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Malory's Work In The Light Of His Times

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Introduction

My examination of Malory's work in the light of his times falls into a number of sections which examine his portrayal of government, society, love, religion and chivalry. I have attempted to identify in each both Malory's own perceptions and those of his society and to show the links between them. I have also considered the proportions of realism and idealism in his work, where appropriate, as well as the accuracy of the physical picture which Malory's work gives of his times.

To some extent my choice of topic has been prompted by a desire to justify, though certainly not to apologise for, the study of medieval European literature in the Southern hemisphere, particularly in Africa. I feel that both the internationalism and, if I may coin a term, the 'intertemporalism' promoted by such disciplines have their part to play in the modern world where they are seen as facets of universal human experience. They allow us to approach the stage where the experience of one man in any time may become the experience of any man in any time, and thus intellectually to transcend the bonds of race, or place, or time.

The Morte d'Arthur is in this respect a pathway in human experience and the aim of my essay has been to test its reliability. Conclusions are expressed at intervals in the body of the essay, often at the end of a section or subsection, and, more generally, in a separate conclusion at the end. While most references are acknowledged in footnotes I have acknowledged quotations from Malory's work only by page number in the body of the essay. My text for these is Vinaver, E; Malory: Works (London:Oxford University Press, 1981).

Since I am to some extent precariously straddling disciplines in this essay I hope that my heavy reliance on historians, particularly social historians, will be viewed with tolerance.

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Government

Geoffrey Ashe writes of Malory that "underlying all his work was a yearning for realiseable ideals of kingship and aristocracy; a yearning alien to the irresponsible troubadours and doubtless prompted to some degree by the infamies of Yorkist and Lancastrian." (1)

Although this seems a sweeping statement, a careful reading of the text shows not only Malory's deep concern with an ideal and stable aristocratic society but also the frequent realism with which he depicted its rise and fall. I feel that Ashe's phrase "realiseable ideals" precisely represents Malory's blend of the traditional aristocratic ideals with the realities of medieval times, by means of which he achieved a depiction of a chivalric society which is both a text book for its accomplishment and a warning of its weaknesses. The evils of such an aristocratic medieval society are not glossed over in the work but revealed and confronted. Indeed, as an object lesson they finally triumph.

The work may be examined in several sections, some subjects showing a predominantly realistic situation softened by idealism. In others a predominantly idealistic aim is made more practical by realism.

The realities of medieval feudal government, for example, are clearly depicted in a sometimes sordid form. However, from an aristocratic viewpoint at least, they have been idealised by such devices as the emphasis on the strength of the court and the glamour and civic commitment of its king. There are frequent parallels between happenings in Malory's fictitious world and medieval English government, both in general practice and specific instances.

(1) Ashe, G. The Quest for Arthur's Britain (London, Paladin, 1984) Page 12.

Ideal of kingship

The tale begins with a united England under Uther Pendragon "...kynge of all England..." (Page 3) who is nevertheless embroiled in a war against a strong vassal as a result of a private indiscretion. The turmoil which follows this is later repeated in the anarchy resulting from Arthur's war against Lancelot.

Clearly in this society, as in the real one, the wisdom and virtue of the king is of paramount importance. The concept of kingship was an important one in the one party states of medieval Europe and to some degree Malory's work serves as a means of examining the virtues of a good king and the failings of a bad one.

Merlin reproves Arthur for lack of mercy after Bedagrayne, condemning the senseless slaughter when Arthur forgets his kingship in the joy of his warrior bloodlust. The moral virtue required of a king is inherent in the sense of his divine responsibility, revealed by such phrases as "for God will have it soo" (Page 8) at Arthur's coronation and the very miracle of the sword in the stone, which stresses the Old Testament interpretation of kingship as a divinely ordained service.

This particular ideal of kingship is emphasised in the Morte d'Arthur by Merlin's character as a type of Old Testament prophet, a Samuel to Arthur's David.

It is plain that this religious emphasis in Arthur's kingship is deliberate. Kennedy (1) points out that the only detail which Malory chose to retain from his source's account of Arthur's knighting was his offering of the sword upon the altar.

This form of knighthood is rare in the work and is clearly included here to bolster the religious aspect of the king's rule. The Old Testament character of Merlin's prophecies, together with such references as the one to God's displeasure after Bedagrayne, further reinforce Arthur's divine backing.

(1) Kennedy, B. Knighthood in the Morte d'Arthur (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S.Brewer, 1985.)

This particular reference after Bedagrayne, incidentally, (... "Who! for God is wroth with the for thou woll never have done ...and thou tary on them ony lenger thy fortune woll turne...") is, as Kennedy points out, not found in Malory's source.

This slaughter of fugitives, it appears from Kennedy, would have been a serious departure from kingly behaviour in 15th century eyes.

(1) Sir Gilbert Hay, in his translation of Lull's Order of Chivalry, warned unjust kings that God would remove them from their thrones if they failed in their duties to him. When Arthur neglects his kingdom to pursue vengeance, ignoring a Papal Bull in the process, the last battle becomes a fated event, with a snake serving to turn Fortune's wheel.

Interestingly, Hay specifically warned that God would make Fortune turn her wheel should the king usurp God's office by seeking vengeance. He may have been prompted to add this specific point by his Scots affiliations. The Scots emphasis on the blood feud is very clear in Malory's work.

At Bedagrayne, then, we see an ideal of kingship in the real world being reinforced, proved and intensified in Malory's ideal world. Later we also see Arthur developing the attributes of a wise ruler, being taught them, and so teaching them to us. Again and again the emphasis is upon the king's need for careful self control and his weighty responsibilities.

At his first meeting with Pellinore Arthur irresponsibly offers to follow the questing beast for 12 months. Later he rashly promises the Lady of the Lake whatever she asks for _ a Herodian promise which later, like Salome, she causes him to regret.

These, however, are juvenile errors and Arthur learns from them, subsequently adding a rider to such promises, as he does on Page 61 where Aryes says that he had heard Arthur would grant any gift "...except hit were unreasonable...." Arthur replies that this is true "...so hit appayre not my realme nor myne astate."

(1) Kennedy, B. *ibid*

Towards the end of the book Guinivere spotlights the two chief duties of a medieval king, and the two leading occupations of Arthur's reign, when she tells Lancelot, now king of France, "...kepe well thy realme frome warre ond wrake...." (Page 720). Kennedy shows how this view was held in real life when she quotes Sir John Fortescue who wrote in 1475 "...a kynges of-fice stondith in ij thynges, on to defende his reaume ayen pair enemyes outwarde bi the swerde; on other that he defende his peple ayenste wronge doers inwarde bi justice...."(1)

In focusing on these two things Arthur does all that is required of him in Fifteenth Century minds which, apart from this, seem to have believed that he governs best who governs least. Carter and Hertz support this, (2) pointing out that until extremely recent times the Government was felt to be responsible only for maintaining law and order.

Hindley too may be called upon in support, writing, like Kennedy, that the chief duty of the king was the keeping of peace within the realm and its defence in time of war. He adds that (3) "...education as such was no part of a government's responsibilities. Nor was housing, social security or employment...." We should not, therefore, judge Arthur's "ideal" rule through modern eyes. In medieval terms, he justifies this description during the greater part of his reign.

These two major duties are fully examined in Malory's tale and Arthur performs both well. His tough response to the Roman ambassador shows him defending the land against external threats. His role as a righter of wrongs is shown in his judgement between Damas and Outlake, in his rescue of Merlin from the churls and in his response to the aggressive challenges of King Pellinore, to name but three examples.

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 20.

(2) Carter, G. and Hertz, J. Government and politics in the Twentieth Century (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971)

(3) Hindley, G. England in the Age of Caxton (London: Granada, 1979) Page 54.

This last instance is particularly interesting in its expression of a reasoned justice at odds with mere jousting for fun or glory. The King asks Pellinore "...for what cause abydest thou here that there may no knight ryde thys way...." (Page 33) and when the anarchic answer does not meet with his satisfaction Arthur tries to "amende" the custom.

The King's question and motivation are in marked contrast to the more chivalrous zeal of Gifflet. Arthur's deliberate encounter with the disruptive Pellinore so soon after his meeting with the Romans is a clear juxtaposition of the two primary duties of a king.

Joinville, in his life of St Louis, stresses in real life the essential role of a king as a just law-giver when he tactfully rebukes the King for accepting gifts from the Abbot of Cluny in a legal case. "I earnestly advise your majesty ...to forbid all those of your councilors sworn to administer justice to accept anything from those who have any matter to bring before you." (1).

The general importance of a king to a country is seen again in real-life when Froissart writes of King John's capture by the English that "...it brought loss and suffering to people of all conditions...." (2). During John's imprisonment in England both French criminals and English invaders rampage unchecked: "The kingdom of France was plundered and pillaged in every direction, so that it became impossible to ride anywhere without being attacked." (3)

An English example may be found in Froissart's reference to the consequences of Richard II's incompetent rule: "...the population of England in general began to stir and engage in internal strife. All the courts of justice were closed, to the dismay of honest men..They began to be attacked by a class of people who

(1) Shaw, M. (trans.), Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984) Page 327.

(2) Brereton, G. (ed) Froissart: Chronicles (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books; 1981). Page 146.

(3) Brereton, G. *ibid* Page 161.

roamed the country in troops and gangs. Merchants dared not ride about their business for fear of being robbed, and they did not know to whom to turn for protection or justice. Such misdeeds began to multiply rapidly, until complaints and lamentations were heard all over England and honest people were saying: 'Things have changed very much for the worse since the death of good King Edward of happy memory. In his time justice reigned and was properly enforced.'"

There is a very clear parallel between the ideals and practices of Arthurian and real world kingship. The King's physical prowess, too, is neglected neither in real life nor the Morte d'Arthur. It was an age when the King's personal role as a war leader was of paramount importance. Malory mirrors reality to a surprising degree in his, from our viewpoint, Romance respect for Arthur's adventurous nature.

Malory writes that "...all the men of worship seyde hit was myrry to be under such a chyffthane that wolde putte his person in adventure as other poure knyghtes ded." I am inescapably reminded of Froissart's account of Crecy, where King Edward refuses to help the Black Prince in order to "...let the boy win his spurs..." and later tells him: "You have proved yourself worthy to rule a land." (1).

Froissart records a strong contemporary desire for such an Arthurian warrior king, particularly among the loot-hungry aristocracy. He quotes the Duke of Gloucester, who complains that in Richard II "England hasn't a king who wants war or enjoys fighting" (2).

In Joinville's Life of St Louis, too, the king's warlike role is stressed, this time with particular reference to his function as a general. Phrases such as "the king decided" and "the king had given orders" abound throughout the text in military contexts. (3). We must never lose sight of the fact that Malory was accurately portraying a medieval ruler's primary function of soldier and general in his accounts of Arthurian campaigns.

(1) Brereton, G. op. cit. Pages 92-93

(2) Brereton, G. ibid Page 422

(3) Shaw, M. op. cit. Page 213

Arthur is not, however, infallible. In the early parts of the work he still has much to learn and this is true, too, of war. In facing the five kings Arthur makes a tactical error, against the advice of his barons, by setting off without the bulk of his forces.

Pellinore and the other barons to whom he writes are not just distinguished knights but those whose retinues make up his strength. Over-confident and under-prepared, he is attacked at night and routed with the loss of many men. Even his own personal prowess when cornered near a river does not make up for his lapse as a commander.

A lesson has been learned by both Arthur and the reader. A king has no business behaving as blindly as a common warrior. The blame for the near defeat rests squarely upon Arthur and a kingdom trembles on his misjudgement.

As the Roman campaign shows, Arthur never again gambles his kingdom so rashly. Not only his toughness as a warrior king but also a more consultative style of government emerge at the start of the Roman War.

Merlin is no longer Arthur's mentor by this time. As Vinaver points out in his notes to this section, the story has been shifted from the tale of a great magician to that of a great king, and Arthur is shown living up to this emphasis and learning to function without his old adviser. Although Arthur has, as is later made clear, already decided to fight the Romans he checks his judgement with his council. His answer to the ambassadors is commendable in its restraint and caution.

"...I woll nat be over-hasty and therefore thou and thy felowys shall abyde here seven dayes; and I shall call unto me my councyle of my moste trusty knyghtes ond deukes ond regaunte kynges ond erles on barowns (i.e. the whole medieval powerbase) and of my moste wyse doctoures (the lawyers and civil servants of the time?), ond whan we have takyn oure avysement ye shall have youre answeere playnly...." (Page 131)

In this list we feel the whole weight of the country that rests upon Arthur's decision, and become fully aware of the power and responsibility of his position. Malory has carefully shown every step of the transition that lies between this point and the boy who "made

grete doole" (Page 9) when he first discovered that Sir Ector was not his father. In its use of example and counter example, and its stress on the development of wisdom and experience, the Morte d'Arthur is as much a discussion and text book of medieval rule as a work of fiction.

Malory's respect for a brave king is equalled only by his contempt for such cowardly rulers as Mark of Cornwall. The first part of the book focuses on Arthur and shows him learning and mastering his trade, as Mark clearly has not. The ideal chivalric paradise that occupies the centre of the book is a direct consequence of his acquired ruling skill blended with his personal kingly qualities. Arthur's physical ability is natural to him but, as we have seen, the king must have more than mere warlike abilities.

Merlin is shown teaching Arthur the kingly habit of thinking in terms of benefits and losses. He must not fight Pellinore, for example, since Pellinore is a powerful baron who will later be useful to him. Again, Arthur not only shows a virile sense of duty in saying that "...hit were grete shame unto myne astate...." (Page 38) if the raiding Ryaunce is not withstood, but also reflects his new caution by prefixing his remark with "Iff thys be trew..." (Page 38).

In a last example, Arthur's responsibility for all classes, not just his knights, is referred to on Page 77 when he hears of the five kings who "...brent ond slewe ond distroyed clene byfore hem bothe the citeis on castels...." " 'Alas' seyde Arthure, 'yet had I never reste one monethe syne I was kynge crowned of this londe. Now shall I never reste tulle I mete with tho kyngis in a fayre felde, that I make myne avow; for my true lyege peple shall nat be destroyed in my defaughte'" (Page 77).

Having seen the importance of a good king, it is not surprising that the memory of good kings such as Edward III and Henry V was still strong in Malory's turbulent times, providing a basis for royalist nostalgia. Froissart, for example, openly connects the rule of Edward III with the memory of the ideal King Arthur. (1)

(1) Brereton, G.op.cit. Pages 195-196

Role Models for Arthur

Schofield writes that "Malory begins his book as if he were writing about a monarch of the House of Lancaster whose right to the throne was not quite clear _ a king 'the which had great war in his dayes for to get all Englonde into his hand'.

"The first undertakings of the monarch are to defeat his enemies and establish his kingdom; he has a private counsellor; he appeals to the Archbishop of Canterbury; he consults his lords and commons; he holds parliaments; his object is the dignity of the nation. Malory strongly emphasised the fact that Arthur was an English King: we see him make alliances, use strategy; prepare for and carry on war in the same spirit and often in the same places as the English of his day." (1)

While Schofield perhaps puts his argument a little too strongly, (I can think of no instance when Arthur actually consults his commons, for example), I feel that he is right in stressing Malory's realism in his portrayal of Arthur's rule.

Kennedy also addresses this issue, attempting to pinpoint an historical role model for Malory's Arthur. While acknowledging in a note the "Lancastrian bias" generally attributed to Malory, Kennedy guardedly suggests that he may have modelled his portrait of Arthur on Edward IV. "Both Arthur and Edward are commanding figures who generate powerful loyalty in their knights and are successful with the ladies. Both are devoted to doing justice but have difficulty doing justice on their relatives (Arthur openly favours his nephews, and Edward was overly generous to his wife's kinsmen) and in both cases their nepotism angers other factions in the court and creates political problems for them." (2)

(1) Schofield, W.H. Chivalry in English Literature (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature Vol II; 1912; Harvard University) Pages 90-91.

(2) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Note 26, Page 55.

Kennedy adds that, although she is hesitant to press this hypothesis, she finds it significant "... that the political dimensions of Malory's history are so clear as to suggest it." I agree strongly with this observation.

Certainly Arthur's struggles were topical, and a link between Arthur and Edward IV, whether intentional or merely in the minds of readers, may be found in the Battle of Towton at which Warwick _ and possibly Malory as well _ fought for Edward. "For the first time since the Twelfth Century the crown of England was to be decided on a battlefield". (1)Decided, therefore, in the same way that Arthur's was.

Edward also seems to have had an Arthurian, charisma and his monarchy, according to Hindley, was rooted in popular acclaim. Irritatingly, Hindley gives no source for this quotation: "We brought King Edward to his prosperity in the realm of England, and if he will not be ruled after as we will have him; as able as we were to make him king, as able we be to depose him and put him down and bring him there where we found him."(2)

Edward owed much of his support to the London mob in particular _ the same mob which established Arthur in Malory's work and which killed Sir Lionel, the last vestige of Arthurian rule, at its end. Whether or not a specific parallel was intended, it is clear that the might of the people is realistically presented, at least in some instances, in the Morte d'Arthur.

Schofield is a great deal less careful than Kennedy when he writes that "Malory's presentation of this ideal monarch was planned to arouse definite contemporaneous interest by the subtle enforcing of similitude between past and present happenings."(3)

Later he provides an example of one of these similarities by claiming that the chain of events during the betrayal of Arthur's kingdom was similar to contemporary history. In fact the bones of this story are present in Layamon, although details, of course, do

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. page 67

(2) Hindley, G. ibid Pages 79 to 80.

(3) Schofield, W.H. op.cit. page 89

differ considerably. An interesting point of detail is raised when Schofield quotes Malory. "Then Sir Mordred raised much people about London, for they of Kent, Sussex and Surrey, Essex and Suffolk and of Norfolk, held the most party with Sir Mordred."

Schofield then adds; "It is worth consideration that these were the counties from which Edward of York largely recruited his followers".(1)

This seems to me to be a discrepancy since Edward appears to resemble Arthur more than Mordred, even allowing for a possible change of feeling during Malory's long imprisonment. If parallels must be found, I shall later point up the apparent Edward/Arthur, Lancelot/Warwick connection, but am now content to stress only the general air of realism which pervades Arthur's rule in the work.

It seems to me that what is important is the fact that Malory's Arthur and his government are a realistic enough portrayal of his times to warrant comparison with the courts of real kings, whether Edward IV or III, or, in the case of the Roman war, Henry V.

The politics of the real medieval world sometimes intrude into the world of the Morte d'Arthur. Care has been taken to place Arthur's rule in a believable setting, the turmoil and fragmentation of which is often typical of the real world of the later Middle Ages.

The process of establishing the kingdom is still to be finished after Bedagraine. The French kings make this clear in declining Arthur's offer to accompany them to France after the battle, saying: "...for ye have much to do yet in thys lande." (Page 26). Arthur's first duty is to rule at home and fight abroad only when he has to. Neglect of these priorities will eventually cost him his throne.

The anarchy which riots through lack of a strong king is shown on Page 7 after Uther's death and remains a constant threat, as well as entrenching serious problems for Arthur to deal with. "Thenn stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty of men maade hym stronge, ond mony wende to have ben kynge."

(1) Schofield, W.H. *ibid* Page 92.

Even loyal barons can be a problem. Shortly after defeating the Northern kings Arthur has to interfere in a domestic squabble between two vassal kings, Leodegraunce and Ryens. Joinville, too, writes of St Louis mediating in baronial squabbles between, for example, the Comte de Chalon and the Comte de Bourgogne. He makes it clear that this was a fairly important political function of the king.

Arthur's strength and decisiveness in such quarrels must have been particularly attractive to the Fifteenth Century readers, in whose England aristocratic tussles and landgrabbing were having a devastating effect.

Anarchy in the real world

Malory refers frequently to the petty aristocratic tyrannies at work in Arthur's land and, as in the case of Sir Damas' quarrel with Outlake, this is perhaps a stylised expression of the need for a strong government to impose its will. Indeed, it is not quite as stylised as it may appear, as I shall show shortly.

The anarchy which Arthur inherits is carried on with enthusiasm by many knights — and even good knights are shown to feel some sympathy for it. When Sir Tristram is imprisoned by Sir Darras for killing his sons, he reflects some of the ethos of his rugged society by saying that Darras had "...done to us but as a naturall knyght ought to do...."(Page 339).

In addition to vengeance, many anarchic knights are pursuing a strong profit motive. Sir Gonereyes, who withholds a woman's lands, is a good example. Both vengeance and greed have their parallels in Fifteenth Century England.

Hindley refers to the "...appalling decay of authority in the 1450's...."(1) and later quotes T.B.McFarlane, writing that the English nobility "...was masterless for thirty years, with the certain prospect of twnty more like them before restraint finally crumbled."(2)

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 52.

(2) Hindley, G. Ibid. Page 55.

He goes on to identify the source of the anarchy, resting the blame on the king's misrule, writing that: "The abuse of lordship and the prevalence of corruption were merely signs that England lacked a ruler."

As in the case of Malory and his patron Warwick, many turned to a form of artificial clan structure. They sided with their local lord, who provided strength and protection, rather than with the King. Hindley drives home the real state of anarchy when he writes that "...by the time Edward IV achieved the throne in 1461 the King's writ had been a dead letter in wide areas of England for a generation _ in the far North men had almost entirely deserted the normal courts for powerful local patrons." (1)

The similarity to Arthur's land, with its feuding Northerners and generation of anarchy between Uther's death and Arthur's full strength, is strong.

Kennedy points out that Gareth becomes "...a kind of romance equivalent for the immense political power of a great magnate in Fifteenth Century England. And his relationship to his retainers reflects that new type of contractual relationship to be found by Edward IV's time; when peers would agree to be "a good and favourable lord" to less powerful men who were neither their tenants nor their fee'd retainers." (2)

This is true of Sir Gareth's relationship with knights like Sir Ironside and the Duke de la Rowse. In view of Vinaver's suggestion that the tale of Sir Gareth may have stemmed partly or even wholly from Malory, this is significant. (3) Such an arrangement is also seen in the Paston letters where, as Hindley points out, the Pastons often rely heavily on the friendship of men like Sir John Fastolf and Lord Essex.

(1) Hindley, G. *ibid* Page 61.

(2) Kennedy, B. *op.cit.* Pages 51-52

(3) Vinaver, E. Malory. (London:Oxford University Press, 1970) First published 1929.

Hindley sets a background of aristocratic tyranny, writing of Malory's real world that: "The more ruffianly elements of the aristocracy were rapidly getting out of control. The Earl of Devon had terrorised his lands in the South-West; in Gloucestershire the dynastic wrangle between the Talbot and Berkeley families burst into open war...In East Anglia the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk ruled their lands like petty tyrants and obliged the lesser gentry to look to their defences with the eyes of professional soldiers."(1)

It is clear from this that the horror stories in some of the Paston letters are no isolated misfortunes, but rather a symptom of a sickness just as widespread in the real world as it is in the Morte d'Arthur.

Hindley quotes the famous letter of 1448 from Margaret Paston to John Paston I. I reproduce the extract from Davis, (2) with some others of related interest. In these extracts we see in the real world the greed and vengeance of the Morte d'Arthur.

"Right worshipful husband, I recommend me to you and pray you to get some crossbows, and windlasses to bend them with, and quarrel; for your houses here been so low that there may none man shoot out with no long-bow. And also I would ye should get two or three short poleaxes to keep with the doors, and as many jacks as ye may."

She also describes the extensive military preparations made by their enemy, Lord Moleyns. Davis, in a footnote to this letter, writes that Margaret was in fact thrown out by force by Lord Moleyns. In a slightly earlier letter Margaret describes how Lord Moleyns, having dispossessed the Pastons, "gathereth up the rent at Gresham a great pace." (3).

In another reference to an attack on a house, Sir John Fastolf writes to John Paston I in 1455 saying he has heard of a planned attack on himself and asking for

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 56

(2) Davis, N. The Paston Letters (London:Oxford University Press, 1983). Pages 13-14.

(3) Davis, N. ibid Page 12.

information the better to '...purvey for them as they shall not all be well pleased...." (1).

The extent of such attacks may be seen from Richard Calle's letter (2) of 1465 in which 300 men are deterred from attacking by the presence of 60 men within the place. Twelve men later attack Calle, eight of them armoured.

In a last example, (3) in a letter from John Paston III in 1461, we find a description of a large number of people, in armour, gathered for the purpose of murdering John Damme. Such references make comparable instances in the Morte d'Arthur seem almost dull.

A Paston-like example from Malory's work may be found in the barons of the Red Castle who "disheryted the lady of the Roche of a baronnery of londis by their extorsion" (Page 107). Clues such as their retinue of a hundred horsemen indicate their wealth and power and also suggest a Fifteenth Century applicability.

Hindley writes that Richard III had tried to stop the recruitment of short-term retainers, but any check to the size of retinues seems to have been temporary for: "In the prevailing conditions of the midcentury civil turmoil, such laws were often breached and the recruitment of life retainers, permitted by law, continued." (4)

The untrustworthiness of the Red Castle barons, and their decision to fight two to one, mark them down as rapacious pragmatists to whom the chivalric ideal means nothing.

While Sir Tarquin's cruelties to knights of the faction which killed his brother may appear the stuff of romance the robber baron, independent in his own domains, was readily recognisable to Fifteenth Century readers. This is so even in the far less justifiable guise of the rapist knight Sir Perys, as witness the charges against Malory himself, whether they be true or not.

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- (1) Davis, N. *ibid* Page 44.
 - (2) Davis, N. *ibid* Page 120.
 - (3) Davis, N. *ibid* Page 66
 - (4) Hindley.G. *op.cit.* Page 174

Keen, too (1) identifies the "Black Knights" as the glamourised, literary version of real robber barons who had been a problem for centuries and seized every opportunity to profit from a weak government. Caxton's preface to Malory's work refers to the many counter examples it contains and I am sure that the anarchists of Arthur's land would have seemed a valid and comprehensible backdrop to his rule.

Under Arthur's rule, at least, Government help is available to those who appeal for it. This is the case with the lady Linnet who complains that, in a Paston-like circumstance, she is besieged by a "tirraunt".

It is clear after this that Malory's political views may well have been similar to those attributed to Froissart by Brereton who wrote that to him: "The harshest ruler was preferable to one who could not compel obedience to a law...The greatest evils were dishonour and anarchy, and in the context of the age this is understandable because the worst sufferings came from such sources _ from peasant revolts, civil wars and bands of unemployed mercenaries." (2)

The Fifteenth Century in England, like the Fourteenth in France, had seen the commons in revolt and the aristocracy on the warpath. It is hardly surprising that the emphasis in Malory's work should be on the unifying strength of the crown.

It is therefore not surprising that he places so much stress on the formalities of accession and its acceptance by the barons. It is clear from other sources that this seriousness existed in real life as well. Froissart reports that at Christmas in 1376 Edward held a great feast attended by all the prelates, earls,

(1) Keen, M. Chivalry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

(2) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 21.

barons and knights of England at which Richard, the king's successor, was presented and an oath was sworn by all to recognise him as king after Edward's death. The whole episode is very similar to Uther's deathbed naming of Arthur as his successor

Importance of Descent

Some interesting political realities of the real world are revealed on Page 11 of the Morte d'Arthur when some barons seize on Arthur's "lowe blood" as an excuse to overthrow him. When Merlin denies Arthur is of low blood, admitting he is Uther's son, the barons pick up the point of his assumed bastardy. When this is denied, some waver. Ulfin's confrontation with Igrayne on Page 30 further stresses the importance of an acknowledged royal bloodline when he says that most barons rebelled in ignorance of Arthur's lineage, thereby implying that his rule would have been accepted if his lineage had been known.

As Froissart shows, even the son of the hated Richard II is accepted as King rather than have the throne left open to the strongest contender. The attitude seemed to be that there is stability in continuity and this appears true of both Malory's work and his world.

The desire for stability prompts Arthur's barons to insist on his marriage to assure themselves of an unquestionable successor. What, to modern eyes, may seem a fairytale emphasis upon kings and lineage in the book is in fact a serious reflection of an important political attitude of Malory's time.

From the first, realism may be seen in the machinations of the anti-Arthur barons who follow well known political techniques of stalling and delaying. For example, each time Arthur draws the sword from the stone the barons insist on his repeating the act at a later time. Clearly, the Archbishop and Merlin fear an assassination attempt when they arrange a day and night bodyguard for Arthur. When Arthur draws the sword from the stone for the last time the fervour of the commons, and his acts at his coronation, are realistic and in line with Malory's times.

"...all the comyns cried at ones; 'We will have Arthur unto our kyng!...and who that holdeth ageynst it, we wille slee hym!...'...and so anon was the coronacyon made, and ther was he sworne unto his lords and the comyns for a true kyng, to stand with true justice fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf." (Page 10).

Arthur then receives fealty from all the lords who held land from the crown. He returns lands taken by force during the anarchy after Uther's death. He then gives important court appointments to those loyal to him, together with practical administrative positions such as "constable" and "wardeyn" of the North. There is a clear practical awareness here, not only of the king's duty to right wrongs but also of his need for popular and court support and of his need for the political appointment of supporters to whom he can delegate the details of his rule.

Malory's own hand can be seen in this passage. Vinaver points out that, although Malory follows the French prose romance of Merlin fairly accurately, the description of Arthur's distribution of lands and offices, and his attention to the complaints of his barons, is Malory's own. (1)

Vinaver adds, in a footnote to this, that there may be an echo of contemporary events in Malory's statement that the North "fro Trent onwarde" was full of enemies. It is, as a rule, in these small details that Malory's modernising and realistic hand is felt rather than in striking alterations to the basic theme.

Realism remains a keynote when, after his first battle with Lot, Arthur calls a council of his barons in London. This city slowly assumes the significance of a capital in the work, although Malory's sources cause him to identify Arthur's capital as Camelot/Winchester.

On the advice of his chief minister, Merlin, Arthur concludes a mutual support treaty with foreign allies.

The need for caution, and for integrity.

Jousts are cried to conceal the true purpose of the French visit, allowing them to arrive accoutred "...both for the pees and also for the warre" (Page 15), i.e. for jousting with both blunt and real battle weapons. After the jousts, which Arthur is careful to stop before tempers are lost, there comes the realism of laborious "counceyles" lasting for two days until the plans are set.

The air of realism is maintained in the references to Merlin supplying the troops with "vitayle", to a French force remaining behind to guard against King Claudas, to Merlin's decision to cut out the infantry in the interests of speed and to the decision to move troops secretly into the planned killing ground of Bedagrayne. At no time does Malory suggest that Merlin used magic.

The same is true of the prelude to the battle when, for instance, Merlin takes precautions against enemy spies by making all knights South of the Trent carry passes.

Malory details the alliance of the independent rebel lords in a straightforward manner and then writes: "So by Merlyon's advice there were sent foreryders to skymme the contrey: ond they mette the foreryders of the North ond made hem to telle which way the oste com. And then they tolde kynge Arthure, and by kynge Ban and Bors hir counceile they lette brenne ond destroy all the contrey before them there they sholde ryde" (Page 17).

Descriptions such as this have all the natural realism of histories such as Caesar's Conquest of Gaul. Arthur behaves realistically in his use of a night attack on the enemy camp, in which details like the sentry's belated warning are mentioned, and his night time concealment of reserves in the woods. There is no foolhardy "fair play" of the sort that cost men their lives at Maldon.

Some details of the battle strike home with vivid realism, such as the reference to "...horse knees braste to the harde bone". (Page 28). Slain horses and severed limbs have a sickening impact, and the blood and agony of a medieval battlefield are not idealised in this description.

Other practical details surface at Arthur's Parliament at York at which we see how the real world of trade and civilian life was affected when "...they concluded shortly to areste all the shyppes of this londe, ond within fyfetene dayes to be redy at Sandwych." (Page 117). Wright (1) in a footnote to Caxton's version of the work, mentions this was a common wartime custom in Malory's day.

Concern with political realism is carried right through to the end of the book. The Round Table split is more than a court quarrel; there is a real sense of Lancelot seceding from the Empire, and the Pope's peacemaking moves are plausible in that context. Malory stresses that Lancelot was "lord of all Fraunce" and takes care to describe the whereabouts of Benoic in realistic terms (Page 699).

The sense of separate nationalism, heightened for Malory by the recent Hundred Years War, is strong in Sir Lyonell's plan to remain in the fortress while the besiegers starve and freeze outside and then attack them "...that ever aftir alyauntis (aliens) may take ensample" (Page 700).

On the home front, too, Mordred's actions are all plausible and rational. His takeover is carefully given an appearance of legality by the calling of a Parliament at which he "made" the lords choose him king (Page 707). His marriage to the ex-Queen would have strengthened his position. Modernisms such as Mordred's use of "grete gunnes" against the Tower of London add further realism.

It is plain that against this background the image of an ideal king in an ideal court should not be

(1) Wright, T. La Mort d'Arthur (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1893)

carried too far. Arthur's court is no Utopian Never-never land but a pseudo-historical one which parallels that of the Fifteenth Century in its intrigues and dangers. Nasty realities surface when, for example, Pellinore overhears a plot to poison Arthur, or when Arthur exiles Yvain on account of his suspect family loyalties.

Similar court intrigues occur elsewhere, as is shown on Page 230 when the infant Tristram is nearly killed by ambitious courtiers at the court of Lyonesse.

There is, too, the odd whiff of corruption at Arthur's court _ seen when Sir Bleoberys demands of King Mark the fairest lady at his court.

It is clear that one of the most important aids or drawbacks to the government and political world of the Morte d'Arthur is the varying character and integrity of the individual knight and the king's ability to control it. Once again this is a characteristic shared with the real world. King Mark suffers in particular when he loses the respect of his barons. They oppose his judgement on two occasions _ when they prevent the burning of adulterous ladies and again when they prevent the execution of Tristram. Finally, they rebel against Mark.

The judgement, customs and integrity of Arthur's knights therefore need to be considered very seriously in any discussion of Arthurian politics and the government which rests on them. In Arthur's realm, for instance, we see a clear difference in attitude between the court-supporting English and the clan-supporting Scots.

This difference, as Kennedy makes clear, was still very strong in the Fifteenth Century when the social structure of the North "...was still based to a greater or lesser extent upon the patrilinear clans.." (1)

The feud motif in the work represents a valid political factor capable of undermining the King's power and destroying his government. That is the great disadvantage of the government of the Morte d'Arthur

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 279.

and of Malory's time. There are too few safety catches and if the king is weak, incompetent, or biased the entire structure is likely to disintegrate.

In this context a weakened king has severe problems. During Uther's last illness, for example, his enemies "usurped upon him"; a distinct danger when power is vested in one mortal man. Certainly the political world of the Morte d'Arthur, like the Government, is not in itself an ideal one. It merely has the capacity to become one, from the aristocratic point of view, under an ideal chivalric ruler.

The distinction is a valid one in the light of Malory's blend of realism and idealism, and his practical aim of the transformation of the real world into the ideal which he shows is possible. Much clearly depends on the strength and integrity of the king and his loyal knights. This, I think, is an essential concept underlying Malory's emphasis on chivalry; the realisation that the realm rests upon the integrity of its powerful men.

The code of chivalry, in his aristocratic world, is put forward as the means of guaranteeing that integrity in all who accept it, whether rulers or ruled. Realistically, of course, this integrity is restricted to few in the Arthurian world and Arthur himself sometimes lapses.

Although Arthur's strength and ruthlessness are clearly necessary in his chaotic world, he is at times a bit too strong. The leading example, of course, is the massacre of the infants. Although Malory tries to shift the blame implicitly to Merlin, Arthur's innocence remains in doubt.

The massacre angers "many lordys and barons of thys realme" but, in a line which reveals a lot about Arthur's rule, they hold their peace "...for drede and for love.." (Page 37). Charisma and strength seem the keynotes of Arthur's governance. His power over vassal kings is seen when King Angwysch of Ireland is "assomned" to Arthur's court "uppon payne of forfeiture of Arthur's good grace; and yf the kynge come nat unto that day assygned and sette, the kynge sholde lose his londys." (Page 252)

Angwyshe arrives rapidly although "...he wyste nat wherefore he was sente fore"(Page252). In the light of the anarchy previously described such fearsomeness would have attractions to Fifteenth Century eyes that it may not have to ours.

Standards the king must meet

Yet, as we have seen, Arthur's power rests on the loyalty of his knights. Specifically, upon the loyalty of Lancelot and Gawain _ who between them control the factions which make up the court. Their loyalty depends on their trust and respect for the king. If, as is the case, Arthur loses these deeper, more charismatic, qualities then his strength, too, will be lost. Strength _ Arthur's signature _ alone is not enough.

Lancelot's faction express this well, showing both the root of Arthur's strength and the fact that the virtue of the Round Table was not drawn solely from its king's character: "For we all undirstonde in thys realme woll be no quyett, but ever debate ond stryff, now the felyshyp of the Rounde Table ys brokyn. For by the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table was kynge Arthur upborne, ond by their nobeles the kynge and all the realme was ever in quiet and reste. And a grete parte', the sayde all, 'was because of your moste nobeles, sir Launcelot'" (Page 699).

Not that Arthur was not a good lord to his men for the greater part of his reign. Kennedy writes that "...late medieval monarchs developed a number of ways to gain and keep the loyalty of the feudal nobility. Malory's King Arthur makes use of all of them. He personally confers the honour of knighthood upon most of his knights. He honours the best of them with membership of the Round Table, which constitutes the core of his political power, and rewards them further with gifts of money and lands. Finally _ like both Lancastrian and Yorkist kings of England _ Arthur makes his knights swear a peace-keeping oath and threatens them with the loss of his "lordship" and their "worship" if they fail to keep it (1)

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 28

Unfortunately Arthur is not consistent in his loyalty and impartiality to his supporters. He has clearly set out to trap Lancelot, and has prejudged both Lancelot and Guinivere. Lancelot, as becomes clear, thinks he has a justifiable grievance.

Malory's presentation of the mechanics of Arthur's rule is logical enough for Kennedy to be able to write: "To understand why Arthur's reign ended in catastrophe from a purely rational and political point of view is to learn two important lessons in temporal governance.

"The first is that kings ought not to favour their kinsmen.. The second political lesson to be learned from Arthur's downfall is that late feudal monarchs cannot afford to fail in "true justyce" where their mightiest magnates are concerned." (1).

In all this Malory draws an object lesson in kingship. First in the acquisition of power, then in its use and finally in the manner of its loss, he shows the requirements for an ideal king and the success of a medieval kingdom.

A strong sense of Arthur's failure as a king is present in Malory's attempt to play down the crime of treason as it relates to Malory's split.

Perhaps his view of events in the real world influenced his perception of the matter. I wonder whether he saw in it a parallel of the split between his lord, Warwick, and King Edward.

Lancelot's split is portrayed as a tragedy rather than treason, and springs from the malevolence of the king's unworthy relatives. These Warwick-like circumstances must have rung bells in the minds of Fifteenth Century readers

Malory, who refers to Lancelot as "that noble knight" (Page 679) allows him a verbal defence. Lancelot points out that he has been "well wylled' to Arthur ever since he came to court. He then criticises Arthur's judgement and justice, saying that Arthur's kin were "...sente by kynge Arthur to betray me and therefore the kynge woll in thys hete and malice jouge the quene unto brennyng...."(Page 680)

Later in the page Lancelot predicts that Arthur will act "by evyll counceile". When Lancelot describes his supporters as "my fayre lordys, my kyn, and my fryndis" (Page 680), we are left with an impression of the goodness and self-sacrifice of his supporters. They are not, like some of the Gawain/Arthur faction, troublemakers and opportunists.

Mordred's rebellion gets far more criticism than Lancelot's. In this context, Malory stresses the defamation of Arthur's character and the ingratitude of the rebels — as he does not in describing Lancelot's rebellion. He then launches into the often quoted plea for order and stability. "Lo, this was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas, thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshmen, for there may no thyngge us please no terme." (Page 708).

The theme of lack of stability is continued when Malory condemns the people for being so "new-fangil" (Page 709).

We have seen, then, the parameters in which Arthur's government functions. The fact that it depends upon a strong warrior-king able to subdue the anarchic background of the land and the emphasis, too, upon his fairness in administering justice has practical application in the real world. Malory's emphasis is upon the need for strength, order, stability and the true application of justice.

Law and Order

Arthur's governance is concerned primarily with order and his role as a lawmaker is stressed in several passages, such as the one during the Roman war when he "...sette lawys in that londe that dured longe aftir...." (Page 135).

The alliterative nature of that line hints that this lawmaking is a function Arthur's reign which has been carried over from Malory's sources; and in view of the attitude to kingship described above this consistency is not surprising.

The collapse of order and restraint after the last battle is emphasized by the "pillours and robbers" (Page 714) who killed wounded knights for their harness and riches.

Arthur's governance begins at home with the Pentecostal oath sworn by his personal knights who will, ideally, not only uphold these values in their own lives but will ensure that others uphold them too. It is a peace-keeping oath composed of the rules of worldly chivalry and enforced by the economic ties between vassal and lord. The oath reflects the basic requirements of bringing order from anarchy.

"...the kynge stablyshed all the knyghtes and gaff them rychesse and londys; ond charged them never to do outrage nothir mourthir, ond allwayes to fle treson, ond to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture of their worship ond lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore; ond allwayes to do ladyes, damsels, ond jantilwomen ond wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, ond never to enforce them, upon payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a wrongful quarrel for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde, both olde ond younge. And every yere so were they sworne at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste." (Pages 75-76).

While this oath, designed to ensure knightly integrity, reflects the ideals of chivalry its prohibitions also reflect the realities of a corrupt world and the possibility of corruption among the knights of the Round Table.

Kennedy points out that "Malory's King Arthur, like his Fifteenth Century counterparts, greatly depends on his "king's knights". That is, he depends upon those knights whom he has dubbed himself and then retained in his service for the 'stabilite' of his governance ...he expects them to do justice and keep the peace, and to this end he makes them swear a peace-keeping oath annually at the feast of Pentecost."(1)

Together with the country's complete dependence on the integrity of these knights, it is noteworthy that they are expected to carry out their duties as armed fighters. Kennedy has hinted at a close connection with reality in her reference to "Fifteenth Century counterparts" and continues this theme when she writes

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit Pages 4 - 5.

that "...Arthur's Round Table fellowship is a kind of romance equivalent of Edward III's Order of the Garter, increased to the size of the great Lancastrian and Yorkist retinues, which effectively illustrates how late feudal monarchs used "the hyghe Ordre" of knighthood to support the Crown."(1)

Not only does the use of knights in governance have links with the real world, but it also has chivalric precedent, as witness the views of Raymond Lull. His many references to the offices of a knight add up to a picture which closely mirrors the Pentecostal Oath of the Morte d'Arthur.

Lull writes, for example, that "Thoffyce of a knyght is to maynteyne and defend wymmen, wydowes and orphanes ond men dyseased on nat puyssant ne stronge." (2). The knight must, in other words, fight such injustices and petty tyrannies as existed in the anarchy of Fifteenth Century England.

The governmental nature of Lull's conception of a knight is carried further by such offices as keeping the "wayes" and defending those who work the land. Another duty is to "...assemble in a place men of many diverse craftes whiche ben moche necessarye to the ordonaunce of this world...."(3). I think in this context of the many references to the association of castles and towns or cities in Malory's work.

The role of the knight as an executive of royal policy is seen in Lull in such statements as; "For in lyke wyse as the knyght putteth his sheld between hym and his emeny/ ryght soo the knight is the moyen bytwene the prynce and the peple...."(4)

A judiciary function, too, is brought out by the duty to "holde ryghte to the peple" (5). The rule of chivalry, then, in ideal at least, turns the knight into a policeman and administrator of the land.

(1) Kennedy.B. *ibid*

(2) Byles, A.T.P. (ed) The Book of the Order of Chivalry EETS No 168 (London, Oxford University Press, 1926) Page 38.

(3) Byles, A.T.P. *ibid* Page 41

(4) Byles, A.T.P. *ibid* Page 82

(5) Byles, A.T.P. *ibid* Page 41.

Malory concentrated particularly on the first of these duties. It emerges ever more strongly in the early parts of the work, parallel with Arthur's development of chivalry and the formation of the Pentecostal oath. Malory's over-riding concern with the practical governmental function of this oath is brought out by Kennedy, who points out that he ignored references to religious elements in the oath which exist in his source. Instead, he has emphasised secular and social priorities.

Schofield points up the rationale behind Malory's emphasis on this form of secular knightly government when he writes that "Malory believed in the established order of things, the ascendancy of the nobles, but not as one indifferent to corruption or injustice. He would have had the lords of his day reform themselves, and he would have conducted this reform on the basis of idealistic principle...." (1).

Keen seems to support this and also places Malory's attitude in its context of popular belief when he writes that "The late medieval answer to the problem of the disorders and crimes of martial men...lay not in the abandonment of chivalrous values but in a re-appeal to the traditional values of loyal and faithful service."(2)

While Malory sometimes hints at the function of Parliament in certain political events he does not show it at work in the realm of internal government, relying instead exclusively on the Round Table knights and their king. This exclusivity is picked up by Kennedy who writes of Malory's work that it "...assumes that governance is the office of knighthood" (3). An attitude, as we have seen, that he shares with Lull whose work was three times translated into English, a testament to its popularity.

Like Malory, Lull had a very physical concept of the knight's activities in government and it is interesting how the blend of love and fear crops up both in this extract and my earlier description of Arthur's rule (on Page 18). Lull writes that the knight should "...by his armes be loved ond doubted of the peple/ ...and by fere recoure veryte ond iustyce/." (4)

(1) Schofield, W.H. op.cit. Page 122

(2) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 234

(3) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 13

(4) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit. Page 17

An interesting example of this attitude in practice is found in a letter by Richard III, who commands a local lord "...to see that no manner robberies, spoliations, oppressions or extortions be suffered to be committed amongst any of the king's subjects of those parts, of what estate, degree, or condition soever they be."(1). It sounds remarkably like an Arthurian commission to a knight errant.

While I have so far stressed the precedents and rationality underlying Malory's portrayal of knightly government, it is clear that he has to some extent over-emphasized the role of the aristocracy, producing a representation of England which is in many ways closer to medieval France. He ignores those essential factors which distinguished English society and government from that of France.

Trevelyan writes that "France was a kingdom in a very different sense from England. She was not governed in shires by the King's judges, sheriffs and coroners sitting in the king's courts. She was governed in provinces and baronies by her feudal princes and lords, each in his own territory".(2)

store

Malory never refers to the presence of townsmen at parliaments and councils, although Froissart always mentions them when writing of English administration. In this neglect, too, Malory is closer to the French model for in France "...there was no cooperation between the burghers and the lesser noblesse as in the English shire and the English House of Commons."(3)

I suspect that Malory's French sources may be only partly to blame for this, since elsewhere he did not hesitate to Anglicise his material. Rather, the responsibility rests upon his chivalric emphasis. Just as the chivalric attitude to government is emphasised _ at the cost of accuracy in showing the role of the commons and bourgeoisie _ so too the chivalric emphasis on justice sometimes leads Malory away from the accurate portrayal of justice in his own times into the portrayal of a cruder, more archaic form. It is, however, never without some form of parallel in his own time.

(1) Kennedy, B .ibid Page 52

(2) Trevelyan, G.M. A Shortened History of England (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1985). Page 183.

(3) Trevelyan, G.M. ibid. Page 183

Trial by combat

The king seems the supreme judge in Malory's work and is able to over-ride any decision. Arthur reverses the decision arrived at in his duel with Accolon, for example. In another instance Tristram's stepfather redeems the wicked stepmother despite the fact that she was "...dampned by the assente of the barownes to be brente...."(Page 231).

In the duel between Tristram and Blamour the watching kings take matters into their own hands and stop the killing of Blamour. Clearly their decision is final. A real-life example may be seen in the king's intervention in the duel between Bolingbroke and the Earl Marshal described by Froissart, and by Shakespeare, too, for that matter, who neatly captures Richard's authoritarianism.(1)

There are, of course, limits to how far the king can go in the arbitrariness of his judgements and still keep the respect of his barons. King Mark discovers this when his decisions are twice overturned by his barons.

Arthur, too, in the Poisoned Apple, is obliged to observe the proprieties, saying "...I may nat have ado in thys mater, for I muste be a ryghtfull juge. And that repentith me that I may nat do batayle for my wyff, for, as I deme, thys dede cam never by her." (Page 614).

He is, perhaps, guided in this caution by the general feeling and suspicion of his court at this time. Yet although the king's role as a fair judge is tied in with his worship this does not necessarily secure true justice. There is a real temptation to think of expedient decisions before just ones _ decisions which will unify support rather than go against the solid opinion of the barons.

This occurs when Arthur refuses to let Lancelot fight in defence of Guinivere, saying: "...I may nat with my worship but my quene muste suffir dethe...." (Page 682). Lancelot feels that Arthur is unjust and biased, and will not trust his judgement at this point.

(1) Richard II; Act I, Scene III, ln.175 : "After our sentence plaining comes too late."

It is clear from Vinaver's reference to Arthur's coronation oath to observe true justice which, Vinaver points out, was not found in Malory's source, (1) that Malory was conscious of the importance of true justice in maintaining a good rule. Many of Arthur's misfortunes arise from his failure to carry out true justice on his kinsmen. The Gawain faction get away with many unpunished murders. The murder of Lamorak and Gaheris' matricide are two examples of this.

Injustices which are not stopped by the king, but which are rather fed by his partisan example, are not stopped by anyone.

The judicial duel plays a prominent part in the justice of the Morte d'Arthur, yet Malory does not accept it uncritically. He shows contrasting attitudes to its validity as a fair judgement among his characters and admits quite openly that the system is not infalible. King Mark, for instance, runs Sir Amaunte through the body "...and yet was sir Amaunte in the ryghtuous quarell." (Page 364).

Arthur is plainly sceptical about God's hand in the duel, and cheerfully fights Accolon in an unjust quarrel. Lancelot seems to accept the validity of the duel, as his careful terminology shows in his response to Sir Meliagraunce "...there lay none of these ten knyghtes wounded with my lady, quene Gwenyver, and that woll I prove with myn handys...." (Page 659).

His duels with Sir Mador and Sir Meliagraunce are bloody and ugly, emphasising the strength and ferocity of Sir Lancelot rather than divine judgement. Arthur seems to acknowledge the failure of divine judgement in duels concerning Lancelot when he says that Sir Lancelot "...trustyth so much uppon hys hondis ond hys myght that he doutyth no man. And therefore for my quene he shall nevermore fyght, for she shall have the law." (Pages 682-683).

It appears from this statement, as well as the general practice in the work, that the law in the Morte d'Arthur serves as a back up to the judicial duel - the reverse of the situation in the real world in Malory's time.

(1) Vinaver.E. op.cit.

In real life the duel is clearly a last resort, as Froissart makes clear in his description of a judicial duel in Paris in 1386-7. The duel was decided on by the High Court of Paris, after a lengthy dispute between the plaintiff and the accused. Froissart writes that: "The proceedings went on for more than a year and a half" (1).

He continues that, "After much deliberation and argument the court pronounced that, since the lady of Carrouges could not prove anything against Jacques Le Gris, the matter should be settled by a duel to the death." (2).

Clearly, this is an alternative method of trial rather than a sentence in its own right. Jacques is killed in the duel but is nevertheless still delivered to the executioner, who hangs his body. Brereton says that this was the last occasion the Parliament of Paris ordered such a duel.

Frequency aside, however, Malory's accounts of judicial duels seem to be fairly accurate. As in the Morte d'Arthur, where Arthur tells Mador specifically to present himself on horseback, Sir Jean and Jacques Le Gris begin mounted and finish up on foot.

The same is true of Arthur's duel with Accolon, and of the Bolingbroke-Earl Marshal duel, which was also intended to begin mounted. On each of these occasions, large crowds were present.

Far less frequent in Malory's work is the more normal form of trial by jury or reasoned law. The jury trial was well advanced in Malory's time but, as Trevelyan points out and the Paston letters prove, it was often of little relevance to the course of justice.

However, Malory does in fact include two different examples of jury trial - the trial of Palomides and that of Tristram's stepmother by her husband's barons. In each of these cases the judgement is overturned in an exhibition of chivalry.

(1) Brereton, G. *ibid.* Page 312

(2) Brereton, G. *op.cit.* Page 313

The chivalry in Tristram's case merely involves a merciful request and the king's clemency; but a more striking case is presented in the trial of Palomides. Here we see both a clearcut, rational jury trial and the total disregard of two good knights for its validity.

The jury, of course, are knights and the trial is described as follows: "And within three dayes twelve knyghtes passed upon hem, and they founde sir Palomides gylty and sir Saphir not gylty, of the lordis deth" (Page 470).

This seems a fair trial, firstly because the timespan of three days implies some deliberation rather than the hastiness of a lynch mob, and secondly because one of the accused is acquitted.

Nevertheless Tristram opposes the execution on the grounds that he will not permit Palomides to die so shameful a death "...for he ys a full noble knyght".

On the same page Lancelot says "...hit were shame to me to suffir this noble knyght thus to dye...." (Page 471). When Lancelot is told that Palomides has deserved death, and judgement has been passed, he merely repeats that Palomides is too good a knight to die so shamefully _ and sorely wounds most of the jury.

There is here a clear expression of contempt on Lancelot's part for any justice other than that of his own sense of chivalry and honour.

It seems to me that, in a work so concerned with idealised aristocratic interests, Malory may simply have seen trial by battle as more gripping and aristocratic. Kennedy agrees that such duels were "...sensational and popular events...." This is borne out by the impression of large audiences given in the accounts of Froissart and Malory.(1)

Such trials, both in real life and fiction, provided good opportunities for showing prowess and winning worship. Kennedy adds that duels, particularly in treason trials, had enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the late Fourteenth and early Fifteenth Centuries.

However, the extensive litigation of the Pastons suggests that this popularity must have been only comparative in relation to alternate forms of justice.

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 39.

One reason for the popularity of trial by combat may have been fear of bribed juries. (1). As we shall see from Hindley, such corrupt juries and shire courts were a serious problem. The use of force in general to defend one's rights seems to have been extremely common.

Kennedy writes of Malory's own life that "...if indeed he was the Warwickshire knight, it is quite possible that the uncertainty of obtaining justice in the courts is what drove him to seek redress by force of arms." (2)

While Vinaver has made a fair case for believing the charges against Malory to be, at the least, exaggerated, it is clear that he had no hesitation in taking the law into his own hands and physically defending his rights.

Hindley writes of the courts that "For years the shire house, the only permanent administrative centre in each county, had been controlled by corrupt sheriffs who sold "...right and law like beef at a cattle market...." (3)

Trevelyan is equally vehement in writing that "Justice was not to be had from juries on the mere merits of a case. The livery of a powerful lord or knight gave immunity for the cutting of purses and even of throats." (4) He adds elsewhere that "...it was seldom possible to get verdicts against the friend of a great man." (5)

Trevelyan refers to one of the Paston letters, in a footnote. In this letter John Osbern opens with a reference to a bribe (... "that was left with his undersheriff....") and moves on to the statement that the sheriff "...would do for you that he may, except for the acquittal of Lord Moleyn's men, insomuch as the king hath writ to him to show favour to Lord Moleyns and his men." Osbern ends by saying openly that the sheriff "...looketh after a great bribe." (6).

 (1) Kennedy, B. *ibid* Page 39

(2) Kennedy, B. *ibid* Pages 39 to 40

(3) Hindley, G. *op.cit.* Page 59

(4) Trevelyan, G.M. English Social History (London: The Reprint Society Ltd., 1948) Page 61

(5) Trevelyan, G.M. *ibid* Page 195

(6) Davis, N. *op.cit.* Pages 29, 30 and 31.

Against this background it is not particularly surprising that a man of Malory's military experience would favour the individual justice stemming from the hands and judgement of a knight. Such justice, however, can easily be corrupted into vengeance. Malory shows the destructiveness of the feud in his work, but also stresses that it is not an inevitable concomitant of the individual justice of the knight. Lancelot's faction, for example, seems to exist without resorting to feud.

It seems to me that Malory, although criticising the feud, was prepared to accept the risk of one rather than put his faith in litigation. The concept of the feud was, in any case, based on a form of primitive justice _ an eye for an eye, a life for a life. This, in fact, is not particularly different from the justice enforced by Arthur's knights, involving as it does bloody combats resulting in deaths. Malory may, in the real world, even have found security and comfort in such feud-like structures.

Hindley, having written of bribed and terrorised juries, adds that: "The only protection possible against this kind of thing was the lordship of a great and influential man....As in the societies of the primitive world, the kin group and the affinity were the natural and crucial organisations of the social structure." (1).

Both the Pastons and Malory allied themselves with such powerful factions and were, presumably, truly thankful.

It is clear from all this that the morality which backs the justice of the work is far more chivalric than social. It is based greatly upon honour and worship, and the respect of one warrior for another.

Lancelot rescues Palomides from the jury, for example. Peace is often made with evil knights who are competent warriors. I think in this instance of Sir Gareth and the Red Knight who besieges a woman in her castle and hangs Round Table knights, yet is forgiven because of his staunch fighting qualities.

Conclusion

Keen can be called upon to sum up the ethos of Malory's judicial system in the light of the ideology of the aristocratic society from which he sprang. "To be sure, that ideology had its limitations. Its conception of secular virtue, centring on courage, loyalty, perseverance and the keeping of faith was narrowly martial. But what else should one expect of a society which interpreted the social role of the secular government in terms of military function _ terms not so inapposite in a time when fitness to rule and the capacity to use force to uphold legal commands were so often very nearly the same thing in practice." (1).

It is clear that Malory was aware of the failings of this system. He nevertheless preferred it, warts and all, to more legalistic procedures, placing his faith in the rules of chivalry to ensure justice.

It is time, I feel, to return to Keen's earlier statement which sums up Malory's complete reliance on chivalry to ensure justice in the world of the Morte d'Arthur : "The late medieval answer to the problem of the disorders and crimes of martial men...lay not in the abandonment of chivalrous virtues, but in a re-appeal to the traditional values of loyal and faithful service."

This appeal is the whole of Malory's answer to the question of justice and _ since justice is one of the two chief duties of a medieval king _ the problems of government as well. His idealism leads him to wish for chivalric knights loyally serving a chivalric king, who in turn is loyally serving God. In the context of his times and background, this is not unusual.

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 177

SOCIETY

MALORY'S world is no Utopia for people of all classes, but rather an aristocratic projection of a chivalric world. The attitude to the commoner is ambivalent in the work and, while superficially pleasant, has darker undertones.

Commoners are mentioned as individuals only when relevant to the main themes. A sense of the broad stream of society is present only in such things as references to the honour of Sir Lancelot "...among hyghe and lowe."

Commoners do, however, appear as nameless shadows in the aristocratic background as when ladies ride abroad accompanied by knights, peasants and yeomen. The class difference is distinct in all cases, and is eased only slightly by even the most courteous of knights.

There is little interaction between knights and commoners, and what there is tends to come about by chance. Beaumains, for instance, receives convenient lodging at a poor man's house (Page 201). "Convenience" is an apt description of most of the appearances of commoners in the work.

Knights like Sir Tristram and Sir Dinadan are sometimes shown asking shepherds for directions to lodgings and, on Page 266, Tristram finds convenient foresters to take care of wounded friends.

Malory cannot be said to ignore commoners, although a brisk reading of the text might leave one with that impression. But he certainly has little interest in them other than as conveniences or irritants to knights.

There is nevertheless a sense of "all the estatis" and "all people" watching the tourney at the Castle of Maidens, and supporting and appreciating chivalry. At the departure of the Grail knights, too, there is weeping among "ryche and poore" (Page 524). This shows an ideal aristocratic view of pro-chivalric and suitably servile commons. There is still a strong sense of hierarchy in such phrases as "...first the astatis, hyghe and lowe, and after the commonalyte, at ones cryed...." in praise of Lancelot (Page 328).

Even supporters of chivalry are not immune to implied sneers, as at the Lonzep tourney, watched by "...all manner of comyn people." (Pages 446-7) where the commons are shown to be fickle in their support for the Green Knight, cheering both at his triumph and his fall.

It would be wrong to convey the impression that Malory's work is invariably bitter and oppressive in its portrayal of the commons. As in real life, for instance, the commons play an important military role and the knight is not too proud to fight beside them.

An example of this can be seen in Arthur's first battle with King Lot in which he is aided by the commons: "...And thenne the commons of Carlyon areas with clubbis and stavys and slewe mony knyghtes...."(Page 13).

This, of course, comes from a more realistic and "historical" section of the work. But an interesting instance of the independence of the yeoman comes from Sir Marhault's quest, when a yeoman is courteous, helpful, but also firm in his refusal to shelter Sir Marhault's party in his "courtelage" "...for no tretése that they coude trete...." (Page 104).

Referred to as "good man", he is also described as "the pore man" (Page 105). There is a clear social gulf, yet also a strong sense of the yeoman's independence from knightly command in this matter. This may well reflect the new social conditions which had been appearing as far back as the Fourteenth Century, when the sturdy yeoman fought in France and was well respected for it.

There are sometimes signs of respect for supporting commons in the work, as in the fishermen of the isle of Servayge who come across fairly well when they have "grete laboure" to save the drowning Lamorak.

Although there is no sense of egalitarianism in the work, as regards knights and commons, there is often an ideal emphasis on the importance of knightly courtesy and forbearance to the commons. In an early episode Arthur is shamed for uncouthness in greeting Merlin, who appears disguised as a churl.

Pellinore, during his first quest for Arthur, meets "...a pore man, a labourer....(Page 71) As though

in illustration of knightly courtesy (these quests are, after all, demonstrative examples) Pellinore is almost too polite as he questions and thanks him. Most knights are courteous when asking directions, although perhaps less formal about it than Pellinore.

As we saw in Malory's reference to Arthur's popularity with the mob, he seems to feel a need to stress the knight's popularity among the commons. It is said of Tristram, for example, that "...every astate loved hym where that he wente." (Page 232). It is in fact very rare for commoners to be shown expressing any criticism of knights in the work.

The dichotomy of the Morte d'Arthur's portrait of the lower classes, in which courtesy to the poor is idealised and contempt for the poor expressed, is echoed in Lull. He, after many references to the lowliness of the common people and the need to dominate them _ showing the real outlook of his caste _ gives the ideal, the doublethink, which exists beside it: "To a knyght apperteyneth that he be a lover of the comyn wele/ For by the comynalyte of the people was the chyvalrye founden ond establyshed/."(1)

Malory's work contains many references to a class-consciousness which verges upon racialism in its violence. That this attitude was not universal in Britain can be seen from Trevelyan's earlier comparison between Britain and France, which stresses the cooperation between classes in Britain _ a cooperation which Malory seems to ignore in his isolation of the aristocracy in the Morte d'Arthur.

Yet it would be wrong to portray Malory as isolated in his views. Caxton expresses extreme class-consciousness on a number of occasions. Caxton's translation of Lull's work, for example, contains a reference in its prologue to the hierarchical order of society in which a knight should have unquestioned domination over the commons.

This, to some extent, is true also of Piers Plowman. But whereas Langland's work is conspicuous for its concern with the commons, both the Morte d'Arthur and the Order of Chivalry are openly harsh.

(1) Byles, A.T.P. *ibid.* Page 113

Although no more sympathetic than Malory, Lull is at least more honest in mentioning realities which Malory glosses over. One is the right of a knight to be maintained by the sweat of the commons, "...to ease hym/ and delight in thynges of whiche his men have payne and travayl...."

Although Malory does not copy Lull's bluntness, the arrogance of many of his knights calls to mind the brutal frankness with which Lull writes that "Thoffyce of a knyght is to mayntayne the londe/ for by cause that the drede of the comyn people have of the knyghts/ they laboure and culture the erthe/ for fere/ lest they sholde be destroyed." (2)

This particular state of affairs was less true of Fifteenth Century England, where serfdom was outdated, than it was of France, where serfs were still in thrall. Yet the cavalier brutality of thwarted knights implies such total domination to be true of the world of the Morte d'Arthur.

This may well have its roots in the French sources of the work; yet this does not alone account for deliberate interjections on Malory's part such as his reference to churls on Page 433. I believe that Malory found such attitudes appropriate and pleasing in the ideal chivalric world he portrays.

In view of this French influence and attitude, Froissart's depiction of the Jacobins as almost another race is relevant. Brereton, in his introduction, writes informatively on the subject of class consciousness: "Froissart has often been criticised for his disregard of them (the commons), sharpening in several passages into contempt.

"One must first say that sympathy with them would have been exceptional in a writer of his century, long before there was any mystique of the proletariat. One can also say that from the point of view of the gentry, especially in France, they belonged to a different, virtually a foreign, race.

"In Froissart's account of the Jacquerie, the colonialist spirit is strikingly evident. First come the rising and the ghastly atrocity stories. The masters flee to a place of temporary safety and barricade them-

(1) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit. Page 20.

(2) Byles, A.T.P. ibid. Page 32.

selves there.

"Help is ridden in from abroad by other masters equipped with the most advanced and costly armament of the day _ armour impervious to sticks and knives, horses trained for battle, lances and swords. They mow down the peasants in thousands, killing them 'like cattle', as they no doubt regarded them.

"But Froissart's most revealing phrase, underlining _ intentionally or not _ the difference between the races, is this: 'There they faced the villeins, small and dark, and very poorly armed, confronting them with the banners of the Count of Foix and the Duke of Orleans.'...."(1)

I am strongly reminded by this of Lancelot's literally cavalier treatment of churls and porters when the occasion warrants it. The churl on the bridge at Tintagel is "foule", in other words physically different from knights, and armed crudely with a club.

Lancelot strikes with a sword from horseback and kills him with effortless skill, illustrating the master's fine new weapons. Meliagraunce's porter, too, succumbs to a blow from the master's advanced iron gauntlet. Such implications are probably not deliberate, but, in the light of Brereton's remarks, their very unconsciousness is significant.

I suspect that Malory's class consciousness is so severe as to approach the racism attributed to Froissart. Again and again, particularly in the Tale of Sir Gareth, Verwoerd's statement on the pointlessness of teaching a black child mathematics is echoed in the implied pointlessness of teaching a commoner the ideals and techniques of knightliness.

Frequently the commons are shown as boorish and cruel. This is the case during Tristram's madness. "And so he felle in the felyshyppe of herdemen ond shyperdis, and dayly they wolde gyff hym som of their mete and drynke, and whan he ded ony shrewde dede they wolde beate hym with roddis. And so they clypped hym with sherys and made hym lyke a foole." (Page 305)

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 20

When Tristram souses Dagonet and company in a well the shepherds laugh, a detail which need not have been added unless Malory was either stressing their crudeness or deliberately striving for what he felt was realism.

Dagonet has his revenge, however, in another class gesture. For "...whan he and hys squyers were upon horseback ... they rode to the kepers of the bestis and all to-bete them." (Page 306)

The general inferiority of the herdsmen is stressed, too, when they admit that they dare not fight the giant Tauleas, and Tristram demonstrates his knightly superiority. Also noteworthy in this context is the unpleasantness of the great "coystrons" who are engaged to shame Dinadan at Surluse (Page 410).

Another incident, already mentioned, is when the mad Lancelot is beaten and pelted with "turvis" by the townsmen of Corbenic, before his rescue by aristocrats. Chaucer's pleasant mockery of simple reeves and millers has nothing of this bitterness and brutality.

Caxton, as I have mentioned, shares something of this attitude, and his comment is highly applicable to the way the commons are portrayed in episodes like Tristram's madness. He writes, in his prologue to The Book of Good Maners, "Whan I consydere the condycions and manners of the comyn people whiche without information and lernyng ben rude and not manered lyke unto beestis brute...." (1)

(1) Crotch, J.W.B.: The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton. (London: E.E.T.S. , 1928)

Social mobility

In a work concerned with the restoration of justice, it is noteworthy that Malory makes no reference to some of the evils listed by Hindley, such as the harsh excesses of landlords enclosing farmlands or evicting villagers. Possibly he did not see these as evils from an aristocratic perspective.

One thing he did see from his aristocratic perspective was the social fluidity and new wealth of the commons of the Fifteenth Century. Schofield points out that Malory included incidents and reflections which had little to do with the tale and could easily have been omitted, but with which he seems to agree.

One such example, quoted by Schofield, is the bitter reference to churls. Malory describes this as an "olde sawe", and uses it to illustrate an event in his tale: "Gyff a chorle rule and thereby he woll nat be suffysed, for whatsomever he be that is rewled by a vylayne borne, and the lord of the soyle be a jantylman born, that same vylayne shall destroy all the jeauntylmen about hym." (Page 433)

This attitude is shared by the uncles of Richard II, according to Froissart, who quotes them as follows: "It always happens that, when a poor man rises in the world and is honoured by his master, he becomes corrupt and ruins the people and the country. A base man has no idea what honour means, but wants to grab everything and gobble it up...." (1)

Similar expressions of a hatred and distrust of the lower classes underlie many of the references to commons in Malory's work - and it is plain that he was not unusual in holding such views.

A commoner could, in the real world, be elevated to the ranks of knighthood. This is true, too, of the Morte d'Arthur. This, however, is more in recognition of the fact than approval of it. Froissart refers to Jacques Le Gris as "...not a man of very good family, but a squire of humble birth who

(1) Brereton.G. op.cit. Page 316

had risen in the world, favoured by fortune as many people are." (1)

Chaucer, who was a vintner's son, saw action in France. Since he was captured and the king contributed sixteen pounds sterling to his ransome, we may assume that he fought in a knightly manner.(2)

Equivalents in Malory's work include Sir Garnyshe of the Mounte, who introduced himself as "...a poure mannes sonne, and be my proues and hardynes a deuke made me knyght and gave me londis." (Page 55) It must be pointed out, however, that _ on discovering his leman in the arms of another _ Sir Garnyshe does not behave like a gentleman or a worshipful knight.

More overt prejudices are shown by Priamus during the Roman war, when Gawain pretends to be a yeoman "...brought up in the wardrobe...." and newly elevated at Yule (Page 138). Priamus says he would rather be quartered by wild horses than beaten by a yeoman, "...other als ony page other prycker...." (mere "horseman" as opposed to "knight.")

The Green Knight echoes such statements later in the work when he regrets that a noble knight should be slain "...of a knavis honde...."(Page 185)

Brewer notes "...the fluidity of movement between the classes of society...." (3) and stresses, too, the resentment of the established aristocracy to this. Indeed, by the Fifteenth Century, efforts were being made to reduce this social movement by the passing of sumptuary laws.

Malory attempts to idealise the society of the Morte d'Arthur by neglecting completely the importance of the wealthy bourgeoisie and confining his presentation of newly risen knights to a small number of disparaging examples. His passing references and attitudes, however, reveal the extent to which the aristocracy was on the defensive in reality.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 309

(2) Robinson, F.N. (ed) The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (London: Oxford University Press. 1983)

(3) Brewer, D. Chaucer in His Time (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963) Page 14

Malory's complete neglect of the most exciting trends of his own time is in itself an example of his defensive withdrawing into an ideal. Hindley writes of the Fifteenth Century that "It was the century in which popular dissent began to become literate, the century in which English merchants made their first large-scale bid for overseas penetration, with women taking a newly active role in trade. It saw the beginning of the reshaping of the English landscape by enclosure. It was a time of ambition, much social injustice, but also much social mobility, and a time of excitement." (1).

All this is ignored. Where the lower classes intrude, they are the lower class of the time of complete artistocratic domination and security.

The Morte d'Arthur is a book which looks backwards, not forwards, in social terms and claims thereby to find social happiness and order.

Malory's neglect of the dynamic trends of his own time is best expressed by Schofield's statement that the work might almost have been written seventy years before Chaucer's birth rather than seventy years after his death. Malory makes only one reference to a merchant, although they were the most energetic and financially powerful class of all. This one serves, like any peasant, to lodge Lancelot, who wishes to remain incognito. Like other commons, he is no more than convenient.

Malory makes a personal reference to class on Page 232, in which he distinguishes sharply between social strata and points up the distinguishing characteristics of true gentlemen, suggesting the need in real life to spot interlopers who might otherwise blend in.

"Wherefore, as me semyth, all jantyllmen that beryth olde armys ought of ryght to honour sir Trystrams for the goodly (hunting) tearmys that jantylnen have and use and shall do unto the Day of Dome, that thereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discover a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylane. For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll touchis and to folow the noble customs of jantylmen." (Page 232).

(1) Hindley, G. Op.Cit. pages 1-2

Noble blood

Malory's aristocratic defensiveness surfaces also in the tales he presents. Keen writes that: "One important aspect of the shift of attitude of a later age was a tendency to lay rather less emphasis on the ceremony of initiation into knighthood, and rather more upon eligibility to take knighthood, this coming to be regarded as dependent upon noble lineage." (1)

Although at first the acceptance of the supposedly common Torre and Beaumains seems to contradict this, in fact it supports this attitude in Malory when their noble lineage is at last revealed - stressing the functional advantages inherent in noble lineage and justifying the exclusiveness found elsewhere.

Schofield points out that Torre is portrayed as mentally and physically different from his foster brothers (2). He seems a naturally higher being, who even in youth spent his time practising with simple weapons rather than settling down to more plebeian tasks.

Vinaver describes this theme as Malory's favourite "motif", listing Arthur, Gareth and Brunor as examples. He writes that if the knight succeeds, (in fact when the knight succeeds, as he invariably does in Malory), "...it is not because he is individually brave and strong, but because he is in reality a noble." (3)

Vinaver suggests an as yet undiscovered source to the tale of Beaumains, writing of it that: "Dispensing with the subtleties of the courtly code, this French Gaheret must have propounded the theory that 'a man of low birth cannot defeat a nobleman except by accident or guile,' and so championed the claims of knighthood as an aristocratic institution.

"And Malory must have found himself in harmony with his model; for his own work may well be said to belong to that rapidly shrinking tradition which treat-

(1) Keen M. op.cit. Page 143

(2) Schofield, W.H . op.cit.

(3) Vinaver, E. op.cit. ; 1970. Pages 1-2

ed chivalry as a quality inherent in rank and breeding, and firmly refused to yield to the threats of the most formidable 'kitchen knaves '. " (1)

The stress upon noble blood in the tale of Beaumains is marked. Both Arthur and Lancelot are at once able to perceive Beaumains' unconcealable "grete bloode" (Page 181), reflecting not only Malory's emphasis upon heredity's outstanding qualities but also the instinctive responsiveness of good knights to its presence. The lady Lynett comes to recognise it more slowly, and learns by physical signs and actions that Gareth is a noble until, at the end, she can say: "...ever curteysly ye have suffred me, and that can never but of jantyll bloode." (Page 191).

References to the superiority of noble blood can in fact be picked up throughout the work, even in tales not expressly concerned with the topic; for example Perceval's statement: "...we be comyn of kynges bloode of both partis. And therefore, modir, hit ys oure kynde to haunte armys and noble dedys." (Page 490)

It may also be seen in Tristram's first meeting with King Mark. Mark asks "What are ye?" and is answered "...a jantylman...." (Page 234).

Many of the great knights of Camelot are kings, or the sons of kings, or at least high in the ranks of the nobility; and there seems to be a strong awareness of comparative lineage even within the ranks of the hereditary nobility. This comes out when Gareth flares up at the Black Knight: "I am a jantyllman borne, and of more hygge lynage than thou...." (Page 184).

We see another example which Vinaver says that Malory himself added, when Tristram takes care to mention that he is "gotyn of a kynge and borne of a quene" (Page 243) in his declaration of love to Isoud.

In one respect Malory is above discrimination. There is little difference shown between knights of the Round Table; though poor knights not of this elite organisation, such as Sir Balyn, are sometimes mocked at court. The egalitarianism of the members of the

(1) Vinaver E. (ed) Malory: Works (Oxford University Press; 1981) Page 747

Round Table is shown in such details as Mador de la Porte's statement that in the matter of justice Arthur is merely a knight like any other _ a passage which Kennedy has attributed to Malory alone. This state of affairs, like Malory's class defensiveness, seems to have some foundation in reality.

Keen writes that: "...the higher and lower echelons of the aristocracy were drawn together through knighthood" (1) and also describes the medieval jousting societies and orders of chivalry which paralleled the Round Table as "...remarkably unhierarchical internally...." (2); a situation preserved in the Round Table, where young knights like Sir Lavayne rub shoulders with kings and dukes.

Referring to real life, Keen acknowledges this, writing: "Thus we encounter once more a theme that is familiar, especially from literary sources _ the bond of equal standing in chivalry which draws together high and low among the aristocracy and sets them on an equal footing within their own estate.

"There is here yet another reflection of the model of the Round Table which set the Arthurian knights, rich and poor alike, on a level of parity with one another." (3)

Nevertheless Keen's phrase "among the aristocracy" is telling. There is only one class at whom this work is aimed, just as there is only one class with which it deals in what little egalitarianism it has. Malory's own sense of hierarchy is revealed in such phrases as "Here may men undirstonde that bene men of worshyp...." (Page 296) and, in his last explicit, his address to the "...jantylmen and jantylwymmen...." that will read the book.

That Malory's prejudices, and fears of the rising bourgeoisie, had as much foundation in his times as did his almost racist attitude to the peasantry can be seen in Caxton's preface, addressed to literate people, which warned that Lull's work on chivalry "... is nat

(1) Keen, M.op.cit. Page 70

(2) Keen, M. ibid. Page 196

(3) Keen, M. ibid. Page 197

requysyte to every comyn man to have/ but to noble
gentylmen that by their vertu entende to come and entre
in to the noble ordre of chyvalry...." (1)

(1) Crotch, W.J.B. op.cit. Page 82

COURT

AS a result of the emphasis on aristocrats in the Morte d'Arthur, a fairly accurate picture of late medieval court life begins to emerge from the combination of brief references. In some ways the court of Arthur reflects Fifteenth Century attitudes and developments although certain facets, naturally, are timeless. Kennedy writes that Henry IV, inheriting his father's retinue, began the practice of retaining knights and owed much of his political strength to them. (1) Malory's picture seems even more realistic when she adds that some of these real-life retainers might have court offices while others might be great lords who were seldom at court.

She points out that this arrangement is echoed in the Morte d'Arthur by court officials like Sir Kay the Seneschal, on one hand, and knights like Sir Torre, Sir Lamorak and Sir Tristram on the other.

The existence of court offices leads to a recognition, in the Morte d'Arthur, of the importance of influence. This comes across clearly in a number of instances.

Sir Ector seizes the opportunity to ask for a high office for his son Kay, and for personal reasons Arthur grants it for life. The fact that this is not merely a token title can be seen in the case of Beaumains, for it is Kay who is given charge of seeing that the kitchen staff take care of him.

Clearly, Kay plays a leading part in the running of the court, and in real terms would find considerable financial advantage in this. This, nevertheless, is a facet of court life which is implied rather than described.

Lull refers to knights serving the king as provosts and bailiffs, and one must imagine an implied background of such figures, but the topic is too dull for Malory to explore in detail. What is interesting is his placid acceptance of the use of influence and nepotism. Such nepotism, unconcealed and unashamed, is

(1) Kennedy, B.op.cit

seen when Arthur tells Gawain that he will do him all the worship that he may for "...ye ar my neveu, my sistir's son." (Page 61)

The power of established court figures is also seen when Lancelot is asked to use his influence to have Sir Belleus raised to the fellowship of the Round Table. A similar experience can be seen in real life when John Paston asked Lord Essex to use his influence over the king in a land matter.

While it is true that the knights are isolated from the bourgeoisie and commons there are still nameless shadows in the aristocratic background, and these add to the impression of a full and realistic court. After the Grail Quest, for example, the king summons clerks to document the adventure.

Another background figure is the faceless yeoman who accompanies Arthur hunting, and returns to fetch him another horse (Page 28). King Mark, too, goes hunting accompanied by various knights and hunters, by which last we are shown a glimpse of the background professionals, the gamekeepers and verderers.

The aristocratic pastime of hunting plays a great role in the world of the Morte d'Arthur. Malory is clearly an enthusiast for accuracy and detail, factors which add to the sense of a real and living court.

As the book moves deeper into a romance setting of questing knights the references to hunting decline; but they are a frequent companion to the tales which focus on events around the court. Arthur hunts frequently, and his hunting often provides a convenient entry into the world of adventure. This is the case at his first meeting with Pellinore and at the beginning of the Accolon adventure.

The best known example of Malory's enthusiasm for hunting occurs in his detailed references to Tristram's influence on the sport, together with his earlier comments on the class of men who practice it.

Malory's most detailed description of a hunt is found in the reference to the lady huntress who shot Sir Lancelot.

Here we see Malory revelling in the use of terms inconsequential to the plot, stressing the popularity of the sport in his society and in the courtly life of the work. He is clearly writing for an expert audience who would identify with such a culture.

The ladies could kill, for example, "at the stalk and at the treste." They bore "wood-knyves" and had dogs both for "the strenge and for a bate." The lady "...abated her dogge for the bowghe at a borayne hynde...." She can tell by the noise of her dogs that the hind is bayed at "som watir".

We read that the hind "...whan he cam to the welle, for heete she wente to soyle, and there she lay a grete whyle. And the dogge cam aftir and unbecaste aboute, for she had lost the veray parfyte fewte of the hynde." (Page 643). All this betrays an easy familiarity, suggesting that the hunting life of Arthur's court is not greatly different from the world of Malory's readers.

In a vignette of court life, the noise and crowding of a medieval hall is hinted at, as is the splendid isolation of the elite on their dais. At Gareth's entry "...there was made peas and rome, and ryght so they yode with hym unto the hyghe deyse...." (Page 177).

The stratification at table is reflected, no doubt automatically by Malory, when Beaumains is sent to a place near the hall door to eat with the faceless ones, the "boyes and laddys."

We begin to form a picture of Arthur's court from the aggregate of such casual references. We also learn, for example, that there are sections of the building allotted to each of the private retinues _ it is too early to call them factions _ of nobles such as Gawain and Lancelot, each of whom offer Beaumains lodging, meat and drink.

Other sparks of off-hand realism highlight the formal etiquette of courtly society. This is seen, for instance, when Beaumains and Lynnet find lodging with a knight and the damsel complains that Beaumains is placed before her at the table. The knight courteously sits with him at another table, a "sydebourde" (Page 183).

Details of courtly comfort include "...the overshete and the neyther-shete, and the pylowes and the hede-shete...." upon which Tristram bleeds (Page 245), and the washing before meat at the home of Sir Gryngamour, not forgetting the bath which Tristram takes in Ireland. Clearly, the courtly life is one of civilisation and comfort.

Education and culture

Extreme courtesy and formality, too, are depicted in such instances as Lynnet's use of the word "madam" when speaking to her more powerful sister, and the kneeling of Castor to Sir Lancelot in seeking his pardon for tactlessness.

A sense of luxury and sophistication appears when La Cote Mal Tayle saves Guinivere from a lion kept at court. Such menageries are not unrealistic in the glamorous court of the Fifteenth Century. All this drives home the standard of living at the courts of the Morte d'Arthur, and the sophistication of the courtiers, fitly paralleling the apex of medieval courtliness achieved in the Fifteenth Century.

Realistic, too, is the over-all culture of the courtiers. Descriptions of entertainment at Sir Gryngamour's home, for instance _ which is not the most prestigious in the work _ include references to all manner of "...gamys and playes, of dauncyng and syngyng..." (Page 204). While words like "gamys" and "playes" are used loosely in the work, it is not impossible that a reference may be found here to the lesser morality plays, often featuring music and bawdiness, that were common in cultured houses of the Fifteenth Century.

The nobles were expected, at this time, to be able to dance and sing well; and there are frequent references to music throughout the courtly sections of the work.

Froissart shows the importance of musical skills in his time; describing, for example, how Sir John Chandos sang with the minstrels at the king's command and how at another royal feast, "...the young Lord de Courcy in particular took great pains to dance and sing well when his turn came" (1).

According to Hindley, (2) music was an art in which the English of the time excelled, and perhaps something of this can be seen in the ease and frequency with which music is mentioned in the work.

(1) Breteron, G. op.cit. (Page 168)

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit.

The literacy of the court is taken for granted. Most of the major characters are shown reading or writing. Gawain, in his last hours, is shown writing in his own hand. Tristram and Lancelot correspond with one another, as do Isode and Guinivere — the nature of their letters making the use of a secretary unlikely.

Both Sir Kayhodins and Isode can read, as proved by their secret communications. So can Sir Tristram, who chances to read them. Both Arthur and Guinivere are shown reading "prevayly" (Page 381) when they must. These are all casual references, with no suggestion at all that their literacy was unusual.

Froissart, too, supports this in his own casual attitude to literacy, mentioning that King Richard at once began to read through his book on love. Indeed, Froissart makes Philipott Mansel's illiteracy seem rare and foolish, remarking that Mansel was not very "astute", and that his illiteracy made him "easy to trick", (1), statements suggesting that a stigma was already beginning to be attached to illiteracy by the Fourteenth Century.

Although Hindley writes that most people could not read in the Fifteenth Century (2), it is clear from other sources and from Hindley, himself that most of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie could. Malory himself, who was first and foremost a soldier, is an obvious example of the literary sophistication of his class and times.

In many ways Tristram seems very English, particularly in his country squire-type education, which Malory describes. He has a private tutor, Governale, a gentleman "that was well lerned and taught" (Page 231) who accompanies him to France, where the boy learns the language (a recognition of the fact that, by Malory's times, French was very firmly seen as a foreign language) and "nurture" (manners) and deeds of arms (Page 232.)

The two other great gentlemanly qualities which Tristram acquires are, interestingly, skill in hunting and excellence in music. As we have seen, both were important social requirements.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 168

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit.

Tristram's education fits him well for the court of the Morte d'Arthur, but in real terms Malory seems a bit outdated in his approach to education. Although his characters are literate and cultured, there is small reference to the practicalities of education in Malory's own day, apart, perhaps, from Morgan's schooling in a nunnery and Tristram's studies of French as a foreign language.

Hindley writes that : "The time was long past when the lay nobility were the illiterate thugs and popinjays beloved by historical romance. Thugs and popinjays there often were but ... some were also talented writers and all were able to keep abreast of their household affairs, if so inclined, and could pen a well-turned letter if a secretary was not at hand." (1)

So far this parallels Malory's presentation which, as we can see, goes beyond "historical romance" in the literacy and culture of its thugs. However, he neglects aspects of Fifteenth Century life referred to in Hindley's next sentence; aspects which were irrelevant to his idealised and active chivalric world, and possibly to his own experience and view of the real one.

It is not true of Malory's work, as it was of his times, that : "There were few gentlemen of birth who had not been to Oxford, Cambridge or one of the Inns of Court in London." (2)

At a time when the Pastons were studying law in London, and Henry VI was building Eton, Malory contents himself with the sort of Fourteenth Century education received by Tristram. The education of his nobles in the work provides warlike and courtly skills and nothing more. It is an interesting insight into the aristocratic society he portrays that this is quite sufficient.

The entertainments of courtly life reflect the balance shown in Tristram's education between physical and musical skills. When Balin is entertained at the fateful court on Page 56 it is with dancing and minstrelsy. He then fights the knight "...that kepeth an island.", a stylised expression of the pageantry of a

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 171

(2) Hindley, G. ibid.

Fifteenth Century joust.

Still in this physical vein are other courtly recreations mentioned in the work. Hunting has already been referred to, and we also find such sports as casting the "barre" (caber?) and "stone" on Page 179. Tristram is shown sailing for pleasure with Isode and Sir Keyhodins.

The general impression of ruddy-faced activity is continued in another of Malory's references to court life: "So thys passed on all that wynter, with all maner of huntynge and hawkyng; and justis and turneyes were many betwyxte many grete lordis." (Page 642).

Boredom, too, is held at bay in Arthur's court by what seems an endless stream of feasts and banquets, all of which bolster the impression of wealth and luxury at his court, and emphasise the greatness of its master.

Need for Wealth

In the courtly episodes throughout the work there is a tremendous emphasis on cutting a dash, on display and ostentation. The need for wealth at court is shown in the case of Sir Balyn, who is ashamed because he is poorly dressed; and the maiden's reaction when he offers assistance indicates the importance of dressing well and making one's status clear. This is true also of La Cote Mal Taille's experiences. This seems an accurate description of a late medieval reality.

Malory's idea of suitable display may be seen in the Book of Sir Lancelot, in the reference to the green silk canopy borne over the heads of the four sorceress queens. A similar article is referred to by Froissart, in his account of the coronation of Henry IV. Glossing over his detailed description of magnificent clothing, I will give only his description of "...a canopy of indigo-coloured silk supported on four silver rods with four jingling golden bells...." which was carried over Henry's head. (1)

From what we have seen of Malory's social attitudes, he may well have welcomed such social distinctions as were provided by the late medieval emphasis on finery; but he is also concerned with the deeper aspects of chivalry, as can be seen from his examination of knightliness in such sections as the Grail Quest or the quests of Torre, Gawain and Pellinore.

In many cases in the Fifteenth Century, as both Keen and Vinaver make clear, "...the great devices of medieval knighthood degenerated into mere love of luxury and theatrical pomp."(2)

I feel, however, that while Malory does reflect his times' love of splendour, he sees it as a natural companion of chivalry rather than a replacement for it. We have seen that he was not alone in desiring a true and active chivalry of which the courtly glamour was merely a by-product.

The emphasis at court on ostentation and worship is explained by Hindley, who writes that: "A man's worthship was his most vital attribute in a world where

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 464

(2) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970 Pages 56-57

prestige was the ingredient of success, and the two were often synonymous with survival" (1)

Hindley also points out that such worship was not an inherent quality, but had to be constantly upgraded and demonstrated: "...it is in this context that we should understand the conspicuous consumption, the egregious feasting and extravagant dress of the medieval magnate." (2)

Tristram demonstrates a consciousness of the importance of worship and reputation when he prepares for his diplomatic mission to Ireland. Malory tells us that he "...made hym redy in the moste goodlieste wyse that myght be devysed, for he toke with hym the moste goodlyeste knyghtes that he myght fynde in the courte, and they were arayed aftir the gyse that was used that tyme in the moste goodlyeste maner." (Page 251).

Malory clearly felt this rather lengthy statement to be important. Raymond Lull, too, stressed the importance of a knight being well clad _ and well clad they are in Malory's work. Malory describes elaborate costume frequently, not only in individual instances such as the Saracen disguise which Lancelot and Lavayne wear at the Great Tournament, but also in his emphasis on livery.

There are several instances of this, such as Guinivere's insistence that all those who go maying with her be uniformly clad in green. But the best example, demonstrating both excessive elaboration and a deliberate bolstering of status, is seen in Lancelot's return of Guinivere.

"Than sir Lancelot purveyed hym an hondred knyghtes, and all well clothed in grene velvet, and their horsis trapped in the same to the heelys... And the quene had four-and-twenty jantillwomen folowyng her in the same wyse. And sir Lancelot had twelve coursers folowyng hym, and on every courser sate a yonge jantylman; and all they were arayed in whyght velvet with sarpis of golde aboute their quarters, and the horse trapped in the same wyse down to the helys, wyth many owchys, isette with stonys and perelys in golde, to the numbir of a thousande. And in the same wyse was the

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 176

(2) Hindley, G. ibid Page 177

quene arayed, and sir Launcelot in the same, of whyght clothe of golde tyssew." (Pages 693-694)

The length of this description stresses the seriousness with which Malory took such display. Froissart, too, enjoys describing magnificent clothing, such as the sleeveless scarlet gown trimmed with ermine worn by King Edward at Poissy. Both Malory and Froissart show the general appreciation of the age for such finery.

Froissart can be called on, too, to counteract any hint that Malory was exaggerating, for his chronicle is crammed with similar references. He describes, for instance, the St George's Day feast at Windsor: "The Queen of England was to be there accompanied by three hundred ladies and young girls...all similarly dressed." (1)

He mentions, as well, how costly Bolingbroke and the Earl Marshal found their lavish equipment for their duel, in which each tried to outdo the other in magnificence.

The pageantry and glamour of the high middle ages is fully emphasized in the Morte d'Arthur. In the Tale of Sir Gareth we find written: "...they saw a wyght towre as ony snowe, well macchecolde all aboute and double-dyked, and over the towre gate there hynge a fyffty shyldis of dyverse coloures. And undir that towre there was a fayre medow, and therein was mony knyghtes and squyers to beholde, scaffoldis and pavylons; for there, upon the morne, sholde be a grete turnamente." (Page 188)

This, Malory seems to say, is how a nobleman should live, this is an aristocratic paradise. Malory hardly exaggerates at all in his descriptions of courtly life and splendour _ he doesn't need to.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Pages 66-67

Attitudes to money

As we have seen, the subject of wealth is closely linked to courtly life . The attitude to money is pieced together, like the depiction of the court, from passing, almost unconscious references.

The acquisition of wealth is a common theme in the work, although Malory neglects the more mercantile aspects current in his times. Each reference to the subject stems from such aristocratic themes as war, generosity, status, or chivalric details such as feudal contracts. While Malory has a strong practical awareness of the need for money, he tries to keep in line with chivalric ideals in describing its acquisition.

Froissart, too, tends to avoid grubby details of mercantilism when he writes of money, but quite happily includes "respectable" money-making such as ransoming prisoners. He shows that Malory's references to noble money-making would have been quite respectable and appropriate to the late medieval aristocrat while, in theory at least, his neglect of business would have been equally understandable.

Froissart himself, although he gloats over gifts from kings, heaps scorn upon the miserly doctor Guillaume de Harselly, (1) writing that he was "...the meanest and stingiest person ever known. His only pleasure in life has been to amass great piles of florins."

Here, perhaps, in the threat of the bourgeoisie with their emphasis on acquisition rather than knightly largesse, and their resulting wealth, we see the roots of snobbish sneers at "trade".

Malory concentrates on knights at war or at court rather than administering their estates. Any reference to rents, for instance, would therefore be out of place in his work. Yet Malory has no sneers at the idea of "lyvelode" and when relevant _ when property changes hands, for instance _ refers to it with respect and seriousness. He does not, however, dwell on the subject

(1) Brereton, G. *ibid.* Page 401

and would, I feel, have shared the contempt for such figures as the Duke of Buckingham, who "...personally scrutinised every page of his own accounts.." (1) which Hindley suggests was generally felt for him.

It is clear from the Paston letters that such figures were common; it is equally clear that Malory is not alone in idealising landowners by ignoring such things in his work.

One acceptable manner of acquiring wealth in the Morte d'Arthur is the tourney. Sir Marhault attends one at which a prize of a thousand bezaunts is offered, no doubt exaggerated in the interests of romance.

At the end of the Fair Maid of Astolat we find a reference to a joust made for a diamond, the sort of prize that Caxton himself suggests in his epilogue to Lull's work.(2) Lancelot is offered great gifts by Bagdemagus after a tournament, and there is nothing to indicate his refusal. Clearly, the possibility of profiting from the tourney was a part of Malory's world, although probably accomplished with less ease than the Round Table knights manage it.

Wealth for the taking seems one of the prime attractions of Malory's ideal chivalric world. After defeating a giant, for example, Sir Marhault found "...grete rychesse oute of numbir, that dayes of his lyff he was nevir a poore man."(Page 107)

During the Roman war, as well, the profits of giant-killing knights are far from understated. Having killed his giant, Arthur displays kingly generosity, saying: "...yf ye lyste ony treasure, take what ye lyst..." (Page 22).

When his companions have done this, he refers to the importance of the fair distribution of the loot "...that none playne of his parte...." There is clearly a strong awareness of wealth here and it shows, in a suitable context, the overt interest of the aristocrat.

In a more realistic, yet similar, vein, we can follow this interest into the subject of war proper. As in the Hundred Years War, ransoming is popular and profitable in Arthur's war with Rome. During this

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 170

(2) Crotch, W.J.B. op.cit.

episode Gawain sends a message to Arthur which includes the phrase "...oure presoners may pay rychesse oute of numbir...." (Page 126). Priamus carries on this tone when he surrenders with the words "...take thee for thy labour tresor inow...." (Pages 137-138)

Bors, before a fairly desperate fight in the Roman war, finds it necessary to say: "And who save ony knyghtes for lycoure of goodys tulle all be done and knowe who shall have the bettir, he doth nat knyghtly...." (Page 128).

A reminder of the primary reason knights went to war in real life and _ from what follows _ possibly their main reason in Malory's work, too. For Arthur also finds it necessary to say: "...save none for golde nothir for sylver...." (Page 134).

In real life too, according to Froissart, the English decided to take no ransoms at Crecy since they were outnumbered. In fact the irregulars took this too literally, and the king was angered at the waste of ransomable lords.

The knights of the Morte d'Arthur, however, have more appreciation of the value of prisoners and despite Bors' prohibition Malory cannot resist giving the financial result of his skirmish: "And sir Kay the kene had taken a captayne, ond Edward had taken two erlys...." (Page 129)

The suggestion that the loot motive is at least a major, possibly a primary, stimulus for the knights of the Roman war is supported more forcefully by the knights' statement to Arthur that they are "...well stuffid, blyssed be God...." and now want him to release them. (Page 145)

Arthur agrees, and loot has the last word in the Roman war as Arthur returns in triumph laden with riches.

In keeping with the acceptability of the spoils of war, Gareth has no qualms about dressing himself in the captured armour of the Black Knight when he sees it is better than his own. Another instance is seen in La Cote Mal Tayle at the Castle Orgylus, when defeated knights part with their horses and armour.

There is certainly no shame about profiting from such knightly contacts _ indeed, there is a strong sense of enthusiasm for such easy pickings in both the ideal and the real chivalric worlds.

Froissart describes the delight of the chivalrous Sir Thomas Holland at his "...fine haul of valuable prisoners, enough to bring in a hundred thousand gold moutons.", (1) and mentions as well the prisoners of Sir Eustace d'Aubrecicourt "...who later brought him in considerable sums which contributed greatly to his advancement."(2)

In this reference to advancement, as we saw in the ostentation of the court, there is a clear connection between wealth and status. Clearly it is a criterion when Merlin tells Uther that Sir Ector, his candidate for fostering Arthur, "...is a lorde of fair lyvelode in mony partyes in Engelond ond Walys". (Page 6). On Page 8, to reinforce his image as a powerful and worthy magnate, Sir Ector is said to have "...grete lyvelode aboute London...."

The possession of lyvelode is not only respectable but essential for respect. Respectable too are the "grete rewardys" granted him by the king (Page 6). An appropriate sense of wealth and privilege thus surrounds Arthur from the beginning.

A poor knight, in fact, would probably have been viewed with suspicion in the real world, if Lull's statement is anything to go by. He writes, with his customary bluntness, that a knight ought to be wealthy to avoid need turning him into a thief. (3)

With his only marketable skill in his sword arm this might well be true. It does much to explain the eagerness for war in both Malory's work and his times, the rise of enlarged retinues in the anarchy of the Fifteenth Century after the war, and the stress placed on the owning of wealth as a guide to respectability in both the Morte d'Arthur and the real world.

As we have seen, a knight's needs were considerable if he was to achieve this status and respectability. Schofield refers to the extravagances of Palamon and Arcite in The Knight's Tale of Chaucer, writing that: "There is little if any extravagance in the

(1) Brereton.G. op.cit. Page 75

(2) Brereton.G. ibid. Page 137

(3) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit.

statements of the Knight's Tale that does not find a parallel in contemporary accounts of the happenings of Edward III's reign." (1)

Clearly, such grand details were not only expected of writers for the aristocracy such as Chaucer, Malory and Froissart but were also true. It is in the light of such extravagances that we must interpret the circumstances of Ellayne's father, Pelles, who permits her to go to a feast provided she is "well beseyne" in "moste ruchest wyse" to compete with those around her, and tells her to "spare nat for no coste". (Page 485).

It is in the light of this that we must interpret the Queen of Orkney's claim that she sent Gareth to court "worshypfully besene", and with gold and silver in plenty (Page 210). And it is in the light of this emphasis on wealth and ostentation that we must interpret Malory's own eye for finery and love of embellishment and riches, as it appears in his work.

In reference to Malory's eye for splendour, Vinaver lists some of his various details of finery (2). Vinaver refers to the jewels on Morgan La Fay's lethal mantle, and Malory's description of the ship which Arthur finds floating in Arthur and Accolon which he enhanced by adding more torches and rich silks

According to Vinaver, Malory also added the detail that the inscription Lancelot found on the tomb at Corbenic was of gold. He also added the detail that, at the tournament at Lonsep, Isoud and "alle they" were similarly clothed in red. To clothe one's retainers identically was, as we have seen, a great mark of wealth and prestige in Malory's work and in the real world in which he lived.

There is, in short, an emphasis on colour and expense in Malory's description of happenings at court which strongly reflects the wealth and splendour associated with the aristocracy in his times.

As we have seen from Froissart's contempt for misers, liberality was as important an enhancement of status as display. We can see from many sources that the generosity of the noble was one of his most respected attributes. Malory fills his ideal chivalric

(1) Schofield, W.H. op.cit. Page 40

(2) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970

world with such generous figures.

Harmeance, to pick an example at random, is praised as "a noble knyght, large and liberall of his experience" (Page 433). Tristram takes care to praise Lancelot for his "larges" and "bounte" among other things (Page 451). Bors upholds Guinivere in The Poisoned Apple, saying that she was "large and free of hir goodis", a "maynteyner of good knyghtes", and "the moste bounteous lady of hir gyfftis". (Page 617).

Froissart also praises generosity in the same vein, showing in the real world acts comparable to those in Malory's work. He describes, for instance, how Edward releases a prisoner who had functioned as a guide with a gift of a hundred gold nobles. He mentions with gratitude that Richard II had given him a goblet of silver gilt, weighing more than a pound, containing a hundred nobles.

Like Malory's Harmeance, Edward, Lord Despenser is praised by Froissart in a statement linking generosity and chivalry when he is described as "open-handed and chivalrous." (1)

Perhaps the best example stressing the link between generosity and chivalry in the real world is Villehardouin's statement quoted by Keen: "The Marquis (of Montferrat) was one of the most highly esteemed knights in all the world, for no-one was more open-handed and generous than he." (2)

Keen sums up the ideal chivalric attitude to wealth when he writes: "...among the late medieval nobility we move in a social world in which any idea of saving, let alone of capital accumulation, was alien. Riches were for redistribution, not for re-investment; largesse was a quality to be expected of every nobleman." (3)

As in the days of the Saxon ring-giver, the originator of largesse in Malory's work and, to some extent, his world, is the king. Deeper implications in the Morte d'Arthur, however, suggest that the king's gifts have more the air of a salary. There is often a sense of a formal contract, a development in monetary terms of the earlier feudal contract based on land.

(1) Breteron, G. op.cit. Page 192

(2) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 55

(3) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 155

After Bedagrayne Arthur is encouraged by Merlin to reward his knights, and also to give loot generously to his allies. This, it is pointed out, will cause strangers to do him better service in future.

The French kings, in turn, "frely" (Page 25) distribute rewards to their knights. This is more than mere generosity, and a hint is made at the realities of paid retainers and mercenaries when Ban and Bors say: "...by your gyfftes we shall wage good knyghtes ond withstonde the kynge Claudas hys malice...." (Page 26)

This reflects the English pattern of recruitment for the Hundred Years War which involved the king's payment of vassals to raise mercenary levies _ the old reliance on vassals being only partly outdated. Clearly, such wages are acceptable to ideal knights in the work.

The results of stinginess are seen in the Roman wars when Priamus' men follow him to the enemy, breaking service with their overlord on the excuse of being poorly paid. They tell their overlord: "Sir, we have bene thy sowdyars all this seven wynter and now we forsake the for love of our lyege lorde Arthure, for we may with oure worshyp wende where us lykys, for garneson nothir golde have we none receyved." (Page 141)

Kennedy points out the similarity between the knights who served Fifteenth Century English kings and Arthur's knights _ a similarity suggested by Arthur's practice of giving retaining fees to Round Table knights. Kennedy gives a number of examples of this in note 15, Page 350, including the ends of The Tale of Sir Gareth, La Cote Mal Tayle and The Healing of Sir Urry. She adds that each of these probably stems from Malory, not from an earlier source. (1)

A detailed example of such a fee can be seen in the case of Priamus, when Arthur takes him into his service with the words: "Where art thou, Priamus? Thy fee is yet behynde. Here I make the and gyff the deukedom of Lorayne for ever unto the and thyne ayres: and whan we com into Inglonde, for to purvey the of horsemete, a fyfty thousand quarterly, for to mayntayne thy servauntes. So thou leve not my felyship, this gyffte ys thyne owne." (Page 145)

Kennedy emphasises the condition on which the gift

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit

is given. It is plain that this is a contract of employment rather than a shower of bountiful gifts. She adds that this form of contract was becoming increasingly common in Fifteenth Century England.

A similar, though presumably smaller scale, arrangement is seen in Froissart in the reference to Sir Denis de Morbeque, who had been banished from France and became "...a paid retainer of the King of England." (1)

Parallel with the granting of money in Malory's work is the older system of granting lands. Frequently the two are combined, as in the case of Priamus, to provide a huge and possibly idealised fee. Arthur gives Sir Ironside great lands for life and elevates him to the Round Table, as he does to the Duke de la Rowse, making him a knight and giving him "grete londis to spende." (Page 225)

This is seen, too, in Froissart's work where the king welcomes a French exile with membership of the royal household and the assignment of a large estate "...to enable him to maintain himself and his followers on a lavish scale". (2) Malory's work is quite close to real life in its description of the profitability of knightliness.

While there is no mention of estate administration in the work, there is, as with Froissart, a strong sense of practicality and worth in Malory's references to land and money. It is carefully stated, for example, that Arthur gives La Cote Male Tayle the castle of Pendragon "and all the londis thereof".

Sir Andred plots against Tristram "bycause he wolde have had sir Trystramy's londis" (Page 306) and not for more respectable reasons of personal hatred or feud. There is a strong sense in many episodes of the importance of lands for providing a livelihood.

We saw this in the case of Sir Ector, and it appears again when La Cote Male Tayle declines Sir Plenary's captured lands through reluctance to deprive him of his "lyvelode" (Page 293), a word mentioned twice in three lines.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 140

(2) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 68

Vinaver notes that Malory is fond of "...specifying the economic and legal aspects of feudal contracts." (1) He mentions Guinivere's dowry and the specific rent which Outlake has to pay Damas. An even better example of Malory's interest may be seen in Priamus' contract with Arthur described above, on Page 71.

Vinaver writes that "...Malory's mind is essentially realistic. He is always conscious of the practical side of his heroes' lives. Thus, while adding nothing substantial to the story of Lancelot, he is responsible for the notion that to discover his whereabouts Guinivere sent to Bors, Hector and Lionel "tresour ynough for theyr expencys.'" (2) Later, in fact, a specific sum in pounds is mentioned.

Malory's realism and preoccupations spring into sharper focus in the light of Hindley's observation that "England was in the slow, socially disruptive process of becoming a money-based economy." (3)

It is noteworthy how frequently Malory mentions specific sums of coined money in the chivalric world of the Morte d'Arthur, as well as the difficulty of surviving without it. An awareness of financial need may be seen, for example, in Lancelot's and Gawain's gifts of spending money to Gareth; and in such references as the King of Ireland's promise to Marhault that, if he battles in his favour; "...whatsomever ye spende ye shall have suffyciauntly more than ye nede." And in Tristram's care to arm himself, two pages later, in "...the beste maner that myght be gotyn for golde othir silver." (Page 235)

There are many more such references throughout the text, illustrating the need for money and betraying a vivid awareness of it.

It is clear, therefore, that the aristocratic needs and practicalities in the Morte d'Arthur mirrored those of Malory's own times. Although he did not set out to portray the courtly life of his own times, his depiction clearly includes reference to it _ sometimes apparently inserted unconsciously and at other times deliberately _ in order to enhance the prestige or

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970 Pages 49-50

(2) Vinaver, E. op.cit. Page 49

(3) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 166

realism of his characters.

Where he does idealise it is in his exclusive concentration on the knightly lifestyle and profits of the characters, to the neglect of such themes as the study of law and the keeping of accounts.

War

Malory may be said to be surprisingly realistic in his portrayal of a courtly culture which, to modern eyes, or a brief reading, may appear over-stylised and idealised. But it is in his portrayal of war that we find him at his most realistic and serious.

The reason for this may be found in the nature of his work as a realistic textbook for the encouragement of chivalry, and his awareness of combat as the most important function of a knight.

There is, at times, a certain amount of idealisation in descriptions of the feats of individual knights; but Malory's awareness of the clumsiness and pain of medieval combat is not softened. I have already referred to the detailed account of Bedagrayne and the realistic planning behind it. Such careful realism is common in the work.

There is, for example, an underlying air of practicality in the Duke of Cornwall's decision to garrison both Terrabyl and Tintagel to divide Uther's forces, and to base himself in Terrabyl, which had "many yssues and posternes oute"(Page 3), for ease in raiding Uther.

The emphasis on practicality is continued in Arthur's favourite tactic of surprising his enemies in their lodging, which he uses both in his first attack on Lot and in his night attack at Bedagrayne. It is, in turn, used against him in The War of the Five Kings.

At Bedagrayne, too, realism is apparent in the reference to footmen, as is the case elsewhere. Malory can therefore not be said to concentrate exclusively on armed horsemen, but rather portrays the battle as an act of war, as distinct from an exhibition of knightly prowess. Exhibitions of prowess there are, but they are firmly curbed.

Ludicrous exaggeration is avoided in the battle with Nero, Royn's brother, where Arthur killed twenty knights and maimed forty. This is heroic, yet still within the bounds of reason _ unlike similar accounts in Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, in one of which Arthur is said to have killed hundreds with his own hands in one battle.

Malory was himself a skilled and experienced fighter _ as Vinaver's account of one of his jail-breaks shows (1) _ and he includes, without hesitation, details of knightly combat which might be regarded as "fouls". In the duel between Arthur and Accolon, for example, the shield is used as an offensive weapon and "crowding" is the order of play when Arthur "...preced unto Accolon with his shelde...." (Page 87).

The same is true even in the more overtly Romance sections of the work. In A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot the realism of Lancelot's duel with Tarquin is equally remarkable.

There is a marked absence of knightly dignity in such descriptions as this: "Than they hurtled togedrys as two wylde bullys, rushynge and lasshyng with hir shyldis ond swerdys, that somtyme they felle both on their nosys...Than at the laste sir Terquyne wexed faynte and gaff somwhatt abakke, ond bare his shyld low for wery. That aspyed sir Launcelot and lepte upon him fersly ond gate him by the bavoure of hys helmette and plucked him downe on his kneis, and anone he raced of his helme and smote his necke in sundir." (Page 158)

This sort of descriptive savagery finds its parallel in the equally realistic accounts of certain sagas which testify to the importance of aggression and physical strength in such duels. I think particularly of Egil's Saga, in which Egil's fight with Ljot provides an equivalent of the "pressing in" and charging of the two Arthurian duels above.

"...Egil kept pressing him with stroke after stroke, so hard that Ljot couldn't hit back and had to give ground in order to find room to strike. But Egil stayed close to him pounding away so that Ljot was chased all over the field...." (2) In the second engagement Egil repeats this tactic, rendering Ljot's shield useless and slicing off his leg.

There is an equal realism in Arthur's battle with the giant of Mount St Michelle. It is clear from the

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1981 Introduction

(2) Palsson, H. and Edwards, P. (trans.) Egil's Saga (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976) Page

language that this savagery is a legacy of Malory's source and he cannot, in the light of this and the saga above, be said to be unique in his realistic descriptions of fighting.

Nevertheless, a characteristic of Malory's descriptions of combat not found in some others is his combination of brute ferocity with an emphasis on skill. He also stresses the physical exhaustion of such fights in a way that other accounts do not.

The duel between Gareth and the Red Knight presents some terms which are to become characteristic of Malory's descriptions in later passages: "...and eyther gaff other sad strokys now here now there, trasyng, traversyng, and foynyng, rasyng (treading, crossing, lunging and slashing) and hurling like two borys...." (Page 188).

This attention to footwork in particular, this trasyng and traversyng, is not common to noncombatant medieval authors such as Froissart. Neither is an equally characteristic detail of Malory's descriptions, that Gareth and Sir Persaunte at times "...hurled so togydir that they felle groveling on the ground...." (page 191)

The battle between Tristram and Marhault, in addition to featuring thrusts at breasts and visors, again shows knights rushing at each other like rams in an effort to knock each other down. Lancelot and Mador de la Porte echo this in their duel. Tristram and Bleoberys may also be found "...trasyng and traversyng on the ryght honde and on the lyffte hond...." (Page 249), when they are not rushing together and grovelling on the earth in Malory's characteristic style.

An interesting touch, too, is his equation of such skills with knightliness, as can be seen from yet another duel between Tristram and Brawnor, who rush together "...trasyng and traversyng myghtyly and wysely as two noble knyghtes...." (Page 260)

The most detailed of all descriptions is found in Gareth's battle with the Red Knight of the Red Lands. This summarises Malory's characteristics in the description of combat, stressing his concern with skill, savagery, knightliness and physical pain and exhaustion.

The description is a long one _ too long to quote after the detail given above. Its very length and detail suggest Malory's enthusiasm and show him as an expert writing for an equally expert and interested audience, and perhaps for the education of younger knights. One theme which I will take up is Malory's emphasis on the physical suffering of the knights as they stand "...waggyng, stagerynge, pantyng, blowyng and bledyng...." (Page 198).

He has a very keen awareness of the seriousness and pain of wounds, an instance of which awareness can be seen in the wound Gareth receives on Page 206 that "...cutte a-too many vaynes and synewys". Frequently expressed, too, is the need for such wounds to be treated and properly searched.

Malory's alternative world, however, seems to be one of clerical and female amateur surgeons; quite different from the state of affairs in his own times when, as Chaucer and Froissart make clear, there were professional physicians.

With this exception, however, Malory displays considerable accuracy in his descriptions of this subject throughout the book, instead of glossing over the reactions of even the greatest knights to a serious wound.

A good example occurs when Lancelot, wounded in a tourney, has a spear head drawn from his wound. There is an hysterical and realistic tone to the argument between Lavayne and Lancelot, with Lavayne fearing to draw the spear head out lest it kill Lancelot (which shows a fair degree of paramedical knowledge) and Lancelot screaming: "I charge you, as ye love me, draw hit oute!" (Page 627)

When the spear is removed Lancelot "...gaff a grete shrycke and a gresly grone, that the blood braste oute nyghe a pynte at onys, that at the laste he sank downe uppon hys arse and sowned downe, pale and dedly." (Page 627) Later, when the wound bursts again, Lancelot's pain, fear and panic are all too evident as he cries out: "A, sir Bors and sir Lavayne, helpe! For I am come unto myne ende!" (Page 636)

Recalling, too, Gawain's pain and fear of being maimed after the arrow wound in his first quest, it is clear that these passages, in their vivid realism, were written by a man who was well acquainted with the sight of others in pain and fear of death; who had perhaps suffered such a wound himself, and who was writing for an audience to whom these things were applicable.

I have mentioned the authentic details of courtly life in his own times which Malory gives almost in passing. There are warlike instances of this too. The cry of the heralds at a duel: "Leches les alere!" (Page 66) is an example of this. So are technical details, such as the fact that Lancelot arrived for this duel on a properly equipped horse, saddled with "a sadyll of warre" (Page 661). These are familiar things set down for an audience equally familiar with them.

There are, however, times when Malory does not write so casually about knightly life, but assumes a textbook tone and seems deliberately to be passing on truths and impressions applicable to his society and times. He mentions, for example, the dangers of the indiscipline characteristic of a feudal army: "...for ofttymes thorow envy grete hardynesse is showed that hath been the deth of mony kyd knyghtes; for though they speke feyre many one unto other, yet whan they be in batayle eyther wolde beste be praysed." (Pages 133 to 134)

That this could be a serious disadvantage is seen from Joinville, who describes how Gautier d'Autreche, in his pride, rides out alone against the Saracens and is nearly killed when they beat him decisively. (1) The king later criticises Gautier for disobeying his orders.

Froissart endorses Malory's advice in his criticism of the French at Crecy who disobey their leaders. He says of them that: "... they would not stop until they had caught up with the front ranks. And when the leaders saw the others coming they went on also. So pride and vanity took charge of events. Each wanted to outshine his companions... there were too many great lords among them, all determined to show their power". (2)

Malory's advice, it is clear, was therefore valid and of practical use to Fifteenth Century readers. It is hints like this which remind the modern reader of the over-all applicability of the Morte d'Arthur to Malory's times.

In similar vein, an interesting note of warlike wisdom is passed on through a remark by Mordred about La Cote Male Tayle. He says: "But as yette he may nat

(1) Shaw, M.R.B. op.cit. Page 208

(2) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 86

sytte sure on horseback, for he that muste be a good horseman hit muste com of usage and exercise. But whan he comyth to the strokis of his swerde he is than noble and myghty." And that saw sir Bleoberys and sir Palomydes; for wete you well they were wylly men of warre, for they wolde know anone, when they sye a yonge knyght, by his rydyngge, how they were to gyffe hym a falle frome his horse othir a grete buffet. But for the moste party they wylly nat fyght on foote with yonge knyghtes, for they are myghtyly and strongely armed". (Page 287)

It is statements like this - which, incidentally, contains Malory's characteristic "wete you well" - that really bridge the gulf between the romance of the past and the practicalities of Malory's present; for in many ways little is shown to have changed.

In Malory's accounts of warfare, particularly warfare on the Continent, we can see clear connections with his own times. Arthur, for example, is a far cry from the Saxon warrior of Layamon who butchered all the men of Winchester. His behaviour on the Continent is that of a merciful late medieval king, chivalrously commanding that "...upon payne of lyff and lymme and also lesyng of his goodys that no lygeman that longyth to his oste sholde lye be no maydens ne ladyes nother burgessis wyff that to the cite longis." (Page 144)

This echoes Froissart's description of the capture of Caen at which Edward gives a very similar command: "...that none should dare, on pain of the gallows, to start a fire, kill a man or rape a woman." (1) This impression of Arthur as a contemporary king has its parallels in the Roman war as a whole, which is often very close indeed to the French campaigns of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.

Malory displays a very strong sense of nationalism in his accounts of this war. In this we find an expression of his times for, as Hindley points out: "The Fifteenth Century was the age, too, in which the English found themselves. Only the nineteenth century coinages such as 'nationalism' and 'jingoism' will do to describe the upsurge in self-awareness and aggressive pride that followed the decades after Agincourt" (2)

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 76

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 2

This attitude can be seen from the start of the war, at the council Arthur calls among his barons. Cador's pleasure at the prospect of "warre and worship" is not only typically aristocratic, as we have seen, but strongly reminiscent of the English attitude in the Hundred Years War.

Just like the English kings laying claim to France, Arthur very carefully points out that his ancestry gives him a legal claim to the enemy lands "...and thus have we evydence inowghe to the empyre of hole Rome." (Page 114)

Arthur's invariable swiftness and success in war is perhaps idealised, but it is worth remembering that in most of their Continental campaigns the English kings of Malory's time were just as efficient and successful.

The realism of the embarkation for war is striking, and would hold great familiarity for Malory's readers. "Than in all haste that myght be they shypped their horsis and harneyse and all maner of ordynaunce that fallyth for the werre, and tentys and pavylyons mony were trussed, ond so they shotte frome the bankes mony grete caryckes ond mony shyppes of forestage with coggis ond galeyes ond spynesse ful noble _ with galeyes ond golyottys, rowyng mony ores." (Page 118)

One thinks of Malory's own overseas service and also of the great amount and variety of shipping available in England during the great mercantile expansions of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.

Malory's nationalism and identification with Arthur's army is evident in such phrases as "... oure bushemente broke on bothe sydys of the Romaynes...." and "There oure noble knyghtes of mery Inglonde bere hem thorow the helmys...." (Page 125)

Malory adds later "Be than the bowemen of Inglonde ond of Bretayne began to shote, ond these other, Romaynes ond Sarazens, shotte with dartys ond with crosse-bowys...the Douchmen with quarrels dud muche harme, for they were with the Romaynes with hir bowys of horne." (Page 132)

This last line seems a reflection of Crecy or some similar encounter, for Froissart refers to the conflict of Genoese crossbowmen and English longbowmen at that battle. Certainly such details would be of topical interest to both Malory and his Fourteenth Century source.

As if it were not enough for the reference to archery to call contemporary English tactics to mind, Vinaver writes that Malory has altered the route given in his source. "...instead of going straight to Luxembourg on his way South, Arthur suddenly turns North towards Flanders and, according to Caxton, to Brabant. This at once calls to mind the itinerary followed by Henry V on his way from Fecamp to Agincourt. The triangle of Soissons-Luxembourg-Flanders is an exaggerated replica of the triangle Amiens-Athies-Calais, which roughly describes the route chosen by Henry V.

"Malory, writing a history of Arthur's conquest of the continent, could not help remembering the most remarkable English victory of the century. By strengthening the analogy, he may have meant to enhance the significance of his work." (1)

The analogy is extended further by the enemies of the English, not all of whom are Romans or Saracens. Priamus tells Gawain: "But now I warne the, sir knyght of the Rounde Table, here is by the deuke of Lorayne with his knyghtes, ond the doughtiest of Dolphyne londys with many Hyghe Duchemen (Flemings)...." (Page 138). These, of course, are the contemporary enemies of Englishmen of Malory's times. Froissart lists the allies of the French at Crecy, including the Duke of Lorraine, the Count of Flanders and many more.

While the Roman war of Malory features Saracens, as the French war did not, it is worth remembering their relevance to Fifteenth Century readers to whom the Turkish war in the Mediterranean was still a reality.

Clearly, war to Malory meant much more than the activities of unsupported horsemen. Realistic touches can be seen throughout. For instance, when Arthur besieges an Italian city he "...lette set up suddeynly mony engynes." (Page 136) Later, he makes use of siege ladders. Scorched earth policies are referred to several times; just before Bedagraine and again in the action of the Roman Emperor who "brennys all clene" (Page 123). Other realities of siege and campaign may be seen in the reference to people being crushed by a portcullis on Page 383, and the use of "wylde fyre" by

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1981 notes, Page 743

Sir Bodwyn in a sea battle against Saracens. This "wylde fire" — the famous Greek fire which was the medieval equivalent of napalm — is also used to destroy the castle of La Beale Regarde (Page 395). Its use in sea warfare against the Saracens is interesting in view of the struggles in the Mediterranean I mentioned earlier.

This weapon is mentioned in accounts which bridge a fair timespan, including the early years of the Hundred Years War. Joinville describes how it was launched by catapult to set alight observation towers, and Froissart refers to its use against an English siege tower at Breteuil in 1356. It may still have been an active danger in Malory's time, and its appearance in his work is casual and familiar. Even more strictly contemporary details such as Mordred's use of cannon cannot be overlooked.

Another practicality emerges in the war against Lancelot. It is "uppon a daye in hervest tyme" that Lancelot first tries to parley with Gawain. War at this season is a severe blow to both realms, and may account for much of the unrest in England — an implication which would be immediately apparent to medieval readers.

During the Roman war Gawain has to go out foraging and is wounded by a blow that "...brastyth the rerebrace and the vawmbrace bothe...." (Page 137) These technical references to armour, together with terms like "bascinet" used earlier and "beavour" in Lancelot's fight with Tarquin, make it clear that Arthur's knights wear contemporary Fifteenth Century plate. Also interesting is the fact that Gawain is on a foraging expedition, which is reminiscent of true life accounts.

Villehardouin also stresses the importance of provisions, writing: "Those who had need of supplies obtained them for themselves — and that meant every man in the army" (1). Later on he remarks that the knights ate and drank very little "...since they were very short of supplies." (2) Joinville also refers to the suffering brought about by lack of provisions in the occupation of Damietta (3). But the most striking related account occurs in Froissart's chronicle, and

(1) Shaw, M.R.B. op.cit. Page 61

(2) Shaw, M.R.B. ibid. Page 73

(3) Shaw, M.R.B. ibid.

relates the abortive expedition into Scotland in 1327, which had to be abandoned through lack of supplies. (1)

Yet though Malory gives such a wealth of detail he makes no reference to disease on campaign, although this was a serious and regular problem for a medieval army. Keen points this out, referring to the flux which struck Henry V's army before Agincourt and quoting Joinville's unpleasant description of the dysentery afflicting St Louis and his troops. (2) Clearly, Malory felt such detail to be unsuitable to his portrayal of Arthurian warfare and decided not to carry realism too far.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit.

(2) Keen, M. op.cit.

LOVE

Love is one of the main themes of the Morte d'Arthur and the work reflects a number of widely differing views of it and the role of women.

The most obvious romantic emphasis in the work is the ideal of chivalric love that first appeared in the Twelfth Century. In many ways this was applicable to the ideals or, more rarely, the practice of the late Middle Ages and its good and inspirational qualities are mentioned several times in the Morte d'Arthur. Keen quotes a number of real life references to chivalric love _ such as that of Marechal de Boucicault who wrote, mingling fiction and reality: "We can see how love prompts men to high deeds from the stories of Lancelot and Tristram, and we can see the same from those noble men whom the service of love has inspired to valour in France in our own day, as Sir Othean de Grandson and the Good Constable Louis de Sancerre, and many others too." (1)

Froissart gives many examples to show how ideal love could be seen as a motivating force in the real world of the late Middle Ages. Sir John Chandos and Sir Jean de Clermont quarrel over the similarity of the love emblems which they wear on campaign. And Sir Eustace d'Aubrecicourt is loved by a lady "...for his great exploits as a knight...." She sent him letters and tokens "...by which the knight was inspired to still greater feats of bravery and accomplished such deeds that everyone talked of him" (2).

Other examples may be seen at the tournament at St Ingelvert, where Froissart makes a number of quite casual references to the chivalric force of love. Examples include the Earl of Huntingdon, who asks to be allowed another course "...for the love of his lady...." (3) and Sir Regnault de Roye, who was "...truly in love with a gay and beautiful young lady, and this contributed greatly to his success in all his undertakings". (4)

In this context, it is hardly surprising that there should be so many references in Malory's work to the inspirational quality of courtly love. What is sur-

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 177

(2) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 162

(3) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 375

(4) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 377

prising is that all these references are fairly brief, and are dwelt upon far less deeply than the disadvantages of such love. The most common theme in favour of such love, stretching throughout the book, is the motivating force it provides in combat. A typical example involves the duel between Balin and Balan, who fight until their breaths fail. "Thenne Balyn loked up to the castel and sawe the towres stand ful of ladyes. Soo they went into bataille ageyne...." (Page 57)

And Gareth finds the strength to win against the Red Knight because of a cry from Lynnet and the weeping of her sister.

Yet the results of such inspiration are not always good. Tragedy results from the extra energy Balin and Balan put into their pointless fight. And the doctrines of courtly love are to cause Gareth some irritation, since after he has won his fight the dame Lyoness sets him the condition that before he has "holy' her love he must go off and become a worthy knight.

Gareth complains strongly having, not unreasonably, expected "ryght good chere". Eventually he goes off, "makyng grete dole", in the tradition of courtly lovers. (Page 201) Unlike Pelleas, however, who has become the model for futile courtly love in the work, Gareth has at least been promised success after his sufferings.

It is, nevertheless, clear that while the conventions of courtly love make themselves apparent in the work this love is ambivalent and can bring about misery as well as good. This lesson becomes very clear indeed in the darker, more destructive, adulterous love affair in the book.

It is impossible to bypass Dinadan's comments on love. They leap out from odd corners of the book, often when things seem rosier for the lovers. One of his chief criticisms is that love makes the lover ridiculous, as it does the knight who "lay lyke a fole grennyng" (Page 421). We have, by the time we read this, already had ample time to check the truth of such statements in characters like Pelleas and Palomides.

Dinadan objects, moreover, to the misery love causes. As he says to La Bealle Isode, "...the joy of love is to shorte, and the sorow thereof...is duras over longe." (Page 424) I feel that here he is not talking of love ending in marriage, but of fickle, adulterous or unreturned love with its dangers and disappointments. This is implied by the question which provokes his reply. "Why," seyde La Beall Isode, "are ye a

knyght and ar no lovear? For sothe, hit is grete shame to you, wherefore ye may nat be called a good knyght by reason but yf ye make a quarell for a lady" (Page 424).

There is here no mention of marriage, but rather the suggestion of proving one's love for a lady by quarrelling in her name. I feel much of the emphasis on love in the Morte d'Arthur is intended to show how the excessive, immoral, love demanded in courtly tradition destroys chivalry rather than increasing it. Dinadan is a knight of proven ability and there is an attractive pragmatism in his admission to Isoude that he finds her lovely, very lovely, far lovelier than Guinivere, but will not on that account fight for her against three knights at once - "Jesu me defende!" (page 424). Dinadan seems the voice of normality and common sense.

Kennedy writes that "Lancelot's relationship to Guinivere is the source of his only imperfections" (1) The destructive power of his love is seen in his rudeness and aggression to Sir Lamorak as he "makes a quarrel" for his lady. Bleoberys intervenes with reason, and so not only highlights Lancelot's degeneration but contrasts it with normality and sense.

The destructive power of love is seen, too, in the pitiful case of Palomides. His sufferings, and vain attempts to gain the love of Isoud fill much of the tale of Sir Tristram. At the tournament of Lonsep his love causes him to behave dishonourably on two accounts; by his treachery in attacking the disguised Tristram and when he deliberately strikes down the horse of Lancelot. The treachery to Sir Tristram, rather like Lancelot's broader treachery to Arthur, is the greater example of destructive love since Tristram is a man whom Palomides admires and "...he was so kynde and so jantyll that whan sir Palomydes remembyrd hym thereof he myght never be myrry." (Page 465)

Lancelot's reaction to being fouled in the tourney is revealing. Though at first nearly berserk with rage, Lancelot recognises in Palomides the same urges that have already caused him to challenge Lamorak and will in the end lead to the killing of Gareth. He sums up these experiences with the phrase "...and well I wote that love is a grete maystry." (Page 449)

It is plain that the ideals of courtly love, and the view of it as beneficent to chivalry, are sometimes shredded in the text. Gawain shows a predominantly sexual and Arthur-like attitude to love, at odds with the ideals of faithful service, and rides happily off into

the forest afterwards; while Pelleas' exaggerated "service" is seen as silly and pointless. The same attitude is reflected in Chaucer's Parliament of Foules and the mockery of such characters as Absalom in The Miller's Tale, and is clearly current in Malory's society, alongside the idealisation. Pelleas later loves, and marries, a woman who loves him in return rather than his more "courtly" love who told Gawain that she "hated hym" (Page 102) for his stupid persistence. Gareth, too, is attacking the ideal of persistence in pursuit of the unattainable when he tells the Red Knight that "...and thou to love that lovyth nat the is but grete foly." (Page 197)

Lewis mentions that Malory's cynicism about it was far from unique (1). Keen names Geoffrey de Charney as a knight who, while extolling the love of a lady, maintained a sensible attitude. (2)

Another critic, focusing less on unrequited love than on its sinfulness, was Raymond Lull. (3)

Vinaver suggests that Malory was unfamiliar with the philosophies of courtly love. In fact I feel that Malory was familiar with them, at least in sufficient outline to represent them in the case of Sir Pelleas, and felt them to be foolish and, in practice, adulterous _ a sin that he condemns. As we have seen, the themes and forms of such idealised love were so prevalent in the Romance literature, and in life, at the time that a literate aristocrat such as Malory _ in the service of Beauchamp _ could hardly have missed becoming familiar with the French love philosophies. Merely objecting to some of the premises of courtly love need not imply that an author was ignorant of them, as we saw from Charney in Keen's reference above.

Concomitant with the ideals of courtly love is the concept of adultery. Many of the love affairs of the Morte d'Arthur concern adultery, and this emphasis on it seems due to the assumed lovelessness of the arranged marriages common both in real life and in Malory's work.

(1) Lewis.C.S, The Allegory of Love (London:Oxford University Press,1951)

(2) Keen.M, op.cit.

(3) Byles.A.T.P. op.cit.

While courtly love affairs were seen as the lot of the aristocracy, so was the arranged marriage, to which there are many references throughout the Morte d'Arthur. Uther arranges marriages for his vassals, as Page 5 makes clear with its reference to the marriages of Lot and Morgause, and Nentres and Elaine, "...done at the request of kynge Uther." (Page 5) Arthur arranges marriages too, at the end of the tale of Sir Gareth.

Two rather striking accounts of arranged marriage are found in real life in Froissart and the Paston letters. Froissart writes that "To reward him (Sir Edward Montague) for his services, the King gave him the young Countess of Salisbury, Madame Alys, whose estates he held in wardship" (1) The marriage is discussed in Parliament before being put into effect.

In the Paston Letters, John Paston I writes to Lord Grey in connection with his offer to arrange a marriage between Paston's "poor sister" and a gentleman he knows of "300 mark livelode". (2)

Nothing illustrates better the woman's total powerlessness than this episode in which her marriage to a stranger is debated with another stranger. The mercenary element is prevalent throughout the Paston's correspondence on arranged marriages. Clearly, this is the complete opposite of the freedom of choice stressed in the courtly love theme, and explains much of its adulterous and underground nature.

Lewis writes that "Marriages had nothing to do with love, and no 'nonsense' about marriage was tolerated. All matches were matches of interest, and, worse still, of an interest that was continually changing. When the alliance which had answered would answer no longer, the husband's object was to get rid of the lady as quickly as possible. Marriages were often dissolved. The same woman who was the lady and the 'dearest dread' of her vassals was often little better than a piece of property to her husband." (3)

Malory glosses over such realities, though a reference to them may be seen in the fact that Arthur is prepared to burn Guinivere for the sake of his kingly stock in trade, his "worship".

(1) Brereton.G. op.cit. Page 59

(2) Davis.N. op.cit. Page 37

(3) Lewis.C.S. op.cit. Page 13

(2) Davis, N. Op.Cit. Page 37

Trevelyan, too, dwells upon the misery inherent in arranged marriages, agreeing that love had normally nothing to do with the choice of marriage partners (1). He stresses certain points that Malory glosses over, such as the ill-treatment of Elizabeth Paston when she objected to a marriage arrangement with an older and ugly man. Yet it is in the Paston letters, too, that we see that while love played little role in arranging such a marriage it was not seen as impossible within that marriage, despite the comments of the courts of love; and in real life was something to be striven for.

Elizabeth Paston writes a rather sad letter to her mother about her new husband: "And as for my master, my best-beloved that ye call, and I must needs call him so now, for I find none other cause, and as I trust to Jesu never shall; for he is full kind unto me, and is as busy as he can to make me sure of my jointure, whereto he is ibound in a bond of 1 000 pounds to you...."(2) The letter expresses a passionless marriage in which Elizabeth's master is at least "kind". Money, of course, surfaces. The opening of the extract, "my best beloved that ye call, and I must needs call him so now" suggests earlier differences of opinion between Elizabeth and her mother.

The letter, in fact, has a boarding school quality quite at odds with the expression of Margery Brews to her Valentine. Yet the concept of love, even through necessity, does arise and is taken up seriously and matter of factly by Elizabeth.

In the Morte d'Arthur Elayne of Corbenic propagates this view, too, when she rebukes Guinivere for not loving Arthur, saying that it is her duty to love him. Arthur, too, seems to feel some affection for his queen as is seen when _ surprisingly, in view of his past record _ he "remembird hym of hys lady" in resisting Aunowre's seduction.

Arthur's own marriage is arranged quite coldly. It is insisted on by his barons and Merlin points out that a man of Arthur's "...bounte and nobles...." requires a wife, showing a view of a wife as a social acquisition (Page 59). There is an avuncular tone in Merlin's inquiry as to whether Arthur loves any woman more than

(1) Treveleyan, G.M. op.cit. 1948, Page 65

(2) Davis, N. op.cit. Page 48

another, but the rest of the scene is quite cold-blooded. Guinivere has no say in the matter at all and Arthur, even in his enthusiasm, refers to wife and dowry in the same breath. Once married, Guinivere becomes a cipher as a character and is unimportant to the plot and Arthur's rule except as an adulterer.

There is, however, clearly some attempt at affection between the two. This is seen in The War of the Five Kings, where the tradition of a woman as an inspiration is improved upon when Arthur invites his wife on campaign to inspire him to be hardier.

There are, of course, varied opinions in the work. Lancelot excuses himself from any part in Elayne of Astolat's death by explaining that love "...muste only aryse of the harte selff, and nat by none constraunte" (Page 641).

In view of the consequences of adultery in the Morte d'Arthur, I feel that Malory on the whole comes out in favour of arranged marriages over courtly love and adultery. The reactions of Bors and Gawain to the Fair Maid of Astolat emphasize such a marriage as an opportunity for Lancelot to avoid the destructive affair with the queen.

Lancelot complains to Bors that he cannot put the Fair Maid from him. Bors' reply is that of a spokesman for arranged marriage: " 'Why sholde ye put her frome you?', seyde sir Bors. 'For she ys a passyng fayre damsell, ond well besayne ond well taughte. And God wolde, fayre cosyn,' seyde sir Bors, 'that ye cowde love her....'" (Page 635). From the phrasing of this line, the possibility of love acquires a strong emphasis.

While the affection of the Fair Maid, and the possibility that Lancelot might return it, makes this marriage more attractive, it would be wrong to claim that Malory depended on love to sugar the concept of arranged marriage. He appears to take it seriously even without the emphasis on love, merely showing that love could be found in such a marriage, and giving the lie to the adulterous traditions of Romance.

In a passage which Vinaver's notes suggest came entirely from Malory, Tristram stresses his noble blood in his love declaration to Isoud, and shows Isoud putting herself completely under his rule and domination in the matter of marriage, saying "...whom that he woll I shall be maryed to hym and he woll have me.." (Page 244). Tristram later uses this right to arrange her

marriage to King Mark. It is only when the love potion is drunk that their love becomes ungovernable and adulterous. It is an odd situation, alien to the modern western attitude, and one which warns against too emphatic an identification with the characters as people precisely like ourselves. This does not, however, mean that they were unrealistic from a medieval viewpoint. Even true lovers should not be seen to be in grim rebellion to the social realities which gave rise to the arranged marriage.

The confines of the arranged marriage and familial duty are accepted by the lovers Alexander and Alys la Beale Pellaron in Malory's work, as can be seen by Alys' line "And whan we be more at oure hartys ease, both ye and I shall telle of what bloode we be com." (Page 397) Status is clearly as important a consideration here as is their love.

In the famous Fifteenth Century ballad The Nut Brown Maid the lovers' awareness of status can be seen side by side with the lady's true love:

"And though that I of ancestry
A baron's daughter be,
Yet have you proved how I you loved
A squire of low degree" (1).

Part of the happy ending, of course, lies in the fact that the squire is revealed to be the son of an earl.

(1) Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur (ed) The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1918 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) Page 51

Changing attitudes to marriage

Trevelyan writes that: "It has been shrewdly said that 'any idealisation of sexual love in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealisation of adultery'. "(1) Malory avoids this by showing a society in which marriage is not always purely utilitarian but is frequently based on love, or provides scope for love, and therefore presents a viable alternative to adultery.

As we have seen, together with the ideals of courtly love, the concept of love within an arranged marriage was accepted in Malory's society. The appearance both of the love match and the growth of love within an arranged marriage _ taken for granted in Malory's work _ in fact signals a radical break with the tradition of courtly love, which held love within marriage to be impossible.

As Trevelyan makes clear "...this poetry of love, from its most heavenly flight in Dante's chaste worship of another man's wife, to the more usual idealisation of courtly adultery, had seldom anything to do with marriage. To the educated medieval man and woman, marriage was one relation of life, love another." (2)

Yet by the Fifteenth Century this break had been achieved and attitudes had changed. Trevelyan points out that the idea of the love match was current in English society around the time Malory wrote _ giving as signs of this the love match mentioned in The Franklin's Tale and the courtly love of a wife reflected in The Kingis Quair of King James.

Kennedy writes, too, that "By the Fifteenth Century...the situation with regard to romantic or "courtly" love and marriage had changed considerably, in literature if not in real life. In both French and English romances, marriage was now viewed as the ideal consummation of the love between a knight and his lady."(3)

It is clear that Lewis' pessimism is not wholly justified in relation to Malory's times, and that Trevelyan is wise in his use of the word "normally" when discussing arranged marriages.

(1) Trevelyan, G.M. op.cit. 1948, Page 67

(2) Trevelyan, G.M. ibid. Page 66

(3) Kennedy, G. op.cit. Page 90

thus Malory, in his use of the love match and of love in marriage in general, is faithful to a literary trend of his own times. He is part of a more rational and moral resistance to the Twelfth Century doctrines of love.

Sir Melyodas and Elizabeth, Tristram's parents, have a loving marriage, as is made clear by the phrase "...and well she loved hir lorde and he hir agayne...." (Page 229) Indeed, Elizabeth becomes a counterpart of the great lovers like Tristram and Lancelot in her forest madness after the loss of her lord.

Schofield writes mistakenly that this is the only instance of happy wedded love in the work, (1). But in fact Malory's work is full of references to such matches. Sir Lavayne and Dame Fyleyoly make such a match, for example, and La Cote Male Tayle marries Maledysaunte. The best example, of course, is the marriage of Sir Gareth in which Malory's view of the relative importance of love matches and arranged marriages can be seen.

The Book of Sir Gareth is largely concerned with love, as well as nobility, and in it we find a fair degree of realism in the attitudes to sex and marriage. It is noteworthy that Arthur takes a hand in the marriage of Gareth and Lyonesse, reflecting the influence of the arranged marriage even on the acknowledged love match.

At Gareth's wedding, "...kynge Arthure made sir Geherys to wedde the damsel Saveage, dame Lyonet. And sir Agravayne kynge Arthure made to wedde dame Lyonesse neese...." (Page 224) The section ends on a love story note, with a recapitulation of the marriages, both love matches and arranged. This last summation stresses the synthesis between the modern love match and the arranged marriage. Agravayne is presumably content with his wife, who is described as "... a fayre lady with grete and myghty landys, wyth grete ryches igyffen wyth them...." (Page 226)

The inclusion of such marriages beside the love match, with no suggestion of anticlimax, implies that the two forms of marriage were seen as equally desir-

(1) Schofield, W.H. op.cit.

able by Malory. In this it is clear that the situation is one of transition from medieval to modern times, such as we would expect in a work written at the close of the Middle Ages in England. Love matches are praised; yet arranged marriages are still common with, as we have seen, the possibility for love. Taking into account Malory's criticisms of the courtly love tradition, seen in such comments as those of Dinadan, it is possible to note his realistic attitude to love and marriage in the work, as well as his moral concern.

Vinaver writes of Malory that "For the medieval courtly idealism he attempts to substitute the philosophy of a practical and righteous Fifteenth Century gentleman . . ." (1) We have seen that his attitude to marriage was a fair reflection of his own times and it would be interesting to examine his moral outlook in this respect.

It seems to me that Malory's righteousness manifests itself in his respect for measure and restraint _ a theme which occurs regularly in the work. The advancement of the idea of measure is achieved often by the confession of lovers in the work. Elayne of Astolat says, as she lies dying, that she loved Lancelot "oute of mesure" (Page 639). Lancelot echoes this to Arthur shortly afterwards (Page 641).

Earlier, during the Grail quest, Lancelot tells a hermit how he had "...loved a quene unmesurably and oute of mesure longe". (Page 539. The emphasis is heightened by repetition and rhythm and masterly phrasing.

In The Poisoned Apple we find Lancelot's quarrel with the queen, in which he blames his failure in the quest on his love and stresses the shame of the affair. Guinivere's reply, with its frequent use of "and", is a study in hysteria and illustrates a lack of control and measure. According to Kennedy, this passage is Malory's own original work, not found in any source. (2).

We must never lose sight of the importance of the love theme in Malory's chivalric world. Together with the feud motif, ungovernable love is shown to be the primary reason for the destruction of Camelot and the chivalry it has established.

Malory's own voice is heard in this context, and

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970, Page 109

(2) Kennedy, B. op.cit.

his attitudes can be seen not only in his explicit statements of the need for other priorities besides love, but in his attempts to redeem the reputation of Lancelot. The Knight of the Cart begins with Malory's discussion of love. The setting is the traditional nature/May combination of courtly love literature used by writers like Gower, Chaucer and Dunbar. Yet the approach to the topic is, in its emphasis on control, alien to the usual depiction of the lover. To a great extent this explicit is an attempt to salvage Lancelot, with a strong emphasis on faithful love.

Yet more important that this faithful love, which will still drag Camelot down, is the emphasis on "virtuous love" (Page 649) which places the love of woman after one's duty to God. This is a lesson which seems drawn from Lancelot's recent experiences in the Grail Quest. In this, Malory attacks the adulterous courtly tradition of his setting. There follows, however, a nostalgic paragraph in reference to the "olde love" in Arthur's days which implies the chastity of Lancelot's love for Guinivere and again attempts to salvage him.

It ignores, however, such details as Lancelot's lust for the lady he believes to be Guinivere at Corbenic. It smacks of whitewash, yet also reveals a strong condemnation of adulterous love which is useful in proving Malory's dislike of that sin in his leading characters.

Vinaver, in his notes to The Book of Sir Tristram, writes that Malory "...was clearly unable to sympathise with the more authentic forms of courtoisie." (1) His theme of the possible innocence of Lancelot is a wishful attempt to apply "measure", in this respect at least, to his love for the queen.

At last both Guinivere and Lancelot achieve this measured love, the virtuous love which puts God first. Guinivere prays that she never sees Lancelot again with her worldly eyes _ presumably lest she lapses. And Lancelot, when he sees her dead, "...wept not gretelye, but syghed." (Page 723)

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1981, Page 749

Conclusion.

The major characters of The Morte d'Arthur, such as Lancelot, are complex and consistently develop. Malory seems more concerned to represent love and lovers as he saw them in the real world, in the period of transition in which he lived, rather than to warp reality to fit any particular theory of love.

This accounts for the variety of attitudes to love held by his characters, ranging from the chastity of Perceval to the lecherous pouncing of Tristram and Gawain.

To conclude, it is clear that Malory was writing of love in terms of his observation of the real world — seriously criticising the adultery and foolishness of courtly love, praising both forms of marriage which were in existence in his times and advocating measure and restraint in love. A restraint antithetical to that romance tradition which saw love as of central and paramount importance.

RELIGION

The healing of Sir Urry is accompanied by a considerable display of religious fervour from all. In a public display, Arthur and all his court kneel to thank God and Mary, and a procession of clerics bring Sir Urry into Carlisle "in the most devoutest wyse" (Page 668).

In a reflection of the attitudes of his society, Malory shows great religious observance throughout the work but, as a rule, only when it is convenient or appropriate to the lives of his knights. This is an important dichotomy to which I shall be returning — the blend of negative and positive attitudes to religion in Malory's world, and Malory's response to them.

The inclusion of references to such things as Lancelot's offer of a barefoot penance for the killing of Gareth indicates a strong Christian outlook in Malory's world. I recall Henry II's similar penance at the tomb of Thomas a Becket. There is frequent reference, too, in this part of the book to the endowment of chapels and chantries — again a common activity in Malory's world.

When Lancelot and his seven companions enthusiastically become hermits the depth, formality and privation of late medieval Catholicism is clearly conveyed. Lancelot's death in the odour of sanctity has a dignity and ecstasy which says much for the ideal religiosity of the author's world.

There is also a strong sense of the moral commands of the Pope having authority over the union of nations which makes up Christendom in Malory's work. The Pope, for example, sends a Bull commanding Arthur to make peace with Lancelot who, like Arthur, is eager to obey. Phrases such as "The Pope must be obeyed" (Page 693) show the ideal Christian knight's world view of a Christian rather than a national duty. The term "Christendom" crops up familiarly at various points in the work — for instance, in Arthur's intention to be revenged upon Morgan la Faye "...that all Crystendom shall speke of hit." (Page 88)

The depth and extent to which such views and attitudes were actually held in Malory's world is debatable, but it is clear that such concepts were in common circulation in the united Catholic Europe of the later Middle Ages and of Malory's work.

Certainly I feel that the Fifteenth Century had a formal consciousness of God and an awareness of itself as an age of Christianity. An example may be seen in the many references to God to be found in the Paston Letters. John Paston II, for instance, writing to Margaret Paston on April 18, 1471, refers to God five times in different contexts in the course of a short news letter. (1)

Froissart, too, makes many references to God's mercy or will though, as Brereton points out, there is no way of knowing how much of this is mere custom. Even so, it is clearly a widespread and deeply entrenched custom, if custom it is. Froissart also shows an awareness of the important social functions of the church, showing it as "...a pillar of stability in the same way as the nobility...." (2), an attitude clearly shared by Malory.

As in the Morte d'Arthur, secular festivals in Froissart's chronicle tend to coincide with religious feasts. The founding of the Round Table at Pentecost in Malory echoes the founding of the Order of the Garter on St George's Day in Froissart, for example, reflecting in each case a strong awareness of the importance of the church cycle.

As in Froissart, there is a great sense of religious observance throughout the Morte d'Arthur. There are many references to knights hearing Mass and to the feasts and rites of Catholicism, as with the tournament in the tale of Sir Gareth which begins "...uppon the Assumpcion day, when masse and matyns was done...." (Page 214)

Kennedy points out at length another correspondence in the work with the religious attitudes of real life. (3) The concept of divine Providence underlies the work, from the prophecies of Merlin to Arthur's accession to the throne, from the foundation of the Round Table to its fall. This was, according to Kennedy, the dominant English view of the world in the Fifteenth Century and its presence adds solidity, realism and moral applicability to Malory's portrayal of chivalry.

Yet this religious tapestry in the work is ideal-

(1) Davis.N, op.cit.

(2) Brereton.G, op.cit. Page 22

(3) Kennedy.B,op.cit.

ised and incomplete. Religion and respect for the church, as Hindley shows below, was not as popular or as deep as Malory at times makes out. I notice that the morality plays of the Fifteenth Century, together with Piers Plowman, show more than their share of corrupt church figures abusing their offices and disrupting the state. Chaucer, too, often criticises and exposes religious abuses.

It is clear that there was a strong spirit of religious cynicism and criticism in the late Middle Ages, but Malory never broaches the subject. To be fair to him, much of the religion in his work is personal or hermit-orientated. Its equivalents in real life would thus be deeper and more sincere, as is seen in such things as the writings of Richard Rolle. (1)

Sometimes, it is true, respect for the Church is shown wanting in the work. But Malory himself never attacks it, and seems to be criticising a failure in the worshippers rather than in the church itself. Much of the Grail Quest is concerned with highlighting a lack of deep religious feeling in the king's court.

There are many instances of this in the work. Examples may be seen when the Archbishop sharply rebukes people who begin to rush out from Mass to see the sword in the stone; and when the barons disregard the divine and church sanction of Arthur's accession to the throne.

Other instances include the ineffectiveness of the Archbishop's protests against Mordred's coup d'etat, and the Pope's attempt to make peace between Gawain and Lancelot. The work in this respect, too, seems to reflect an accurate picture of the views of the Fifteenth Century. It seems clear, however, from the absence of any overt criticism of the church that these are not the views of Malory himself who — judging from his explicit — may well have been deeply religious.

There may in fact be a sense of embarrassment at church excesses in Malory and his sources, and a consequent attempt to avoid reference to associated themes. Keen implies this when he writes that: "Among the clergy of the stories, the figures whom we most often encounter are hermits, solitaries whose way of life is just about as divorced as may be from the world

(1) Ogilvie-Thomson, S.J. (ed) Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse London: (E.E.T.S. Oxford University Press, 1988)

of the organised ecclesiastical hierarchy ..."(1) Though references to abbeys, for example, mention only their good points in Malory's work _ I think particularly of the aftermath of the Arthur-Accolon duel _ darker implications can be picked up on occasion. The plainest example is Morgan's magical studies in her convent, the moral decrepitude of which, judging by Hindley and Trevelyan (2 and 3), seems typical. It would not be surprising, in view of the common cynicism about such institutions, if Malory took care to avoid dwelling on them.

As we have seen, Malory concentrates more upon the shortcomings of the worshipper than the institution. Yet while he criticises the less than devout, writing of the lack of true belief in Arthur's times, he makes no reference to heresy in any form, although Lollardry was a serious matter in his world. Conservative and partisan in his views, Malory avoids both the corruptions of a church which had become the main career ladder of the ambitious and the overt rebellion of some of its worshippers. He ignores anything other than Catholicism and the lack of devoutness in some nobles.

Hindley writes that "Between the soft-centred credulity of the pilgrim shrine and the narrow fervour of the Lollard Bible class, the bulk of the English were indifferent to church religion." (4) Malory's work often reflects the attitude of this majority, while also making clear his own "soft-centred credulity", at least in connection with the true knight's idealised response to the church.

Froissart, too, reflects this double presentation of cynicism and observance _ indicating a similarly ambiguous attitude in real life. Despite many references to religious events and festivals in Froissart's work, the fighting knights he describes seem harsh pragmatists.

Before Poitiers, for example, Cardinal de Perigord declares a truce and attempts to make peace. The Black Prince finds this truce useful, because his forces were "...continually improving their dispositions and their

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Pages 61 to 62

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit.

(3) Trevelyan, G.M. op.cit. 1948

(4) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 129

battle plan". (1)

This reflects more than merely the modern division of society into agnostics and believers; for it is knights like these whom we see referring frequently to God, and regularly hearing Mass, in both Malory's work and Froissart's. The Bascot de Mauleon, for example, was clearly a notorious and conscienceless freebooter. Yet Froissart quotes him saying in casual conversation that he was instrumental in saving people from the Jacqueri who would have been raped "...if God had not sent us there" (2).

What we see in Malory's presentation, then, is that these attitudes were combined in his characters as they were in real life, and that the indifferent "bulk" whose cynicism he condemns were frequently religious in their observances while at the same time accepting the realities and injustices of life in their behaviour.

Malory himself reflects a certain pragmatism at times. Trevelyan, for example, points out that: "The nun, and particularly the lady abbess or prioress, seldom forgot that she was a lady born and bred." (3) This, it appears, is no scandal to Malory, as is seen when Guinivere enters a convent, instantly becoming "...abbas and ruler, as reson wolde...." (Page 718) accompanied, as Page 720 shows, by her "ladyes and jantyllwomen."

Malory seems to reflect his society quite well in this blend; but we must remember that his main aim was not to portray his own society, but the ideal chivalric one of his work. It is his attitude to religious chivalry rather than religious life as such that we must consider. As we shall see, Malory does not take the easy path of the cheap moralist in this, but reflects a more godly version of the blend seen above.

The importance of the church in the Morte d'Arthur, as a result of its association with chivalry, may be seen in the fact that the most frequently mentioned buildings in the work _ with the rare exception of cities and the odd poor man's 'home _ are hermitages, priories, churches, abbeys, convents and castles. The church is frequently associated with the medical care of wounded knights, as is seen when Lancelot recovers

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 131

(2) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 281

(3) Trevelyan, G.M. op.cit. 1948 Page 73

from a lance wound at a hermitage and Arthur, after his fight with Accolon, wishes that he were at some place of worship to rest himself and is directed to an abbey.

The absence of professional secular physicians gives the church a rather archaic prominence in this respect, which seems a legacy of earlier times and sources. It does, however, stress the unquestioning association between knights and clerics required of ideal chivalry which is, on a worldly level at least, fairly strong in Malory's work.

Lull's work refers frequently to this alliance, and in fact begins with a knightly hermit _ a common character in Malory's work _ who instructs the squire in religious chivalry rather than pure religion. Lull, as part of his list of the offices of a knight, mentions the duty to maintain and defend the holy Catholic faith. He adds that the most honourable offices are those of clergymen ("clerkes") and knights, who should work together without jealousy, as they do throughout the Morte d'Arthur. Lull makes this point several times, in such expressions as "... the grettest amyte that shold be in this world/ ought to be bitwene the knyghtes and Clerks/." (1)

Indeed, his emphasis hints at occasional friction in real life, and it is clear from Froissart's accounts of sacrilege that the church sometimes provided useful prey for freebooting knights. The wealth of the church went hand in hand with its reputation for corruption, and must have led to some bitter secular disputes. An instance can be found in Malory's own life, as Vinaver makes clear (2) when he writes that Malory was accused of breaking into an abbey at Coombe "...and did there steal money and valuables from the abbot's chest", returning a few days later to insult the abbot.

Uden adds interesting details, such as the use of a battering ram to break down the abbey doors (3). It is clear, therefore, that the constant alliance of knights and church in the Morte d'Arthur, and the absence of any reference to sacrilege and the looting of churches, reflects an element of idealisation in the behaviour of Malory's knights.

(1) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit. Page 26

(2) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1981, Page V, Introduction.

(3) Uden, G. A Dictionary of Chivalry, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Kestrel Books, 1971)

Their main religious failing is shown to be a lack of depth in their observances and behaviour. It is this lack only, rather than any deliberate anti-clerical action, which is highlighted in the Grail Quest. Religion is not a particularly dominant presence and the knights themselves, though lodging with hermits and resisting sorceresses at chapels, are motivated more by a desire for secular glory and worship than a desire to serve God. In the Grail Quest this pride and emphasis on worldly chivalry is seen as the great failing of the Round Table.

From a religious viewpoint, the two most interesting passages in the work are the Grail Quest and the religious life led by Lancelot after Arthur's death. Both are concerned with a rejection of the secular chivalry which has occupied the greater part of the book. It is difficult to avoid describing the quest in the context of the events in the Morte d'Arthur rather than the context of Malory's time, since it is so deeply interwoven with criticism of earlier episodes.

It is certainly opposed to the chivalric love theme _ the questing knights are explicitly told to leave their women behind _ signalling entry to a world of completely different priorities to those previously encountered. The quest is filled with allegorical visions and their exposition, in which the traditions of religious writings through the centuries are evident.

In the quest Malory is concerned with supplying the religious motivation which is lacking in the Round Table oath, and showing the effects of its absence in Arthur's kingdom: writing of the religious attitude that "...in tho dayes there was but few folkes at that tyme that beleved perfutely...." (Page 546) a phrase which, as we have seen, is of relevance both to his work and his world.

Yet Malory has altered his source to lessen some of its more excessive religious attitudes, and in the process made it more realistic and more applicable to the activities of his own age. He is concerned with blending the contemplative ideal with the military reality, and producing a practicable religious chivalry rather than a religious ideal per se. This emphasis on chivalry is never lost sight of.

Malory's chivalric idealism makes its presence felt in his claim that "...in thos dayes hit was nat the gyse as ys nowadays: for there were none ermytis in tho dayes but that they had bene men of worshyp and of prouesse, and tho ermytes hylde grete householdis and refreysshed people that were in distresse." (Page 629) Many of the hermits throughout the work are explicitly described as ex-knights and Lancelot, of course, becomes such a holy man himself, as does Sir Percival before dying. This seems the drawback of the knightly religion extolled by Malory's priestly source. It is not, when carried to its logical other-worldly conclusion, very applicable to the real world of deeds and human aspirations.

Malory's alterations provide an alternative to this. He is also careful not to become bogged down in the deeper doctrinal exposition of his Grail quest source, which would have been out of place against the chivalric background of the rest of his work. Nevertheless, while relatively realistic in his editing of the source, Malory was not without his own brand of worldly religious idealism.

As Reid points out, (1) the aims and ideals of the Cistercian monk who provided Malory's source were very different from those of his chivalric sources where love and adultery were the prime movers. Vinaver shares this opinion, describing the source as "...a dogmatic expression of doctrine...." (2) As a result, Malory "...shifted the emphasis from theological disquisition to poetical representation...." (3)

I cannot, however, agree with the second half of Vinaver's statement, that he "...made the Grail Quest appear as a mere pageant of picturesque visions." In the first place the mystical visions are still followed by a fair degree of exposition by hermits and supernatural messengers and secondly, the main characters, such as Lancelot and Percival in particular, still show by their deep emotional reactions the spiritual importance of their visions. While the religious ideals of medieval monasticism are subordinated to Malory's

(1) Reid, M.J.C. The Arthurian Legend (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1938) Page 135

(2) Vinaver, E. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory Vol I. (Oxford University Press, 1973, Page LXXXIX

(3) Vinaver, E. *ibid.* Page XC

greatest motivation, chivalry, they are very much alive.

According to Vinaver the coming of the Grail was, in Malory's source, the ultimate test of good and evil, the triumph of heavenly chivalry over earthly chivalry. Malory altered this to support the expression of his own views of chivalry. The quest takes its place in the chivalric object lesson. It is not the great arbiter between good and evil which it originally was, but the final signal of success or failure of Arthurian chivalry; the sign that it has gained a source of spiritual unity and strength or the sign of its fallibility and transience.

I cannot agree that Malory is wholly secular and ignores the contrast between "la chevallierie celestiale" and "la seculiere" as Vinaver suggests. (1) His emphasis on "vertuous lvyng" is not, to my mind, an easy escape route from the implications of heavenly knighthood but an attempt to apply such godliness to the world in which the knight justifies his existence by righting wrongs and defending the victims of disorder. This is a theme which Malory took seriously, as we have seen.

The ultimate result of celestial chivalry is rather the knightly Christian than the Christian knight _ as typified by such noble hermits as Sir Ulphyne who are of no real use to anything except their own souls. The heavenly knights, Galahad and Percival, are of remarkably little significance to the tale as a whole and even in the quest their ultimate triumph affects none but themselves. They are removed from the scene, while earthly chivalry continues on and is shown in the spirituality of Lancelot and Bors to be not wholly evil.

The religion of the Grail Quest has become a blend of heavenly ideal and worldly necessity. I have stressed in the earlier section on government how dependent the structure of Arthur's realm is on knightly integrity. Perhaps in a warning to the spiritual cynicism of his own society, Malory shows the destruct-

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1981, Page 758

ion of a purely worldly, military, Round Table as a result of its own worldliness and lack of integrity, when it could have been strengthened by a workable leavening of godliness. Where the Round Table sections of the work saw the development of earthly chivalry, the quest, as altered by Malory, shows a further development of it to a workable heavenly version which is prone to none of the corruption of the Round Table.

In that sense the quest, with its focus on the varying behaviour of a handful of knights, produces a return to the state of affairs in Gawain's first quest. In that quest a small group of knights were examined in terms of their understanding of wordly chivalry and, as a result of their successes and failures, an ideal pattern of behaviour was brought out.

In the Grail Quest religious chivalry is explored in the same manner and _ as in the first secular quests _ the standard of success varies with individual knights, illustrating different attitudes and allowing Malory to select the one most suitable for his purposes. In this instance it stands between the extremes of Galahad and Gawain.

As we have seen, this technique was also followed in the examination of love; where Pelleas and Gawain stood at different poles with the medium way of a loving marriage offered. The selection of the medium way, the way of "vertuous lyvyng", is, I feel, the way most acceptable to Malory.

Kennedy, who distinguishes between several types of knighthood in the Morte d'Arthur, writes that "... the True knight believes knighthood to be an order established by God...and therefore tantamount to a religious vocation, whereas the Worshipful knight believes it to be a social and military elite in the service of the feudal monarch..." (1) Lancelot, from being a True knight in his youth, has degenerated into being a Worshipful knight. The aim of the quest, to return him to this pinnacle, would have succeeded were it not for Guinivere.

Malory clearly shows the Round Table's foundation to be based in divine sanction, and the implication of

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 212

the Grail Quest is that the True knight should from the beginning have been the mainstay of the order, with his integrity assured by his constant awareness of his duty to God. There is nothing to prevent the True knight from also being a worker in the world, or from honouring his king.

The blend of chivalry and religion arising from the quest is displayed by the damsel who appeals to the true knight Sir Bors for help (Page 508). She appeals to him in the name of the three priorities of the Christian knight, which she names in descending order: the faith owed to God, the faith owed to the high order of knighthood, and the sake of King Arthur.

These priorities are the guidelines for godly chivalry in the world. This is the same blend of life and faith which Malory refers to in the context of love at the beginning of The Knight in the Cart, feeling that a knight should subordinate his love to the service of God and not reverse the order, yet seeing nothing wrong with a love that meets these conditions.

The same is true of chivalry. Lull, too, lists a knight's obligations to God and his worldly lord in a descending hierarchy of church above king. In this Lull, like Malory, seems to find a synthesis between religion and knighthood which is still of use in the world, but is nevertheless on a slightly higher plane than the usual combination of observance and worldly cynicism found in real life.

Both Lull's and Malory's views are still in line with worldly living. There is no question of a knight living without a lord, for example. In addition to emphasising a knight's duty to God, Lull still stresses his duty to exercise in arms and sport, and to maintain worldly justice and carry out his duties in society. Malory seems to intend the same ideal in his work, but shows the problems which arise when knights neglect the godly side of Lull's teachings and follow only the worldly. Religious observance is common to both works, Lull writing that "The custom and usage of a knyght ought to be to here masse and sermon/..."(1) Malory is quite subtle in showing that observance and lip-service are simply not deep enough to be a cohesive influence preventing the degeneration of a chivalric government.

(1) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit. Page 109

I feel that Malory's ideal worldly knight is something less than Galahad. The prophecies and divine favouritism extended to Galahad make it clear that he is unique and rather other-wordly. Bors and Lancelot are knights of the world, men who have sinned but can yet aspire to spiritual knighthood while serving society in the world. The first task of Round Table heroes like Lancelot and Bors is to abandon the pride and elitism and lust for glory which characterise the Round Table. Lancelot, especially, is unhorsed several times _ the horse being the root and symbol of knightly power and pride, as the derivation of "chivalry" shows.

By their fasts and vows and hair shirts the knights are transformed into monks. But they are fighting monks, and Lancelot wears armour over his hair shirt. The establishment of both the Round Table oath and the Grail Quest at the feast of Pentecost may have symbolic value in stressing the function of True knights as apostles of God, and the conversion of the pagans at Sarras has an apostolic quality. But Malory never loses sight of the fact that True knights are not only servants of God but are also fighting men, with a duty in the world.

The world of the quest is interwoven with the real world. The knights the heroes fight are real men, as well as symbols, and even the purely spiritual Galahad fights savagely on a number of occasions. Sir Bors' single combat, fought in "...Goddis quarelle and youres...." is a bloody and dangerous affair, and we see in it no real difference from the "worshipful" combat in the main part of the work (Page 656).

One of Malory's relatives was a Hospitaller. It is in these great military-monastic orders like the Templars, or Hospitalers, or Teutonic knights that we find real examples of spiritual monks, who kept the Benedictine or Cistercian order, combined with being the warriors for justice and for God that Malory wished for in his work. (1)

Malory's source, as we have seen, was written by a monk and stresses spirituality at the expense of the world. But Malory himself was a knight, and perhaps had a clearer awareness of the need for ideal knights in the world _ especially a world as anarchic as his own.

(1) Uden, G. op.cit.

He describes the development of a standard of knighthood with the main purpose of healing a turbulent world; his portrayal of religious chivalry in the Grail Quest continues this theme, showing how such a spirituality could have, and should have, sprung from Camelot, ensuring the integrity of its knights.

His primary portrait of religion, then, while idealised in its neglect of such things as heresy and sacrilege, is based fairly accurately in the strange blend of faith and cynicism which was current in his age. The attempt to correct this is based on ideals of chivalry which, again, were current in his time. The result is shown to be of application to the world as an enhancement of the ideal chivalric government which he presented as an answer to the anarchy of his times.

Magic and Superstition

Another, related, theme which throws light on rather a strange facet of his society is Malory's presentation of magic in the work. His work contains far more references to magic, and magical religion and mysticism, than it does to orthodox religious practices. Insight is given into this when Hindley, after describing the trial for witchcraft of Elena Dalock, writes: "To the people of the village Elena Dalock was a more potent agent of the spiritual world than the priest, just as magic was more real than religion. The same was true even at the most sophisticated level of society." (1) The same is true of the knights of the Morte d'Arthur and of its priests and holy men _ again, it appears, not a poor reflection of society.

Superstition gave the land its frightening aspects in Malory's day. Hindley quotes the belief expressed in William Worcester's Itineraries that the English River Wye ran "...through a valley called Dimmin Dale where spirits suffer torments, where there is a marvellous entrance into the earth of Peak where souls are tortured." (2)

We must remember that this was an age of wide-

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 147

(2) Hindley, G. ibid. Page 16

spread belief in saint's miracles, and of prophecy in this world, and of hell and judgement in the next. Much of the fantastic in Malory, while no doubt largely seen as fiction, was, I feel, considered far closer to fact than our colder modern judgement realises. The English, in particular, had a strong reputation for superstition on the Continent. (1)

But foreigners like Froissart clearly shared in such attitudes. Froissart refers to the oriflamme which he says, quite seriously, had been sent down from Heaven and describes some debate amongst knights as to the rectitude of bearing it against fellow Christians.

He also recounts, apparently seriously, a ghost story involving the Count of Foix and the Lord of Canosse. A squire suggests that Foix might owe his surprising knowledge of distant events to necromancy. The tale involves reference to the evil magic of a cleric from Catalonia.

In a last example of superstition, Froissart refers to an instance of divine intervention which he describes as "... a true example of God's anger...." One of Sir Peter Audley's squires struck a priest and stole a chalice, spilling the communion wine. "His horse and he on it began whirling madly about in the fields...until at last they fell in a heap with their necks broken and were immediately turned into dust and ashes" (2) It is a tale which could have come from Robert Mannyng rather than an historical chronicle.

Malory lived, let us not forget, in the century which saw Joan of Arc formally convicted of witchcraft. Whether this was seized upon as an excuse or not is irrelevant, for even an excuse must have some hint of plausibility in the minds of its hearers. She died in 1431 - a date which makes Malory's presence at the event possible.

It is not, therefore, unlikely that Malory himself was superstitious. It is certain that some of his readers must have been. One of the best guages of Malory's view of magic lies in the fact that he carefully de-magicalised certain themes which he found in his sources. While Geoffrey of Monmouth goes out of his way to describe a miraculous countryside full of odd-

(1) Hindley, G. *ibid.*

(2) Brereton, G. *op.cit.* Page 162

ities like square ponds, Malory tones down descriptions of the Lady of the Lake's dwelling. (1) What magic remains in his work tends to be "realistic" magic — the spells and prophecies of men and women, which were taken surprisingly seriously in his times.

Vinaver refers to this toning down of various magical episodes to be found in Malory's sources. Among other examples he gives that of Tristram, who is no longer in a rudderless boat sailing by chance, as Malory's sources insist, but is told where to go and sails there normally.

Perhaps this is a reflection of a Fifteenth Century attitude. It was a time which saw a massive increase in overseas trade, and the regular shipment of troops to France and pilgrims even further, leaving nothing particularly mysterious about a sea voyage. Malory himself must have crossed the Channel at least twice.

This was also the century in which Columbus and da Gama set sail, armed with globes and scientific maps. Vinaver's statement that "...improbable incidents held no appeal for Malory." (2) may well be a reflection of the greater familiarity with the wider world of men like himself in the late Middle Ages. What we are left with in Malory's account, then, is realistic magic — things which Malory did not find improbable — prophecies which find their precedent in Holy Writ, and spells which number among their practitioners the scholars of Oxford.

Malory has avoided the rural aura of faerie at every opportunity, clinging to the scenes and events which would have seemed realistic to his own time — in which, as Hindley points out, "there was nothing folksy about magic" (3).

While Lull criticises pagan superstitions such as the belief in divination, Malory seems far more reflective of medieval attitudes when he includes prophecy and magic in his work. Clearly, Malory was aware of the power of superstition and the fascination with the occult among his contemporaries, and made no attempt to purge believable instances completely from his work.

When Lancelot participates in the summoning of a

(1) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970

(2) Vinaver, E. ibid. Page 52

(3) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 147

demon we see a clear break from what Lull would have felt to be acceptable behaviour in a knight. It does not seem to bother Malory, since the summoning _ which seems extremely realistic in its technical details _ is, after all, conducted by a holy man. This, too, is a reflection of Malory's times.

To the believers of the Fifteenth Century, as Hindley makes clear, the church was the source of many magical superstitions. Hindley refers to the Fifteenth Century work Dives and Pauper where it is implied that some priests practised magic. I am reminded of Robert Mannyng's warning of the effectiveness of a priest's curse in Handlyng Synne (The Dancers of Colbeck) and of the interest a bishop shows in a witch's magic bag in the same work. A reference to the fear of a priest's curse can be found in the Paston Letters when Margaret Paston writes that the Bishop "...charged me on pain of cursing..."(1). Another is in the Morte d'Arthur when the forged letters purporting to come from the Pope threaten Mark with "cursynge" if he does not obey.

Magic as such does not seem to be condemned in Malory's work. Only when its purposes are evil is it criticised. This seems to reflect the attitude of the Fifteenth Century, which was not nearly as ferocious in its prosecutions _ if we allow for certain exceptions _ as the Seventeenth Century was to be. As has been mentioned, the bishop in Mannyng's tale of the magical bag is openly curious rather than rabidly antagonistic; and there is no suggestion of the witch's death.

It appears that the occult was explored quite openly in the Fifteenth Century, as it is by such as Merlin in the Morte d'Arthur. Penalties were reserved for those dabblers who attempted evil. Hindley writes that experts in the occult "...were expected at the country's leading centre of learning, and the university magician was more to be feared than the village practitioner because he was better informed." (2)

Astrologers were at work at Merton College in the Fifteenth Century and, indeed, at court as Hindley's second reference makes clear. He mentions two incidents: "The warden Richard Fitz-James, who built the

(1) Davis, N. op.cit. Page 181

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 147

great arch at Merton, with its frieze of zodiacal designs, used astrology to calculate the most auspicious time to start the building." (1) He also tried to divine the whereabouts of lost college property, an event repeated later when the Bursar of Magdalen hired an astrologer from Westminster to discover the whereabouts of money which had disappeared from the vaults.

While this seems open and tolerated, the darker side of Fifteenth Century magic is also shown by Hindley. "In the 1470's two more Oxonians, this time from Merton, were charged with having 'worked and calculated by art, magic and necromancy and astronomy' to bring about the death of Edward IV and the Prince of Wales.

"One of them, Dr Stacy, had already been suspected of advising Joan, Lady Beauchamp, in her attempt to cause her husband's death by melting a leaden image of him." (2) As the reference to Westminster shows, the presence of Merlin and Nynve at court is not as unrealistic as may at first appear; and the many dabblers in good and evil magic in the work find their real life counterpart in Lady Beauchamp. It can only be concluded that Malory's presentation of magic, and the very presence of magic in his work, is realistic in Fifteenth Century terms. He has deliberately made it so.

In conclusion it can therefore be said that Malory's presentation of religion and magic tended to be fairly realistic in the light of his times. Where he does idealise it is, as a rule, in sins of omission - neglecting church corruption, heresy and friction between aristocracy and clergy. Otherwise he accurately portrays the superstition, religious observance and lack of spiritual depth in the society of his time. His primary concern, however, is with the relationship between religion and chivalry. He blends this into a product which is of use in the idealised chivalric government he has created and which he takes seriously. Chivalry, whether in association with religion, love or government, is the central concern of his work and a theme to which we will now turn.

(1) Hindley, G. *ibid.* Page 146

(2) Hindley, G. *ibid.*

CHIVALRY

IT is in the portrayal of chivalry that the Morte d'Arthur finds its purpose and its wholeness. All the major themes of the work, which form the sections of this essay, are tied into the expression of chivalry. Kennedy sees the key to Malory's unity in his examination of knighthood(1) — undoubtedly his primary concern. Such a concern with chivalry was far from being a new theme, and was widely and seriously discussed by writers such as Caxton.

Not only a foreboding of Camelot's fall, but also Malory's dissatisfaction with the chivalric standards of his own time is implicit in his nostalgic description of Camelot on Page 648: "...and revell, game, and play, and all maner of nobeles was used. And he that was curteyse, trew and faytheful to hys frynde was that tyme cherysshed."

There was, it is clear, a spirit of self-criticism current in Malory's time, and some had been feeling a sense of degeneration well before the Fifteenth Century. Froissart, for example, returning to England in 1395, felt that he could discern a marked degeneration of spirit and atmosphere from the days of Arthur-type kings like Edward.

We have seen in earlier sections the social and political disruption of Malory's period, and this took its toll also on the practice of chivalry. Schofield quotes Froissart in this context: "What has become, they said in England, of such great undertakings and valiant men, splendid battles and conquests? Who are the knights in England who do any such things?...It certainly appears that we are in this country weakened in sense and grace. Things have changed from right to wrong since the days of good King Edward.... It is apparent that soon there will be no men of valour left in England, and all sorts of jealousy and hate will increase." (2)

It is true that this degeneration was interrupted, before returning to the corruption of Henry VI's time,

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit.

(2) Schofield, W.H. op.cit. Page 26

by such glorious kings as Henry V. But Froissart's words show how chivalry would wax and wane and, when echoed by similar complaints from Malory's contemporaries, show how the late Fifteenth Century was just such another phase of degeneration from earlier standards of heroism. Caxton, in his epilogue to the translation of Lull's Order of Chivalry, contrasts the past with the present and exhorts the knights of his time to reform. (1)

Hindley produces another example, writing: "To us it seems obvious that the high ideals of honour, loyalty, liege homage and knighthood have little place in the moneyed self-interest of Fifteenth Century society. Many contemporaries thought the same and lamented the passing of former virtues" (2). And then quoting Thomas Hoccleve _ one more in my troop of those who took chivalry seriously _ who dedicated his Regiment of Princes to Henry V:

"For that I would the high degree
Of chivalry universally
Bare up his head and bend not awry"

An interesting point about this criticism, and others, is that while they mourn the degeneration of chivalry they also imply, and sometimes state forcefully, the belief that chivalry can be redeemed. As we have seen with the alternation of such reigns as those of Henry V with more mediocre kings, chivalrous pride and values were sometimes pulled from the mire of degeneracy in real life. This provides the motivation for Malory's work, which is no nostalgic pipe-dream but a serious attempt to resurrect and promulgate chivalry.

Malory's concern with chivalry can therefore be seen as part of a trend of concern extending over a long period, and his work must be seen to have a serious intent and considerable applicability to his age. At the end of this section on chivalry I shall return briefly to the theme of applicability, to stress the textbook nature of the Morte d'Arthur. At this time, however, it would be better to show briefly the Morte d'Arthurishness of real life as a balance to my previous emphasis on the realism, and therefore to some extent the drabness, of the Morte d'Arthur.

(1) Crotch, W.J.B. op.cit.

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit. Pages 178-179

Froissart's work is crammed with accounts of real-life chivalry. The set of single combats in his description of the sack of Limoges could have come straight from the pages of the Morte d'Arthur. "Sir Jean de Villemur said to Roger de Beaufort: 'Roger, you must be made a knight.' Roger replied: 'Sir, I am not yet worthy of knighthood, but all my thanks for thinking of it.'...There was a long hand-to-hand combat between the Duke of Lancaster and Sir Jean de Villemur, who was a fine knight, strong and of superb physique; also between the Earl of Cambridge and Sir Hugues de la Roche, and between the Earl of Pembroke and Roger de Beaufort. Those three against three gave a masterful display of skilful fighting. The others let them fight it out; it would have gone ill with any who tried to interfere....At length the three Frenchmen stopped fighting with one accord and said, giving up their swords: 'Sirs, we are yours, you have beaten us, treat us according to the law of arms.' 'By God, Sir Jean', said the Duke of Lancaster, 'we would never dream of doing anything else....'"(1)

It is important to note that chivalry, whether real or fictional, is best exhibited in combat. This explains much of the violence in Malory's work. Coupled with the successful wars in France in Froissart's century, the English were enjoying tournaments of great magnificence and frequency at home. Schofield seems justified in describing the reign of Edward III as "...the halcyon days of English knighthood." (2) It provided a model of factual bygone glories for those such as Malory and Caxton to look back on with nostalgia.

Edward's decision to found an international order of chivalry based on the Round Table, moreover, shows a strong Arthurian consciousness and basis in this ideal chivalric past which is again of relevance to Malory's work. I recall, too, the seriousness with which Chaucer presented his Knight in The Canterbury Tales. With his ready eye for pomposity and falsehood, I feel that Chaucer would hardly have written such a description had he not taken these ideals seriously, or felt them to be inapplicable to Fourteenth Century knighthood.

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit. Pages 178-179

(2) Schofield, W.H. op.cit. Page 29

In the Fifteenth Century such ideals were still current, as can be seen by the number of chivalric works published by Caxton. Malory's own early life can be seen to have a foundation in such real-life chivalry when we recall that he fought in France in the service of the famous Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. Schofield quotes Kittredge in stressing this: "The service of Malory with Richard of Warwick is peculiarly significant in view of the well-known character of the earl. No better school for the future author of the Morte d'Arthur can be imagined than a personal acquaintance with that Englishman whom all Europe recognised as embodying the knightly ideal of the age." (1)

The similarity between fact and fiction is then emphasised further by Schofield, who points out that in a biography, by John Rous, Warwick "...is presented very much as a knight of the Round Table, and has adventures which make him seem akin to Sir Gareth...." (2) A similarity also pointed out by Vinaver who, in fact, suggested that Malory consciously emphasised the connection (3).

It is clear that Warwick was a far-travelled and adventurous man. Schofield goes on to describe how he fought disguised at a tourney in Calais (4), and Uden refers to his presence at jousts in Verona and other places. (5) Hindley, too, refers to the earl's international reputation and the fact that he was presented with the heart of St George while jousting in Germany en route to the Holy Land. (6)

All this heightens his similarity to a Round Table figure. A more striking link, however, is that Warwick was also a Knight of the Garter - an organisation modelled openly on the Round Table. Here we see literature and life intermingling and reinforcing each other. This concept can be seen in virtually any chivalric society or individual of the period, this sense of the applicability of the Arthurian tales and the conscious desire to emulate them. A similar figure to Warwick, mentioned by Uden, is Philip, Duke of Burgundy, who

(1) Schofield, W.H. *ibid.* Pages 82-83.

(2) Schofield, W.H. *ibid.* Page 83

(3) Vinaver, E. *op.cit.* 1970

(4) Schofield, W.H. *op.cit.*

(5) Uden, G. *op.cit.*

(6) Hindley, G. *op.cit.*

maintained a consciously Arthurian court and, in 1430, founded a Round Table/Order of the Garter clone called the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Such real-life Arthurian chivalry had been in existence long before the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century romances. The lives of such men as William Marshal, who travelled widely as a jouster and Crusader, show the early framework of the real-life chivalric pattern which shaped such romances as Malory's. Keen writes of the chivalric pattern which had already come into existence by the Twelfth Century, and which can be seen copied in tales of figures like Lancelot as well as in the life of the Earl of Warwick.

Clearly these ideals spanned a considerable period, gaining momentum and reinforcing each other in fact and fiction as they went." An adventurous youth, an apprenticeship in the tourney to the 'great business of war', the eschewing of idleness at home and seeking service in farflung places, all these are already essential ingredients of a stylish opening in chivalry."

(1)

These ideals of knight errantry, together with such things as chivalric vows, exist side by side in literature and life for a considerable period. I agree with Keen that the chronicle of Villehardouin shows various ideals and patterns of behaviour that make it comparable to the chansons, although it also reflects realities of disease and confusion which the chansons gloss over. All this, however, highlights the fact that the chivalric ideals were existing in the real world of dysentery and defeat.

Villehardouin's contemporary, Joinville, for example, writes of events which seem startling to modern eyes. Matching such vows in Malory's work as that of La Cote Mal Tayle, for instance, Joinville refers to a knight called Geoffrey de Rancon who had vowed never to cut his hair until he had been revenged on the Comte de la Marche. (2) Vows such as that taken by Palomides to achieve certain deeds before taking baptism are echoed in reality by such knights as Galeas of Mantua, and the German knight with whom he jousting to help him fulfil a vow to achieve "certain feats of arms." (3)

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 21

(2) Shaw, M.R.B. op.cit. Page 189

(3) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 18

That knights errant did exist in the later Middle Ages has been made clear by Keen, who refers to several. Literary parallels can be seen in Arveragus in The Franklin's Tale, who went to England "...to seke in armes worshipe and honour" (4). The crusades of the Teutonic Knights in eastern Europe are a good instance of knight errantry in fact and fiction. They had no gain to offer foreign assistants, only honour, yet, as Keen makes clear, foreigners flocked to them in droves — among them Chaucer's Knight in fiction, and Henry Bolingbroke in real life.

The idea of the Round Table is a good example of the parallel between fact and fiction, and of how they reinforce each other. Keen refers to the various secular orders of chivalry which flourished in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, such as the Order of the Garter, 1348, the Order of the Star, 1351, the Order of the Dragon, 1413, the Order of the Golden Fleece, 1431, and many more (1).

Like the Round Table, many of these orders had vows of chivalric service to society, such as the Order of the Dame Blanche a l'Escu Vert, the chief duty of which was the defence of women. Like the Round Table, the societies were a military brotherhood dedicated to martial prowess whose members stood together against outsiders, helping each other in wars and feuds.

Often, too, there was a deliberate Arthurian or romance consciousness behind their formation. Froissart explicitly mentions the influence of the Round Table on King Edward's decision to found the Order of the Garter. The elitism and internationalism of this order, copying that of the Round Table, is clear: "King Edward's intention was to found an order of knights made up of himself and of his sons and the bravest and noblest in England and other countries too." (2) As with the Round Table, the great formal gathering of the order took place on a religious holiday at which forty knights swore to observe its statutes.

On a less ideal note, the practicalities and savagery of both the real world and the Morte d'Arthur are reflected in the clan-like structure of both the real and the romance orders. The loyalty Keen describes "...was not the corporate loyalty of nationalism, but

(1) Keen, M. op.cit.

(2) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 66

the intimate personal loyalty of the fighting vassal to his lord, and of the companion in arms to his fellow. The kind of eventualities against which they sought to insure their companions were becoming the victim of a feud, or being taken prisoner and set to ransom." (1) As the Cornish advisers in the Morte d'Arthur make clear when they search for a champion to fight Sir Marhault, Round Table knights are unlikely to oppose each other, but usually back each other up whether right or wrong. In fact, the aggressive pride and arrogance of some knights is stressed in the work as they stick together in wrongful causes. Malory's criticisms of this attitude may be seen in a highly rational context _ as though he were criticising a real life order of his own time.

In fact, Malory's presentation of the Round Table seems to have been undertaken in this spirit of realism and applicability to his own time. In The Knight in the Cart, Malory describes at length how those queen's knights that were of most prowess were elevated to the Round Table to take the place of those slain. Kennedy writes that this idea of beginning one's career in the queen's service is Malory's own addition, and speculates that the idea was suggested to him by Richard IV's decision to make a large number of Knights of the Bath at the coronation of his queen.

In fact I feel that no strained interpretation is necessary to explain Malory's addition. If he took the idea of the Round Table seriously, as I believe he did, and consciously saw it as a version of orders current in his own time, the portrayal of such promotional structures would be natural.

The Garter knights were intended to be as useful as the Round Table knights were in the Morte d'Arthur. The order was composed of powerful and experienced knights for this reason. And the Garter knights appear to have been just as effective as their romance equivalents when it came to war on the Continent. Kennedy writes that: "The role which the Round Table plays in Arthur's Roman campaign, both as counsellors of war and as commanders in the field, greatly strengthens the likeness between King Arthur's Round Table fellowship and Edward III's Order of the Garter." (2)

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 198

(2) Kennedy, B. op.cit. Page 35

Another similarity, of course, between Arthur's Round Table and its real equivalents is the glamour and ostentation which surrounds it. This, in its material sense of fine clothes and wealth, has been touched on earlier. But so far I have placed no emphasis on the worship attained by deeds and feats of chivalry. Yet this, it is clear, is at least as important in the real world as in fiction. In fact, the idea of worship is one of the leading motivators of chivalry which, as I pointed out earlier, is best expressed in feats of arms.

The desire for worship is part of the emphasis on the achievements of the individual. Although moralists of the Middle Ages condemned vainglory, as Malory does in a reference in the Roman war, and as his Grail Quest sources did, it is clear that as a whole his book propagates this chivalric individualism in its concentration on the deeds of individual knights. This, I feel, is a result of the general attitude of his time.

Worship and chivalry, as Hindley points out, were inextricably linked. As he phrases it: "...the notion of worship was still governed by the antiquated but fascinating code of chivalry." (1) I am reminded, too, of his statement that worship required constant bolstering. This is supported by Keen's reference to Charney's chivalric works, in which he says that Charney's ideal of chivalry "...involves a constant quest to improve on achievement and cannot rest satisfied." (2) This obsession with worship and acclaim suggests that Lancelot's lust for worship in Malory's work is not particularly unrealistic.

Another connection between romance and reality in Malory's work, linked to the desire for worship, is the quest motif. Keen points out that the desire of real knights to seek adventure in far-off lands is an analogue of the quest motif in the world of romance — an analogue which, I feel, further inspires and vivifies fiction. Certainly it seems that the idea of a knight going off in search of worship was far more relevant and normal to Malory's times than might at first appear.

(1) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 178

(2) Keen, M. op.cit. Pages 14 and 15

Even the staid and moral Gower finds himself writing of such men: _

"Somtime in Prus, somtime in Rodes,
And somtime into Tartarie;
So that these heraldz on him crie,
'Vailant, vailant, lo wher he goth!'
And thanne he yifth hem gold and cloth,
So that his fame micht springe,
And to his ladi Ere bringe
Som tidinge of his worthinesse...." (1)

This description, incidentally, combines courage and fame with other facets of worship discussed earlier _ wealth and generosity, and success in love.

Froissart, too, shares a strong awareness of the drive for worship, mentioning it on several occasions and showing its connection with individual prowess. At the battle of Roosebecke, for example: - "Knights and squires did not spare themselves but went to work with a will, vyng with one another". (2) In another instance, at the ford of Blanchetaque, a number of French knights opposing the English crossing disdained to wait on the bank but rode into the water to meet them "...in order to win greater distinction." (3)

Froissart also takes care to mention the names of heroic knights where possible, writing, for example, that " The King's sovereign banner was carried by sir Geoffrey de Charny, as the wisest and bravest knight of them all." (4)

Villehardouin shows the same appreciation of the deeds of individual knights. He describes Guillaume de Champlitte as "...a very good and gallant knight". (5) On the same page he mentions Mathieu de Wallincourt, who "distinguished himself". The next page, too, names a knight who "...won himself greater honour than anyone

(1) Macaulay, G.C. (ed) The Complete Works of John Gower Vol I London: Oxford University Press, EETS 1901 Page 345.

(2) Brereton, G. op.cit. Page 249

(3) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 81

(4) Brereton, G. ibid. Page 129

(5) Shaw, M.R.B. op.cit. Pages 69-70

else." Such frequency of reference speaks for itself in emphasising the importance and consciousness of worship in Malory's era, and explaining his undertaking of such a work as the Morte d'Arthur, which, to his readers, would clearly be much more than the pseudo-historical fairy tale it is to the modern reader.

We may say that worship is the sum of those qualities that make an ideal knight. As in the chronicles mentioned above, these qualities are reflected in Malory's work by the contexts in which the term is used, and show the comprehensiveness of the work in this respect. Physical prowess is shown to be worshipful in the battle with Nero, where Sir Kay did so well "...that dayes of his lyff the worship wente never frome hym...." (Page 47). Worship is derived from ethical behaviour, too; as Gaheris tells Gawain, "...a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship." (Page 66) Valour is another source of worship, as is shown in Arthur's duel with Accolon where the king, in refusing to surrender, comforts himself with the thought that his death shall not lack "worshippe" (Page 86).

The tournament, as the beginning of The Book of Sir Lancelot shows, was the place where peacetime knights could be "...encreysyd in armys and worshyp...." (Page 149). The duel offers similar opportunity, as is seen when Sir Marhault offers to fight a Cornish champion "...for to advaunce my dedis and to encrease my worshyp...." (Page 233) Worship is also the prime stock in trade of kings, as is seen when Arthur decides to burn Guinivere, and when Angwysh regretfully expels Tristram from Ireland, saying that he cannot keep him and still retain his worship. (Page 243). Even Dinadan raises the subject, though as always he provides the counter view, when he states that "...hit is ever worshyp to a knyght to refuse that thyng that he may nat attain." (Page 356)

With very few exceptions, the majority of the references to worship given above are in some way connected with combat. In this violent context the joust is the best way of gaining worship, short of war. In fact in some ways it is better than war, since an audience is provided. This explains the tremendous number of jousts and duels which fill the peacetime sections of Malory's work.

The Tournament

In the Morte d'Arthur , as it did in real life, jousting plays a considerable part in the presentation of chivalry. In his account of tourneys, however, Malory shows an odd blend of contemporary realism and idealised anachronism. Keen writes of the tourney that: "The space which romances devote to accounts of them, which to a modern reader can only appear excessive, testifies to their importance to the knightly way of life" (1).

By Malory's time, however, jousts were less common in England. According to Hindley, the wild melee of the Twelfth Century and of Malory's work was archaic and absent from Britain. Nevertheless, the melee was far more exciting than the joust, and far more like war with an audience. This explains its prominence in the work as a happy compromise between war and sport, giving added opportunity for the demonstration of chivalry. It was also, as we shall see, still relevant in a European context despite having been abandoned in England.

As Malory's reference to the "the Freynshe booke" (Page 328) shows, his source for the tourney at the Castle of Maidens, with its massed melee, is Continental rather than English, and somewhat old-fashioned at that. Sir Darras loses three sons at this tourney, and has two more crippled.

This, in the context of the earlier Middle Ages from which the source sprang, is not unbelievable. Hindley refers both to the anachronism of such gatherings and their bloodiness when he writes: "The code of chivalry had been born in the murderous melees which had become a popular diversion for the warrior gentry of the later eleventh century. These friendlies to the death involved scores, sometimes hundreds of combatants; men were killed, ransoms were taken and fortunes won and lost. William Marshal, the most famous knight of all, had risen from penury to be one of the greatest landowners in England...but was the last to build his fortune on the spoils of the tourney which was being disciplined by rules and conventions." (2)

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 83

(2) Hindley, G. op.cit. Page 180

The physical realism in Malory's accounts of such tourneys is often striking, but it is clear that it was not an accurate representation of English practice in his own times. He was, after all, writing in an historical vein but may have had deeper motivations. He does still retain his practical approach in details such as scaffolding for seating for the audience, but exaggerates greatly when he refers to eighteen knights being killed "at the fyrst recounter" (Page 155), and to the four broken backs and one broken thigh among the knights Lancelot unhorses in his first encounter. He is also fond of such anachronisms as melees fought over open and wooded ground, allowing the use of ambushes and battle tactics.

Certain timeless details, though, do ring across the centuries, such as the importance of riding a blow; as demonstrated when Palomides is struck by Lancelot and we are told that "...had he nat fallyn he had be slayne." (Page 320). The overall effect of Malory's accounts, however, is of anachronism. By the Thirteenth Century, especially in England under the statutes of Edward I, the use of blunted weapons became common. Jousts between pairs rather than teams became the norm, judges were appointed and the area of the fight reduced. Late medieval tournies, then, were no longer as much like real war as Malory's work suggests.(1)

Keen describes the development of the tilt - the barrier which kept jousters from colliding. Even when fighting on foot, a barrier was sometimes erected across which the fighters struck each other. Since the melee, in a far more restrained form, was still alive on the Continent, Malory's descriptions are not wholly irrelevant to his times. Nevertheless, it is plain that he ignored a great many modern developments which would have detracted from the blood and thunder of the earlier melees mentioned in his sources. Possibly he felt them to be too removed from war. While Malory approves of elaborate ostentation in dress at tourneys he avoids the artificiality of the "theme" jousts of his times. The decadence of these may be seen in Keen's description of the symbolism and romance themes which smother the joust at Chalon-sur-Saone in 1450 (2)

(1) Keen.M. op.cit.

(2) Keen.M. ibid.

This involved an extensive series of single combats with elaborate and courtly forfeits, and the appearance of figures such as a maiden with a unicorn. Keen names several more events, all seeming to have similar settings. Malory, it is clear, prefers to concentrate on his knights as fighters in his accounts rather than fantasists. The only similar event I can think of in Malory's work is Lancelot's challenge to all comers as Le Chevalier Mal Fait. Keen describes this as "...a realistic description of a Fifteenth Century pas...." (1) Yet even in this Malory avoids extravagant symbolism, and concentrates on the characters as fighters.

Keen writes that Malory tailored some of his accounts to modernise them; but I feel, from reading his descriptions, that as a whole Malory sought rather to purify _ to purge the late medieval tourney of unwarlike and effete elements _ and took care to retain those warlike anachronisms which are not only more satisfying to read but stress functional skills of practical use in the world. Clearly, Malory had no objection to the glamour and pageantry of the late Middle Ages. He portrays it frequently, but never loses sight of the warlike and less formal skills required of a practical knight.

Vinaver may perhaps be exaggerating when he writes that protagonists in Fifteenth Century jousts ran no risks, due to the strength of their armour, (2) but this was certainly true in comparative terms. Certainly the tourneys of the Morte d'Arthur are far from safe, and this may reflect not only the influence of Malory's sources but a deliberate choice on his part.

Keen echoes Caxton and Lull in his appreciation of tourneys as a training ground for war, writing that "...tournaments gave men who were likely to serve together on campaign useful practice in operating as a group." (3) Clearly this is true only of the earlier form which Malory preserves, and he seems to have a clear awareness of the practical value of such jousts. I think particularly of the joust before Bedagrayne in this context, as well as the reference during the Roman War to the dubbing of a young squire called Joneke on

(1) Keen, M. *ibid.* Page 208

(2) Vinaver, E. *op.cit.* 1970

(3) Keen, M. *op.cit.* Page 88

the eve of battle, described as "...a juster full noble...." (Page 128) with consequent implications of military skill.

It would be convenient in this context to claim that Malory disapproves of the convention of breaking lances in tourneys _ a convention that was moving up from Italy by the Fifteenth Century _ for there are occasions when he seems to be attacking the custom. He stresses, for example, that Sir Marhault strikes down four knights "with one spere" (Page 107) and also stresses that Ywain's lance "broste nat" in his judicial duel. Lancelot, too, knocks down four knights with one spear and rides off saying: "God gyff hym joy that this spere made, for there cam never a bettir in my honde." (Page 166) Gawain seems to be sneering at the custom when he taunts Lancelot with the words "Ys there none of all youre proude knyghtes that dare breake a speare with me?" (Page 702).

Nevertheless, different attitudes co-exist in the work. At the tournament at Lonsep, for example, Sir Gareth asks Tristram "...to gyff hym leve to breake his speere, for hym thought shame to beare his speare hole agayne." (Page 443). Galahad, too, "...began to breke speares mervaylously...." (Page 521). The same approval is found in the tournament in Sir Gareth which, though a melee, lacks descriptions of shocking bloodshed and concentrates upon the breaking of lances "...myghtly and knyghtly". (Page 215). We must beware, it is clear, of stereotyping Malory, for he is not uniformly blood-thirsty or anachronistic but combines various chivalric developments in his work as it suits him.

In fact Malory is flexible enough to have a toehold in a great many of the forms which the tourney took in the medieval period, presenting both savage and peaceful melees, together with Lancelot's pas d'armes. He is aided in this by the relatively unchanging medieval period and by the strong presence of traditional chivalric elements in his society.

The Paston Letters can be called upon to show how this combination still renders Malory's work surprisingly relevant to an admittedly Continental tourney of the later Fifteenth Century. I refer to the letter

which John Paston III wrote to Margaret Paston from Bruges in 1468 (1). I feel this letter to have eight points of relevance to Malory's work, and these are numbered in Roman numerals:

"And the same Sunday my lord the Bastard took upon him to answer 24 knights and gentlemen (I) within eight days at jousts of peace (II); and when that they were answered they 24 and himself should tourney with other 25 (III) the next day after....And they that have jousted with him this day have been richly beseen, and himself also, as cloth of gold and silk and silver and goldsmith's work might make them (IV)....This day my Lord Scales jousted with a lord of this country, but not with the Bastard, for they made him promise at London that none of them both should ever deal with other in arms. (V) But the Bastard was one of the Lords that brought the Lord Scales into the field; and of misfortune an horse struck my lord Bastard on the leg, and hath hurt him so sore that I think he shall be of no power to accomplish up his arms (VI), and that is a great pity, for by my troth I trow God made never a more worshipful knight (VII). And as for the Duke's court...I heard never of none like to it save King Arthur's court (VIII)."

The first point, the Bastard's lone challenge, is of course reminiscent of Lancelot's open challenge as Le Chevalier Mal Fait. The second point, the reference to a "joust of peace", implies that sharp blades were still in use in Fifteenth Century jousts and that distinctions needed to be made. The third shows that, as in the Morte d'Arthur, where Malory distinguishes between those who came "...some to joust ond som to torney" (Page 8) there is still a distinction between single combat and the melee _ which in this case is fairly large, involving teams of twenty-five a side.

The fourth point is reminiscent of the ostentation of the Morte d'Arthur in accounts of similar events. The fifth refers to the honourable pact between Lord Scales (the glamorous, Lancelot-like, Anthony Woodville) and the Bastard, a romance brothers-in-arms idea which is echoed frequently in Malory's work _ for instance in the reluctance of Lancelot to engage Tristram. The injury to the Bastard, point six, makes it clear that the clash of armoured horsemen was still

(1) Davis, N. op.cit. Pages 165-166

nearly as violent and rough as Malory stresses, even with blunted weapons. The seventh point notes John Paston's unselfconscious use of the term "worship", in a context which Malory's work associated primarily with worship. The eighth point notes Paston's immediate likening of the Fifteenth Century scene to Arthurian myth, reflecting both that Englishmen already had a strong Arthurian consciousness before Malory wrote, and the intermingling of literature and fact in the mind of a Fifteenth Century man. This is in similar vein to the intermingling in Malory's work.

While this description is less violent than those in the Morte d'Arthur, an account of a Fourteenth Century tourney in Froissart's work shows that even at that relatively late date such dangerous encounters with real blades were in vogue on the Continent. (1). Many of these encounters at the tournament are reminiscent of the informal jousts between chance-met knights in the Morte d'Arthur. Like Malory, Froissart describes these encounters blow by blow and one is aware that both are writing for an expert and professionally interested reader.

A very strong link between the jousts of reality and those of the Morte d'Arthur is given by Vinaver, who describes how Beauchamp, at a gathering in Calais, sent three challenges to French knights — one in his own name and the others under romantic aliases. (2) He defeated them, twice fighting in disguise as "The Green Knight" and "The Chevalier Attendant."

Vinaver connects this to the adventures of Beaumains, remarking that the name would be impossible in any French romance and pointing out its similarity to Beauchamp. He also refers to Schofield, who suggests that the Duke de la Rowse in the book of Beaumains may be a tribute to Beauchamp's associate John Rous. Certainly the age in which Malory lived and the feats of Beauchamp would make such correspondences not only possible but apt.

The prevalence of multi-coloured knights in the tale, both in Beaumains' opponents and in his own disguises at the tourney, remind one of Beauchamp's adventure. It might, however, to be unwise to place too much emphasis on colours in linking Beaumains to specific

(1) Brereton, G. op.cit

(2) Vinaver, E. op.cit. 1970

individuals since the disguise motif is common both in the work as a whole and in the pageantry of Malory's time. The question is most useful here as an indication of the strong two-way connection between literature and reality.

In spite of this tradition of appearing in disguise, the social stratification of tourneys, and the requirement for a knight to prove his rank when entering, became tighter with the rise of the bourgeoisie. Landless and unknown knights were frowned on by the end of the Thirteenth Century. "This tendency no doubt reflects knighthood's growing awareness of the challenge of bourgeois wealth to aristocratic dominance, and its response to that challenge with efforts to entrench its influence and way of life through caste exclusiveness," writes Keen (1).

He quotes a good example of such efforts to remain exclusive from the memoirs of Sigmund von Gebsettle, who was prevented from tourneying at Stuttgart and had to prove his "four lines" of noble descent (2). Clearly, disguised knights, or knights with suspect shields, would hardly have been as free to come and go as they pleased in real life as they are in the tourneys of the Morte d'Arthur.

Malory also tends to idealise and simplify the financial aspects of the tournament, ignoring both the crippling cost of equipment and the practice — contemporary with his Twelfth Century melees though not with his own times — of taking armour and ransom from defeated knights. However he is not, as has been mentioned, squeamish about this in warfare or private duels. In these idealisations and others, such as the emphasis on fair play and courage, the tourney teaches chivalry and worshipful behaviour.

We have, therefore, in conclusion, an artificial presentation in Malory's accounts of the tourney. It is filled with anachronisms, seasoned with idealism and presented from an historical perspective as the manner in which tourneys were fought in Arthurian times. These accounts nevertheless retain a strong degree of applicability to Malory's times, based in the shared appreciation of certain facets of the tourney across several centuries, and in the two-way link between lit-

(1) Keen, M. op.cit. Page 90

(2) Keen, M. op.cit. Pages 209 and 210

erature and life which preserves certain motifs. Another factor seen in Malory's artificial tourneys and their varied links with his own times is the co-existence in late medieval Europe of a wide spectrum of views and practices. A similarly wide range of views may be seen in another important chivalric theme presented in Malory's work _ the concept of knighthood. In this, too, we see a blend of realism and idealism and from it can discover indications of Malory's favoured chivalric code.

Concepts of Knighthood

Keen refers to an anonymous verse text on knighthood which tells the tale of the knighting of Saladin in a secular ceremony by a Christian knight, in the course of which the duties and requirements of knighthood are expounded. (1) A knight, for example, must be loyal, courteous and succour women. The text remained popular until the late Fifteenth Century and Keen stresses that thousands of men did go through such a ceremony in which similar ideals were propounded. As Keen points out, the knighthood ceremony expressed the knightly code in its various forms and stages of development. It would be interesting to examine the various knightings in Malory's work and to try to determine from them the dominant chivalric code in Malory's chivalric world.

The chivalry of Malory's work and times appears sometimes as a patchwork structure, a mixture of co-existent ancient and later customs. In Malory's work, for example, we find references to both formal and informal knightings _ a reflection of his place at the end of a chain of chivalric development. Byles, the Early English Text Society editor of Lull, gives an appendix at the end of his work; a document detailing the formalities of making a Knight of the Bath and dating from 1429. It runs to 23 separate points of protocol.

On the other hand Froissart describes the young Richard knighting people before a possible skirmish, in what appears to be a very simple ceremony. Keen describes a similar and far older instance shown in the Bayeux Tapestry in which William is giving the "colee" of knighthood to Harold by means of a simple, open-handed slap to the head. Originally this was a symbol of the last blow a new knight need ever accept without retaliating. Such an event among the great men of the Fifteenth Century would have been a far more elaborate spectacle; yet it is clear from Malory's work and other sources that this simple ceremony never died out and continued to co-exist with the most elaborate forms. We should no more look for consistency in this matter in

(1) Keen, M. op.cit.

Malory's work than we should in his society which, in its diversity, his work faithfully reflects. The question to be asked of Malory's work is to which of these poles it inclines, the grand or the simple, and what chivalric attitudes are conveyed by the choice.

We can at once attribute to Malory a fairly secular ideal of knighthood in comparison to the ideals of Lull. Both stress the importance of worldly duty; but Lull's idea of duty to God as expressed in the knighthood ceremony is not consistently stressed in the Morte d'Arthur, although it does occur. In fact, Kennedy writes that Malory omits complicated descriptions of the religious ritual of knighting where they appear in sources such as the French prose Tristan (1).

According to Lull (2) the squire should be knighted at a great Christian holiday, after a vigil and confession, before an altar, and after listening to a sermon on the articles of the Catholic faith. Lull adds that the squire should be knighted lifting hands and eyes to God.

Malory seems generally to be concerned with bringing these concepts down to a more mundane, practical level. Keen makes it clear that accounts of knightings nearly all show a layman conferring knighthood. (3) This is true of Malory's work, too, as a rule. He has resisted any temptation to flood his work with religious ceremonies more in line with chivalric idealism. Keen also points out that where religious knightings do occur in the real world they are normally associated with great men. This, too, is reflected in Malory's work in his descriptions of the lavish ceremonial accompanying the knightings of Galahad and Alexander.

Alexander, for example, is made a knight very formally in what is clearly a religious ceremony with references to "Oure Lady day in Lente" (Page 390) and to the offering of the Mass. It is also clear that Alexander is a great man, a fact shown by the "...twenty of the grettyst jantylmennes sunys and the best men borne of that contrey whyche sholde be made knyghtes the same day that Alysaundir was made knyght." (Page 390)

This association of the religious ceremony with

(1) Kennedy, B. op.cit.

(2) Byles, A.T.P. op.cit.

(3) Keen, M. op.cit.

men of great families can be seen in a number of earlier romances. The early Thirteenth Century Nibelungenlied, for example, parallels Alexander's knighting very closely in the description of Siegfried's knighting, which is accompanied by that of lesser "noble squires". It, too, took place in conjunction with a Mass and, like Sir Alexander's knighting, was followed by a tournament. (1) The same is true of Gottfried von Strassbourg's Tristan, another Thirteenth Century work. There is a reference to thirty young men "...whom the noble Tristan wished to sponsor as comrades" (2). It is made clear a few pages later that the ceremony is accompanied by a Mass and jousting.

More normally, as Keen points out, late medieval knighthood was given on one of three occasions; on the eve of battle (as in the Roman war), on a pilgrimage (perhaps of relevance to Galahad's knighting), and when the emperor holds a solemn court or coronation (as in Lancelot's case). The secular nature of the ritual is shown in Keen's description of the latter, "...and the prince himself 'or some other lord who is a knight' will gird the aspirants." (3)

This seems to be the form of secular ceremony which Lancelot underwent and Malory, I feel, had a realistic picture in mind when Lancelot mentions that he forgot his sword at the knighthood ceremony and had it handed to him by Guinivere. The inference, of course, is that he was holding it loose to be girded with it, not wearing it. Again, this form of ceremony is not often depicted in the work.

The simpler manner of knighthood on the eve of battle became very common in the later Middle Ages. It is this simple ceremony which is most often depicted, and seems most commonly implied, in the Morte d'Arthur. It is possible that Malory's own knighthood was conferred in this manner in France, for "In the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries the making of knights became almost a regular feature of the eve of battle" (4)

(1) Hatto.A.T. (trans.) The Nibelungenlied (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969) Page 21

(2) Hatto.A.T. (trans.) Tristan (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1960) Page 104

(3) Keen.M. op cit Page 79

(4) Keen.M. ibid Page 80

The dubbing of knights on the eve of battle is mentioned in the Roman war, in a passage that _ from its alliteration _ clearly predates Malory. But Keen has made it clear that this expresses an attitude still in vogue in the Fifteenth Century: "Than anone sir Lancelot and sir Cador, tho two myghty dukis, dubbed knyghtes worshyp to wynne." (Page 129) The ceremony is plainly a brief one, performed by secular knights on the eve of battle to promote courage and tenacity as the phrase "worshyp to wynne" suggests.

I feel that it is in the stark pragmatism of the ceremony that we find Malory's "code" of utilitarian chivalry expressed. Two examples of such a simple ceremony in the Morte d'Arthur are seen in the knight-
ing of Hebes "in the fylde" (Page 240) at a tournament, and in the knight-
ing of Gareth, who promptly revenges himself on Sir Kay.

As we have seen, the physical courage and strength of the knights in the Morte d'Arthur is emphasised throughout. An example of the equation between knightliness and toughness in the work can be seen in the case of Arthur who, though terribly wounded, "...was so full of knighthood that he endured the payne." (Page 86). A last example may be seen in the eulogy in which Tristram describes Lamorak as "...the clennyst-myghted man and the beste-wynded of his ayge that was on lyve." (Page 427) It is in this context that we must see the predominance of the simple warrior's colee form of knighthood, and the occasional elimination of religious ceremonies mentioned in Malory's source.

Raymond Lull refers to the importance of squires serving an apprenticeship in chivalry. (1) In this respect the Morte d'Arthur tends to idealise since the military training of potential knights is sketchy, or appears to be so. Beaumains and Torre seem to be of limited training _ Beaumains as a knave watches knights jousting, and Torre casts home-made javelins as a herdboy. This lack of formal training in knighthood is seen also in other romances, such as the Arthurian tale in the Mabinogion _ Peredur, son of Evrawg. This is a convenient tradition rather than a characteristic of real life even though, as Caxton makes clear in his epilogue to the Order of Chivalry, not all Fifteenth

(1) Byles .A.T.P. op cit

Century knights were trained fighters. In the Morte d'Arthur all are fighters, and Malory's aim is to stress the instinctive fighting abilities of the noble rather than reflect any contemporary practice.

Malory reflects an attitude of his own time in his emphasis on the importance of being knighted by a great or famous man. Keen refers to the social importance of this, writing: "That is the idea that informs the repeated anxiety of young aspirants of romance to receive knighthood from the hands of King Arthur or one of his great knights, such as Lancelot. Not in romance only: in history also we find, for instance, Henry II of England seeking the honour of knighthood from the King of Scots, and St Bernard despatching a letter to the Greek Emperor ...explaining that he is sending him Henry, son of the Count of Champagne, so that he may be girded a knight of Christ by the Emperor himself." (1)

Such great political figures have their parallels in Malory. But he more frequently shows the desire of young aspirants to be dubbed by knights of prowess rather than merely great birth or political power. Gareth, for example, insists on being knighted by Lancelot _ even telling Arthur "...of hym I woll be made knyght and ellys of none." (Page 180). This is an interesting reflection both of Malory's priorities and of the priorities of his time. Keen writes that "In the later Middle Ages a still more particular dignity was associated with receiving knighthood at the hands of one who had established a name for himself as a knight of prowess..." (2).

It may be seen, in conclusion, that the variety of codes and forms of knighting in the Morte d'Arthur mirrors the variety existing in its author's society. The presence of none of these forms in the work can be described as archaic or anachronistic. Malory, however, clearly favours a starkly simple form at the hands of a proven fighter. This, by implication, stresses the role of the knight as a soldier rather than a courtier or a priest. This starkness is in line with a dominant ethos in the work, seen in the focus on the physical courage and ability of knights.

Malory may be said to idealise this to some extent

(1) Keen.M. op.cit. Pages 68-69

(2) Keen.M. op.cit. Page 77

in his neglect of any reference to non-combatant or under-age knights, and his implication, in the case of Sir Torre, that the noble knight is a natural fighter. He is nevertheless, as Keen has shown, in line with an attitude current in his time in this emphasis on receiving a secular knighthood at the hands of a proven fighter.

Malory, in describing King Melyodas as a "lykly knyght", (Page 229) shows his sense of the dignity of knighthood, fit to be mentioned in the same breath as wearing a crown. This dignity is a leading concept throughout his work, finding its basis mainly in utility as we have seen. Because of this, a study of the Morte d'Arthur tends to become a study of chivalry — chivalry in government or love or religion, but chivalry none the less. In his notes to The Book of Sir Tristram, Vinaver writes that "Phrases such as 'he was a true knight', or 'the High Order of knighthood' are too common to be quoted, but it is important to note that they are in most cases absent from Malory's sources...." (1) Malory's awareness of himself as a knight is a fact that we must never lose sight of in stressing the seriousness with which he took his subject. This can be seen, for example, in his conclusion to the tale of Tristram, where he asked God to "Have on thy knyght mercy." (Page 511)

Kennedy refers to the meanings of knighthood in the later Middle Ages, pointing out that the term no longer merely meant "armed horseman" but had also acquired religious, judicial, social and ethical meaning — all qualities which have been shown in this essay to exist in the Morte d'Arthur (2). Kennedy sees Malory's text as "...an expression of the different knightly codes and values of his society.." (3). A deliberate expression, I feel, aimed at reflecting a society which was still early enough to value such an expression yet late enough to see these different codes in full.

In discussing Malory's view of the three types of knighthood which she detects in the text, (the heroic, the worshipful and the true), Kennedy writes that very few of the passages on this theme are found in Malory's immediate sources but that they are found in chronicles

(1) Vinave.E. op.cit. 1981, Page 750

(2) Kennedy.B. op.cit.

(3) Kennedy.B. ibid Page 1

and treatises written in his own time. She points out that the concept of knighthood was still relevant to Malory's society, and its interpretation governed social conduct. Thus the different perceptions in the Morte d'Arthur are more than a reflection of the development of knighthood, they are also an examination of the different codes of behaviour in Malory's society.

Kennedy's three types of knighthood live by different codes. The heroic knight, such as Gawain, lives by fate and vengeance. I feel that Gawain's Scottish heritage, with its Fifteenth Century associations with clan feuding, makes his character an apt one for Malory's readers. The true knight, such as Galahad, lives by the Christian code. Rare in any century, the fighting monk that Galahad becomes still finds its parallel in the Hospitallers of Rhodes and Malta in the Fifteenth Century. While Malory makes it clear that his ideal worldly knight is a man of faith, his editing of the Grail Quest source shows that he felt the extremes of true knighthood to have disadvantages _ to be of limited application in the world. The third category is the worshipful knight who, Kennedy says, "perceives his office primarily in secular, political terms." (1)

Lull takes it for granted that a knight should place his duty to God above his duty to his temporal lord. Hay, in his Fifteenth Century translation, finds it necessary to stress this, as does Malory. This suggests, as Kennedy points out, that by the Fifteenth Century the conception of temporal, social knighthood had become dominant over the religious one. Kennedy writes that by Malory's time "...a more rational, pragmatic and humanist view was beginning to find its way into treatises on knighthood..." (2), giving as an example Christien de Pisan's book The Faytes of Armes and Chyvalrye. Malory's own text often seems to share this rationalist view in its references to the practicalities of war and government, and in the absence of some of the overtly religious material found in the sources. With the addition of a strong awareness of sin to act as a moral safety-catch and preserve knightly integrity, Malory seems quite happy with this realistic, practical, chivalry.

(1) Kennedy.B. op.cit Page 9

(2) Kennedy.B. ibid Page 16

There is, as we have seen, a strong educational element in the early stages of the work, in such things as Arthur's development of kingly attributes. Malory also shows knights like Balin developing the concepts of chivalric behaviour. Balin _ who sends a lady's head home as a trophy _ typifies the raw material with which Arthur works. Balin later tells Lancelot that he would have been as reluctant as any knight to kill the lady had she not done him so much harm. Arthur, under Merlin's guidance, will later advance the concept of knighthood to a point where there is no excuse for killing ladies. But he, himself, is shown learning at this point; his chief protest is that Balin should have forbore in his presence.

The lesson of courtesy to women is shown not only in Balin's crimes but in his repentance. There is frequent reference to the death of Lancelot's leman in the following pages, emphasising the death and the tragedy of it. Balin comes across as a well-meaning knight, but one whose code is faulty and undefined. There is a sense of the evolution and development of knighthood in Malory's explicit at the end of The Knight With The Two Swords, in which he makes clear that Balin and Balan belong to the past. He writes that they "...were two passynge good knyghtes as ever were in tho dayes." (Page 59)

Gawain repeats some of these lessons about lack of mercy and sensitivity, but lives to outgrow them to some extent. This is shown by the appearance of the ghostly ladies he has helped when he returns from the dead to warn Arthur of the dangers of the last battle.

The educational purpose is continued in other sections of the work. The Gawain, Torre and Pellinore quests illustrate basic principles of knightly behaviour. So do the second set of quests, by Gawain, Ywain and Marhault. The tale of Sir Lancelot shows the spring of established chivalry. Lancelot's adventures here illustrate not knightly lapses, but knightly attributes such as chastity, courtesy and truthfulness. The Grail Quest, of course, expounds the ideal chivalry of the Christian knight. After this, the book develops more of a chronicle format. It shows the effect on society of those vices and failings which have been illustrated earlier, and which ultimately destroy the Round Table.

Malory does not lose himself in the world of chivalric dreams. Keen refers to the belief of many historians, such as Huizinga, that "...outside literature, chivalry was no more than a polite veneer, a thing of forms and words and ceremonies which provided a means whereby the well-born could relieve the bloodiness of life...." (1).

It is clear from historical facts that this was not strictly true. I think of the King of Bohemia riding blind into battle, for example (2). It must also be borne in mind that Malory was well aware of "the bloodiness of life" and draws no screen of words and ceremonies over it. He tries, instead, to show a practical, workaday chivalry which actually had some effect on this bloodiness. Brereton expresses this blend of blood and ideal well when he writes that the knights of the later Middle Ages "...possessed a code of behaviour - a caste code, certainly, founded largely on mutual self-interest, and in which money played a leading part - which it was the exception not to observe and whose imperatives were backed ultimately by force...." (3). This is seen very clearly in Malory's emphasis both on the mercy of chivalry and on the strength of the knights whose force backs up the mercy.

Vinaver writes that Malory was undoubtedly thinking of his own troubled times when he wrote of Arthur. "To him Arthur was the perfect English King, and his reign the very embodiment of the past glories of England. Unlike his French predecessors Malory was not a mere observer, a passionless narrator of a fairy tale; but one who used his material as a commentary on the glory of English chivalry...." (4). In fact I feel that while Vinaver is right in stressing Malory's seriousness he goes too far in suggesting Malory had an uncritical enthusiasm for Arthur and his chivalry. It is clear from the text, as I have shown on occasion, that Malory could judge and condemn as well as praise. This adds depth and validity to his "commentary" on chivalry, and to the type of Arthurian knighthood which he advocates in his work.

Malory seems to halt midway between the amorality

(1) Keen.M. op.cit. Page 3

(2) Brereton.G. op.cit.

(3) Brereton.G. ibid Page 19

(4) Vinaver.E. op. cit. 1970, Page 8

of romance and the blind idealism of religious chivalry. Vinaver writes: "His attitude towards the legacy of the Middle Ages was essentially that of a moralist." (1) An example of Malory's moral chivalry may be seen in Sir Ector's powerful and moving eulogy of Lancelot in which the mixture of warlike skills and mercy is stressed. A similar example may be seen in the description of Gareth. According to Vinaver, this is entirely Malory's work.

Lancelot's description of Gareth mingles the moral and physical attributes of a good knight as follows: "... he ys a noble knyght and a myghty man and well-brethed; and yf he were well assayed' seyde sir Lancelot. 'I would deme he were good inow for ony knyght that beryth the lyff. And he ys jantill, curteyse and right bownteous, meke and mylde, and hym ys no maner of male engynne, buy playne, faythfull, an trew.'" (Page 638)

Sir Ector's speech is in similar vein, highlighting the importance of this blend in Malory's judgement. "And thou wert the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde! And thou wert the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrad hors, and thou wert the trewest lover, of a synful man, that ever loved woman, and thou were the kyndest man that ever strake wyth swerde. And thou were the godelyest persone that ever cam emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest man and the jentyllest that ever ete in halle emong ladyes, and thou were the sternyst knyght to thy mortal foo that ever put spere in reeste." (Page 275). These original passages seem to be the expression of Malory's deepest ideals of knighthood, of the type he advocated in his work to the people of his times.

Chaucer's Knight has something of this blend. His meekness and goodness is stressed in the prologue to The Canterbury Tales. But it is worth remembering that his armour has been hacked about and that he has fought "in lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo." (2). Malory, it is plain, lived in a time when such ideas could still be taken seriously — perhaps the greatest influence of his time upon his work.

Malory's moralist attitude, it may be wise to

(1) Vinaver.E. op.cit. 1970, Page 55

(2) Robinson.F.N. (ed.) op.cit. Page 17

point out, is not one that has merely been tacked on to add pathos to the deaths of Gareth and Lancelot. Rather it culminates a trend of editing and shaping, which can be seen in such things as Lancelot's encounter with a strange knight who mistakenly climbs into bed with him. In the French prose Lancelot, as Vinaver points out, Malory found that Lancelot killed this knight (1). He changed it to reflect a kinder spirit. Although Lancelot wounds the knight, in his immediate reaction, he instantly regrets it and promises to help him enter the court. He does not pursue him, and cut him down fleeing, as the source has him do.

Ashe sums up Malory's achievement in the work rather well when he writes of the Morte d'Arthur that: "All the chivalric trappings are there, but underlying them is a graver morality. Malory enlarges the ethics. In the French stories normal knighthood means essentially violence and courtly love....Malory keeps much of the manslaughter and bawdry. But like other medieval Englishmen _ such as Langland of Piers Plowman _ he believes that each social order has a duty of its own and a proper path of fulfilment and salvation. His implied message to the corrupt English nobility is not to retreat into the cloister, but to turn from knighthood as it is to knighthood as it was meant to be and, under King Arthur, occasionally was. He has three levels of virtue where most of his predecessors have two. When they are ethically concerned at all, they simply oppose the holiness of religion to the amorality of lay life. Malory too has his holy monks, his amoral or wicked laymen; but, in between, he asserts the claims of a lay life which can be good, and to some extent holy, after its own fashion." (2).

In the light of my reading of Malory, and of such critical statements as this, I cannot doubt his serious didactic intent in the Morte d'Arthur. In the light, too, of what the work and contemporary resources reveal about Malory's readers, I feel that such a purpose would have been seen as realistic and worthwhile.

(1) Vinaver.E. op.cit. 1970

(2) Ashe.G. op.cit: Page 14

CONCLUSION

My essay has taken two main thrusts in addressing the question of Malory's relevance to his times. These are of necessity intermingled with my text, yet are clearly distinguishable. The first reflects his accuracy in the depiction of "physical" things such as structures of government, techniques of warfare and details of courtly life. In these Malory's realism, although not consistent, is often surprisingly pronounced _ due more to the naturally "romance" nature of his times than to deliberate modernisation of his sources. Such modernisation as there is often seems to be automatic on Malory's part _ a product of enthusiasm or assumption rather than policy, although he is often deliberately realistic.

The second thrust is aimed at Malory's ideas and perceptions, and those of his times and social class, as they are reflected in his work. Under this heading fall such concepts as religious attitudes, political and social ideas, the attitude to love and marriage and, of course, the concept of chivalry. In the cognitive realm Malory is almost invariably accurate in his reflection of ideas current among men of his class; and where he idealises tends to do so by omission rather than by deliberate invention. In this context, too, account must be taken of the deliberately didactic nature of his presentation of chivalry, and of the fact that enthusiasm for chivalry as a still living ideal is evident in his world.

It can be concluded that Malory's work is deeply embedded in his time _ far more deeply than is at first apparent _ and was, too, of far more serious intent than is generally believed today. For us, he presents a means of understanding several facets of his society. For his own time he presented an idealised aristocratic model for its improvement, designed along guidelines already current in the real world.

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