holding and shaping the reader’s imagination by its own power.”\textsuperscript{18} The student of Malory must begin with source study, of course, but he must remember that Malory not only deleted, enlarged, and altered, he also simply copied, and that those passages which he copied, those things he left as he found them in his sources, are as much an index to his intentions as those items he changed, though they are necessarily more difficult to work with. Malory’s placing of old material within a new context, for example, is of tremendous importance in the study of the *Morte Darthur*. This study attempts to use the techniques of source study, but to avoid the temptation of constantly turning away from Malory to his sources, and to see the *Morte Darthur* as a critical whole rather than as a patchwork quilt of translation and alteration.

The difficulty of demonstrating the historical unity of the *Morte Darthur* is further complicated by the absence of any really helpful biographical data concerning the writer. He has been identified as a particular Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel, Warwickshire, who was born sometime in the first quarter of the fifteenth century and died on March 14, 1471.\textsuperscript{19} The major connection between this Warwickshire knight and the author of the *Morte Darthur* lies in the fact that the Malory of the *Morte Darthur* refers to himself as a “knyght presoner” and the Malory of Newbold Revel spent a great portion of his adult life in prison for a number of crimes including theft, cattle, horse, and sheep rustling,
extortion, rape, and failure to pay his debts, the dates of imprisonment agreeing for the two men. But we have absolutely no information regarding Malory's literary career; we cannot learn from history why he began to write, or how he regarded his subject, or what his work habits were, or whether he had either the inclination or the opportunity to revise early sections of his work in the light of later experience, or even what hopes, if any, he had for his book. There is not one shred of evidence outside of the *Morte Darthur* to show that Malory intended to write a single, unified book, though, of course, there is also equally no evidence to disprove it.

A third difficulty in demonstrating satisfactorily the historical and, for that matter, the critical unity of the *Morte Darthur* lies in the mixed attitudes of scholars and critics toward the problem of artistic unity in works of medieval literature generally. It is demonstrably true, I think, that a number of students of medieval literature, reacting against the excessive emphasis on unity in much modern criticism have found in the wandering plots and digressive speeches of the romances a welcome change from the modern novel in which every mark of punctuation is fiercely assigned a place in the "architectonic integrity" of the work. They have thus stoutly defended the medieval poem against all efforts to show that it might occasionally boast an objective *persona* or image clusters or an archetypal myth pattern. We are constantly told, therefore, that medieval writers knew nothing about, could not indeed have imagined, a work having unity in the modern Brooks-and-Warren sense of the term and that medieval audiences actually preferred their poems episodic and disunified. C. S. Lewis, for example, whose opinion certainly carries enormous weight, asks if "any Middle English author [could] conceive clearly that he was writing fiction, a single work of fiction, which should obey the laws of its own inner unity but need not cohere with
anything else in the world?” and he answers his own question with “I cannot believe it.” And D. S. Brewer, writing in the same volume, agrees that “obviously unity here [in the Morte Darthur] cannot mean structural unity of a kind we expect from a modern novel, or that we find in an ancient epic.”

But even those critics who are predisposed to see, or at least to search for, unity in medieval works are immediately put off by what they find. For superficially at least the more conservative critics are right: most medieval literature is diffuse, its plots episodic and disjointed, its speeches digressive. Dazzled by the brilliant unity of Madame Bovary or The Wings of the Dove, one cannot always see the dimmer, but none the less real, motifs that bind together and unify the apparently haphazard actions and motifs of Chrétien and Malory.

Thus Vinaver’s claim that Malory intended to write eight books rather than one frankly cannot be historically disproved. Had we the exact books from which Malory worked or more precise information about his literary habits or even some general agreement about the canons of medieval literature, some “proof” might be forthcoming. But as the situation now stands, and is likely to remain standing, Professor Vinaver’s theory is safe from any scientifically demonstrable refutation. One cannot prove incontrovertibly from the evidence at hand that Malory set out with a definite plan to write a unified work. But neither can one, using the same evidence, wholly disprove it. Thus, because of the absence of positive information about sources and biography and literary technique, one is thrown back on the work, and on the basis of the internal evidence of the Morte Darthur itself, I would argue that a reasonable case can be made for both critical and historical unity in Malory’s book.

Certainly, aside from Professor Vinaver, no one would seriously deny to the Morte Darthur some degree of critical unity, especially in the later tales, and here I should like to
bring forward a familiar distinction, relevant here, between two kinds of critical unity—mechanical and organic. Coleridge discerned quite clearly that a work might have mechanical unity in the arrangement of its parts without having organic unity in the formation of its whole structure. Now mechanical unity, as its name implies, is simply a joining together from the outside of incident, character, image, whatever, in a precise, workmanlike fashion so that part fits easily with part and the whole functions as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. This kind of unity, I think we should all, with the exception of Professor Vinaver, grant to Malory. D. S. Brewer, for example, when he states that Malory's book has "cohesion" and that Malory's "tales" must be read in their present order is simply asserting the mechanical unity of the *Morte Darthur*. The *Morte Darthur* is, in fact, full of evidences of this kind of mechanical fitting together of incident. The Grail quest which forms book vi is, for example, prepared for as far back as book i in the prophecies of Merlin and throughout book v in the adventures of Lancelot and Bors and in the begetting of Galahad. The five major adventures of book vii are, as R. M. Lumiansky has shown, built one on the other in a rising pattern of suspense leading to the killing of Gareth and the final shattering of the court. The whole chronology of book v is, as we shall see, so arranged as to overlap very carefully with certain events in the other books. These are all kinds, albeit different kinds, of mechanical unity, and they, along with dozens of other such instances, bear witness to Malory's foresight and skill.

Organic unity as defined by Coleridge is quite another matter, however. For, as its name implies, organic unity is the unity of living things, and though it includes within its definition mechanical unity, it is different in kind as well as in degree. Organic unity is not arranged from without, but decreed from within by a seminal principle of growth. In
Coleridgean terms, mechanical unity is the work of the "Fancy," which is simply the "aggregative and associative power" of the mind, but organic unity is the product of the "Imagination," which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate."\(^{24}\)

Such a priori definitions can of course be applied too freely, and certainly no one would assert that Coleridge had in any sense a medieval outlook on literature or on the world. Yet Coleridge and Malory—and Chaucer and Dante and the *Pearl*-poet—are all creators of literature, and the processes of art and creation, if not always their products, do not vary greatly from age to age. Thus without making Malory into a Romantic, we can perhaps profit from looking at his book through Coleridge's eyes. Again, let me quote from Professor Brewer: the *Morte Darthur* closes, he says, "with a final *explicit*, which hammers home the essential unity of conception that has underlain the *whole book*." And, he continues: "The whole book is bound together in various ways: by the unity of atmosphere and the continuous moral concern; by the chronological continuity of the main events and characters . . . ; by significant references back and forward to important characters and events; and by links between the various tales."\(^{25}\) While a number of these items refer of course to the mechanical unity of the book (the "links," "the continuity of the main events," and the "references back and forward"), the rest—the unity of "conception" and "atmosphere," the "continuous moral concern," and the "continuity of . . . character"—very clearly define the essentially organic unity, the seminal oneness, of the *Morte Darthur*. Thus, in spite of the fact that Brewer specifically denies to the *Morte Darthur* the "Coleridgean concept of 'organic unity,'"\(^{26}\) he defines the unity of the book in terms of its singleness of conception, atmosphere, tone, and characterization, matters that point, almost without argument, I think, to a *preconceived*, seedlike unity of purpose from which the many-branched tree sprang into life.
It would seem to me, moreover, that the demonstrable presence of organic unity within a work of art necessarily implies, though again it cannot prove, the presence of what we have been calling historical unity, which is essentially unity of intention. My argument for historical unity in Malory thus does not stem simply from the presence of a large degree of critical unity *per se* in Malory, but from the presence of a particular kind of critical unity. A work may very well, I think, have mechanical critical unity without having historical unity—and this is, again, what R. H. Wilson and others believe of the *Morte Darthur*—but organic unity, on the other hand, is inseparable from historical unity. To talk of “unity of conception” is to assume the presence of a “conceiver” who, by whatever process however described, envisions the single, coherent principle which underlies his atmosphere, tone, and characterization and so shapes the organic design of his work as it emerges bit by bit from his pen.

I have not meant to “use” Professor Brewer to demonstrate my own point, the existence of organic and hence of historical unity in the *Morte Darthur*. But Professor Brewer’s argument demonstrates very well the fact that though he and Professor Lewis and, I suppose, the majority of medievalists instinctively deny historical unity to the works of medieval writers simply on the basis of their “differentness” from modern writers, yet they sometimes point to, as examples of this “differentness,” works that manifest organic unity of conception in every line. For example, Professor Lewis maintains that even Chaucer was simply “handing on, embellishing, expanding, or abridging a matter received from some source.” Yet if one accepts the well-founded theory of the “dramatic unity” of *The Canterbury Tales*, it is difficult to imagine Chaucer as this kind of redactor. The structure, the themes, the interrelations of character in *The Canterbury Tales* are certainly preconceived; Chaucer could not have achieved the dramatic unity of the work simply by
embellishing, expanding, and abridging” his sources as he went along. And who would deny organic and hence historical unity to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or, even more obviously, to *The Divine Comedy*?

Granted for the moment that what I am saying is at least theoretically true, that organic unity, if it can be shown in a work, does in fact demonstrate the presence of historical unity, unity of intention, and that such unity does in fact exist in the literature of the Middle Ages—granted all this, then how can one demonstrate effectively the organic unity of the *Morte Darthur*? The first chapter of this study attacks directly what I consider to be the main stumbling block to any critical treatment of the *Morte Darthur*, its highly ingenious, though superficially confusing, chronology. Out of the study of that chronology comes one important, though thoroughly predictable, conclusion: that Malory’s prime interest lay not in composing a year by year chronicle of Arthur’s reign, but in developing an Arthuriad in which theme would always take precedence over mere event and in which the sowing and growth of the seeds of Arthur’s downfall would be immediately and continuously perceptible.

But Malory, unlike the San Francisco poets, felt an obligation to his reader and to the tradition with which and within which he was working. The gentleman who read Malory’s book would expect to find there the well-known adventures that he had met in the English and French chronicles and romances; therefore, we may surmise that Malory would have felt an obligation to include these traditional materials but to use them in such manner as to produce a unified book. No matter that in most of his sources no unity, no thematic purpose even, could be found; no matter that his sources were, for the most part, endless recountings of quests and tourneys and jousts; no matter that he could have achieved his purpose simply and easily by deleting every episode and character which did not upon first sight fit his design—Malory
still chose to accomplish his task the “hard way.” He elected to salvage everything he could from the older tales and even to incorporate the difficult Tristan material in order to emerge with an authoritative work which would be both complete and unified.

Malory’s first problem was that of finding a means of unification, and the immensity of that problem is demonstrated every year by the failure of novelists who do not face half of Malory’s technical problems. How could one prune and shape the many-branched growth that had emerged untended out of the Celtic darkness into the light of the French court? Malory’s answer, and indeed it was a brilliant solution, was to single out from the mass of the legend three great leit-motifs, three narrative strands, each one of which might convincingly travel its path through the story independently for a while and then join with the other two to define the great conflict of interests that constitutes the tragedy. The three themes—and their familiarity is due largely to Malory’s influence—are the intrigues of Lancelot and Guinevere, the challenge and failure of the Grail quest, and the feud between the houses of King Lot and King Pellinore. Malory follows these three motifs scrupulously through the maze of quests and tourneys; these are his guides and he never loses sight of them. And they are not only guides; they are also the screens by which he winnows out the useful and pertinent from the wholly decorative, the criteria by which he seems to test incident and character. What is relevant to these themes stays; what is irrelevant, for the most part, goes.

“For the most part”—the qualification is needed. For no matter how clear Malory’s intention may be, his execution is not always perfect. The Tristan section, for example, which is necessary to the development of all three of the central themes, is at times repetitious and awkward. Yet when one realizes how many problems of assimilation Malory faced
and solved and the amount of material he did manage to cut without harming the fabric of the narrative of the Tristan story, his accomplishment in what Vinaver dismisses as a "timid account" is little short of miraculous. But the truly enlightening point, evident even in the reworked Tristan (surely Malory's most ambitious and fearless innovation), is that Malory was indeed striving to refashion these older materials into a harmonious, unified, and meaningful work of art.

A few critics have pointed to the fact that the amount of interconnection between the "tales" becomes greater as the Morte Darthur progresses as an indication that Malory did not originally intend to write a single, unified story, but that he became aware as he went along of the possibilities for unity inherent in the "series of tales." This increase in interconnection would seem, however, to be dictated more by the demands of the plot than by Malory's growing knowledge of the story. (One might remark also that the increasingly denser weave of the Morte Darthur is probably a natural result of Malory's growing technical proficiency in executing his design.) Indeed, it is quite clear from the researches of R. H. Wilson that Malory was in fact familiar with the broad general outline of the Arthur story before he set pen to paper; the various turns and reversals of the plot did not come as surprises to him nor did he become gradually aware, as Tucker maintains, of what might be done with the traditional characters of the story. In his very first section, the "Tale of Arthur and Lucius," we see him making adjustments in his sources in order to bring into prominence Lancelot, whom he is grooming to be the hero of the later tales. As I have said, Malory envisioned the overall plot structure of the Morte Darthur in terms of establishing, developing, and finally bringing together three distinct plot lines. The early sections of the book deal, as they must, with these three plots in alternation, and the interconnections
between them and between the various tales also only become important and necessary as the three plot lines begin to converge immediately following the Grail quest. Malory’s increased use of plot connections in the late sections of the *Morte Darthur* is thus not a matter either of increasing knowledge or of a growing consciousness of the possibilities for unity inherent in the material; it is a structural means of bringing together the major plot elements of his work and hence of achieving the unity he had envisioned from the start of his labors.

We suffer greatly, as I have noted, from a lack of positive biographical information. I personally am a bit weary of the image of the “knight-prisoner” diligently working away on his book in prison between orgies of rape, robbery, and attempted murder. But the circumstances of the book’s composition, written as it presumably was in snatches and probably in discomfort, do, it seems to me, rule out the possibility of Malory’s having done a great deal of revision. In a totally different context, I once told Professor J. R. R. Tolkien with great smugness that I was sure, judging from the great number of foreshadowing passages in the early parts of *The Lord of the Rings*, that he had had the whole narrative in mind before he set pen to paper. Tolkien immediately informed me in no uncertain terms that he had rewritten the first sections of the work in the light of its conclusion not once but many times and that it had been a very difficult job indeed. I doubt that Malory had similar opportunities for revision. Certainly the early sections of the *Morte Darthur* show no signs of having been reworked, and Malory by the time he had reached the end of his labors had surely learned enough about the writing of prose to have enabled, and indeed almost compelled, him, had he found opportunity, to rework the clumsily-written “Tale of Arthur and Lucius.” Thus it seems only logical that we take the prophecies of Merlin and the other foreshadowing devices
of the first tale (good examples, by the way, of statements that Malory consciously allowed to remain) as being deliberate attempts to create in his work a coherent design.

What then can I substitute for external and historical evidence in order to demonstrate the critical and historical unity of the *Morte Darthur*? Chiefly the strong internal evidence not only of mechanical unity in chronology and action, but also of organic unity in character and theme—evidence so strong as to outweigh, I believe, any lack of historical evidence and to make the conclusion that Malory intended that unity not only reasonable, but inescapable, a judgment that twenty generations of readers have concurred in.

This has been a long preamble of a tale. The rest of the volume is a defense of the unity of the *Morte Darthur* organized so that the three great unifying themes may be followed through the work. It is simply that and no more than that: it does not attempt to sketch Malory's life, or to trace the development of the legend, or, in any adequate sense, to describe Malory's sources. For those readers who wish more information on these and other more technical problems, excellent bibliographies are available.31

The first problem, however, is one of chronology.
THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MORTE DARTHUR

Of all the problems of structure and theme that arise in connection with the Morte Darthur, the most pertinent to study of Malory's purpose and method and, hence, to establishing the unity of his book is that of the internal chronology of the work. For much of Eugène Vinaver's case for the separation of the eight tales lies in his charge that Malory's "inconsistencies" in overall chronology are due to the "fact that he regarded each of his works as an independent 'tale' or 'book'" (p. xxxii), and, on the positive side, an examination of the strategy of the complex time scheme of the Morte Darthur demonstrates clearly that Malory's book follows indeed a carefully thought-out pattern of composition.

It was imperative, of course, that Malory consider the
manifold problems of chronology which faced him. For perhaps the prime characteristic of the collections of disjointed tales and romances from which he intended to extract the purer metal of his own book was their timelessness. Time, for the most part indications of short periods of time and the ages of characters, is occasionally chronicled, but always in a desultory, peripheral fashion, and is mentioned, one feels, only because a medieval writer wished to add a bit of random verisimilitude.

Thus the events of Arthur's history as they are presented in Malory's sources are not only lost in the golden vagueness of the legendary past—as indeed they are, though to a lesser degree, in Malory¹—but they are not, except in the loosest possible way, connected internally with each other. There was available to Malory, of course, the familiar general outline of the chronicles: Arthur is born, hidden by Merlin, comes forward at the proper time to draw the sword from the stone, establishes the Round Table, rules wisely and happily for many years, and is finally overthrown as the result of internal strife within his court; but this was by no means the kind of strong chronological skeleton which he required to support a long and heavily thematic fiction. One need only examine *Tom Jones* or *Emma* or *Vanity Fair*, or, in a different form, the *Iliad* to see the point. Indeed, Malory's task was much more like that of a novelist than that of a medieval chronicler or romancer. The Canon of Toledo in *Don Quixote* objected quite rightly that he had "never seen yet a book of chivalry complete in all its parts, so that the middle agrees with the beginning and the end with the beginning and the middle," and it is precisely in their enormous and wayward elaboration of their middles that Malory's sources presented their greatest problems. The chroniclers were at least sure of the beginning and ending of the saga; it was in the ruling "wisely and happily for many years" that the French romancers placed their disjointed and timeless quests and adventures.
Mind you, this digressive rambling did not constitute a fault to the medieval mind. Apparently what the early readers of the romances most enjoyed was this stringing out of adventures “without any apparent sequence or design” and the introduction of “innumerable personages, mostly anonymous” (p. xlviii). But everything in the Morte Darthur points to the fact that this sort of tale was most emphatically not what Malory had in mind: the sharp pruning of the sources, the careful retention and addition of interconnective devices, the consistent development of character—all indicate Malory’s desire to write a unified piece, one which should be neither digressive nor episodic, but clearly manifesting a beginning, a middle, and an end and, like a modern novel, working towards a single climax and an intermingling of all the various narrative lines.²

As I have said, Malory’s chief chronological difficulties lay in the “middle” of his sources, in the vast open traceries of the French books’ innumerable quests, and it is in the Aristotelian middle of Malory’s own book that we find his most brilliant reworkings of what little chronology came to him from his sources.

The general story line of the whole Morte Darthur is quite clear. Book i begins the tale; book viii ends it. From book vi, the Grail quest, or rather from the concluding sections of book v which prefigure the Grail quest, on to the end, the action is straightforward; event is linked to event in clear, logical sequence. The difficulties all arise, significantly, during the early and middle parts of the story, in the chronological relationships of books ii, iii, iv, and the first sections of v.

Now, before proceeding in detail, let us summarize the generally agreed upon points made by others concerning Malory’s chronology in these sections:

(1) There is a considerable time lapse between Malory’s tale i (“The Tale of King Arthur”) and his tale ii (“The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius”).³ During this
interval of approximately twenty years, Arthur fights King Claudas, Lancelot grows up and comes to court, and Galahad is born.

(2) Malory's tale iv, that of Gareth, is almost certainly presented by Malory out of its proper chronological sequence since Lancelot once refers in the Gareth section (295) to the coming to court of La Cote Mal Tayle, an incident which is not related to Malory until well into book v (455-76) and since two knights, Carados and Tarquin, fight in book iv (346) who were reported dead in book iii (266-67). It is interesting also to note that Malory allows a reference to Carados to stand in the La Cote Mal Tayle episode (475), thereby demonstrating again the early position of this episode in his total chronology.

(3) Some part of Malory's tale v, his version of the Tristan story, is contemporaneous with earlier sections of the Morte Darthur. R. M. Lumiansky states that Tristan's birth and early manhood occur chronologically after the wars with Claudas but before the Roman wars in which Tristan does not participate, the key passages in Malory being those that state that when Tristan was born, Arthur was king of all countries "unto Roome" (371), that the war with King Claudas was fought between books i and ii (194), that Tristan arrived at court before the Roman war (185), and that he left Arthur's court to return to Cornwall with King Mark before the expedition sailed (195). Significantly, all of these passages are original with Malory. R. H. Wilson also remarks that at the beginning "of the first Book of Tristram the narrative is making a clear if unannounced loop back to the period summarized at the end of the first tale, and Tristram's birth and early life need not be thought to occur after his appearances as a knight."7

These three general points alone should demonstrate that there is present in the Morte Darthur a planned chronology which makes use of cross references and retrospective nar-
The action of book 11, Arthur's Roman wars, must occur chronologically sometime after the presentation at court of Lancelot and Tristan. Now Tristan comes to court quite late in book v (572), in fact, long after his reputation is secure. Presumably then, all the adventures of Tristan up to his presentation at court—and these would include not only his birth and boyhood, but also his rise to fame, a large portion of his intrigue with Isode, his rivalries with Mark and Palomides, even his madness and exile—would have to take place chronologically sometime during the interim between books 1 and 11, an interval, we know, of at least twenty years, the period from Merlin’s prophecy of the young Lancelot’s greatness to the war with Claudas. But the war with Claudas is over when book 11 begins, and so we do not know its duration or the length of the interval between the war and the opening of book 11. Lancelot of course fights in the war with Claudas; Tristan does not and so must be presented at court later than is Lancelot.

Other statements in the text indicate that this chronological sequence is intended by Malory. First, there is the significant repetition of the fact that a feast was held to mark Tristan’s presentation at court (185 and 572). Second, we are told in book 11 that Tristan did not participate in the Roman expedition because he “at that tyme beleft with kynge Marke of Cornuayle for the love of La Beale Isode, wherefore sir Launcelot was passyng wrothe” (195). Malory, surely in order to establish temporal sequence, arranges a parallel passage in book v in which King Mark and Tristan leave for Cornwall “for the entente to see La Beale Isoude”
(610) shortly after Tristan's presentation at court, at the very time, in fact, when the rest of the court must be preparing for the Roman wars. This parallelism is again enforced by the statement in book 11 that Lancelot was “passyng wrothe” at Tristan's accompanying Mark to Cornwall, a detail which is repeated when the incident is described for the second time in book v (609). The most interesting thing about these passages, by the way, is that the references taken from book v are presumably in Malory's source; the passages on pages 185 and 195 are Malory’s additions. Malory added these key lines, we may assume, long before he wrote the Tristan section of his book, another clear indication that he had from the beginning intended a unified work.

These parallel passages should, by the way, clear up one misconception of Lancelot's motives. Both Lumiansky and Rumble assume that Lancelot is angry because he wishes, like Tristan, to remain home from the Roman wars with his love.\(^8\) The passage in book v, however, shows clearly that Lancelot is one of a group of knights, all of whom are angry at Mark's intent to kill Tristan. Indeed, if, as Lumiansky states, the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere was at this time “platonic,” then Lancelot would feel no jealousy of Tristan on this score.\(^9\)

If, as I have said, the section in book v in which Tristan leaves for Cornwall with Mark immediately following his presentation at court is deliberately intended by Malory to coincide with the beginning of book 11, then Malory was left with a considerable structural problem. How was he to allow sufficient time for the passing of the Roman wars within the structure of book v? Necessarily, Tristan could not have dealings with knights who were off for years fighting the Emperor Lucius. This time lag, if it can be called that, is very skillfully taken care of by the oft-misunderstood story of Alexander the Orphan, a tale which is a digression in terms of plot, but which fulfills a necessary function in terms of chronology.
The tale of Alexander the Orphan is not retrospective narrative, but a part of the main story line of book v. We learn (618 ff.) that upon their return to Cornwall Mark and Tristan fought the “Sessoynes” (Saxons); the story of Alexander the Orphan begins with a statement of Malory’s own composition that the “myscreauntys Sarezynes londid in the countrey of Cornwayle sone aftir the Sessoynes were departed” (633). Thus the tale of the birth, rearing, and coming of age of Alexander takes place within the main narrative line of book v, and the “yerys and wyntyrs” which Anglides endured “tyll Alysaundir was bygge and stronge” (635) can be assumed to be contemporaneous with those of the Roman wars of Arthur. We are told (639) that the young Alexander “purposed to ryde to London, by the councyle of sir Trystram, to sir Launcelot,” but by this time Alexander is a grown man and the court has had sufficient time to return from the war with Lucius.

Thus, the opening of book iii, which begins with the knights returning from Rome, is roughly contemporaneous with action more than halfway through book v. The next problem, therefore, is to ascertain as far as possible the exact positions of books iii and iv.

Of the two, book iv is the easier to place. The “Tale of Gareth” must follow chronologically the coming to court of La Cote Mal Tayle; it must precede book iii and, more significantly, the presentation of Tristan at court (572). Thus, the “Tale of Gareth” lies chronologically between the end of the tale of La Cote Mal Tayle (476) and Tristan’s presentation at court. And since Tristan’s presentation precedes Arthur’s Roman wars, book iv must thus precede not only book iii, but book ii as well. The events in the “Tale of Gareth” must be placed during that period between the war with Claudas and the opening of book ii, a period of undetermined length during which we are to presume that Lancelot has already attained some importance at court and is in a position to encourage young knights.
Certainly this early dating of the Gareth story need not interfere with our usual notions of the career of Lancelot. We know from Merlin’s prophecy (126) that Lancelot was old enough to participate in the war against Claudas, completed before the opening of book II, and we know also that Malory makes source alterations to give a position of prominence to Lancelot early in book II.11

It is interesting to note also, as Wilfred Guerin has pointed out in detail,12 that Malory systematically deleted or altered references to Gareth in early portions of his sources, particularly in the early sections of book V, in order to avoid a conflicting chronology. Gareth first appears late in the main narrative of book V as a mature, though inexperienced, knight, long after his coming to court in book IV.

Guerin’s thesis answers also the charge made by Vinaver (1430) that Malory is inconsistent in his handling of Breunys Sanze Pyte, who is presumably killed by Gareth (355) and yet reappears later in the Tristan section, by showing that most of the Breunys passages in the Tristan section occur chronologically before the “Tale of Gareth” and that, despite Vinaver’s assertion, the Brown Knight Without Pity killed by Gareth is not necessarily Breunys Sanze Pyte at all.

This placing of the Gareth episode chronologically before book II helps also to clear up Malory’s handling of Queen Morgause who appears several times in the Gareth section and who is killed by Gaheris in book V (612). If we assume that the “Tale of Gareth” must end before Tristan is presented at court (572), then her death occurs chronologically well after her appearances in book IV.

The exact bounds of book III are more difficult to place. The action of the book is of indeterminate length, and although Malory adds a few references to the Lancelot-Guinevere affair which place book III within the thematic framework of the Morte Darthur,13 there is little to place it definitely within the total chronological scheme. We know,
however, that the action of book III follows that of book II since book III opens with a reference, original with Malory, to the return of the knights from the Roman wars (253). The ending of book III would seem to me necessarily to precede chronologically the first appearance of Gareth in book V (696) where he is presented as a still somewhat inexperienced knight, and where the close relationship of Gareth and Lancelot begins. Thus, the action of book III would seem to lie between the Roman wars and the "Joyous Gard" section of book V.

From the "Joyous Gard" section of book V, the narrative line, its origins and motives established, moves along in a straightforward manner. We are prepared for the coming Grail quest by the adventures of Palomides and for the by-now unalterable catastrophe by the ramifications of the Lot-Pellinore feud. One structural problem, however, remained to be solved: the enfance of Galahad.

A part of the section of book V entitled "Launcelot and Elaine" by Vinaver is clearly retrospective narrative, a "flashback" for which Malory prepares us in a transition passage stating that we are now to deal with Sir Galahad, "how he was begotyn and in what maner" (791). Moreover, this is a flashback that returns us to a period before the beginning of book II; the visit of Elaine to Arthur's court, which culminates in the second bed trick and Lancelot's resultant madness, occurs at a feast which Arthur gives shortly after he "had bene in Fraunce and hadde warred uppon the myghty kynge Claudas" (802). Now Galahad is said to be fifteen years old at the end of the "Launcelot and Elaine" section of book V (832), the point at which the narrative turns again to Tristan and Palomides. However, Malory, in a significant addition to his source, indicates clearly that he means his flashback to end long before the end of the "Launcelot and Elaine" section. During his madness Lancelot is captured and held by Sir Blyaunte,
whose dwarf upon seeing Lancelot remarks that “he resemblyth muche unto sir Launcelot, for hym I sawe at the tournemente of Lonezep” (819), a tournament, we remember, which occurs in the main narrative immediately preceding the beginning of the *enfance* of Galahad.

Malory obviously cannot enforce a rigid chronology in presenting the birth of Galahad. In a statement presumably inherited from the French, Malory states that Lancelot wandered in his madness “two years” before being captured by Blyaunte after the tournament of Lonezep. Quite obviously the events of the main narrative from the end of the war with Claudas to Lonezep must take somewhat longer than two years, especially in view of the fact that by such calculation the events from Lancelot’s imprisonment to the end of book v must occupy thirteen years, a time span in no way justified by the action of the story.¹⁵

Malory obviously tried, however, to compensate for this discrepancy in time by retaining a number of references to the passing of time (819, “a yere and an halff”; 820, “an halff yere and more”) which serve to suggest that time is passing quickly but which are obviously not intended to be considered exact calculations.

From the capture of Lancelot by Blyaunte to the end of the *Morte Darthur*, Malory does not deviate from the main narrative line. At the beginning of the last section of book v, called “Conclusion” by Vinaver, Malory adds a short transition passage (839) again referring to the “two yere and more” of Lancelot’s madness, a passage designed to account for the movements of Tristan during the period just past, but from this point on, Malory never strays from his straight chronological line. Event follows event in determined sequence from the christening of Palomides to the “dolorous death and departing” of the Arthurian company.

The presence of such an involved chronology would seem to indicate Malory’s solution to a difficult problem of struc-
ture and theme, that of finding a method of composition which would permit him to present clearly and with great emphasis his total concept of the meaning of the traditional Arthurian story without at the same time diffusing the force of that concept in the maze of chronological sequence. It is clearly to avoid this needless and meaningless stringing out of events in strict order that Malory alters whenever possible the "tapestry" technique of his French originals and settles on a method of presentation which blocks out its episodes in structural and thematic units.

Read from beginning to end, the Morte Darthur is presented in terms of theme rather than of time. Books i and ii chronicle the establishment of Arthurian order and, through the prophecies of Merlin and the beginnings of the Lot-Pellinore feud, sow the seeds of its downfall; books iii, iv, and v are the Aristotelian "middle," the great, golden days of chivalry, over which the clouds of dissolution and adultery slowly gather; books vi, vii, and viii are denouement in which the civilization is tested, fails, and crumbles. Malory's thematic pattern is perfectly clear.

Yet in order to present the development of this theme, it was necessary not only that Malory provide a more definite chronology than was available to him in his sources, but that he also take great liberties with the already-existing chronology of the story, lest a too strict observance of the old time scheme obscure his new thematic pattern. For example, Arthur's war with the Emperor Lucius is traditionally the last of the great Arthurian conquests; it is from this war that Arthur traditionally is called home to fight Mordred. Thematically, however, the war with Lucius belongs, in Malory's mind, to the period of great expansion, and so in the Morte Darthur it occurs at the beginning rather than at the end of the book. Again, the tragic ending of the Tristan-Isode affair is reported out of its normal chronological position because thematically it is a part of the general tragedy
of the Round Table and so belongs at the very end of the story. The "Tale of Lancelot" must come thematically before that of Gareth since Lancelot must be seen in the latter tale as the mature, encouraging teacher, his reputation already established in the reader's mind. But chronologically the "Tale of Gareth" belongs to the early formative days of the court. Malory thus presents his tales in their natural thematic order and suggests by implication their proper chronological arrangement.

I submit that the very presence of such design and structure is proof enough of Malory's conscious intent to write a thematically unified history of Arthur's reign. But this design and structure is after all only a means to an end: Malory's chronology is by no means an example of ingenuity practiced for its own sake, but instead an extremely effective means of casting the greatest possible emphasis upon the major themes of his book, upon those three narrative threads—the intrigues of Lancelot and Guinevere, the Grail quest, and the Lot-Pellinore feud—which weave their ways, at first separately and then in combination, towards the catastrophe which they themselves have defined.
THE FAILURE IN LOVE:
LANCELOT AND GUINEVERE

Of the three controlling motifs, the most immediately compelling is the Lancelot-Guinevere story. For although the final tragedy is the culmination of the disastrous effects of all three and although Malory is careful to trace each of the three plot strands through all eight divisions of his work, Lancelot and Guinevere are, in a manner of speaking, Malory's hero and heroine, and the reader's first concern in the Morte Darthur naturally should be with them.

For, whatever else it may be, the Morte Darthur is the tragedy of two of the world's most popular lovers, and their love and their tragedy, which is, of course, the tragedy also of the whole society, are inseparable. Their love, moreover, is in Malory's sources a particular kind of love, l'amour
courtois, courtly love, and whatever Malory may or may not have understood by the term, courtly love was an aspect of plot and character with which he had to deal in constructing his own version of the tale. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to attempt to define the part played by the system of courtly love in the history of Arthur's kingdom as Malory conceived it.

It seems clear first of all that Malory knew all about courtly love and its presence in his sources before he set out to write his book. P. E. Tucker's statements that "Malory seems to have taken Lancelot as his exemplar of the knightly ideal without realizing how different his conception of chivalry was" in regard to the role of courtly love and that in "Book III he realizes quite suddenly that he very much dislikes this feature of his sources"1 thus seem to me to be based on a misconception both of Malory's early knowledge of Arthurian romance and of his total design and plan of composition. R. H. Wilson has demonstrated quite effectively that Malory even before he started to write was familiar with the prose Tristan and with the French Vulgate Cycle, both of which texts treat courtly love as a part of the chivalric code.2 Moreover, Malory's treatment of courtly love in the Morte Darthur is so consistent from first to last that one can hardly avoid the conclusion that, far from realizing "quite suddenly" in midstream that he did not approve of what Lancelot and Guinevere were doing, Malory had instead from the beginning taken pains to adapt so far as he was able this aspect of the French chivalric code to his own notions of the Arthurian characters and drama.

Courtly love, as it appears in Malory's French sources, reveals the basic paradox that underlies the system in all the works in which it appears. Love is, on the one hand, the source of the best features of the chivalric code. Properly and devoutly followed, the service of the beloved prompts a man to reveal in action the noblest feelings possible to him;
he is required to demonstrate the sincerity and depth of his love by displays of unusual courtesy, generosity, and bravery. Love, says Andreas Capellanus, "omnis . . . boni erit . . . origo et causa." Yet courtly love is by definition immoral and adulterous, and it was vigorously condemned as such by the Church. It might even be conjectured that to the unknown thirteenth-century French writers of the Vulgate Cycle and the romances, l'amour courtois existed not only as a paradox, a literary ambivalence, but as a fundamental dilemma of life, necessitating as it did a choice between Venus and Christ. Thus Chaucer in the Troilus and Criseyde must recant, and even Andreas feels the necessity of making apologies for the laws he has set down.

Malory could hardly fail to be aware of the paradoxical nature of courtly love as he found it in his sources, and it seems to me that instead of ignoring or distorting or even merely reducing the courtly love material he found there, he deliberately set out to exploit the paradoxical nature of courtly love in order to define and emphasize one of the chief failures of Arthur’s court. For Malory was not confused and troubled as were his predecessors; to Malory, the adulterous courtly love of his sources was an evil, and he sets out in the Morte Darthur to show how this tragic confusion of earlier times contributes to the destruction of the Round Table civilization. Malory consistently reduces those sections of his sources which extravagantly glorify courtly love lest his reader misconstrue his intent and think him in agreement with the attitudes of the French writers; yet he is careful to preserve the core of such passages in order to demonstrate the tragic effect of courtly love upon his characters. As we shall see, Malory is able by such tactics to focus clearly upon the paradoxical nature of courtly love and thus to sharpen its tragic effect. Seen from this point of view, one of the great causes of the downfall of Arthur’s court is a failure in love, or rather a triumph of the wrong
kind of love. The tragic consequences of the Lancelot-Guinevere affair are best seen as resulting from a struggle between the adulterous courtly love of the last days of the court and the fresh, chivalric love of its youth. The passage best illustrating the conflict between courtly and chivalric love occurs late in the *Morte Darthur* and is clearly Malory’s own. After describing the coming of May to Camelot, Malory says:

For, lyke as wynter rasure dothe allway arace and deface grene summer, so faryth hit by unstable love in man and woman, for in many persones there ys no stabylitk: for [w]e may se all day, for a lytyll blaste of wyntres rasure, anone we shall deface and lay aparte trew love, for lytyll or nowght, that coste suche thynge. Thys ys no wysedome nother no stabylitk, but his ys fyeblenes of nature and grete disworshyp, whosomever usyth thys.

Therefore, lyke as May moneth flowryth and floryshyth in every mannes gardyne, so in lyke wyse lat every man of worshyp florysh hys herte in thys worlde: firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promysed hys feythe unto; for there was never worshypfull man nor worshypfull woman but they loved one bettir than another; and worshyp in armys may never be foyled. But firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarell muste com of thy lady. And such love I calle vertuouse love (1 19).

This passage cannot be taken in context as praising the present state of affairs between Lancelot and Guinevere. After all, Malory has just told us that following the Grail quest Lancelot “forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste” and that, had he not been “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” (1045). Also Lancelot is twice within a few pages to defend Guinevere’s adultery, first on the basis of a technicality (she is accused of having slept with one of her attendant knights; actually she has slept with
Lancelot) and then with no justification whatsoever—hardly instances of first reserving the honor to God. It is noteworthy too that while immediately following the passage quoted Malory manages a few kind words (only a "lytyll mencion") for Guinevere solely on the basis of her fidelity to Lancelot, he does not attempt to praise Lancelot at all.

Taken in context, the quoted passage seems to me to recapitulate here at a moment of crisis the theme that Malory has been emphasizing throughout the *Morte Darthur* in his treatment of Lancelot and Guinevere. "Vertuouse" love is the way things might have been: its virtues are stability and chastity, and it is perfectly compatible with the chivalric ideals of honor and loyalty and with marriage. Courtly love is the way things have gone: its vices are instability (a term continually applied to Lancelot) and adultery, and it is connected throughout Malory's book with a debased chivalry. To Malory's mind, the "olde love was nat so" (1120). The whole story of Lancelot and Guinevere is thus seen by Malory as a gradual debasement of what might have been "vertuouse" love into the adulterous relationship he observed in his sources.

There can be little doubt that Malory's presentation of the early history of the lovers is designed to show precisely this point. Malory is careful in his earliest mentions of Guinevere to forecast and thus emphasize the disastrous effect which her love for Lancelot will have upon the court; to a vague source passage in which Merlin warns Arthur of the harm which the queen's beauty may bring him, Malory adds the specific information that "Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne" (97). Malory's first presentation of Lancelot in book III is done in the same manner; in a passage original with Malory, we see Lancelot as the man who "loved the quene agayne aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her from the fyre thorow his noble chevalry" (253).
Yet Malory, unlike his French sources, does not present the adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere as a proven fact. R. M. Lumiansky has already pointed out how Malory's changes in book 31, the "Tale of Lancelot," all indicate that at this point in Malory's story, "Lancelot loves the Queen . . . but she has as yet given him no indication that she will grant him her love." Malory plainly wishes to inform his reader at the outset that the love of Lancelot and Guinevere will have a tragic effect, presumably in order to focus the reader's attention upon the progressive deterioration of that love. Thus we first see Lancelot in book 31 as an aspiring young lover, subduing false knights for Guinevere's sake and denying all false reports that he and Guinevere are engaging in an affair. It is important to note that Lancelot protests vigorously any suggestion that he wishes anything other than to admire the queen from a safe distance. In response to a damsel's statement that "hit is noysed that ye love quene Qwenyvere" (270), Lancelot states at some length his belief that knights errant should neither marry nor involve themselves with paramours. Lumiansky regards Lancelot's statement as a "half-truth," spoken presumably in an attempt to disguise his true feeling toward the queen. I should prefer to think that Lancelot is perfectly sincere. That he is in love with Guinevere he nowhere denies; he speaks of the queen only to defend her honor (258) and to assert the innocence of his own intentions (270-71).

Lancelot would seem to be, in short, the perfect embodiment of young "vertuouse" love, worshipping his lady from afar. Yet that lady is married, and the love which he bears her can lead him only into a courtly relationship, the end of which is adultery. He is in reality the young courtly lover, even though he has not as yet been accepted as such by Guinevere, who at this point holds him only "in grete favoure aboven all other knyghtis" (253). Lancelot exhibits even here the distinctive marks of the courtly lover, and in
altering his sources to indicate Lancelot's early conformity to the code of *l'amour courtois*, Malory would here seem to be forecasting in still another way the inevitable downfall of the court. For no matter how high-minded his intentions, Lancelot, like Troilus, has in all innocence embarked upon a path which can lead only to adultery and tragedy.

It is significant that, having presented in book iii a picture of the first innocent symptoms of the deadly malady of love, Malory abandons the Lancelot-Guinevere story in order to present in book iv, the "Tale of Gareth," quite a different kind of love story. Whether or not Malory had an immediate source for his "Gareth" is here of no importance. What is undeniably Malory's own contribution is the placing of the Gareth story within the total Arthurian framework. Coming as it does between the first, deceptively innocent signs of courtly love in Lancelot and the actual adultery of the "Tale of Tristram," the "Tale of Gareth" sheds light forward and backward.

Malory's "Tale of Gareth" is an example of the type called the *belle inconnu*, the fair unknown, and tells the familiar story of the young knight of noble birth who, having been first assigned menial kitchen duties at Arthur's court, asks to accompany a damsel who has come to the court seeking aid for her mistress who is held in captivity. During a series of encounters with unfriendly knights, the young hero's victories are held in contempt by the damsel who mistakenly thinks him to be of inferior birth. Eventually the damsel comes to recognize his true worth, and the knight marries the lady whom he had set out to rescue.

This oft-repeated story is used by Malory as a commentary upon love and the behavior of lovers, the main purpose of which is to present a natural, untutored affection, very different from the artificial, conventionalized *l'amour courtois*. We may safely pass over in this discussion the verbal encounters between Gareth and the Lady Lynet, the damsel
who accompanies him on his adventurous journey, in order to concentrate on his behavior toward the Lady Lyones whom he rescues. His remarks upon first seeing her are instructive: having pronounced her "the fayryst lady that ever [he] lokyd uppon" (321), he says to her captor, the Red Knight, that "she lovyth none of thy felyshyp, and thou to love that lovyth nat the is but grete foly" (322), a commonsense principle utterly opposed to that tenet of courtly love which insists that the true lover press his suit in spite of any rebuffs he might receive. As Vinaver says, "no protagonist of a French romance of chivalry could have said this, and it is safe to assume that the maxim is M[alory]'s own." (1426).

Nor does the Lady Lyones exhibit the hauteur which generally marks the courtly heroine. During the combat which follows immediately upon the lovers' first glimpse of one another, the Lady Lyones makes Gareth "suche countenaunce that his herte waxed lyght and joly" (323). And later, when Lyones attempts to treat Gareth in the accepted courtly fashion by rebuffing his attempt to enter her castle and by telling him that he "shalt nat have holy [her] love unto the tyme that [he] be called one of the numbir of the worthy knyghtes" (327), she is told by Gareth in most uncourtly fashion that he has "nat deserved that [she] sholde shew [him] this straungenesse" since he has "bought [her] love with parte of the beste bloode within [his] body" (327). It is noteworthy that Lyones immediately drops her courtly manner and assures Gareth that his "grete travayle nother [his] good love shall nat be loste" (327) and that she will love only him until death. True, she does insist in courtly style that he "laboure in worshyp this twelve-monthe" (327), but immediately upon Gareth's departure, she undertakes a plan which results in her seeing him almost immediately. Having learned from Gareth's dwarf his true lineage, Lyones disguises herself "lyke a prynces" (331) and flirts with Gareth when he appears at her brother's castle to reclaim his
dwarf. Gareth, however, immediately violates the most sacred of the courtly lover's rules by falling in love with this new girl, the disguised Lyones; he even finds himself thinking "many tyme: 'Jesu, wolde that the lady of this Castell Perelus [Lyones] were so fayre as she is!'" (331). Lyones, upon seeing Gareth's fickleness, promptly forgets her courtly stipulation that he wait a year before approaching her again, reveals her identity, and, in the same interview, arranges to come to Gareth's bed that very night. This is hardly the prescribed conduct for courtly ladies.

Their plans, however, are thwarted by Lynet, who feels that "hir sister dame Lyonesse was a lytyll overhasty that she myght nat abyde hir tyme of maryage . . ." (333) and so twice interferes to preserve her sister's chastity. The tale ends with the marriage of Gareth and Lyones and with their mutual pledges of fidelity:

>'For, my lorde Arthure,' seyde dame Lyonesse, 'wete you well he is my fyrste love, and he shall be the laste; and yf ye woll suffir hym to have his wyll and fre choyse, I dare say he woll have me.'

>'That is trouthe,' seyde sir Gareth, 'and I have nat you and welde you as my wyff, there shall never lady nother jantyllwoman rejoyse me' (359-60).

If read in context, Gareth is clearly a commentary on *l'amour courtois* and is so placed as to contrast with the adulterous affairs of Lancelot and Tristan. The "Tale of Gareth" works towards the propositions that the true end of love is marriage, not adultery, that young lovers may in fact be fickle, that wise maids had best not tarry, and that young lovers sometimes need restraining. Gareth is a "vertuous" rather than a "courtly" lover; he occasionally spends a sleepless night or goes without eating, but these actions seem dictated by a quite human passion, "his love was so hoote" (331), rather than by the elegant conventions of the code. The Lady Lyones, like Gareth, is direct and frank; her
attempts to test Gareth by courtly standards failing, she wastes no time in arranging for their marriage. By contrasting Lyones' action in rebuking Gareth after he has rescued her with Guinevere's similar act in Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart*, Vinaver demonstrates that even in her most unsympathetic action, Lyones has a "kinder heart" than the usual courtly heroine (*Works*, p. 1419). The contrast between the two women is surely consciously enforced by Malory in order to emphasize the true nature of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship.

If the "Tale of Gareth" defines the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship by contrast, then the Tristan section works by comparison and allusion to accomplish the same end. Generally speaking, Malory has drastically reduced the courtly material found in his sources for this tale mainly to reduce the vast size of the sprawling legend, but partly also to change somewhat the nature of the Tristan story. As Thomas C. Rumble has amply demonstrated, Malory's only reason for including the Tristan material at all was to provide a "parallel motif" to the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship "lest the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere be thought an anomaly—a single flaw in an otherwise perfect world. . . ." Yet Malory's sources, whatever they may have been, almost certainly glorified the love of Tristan and Isode by romanticizing its tragic consequences. In Beroul, Eilhart, Thomas, Gottfried, and the others, the passion of Tristan and Isode is beyond the lovers' control; they are driven by a love which transcends ordinary earthly relationships and responsibilities. Tristan and Isode in the older books are sympathetic figures, caught in a tragedy of fate beyond their control.

Needless to say, such a conception hardly fitted Malory's plan. Therefore we find Malory systematically robbing the legend of its courtly glamour and at the same time preserving the adulterous actions of the lovers in order to enforce a
comparison with Lancelot and Guinevere. Time and again, Malory makes Isode a more attractive, a more human figure by deemphasizing her stylized characteristics as a courtly heroine; she falls in love with Tristan quite naturally, not through drinking the potion (385 and 389); she does not in Malory institute the plot against Brangwayne (419); she wants Palomides spared so that he may be christened (425); she even invites Tristan to bring Isode Blanchemains to court (481).

Tristan also is made by Malory somewhat less of a courtly hero and more of an ordinary knight than he is in the older legends. Like Isode, Tristan falls in love long before he drinks the potion (385); he forgets Isode the Fair and marries Isode Blanchemains (434); as Vinaver states, "his first concern is chivalry, not Isode" (1435).

Changes in other characters reinforce Malory's general change in emphasis: Malory blackens Mark; he appears in the Morte Darthur as a cowardly, treacherous villain so as to make the adultery of Tristan and Isode more human, more understandable, and less mystical, though none the less excusable. Palomides and Dinadan retain their roles as critics of the courtly pose, though Malory shortens their speeches.

Malory, in short, attempts to strip the courtly glamour from the Tristan-Isode legend by presenting the story of a young knight and a married queen whose sins are all of their own making. There is little of the Celtic magic left in Malory's "Tale of Tristan," nor is there meant to be; the lovers are no longer fated to love. Yet the essentials of the courtly system are carefully preserved: the youthful innocence, the secret meetings, the pledges, the adultery, the tragedy.

Malory is also careful to enforce the parallels between the situation in Cornwall and that at Camelot. As Lumiansky has pointed out, the sixteen passages in book v which concern
the Lancelot-Guinevere affair all "show the commencement of the adultery and its development to a degree that awareness of it has spread widely. . . ." We watch the progress of Tristan and Isode directly, but we are constantly made aware that the love of Lancelot and Guinevere is following a similar path: Tristan writes to Lancelot, Isode to the queen, and Mark to the king; Morgan sends the symbolic shield to Arthur and almost succeeds in forcing Guinevere to drink from the magic horn from which Isode could not drink; Tristan’s prowess is continually compared to that of Lancelot. Over and over the parallels are enforced. The adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere, like that of Tristan and Isode, is public knowledge by the middle of book v.

Although Malory is sharply criticized by Vinaver for leaving unfinished the tragedy of Tristan and Isode (1432 ff.) there would seem to be a number of reasons for Malory’s decision to end their story with the christening of Palomides and the preparation for the Grail quest. Malory almost certainly wished to preserve his general chronology and so decided to begin the Grail quest rather than finish the Tristan story; he may have wanted, as Rumble suggests, to postpone any account of the Tristan-Isode tragedy in order to make it a part of the general tragedy of the court. But he may also have wished to suppress the romantic pathos of the last days—the dying Tristan, Isode’s frantic attempt to reach him, the false message of the sails—and so avoid any glorification of a passion which he saw only as a destructive force.

There is no need to recount in detail the later history of Lancelot and Guinevere as Malory recounts it in books vii and viii. Misunderstandings lead to separations and reunions; the pious vows of the Grail quest are forgotten; the adultery cannot be ignored at court and becomes a formidable weapon in the hands of Mordred. To the very end, however, the courtly code exerts its evil influence.
Lancelot is the queen's servant while he lives; "and never dud [he] batayle all only [for] Goddis sake, but for to wynne worship and to cause [him] the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought [he] thanked never God of hit" (897). Guinevere becomes more and more demanding, more and more the aging courtly heroine, jealous and nagging:

'Sir Launcelot, I se and fele dayly that youre love begynnyth to slake, for ye have no joy to be in my presence, but ever ye ar oute of thys courte, and quarels and maters ye have nowadayes for ladyes, madyns and jantillwomen, [more] than ever ye were wonte to have beforehande' (1045-46).

She first becomes furious that Lancelot has worn Elayne's sleeve, then later rebukes him for his unkindness to Elayne. She demands that he wear her sleeve at the next tourney, even though she knows it will be recognized. She arbitrarily orders him to spare Meleagant's life knowing that Meleagant alive will be a constant threat to him.

Lancelot's reactions to these excessive demands show clearly the dilemma he has been forced into by the courtly system. He is too much a man of the world to think that his conduct is going unnoticed; his genuine religious feelings are outraged by his own actions; yet he must obey Guinevere, not because she is the queen, but because he is her pledged lover. In passages largely original with Malory, Lancelot warns Guinevere of what must be the outcome of their affair. "I love nat to be constrayned to love," he tells her (1097) and later, in apparent hopelessness, he adds, "but, madame, ever I muste suffir you, but what sorow that I endure, ye take no forse" (1098).

The final degradation of the lovers comes when Lancelot is forced, again by the demands of the code which he willingly adopted many years before, to forsake his honor and defend the guilty queen. His action, the action of a courtly lover, results in the accidental killing of Gareth, the
"vertuouse" lover, and brings crashing down the whole fabric of the Arthurian civilization. And surely his statement to Guinevere in her cloister, their world in ruins at Salisbury, is no idle chiding, but an expression of the "real" Lancelot, the knight who healed Sir Urry and whose very existence Guinevere has always denied:

'Well, madame,' seyde he, 'ye say as hit pleasith you, f[o]r yet wyste ye me never false of my promyse. And 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 not 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 excepte syr Galahad, my sone. And therefore, lady, sythen ye have taken you to perfection, I must nedys take me to perfection, of ryght' (1253).

But Malory does not restrict his comments on courtly love to his main narrative line. There is hardly a quest or a conversation that does not contain a passing allusion to love, allusions which Malory, by means of additions to and changes from his sources, uses to advance his attitude toward courtly love. Among the dozens of such reductions and changes, a few may serve as striking indications of Malory's attitude towards courtly love and towards the adultery which springs from it. Arthur, we remember, is himself born of a liaison which just misses being adulterous. Mordred is the product of the adulterous union of Arthur and his half-sister Morgause. By a few subtle changes Malory transforms the love of Blamore and his lady, whom Gawain kills, from a conventional courtly relationship into a genuine devotion.

And by a remarkable set of changes, Malory transforms the whole complexion of the tale of Pelleas and Ettard. Pelleas no longer appears as a courtly lover willing to suffer endless indignities for the sake of a cruel lady whom he will never win. He is instead a young man in love who suffers
“in truste at the laste to wynne hir love” (167). His action in placing his sword across the throats of Ettard and the treacherous Gawain is a promise of vengeance to come, not a sign of courtly forgiveness. Instead of allowing Ettard to marry Pelleas, Malory makes the faithless Ettard die of sorrow and provides Pelleas with the Damsel of the Lake.

Again, in the course of a quarrel between Lamerak and Meleagant, Lamerak states in a most uncourtly way that it seems to him a useless matter to fight over the virtues of women since “every knyght thynkith his owne lady fayryste” (487). And surely Lamerak’s courtly complaint of his love for the aged Morgause (“O, thou fayre quene of Orkeney, kynge Lottys wyff and modir unto sir Gawayne and to sir Gaherys, and modir to many other, for thy love I am in grete paynys!” [579]) is meant as a parody of l’amour courtois. The rivalry of Mark and Tristan for the favors of Segwarides’ wife is almost certainly intended as an ironic commentary on a degraded courtly affair.

It is thus possible to see in the Morte Darthur a consistent attitude towards and treatment of courtly love by means of which Malory is able to foreshadow and suggest at every turn in his plot the tragic implications of his story. We see in the main narrative line—in the young Lancelot, in Tristan, and, by contrast, in Gareth—and in a great number of incidental references to courtly love and lovers signs of the approaching catastrophe. And in this way the theme of courtly love and lovers gives unity and strength to the whole structure of the Morte Dartur. Malory is able, moreover, to solve the great dilemma of courtly love which had confronted the writers of his sources: he unequivocally condemns courtly love throughout his book by emphasizing its tragic consequences and thereby avoids recantation and paradox. Such changes as Malory makes therefore contribute directly to the tragic theme of the Morte Darthur and bear witness to the unity of his vision.
The second, and in some ways the most important, of the three themes which infuse and direct Malory's book is the quest of the entire court for that most striking and intriguing of all the relics of medieval piety, the Sankgreall, the Holy Grail. The Grail tradition begins, at least in writing, with Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century *Conte del Graal*. The hero of Chrétien's romance, Perceval, witnesses a strange procession in which are carried a bleeding lance and a low, flat vessel (*graal*) which lights the hall. Although Perceval is later told that had he sought the meaning of what he had seen, the wounded king of the country would have been healed and the wasted country made fertile, the exact origin and significance of the processional emblems is never ex-
plained. However, the first of Chrétien's continuators, Robert de Borron, in his romance *Joseph*, identifies the lance of Chrétien's poem with the sword with which Longinus pierced the side of Our Lord and the *graal* with the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper and which was used to catch the mingled water and blood which flowed from His side.

Although there are a number of distinct theories regarding the ultimate origin of the Grail, in its literary appearances, it has always appeared as a specifically Christian symbol. And as a Christian symbol it passes from Chrétien into the Arthurian literature of France, Provence, Germany, Scandanavia, Holland, and England.

Malory's immediate source, however, for the Grail story is the French Vulgate Cycle *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and of his handling of that source, Eugène Vinaver has this to say: "Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreall* is the least original of his works. Apart from omissions and minor alterations, it is to all intents and purposes a translation of the French... His attitude [towards the source] may be described without much risk of over-simplification as that of a man to whom the quest of the Grail was primarily an *Arthurian* adventure and who regarded the intrusion of the Grail upon Arthur's kingdom not as a means of contrasting earthly and divine chivalry and condemning the former, but as an opportunity offered to the knights of the Round Table to achieve still greater glory in *this* world" (*Works*, pp. 1521-22).

And even earlier, in his 1929 volume on Malory, Vinaver had called the sixth tale a "confused and almost pointless story, a beautiful parade of symbols and bright visions, ... deprived of its spiritual foundation, of its doctrine, and of its direct object."¹ Vinaver proceeds throughout his edition and principally in his introduction and notes to this "sixth romance" of Malory's to show in detail how Malory "secularizes" the Grail. In spite of these claims, however, I think
it is possible to show that Malory's changes are far from mere "omissions and alterations" and that Malory's handling of his source material is both purposeful and original.

Most of Vinaver's statements about Malory's Grail section are based upon his assumption that Malory "regarded each of his works as an independent 'tale' or 'book' and did not think it necessary to make them consistent with one another" (p. xxxii). Vinaver can regard the Grail section, therefore, only as an autonomous piece having little or no connection with any other section of the work, and he is prohibited by his own theory from even considering the possibility that Malory deliberately changed the "direct object" of the French text for one of his own.

Yet surely Malory would not have allowed the many foreshadowings of the Grail quest in book 1 to stand had he not intended himself to fulfill the prophecies of Merlin in a later book. And most assuredly, he would have never included in that first "work" the tale of the ill-starred Balin and Balan and all its connections with the promised Grail story had he not at least envisaged the possibility of dealing later with the Grail material. Vinaver's contentions that Malory's version of the Balin story is a "well-circumscribed set of incidents, unrelated to earlier or later events" (1273) and that in the Morte Darthur "the Dolorous Stroke loses its original significance and acquires a new meaning which can be understood without reference to anything that lies beyond the Balin story proper" (1274) simply falls apart in the face of the text. The opening sentence of Malory's Balin story, which Vinaver takes as evidence that Malory wished this tale to stand alone, is clearly a transition device neatly linking it chronologically with the events preceding it. Again, Vinaver's whole case for Malory's supposed reinterpretation of the Balin material depends entirely upon Merlin's statement that Balin struck the Dolorous Stroke "because of the dethe of that lady" whom he had rashly
slain, a statement which in no way affects the really important connections between the story of Balin and the Grail quest. Malory is here clearly supplying, as he is apt to do, a motive for what is in the French, as Vinaver admits (1304), an almost motiveless malignity; he is more than careful both here and later in the sixth tale to keep and even to reinforce the necessary connections between the two incidents.

Even a cursory glance at Malory's fifth tale, "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones," would seem to refute Vinaver's contention that Malory regarded the Grail section of his work as self-contained: Ector and Perceval are cured of their wounds and Lancelot of his madness by the Grail; Lancelot conceives Galahad on Elaine; the prophecy is made that Galahad will succeed and that Lancelot will fail in the Grail quest; Bors sees the Grail. Surely all these events in the Tristan section are a preparation for the coming book. More significantly, Malory leaves his Tristan material before the final tragedy of the lovers, presumably because the following Tristan adventure in his source is Tristan's Grail quest. Also, Malory connects the Tristan and Grail sections of his book by having the christening of Palomides, the last event in the Tristan section, and the seating of Galahad, the first event in the Grail episode, happen on the same day. In the same way, the seventh tale, "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," opens with a statement of Arthur's joy at the return of the Grail knights.

It is almost certain, therefore, that Malory took great pains to connect his Grail adventure with the rest of his story, and it does not seem overly conjectural to assume that Malory fitted the Grail action into his thematic scheme as well as into his narrative pattern. If this be true, surely no change which Malory makes from his source can be considered unimportant. My general purpose in this chapter, then, is to examine three large groups of source alterations in Malory's Tale of the Sankgreall—the changes in religious
material, the changes in characterization, and the changes
which relate to the unifying of the Grail quest with the rest
of the Morte Darthur—in order to demonstrate that Malory
consciously attempted in his Tale of the Sankgreall to link
the Grail quest, an isolated adventure in the French source,
with his unified Arthurian history by presenting the failure
of the Grail knights as one of the major causes of the down-
fall of the Round Table.

Vinaver is perfectly correct in asserting that in this section
of his book, Malory adheres closely to the plan of his French
source. Malory follows exactly the tapestry-like interweaving
of the adventures of the Grail knights—Perceval, Lancelot,
Gawain, Bors, and Galahad—in the French book; he neither
adds nor eliminates any of the major episodes of the quest.
This, however, cannot be regarded as slavishness to the
source. The tapestry method, the intersplicing of incidents
from each knight's adventures in alternation, is the natural
way to treat such material. Yet certainly the Grail story
changes under Malory's hand. The Vulgate Queste is a
theological treatise on salvation, an Arthurian story in name
only. The familiar knights fade into the background while
innumerable hermits expound visions and symbols. The
nature of the source, then, made Malory's problem twofold:
(1) he had to reduce, without diminishing their significance,
the religious fabric and tone of the whole, and (2) he had
to adapt the material before him to the long history of
Arthur's court and to the theme which he had been expound-
ing from the beginning.

Obviously, since the Grail quest in Malory's source was—
except for Galahad, Perceval, and Bors—a failure, he had to
keep it so. But the Grail quest in the Vulgate Cycle was an
isolated failure, a symbol of man's inability to exchange
temporal, courtly values for a religious principle which
transcended them. This division of values is the principal
theme of the Vulgate Queste, reinforced at every stage by
the allegorical qualities of the French book. The failure of the French Grail knights is the general failure of all mankind; it is not the failure of particular knights in the history of a particular court. Malory, it seems to me, having envisioned from the beginning an Arthurian cycle of growth, decay, and fall, saw in the Grail a symbol not of man's failure, but of the ultimate failure of Arthur's would-be ideal secular civilization, a failure which he had pointed forward to in the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship, in the prophecies of Merlin, and in the feud of the houses of Lot and Pellinore, and which was to culminate in the dissension and struggle of the last two books. Malory's changes do not then, as Vinaver intimates, stem from his failure to understand the religious tone of the French Queste; he always preserves the core of the French book's doctrinal statements, no matter how great his deletions. All the changes which Malory makes are necessary to his overall plan for the Arthurian cycle, and it is difficult to see how he could have treated the Grail material in any other fashion and yet have made it meaningful within his plan.

Malory's greatest changes in the purely religious parts of his French source occur in the explanations of the knights' dreams. The basic pattern is this: one of the knights falls asleep, dreams, and, puzzled by his vision, goes to a hermit for illumination. Such explanations are the natural vehicles for the French writer's theological commentaries, and these long digressions fill a great part of the French book. Malory's method of dealing with these sections shows quite clearly his intent in the Grail story. He pares away from the hermits' comments the purely religious commentary which is alien to his purpose, yet he is always careful to keep, usually in summation, the religious core of the argument presented. Accordingly, Vinaver would seem to be mistaken in assuming that Malory completely "secularizes" the Grail. Malory is transforming his material into an organized pattern, while
retaining the essential religious feeling and atmosphere of the source. For example, in the Perceval section, Malory reduces the hermit’s explanation of the mystical lion and serpent episode, which fills two large pages in H. Oskar Sommer’s edition of the French *Queste,* to a bare two paragraphs; he trims his material so carefully that the main points of the exposition and symbolism are retained:

‘She which rode uppon the lyon, hit betokenyth the new law of Holy Chirche, that is to undirstonde fayth, good hope, belyeve and baptyme; for she semed yonger [than] that othir hit ys grete reson, for she was borne in the Resurreccion and the Passion of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. And for great love she cam to the to warne the of thy grete batayle that shall befalle the’ . . . ‘And she that rode on the serpente signifieth the olde law, and that serpente betokenyth a fynde. And why she blamed the that thou slewyest hir servaunte, hit betokenyth nothynge [aboute] the serpente ye slewe; that betokenyth the devyll that thou rodist on to the roche. And whan thou madist a sygne of the crosse, there thou slewyest hym and put away hys power. And whan she asked the amendis and to becom hir man, than thou saydist nay, that was to make the beleve on her and leve thy baptym’ (915).

It will be seen that Malory in making such changes in the religious materials of his source is not attempting to “secularize” the Grail. Had this been his purpose, he could have very easily omitted the hermits altogether, thereby increasing the pace of the narrative and shifting the reader’s attention completely to the physical adventures of the knights. The dreams of the knights, however, retain their essential religious significance in Malory, but they do not retain their original function as excuses for homiletics.

Malory’s alteration of the religious material in his French source to fit his concept of a unified Arthurian story can be observed also in his treatment of the sins of the Round Table and of the Grail knights. Malory in fitting his material to his theme nearly always makes specific and relevant the
rather general sins mentioned in the Vulgate Queste. For example, in a crucial passage (1025) in which Galahad calms the boiling well in the “perelous foreyste,” the French source says that Galahad could calm the fire since “en lui n’avoit onques eu eschaufement de luxure” (F 263). Vinaver, quite correctly, I believe, thinks the well to be a symbol of “man’s sinful nature” (1568). But Malory, on the other hand, adds a phrase in which he says that the well was a “synge of lechory that was that tyme much used.” Since in Malory’s scheme the Arthurian world is undermined from the beginning by “lechory” (Uther and Igraine, Arthur and Morgause) and since one of the contributing factors to the downfall of the court at “that tyme” is the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship, the passage takes on an importance and a relevance to the whole cycle which never existed in the French text. Again, Malory has a hermit tell Gawain that he should long ago have given himself over to “knyghtly dedys and vertuous lyvyng” (891). Malory’s French source states that Gawain should have served our Lord and Saint Eglise (F 54). Vinaver, in noting Malory’s “secularized rendering,” forgets that in Malory’s scheme Gawain’s sins were all against the ideal knightly code and that to blame Gawain for not being a saint would have been in this context ridiculous. It may thus be said that Malory consistently makes the generalized textbook sins of the French into the actual sins of the Round Table, and so is able throughout to use this sort of religious material organically.

Malory also makes a considerable effort to transform the hazy symbols of the French Queste into tangible, concrete parts of a real quest. Perhaps the most effective single change in this direction lies in the presentation of the Grail itself as it appears in one major scene (893). Lancelot, having fallen asleep at the Chapel Perilous, awakens to find a sick knight praying there for aid. The table holding the Grail is mysteriously brought to the knight, and, according to Malory,
he towched the holy vessell and kyst hit” (894). Vinaver states that this is wholly out of keeping with the mysticism of the source and that it would be “unthinkable in the French Queste” (1539), since there the sick knight kisses only the silver table on which the Grail is brought (F 59). Yet, is it not strange that only three lines above, Malory has added to the French source a phrase in the sick knight’s prayer—“fayre swete Lorde whych ys here within the holy vessell”—which, despite Vinaver’s equivocation that “here within” may be taken in the “figurative sense,” insists on the fact of the transubstantiation? The point is, I think, that Malory wishes to make the Grail itself tangible and concrete without diminishing in the least its mystical qualities. Malory is also quite capable of adding supernatural elements where he feels them necessary. Twice (998, 1003), Malory assigns to a mystical voice commands given to Galahad by other characters in the French text, presumably in order to lend these commands supernatural authority.

Malory’s modifications of the characters of the Grail knights also reveal his purpose and originality in adapting the French Grail materials to a unified Arthurian history. For the most part, Malory had no serious problems in handling the traditional Grail knights; he had very few preconceived ideas of Perceval and Galahad, and Bors’ conduct in the Grail quest could be adapted without difficulty to his conception of Bors’ role in the whole Morte Darthur. But Lancelot was Malory’s hero, and from the beginning Malory had elevated him to the primacy of all the knights. Quite naturally, then, Malory will turn his main attention to the figure of Lancelot in developing his version of the Grail quest. To say this, however, is not to say, as does Vinaver (1523), that Malory takes it upon himself to “protect Lancelot” from the sort of treatment he received in the French book. Malory cannot protect Lancelot since he is fully aware that by protecting him he will be defending the
whole complex of adultery and strife that he had been preparing all along to indict. What Malory does, therefore, is to continue to use Lancelot as he had used him in the other adventures, as the perfect earthly knight, the best product that the Round Table civilization can produce. Seen in these terms, the Grail quest may be said to take on a new significance within the whole Morte Darthur. It would seem, in the light of these changes which Malory makes in his source, to represent to him the greatest of the court's adventures and the final test of the Round Table. If the Grail is to be attained, it must be won by the finest knight the Round Table has to offer—Lancelot. In Lancelot's failure, then, lies the failure of the whole system, since Lancelot, though the perfect embodiment of the system, himself represents the sins that are to lead to the destruction of the company. Throughout the Grail section, Malory begins to underline the failure of Lancelot and through his failure to prepare for the coming catastrophe.

Malory would seem to regard Lancelot as a tragic hero, as the man whose greatest strength, his devotion to the chivalric code, is at the same time his greatest weakness and his downfall. A lesser knight, Bors, can, as we shall see, substitute the celestial standard for the courtly and so achieve the Grail, but Lancelot cannot so shift values. He is himself the personification of the secular chivalric way of life; to abandon it would be to abandon his own identity.

As a tragic hero, he possesses a tragic flaw. Malory settles on instability as the chief sin of Lancelot, just as perhaps lechery, used in a very inclusive sense, is made the main sin of the Round Table. It is obvious that the two are closely linked; taken together, they can be said to include the theme of Malory's book. There are two Round Tables—the ideal, which Merlin made in "tokenyng of rowndnes of the worlde, for men sholde by the Rounde Table undirstonde the rowndenes signyfyed by ryght" (906), and the real, founded
upon lechery, shot through with civil strife, and ending with adultery. It is the tragic instability of the members of the company which makes them fluctuate between the two Round Tables and permits the lechery which brings on the fall of the court. The Grail quest had existed from the beginning ("When Merlyn had ordayned the Round Table he seyde, 'By them whych sholde be felowys of the Rounde Table the trouth of the Sankgreall sholde be well knowyn'" [906]), but so had the seeds of downfall in the birth of Arthur and the conception of Mordred, whom Merlin himself could not destroy. The two strands, instability and lechery, meet in Lancelot and in meeting define the nature of the tragedy: "Than, as the booke seyth, sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promyse and the perfeccon that he made in the queste; for, as the booke seyth, 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, and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they ded toforehonde, and had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of hit..." (1045). Malory has, accordingly, changed a great many of the Lancelot passages in order to demonstrate in action Lancelot’s instability. Very early in the Grail quest (863) a "lady on a whyght palferey" comes to court seeking Lancelot. She tells him that he is no longer the best knight of the world, for Galahad has now come. Malory then adds to Lancelot’s modest reply that he knows he “was never none of the beste,” a statement made in answer by the maiden: “‘Yes,’ seyde the damesell, ‘that were ye, and ar yet, of ony synfull man of the worlde.’” It is clear that in the Grail quest Lancelot remains Malory’s hero. Yet there is a competition not open to him; even the best of the fellowship of the
Round Table cannot accomplish the spiritual quest. Lancelot himself laments at times his own shortcomings: “My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For whan I sought worldly adventures for worldly desyres I ever encheved them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no quarell, were hit ryght were hit wronge. And how 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” (896). In Malory’s source, says Vinaver, “Lancelot, instead of referring to his successes in worldly adventures, stresses his ‘deadly sin’” (1540). Yet it seems to me apparent that Malory, far from excusing Lancelot by referring to his achievements, actually uses this comparison between chivalric success and religious failure to condemn the perfect secular hero. Such changes as these serve an important purpose: by keeping Lancelot’s worldly exploits before us, Malory can keep the contrast of appearance (the ideal Round Table) and reality (Lancelot and Guinevere) uppermost in the reader’s mind. In other words, Malory does not in the least ignore Lancelot’s sin; he deepens it by having the hermits hold up before Lancelot a picture of his potential greatness, a greatness which, were it not for sin, might have saved the Round Table civilization.

Malory also underscores Lancelot’s inability to remain firm in the faith by adding a passage in which a hermit admonishes Lancelot that he “loke that [his] harte and [his] mowth accorde” (897). The hermit’s point—that Lancelot, although he understands the difference between heavenly virtue and knightly virtue, cannot act upon that realization—is shown clearly in Lancelot’s behavior in the quest. For example, immediately after Lancelot has heard the speech of an “olde man” from heaven telling him that he has “used wronge warris with vayneglory for the pleasure of the
worlde” (928), he meets the sick knight of the Chapel Perilous who took his horse and armor after the Grail had healed him. Does Lancelot remember his instruction about using “wrone warris with vayne glory for the pleasure of the worlde”? “So whan sir Launcelot saw hym he salewede hym nat fayre, but cryed on hyght, ‘Knyght, kepe the, for thou deddist me grete unkyndnes.’ And than they put afore them their spearis, and sir Launcelot com so fyersely that he smote hym and hys horse downe to the erthe, that he had nyghe brokyn hys neck” (929). The French source of this passage makes it clear that the sick knight challenges Lancelot (F 132), but Malory’s syntax seems to me to indicate that he saw in this episode a fine instance of Lancelot’s instability, and so had Lancelot make the challenge. After his painful experience at the Chapel Perilous, Malory’s Lancelot is “somwhat . . . comforted” in the rising of the sun (896); in the French book, he feels even more ashamed of his actions (F 62). Again, Malory has a hermit tell Gawain that Lancelot “ys nat stable” (948), and Lancelot himself admits that he has always done battle “were hit ryght other wronge” (897) and that he realizes that in him “was nat all the stabilitk of thys realme” (1204). In a very famous passage, Malory changes his source to allow Lancelot, who has grown “somewhat wery of the [holy] shippe,” to “play hym by the watirs syde” (1012). Finally, at the end of his journey, the triumphant Galahad, at the end of the quest, bids Bors remind Lancelot to “remembir of this worlde unstable” (1035), and, to reinforce the point, Malory adds a final passage in which Bors delivers this message (1036). The purpose of this final passage is, of course, to end the Grail quest with a severely chastened Lancelot and not, as Vinaver has it, to make Lancelot the Grail hero.

Thus, Malory accomplishes what he must with Lancelot; he makes him the protagonist of the quest without making him the Grail knight. That knight is, of course, Galahad,
and an analysis of Galahad's character in the *Morte Darthur* reveals another aspect of Malory's purpose and theme. Needless to say, the success of Galahad in the Grail quest does not in any way affect the fate of the Round Table; as I have said, Lancelot's failure assures us of the coming catastrophe. Therefore, Malory must treat Galahad, not as a regular knight of the Round Table, but as a heavenly knight, sent to Arthur to accomplish only this one mission, and, by example, to reveal the inadequacies of the other knights and of the secular civilization which they represent. For this reason, Malory regularly elevates and dehumanizes Galahad in his adaptation of the French book. It is true, of course, that Galahad of the source is little more than a symbol; yet Malory is careful to reduce even further his physical reality as a member of the company. The most obvious change is one which links Galahad with the Trinity. In an important addition Malory describes Galahad as being "semely and demure as a dove" (854). This is our first introduction to Galahad, and since the time is that of the vigil of Pentecost, we may be fairly sure that Malory is attempting to link Galahad with the Holy Ghost. Malory also makes an effort to divorce Galahad from the actual life of the court by deleting the rather detailed French account of Galahad's instruction in chivalry given by Lancelot and the vigil which Galahad makes before becoming a knight (F 2-3). Thus Malory uses Galahad only as a supernatural object lesson in heavenly chivalry, as a knight whose deeds do not in any way affect the fate of the Round Table.

Malory met with a somewhat similar problem in dealing with the figure of Perceval. In the French book's treatment of Perceval he is little more than an extra and slightly soiled Galahad. As the original Grail knight, he had to appear in the story, but he has no function there except to serve as an excuse for introducing a few more hermits. Malory, it would seem, can find no real dramatic or thematic function
for Perceval, and so instead of attempting to adapt his presence to the theme of the *Morte Darthur*, merely reduces his role. It is in the Perceval section, therefore, that Malory makes his most extensive cuts, presumably to speed up the narrative as much as possible.

Bors would seem to represent a third level in Malory’s scheme of characterization. He is the minor knight who, lacking both Lancelot’s greatness and Lancelot’s sin, is able to achieve the Grail by following the path leading from temporal values to spiritual values, the path which Lancelot is unable to follow. Bors is characterized by his first remarks as a man who thinks entirely in terms of the everyday chivalric secular virtues: “‘Sir,’ seyde he, ‘I am a knyght that fayne wolde be councelyed, that ys entirde into the queste of the Sankgreall. For he shall have much erthly worship that may bryng hit to an ende’” (955). That Malory deliberately intends to characterize Bors as interested only in “erthly worship” is clear; the French source states that Bors feels that the Grail quest is a search “ou cil avra tant honor, qui a fin la porra mener, que cuer d’ome mortel nel porroit penser” (F 162). Vinaver here objects to Malory’s secularized rendering (1551), but the point is that Bors, not Malory, is the speaker and that Malory is here establishing the beginnings of Bors’ character development. The point may be further demonstrated by the fact that in the French, a hermit at this point in the action indulges in a long speech explaining the values of baptism after which he and Bors debate at length the effects of baptism (F 162-65). Malory omits this material, not because he does not understand the doctrines involved, but because he cannot have Bors, as he conceives him, indulging at this point in a theological discussion.

Shortly after the interview with the hermit, Bors meets a damsel who laments the fact that she must find a champion to fight against Prydam le Noyre in order to save her lands (957). In the French text, the lady at this point must give
Bors a full explanation of her situation before he is willing to agree to become her protector (F 169). However, Malory has Bors follow the normal chivalric pattern by volunteering his services immediately (957), though he knows nothing of the justice of her claim. Soon after this, we see some reflection of Bors' worldly reputation. A lady approaches Bors and asks him to protect her: "Then she conjoured hym, by the faythe that he ought unto Hym 'in whose servyse thou arte entred, for kyng Arthures sake, which I suppose made the knyght, that thou helpe me and suffir me nat to be shamed of this knyght'" (961). Vinaver interprets this passage to mean that the lady conjures Bors "for kyng Arthures sake," which is directly contrary to the French (1552). But the passage makes considerably more sense if interpreted that she conjures him by God "in whose servyse" he is entered, and that he has entered this service for earthly glory and for Arthur's sake, not from holiness or even from a desire, like Gawain's, merely to see the Grail clearly. Bors again reveals his habit of thinking in worldly terms when he is confronted by a beautiful woman (later we find that she is a devil), and Malory says that she seemed to Bors "the fayryst lady that ever he saw, and more rycher beseyne than ever was quene Guenyver or any other astate" (964). The comparison to Guinevere is Malory's addition, and while such comparisons to Guinevere are standard in medieval literature, it would here seem to demonstrate Bors' habit of thinking in terms of Round Table adventure.

Bors' conversion can be said to come at about this point in the narrative, and, having established his early character, Malory follows his source very carefully from this point on. The lady swears that unless Bors sleep with her she will commit suicide. Bors, true to his vows to a hermit, refuses; when the lady and her gentlewomen jump from the battlements, he crosses himself and sees the tower and the ladies disappear. Thereafter, Bors devotes himself entirely to the
service of God. He denies the courtly system entirely shortly afterwards (969-74) by refusing to resist the onslaughts of his brother Lionel, even though Lionel has killed a hermit and has sorely wounded Bors and Collegrevaunce. He even turns his back upon knightly loyalty in this scene by refusing to protect Collegrevaunce against Lionel's attacks. The point here would seem to be that Bors has chosen to remain steadfast in his service to God and that in doing so he has found that he must repudiate the chivalric code.

Bors' constancy to God is, of course, just the quality which Lancelot lacks, and Malory makes an effort, I think, to present the two knights in parallel fashion in order to demonstrate their differences. Early in the section devoted to Bors, the hermit who admonishes Bors to eat nothing save bread and water "founde hym in so mervales a lyffe and so stable that he felte he was never gretly correpte in fleysshly lustes but in one tyme that he begat Elyan le Blanke" (956). The word "stable" (Malory's only addition to the passage) was, in my opinion, deliberately chosen in order to contrast Bors to the unstable Lancelot. In the source as well as in Malory, Bors eats only bread and water, though he is tempted with "many deyntees" (956); he refuses the "grete gyfftes" of a lady (960); he will not leave his quest to sojourn with the father of a rescued maid (962); he resists the sexual attractions of the fair witch; and, finally, he turns his back upon the whole code of chivalric honor. In short, he is stable, true to the spiritual ideal of the quest, and, through his singleminded attention to duty, able to do what Lancelot, for all his nobility, cannot do. Bors' refusal to yield to the temptations placed before him is doubly commendable, since, from the beginning, he lacked real stature as a knight; unlike Lancelot, Bors was "tendir-herted" (the phrase is Malory's addition) and so was especially tempted by the fiend (968).  

The final Grail knight is Gawain. In his characterization
of Gawain Malory is once more preparing for the final scenes of the *Morte Darthur*; the unreasoning anger of Gawain is here prophesied. The Gawain of the French book is indistinguishable from the other knights except by the fact that he resigns the quest early, having himself originated it. Malory has very skillfully changed the nondescript Gawain of the source into an almost totally bad character, the traditional "light" Gawain, and so has prepared for his later enmity with Lancelot. For example, in the French *Queste*, Gawain welcomes Lancelot home after the journey in which he knighted Galahad (F 4); Malory omits this. In the French source, Gawain refuses to attempt to draw the sword from the stone because, as he says, he is far inferior to Lancelot, who has already refused to draw (F 6); Malory, at this point, omits Gawain's explanation and allows his curt refusal to be understood merely as stubbornness. The French Gawain, upon perceiving Arthur’s sadness at the departure of the Grail knights, repents his having initiated the quest (F 18); Malory omits this point. Again, Malory omits a remark in the French *Queste* (F 197) to the effect that many were grieved and angered by Gawain's wound. Thus, Malory at every opportunity degrades the character of Gawain. During Gawain's own Grail adventure, Malory has few changes to make, since here, as in the others' Grail quests, the hermits thoroughly degrade Gawain.

Having seen Malory's changes in the religious materials and the characterizations which he found in his source, we may now examine Malory's general purpose in adapting the French *Queste del Saint Graal*. His first consideration would seem to have been to make connections between this adventure and the others in the *Morte Darthur* and to tighten, by means of foreshadowing devices, the events within the Grail quest itself. For example, Malory's Galahad, unlike the Galahad of the French source, comes to Arthur's court wearing an empty scabbard (859), and it is obvious that
Malory is here foreshadowing Galahad’s pulling the sword from the stone. Again, the abbot of a monastery, in talking to Bors, remarks that Lionel is “a murderer and doth contrary to the Order of Knyghthode” (968). The corresponding French passage accuses him of having “nule vertu de Nostre Seignor” (F 186). Vinaver uses this charge to demonstrate Malory’s worldliness, but the point of the abbot’s statement becomes clear a little later when Lionel kills a hermit who attempts to separate the quarreling brothers. The hermit’s remark is thus a simple foreshadowing device. Malory also adds an allusion to Lancelot’s dying a hermit (948) within the context of the Grail quest. Besides bolstering our opinion of Malory as a conscious and skilled craftsman, these examples should help to dispel the notion that Malory never knew what was going to happen on the next page of his source.

The single most important linking of the Grail adventure with the whole of the *Morte Darthur* is Malory’s identification of the sword which Galahad pulls out of the stone with the sword of Balin the Savage. Galahad says: “Now have I the swerde that somtyme was the good knyghtes Balyns le Saveaige, and he was a passynge good knyght of his hondys; and with thys swerde he slew hys brothir Balan, and that was grete pité, for he was a good knyght. And eythir slew othir thorow a dolerous stroke that Balyn gaff unto kynge Pelles, the whych ys nat yett hole, nor naught shall be tyll that I hele hym” (863). In spite of the two versions which Malory gives of the “dolerous stroke,” it seems clear that he intends to link thematically the incident of Balin’s wounding of King Pellam with the adventure of the Grail knight, Galahad. By connecting Balin and Galahad, Malory has perhaps knowingly established another symbol of the fall of the Round Table. There are two effects of the “dolerous stroke”: (1) it makes necessary the Grail quest in order that the Grail knight cure the Fisher King and redeem the Waste Land,
and (2) it brings about the confusion and consequent slaying of the two brothers, Balin and Balan, at each other’s hands. I would conjecture that, to Malory, this slaying of brother by brother is a major symbol of the civil strife of the Round Table. The masking and consequent confusion of knightly opponents can be observed on almost every page of the *Morte Darthur*. Thus, very often, the sworn brothers of the Round Table fight bitterly against one another in ignorance. Many of the major conflicts of the book are caused by brother contending against brother, culminating in the final conflicts between Gawain and Gareth, between Lancelot and Gareth, between Arthur and his son Mordred.

Thus, it is possible that Malory has altered his source to allow Galahad to pull from the stone a symbol, perhaps even one of the causes, of the internal dissent which brings on the destruction of the Round Table. Even within the confines of the Grail section, Malory takes care to underline at every opportunity this motif of brother fighting against brother. Gawain kills Ivain, and Malory adds to Ivain’s final speech the line “And now forgiff the God, for hit shall be ever rehearsed that the tone sworne brother hath slayne the other” (945). Again, in the battle between Bors and Lionel, Malory reinforces the fact of their relationship by having Bors’ heart counsel him not to fight Lionel “inasmuch as sir Lyonell was hys elder brothir, wherefore he oughte to bere hym reverence” (970). A voice from heaven prevents Bors from attacking Lionel, and Malory adds a dialogue between the two brothers in which Bors says upon leaving the scene, “For Goddis love, fayre swete brothir, forgiff me my trespasse,” to which Lionel answers, “God forgiff you, and I do gladly” (974). It is, I think, Malory’s intention to show that it is Bors’ reluctance to join symbolically in the civil strife of the Round Table by fighting his brother which makes him in large part worthy to come finally to the Grail.

A final indication that Malory intends the Grail quest to
be the beginning of the fall of the Round Table may be seen in the behavior of the king. Arthur is conscious at the beginning of the Grail quest that the end is near: ‘‘Now,’ seyde the kynge, ‘I am sure at this quest of the Sankgreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne hole togydirs, therefore ones shall I se you togydir in the medow, all hole togydirs! Therefore I wol se you all hole togydir in the medow of Camelot, to juste and to turney, that aftir youre dethe men may speke of hit that such good knyghtes were there, such a day, hole togydirs’’” (864). The French passage from which this is taken is matter-of-fact; it has none of the poignancy and grief which the passage assumes in Malory through the king’s fourfold repetition of “hole togydirs.” The high point of the Round Table is at this celebration of Pentecost. Under the light from the Grail, the incivility and internal dispute are forgotten for the moment; “than began every knyght to beholde other, and eyther saw other, by their semynge, fayrer than ever they were before” (865).15 Surely this change—like those Malory effects in religious material, in characterization and in devices which link the Grail quest with the book as a whole—is not a “minor alteration,” but is integral to Malory’s purpose in assimilating the Grail adventure into the whole of his Arthurian romance.
THE FAILURE IN CHIVALRY:
LOT AND PELLINORE

The third of the great failures of Arthur’s court, its inability to maintain the ideals of loyalty and knightly service demanded by its own definition of chivalry, is emphasized by a number of means throughout Malory’s book. Indeed, we are so prone to concentrate our attention on this aspect of the Morte Darthur that we are apt to neglect the other equally important themes with which the book deals. But while it is misleading to oversimplify the theme of the Morte Darthur as “primarily a conflict of two loyalties...: on the one hand, the heroic loyalty of man to man...; on the other, the blind devotion of the knight-lover to his lady” (p. lxxxii), it is nonetheless true that Malory is almost passionately drawn to the theme of “the mutual love of
warriors who die together fighting against odds.”¹ And it is precisely because Malory is so devoted to the ideal of chivalry that he was able to see so clearly and record so accurately its decline and ultimate failure in Arthur’s kingdom. But before chivalry can be destroyed, it must first be established, and it is part of the function of the early books of the *Morte Darthur* to affirm the kind of knighthood that Arthur’s court embodies and upholds.

Book I, “The Tale of King Arthur,” is Malory’s first attempt at the reworking of a French source, the *Suite du Merlin*. Although he endeavors, as Vinaver says, “with varying degrees of success, but with remarkable consistency . . . to reduce the bulk of the stories and to alter their arrangement” (p. lii), he adds very few incidents to his French original. He is content to make his principal thematic changes by the simplest possible means—by the insertion, deletion, and alteration of speeches and details of action.

Book III, “The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake,” on the other hand, though next in order of composition, presents an entirely different aspect of Malory’s treatment of his source material. Here Malory selects from the vast Old French Prose *Lancelot* two short, widely-separated adventures of Lancelot to which he adds a third adventure for which there is no clear source.² Although Vinaver states that Malory has here composed a skillful roman d’aventures (p. lvi), he denies to Malory any intention of fitting these adventures into an overall scheme of composition and insists that Malory had “no ambition except that of telling a good story” (1402).

Yet, as I have sought to show, one of Malory’s main purposes in these early sections of the *Morte Darthur* is to establish at the very outset of his work his principal theme—the rise, flowering, and decay of an almost perfect civilization—as well as to prefigure the plot lines which unify the narrative framework of the book—the Lancelot-Guinevere
intrigue, the Lot-Pellinore feud, the Grail quest—and hence unify as well the tragic themes which these narrative strands convey—the failures in love, loyalty, and piety. As part of this intent, therefore, Malory in book i defined pre-Arthurian knighthood and chronicled the emergence of the new chivalry. It is my contention here that taken together books i and iii of the Morte Darthur do precisely that, far from relating a "series of short and well-defined tales" (p. lvii); book iii attempts to present by means of contrasting parallel episodes a commentary on the actions of book i in order to contrast the new knighthood with the old.

Malory therefore needed to make comparatively few changes in the episodes related in book i, all of which could be adapted to his purpose by means of alterations. In book iii, on the other hand, he needed to recast and reorganize completely his source material in order to construct, insofar as he was able within the limitations imposed on him by his French book, a series of parallel episodes. These parallels could not, of course, be exact since Malory was adapting old materials and was obliged to conform to the familiar story patterns. But there are clear signs that the startlingly original organization of book iii reflects Malory's attempt to present the first adventures of Lancelot, the finest exponent of Round Table chivalry, in contrast to the adventures of the older knights—Gawain, Marhali, Pelleinore, and the others—who typify an older, less refined civilization.

In general, Malory's presentation of the two sorts of chivalry centers on two issues: (1) the proper attitude of a knight towards women (including the problems of courtly love and adultery) and (2) the attitude of victor to vanquished. These contrasting elements are not presented, of course, in anything resembling chronological sequence, but their contrasting natures are enforced and emphasized by Malory's own comments on the action (particularly in book i) and by his additions to and arrangements of the action.
(particularly in book III). A table will summarize these contrasts more clearly.

**ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Book I)</th>
<th>(Book III)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Arthurian Chivalry</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Chivalry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Pellinore rapes Torre's wife (101). [Malory is responsible for Pellinore's use of force.]</td>
<td>1) Lancelot kills Perys de Foreste Savage, described by Malory as a ravisher of women (270).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Gawain kills a damsel &quot;by myse-fortune&quot; (106). [Malory adds the grief of the damsel's bereaved husband, and he strengthens the rebukes of Gaheris and the four knights.]</td>
<td>2) When Pedivere kills his own wife, Lancelot rebukes him fiercely (285). [Added by Malory]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a) Lanceor's damsel, Columbe, kills herself (70). [Malory increases the importance of the death of Columbe by making it the cause of the dolorous stroke.]</td>
<td>2a) Lancelot spares Phelot's wife though she has aided her husband in his attempt to kill Lancelot (284). [Added by Malory]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b) Balin smites off the head of the Lady of the Lake (66), thus breaking the law of safe-conduct.</td>
<td>3) Pedivere is forced to do great penance for having killed his wife (286) and becomes a hermit. [Added by Malory]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Upon his return to court, Gawain swears to be never again un-chivalrous to ladies (108), but later tricks Ettard (169).</td>
<td>4) Lancelot cures Meliot at the request of his sister (279-82). [Added by Malory]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Abellius spurns a damsel's request to spare her brother (112).</td>
<td>4a) Lancelot assists Bagdemagus at the request of his daughter (259). [Added by Malory]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a) Pellinore spurns a damsel's request to aid her wounded brother (114). He is later severely punished for this action (119).</td>
<td>5) Lancelot three times denies any unlawful association with Guinevere (258, 270, 281).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Accolon is Morgan's lover though she is married (141).</td>
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THE FAILURE IN CHIVALRY

ATTITUDE TOWARD WOMEN (Continued)

(Book I)

Pre-Arthurian chivalry

6) Gawain betrays Pelleas in order to seduce Ettard (166-72).

6a) Garnish murders his betrothed and her lover and commits suicide because of his betrothed’s infidelity (88).

(Book III)

New chivalry

6) Lancelot disdains the advances of Morgan and the three queens (258).

ATTITUDE OF VICTOR TO VANQUISHED

1) Gawain is willing to kill Ablamor because Ablamor has killed his hounds (106). [Gaheris and the four knights add Malory’s own judgment of Gawain’s action (107).]

2) Pellinore refuses to help a wounded knight (114).

1) In book III, Lancelot continually grants mercy to the knights that he overcomes, even to Pedivere whom he obviously despises (285). [Added by Malory]

2) Lancelot helps a knight whom he has accidentally wounded (250). [In source, he kills him.]

But the chivalry here defined cannot long be maintained, and the most important symbol of the decay of the new chivalry is the bitter feud between the houses of King Lot of Lowthean and Orkeney, the husband of Morgause, half-sister of Arthur and mother of Gawain, Gaheris, Agravaine, Gareth, Mordred, and, as Lamerak remarks, “modir to many other” (579), and of King Pellinore, King of the Iles and father of Torre, Lamerak, Aglovale, and Perceval. Malory’s handling of the growing bitterness between these two families and its frequent eruption into the most hideous violence not only serves as another indication of the unity of his book, but also demonstrates several important facets of his technique and theme.

Like the Grail quest and the courtly affair of Lancelot and Guinevere, the Lot-Pellinore feud is prophesied early in the Morte Darthur, but works towards its culmination gradually, and although it seems clear that he singled out this conflict...
quite early as an important thematic and structural device, Malory does very little with it in the early books. Just as in his handling of the Grail quest, Malory adds almost nothing to the early prophecies of the Lot-Pellinore feud; significantly, however, he deletes nothing, as he almost certainly would have done had he, as Vinaver maintains, regarded each book as a separate work. What he does do is to disengage these important plot strands, the Grail and the Lot-Pellinore feud, from the surrounding undergrowth of quest and tourney by pruning carefully the digressive elements of the French plot. Thus the Lot-Pellinore feud is not invented or even added to by Malory, but it does emerge, much as a bas-relief emerges, by means of his careful planing away of the irrelevancies that obscure it in the French. One has only to compare the sheer bulk of the Suite du Merlin and the prose Lancelot with books I and III of the Morte Darthur to see the point. By the very act of choosing to keep an incident or a speech, Malory is giving it an importance and an emphasis in his own work far beyond that which it claimed in the source.

But Malory in these early books nevertheless does make subtle changes in his source and thereby declares something of his intent to use the feud thematically. He specifically names Morgause when she first appears upon the scene (10) and Pellinore when he kills Lot (77) not only because he seemingly has a passion for naming the anonymous characters of the French book, but because he wishes to fix the names of these characters quickly and firmly in the reader's mind since they are to play important roles later on. Again, in an important addition, Merlin foretells the birth and accomplishments of Perceval and Lamerak, and incidentally the coming of Lancelot (52), and so points forwards both to the Grail quest and to the tragedy which surrounds Lamerak. Malory also emphasizes the adultery of Arthur and Morgause, thematically forecasting the tragedy of Lancelot and Guin-
evere, by having Lot's principal grievance against Arthur stem not from Arthur's drowning of the children in his attempt to kill Mordred (as in the source), but from his having taken Morgause in adultery.

The main events of the Lot-Pellinore feud, however, he finds perfectly suited to his projected scheme and so leaves unaltered. Lot, an implacable enemy of Arthur even before Arthur pulls the fateful sword from the stone, is married to Morgause, Arthur's half-sister. Arthur, after he has become king, takes Morgause to bed, not realizing that she is his half-sister, and begets Mordred on her. Lot in retaliation wages yet another war against Arthur, but is killed in battle (77) by King Pellinore, one of Arthur's trusted advisors (130) who had previously devoted himself to the pursuit of the Questing Beast and whose only crime had been that he had unwittingly caused the death of his own daughter through ignorance.

But the killing of King Lot brings tragic consequences. The fierce pride of the house of Orkeney has been offended and imagining their father to have been killed feloniously, Gawain, Gaheris, and Agravaine pledge themselves to avenge their father's death. Events, moreover, serve to increase their rage rather than to assuage it. Torre, Pellinore's illegitimate son, is knighted before Gawain, and Pellinore himself is asked by Arthur to fill the one available empty seat (the Siege Perilous remaining vacant) at the Round Table. Gawain, furious, swears to kill Pellinore "for he slewe oure fadir kynge Lott" (102) and is only dissuaded from taking immediate action by Gaheris.

We are not given a direct account of the death of Pellinore, though his widow, years afterwards, in a passage of Malory's own composition, tells her remaining sons, Aglovale and Perceval, that their father was "shamefully slayne by the hondys of sir Gawayne and hys brothir, sir Gaherys" (810). After the death of Pellinore, however, Lamerak indulges in
an illicit love affair with Morgause, the widow of Lot and mother of Sir Gawain and his brothers. She must be, of course, years older than her lover, and Lamerak’s motives are surely mixed, to say the least. Gawain, as would be expected, believes that “for the deth of kyng Pellynor sir Lameroke ded us a shame to oure modir” (608), and though, on the other hand, Malory tells us that “ayther lovid other passynge sore” (612), Lamerak certainly intends his action to disgrace the Orkeney family. At any rate, Gawain and Gaheris (in what surely must be a foreshadowing of their device for trapping Lancelot later on) arrange for a meeting between Lamerak and Morgause, and Gaheris kills his mother while she lies with Lamerak (612), though to Gawain’s chagrin he allows Lamerak to go free.

At this point, Lamerak makes a statement of great interest. To Gaheris’s accusation that Pellinore killed Lot thus initiating the feud, Lamerak replies that his “fadir slew nat [Gaheris’s] fadir: hit was Balyn le Saveage!” (612). Yet the rather full description of the death of Lot (77) makes it quite clear that Lamerak is totally mistaken and that Pellinore did indeed kill King Lot. Now then, Lamerak’s startling announcement is one of Malory’s rather infrequent additions to this section; he has, in fact, been occupied in consciously deleting material of all sorts in an effort to reduce the great bulk of the Tristan source. Vinaver, always quick to find fault with Malory’s knowledge of the legend, maintains that Malory here confuses Pellinore with King Pellam, the Grail keeper, whom in fact Balin did wound. Yet this explanation really avoids the problem, for in the first place Malory, despite Vinaver’s undocumented statement that there are many examples of “confusion between Pellinore . . . and Pellam” (1481), is very careful in handling the Lot-Pellinore material and goes to great lengths to emphasize Lamerak’s role in the feud, hence his “sourceless repetitions of the murder of Lamerak by Gawain.” In the second place
Malory would hardly *add* to his source a passage containing such an obvious error, especially one concerning the "Tale of Balin" which he had already written and which even Vinaver would admit that he was familiar with. Finally, Balin did not in fact *kill* King Pellam, but instead wounded him. Also Lamerak has some small reason for confusing the issue since Balin did fight against Lot in that very battle (77).

The point is, I think, that Lamerak and his brothers may very well at this point be ignorant of the circumstances of King Lot's death and believe their father to have been slain by Gawain and his brothers without cause, a belief substantiated by the Orkeneyes' reputation for indiscriminate killing. Indeed, Lamerak himself, in what may be one of Malory's additions to his source (670), states that he cannot trust Gawain, "nother none of his bretherne," even though King Arthur may charge them with keeping the peace. Certainly such ignorance on Lamerak's part goes a long way towards excusing the disgraceful conduct of an otherwise valiant and courteous knight, and it also enhances, one feels, both the tragedy of his death and the blackness of Gawain's crime.

The murder of Lamerak is one of the great turning points in the *Morte Darthur* in that it clearly divides the household of Orkeney and its supporters from those knights, friends of Lamerak mostly, who after his death look to Lancelot for leadership. The death of Lamerak is reported three times, first by Palomides (688) who states simply that Lamerak, after a successful tournament, was slain "felounsly" (the word is Malory's addition) by "Gawayne and his bretherne"; next, in a much fuller account (691) added by Malory, in which Tristan directly accuses Agravaine and Gaheris of the murder and adds that he wishes that he had been present to defend Lamerak; and finally, by means of a long conversation, all of which is of Malory's composition, between Tristan, Dinadan, and Palomides in which all agree that
were not Agravaine and Gaheris Arthur's nephews "they sholde dye for hit, all that were concentynge to [Lamerak's] dethe" (698). In the same conversation, Palomides also specifically names Mordred as the knight who "gaff [Lamerak] his dethis wounde byhynde hym at his bakke . . ." (699), and Gareth declares that "for cause that [he] undirstonde they be murtherars of good knyghtes" he has left his brothers' company.

There can be little doubt that Malory's additions to his source's accounts of the death of Lamerak not only add greatly to the dramatic interest of the event, but contribute tremendously to the unity of the book. The death of Lamerak in Malory's hands becomes the focal point of the Lot-Pellinore story and, more significantly, the point at which that story attaches itself firmly to the main narrative line of the *Morte Darthur*.

The consequences of the murder of Lamerak are immediately obvious in the relations of the knights, who quickly begin to align themselves either behind Mordred, obviously the most villainous of the Orkeneyes, all of whom "hatyth all good knyghtes of the Rounde Table for the moste party" and who "prevayly . . . hate my lorde sir Launcelot and all his kyn" (700), or behind Lancelot, who from the weight of his position at court becomes the natural rallying point for the loyalists. And it is interesting to note that though Lancelot here, as in his dealings with Guinevere, realizes perfectly well the dangers of the situation, he can apparently do little about it. As with Guinevere, he is cautious and "that causyth hym the more to have the good knyghtes of his kynne aboute hym" (700).

The Grail quest temporarily delays the plans of the Orkeney group whose hatred for "all good knyghtes" and for Lancelot will not rest content with the death of Lamerak. But immediately the quest has ended, they are once more at work, and their malice finds a tool ready at hand—Lancelot's
love for the king's wife. This lever they ply unmercifully for their own ends; Agravaine cunningly spreads the vilest rumors of the queen's misconduct "for he was ever opynne-mowthed" (1045). And luck—the same malevolent, though perhaps not wholly unwarranted, fate that has dogged Arthur's court from the beginning, in Arthur's ignorance of Morgause's identity, in the failure of Merlin to destroy Mordred—this same luck operates to the advantage of the Orkeneys now. Not only does Guinevere innocently play into their hands by refusing to let Lancelot go his way, but in attempting to spite Lancelot for his lack of attention, she arranges a dinner party for the most prominent knights of the court and so sets the stage for the poisoning of Sir Patryce.

Malory makes one intensely interesting alteration to his source's account of Sir Pynel's poisoning of Sir Patryce at Guinevere's dinner, and it is the sort of alteration that clearly demonstrates the technique Malory most liked to use in twisting together the loose strands of his source. Like Malory's best source additions and changes, this one costs him nothing—it detracts nothing from the established story line—but provides unifying links backwards and forwards in the narrative. Here a clause does the work: "and thys sir Pyonell hated sir Gawayne bycause of hys kynnesman sir Lamorakes dethe" (1049). This linking of the "poisoned apple" episode with the Lot-Pellinore feud is a brilliant stroke. Not only does it properly motivate Pynel's action, but it provides yet another tragic consequence of the feud and so points forwards to the dissolution of the court.

The first two paragraphs of book viii are Malory's own, and they contrast perfectly, and with sharp irony, the two states of chivalry. We are told that the time is May, the time "whan every harte floryshyth and burgenyth," but a May which shall witness the destruction of "the floure of chyvalry of the worlde" (1161). And then immediately Malory strikes
the dominant note, the enmity of the houses of Gawain and Lancelot:

And all was longe uppon two unhappy knyghtis whych were named sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred, that were brethirn unto sir Gawayne. For thys sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had ever a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot; and dayly and nyghtly they ever wacched uppon sir Launcelot (1161).

It is in these passages that the active leadership of the Orkeney plot falls by Gawain’s default to Agravaine and, after his death, to Mordred. Gawain and Gaheris join Gareth in renouncing their brothers’ plan to trap Lancelot with the queen. This is Gawain’s great moment of sanity and nobility, and though Malory has systematically blackened Gawain’s character throughout the Morte Darthur in preparation for his final unreasoning attacks upon Lancelot, he here allows him, for a single moment in order to achieve a superb dramatic effect, his great speech:

‘Also, brothir, sir Aggravayne,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘ye muste remembir how oftyntymes sir Launcelot hath rescowed the kynge and the quene; and the beste of us all had bene full colde at the harte-roote had nat sir Launcelot bene bettir than we, and that hathe he preved hymselff full ofte’ (1162).

The situation is, we remember, tremendously tense. Gawain could, one feels, exert his influence as head of the clan and as one of the great lords of the kingdom and simply forbid Agravaine and Mordred access to the king. But Gawain, “light in life and light in death,” cannot rise to the occasion and in a single breathtaking line revokes his gallant words and retreats into his habitual surliness: “[But] do ye as ye lyste,” he says, “for I woll layne it no lenger” (1162).³ Agravaine and Mordred go to the king, and the die is cast.

The catastrophe comes swiftly and inevitably nearer.
Lancelot, trapped with the queen, kills Agravaine and escapes, but in rescuing the queen from the stake to which she has been sentenced, accidentally kills Gaheris and Gareth and so through the malevolent luck which still haunts him, brings on the raging enmity of Gawain. These last sections, which contain Malory's most accomplished writing as well as his most original use of sources, are filled with additions and alterations that bring home the terrible effects of the Lot-Pellinore feud upon the Round Table civilization. Arthur's premonition that "the deth [of Gaheris and Gareth] woll cause the grettist mortall warre that ever was" (1183), Gawain's disbelief that Lancelot could ever have harmed Gareth (1185): details such as these reinforce the contribution of Gawain's unwavering wrath to the total tragedy. And Gawain's farewell to Arthur and his touching letter to Lancelot emphasize here at the very end of the story with an intensity and conviction which the French cannot approach the tragedy which came from that day, years before, when Pellinore in the midst of battle slew King Lot of Orkeney.

The Lot-Pellinore feud is thus one of the great structural foundation stones upon which Malory builds the many-arched Morte Darthur. Yet it is more than a mere structural device, for it also encompasses and defines Malory's attitude towards chivalry and relations among men in the same way that the Grail quest defines his concept of the relation of religion and society and the Lancelot-Guinevere affair his notion of the proper relations between men and women.

The usual definitions of chivalry, and indeed Malory's own early concept of the convention, include and emphasize the articles sworn to by Arthur's knights at the founding of the Round Table. There Arthur charges them:

... never to do outerage nothir morthir, and allways to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture [of their] worship and lordship of kynge
Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels and jantilwomen and wyldowes [socour:] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them upon payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis (120).

As we have seen, this is a new and peculiarly Arthurian idea of conduct, however. The new knights, particularly Lance-lot, accept it readily enough, but the older families, such as that of King Lot, are slow to change and hold tenaciously to an older, more barbaric code of clan loyalty.

In time, then, the Arthurian code must come to include not only the prohibitions against treason, murder, “oute-rage,” and false quarrels and the injunctions to show mercy and respect women sworn to yearly by the knights, but also a new idea of loyalty and fidelity to the Round Table that is, though most historians would deny that it could have existed much before Malory's own time, a kind of nationalism.

In short, this new chivalry, in Malory's book, entails a new concept of patriotism and loyalty, loyalty not only to the family or even in the feudal manner to the person of Arthur the king, but also to the Round Table, to the whole order and state. A crime against any knight must be counted not only as a personal outrage against a particular sworn brother, but also as a crime against the order of chivalry and against the whole Round Table. Lancelot's failure in the Grail quest is not his alone; it stems from the worldliness of the kind of chivalry he himself stands for, and it involves, tragically involves, since he “forgate the promyse and the perfeccion” (1045), the whole company of knights. The love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere cannot remain a private matter, for it runs counter to the code to which Lancelot and the others swear yearly, and it eventually forces Lancelot to betray those most solemn articles of his oath which forbid treason, murder, and wrongful quarrels.

And so it is with the feud of the families of Lot and
Pellinore. Gawain and his brothers cannot conduct their family affairs with such violence without harming the fabric of their society. Before what he considers proper retribution can be made, Gawain discovers that all his brothers are dead along with the sons of Pellinore and that his anger has split the court and destroyed the very civilization that he had yearly pledged himself to help sustain.

So the third failure is in chivalry. Like the failures in love and in religion, it stems from the inability of the Round Table to live up to its own proper standards and ideals, to place true love, sincere religion, chivalric loyalty above passion and expediency. Had not Gawain . . . had not Lance-lot . . . had not Arthur. . . . But they did.
ALL WHOLE TOGETHER

Two tasks remain to be accomplished: first, to point out how Malory's three plots—the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, the Grail quest, and the Lot-Pellinore feud—interconnect and bind together the whole of the *Morte Darthur* and, second, to show, at least by example, how Malory integrates the seemingly unconnected strands of his sources into the whole fabric of his book. Taken together, these two accomplishments should go far to demonstrate the unity that Malory has impressed upon the waywardness of his sources.

Malory's use of his three major narrative lines would seem to be this: he first of all introduces them, more or less simultaneously, by means of foreshadowings and prophecies; then he allows each to wind its own way through the great
middle section of the book; and finally he joins them together at the end by making the outcome of each depend upon events in the other two.

Some comparison with Shakespeare's technique is perhaps proper here. For even though Malory's skill nowhere touches Shakespeare's genius in narrative construction, their methods of interweaving a number of plots are strikingly similar. The knack—and as the great nineteenth-century novelists knew, it takes a deft touch to bring it off—consists in letting each of the plots retain its own individual characteristics and develop towards its own separate climax, and in allowing each at certain critical moments to touch and change the course of the other narrative strands. *Much Ado*, or almost any of the middle comedies, shows the technique in a state of near perfection. Shakespeare interweaves a conventionally romantic love affair, complete with the usual stylish accoutrements of mistaken identity and the calumniated innocent, with a sophisticated and witty pair of reluctant lovers and with a bumbling set of Keystone constables. Now simply to present such groups in alternation would have been enough for any audience. Vaudeville houses, music halls, and now television variety hours have thrived on such fare. But simply to introduce such elements in isolation did not satisfy Shakespeare's, or Malory's, sense of unity. So Shakespeare, by a set of deft and accurate manuevers, brings Beatrice and Benedict together by means of Hero and Claudio and puts the key to the final unravelling in the hands of the witless Dogberry.

Malory in book 1 introduces the reader at once to all three of his major plots. Book 1 takes up the French book at its account of the begetting of Arthur. And even here Malory's strategy is apparent: the early history of Uther and Merlin contributes nothing to our understanding of later developments that Malory cannot safely either omit or add later. It is vital, moreover, to his theme that the *Morte Darthur*
begin not on a note of triumph or hope, but on one of corruption. The very seeds of the new order are sown, if not technically in adultery, then at least in lust and trickery. Malory's rude, barbaric Uther is far different from the courtly monarch of the French book. We are thus introduced in these very first chapters to the atmosphere of a barbaric land, and though Arthur will do much to transform and elevate the rough code of Uther's court, the adultery and lust continue under the new façade. And so the tone, and the contrast between ideal and real, promise and reality, is set.

Malory goes on to recount the familiar incidents—the sword in the stone, the crowning of Arthur, the wars with the local rulers—but alongside and underneath the old story lie the hints of the new: Mordred is born and the births of Lamerak and Perceval are foretold.

The first real clustering of the three great themes, however, comes with the Balin story. Here, by means both of additions and careful retentions, Malory lays the foundations of the Grail quest and the coming of Galahad; here Pellinore kills Lot, and Gawain's murder of Pellinore is prophesied; here Merlin foretells Lancelot's career and eventual war with Gawain. And in the next section, the story of Torre and Pellinore, Merlin warns Arthur of Guinevere's infidelity and then turns "his tale to the aventures of the Sankegreal" (97), Gawain swears vengeance upon Pellinore, and the knights affirm their great oath.

It is apparent, of course, that the primary function of Merlin in these early sections of the Morte Darthur is to provide these foreshadowings. The usual comment that Malory places little faith in the superstitions of the earlier accounts and so reduces the roles of Merlin, Blaise, and Morgan le Fay is perfectly accurate (1276). But one should note that although Malory eliminates almost all the magic of Merlin and has turned the aged magician into a kind of
elder statesman, he nevertheless retains those prophecies that he needs in order to link present events with those to come.

There is also perhaps a second reason for the retention of these prophecies and foreshadowings. They bear witness to the pervading presence and influence of a kind of fate which is everywhere discernible and operative in the book. We know it all from the beginning: "ye have done a thynge late that God ys displesed with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a chylde that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme" (44); "because of the dethe of that lady thou shalt stryke a stroke moste dolerous that ever man stroke" (73); "he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne" (97). Thus Lot is fated to be slain, and Balin to smite King Pellam, and Guinevere to be unfaithful; the whole tragedy of the Round Table is in fact foreordained, and just as the roots of Arthur's civilization lie unmistakably sunk in adultery and revenge, so its flowering must inevitably end in destruction and tragedy.

The effect of such foreshadowing is to heighten the tragedy. For all through the great triumphs that follow, the three dark lines wind unalterably towards their end, an end that we, unlike the merry knights and ladies, already perceive. The dramatic irony works here, as it does in Lear or in Oedipus, to sharpen our awareness of our human plight, to arouse in us, as Aristotle said, pity and fear—pity that such splendid creatures as these should weave their own shrouds and fear lest we share their blindness. And weave their own shrouds they do: Gawain knows, Lancelot and Guinevere know, that their actions can bring only tragedy, but their full understanding of their responsibilities comes too late. At the end, Guinevere's plight forces Lancelot to forget the "promyse and the perfeccion" and to break his oath, and the death of Gareth and Gaheris forces Gawain to abandon his
aloofness. They cannot escape at the last the sins of their youth.

In all probability, Malory thought of tragedy in the familiar medieval terms of Dame Fortune and her wheel, by which even the most deserving of heroes were eventually overthrown by forces outside themselves and by events which they had neither precipitated nor deserved. The wheel of Fortune itself appears once in Malory (1233), and certainly the strong element of fate, articulated most strongly in the prophecies of Merlin, bears witness to Malory’s belief in the transitory nature of all earthly felicity.

Yet it seems to me that although Malory was totally ignorant of the Greek tragedies, his book is in many ways closer to them in emphasis and depth than to the simpler concepts of the Monk’s hundred tragedies. In defining Malory’s concept of the tragic nature of chivalry, I mean to imply that the Morte Darthur reveals that Malory felt (1) that the fall of Arthur’s court was inevitable, given its aims, its character, and the conditions under which it was expected to operate; (2) that its fall was thus predetermined, fated if you like, but also self-ordained and self-created by agencies within itself; (3) that its fall was ironic, marked by ignorance of self and hence by peripety. And I would suggest also that in maintaining, as he does, a tragic rather than a didactic approach to chivalry, Malory reasserts in the strongest possible terms the essential definition of the mixed nature of knighthood framed before him by Chrétien and the Gawain-poet.

The first and second of these assertions, that the fall of the Round Table was tragic because inevitable, are of course ambiguous, since the “inevitability” of any fall can be defined in any number of sets of terms—religious, psychological, naturalistic, etc. Yet it is basic to any serious reading of the Morte Darthur that Malory presents very carefully and specifically the reasons for the fall of Arthur’s kingdom in order
to demonstrate that the collapse of the Round Table was caused not only by the whims of Dame Fortune and by the mutability of time and tide, but more directly by internal dissension and failures, particularly those in loyalty, religion, and love.

Malory's concept of the self-destruction of the Round Table is demonstrated throughout the *Morte Darthur* by the kinds of changes that he makes in his source materials. For example, Malory's source for book 1, "The Tale of King Arthur," the so-called *Suite du Merlin* or *Huth Merlin*, a part of the fourteenth-century Pseudo-Robert de Borron Prose Cycle, is a rewriting of the better known thirteenth-century Prose Vulgate Cycle. Unlike the *Merlin* of the thirteenth-century work, which is primarily involved with preparing the reader for the coming glory of Lancelot, Malory's source work constituted the opening movement of what was obviously to be a Grail-centered history of Arthur's kingdom. Malory's changes here are highly instructive. He had already indicated in his reworking of book 11, "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius," the first of his "translations," a clear intent to make Lancelot his hero. His changes in book 1 are obviously intended to subdue somewhat the Grail theme (though not of course to obscure it, since he intended to develop it later) and to initiate the themes of the infidelity of Lancelot and Guinevere and the feuding of the houses of King Lot and King Pellinore, both of which motifs, along with the Grail quest, could be used to frame the eventual failure of Arthurian chivalry.

In shaping his source material to allow these three plot motifs to emerge, Malory is at the same time providing for a theory of fate and history which will allow for the kind of internal tragedy his theme demands. This he does largely, as we have seen, through the prophecies of Merlin, but also through changes in characterization, particularly that of Merlin. The Merlin of the French book is a magician, a
redeemed child of Satan whose only function is plainly to forecast the events of the future, particularly the coming of the Grail. In Malory, however, he becomes also the agent of the “adventure and grace” by which Arthur “was chosyn kynge” (97). He is therefore the practical strategist who carefully manages both the diplomatic maneuvers by which Arthur achieves maturity and the throne and the actual tactics of the wars which establish his power over a united Britain, and he is also the spokesman of God, the forecaster of the immutable tragedy to come. Malory’s Merlin is no mere purveyor of marvels, but to an extent unimaginable in the French source, at once both statesman and priest, whose efforts are largely responsible for the establishment of Arthur’s kingdom, but whose power cannot avert its tragic end, even when that end is known to him:

Also he tolde kyng Arthure that he scholde mysse hym.
‘And yett had ye levir than all youre londis have me agayne.’
‘A,’ sayde the kyng, ‘syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure, purvey for hit, and putt hit away by youre crauftes, that mysseadventure.’

‘Nay,’ seyde Merlion, ‘hit woll not be’ (125).

And for all Merlin’s strategy in the slaughtering of the children born on May Day, Mordred is saved “by fortune” (55) to fulfill his role in the destruction of the kingdom.

Malory uses Merlin to establish the fact that while the tragic fall of Arthur’s kingdom is predetermined, in proper medieval fashion, by the rise and fall of Fortune’s wheel, it is also due to particular actions of particular knights. Like the tragedy of Romeo, whose destiny it is to be “star-crossed,” but whose tragic nature it is to be impetuous, the fall of the Round Table is caused ultimately by fate, by an unalterable destiny beyond its control, but effectively by its own internal corruption, by the sins of its members and, even more importantly, by the inherent faults of the chivalric system it
extols and lives by. The function of Merlin's prophecies and actions in these early books is thus to make clear not only the predestined end—"hit woll not be"—but also the particular sins of the court in the years to come: "for he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir [Guinevere], and sche hym agayne" (97); "and Launcelot with hys swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that shall be sir Gawayne" (91); "for Merlyon told kynge Arthure that he that sholde destroy hym and all the londe sholde be borne on May-day" (55).

Moreover, Malory's changes in these first chapters in the actions and characters of the knights reveal, in addition to his intent to write a consistent and unified book, this same concern to make clear the nature of the Arthurian tragedy. King Lot, whom Malory makes the focal point of the early rebellions against Arthur's authority, is greatly ennobled in the Morte Darthur. Far from being the skulking bully of the source, he possesses in Malory's book all the noble attributes usually attributed to the Round Table company:

But allwayes kynge Lotte hylde hym ever in the fore-front and dud merveylous dedis of armys; for all his oste was borne up by hys hondys, for he abode all knyghtes. Alas, he myght nat endure, the whych was grete pité! So worthy a knyght as he was one, that he sholde be overmacched, that of late tyme before he had bene a knyght of kynge Arthurs, and wedded the syster of hym (77).

The tragedy of King Lot, like that of Balin the Savage, whose well-intentioned actions always result in the most disastrous consequences, is made by Malory into a tragedy of chivalry itself. Lot and Balin seem at odds with history and no matter how just their causes—the seduction of a wife or the death of a mother—or how honorably motivated their actions, their devotion to the ideals of chivalry itself destroys them. Malory in characterizing Lot and Balin seems deliberately to invoke
on their behalf the best qualities of chivalry—prowess, honor, devotion to duty—only to render those values inoperative and meaningless in action. Despite his fine personal qualities, Lot cannot stand against the tide of Arthurian power, and it is no accident, I think, that his death in battle precipitates the bloody feud that eventually splits the court. And Balin, driven by destiny to kill his brother, himself realizes that he cannot alter that destiny. Having inadvertently, and with the best of intentions, brought tragedy to Garnish and warned by “an old hore gentylman” to “torne ageyne” from his elected way, he hears “an horne blowe as it had ben the dethe of a best,” and from the depths of his sudden understanding of the inevitability of his own tragedy, he refuses to turn back: “that blast,” he says, “is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede” (88).

These short vignettes are thus in fact microcosms of what Malory is later to show in his major figures—in Lancelot and Gawain, for example: that mere chivalry is not enough, that however fine-sounding the courtly ideal may be, it is not a sufficient basis for the life of a kingdom nor can its virtues prevail against the tragic destinies its sins have spawned.

Thus Malory’s alterations and additions to his source materials demonstrate clearly that his great concern in the Morte Darthur is not whole-heartedly to advocate chivalry as a way of life either for the past or for the present, but to present it in all its glory and its corruption and so to define its essentially tragic nature. Viewed from any standpoint, from that of love or of religion or of loyalty, chivalry is a failure and the knight—even Lancelot, the best of “ony synfull man of the worlde” (863)—is a tragic figure, pledged to a set of vows and standards which are impossible to maintain even in the society that conceived them. Thus the knight is committed to respect for and protection of women in a society dedicated to the seductions of fin amor; he is pledged to pursue a mystical Christian ideal armed with a
set of values that elevates physical prowess and the accumulation of glory into articles of faith; he is expected to maintain standards of loyalty and trust in a society split by the gossip and intrigue of a faction-ridden court.

It is thus no wonder that Lancelot’s abiding fault is instability, the chief characteristic of fallen man: “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” (1045). He cannot, by definition, possess both his own virtues and those of Galahad, though both are required of him. He cannot, under any circumstances, forever remain both the lover of Guinevere and the sworn companion and vassal of her husband. Lancelot’s tragic instability is rooted in the mixed nature of chivalry itself. Like Oedipus and Agamemnon, his greatest strength, his devotion to the chivalric code, is ironically his greatest weakness and his downfall. Like Balin, he “trustyth so much upon hys hondis and hys myght” that he cannot abandon the chivalric code, even when to follow it is clearly to destroy the civilization it has created.

Much of the Morte Darthur is thus concerned with revealing the corrupt reality beneath the fair chivalric surface. From the birth of Arthur, conceived in lechery and born in what avoids being called adultery only by the merest technicality, to the incestuous conception of Mordred to the attempts by Morgan to destroy her half-brother to the wanton killing of Round Table knight by Round Table knight to the final slaughter at Salisbury, the book reveals the failure of chivalry to provide in fact the standards it in theory advocates. At the end, Arthur advises Bedivere to leave him: “Comforte thyselff,” seyde the kynge, “and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in” (1240). The Round Table has in the end failed in “trust” because the code which Arthur outlined for its maintenance in the very
The youthful sins of the court seem harmless enough in the beginning. Having established in book I both the tone and the dramatic structure of his book, Malory goes on to chart the progress of Arthur's court. Book II extends Arthur's kingdom to Rome and begins the elevation of Lancelot. Book III defines, in the adventures of Lancelot and the others, the new chivalry. Malory, however, is careful even here in book III to spin the threads of destruction. The courtly love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere is, of course, suggested by the parallels listed under "Attitudes towards Women" in chapter 4 in which the older brutal treatment of women, particularly by Pellinore, is contrasted with the courtesy of Lancelot. However, in addition to these parallels, Malory adds at the beginning of book III (253) references to Guinevere's growing regard for Lancelot and to Lancelot's later rescue of Guinevere from the stake and passages (274, 276, 285) in which Lancelot orders captured knights to report to Guinevere rather than to Arthur as was usual in book I. The Lot-Pellinore feud is suggested in books I and III both by direct reference (Gawain's anger at being knighted after Torre, 102) and by a series of parallel episodes dealing with kinship. The tragic conclusion of the Balin-Balan story (90-91) and the various attempts of Morgan to kill her
brother and her husband (141, 149, 157) contrast with the clannish devotion of Gawain and his brothers in book i (102, 104, 159) and Lancelot and Lionel in book iii (254, 263). Malory would seem to be working with a double contrast here, pitting family loyalty against family disloyalty, but at the same time foreshadowing the feud between the families of Gawain and Lancelot.

The Grail quest is, of course, prepared for in the Balin-Balan story of book i and by Bagdemagus's finding of the "brauche of holy herbe" (132), but it is entirely possible that the oddly-conceived "Healing of Meliot" section of book iii also prefigures the Grail. This adventure of Lancelot, possibly derived from a section of the Perlesvaus, recounts Lancelot's journey to the Chapel Perilous in search of a "swerde and a blody cloth" (279) which will cure the wounded Meliot. Lancelot goes to the Chapel, encounters a number of wonders—thirty fierce knights who flee at his approach, "a corpus hylled with a clothe of sylke" (280), an earthquake, the magic sword, a sorceress—and returns to cure Meliot. This episode, seemingly out of place among the more pedestrian adventures of book iii, may well represent another of Malory's parallels, devised by him to show Lancelot's success in a spiritual adventure of the kind in which Balin had so obviously failed. The "Healing of Meliot" thus stands in marked contrast to the Balin-Balan story of book i and prefigures both the Grail quest and, more importantly, still another of Malory's additions, the "Healing of Sir Urry" in book vii.

The main purpose of book iv is surely, as I have pointed out, to define "vertuouse" as opposed to courtly love. But book iv has other purposes as well. Lancelot knights Gareth and to Lancelot alone does Gareth reveal his identity. The friendship of the two knights—the magnificent, already-revered Lancelot and the young, untried Gareth—is established here, though its relevance to the whole tale will not
become apparent for hundreds of pages. But here the preparations are made:

For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved so well as he dud sir Launcelot; and ever for the moste party he wolde ever be in sir Launcelottis company.

For evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe hymself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyship, for he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth (360).

Book v, "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones," is the most difficult section of the whole with which to deal, for while it is certain that Malory had a number of clearly-defined purposes in mind in attempting to use this hitherto only crudely assimilated matter in his own unified Morte Darthur, it is unfortunately equally certain that the stubborn nature of the material made it well-nigh impossible for him to maintain the clarity of approach which distinguishes his earlier (and later) reworkings of his sources. Although Malory's Tristan is only one-sixth the size of its probable source,³ which must have been, as Vinaver remarks, a "long series of seemingly disjointed episodes centring round the figure of a great knight" (1432), even this drastic reduction is not enough to prevent this fifth book from occasionally lapsing into the digressive meanderings of its source.

On the whole, however, Malory was wise to attempt the assimilation of the Tristan material. Considered without it, the Morte Darthur seems misshapen and centerless, and Malory's structural chronology demands a lengthy middle section in order to absorb and account for the passage of time from the early days of the court to its final dissolution. The Tristan section is necessary, however, not only to the book's structure, but also to its theme. As we have observed, it is during the long central section that the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere is seen in the sharp, unflattering
light of the adultery of Tristan and Isode, here that the tragic career of Lamerak is unfolded, here that the Grail quest is prepared for in the enfance of Galahad. Malory's Tristan book, like the mills of the gods, grinds slowly, but it moves relentlessly towards establishing the grounds of the tragedy to follow.

Book vi is, of course, devoted wholly to the Grail quest and to making it a part of the unified Morte Darthur. Book vii, however, plunges the reader immediately into the last turbulent period of the history of the court, and here the three themes—the failures in love, religion, loyalty—which Malory has hitherto treated as independent plot strands, begin to weave together into the failure of Arthurian chivalry. The vital links can be stated in a single sentence: Lancelot, upon his return, forgets the "promyse and the perfeccion that he had made in the queste" (1045) of the Grail, resorts again to the queen, and, in rejecting holiness for adultery, permits the plots of the house of Orkeney to reach fruition.

The rest of the Morte Darthur is a series of elaborations and variations on this formula. Lancelot, tortured by the realization of his failure to live up to the "hyghe servyse in whom [he] dud [his] dyligente labouré" (1046) and by a growing consciousness of the dangers of the political situation around him, begs Guinevere to be more tactful. But the queen, driven by passion and jealousy, sends Lancelot away and arranges straightway for the calamitous dinner at which Pynel is poisoned.

The consequences of Guinevere’s pique—her anger at Lancelot’s wearing the sleeve of Elayne le Blanke, her sparing of Meleagant, her insistence that Lancelot visit her during Arthur’s absence—are immediately apparent in the political activities of the court. Agravaine and Mordred take swift advantage of Lancelot’s desire to escape the intrigues into which he is drawn and of Guinevere’s schemes to draw him
back from the solitude into which he is driven by the religious conflict within himself. In these last days, the tragic Lancelot, like Balin and Hamlet, seems to welcome action, any action, for its own sake: "that blast," said Balin, "is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede" (88).

But once before the end, just before Lancelot rides down, sword in hand, to free Guinevere and slay Gareth and so in one stroke violate forever his knightly pledge and determine once and for all his conflict—once here at the end, the Grail motif, the "promise and the perfection," returns. The seemingly digressive "Healing of Sir Urry" (almost certainly of Malory's invention) bears witness, perhaps like the Gareth, to the fact that Malory is perfectly capable of framing a tale of his own to suit his immediate needs. Malory at this point, I think, feels the need of emphasizing, just before the slaying of Gareth, Lancelot's essential goodness. Granted Lancelot has failed in the Grail quest, that his tragic instability has allowed him to defend the queen knowing her to be guilty, that he has for years deceived his friend and sovereign, Arthur, granted all this—yet he is still, as indeed he will always be, the "best knyght of the worlde" (868), in whom can be seen the glory and the tragedy of the chivalric code, and so even here Lancelot's prayer is answered. Fearful of failure, he attempts the miracle only after Arthur has compelled him to search Urry's wound, and his prayer clearly shows his humiliation and shame:

‘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 knyght by the grete vertu and grace of The, but, Good Lorde, never of myselff’ (1152).

Something of the "promise and the perfection" remains in Lancelot; the wound "hit fayre healed" (1152). And Lance-
lot, in what must be his most hopeful, most glorious moment, "wepte, as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn." The "Tale of Sir Urry," however, has a different ending: "but every nyght and day sir Aggravayne, sir Gawaynes brother, awayted quene Gwenyver and sir Launcelot to put hem bothe to a rebuke and a shame" (1153). From this point on, the three themes become one.

I do not have sufficient space to suggest even in outline the way in which incidents—knightly encounters, say, or quests—are fitted by Malory into his whole work, and indeed I believe there to be many adventures which Malory could not so assimilate, adventures too well known to be deleted, but too stubborn to be transformed. Yet a surprising number of the familiar stories could be reworked: the "Knight of the Cart," for example, assumes a totally different shape under Malory's hand. It is obvious that Malory has greatly changed the courtly tone of the original episode: no longer does Guinevere, as in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charette*, the ultimate literary source of the tale, become enraged that Lancelot should hesitate even a few seconds before undergoing on her behalf the ignominy and shame of the hangman's cart. And Malory has ruthlessly cut the many adventures, among them the famous magic bed and sword bridge, which the French Lancelot must undergo before reaching Meleagant's castle. As Vinaver rightly maintains, these courtly adventures "belong to a world of their own" (1581) and so have no place in Malory's planned book.

What exactly did Malory do to the story as he received it from the French Prose *Lancelot*? First of all, he removed it bodily from its context among the rest of Lancelot's adventures and placed it here in the midst of his history of the last days of the court, most of which is taken from the French *Mort Artu* and the English *Morte Arthure*. Second, he alters the tale so radically that R. H. Wilson even believes him to
be "reconstructing his story from memory." The story retains its general outline, to be sure: Guinevere is abducted by Meleagant; Lancelot rescues her, having made part of his journey in a cart; they spend the night together; Meleagant seeing Lancelot's blood on the queen's bed accuses her of having slept with one of the wounded knights and succeeds in imprisoning Lancelot; the queen is sentenced to be burned, but is rescued by Lancelot, who has meanwhile escaped and who returns to kill Meleagant and free the queen. But Malory's tale is grounded not in the context of the chivalric romance, but of a genre much more clearly resembling the novel. Hence his characters are motivated not in the least by abstract considerations of how the courtly lady and her knight should react in such a situation, but by the very practical necessities of a fast-developing plot and already-established characters.

Thus, Malory uses the "Knight of the Cart" as one of a series of short episodes which, taken together, are clearly designed, as R. M. Lumiansky says, to show "instances of lack of harmony between Lancelot and Guenevere." In each of the five divisions [of book vii there is] the same pattern of suspense: there is a crisis in the affairs of the court; the crisis is seemingly happily resolved, but the continued adultery provides the basis for the future tragedy. This is, of course, why Malory places his "Knight of the Cart" here at the end of the story, at a point where it assumes great structural importance. Malory obviously felt constrained to include the "Knight of the Cart" since it was a familiar part of the legend, but it is indicative of his genius that he was able, as with his account of Arthur's Roman wars, to make thematic capital of his necessities by skillfully resetting a well-known episode within the framework of his remade legend.

The same thing is true of his handling of the characters in the reworked "Knight of the Cart." Guinevere appears
here, as indeed she has in the sections immediately preceding this one, in the role of the aging courtly heroine. The Maying expedition is Malory’s addition and its meaning is clear: the indignant queen, fancying herself jilted, surrounds herself with “yonge men that wolde have worship” (1121). Her conduct throughout the tale consistently demonstrates the same point. After her capture, she sends the “chylde” directly to fetch Lancelot (who in the French is already on the scene), and indeed Arthur is not even informed of her plight (1128). The most important fact of Guinevere’s characterization in the Chrétien, her anger at Lancelot’s having hesitated to humiliate himself in her behalf, is here omitted by Malory, perhaps as being “out of character” for her. Instead she defends Lancelot’s riding in a cart to one of her ladies who questions his action (1127). But Malory adds here a deft touch which demonstrates more clearly than could the cart episode Guinevere’s essential nature: Meleagant is in the source a brave knight who fights Lancelot a number of times; Malory makes of him a coward who beseeches Guinevere to protect him from Lancelot. She does, and in this action we again see her in the role of the arbitrary courtly heroine. Lancelot arrives “wood wrothe oute of mesure” and ready to kill Meleagant on the spot only to be greeted by Guinevere’s calm “Sir Launcelot, why be ye so amoved?” (1128). Lancelot’s answer indicates his anger and dismay at her seemingly motiveless defence of Meleagant:

‘A! madame,’ seyde sir Launcelot, ‘why aske ye me that questyon? For mesemyth ye oughte to be more wrother than I am, for ye have the hurte and the dishonour. For wyte you well, madame, my hurte ys but lytyll in regard for the sleyng of a marys sonne [killed by Meleagant’s men], but the despite grevyth me much more than all my hurte’ (1128).

And Lancelot’s sharp remark that had he “wyste that [she] wolde have bene so lyghtly accorded with [Meleagant he]
wolde nat a made such haste unto [her]" (1129) sharply defines the tenor of the lovers' relationship at this point.

What I am attempting to say should be obvious without further detail. Malory here in addition to his usual shortening and tightening makes those alterations in structure and characterization which are necessary to the integration of one of the traditional episodes of the legend into his unified presentation of the history of Arthur's kingdom. The same point may be demonstrated again and again throughout the Morte Darthur—in the handling of Lancelot's early adventures in the skillful selection and placing of traditional incidents, and in the consistent characterization of the traditional Arthurian figures. Normally consistency of characterization is not used as more than a corroborative proof of unity of authorship. Even in the disputed plays of Shakespeare, plays like Henry VIII and The Two Noble Kinsmen, where the hand of a second, and possibly even of a third, author is suspected, the experts are more inclined to rely upon technical studies of verse mechanics and diction than to search for differences in character in various parts of the play. Such methods lead of course to far surer proofs of unified or multiple authorship than could studies of characterization; any continuator, it is assumed, would as a matter of course attempt to develop consistently the characters he had inherited.

The problem, however, is a different one in the Morte Darthur. For there is no question of multiple authorship in the usual sense that more than one writer is suspected of being involved in the composition of a single work. The problem in the Morte Darthur concerns the question of whether a single author wrote a number of separate tales or a single unified work. In dealing with a problem such as this, the consistency of characterization and the relation of characterization to theme may indeed be highly relevant. For, first of all, whereas the writer of eight tales might feel
no compunction to make consistent his characters, particularly the minor ones, as they appeared in the separate stories, the writer of a single work would be obliged to make sure that all his characters remained “in character” throughout the whole work. Faulkner, for example, who is surely writing “separate romances” utilizing common characters and a common background, obviously feels free to take liberties not only with chronology, but also with characterization in the separate stories that the writer of a single novel would not dare to. Suratt, the gossipy itinerant sewing-machine salesman of *As I Lay Dying* appears as the cunning trader and narrator of *The Hamlet* whom only Flem Snopes can outwit and finally emerges as the idealistic philosopher friend of Gavin Stevens in *The Town* and *The Mansion*. One would not in reading *The Hamlet* readily believe the voluptuous Eula Snopes to be capable of taking her own life to protect her daughter as she does in *The Town*. As Robert Kirk says, “Faulkner, without much thought, one suspects, bowed to the aesthetic demands of the moment rather than to the demands of consistency.” Second, an author engaged in writing a number of separate works—especially one who, as is claimed of Malory, did not plan in advance to write anything beyond the work on which he was then engaged—might not bother to insure the development of a character from work to work as he would within a single work. Third, the author of separate tales, if working with figures whose characters were largely inherited from tradition, would make little effort, it seems to me, to change those traditional characters in order either to make them consistent or to insure their development within his own work.

This last point is of considerable importance. As we have seen, Malory used a number of sources representing a variety of traditions. As the Celticists, particularly Roger Sherman Loomis have amply shown, it is possible to trace most of the Arthurian characters back into the mists of the Welsh folk
tradition. In the course of their creation out of legend and myth and primitive history and in their transmission from their oral sources through the early chronicles and romances down to Malory, these characters developed not only set personalities, but often also a number of contradictory attributes, which later writers must reconcile.

A good case in point is Morgan le Fay. Although she could hardly be called a major character in any of Malory's sources, her place within the Arthur story was certainly prominent enough to demand her inclusion in Malory's version. Yet the inconsistencies of her character, caused by the waywardness of her development in the sources, made it necessary for Malory to alter somewhat her traditional personality in order to use her within his own work. For example, there are at least ten clearly-defined traditions or characteristics which come to be associated with Morgan le Fay from her first appearance in written literature in the *Vita Merlini* (ca. 1148) up until the composition of Malory's book: (1) she is associated with an Otherworld paradise, (2) she possesses a magical healing power, (3) she is the half-sister of Arthur, (4) she lures knights into her Otherworld abode, (5) she has the ability to change the shapes of things, (6) she possesses great beauty, (7) she hates Guinevere, (8) she tests the fidelity and honor of individuals, (9) her actions are usually directed against Arthur, and (10) she possesses the power of prophecy. Of these, at least three (her healing power, her testing power, and her power of prophecy) can be said to be generally "good" qualities, three (her luring knights into her Otherworld lair, her hatred of Guinevere, and her activities against Arthur) "evil" qualities, and the remaining four neither good nor evil in themselves. Malory's problem was to remain within the limits of her traditional character, yet to present her either as basically "good" or as basically "evil." His answer was to blacken her character as
much as he could both in order to present her consistently and to fit her effectively into his overall thematic structure.

Thus Malory "has either removed or depressed considerably two of the most common traditions" associated with Morgan during her long literary history: her ability to heal and to prophesy. True, there remain in two actions vestiges of her healing tradition: she administers a healing ointment to Alexander the Orphan (642-43), and she helps transport the wounded Arthur to Avalon (1242). In the first of these instances, however, her motive is to obligate the young Alexander to "do hir plesure whan hit lykyth hir" (643), and in the second she apparently is present simply in order to symbolize at the conclusion of the book the evil forces of society which Arthur has fought against during his life.

Nowhere, moreover, in the Morte Darthur is she permitted to prophesy, although in the Suite du Merlin, Malory's immediate source, she writes an extended prophecy of the deaths of Arthur and Gawain.

Malory's purpose in making such source alterations is to make Morgan le Fay into a wholly evil person and so she appears throughout the Morte Darthur. In her most extended appearance, in the "Arthur and Accolon" section of book 1, she actively seeks the death of her half-brother Arthur. T. L. Wright sees her action here as generally symbolic of the failure of "trust," the very keystone of Arthurian chivalry, in Arthur's court. Morgan's deceitful, violent attempts on her brother's life are designed by Malory to represent a failure of trust on its most basic level, that of the family and so he consistently emphasizes the blood relationship between Arthur and Morgan by the addition and repetition of appositional phrases such as "hys sister" and "hir brother" at critical points in the story. Both principle and technique can be seen in such a passage as this, in which the italics represent Malory's addition to his source:
So aftir for grete truste Arthure betoke the scawberde unto Morgan le Fay, hys sister. And she loved another knyght bettir than hir husbande, kynge Uriens, othir Arthure. And she wolde have had Arthure hir brother slayne, and therefore she lete make anothir scawberd for Excaliber lyke it by enchauntement, and gaf the scawberd Excaliber to her lover. And the knyghtes name was called Accolon, that aftir had nere slayne kynge Arthure (79).

Passages like this make it clear that Morgan in the early days of the court deliberately and continually violates the trust and faith of Arthur and that in so defining her Malory is placing Morgan le Fay within the general context of the failure of Arthurian chivalry that the book as a whole exemplifies, especially in the blood feud of the houses of King Lot and King Pellinore.

Morgan’s next appearance bears out our first impression of her malice and deceit. For in sending to Arthur the poisoned mantle (157) she again takes advantage of her family position of trust by instructing her messenger to tell Arthur that the mantle is sent as a peace offering between them in order that “what thynge she hath offended she woll amende hit at your owne plesure” (157). And in all of her six later appearances, Malory emphasizes the traditions of her hatred of Arthur and Guinevere: she sends the magic drinking horn from which only faithful wives may drink to Guinevere (429-30) and a suggestively painted shield to Arthur (557) in order to expose the queen’s treachery; she twice imprisons Arthur’s knights (257-59; 553-55); and she attempts to kill by means of ambushes both Lancelot (505 ff.) and Tristan (511). In none of these episodes are Morgan’s actions in the least justified; they are allowed by Malory to stand as examples of her thoroughly evil nature. Malory has thus repressed the few “good” qualities which tradition associates with Morgan le Fay and so makes her one of his many symbols of the general failure of chivalry in Arthur’s society.
Much the same point can be made concerning Malory's use of Mordred. Henry Grady Morgan, following T. L. Wright's general argument, has effectively shown that just as the relationship of Morgan and Arthur in the "Arthur and Accolon" section of book I initiates the theme of the failure in trust, so the relationship between Arthur and Mordred in "The Day of Destiny" in book VIII consciously echoes that earlier relationship and so repeats this vital theme at the very end of the *Morte Darthur*. In book VIII, for example, Malory alters his sources considerably by having Arthur himself choose Mordred "chyeff ruler of all Inglelond" in his absence "bycause sir Mordred was kyenge Arthurs son" (1211). And just as he had in book I repeatedly emphasized Morgan's relationship to Arthur by the addition of such phrases as "hys sister" and "hir brother," so in book VIII Malory no less than six times emphasizes by the use of similar phrases the relationship of Arthur and Mordred. Just as in book I Morgan had violated Arthur's trust by using his sword, Excaliber, which he had given her "for grete truste" against him, so in book VIII, Mordred turns against Arthur the power of the regency with which Arthur had trusted him. In both examples of broken trust Malory emphasizes at the beginning and again at the end of the narrative one of the basic weaknesses of the Round Table society, its failure to live up to its own vows of fidelity and loyalty, and in both instances he illustrates that failure, moreover, within the basic unity of all society, the family.

It is clear also that Malory has taken pains, as he had done with Morgan le Fay, to alter his sources in order to present Mordred consistently as well as to fit him thematically into the *Morte Darthur*. Malory has therefore denigrated the character of Mordred as found in the earlier accounts by increasing his share in the treachery of the Orkeney family. He is, for example, specifically named by Malory as the "murtherer" of Lamerak (699), and he is said by Malory to
hate Dinadan (614), one of Malory’s most attractive knights. Other characters—Gawain (1161-62), Guinevere (1228), Lancelot (1249), even the Bishop of Canterbury (1228)—speak ill of Mordred in passages not to be found in Malory’s sources. His role in the final treachery has been augmented by the inclusion of sourceless speeches and actions. And throughout the _Morte Darthur_, his actions have been made by Malory to stem consistently from a single motive; like his brother Agravaine, he is envious and jealous of those who are in power and who use that power for good ends.

It is relatively easy to demonstrate this sort of consistency of characterization in comparatively straightforward characters like Morgan le Fay and Mordred whose functions in the _Morte Darthur_ largely dictate their actions. R. M. Lumiansky has shown, for example, that Malory has changed a number of passages throughout the _Morte Darthur_ in order to present a “consistent picture of Bors as a valiant and steadfast knight able to overcome the blemish of his one lapse from virtue,” standing thematically “in sharp contrast to Lancelot, whose instability is paramount until the final scenes of the book.” Thomas C. Rumble has demonstrated how, to enforce a thematic comparison with Lancelot and Guinevere, Malory has whitened the character of Isode by eliminating her role in the attempted murder of Brangwayne, humanized Tristan (and, of course, Isode) by having him fall in love with Isode long before the administration of the love potion, and thoroughly blackened the character of King Mark so that the lovers may have some measure of sympathy. And Wilfred L. Guerin, Jr., has shown how Gareth’s “good points” are consistently “stressed, many times sourcelessly, so that he becomes in Malory’s version the chief secondary character of the story—high in physical prowess, in morality, and in personal relationships.”

Guerin has also framed a theory of characterization in the _Morte Darthur_ which demonstrates that Malory took
pains to present consistently from the beginning to the end of his book those major Arthurian characters who were in his sources anything but consistently presented and whose characters in his own work have seemed inconsistent to some critics. Following the general argument of Vida D. Scudder (in *Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory and Its Sources*), Guerin maintains that Malory's characters are composed of deliberately "mixed" characteristics and that this mixture of seemingly contradictory qualities represents Malory's attempt to delve into the psychology of his knights and ladies in order to portray them as persons whose conflicting values and emotional intensity lead them into inner struggles and so ultimately cause them to develop and grow. For example, Guerin conceives of Lancelot, as he does of Arthur and Guinevere also, as being essentially tragic in nature; he is a man torn between his love of the queen and his loyalty to Arthur, a conflict which leads eventually and ironically to his destroying both of them. Malory thus alters his sources and arranges his narrative line in order to present Lancelot as "a unique blend of good and evil" and to demonstrate "the change of fortune that first lowers, then raises him, the tragic irony that besets his actions, his growing sense of self-discovery and repentance, and the conflict of his emotions."25

The case for consistency of characterization in Malory, however, is most forcefully demonstrated by his treatment of Gawain, at first glance the most inconsistent of all the traditional characters. The Gawain of the *Suite du Merlin* and the prose *Tristan* had been traditionally a "bad" character, frivolous, ill-tempered, and deceitful; the thirteenth-century romances, on the other hand, had pictured him as the "courteous" Gawain, the perfect chivalric warrior and lover. Malory thus inherited a tissue of contradictions. Yet the consistency of Gawain in the *Morte Darthur* has been perhaps more vehemently, and more variously, defended than that of any other of Malory's characters. R. M. Lumiansky and
B. J. Whiting have both shown that Malory exerted considerable creative selectivity in adapting his sources in order to insure Gawain's consistency in particular incidents; R. H. Wilson and Vida Scudder, while denying to Malory complete success in integrating Gawain into the whole of the *Morte Darthur*, maintain that Malory attempted to motivate all of Gawain's actions in terms of his fierce loyalty to his family.

Malory's problem with Gawain, however, was not simply one of reconciling the knight's inconsistencies, but of creating for Gawain a role in which he might make a selected use of character traits taken from both Gawain traditions. Again, Wilfred Guerin's principle seems best to fit the case. Gawain is the arrogant, proud, blood-feuding knight of the northern islands, head of his clan and sworn revenger of his father's death; and he is at the same time the knight who has learned the new chivalry at Arthur's court and who is the first to admit that "the beste of us all had bene full colde at the harte-roote had nat sir Launcelot bene bettir than we" (1162). Thus he at first tries to turn back Agravaine and Mordred from their attempt to destroy Lancelot and, through Lancelot, Arthur, but allows them to go to the king when they appeal to him on the grounds of family honor. He reverts, however, to his former savage personality and to his exaggerated code of clan loyalty when Gareth is struck down accidentally by Lancelot. In his final, ungovernable, unswerving anger, Gawain helps to bring on the downfall of the whole court before he comes to himself and in a final reversion to his civilized nature begs Lancelot's forgiveness. Thus both Gawains are to some degree present in Malory and Malory's portrait of the whole Gawain is totally consistent within itself.

G. H. Maynadier's statement that Malory had "but little psychological interest in [his characters] and but little invention" is thus seen upon investigation to be simply inac-
curate. Malory's inventiveness and interest in character is everywhere evident in the *Morte Darthur*, and the consistency of his characterization throughout the whole work is a strong indication of its planned unity. The knights and ladies of the *Morte Darthur* evolve—as they do in none of the sources—as actors within a thematically unified drama in which each plays an appropriate and wholly consistent role. There is digression and awkwardness and repetition of detail in the *Morte Darthur* to be sure; given the nature and sheer bulk of the sources, it is a marvel that there is not more. But purpose there is and planning and consistency and structure and unity, everywhere apparent and effective.

Faced with the *Morte Darthur*, the great book itself, the argument for separate tales becomes academic, a scholar's hypothetical abstraction. It is much like the arguments for and against the Christian origin of the Grail. Of course, there are arguments for ritual and for Celtic origin and, of course, great amounts of evidence supporting either or both of these positions, but no poet, no "creative" writer (to apply literally a cant term) ever took the Grail to be anything other than a Christian symbol. And Spenser, Milton, Tennyson, and Charles Williams, not to mention generations of English and American schoolboys, have read Malory's book as a single story, beginning and ending in darkness, but in its progress passing through radiances and glories and encompassing in its unity "many joyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble and renomed actes of humanyte, gentynesse, and chyvalryes."29

And as Malory, who should have known, himself incontrovertibly concluded:

**HERE IS THE ENDE OF THE HOOLE BOOK OF KYNG ARTHUR AND OF HIS NOBLE KNYGHTS OF THE ROUNDE TABLE, THAT WHAN THEY WERE HOLE TOGYDERS THERE WAS EVER AN HONDRED AND FORTY.** (1260)30
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NOTES

PROLOGUE


4 The phrase is used by Caxton in his "Preface" to Le Morte Darthur to describe himself.

5 For a sampling of such criticism, see the essays published in Malory's Originality, ed. R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).

6 Arthurian Literature, p. 546.


10 Helen I. Wroten, "Malory's Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius Compared with its Source, The Alliterative Morte Arthure" (Unpublished dissertation, University of Illinois, 1950); Lumiansky, Tulane Studies, V.
NOTES FOR PAGES XVI TO 2

12 Lumiansky, Tulane Studies, V, 32.
13 Lumiansky, Tulane Studies, V, 33.
14 See T. L. Wright, “The Tale of King Arthur,” in Malory’s Originality, pp. 9-12.
15 This is essentially the method of the essays in Malory’s Originality.
17 Arthurian Literature, p. 546.
18 “the hoole book,” in Essays on Malory, p. 44.
19 The known facts of Malory’s biography are summarized in Works, pp. xiii-xix.
21 Essays on Malory, p. 42.
22 Essays on Malory, pp. 42 and 48.
23 “The Tale of Lancelot and Guinevere,” in Malory’s Originality.
24 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, chaps. XII, XIII.
25 Essays on Malory, p. 61.
26 Essays on Malory, p. 42.
27 Essays on Malory, p. 22.
28 The most carefully worked out exposition of the dramatic unity of The Canterbury Tales is that of R. M. Lumiansky in Of Sondry Folk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1955).
29 This is essentially the position taken by D. S. Brewer in “the hoole book” and by P. E. Tucker, “The Place of the ‘Quest of the Holy Grail’ in the ‘Morte Darthur,’” MLR, XLVIII (1953), 391-97. Brewer also advances the specious and irrelevant argument that Malory may have “built better than he knew” (p. 48).
30 Particularly in “Malory’s Early Knowledge of Arthurian Romance,” University of Texas Studies in English, XXIX (1950), 33-50.
31 A nearly complete listing of the important works can be had by consulting the bibliography in Vinaver’s edition (pp. 1652-58), the supplement to it in Arthurian Literature, and the notes to Malory’s Originality. Yearly bibliographies of Arthurian studies, including works on Malory, appear in Modern Language Quarterly and in the Bulletin bibliographique de la Société Arthurienne. The bibliography in Essays on Malory is notably incomplete.

ONE

Cp. Malory’s technique of supplying, wherever possible, native English place names to take the place of the French books’ vague references. The extent to which he does this would seem to indicate that Malory has in mind a “clear and fairly accurate plan of the geography of the story” (Works, 1643).
I need to repeat here briefly what I said in my prologue about my attitude toward Malory's sources. Clearly, my strongest points must be those which rest on explicit changes which Malory makes in his immediate sources, and whenever I am dealing with such passages, I have so noted. However, I also believe that often Malory found the seeds of his own chronological scheme in his sources and so retained certain passages which he was able to fit together with statements of his own in order to form a coherent temporal framework.

Also, I am frequently working here with Malory's book v, his version of the Tristan story, which presents one of the greatest source problems in Malory. As Thomas C. Rumble points out in an unpublished dissertation entitled "The Tristan Legend and its place in the Morte Darthur" (Tulane University, 1955), pp. 120 ff., and in "The Tale of Tristram" in Malory's Originality, pp. 122 ff., despite Vinaver's hypothetical reconstruction of Malory's Tristan source, the manuscripts which he cites and with which he compares Malory's text in book v are not Malory's immediate sources. Thus, Vinaver's whole process in the Tristan commentary represents to Rumble a "hazardous critical approach" operating on a "false premise."

The chronological chart which accompanies this chapter is designed to show only roughly the temporal relationships of the various sections of Malory's book. A more exactly proportioned chart is, I think, out of the question in view of Malory's silences and his sometimes unavoidable discrepancies.

2 I am quite aware that the author or authors of Malory's most useful source, the thirteenth-century French work, had attempted to establish some semblance of order. But even so, this work is closer to the older romances in technique than it is to Malory.

3 This point is made both by R. M. Lumiansky (Tulane Studies, V, 36) and by R. H. Wilson ("How Many Books Did Malory Write?" in University of Texas Studies in English, XXX [1951], 11).

4 That the time lapse here is of approximately twenty years duration is noted by Thomas C. Rumble ("The Tristan Legend," pp. 152 ff.). Rumble's argument is based on Merlin's statement in book 1 to Lancelot's mother that "yonge Launcelot shall within this twenty yere revenge you on kyng Claudas" (126).


6 Lumiansky, Tulane Studies, V, 37.

7 Wilson, Texas Studies, XXX, 11-12.

8 Malory's Originality, p. 96, and "The Tristan Legend," p. 153, respectively.

9 Malory's Originality, pp. 96 ff.

10 This because of a reference, original with Malory, to Tristan's presence
at the tournament of Lady Lyonesse in the Gareth section which asserts that Tristan "was nat at that tyme knyght of the Rounde Table" (344).


15 For this reason, I have not shown these figures on the accompanying chart.

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**MALORY'S CHRONOLOGY**

**BOOK I**

**TALE OF ARTHUR**

War with Claudas

- 20-year interval (p. 126)

- Conception of Galahad (p. 795)

**ENFANCE OF GALAHAD**

- Madness of Lancelot (pp. 806-24)

**TALE OF TRISTAN**

(pp. 365-786, 835-45)

**BOOK V**

(pp. 787-834)

(15 years)

- La Cote Mal Tayle (pp. 455-76)

**BOOK IV**

**TALE OF GARETH**

- Presentation of Tristan (p. 572)

- Mark and Tristan leave for Cornwall (p. 610)

**BOOK II**

**WAR WITH LUCIUS**

- Alexander the Orphan (pp. 633-48)

- Arthur returns (p. 638)

**BOOK III**

**TALE OF LANCELOT**

- Gareth's first appearance (p. 696)

- Lonezep (pp. 727ff)

- Lancelot and Blyaunte (p. 819)

- Tristan and Palomides fight, and Palomides is christened (pp. 843ff)

- Lancelot returns to Court (p. 832)

- Pentecost (Galahad comes to Court) (p. 854)

**BOOKS VI, VII, VIII**
NOTES FOR PAGES 11 TO 22


17 Rumble, Malory's Originality, p. 146. There are possibly additional reasons for so delaying the ending of the Tristan story. See p. 24 below.

TWO

1 MLR, XLVIII, 391-92.
2 Texas Studies, XXIX, 33-50.
3 De Amore, ed. Amadeu Pagès (Castelló de la Plana, 1930), p. 15.

4 In this chapter, I have not attempted to list the great number of passages reflecting courtly love which Malory altered; Eugène Vinaver's notes to his large edition of the Winchester manuscript scrupulously record each alteration. Needless to say, I do not agree with Vinaver's notion that Malory neither understood nor appreciated courtly love and so merely reduced or distorted what he did not understand.

In tracing what I believe to be a clear pattern in Malory's treatment of courtly love, I have dealt only with Malory's major changes in his sources. What I have said of Malory's major changes, however, may be borne out by an examination of any of Malory's less important alterations.

5 The first mention of the virtues extolled in the quoted passage occurs in a section of Malory's own composition in book 1 (120).

6 See Gervase Mathew's statement that by the late fourteenth century "a conventional theory of marriage assumed that it was not only compatible with romantic love but ideally an expression of it" ("Marriage and Amour Courtois in Late Fourteenth-Century England," Essays presented to Charles Williams [London: Oxford University Press, 1947], p. 131). Such a notion would seem absurd to a twelfth-century writer of romances.

7 Malory's Originality, p. 95.
8 Lancelot's stipulation that the captured knights present themselves to Guinevere and his three conversations regarding his love for Guinevere are all Malory's additions to his French source.

9 Malory's Originality, p. 96.

10 The speech (330) beginning "A, fayre lady" given to Lyne in the Winchester manuscript clearly belongs to Lyones, to whom Caxton correctly assigns it. The speech describes Lyones' plan to disguise herself in order to meet Gareth.

11 The figure of Lyne is of great interest throughout the tale. She is plainly used by Malory (whatever her functions in the analogues) as a dea ex machina to bring the lovers together and then, significantly, to keep them apart until they can be married.

12 It is interesting to note that in Malory's story the capture of Lyones and the consequent slaying of Round Table knights is in a sense caused by l'amour courtois: the Red Knight attempts to kill Arthur's knights because of a promise made to a woman whom he loves.

13 Malory's Originality, p. 146.
Malory's Originality, p. 208.
15 Malory's Originality, p. 146.
16 R. M. Lumiansky has already performed that useful task. "The Tale of Lancelot and Guenevere" traces in great detail the progress of the lovers.

THREE

2 "Aftir the deth of Uther regned Arthure, his son, which had grete warre in hys dayes for to gete all Inglonde into hys honde; for there were many kyngis within the realme of Inglonde and of Scotlonde, Walys, and Cornuwayne" (61).
3 P. E. Tucker (MLR, XLVIII, 391) states that he believes the Grail quest to be a turning point in Malory's conception of Lancelot's character and hence in the thematic movement of the Morte Darthur.
4 For instances of Malory's reductions of the elaborate theological commentaries of the hermits see Vinaver's text 882, 892, 898, 927, 945, and 990.
5 The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romance, Volume VI: Les Aventures Ou La Queste del Saint Graal, Carnegie Inst. of Washington: Publ. No. 74, VI (1913), 72-73. The best modern edition of Malory's source for the Grail section is that edited by Albert Pauphilet for the Classiques français du moyen âge in 1923. Page references in this chapter to the French text are to Pauphilet's edition and are marked (F).
6 That Malory's task was not to "secularize" the Grail may be demonstrated by the fact that in three places (888, 891, 997) he cuts away needless battle detail. Plainly, Malory wishes to eliminate all unnecessary detail, be it religious or secular.
7 I note one possible exception to this general statement: in the Gawain section a hermit condemns the court "for their synne and their wyckednesse" (946). The French source reads "por lor luxure et par lor orgueil" (F 156). It may be, however, that Malory felt his general rendering to be a stronger indictment of the court than was the statement found in the source, especially in the substitution of "wyckednesse" for "orgueil."
9 Tucker (MLR, XLVIII, 393) in discussing Lancelot's pride, states that Malory "magnifies Lancelot's sense of his own prowess until it becomes a fault in his knighthood."
10 Tucker, in discussing Lancelot's character, also regards Lancelot's instability as his chief sin. Tucker, however, views Lancelot as wavering between two sorts of chivalry—"good" (that directed by the chivalric code and represented by the Grail) and "bad" (that directed by his love for Guinevere). On the other hand, I would prefer to see Lancelot wavering not between two degrees of chivalry, but between his own avowed conception of chivalry as a secular ideal (and this would include his love for
Guinevere) and a religious ideal which itself transcends chivalry. Tucker also contends that Malory “was already uneasy over the connexion of love and chivalry when he came to the quest” and that because “he found Lancelot condemned as the knight-lover, but being certain that knighthood was a noble ideal, he began to distinguish between good chivalry and bad.” This thesis, however, seems to me to ignore a distinction important to the interpretation of the whole Morte Darthur, that Malory did not condemn love as a part of the knightly code (see Malory’s own “Tale of Sir Gareth”), but instead condemned the adultery which was an integral part of the system of courtly love as he found it reflected in his French source.

11 The italics represent Malory’s addition. For other instances of the changes which Malory makes in his source, see Tucker’s article.

12 Charles Williams, in the elaborate reconstruction of the Arthurian cycle contained in Taliessin through Logres, The Region of the Summer Stars, and the fragmentary Figure of Arthur, makes much the same point concerning the function of Bors and Galahad.

13 Lumiansky’s “Malory’s Steadfast Bors” demonstrates that Bors’ conduct in the Grail quest is consistent with the development of his character in the whole Morte Darthur.

14 Later (990) we learn that King Pelles received the stroke for daring to touch the forbidden sword. This inconsistency, however, like the confusion of the Fisher King and King Pelles, comes to Malory from his source.

15 The italics represent Malory’s addition.

FOUR


2 Among the episodes of this third adventure, the “Healing of Meliot” recalls a section of the Perlesvaus (cp. R. H. Wilson, “Malory and the Perlesvaus,” MP, XXX [1932], 13-32), and Lancelot’s encounter with Sir Pedivere is strongly reminiscent of a passage in the Prose Lancelot (cp. R. H. Wilson, “The Prose Lancelot in Malory,” University of Texas Studies in English, XXXII [1953], 1-13).

3 This same view of at least part of book 1, the “Torre and Pellinor” section, is put forth by Vida D. Scudder in Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory and Its Sources (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1921). Miss Scudder states, rightly I think, that the theme of these early adventures “is the theme of the failure of the knights for lack of a restraining code, the imperative need for a standard through which the confused instincts of nascent chivalry may be focused and preserved. At the end of the book [Caxton’s book III] this standard is to be established once and for all: the great Oath [Malory’s addition on p. 91] is to be sworn” (p. 201).

4 See the various articles by R. H. Wilson on Malory’s handling and naming of his minor characters.
There are other foreshadowings of Gawain's revenge on Pellinore, taken by Malory from the French, on pages 77 and 81.

The passage on page 613 is somewhat ambiguous: "Wyte you well sir Gawayne was wrothe that sir Gaherys had slayne his modir and let sir Lameroke ascape." There is, of course, a possibility that Gawain is sorry for both deeds, but since Gawain himself had helped arrange the rendezvous, he must have known what Galieris intended.

Wilson, Texas Studies, XXX, 13.

Vinaver (1582-83) attributes this detail of characterization to a mistranslation, but whether accidental or purposeful, it is a brilliant stroke.

Vinaver here, it seems to me, exceeds his editorial authority. He prints in his text Caxton's version of the passage which attributes this last line to Agravaine and which does not contain the vital linking conjunction "but." Gawain's dramatic reversal is quite clearly intended in the Winchester manuscript, but it is forever denied the reader who has only the one-volume edition of the text or the scholar who does not trouble to inspect Vinaver's apparatus or note on the passage.

FIVE

I am indebted for this point to T. L. Wright (Malory's Originality, pp. 24 ff.).


One should note that Vinaver's "line-by-line" comparison of Malory's Tristan in volume III of his edition is made with a purely hypothetical source.

I have never been convinced by the almost universally accepted argument of Arthurian scholars that there somewhere exists a source for the Gareth. I see no reason why Malory, realizing his need at this point in his story for a tale of "vertuouse" love, might not have framed, rather freely, a suitable piece using as a base one of the many analogues of the "fair unknown" tale.

Lumiansky, Malory's Originality, p. 230.

The probable nature of Malory's source and his use of it are taken up in detail by R. H. Wilson (Texas Studies, XXXII, 1-13).

Texas Studies, XXXII, 13.

In the source, she is accused of having spent the night with Kay.

Malory's Originality, p. 215.

Malory's Originality, p. 232.

One has only to glance through the articles by Lumiansky, Rumble, and Wilson and through Malory's Originality to see how precisely, incident by incident, this task is being accomplished.

Robert W. Kirk in an appendix to Faulkner's People (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) provides a table of chronological inconsistencies.
NOTES FOR PAGES 83 TO 91

13 *Faulkner's People*, p. x.
18 Malory’s Originality, pp. 60-61.
22 Malory’s Originality, pp. 148-60.
27 “Characterization in Malory: A Comparison with His Sources” (private edition: University of Chicago Libraries, 1934), pp. 70, 82, and *Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 188, respectively.
29 Caxton’s “Preface.”
30 Italics mine.
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