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Romance Motifs and Ethics in Malory’s ‘Book of Sir Tristram’

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Summary

Sir Thomas Malory’s ‘Book of Sir Tristram’, a condensation of the Old French Tristan en prose, has not received the attention it deserves. Previous studies notice the two texts’ differences in characterisation, style, moral emphasis, structural arrangements, and so on, but no study has sufficiently demonstrated the overall strategy and the moral purposes behind Malory’s changes. This thesis offers an evaluation of both texts’ approaches to some ethical questions, including identity, violence, justice, and passion, through a close analysis of their presentation of romance motifs. The comparison draws on traditional treatments of these motifs and reveals that the authors of romance can incorporate stratified perspectives to voice ideological interpretations. Malory’s treatment of the moral discourse in the ‘Tristram’ articulates the chivalric ideal in the characters’ expressions of how they understand identity, honour, courtesy, courage, faithfulness, justice, compassion, and love. This analysis shows how Malory renews the meaning of the romance motifs borrowed from his sources by changing the characters’ response to the ethical problems underlying the archetypal actions. Thus, Malory’s narrative generates experiential edification, as it engages the reader in the active moral evaluation of the events.
Declaration of Length

This dissertation is the result of my own work, produced exclusively for the degree for which it is submitted. It includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Acknowledgements and specified in the text. The total word count, including footnotes and references but excluding translations and bibliography, does not exceed the regulated length of 80,000.

Suxue Zhang
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I thank my mother and father for their immeasurable love and sacrifice. Their support and trust helped me to go through many difficulties. Most of all, I give thanks and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ for His wondrous grace and for giving me the strength to finish this work.
INTRODUCTION

The Arthurian legends, together with the Celtic tale of Tristan and Yseut, provided fertile source material for medieval romance writers to work on. Through many textual transmissions and translations, Tristan and Yseut’s doomed love and the exploits of King Arthur’s knights were adapted many times until they finally became one organic narrative in the thirteenth-century Old French Roman de Tristan en prose (hereafter referred to as the prose Tristan). This massive work was the main source for Malory’s close adaptation, the ‘Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones’ (the ‘Tristram’), which constitutes a third of Le Morte Darthur. Malory’s strategic treatment of the prose Tristan, as this study seeks to demonstrate, has clear moral purposes.¹ His originality is best observed against the background of the transforming themes and motifs in earlier romance narratives. This close textual comparison demonstrates that Malory consistently enhances the ethical consciousness of the exemplary characters in accordance with a renewed chivalric ideal. This ethical dimension is enriched by the author’s insights into the nature of the institution of knighthood in his own time.

Knighthood and the Moral Ideal of Chivalry

Malory’s exemplary knights are often praised for their virtue of being gentle, which shows the author’s intention of encouraging his readers to imitate them in manners and

conduct. In particular, Tristram’s accomplishments in harping, hunting, and other ‘jantyll tacchis’ make him a qualified paragon:

And than he (King Meliodas) ordayne a jantyllman that was well lerned and taught, and his name was Governayle, and than he sente Yonge Tristrams with Governayle into Fraunce to lerne the language and nurture and dedis of armys, and there was Trystrams more than seven yere. [...] Wherefore, as me semyth, all jantyllmen that beryth olde armys ought of right to honoure Sir Trystrams for the goodly tearmys that jantylmen have and use and shall do unto the Day of Dome, that thereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discover a jantyllman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne. For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll tacchis and to folow the noble customys of jantylmen. (293.3-25)

Such an explicit narratorial appeal proves the didactic purpose behind Malory’s adaptation of this well-known legend. Felicity Riddy reads this passage as a statement of the author’s hierarchical view of society. One must question, however, why, having called Governale a ‘jantyllman’, Malory would associate Tristram, a nobleman, with ‘the goodly tearmys that jantylmen have and use’. The emphasis on becoming a gentleman through the deliberate cultivation of manners and skills is rather incompatible with a static view of social classes. By anachronistically associating the education of a chivalric elite with that of a gentleman, the author uses the characterization of Tristram and Governal to support a morally focused class ideology. Although the terms ‘gentleman, yeoman, villain’ refer to class distinctions, the narrator seems to suggest that a man’s social status depends on his

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2 For the convenience of this study, I use the spelling ‘Tristram’ and ‘Isode’ whenever I refer to Malory’s characters, and the spelling ‘Tristan’ and ‘Yseut’ whenever I refer to the characters in the source texts and the earlier verse narratives of the legend.
4 The word ‘gentil’ in Old French refers to the nobility, and it has been used in Middle English to refer to the nobility and the gentry. However, at the beginning of the fifteenth-century the term ‘gentleman’ begins to indicate a social class below the nobility, especially in the everyday language of the gentry, although the distinction between noblemen and gentlemen is somewhat blurred in Malory’s text. Hyonjin Kim, The Knight Without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry, Arthurian Studies, 45 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 114-18. Felicity Riddy and Raluca Radulescuc have argued that this trend necessitated the assimilation of noble manners among gentry families, as they tried to educate their children in the manners of the class above them for the prospect of advancement. Raluca L. Radulescu, The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur, Arthurian Studies, 55 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 7.
conduct rather than his birth. This, as Raluca Radulescu suggests, reflects Malory’s sensitivity to fifteenth-century gentry readers’ flexible view of advancement in society.\(^5\)

Scholars like Peter Coss and Maurice Keen recognize the difficulty in identifying the knights as a homogeneous social group, since it was not strictly a class identity like the nobility or the gentry.\(^6\) Chaucer’s knight no doubt has an aristocratic background, as do most of the knightly characters in *Le Morte Darthur*. However, knighthood has the double meaning of ‘a rank’ and ‘a vocation’.\(^7\) A knight was a man capable of serving a feudal lord’s military purposes as an armed warrior on horseback, and he might not have inherited his knighthood from previous generations. Keen enumerates several historical cases of knights who were born of a lower class, but ‘rose’ through their service in war.\(^8\) If the title was purely hereditary, it would have signified an aristocratic identity; but if the title was earned through service in war or governance, it would point to a kind of meritocratic institution. In reality, both aspects were present in the literary imaginations as well as the historical practices of knighthood. Through subtle configurations of the social parameters underlying the prose *Tristan*, Malory presents different approaches to the chivalric identity in dramatized forms. The institutional incoherence of knighthood is revealed through the multivalent translations of the moral ideals, expressed through different voices.

Historically, the emergence of chivalric romance was perhaps a response to the need of moral education. Richard Barber draws attention to the change in political atmosphere as the condition for the popularization of chivalric romance: ‘The twelfth century brought relative peace and substantial prosperity to much of the west, particularly France and England. [...] War, although an ever-present concern, took a back seat, in literary terms, for the first time since the silver age of Latin literature.’\(^9\) The ambition of the

\(^5\) Radulescu, p. 88.
\(^6\) This view is expressed through the discussion of the history of knighthood in Peter R. Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England, 1000-1400* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1993); Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Radulescu also mentions the social mobility relevant to knighthood. See Radulescu, pp. 9-12.
powerful and potentially anarchic military elites can become a source of social unrest in times which called for peaceful coexistence with, rather than dominance over, neighbouring lands. Hence, '[i]t was in the interest of both secular and spiritual rulers to ensure that their power was channeled and regulated.' The ritual of knighthood, the significance of religious festivals, and the frequent appearances of clerical figures in romance narratives draw attention to a Christian ethos. As Ad Putter suggests, the *roman courtois* played the role of 'transforming the independent warrior to the well-mannered courtier'. K. S. Whetter agrees with Keen and Richard W. Kaeuper that medieval knighthood functioned as 'a form of secular piety, appropriating the rules of the Church for its own ends as much as the Church attempted to appropriate and control chivalry'.

Chivalry, as Keen puts it, is 'a way of life'. What the medieval manuals of conduct call chivalry pertain to all that which belong to the estate of the warrior, whose ideals are characterized by keywords such as prowess, loyalty, largess, courtesy, and franchise. The moral aspects are always present in the narratives of the knights' adventures. For example, the courtly romances of Chrétien de Troyes demonstrate that the pursuit of love, honour and justice are primary motivations behind chivalric actions. The quest of the Holy

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10 Ibid. p. 22.
12 Ad Putter, 'Narrative Technique and Chivalric Ethos in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Old French *roman courtois*: A Comparative Study' (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1992), pp. 17-18.
14 Keen, p. 17.
15 Some examples mentioned and studied by Keen include the *Livre des maniere* of Etienne de Fougères, the *Policraticus* by John of Salisbury, the *Ordene de chevalerie* of the thirteenth century, and the *Libre del ordre de cavayleria* by Ramon Lull. Ibid. pp. 2-10. The ethical implications of the chivalric ideal is also mentioned in the symbolic interpretation of the heraldic pentagon in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, vss. 640-65.
Grail in the Lancelot-Grail Cycle tightens the bond between the secular roles of chivalry and the Eucharistic union with Christ. These themes are all re-fashioned in the prose *Tristan* and Malory’s ‘Tristram’.

When Malory uses the word ‘knighthood’, he often associates it with the moral expectations of chivalry. For example, Palomides comments thus on Lancelot’s conduct in the tournament at Lounezep: ‘as for Sir Launcelot, of noble knyghthode and of his curtesy, proues, and jantynes I know nat his piere’ (584.33-35). In the same episode, the appreciation of Lancelot’s knighthood is echoed in the collective comment: ‘and all kynges and lordis and knyghtes seyde of clyere knyghthode and of pure strengthe and of bounté and of curtesy Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystram bare the pryce of all knyghtes that ever were in Kynge Arthur’s dayes’ (585.6-9). The terms ‘noble knighthood’ and ‘clear knighthood’ refer not only to the knights’ observable martial abilities, but also to their moral conduct in the competitions. Palomides, on the other hand, fails to be an exemplar of knighthood because of a seemingly insignificant detail – he deliberately killed Lancelot’s horse. Such a deed is collectively condemned by the observers of the tournament: ‘hyt was unknightly done in a turnemente to kylle an horse wyffully, othir ellys that hit had bene done in playne batayle lyff for lyff’ (582.8-10). The adverb ‘willfully’ shows that whether or not a deed is ‘knightly’ depends on the knight’s motivation rather than the outcome of his physical activity. If Palomides had killed the horse by accident, his action would not have been deemed ‘unknightly’; but the fact that he did so on purpose exposes his bad intent, which he later acknowledges in his confession to Lancelot (582.22-30).

Later in the same episode, Lancelot comments thus on the intentions of his two friends: ‘the tone knyghte waytyth uppon the tother and enforsyth hymselff thorow envy to passe Sir Trystram, and he knowyth nat the prevy envy of Sir Palomydes. For, sir, all that Sir Trystram doth is thorow clene knyghthod’ (600.13-16). The ‘cleanness’ of Tristram’s knighthood would only make sense if, by contrast, Palomides’ envy somehow makes his knighthood ‘unclean’. Hence, the term ‘knighthood’ in Malory’s text cannot be separated from the moral implications of chivalry.
Can there be ‘A Moral’ in Le Morte Darthur?

Some scholars have questioned the moral consciousness in Malory’s narrative. Eugène Vinaver observes that the Old French prose romances, which served as Malory’s source, preserve little courtly inspiration of the early romances. They treat knight errantry as a mode of adventurous living and lack ‘moral and sentimental refinement’. Lynch compares Malory’s ‘ideological assumptions’ with that in his sources and concludes, ‘there can never be one code, one generic pattern or one thematic register’ governing the episodic development. Lynch’s comment confirms that Le Morte Darthur is a complicated narrative that contains various voices and worldviews. The ethical questions are explored through a variety of ideological interpretations, courses of action, and consequences. The diversity of perspectives engages the reader in the active discerning of motives, and illuminates the desirability of ethical conducts through the presentation of their plausible outcomes.

The problem of the moral interpretation of Le Morte Darthur partly stems from our lack of knowledge about its author and the time he lived in. As many studies note, neither the historical person of Sir Thomas Malory, nor the subject matter of his work, seems to be preoccupied with moral rectitude. The former was accused of multiple crimes, and the latter speaks of ‘open manslaughter and bold bawdry’. The majority of debate on the lack of moral consensus in Malory is inspired by William Caxton’s preface to the first edition. Eugène Vinaver mentions some similar views expressed in the writings of Tennyson and Edward Strachey, and suggests that these are ‘based not so much on Malory’s work as on Caxton’s preface to it’. Caxton’s advice to his readers is perhaps

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16 Malory, p. xxviii.
20 Malory, p. xxvii.
the most quoted criticism on Le Morte Darthur: ‘herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyte, frendlynesse, hardynesse, loue, frendshyp, cowardyse, murder, hate, virtue, and synne. Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shal brynge you to good fame and renommee’. Caxton assumes the reader’s ability to discern good and evil in what they read. This assumption, however, fails to acknowledge the moral purpose of the narrative itself – what it is capable of without deferring to the reader’s judgment. Is it possible to identify a self-contained moral agenda in Le Morte Darthur despite the complexity of the plotline?

The debate concerning Le Morte Darthur’s stylistic similarity to historical texts also sheds light on the work’s particular approach to moral edification. Field, in his Romance and Chronicle, highlights the high percentage of parataxis – sentences without subordinating clauses – in the text. He suggests that this syntactic structure ‘renders the impression of objectivity as it limits the narrator’s perspective to that of an observer’. Wheeler further notes that the paratactic narrative encourages readers to ‘perform analytic and creative acts that Malory neither took upon himself nor explicitly recommended to his readers’, because whatever happens in the narrative is presented ‘as happening, not as required meaning; as story, not as deduced moral’. Historical writings can serve the purpose of moral teaching. As Caxton articulates in his 1482 Prohemye to John Trevisa’s translation of the Polychronicon: ‘yf the terrible feyned Fables of Poetes haue moche styred and moeued men to pyte and consseruynge of Justyce, ho moche more is to be supposed that Historye assertryce of veryte and as moder of alle philosophye.’ To the fifteenth-century printer, the category of ‘hystorye’ not only includes his ‘Nine Worthies’, but also the narratives of Chaucer and Boccaccio. Kirk notes that Caxton’s view of ‘history’ highlights ‘its capacity to teach us not conceptually, like philosophy or ethics, but

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21 Ibid. p. cxlvi.
24 Quoted from Kirk, p. 281.
25 The historicity of King Arthur is the main argument of Caxton’s Preface.
experientially, as experience does, yet even better.\textsuperscript{26} Field recognizes a similar educational function in \textit{Le Morte Darthur}. He suggests that this narrative is effective in edification because of its propensity to move towards poetic catharsis through ‘the cumulative effect of description in moral and emotive terms’.\textsuperscript{27}

Scholars such as R. H. Wilson, Paul R. Rovang, Donald Hoffman, and Elizabeth T. Pochoda have followed the same trajectory to perceive Malory’s characters as exempla of ethical conduct.\textsuperscript{28} Kenneth Hodge views knights as self-fashioning agencies of different ideals of chivalry, and James I. Wimsatt argues that \textit{Le Morte Darthur} has an ‘overriding thematic purpose, which is to present a mirror and anatomy of worldly knighthood’.\textsuperscript{29} On the other hand, the institution of knighthood is at best tangential to the spiritual quest of the Holy Grail, and scholars have observed that the moral and emotive terms in Malory serve mostly for the unity of a group, or an ideal of fellowship.\textsuperscript{30} This ideal motivates the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 291.
\textsuperscript{27} Field, \textit{Romance and Chronicle}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{30} For example, D. S. Brewer suggests that Malory seems to lack interest in individuality, which contrasts with the characters’ strong feelings for the cohesion of the group. Derek Brewer, ‘Malory: the Traditional Writer and the Archaic Mind’, \textit{Arthurian Literature}, I (1981), 94-120. Terence McCarthy argues that the unity of the fellowship is the key concept symbolized by the Round Table. Terence McCarthy, \textit{Reading the Morte Darthur} (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988). Elizabeth Archibald reviews the arguments concerning the unity of fellowship in Malory and notes that the keyword ‘fellowship’ occurs particularly frequent in ‘Tristram’ and ‘Sankgreal’, the meaning of which is close to ‘loyal friendship’ and the sense of ‘an organized and permanent knightly order’. Elizabeth Archibald, ‘Malory’s Ideal of Fellowship’, \textit{The Review of English Studies}, 43, 171 (1992), 311-28 (p. 312).
governing elites to serve the interests of the community, orchestrating celebrations of chivalry from characters representing different social groups.\textsuperscript{31}

**Echoing: A Technique**

Previous studies on Malory’s style note that, despite the author’s inclination to reduce the general length, one of its prominent features is the repetition of words and phrases. Field suggests that the repeated groups of associated words are marks of the colloquialism of Malory’s language.\textsuperscript{32} Jeremy Smith, however, considers this feature to be illustrative of the author’s ‘subtle handling of vocabulary’, which conveys ethical divergence through conversations.\textsuperscript{33} It is important to understand that these repeated words and phrases are not rhetorical ornaments which serve the purpose of amplification. According to the thirteenth-century Englishman Geoffrey of Vinsauf, one of the seven formulae of abbreviation is the avoidance of repetition.\textsuperscript{34} Among the other six formulae (emphasis, articulus, ablative absolute, implication, asyndeton, fusio), the last term refers to the fusion of many concepts or clauses in one, ‘so that many may be seen in a single glance of the mind’.\textsuperscript{35} Fusio corresponds with Malory’s application of a controlled and restricted moral vocabulary to various circumstances and conducts. The proximity of the recurring words in Malory generates the effect of echoing – an essentially polyphonic technique that adds layers of meaning to generic ethical terms.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{32} The features enumerated in Field’s study include ellipsis and repetition, and rhetorical ornaments such as chiasmus, exclamation, anaphora, doublets, onomatopoeia, alliteration, and formulaic expression in groups of associated words, Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, pp. 46-82.


\textsuperscript{34} This principle is illustrated in the manual *Poetria Nova*. See Geoffrey of Vinsauf: *Poetria nova*, ed. by Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), pp. 39-41.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. pp. 39-40.

\textsuperscript{36} The term polyphony is adopted from Bakhtin’s theory explored in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, which refers to the stratification of voices, philosophical stances, and interpretative perspectives in a single artistic narrative. ‘The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky’s finalizing artistic vision.’ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature, 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 5.
A closer look at Malory’s condensation of the source allows us to perceive the difference between the common ornamental repetition in the prose Tristan and the echoing in Malory’s ‘Tristram’:

I. Quant cil se sent ensi feruz, il n’a nule volenté de plus atendre, enz torne mentenant en fuie tant com il puet au ferir des espero versus le chastel qui n’estoit mie loig d’illec. Cil a la Cote Mautailiiee va après li mout asprement. Cil devant s’enfuit, et li autres le chace, qu’il dit et jure quanqu’il puet qu’il nou lera jamés ne amont ne aval devant ce qu’il l’ait pris. Cil devant s’enfuit espoentez mout durement, comme cil qui maaigniez se sent a toz jorz mes, et tant s’enfuit qu’il vient dusqu’au Chastel Orgueilleux.37 (Curtis III, §675)

When he felt wounded thus, he had no wish to stay any longer, but immediately turned around and ran for life as fast as he could, spurring his horse towards the castle nearby. La Cote Mautailiiee went fast after him. The first knight fled, and the other chased him behind, swearing that as long as he could he would not let the former escape via any route before he catches him. The first knight fled fast in fear like a wounded man, and he kept running away until he reached the Proud Castle.

II. So he turned unto hym that mette hym afore, and he toke the flight towarde the castell, and Sir La Cote Male Tayle rode aftir hym into the Castell Orgulus.38 (364.33-35)

Given the two texts’ difference in lengths, it is clear that Malory’s text is the outcome of large-scale reduction, including the omission of descriptions and interior speech. Some repeated details, such as the chased knight’s wound, the castle, and the phrase ‘cil devant s’enfuit’, also disappear in Malory’s account.

Malory’s adaptation involves not only reduction, but also occasional amplification. As we shall see in the following chapters, many instances of expansion result in dialogues

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37 This and subsequent quotations of the primary text of the prose Tristan are taken from two editions. The first is the text of the early parts of the prose Tristan in Renée L. Curtis, Le Roman de Tristan en prose, 3 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985-6). This is followed by the nine-volume edition that picks up the narrative shortly before where Curtis’ edition ends: Le Roman de Tristan en prose, ed. by Philippe Ménard and others, 9 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1987-97). The volume and section numbers are indicated in the brackets following the quotations. Translations are mostly my own, with a few exceptions marked by bracketed page numbers, which are quoted from Renée L. Curtis, The Romance of Tristan: the Thirteenth-Century Old French Prose Tristan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

38 All quotations of Le Morte Darthur are from Sir Thomas Malory, The Morte Darthur, 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013). Page and line numbers are indicated in the brackets following the quoted text.
that tell us something new about the characters. They reveal Malory’s originality more than his paratactic style and the condensation of elucidatory passages in his sources.\footnote{On the aesthetic effect of Malory’s condensation, see Jill Mann, “Taking the Adventure”: Malory and the \textit{Suite du Merlin}, in \textit{Aspects of Malory}, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 71-91. Also see Wheeler (1993); James Wade, ‘Arbitrariness and Knowing in Malory’s \textit{Morte Darthur}, Book 4.18–21’, \textit{Studies in Philology}, 110, 1 (2013), 18-42.} He enriches the ideological multivalence of the text by adding meanings to essential words through the echoing of the word in different voices. A typical example, the word ‘aventure’, is often commented on. As scholars have suggested, adventures are revelatory and can be read on several levels. For example, in the episode of Bors’ adventures in the country of King Pelles, the repeated word reveals the variety of individual approaches to its meaning:

Than as hit fell by fortune and adventure, Sir Bors de Ganys that was nevew unto Sir Launcelot com over that brydge; […] (625.34-35)

‘Sir,’ seyde Sir Bors than unto Kynge Pelles, ‘this castell may be named the Castell Adventures, for here be many straunge adventures.’ (627.5-7)

‘That is sothe,’ seyde the kynge, ‘for well may thys place be called the adventures place. For there com but feaw knyghtes here that goth away wyth ony worshypp; be he never so stronge, here he may be preved. And but late ago Sir Gawayne, the good knyght, gate lytyll worshypp here. For I lat you wyte,’ seyde Kynge Pelles, ‘here shall no knyght wynne worshypp but yf he be of worshypp hymselff and of good lyvyngge, and that loveth God and dredyth God. And ellys he getyth no worshypp here, be he never so hardy a man.’ (627.8-11)

‘Sir, I shall take the adventure that woll fall,’ seyde Sir Bors. (627.22)

For the knightly characters, an adventure is a test of ‘worship’ and its meaning can only be understood through its outcome. Worship is awarded to whoever brings the adventure to completion. This often confuses readers since no rational explanation seems possible to elucidate the condition of success. King Pelles’ speech in this episode, however, reveals the moral dimension behind the adventure – ultimately, the knight himself must be of worship and good living, and love and fear God, to be able to accomplish the adventure. In other words, a knight already has ‘worship’ by faith, and the adventure provides the occasion to manifest what otherwise cannot be seen. This moral significance is often absent in Malory’s source texts, which promote a strong conviction of predestination associated with one’s blood lineage.
Joy Wallace suggests that the instability of adventure’s meaning in Malory is caused by its transposition from various source texts.\textsuperscript{40} This study contends that the plurality of interpretation is evidence of the author’s controlled approach to morality. The echoing of terms such as ‘worship’, ‘adventure’, ‘treason’, and ‘shame’ in different voices is the outcome of the author’s subtle manipulation of perspectives. The ideological and narratorial variations of his source texts become less visible as they converge under the cover of a unified narrative style.\textsuperscript{41} Thus the plurality of the characters’ approaches to chivalric achievements is concealed by a shared vocabulary of moral codes. The surface uniformity does not resolve the conflicting interests of the individual knights. Their divergent approaches to the idealized versions of the self constantly generate tension within a centralized establishment. This is illustrated in Megan Leitch’s study on ‘treason’ (and related terms such as ‘trouth’ and ‘traytour’) in \textit{Le Morte Darthur}. The meaning of treason is subject to individual interpretations and purposes, although all accusations of treason undermine the unity of the fellowship.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{The Episodic Structure and Romance Motifs}

When compared closely with the prose \textit{Tristan}, Malory’s purpose of enhancing the ethical consciousness of the chivalric ideal only becomes more evident. While Karen Cherewatuk suggests that Malory shows little concern for moral complexities in his ‘Tristram’,\textsuperscript{43} others have argued that this book occupies a central place because of its thematic focus on chivalric worship and exemplarity.\textsuperscript{44} Cooper points out that the ‘Tristram’ book marks the ‘structural watershed’ of the whole book to celebrate ‘models of


\textsuperscript{41}For the debate on the unity of Malory’s work and how his style may be influenced by that of his sources, see \textit{The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte Darthur}, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, and Michael Norman Salda (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

\textsuperscript{42}Megan G. Leitch, ‘Speaking (of) Treason in Malory’s Morte Darthur’, \textit{Arthurian Literature}, 27 (2010), 103-34.

\textsuperscript{43}Karen Cherewatuk, ”Gentyl Audiences” and “Grete Bokes”: Chivalric Manuals and the \textit{Morte Darthur}, \textit{Arthurian Literature}, 15 (1997), 205-16 (pp. 205-6).

male companionship’, or fellowship.'45 Pochoda highlights that the ‘Tristram’ examines ‘the daily operations of Arthurian society removed from the pressures of external crisis’, with ‘a new emphasis on the obligations of fellowship within the community’.46 Hyonjin Kim notes that the ‘Tristram’ provides the author with the instruments for representing the bastard-feudal relationship – ‘in fact, no other tale in the Morte Darthur provides a more full-blown picture of late medieval political society’.47 Moreover, Fiona Tolhurst suggests that the role of the female figures in this book modifies its outlook.48 Keywords such as ‘worship’ and ‘fellowship’ signify the accumulative condensation of the theme, whose moral deduction is aided by the narratorial, communal, and individual responses to the chivalric deeds.

Most close studies on the prose Tristan focus on two topics: its connection with the French narratives prior to the fourteenth century,49 and the identification of the manuscript versions.50 Malory’s ‘Tristram’ has suffered major criticism in the past, but more recent studies recognize its importance for the development of central themes and characters in Le Morte Darthur. Eugène Vinaver suggests that given the subtle differences between the two texts, a ‘line by line’ comparison between the ‘Tristram’ and the source is an essential

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46 Pochoda, p. 97.
47 Kim, p. 99.
step to discover the English author’s attitude to the story. Larry D. Benson thinks that in this centerpiece of the book, ‘all is controlled in a solidly coherent, even elegant, thematic structure’ and that the prose Tristan is ‘closer in spirit to his own work than any of the Vulgate romances, and he seems to have found it more congenial to his tastes than any of the French works he had previously used. Cooper notices that Malory ‘does not subject it to such drastic processes of excision and rearrangement as he practices elsewhere’, which shows the adaptor’s respect for this source. Pochoda draws to the narrative attention given to the characters in ‘Tristram’: ‘we see far less of Arthur than we do of Palomydes; the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere occupies considerably less narrative space than Tristram’s jousts. Since most previous studies focus on the thematic and structural innovations of the ‘Tristram’, there remains considerable space for investigations into Malory’s handling of the source text’s approach to the chivalric ethos.

One of the ways that chivalric romances address conventional ethical topics is through the renovation of romance elements, especially motifs. In her seminal work on this topic, Cooper points out the relationship between convention and motifs: ‘whilst romance motifs remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time, rather in the way that a word may change meaning.’ The episodic structure of the prose Arthurian romances allows the authors to re-use familiar motifs without harming the organic unity of the narratives, sometimes through juxtapositions and digressions. The refashioned motifs often dramatize and exemplify certain characters’ decisions at moments of moral and emotional struggles. For example, combats and chance encounters allow the artistic expression of the conflicting desires and ambitions of individuals living on the edges of a transforming world. Comparing literary production to the fabrication of tapestry, Vinaver terms this technique ‘interlacing’, or entrelacement, which allows the compositor to combine the ordo

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52 Benson, pp. 109-10.
53 Cooper, p. 185.
54 Pochoda, pp. 17-18.
artificialis with digressio. This compositional method of expanding the ‘cyclic’ frameworks through interwoven episodes matured in the Post-Vulgate Cycle. These texts are often referred to as the ‘pseudo-Robert de Boron’ cycle before the publication of Fanni Bogdanow’s monograph, The Romance of the Grail: A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Prose Romance. Her study proposes the dating of the two versions of the prose Tristan, one before and another after the composition of the Post-Vulgate Cycle, based on the evidence of some interpolations of the Post-Vulgate Queste in the Tristan manuscripts. As Vinaver and Bogdanow both agree, this method allowed the prose Tristan to incorporate new materials ‘to rationalize and elucidate the various themes’, such as King Mark’s envy of his nephew, the rivalry and friendship between Tristan and Palomides, and the Lot-Pellinor feud, against the Arthurian backdrop. The device of interlacing gives romance chronotope considerable flexibility. They allow countless quests and adventures to enter the chronological frame without revision of what had happened before or after a certain diegetic moment. Thus, the authors may freely allocate space for the development of new characters and themes. The chivalric events, or adventures, are therefore the part and parcel of the genre of prose romance. The mission of the adaptor is both similar to and different from that of the remanieurs: he not only selects and reconstructs old material to improve the coherence of the whole, but also motivates the actions in accordance with new ethical expectations.

Vinaver suggests that Malory’s reaction to this style of composition demonstrates an attempt to ‘substitute for the method of “interweaving” the modern “progressive” form of exposition’. Malory disentangles interwoven narrative threads and form ‘a continuous narrative without depriving the story of its essentially adventurous character’. Most

56 Malory, Works, p. lxvi.
60 Malory, Works, pp. lxviii-lxix.
scholars acknowledge that the episodic structure of the prose *Tristan* is largely kept in Malory’s ‘Tristram’, which causes scholars like Vinaver, E. K. Chambers and Thomas C. Rumble to regard this book as an artistic failure.\(^{61}\) However, such an evaluation is based on an evolutionary approach to literature, which seems to grow out of a certain medieval messiness towards the more enlightened forms of logical progression and unity in the modern novel.\(^{62}\) It undervalues the creative coherence of the prose Arthurian romances of the thirteenth century. Moreover, such a compositional method is still prevalent in modern literary imaginations, such as the Superhero films, sitcom episodes, and other television series which involve collective creative efforts.

Malory’s work is intended for an audience/readership that was distinct from those entertained by the thirteenth-century prose romances. He develops psychological depth in these motifs through discourses that are rich in moral and emotive terms. Helen Cooper points out that the ‘Tristram’ witnesses Malory’s intention of ‘bringing insular vernacular literature up to date with the fashions of the continent’.\(^{63}\) Maureen Fries observes that the French source offers ‘a variety of changes in character and situation, in themes of desire, adventure, and death’, which allows Malory to alter the impression of familiar characters.\(^{64}\) Felicity Riddy highlights the shift in focus in Malory’s text, which allows Camelot to be seen from a long way off, as the author ‘seeks to contain but not to idealize or sentimentalize the divisiveness’ that is familiar to fifteenth-century readers.\(^{65}\) The current analysis of the topical motifs identifies the archetypal ethical themes behind the dramatic situations. The comparison with the source text yields fruitful evidence of the author’s original understanding of chivalry. As we shall see, Malory constantly renews the approaches to chivalric values through the layered revelation of the meaning of worship, nobility or gentility, and ‘knyghthode’. His ingenuity lies in the re-interpretation of the

\(^{61}\) Ibid. p. lxxxviii; Chambers, p. 5; Rumble, p. 120.
\(^{62}\) Malory, *Works*, pp. lxvi-lxxiii. This evolutionary view is also implied in Bakhtin’s prioritization of the novelistic form; in Frye’s review a reverse order of degeneration in terms of character and subject matter is demonstrated.
\(^{64}\) Maureen Fries, ‘Malory’s Tristram as Counter-Hero to the *Morte Darthur*, Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 76 (1975), 605-13.
characters and the events through renewed discourse within the framework of a conventional scenario.

The constant repetitions and renewals embedded in the episodic structure provide the narrator with opportunities of ideological reassessment and regeneration. In Vinaver's term, the ideological elements in medieval romance constitute the ‘sen’ (spirit). In prototype romances, the sen is often illuminated as extraneous to the matiere (matter), whereas in the prose Tristan, they are no longer distinguishable. ‘Its author was on the whole more concerned with the stories he had to tell than with any significance they might possess’, whereas Malory, “for the first time” [in his work], experiments with incorporating new motives through direct discourses and digressive episodes.66 Highly relevant to and compatible with the renewal of the chivalric ethos is Malory’s interest in the matiere of romance per se: the knightly career undertaken by various individuals who live out their commitment to the exercise of arms as well as the Christian moral precepts for the benefit of the commonwealth. Chivalric events such as quests, tournaments, and adventures not only reveal a knight’s physical prowess and courage, but also test his dedication to the ethical codes.

The transformations of a motif reflect the dialogues between different romance authors across time, and facilitate the renewal of cultural paradigms. It is the generic way of handling the ‘historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together’.67 Motifs are indicators of the generic conventions within a single narrative, and they form naturally-occurring topical units. Cooper thus draws attention to the romance author’s ‘ability to vary the pattern, to make a conventional, shared motif new and surprising’: ‘[t]he very familiarity of the pattern of the motif, the meme, alerts the reader to certain kinds of shaping and significance, and sets up expectations that the author can fulfil or frustrate’.68 This is particularly true with regard to Malory’s work, which is contextualized by a highly transitional historical moment in many aspects. Since a romance "prototype" does not exist, the conventional elements

66 Malory, Works, p. vxxxiii.
68 Cooper, The English Romance, p. 15.
may or may not appear in a chosen cluster of texts, which would share limited common features with other narratives within the same corpus.\textsuperscript{69}

This thesis systematically examines Malory’s ideological departure from the source text following the comparative analysis of several conventional motifs in both texts. The selected motifs represent recurring patterns of events that ‘formed a part and helped to define’.\textsuperscript{70} They highlight the narrative loci where multiple interpretations convene to address the key ethical questions in Arthurian literature. The motifs are grouped under four themes: identity, violence, justice and passion. The discourses surrounding these topics respond to the ideological promotion of a military institution which rewards armed exploits and competition. Some of the motifs, such as the Fair Unknown and the judicial combat, have been frequently discussed in existing studies, but the illustrative cases are mostly taken from the text outside the ‘Tristram’ section. Others, such as prophetic naming and the conversations at the fountain, are unique to the Tristan tradition and have not been sufficiently treated in the studies on Malory. The reconfigured motifs in the ‘Tristram’ section test the chivalric ethos from a wider range of perspectives, and offer interpretations in response to the ideological issues of his own time. Compared with the source and other relevant texts, Malory’s treatment exposes the ethical insufficiency of the Arthurian structure of power distribution: the governing body of military elites cannot prevent its inner erosion due to the human weaknesses of its members. Malory’s political vision is shaped in the process of reworking the prose Tristan, whose artistic potency provides the adaptor with a storehouse of models and devices to speculate on the causes of division, violence, injustice, and emotional suffering that bring a tragic end to the less-than-ideal world.


\textsuperscript{70} Cooper, \textit{The English Romance}, p. 3.
Chapter Summaries

Chapter one discusses three motifs relevant to the ethical questions around an individual's identity: naming, heraldry, and the ‘Fair Unknown’. Naming refers to the phenomenon of onomastic hermeneutics in fictional contexts, where the meaning of a name is constructed in different voices. The early narratives of the Tristan legend employ the device of prognostic naming for the characterization of Tristan. The prose Tristan critically reflects on the conventional interpretations and reinvents the dynamics between the proper name and the named individual. Malory eliminates the prognostic interpretation of names from the discourses of naming in his narrative. His treatment of the naming of Lancelot and Galahad adopts a similar realist approach to names while using naming to commemorate bonds of love. Malory also adds ethical significance to the vocabulary of reputation to tighten the relationship between the knight's public identity and his moral conduct.

The motif of the ‘Fair Unknown’ is often discussed in scholarship on medieval romance. Malory's ‘Fair Unknowns’ characters, especially Gareth and Brunor, exhibit certain features of the conventional types; however, his manipulation of perspectives changes the interpretation of elements such as identity loss, the suffering of mockeries, and moral growth. This analysis compares the treatments of this motif in a range of texts and traces the shift of its thematic focus from the loss and restoration of identity to the problems of cultivation and socialization of the strangers in a chivalric community. In Malory's adaptation, the protagonist's deliberate anonymity transforms the motif from a trial of chivalric qualities to a test of the community's ability to both receive and support the aspiring young men coming from the outside. Malory's subtle manipulation of the chiding damsel's motivation and speech encourages a more sympathetic response to female rebukes.

Chapter two examines two motifs related to the topic of violence, the incognito combat and the tournament, to reveal Malory's attitude towards martial competition and the problems caused by the dependence on violence. His strategic adaptation of the sources shapes a chivalric community that is interested in nurturing the ethical consciousness of its members. The knights are evaluated according to an updated set of moral codes, which prohibits killing in chivalric competitions. Malory diverges from his
source to suggest a new model of chivalric interactions through reinvented conversations between the characters and the narratorial comments which illuminate the knights’ emotions and motivations behind their action.

The motif of the incognito combat explores the psychology of competition: why knights fight with the strangers that they meet by chance, what prevents them from reconciliation, and the potential harm caused by the unreasoned pursuit of achievements by force. The examination of the archetype and transformations of this motif reveals that when knights cannot identify their opponents, the rational approach to honour and shame in competitions causes animosity between the combatants. Malory’s treatment of this motif entails a critical presentation of ideological manipulations, such as the zero-sum game paradigm of honour and shame, and the effect of gendered spectatorship, which prevent recognition and reconciliation during the combats. His constructive adaptation encourages an ethical modification of the practice of arms to generate an athletic spirit, which can transform the dangerous contests into gentler forms of interaction and learning experiences.

The tournaments in the prose *Tristan* function as stages on which various types of bonds such as love, jealousy, political coalitions, and the opposition between factions are manifested in physical motions, strategies, and dialogues. Malory tailors the tournaments in many ways so that their thematic focuses are different from each other and from those in the source text. His characters are more intelligent and capable of using heraldic information for diplomatic purposes. The authoritative figures draw attention to certain aspects of moral conduct in their evaluations of the performances, which serve to educate and encourage regulated chivalric competitions. Moreover, Malory enhances the role of the female characters in the tournaments, and articulates a deep anxiety about the negative byproducts of competition, such as envy and vengeance, through their voices.

The third chapter examines the ‘rash promise’ and the judicial duel, two conventional motifs that express different views of justice in chivalric romances. The ‘rash promise’ grew out of covenantal bonds in medieval social relationships. Romance writers presented oral covenants as a flawed institution by imagining many situations where a well-intended promise can have harmful consequences. Malory adapts several cases of the rash promise from his sources, which differs from the narratives of this motif in earlier
romance texts in subtle and meaningful ways. Existing scholarship does not comment on Malory’s attitude towards the importance of being faithful to one’s words, and little has been said concerning the realistic implications of the discursive formulations of this motif in various texts. Their ethical dimensions become most evident when the cases are juxtaposed and compared. This study shows that the conventional scenarios express common anxieties about the ethical risks embedded in the bond of gift-giving facilitated through oral agreements. Malory’s modification of some episodes from his source suggests that in a shame-sensitive society, individual agencies and the community can guard themselves against unethical exchanges by articulating moral principles.

The judicial duel was historically practiced to settle disputes. Its popularity derives from the belief of divine intervention in this form of ordeal, which causes victory to fall on the just side. Although the efficacy of the judicial duel was questioned from the beginning of its existence, especially in non-literary texts, the frequent occurrences of this motif in chivalric romance express deep-rooted convictions about justice. Over half of the judicial duels in Malory’s Le Morte Darthur are located in the ‘Tristram’ section, invariably adapted from the source. The close comparison between the corresponding episodes in the prose Tristan and the ‘Tristram’ allows us to discern Malory’s sensitivity to the religious and rational arguments concerning the judicial efficacy of the trial by combat. Even though Malory appears to be disillusioned about the paradigmatic link between military or martial victory and justice, he envisions a more democratic foundation of justice through the theatrical representation and dialogic construction of the battles.

The last chapter focuses on passion. Two motifs, the ‘Damsel in Distress’ and the ‘conversations at the fountain’, are particularly relevant to the Arthurian and Tristan traditions as they address the topic from different angles. Both motifs reflect on the problems of male and female desires in a predominantly patriarchal society. The passionate suffering of men and women initiates dialogues concerning the significance of individual will and consent within established legal and ethical boundaries. The ‘rash promise’ explores the causes and effects of ignoring individual’s, especially women’s consent, in social interactions. Malory critically demonstrates the social implications of the necessity of knights rescuing women who are in distress because of men’s aggressive intent. Compared with the prose Tristan and other earlier Arthurian texts, Malory’s
characters conform to renewed ethical expectations of chivalric and charitable rescue, and the affective rewards are less sex-oriented. In his narrative, the female characters who experience male coercion seem readier to seek self-protection and defence.

The ‘conversations at the fountain’ episodes capture the knights’ personal frustration and struggle in their experiences of love. In the source text, many chivalric characters come to the solitary space near a fountain in the wild to make complaints about their emotional struggle, especially caused by unrequited love. The medieval literary constructions of the fountain, which is rich in symbolism, facilitate narrative digressions that give voice to the expression and exploration of intense inner experiences of passions. Although Malory reduces the lyrical and allegorical expressions of erotic desire, he shows familiarity with the symbolism and uses this motif to illuminate the cause and effect of passions through the experience of the characters. He employs this motif to draw attention to the problem of adulterous relationship, sexual jealousy, and violent competitions caused by illicit pursuits of passions. He also illustrates a potential moral solution through the example of Palomides, and demonstrates how a knight’s unfulfilled desire may be channeled towards edification and charitable pursuits.
Chapter One: Identity

This chapter considers several factors that determine the perception of the chivalric identity: birth (or blood lineage), inner virtues, reputation, conduct, and experience. These aspects are never clearly defined or uniformly presented in different romances, and their relevance in the narratives reveals the authors' understanding of what constitutes knighthood. Hyonjin Kim notes the juxtaposition of two conflicting ideas of gentility in the prose romances. One can be summarized as *generositas virtus, non sanguis* – nobility is virtue, not blood. The other assumes that physical beauty as well as noble virtues are hereditary, and therefore high birth promises moral excellence. A closer examination of the motifs of naming, heraldry, and the Fair Unknown in this chapter allows us to understand how Malory handles the ideological assumptions about identity in his source text, and what moral message he is trying to convey through the renewal of discourses.

Naming and Heraldry

*Overview*

Arthurian romances frequently recycle names and characters from existing narratives, and by so doing merge with a long and complicated textual history. Studies on the names and characters in the prose Tristan suggest that the story grew out of two narrative traditions: the early Tristan poems and the Lancelot-Grail legends. Florence Plet-Nicolas documents the anthroponymic, etymological, and toponymic origins of some names to consider the selective body of named characters against the backdrop of the nameless majority in the prose Tristan. She suggests that the anonymity of the peripheral collective body, including knights, hermits, damsels, ladies, queens, and kings,

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71 Kim, pp. 100-09.
72 Studies on this topic include ‘Galehaut, prince conquérant dans le Lancelot en prose’ and ‘Tristan et les bergers dans le Tristan en prose’ in Philippe Ménard, *De Chrétien de Troyes au Tristan en prose: Études sur les romans de la Table ronde* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), pp. 121-40; Plet-Nicolas. Also see Mario Botero García, *Les Rois dans le Tristan en prose : (ré)écritures du personnage arthurienn*, Essais sur le Moyen Âge 51 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011).
73 Plet-Nicolas, pp. 113-22.
is a particular feature of the romance genre. Jane Bliss argues that anonymity ‘does not signal no-importance except in the case of very minor characters’. The anonymity of a character does not undermine his or her importance, even though specific strategies of naming can function to manipulate the readers’ expectation.

Heraldry, on the other hand, often symbolizes a collective identity. Both markers of identity can serve to problematize the characters’ social interaction in the fictional world. Authors of chivalric romance often played upon received perceptions of identity through the interpretations of identity markers in different voices. These interpretations negotiate the social value of various aspects of identity, such as blood lineage, status, education / experience, and individual achievements. The motifs of naming and heraldry in the prose Tristan renew the conventional modes in many ways, which Malory then borrows and modifies to express his vision of chivalry. His adaptation articulates individual knights’ free will through the elimination of narratorial control over the meaning of identity markers and the reinvention of the conversations about identities.

**Two Views**

R. Howard Bloch, in *Etymologies and Genealogies*, traces the debate concerning names in Western philosophy. He uses the terms ‘naturalism’ and ‘conventionalism’ to distinguish between two beliefs concerning ‘the paradox of the first namer’. The naturalists believed in the transparency of signs whereas the conventionalists saw verbal signs as arbitrarily imposed on things. This distinction is suggested in the debate between Cratylus and Hermogenes in Plato’s *Cratylus*, which Bliss refers to as the realist and the

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76 The paradox of the first namer, which reflects on Adam’s naming of the animals and the birds, is ‘conceived simultaneously as a theological, a grammatical, and a logical issue’; some medieval scholars such as Isidore of Seville and Augustine of Hippo suggested that Adam was divinely inspired in the act of naming, although they maintained an ontological ambivalence towards the trustworthiness of words; others, like Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury, suggested that linguistic signs imitate and conform to nature. See R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 45-51, 58-63.
nominalist perspectives. The realist sees names as symbols of the inner nature of the named – such as Soredamors (‘I am destined to love and be loved in turn’) in Cligés, whereas the nominalist perceives names as signs arbitrarily attached to the named. Both views are expressed in the prose Tristan through different voices. As we shall see in the following discussion, Malory’s adaptation eliminates the naturalist-realist interpretations and adopts a more conventionalist-nominalist approach to naming.

Medieval texts are sometimes embedded with ideological application of names. Historical forms of bipartite names in England indicate a system of identification primarily based on patrilineality and geographical locations. For example, in the Domesday Book, a 1086 Survey record commissioned by William the Conqueror, the most common constructions of bipartite names (of distinguished individuals) are of the following patterns:

1) first name plus ‘son of X’ or ‘father of Y’;
2) first name plus a possessive preposition (such as ‘of’ or ‘de’ or ‘von’) plus a place name (castle, village, region);
3) first name plus a descriptive noun (such as social status, occupation or an unusual physical feature).

The same rules apply to other historical texts of the time. In literary genres such as the chanson de geste and romance, it is not uncommon for heroes and heroines to be

77 Bliss, p. 15.
78 Ibid. Another example is the interpretation of the name Fenice in Cligés, vss.2685-91. Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes édités d’après la copie de Guiot (Bibl. nat. fr. 794), II, Cligés, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1982), p. 82.
79 Onomastics, meaning the study of naming (especially related to places), is more widely spotted in historical genres. Names can index the descent of significant individuals through indicators of parental or kinship bonds. In the insular cultures prior to the fourteenth century, with the possible exclusion of some Gaelic cultures, most people had single name. Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians and the Normans who were ultimately of Danish descent all originally had a single name for each individual. And it was only in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that real alternative surnames were recorded in documents. See ‘Introduction’ in A Dictionary of English Surnames, ed. by Percy H. Reaney and R. M. Wilson, 3rd edn, (London: Routledge, 1991). Also see R. Howard Bloch, Etymologies and Genealogies, p.66. The bipartite naming systems were later inventions necessitated by the growth of population, which appeared at different moments depending on the stage of socialization. For the Latin naming system of Tria nomina, see Florence Plet-Nicolas, La Création du monde, p.66.
81 For example, in A Family Dispute in Herefordshire, ‘Supplementary identification was provided by indication of either paternal line or place or residence’. Norbert A. Poruciuc, 'English and
introduced as ‘son of’, ‘nephew of’ and ‘daughter of’ a famous king. These fictional
narratives retain the capacity to absorb discourses of identity into historical texts, even
though the names are often invented by the authors.

Onomastic hermeneutics can become a narrative device which allows the author to
interpret the characters’ life events from an extradiegetic perspective. For example, a
name may anticipate the named person’s fortune in adulthood. Prognostic naming has
Biblical roots: certain names were assigned by divine agency long before the individuals’
births. In the Vulgate Cycle of Arthurian romances, a handful of names have prophetic
significance, especially Galahad. The narrator of the prose narrative assigns this name
with genealogical significance in a brief account of Lancelot’s ancestry:

Si en fu Joseph d’Arimachie, li gentiex chevaliers qui Jhesu Crist despendi de la
sainte crois a ses ii mains, et coucha dedens le sephulcre. Et si en fu ses fiex
Galahas li haus rois de Hoseliche qui puis fu apelee Gales en l’onor de lui. Et
trestout li roi qui de li issirent dont je n’en sai pas les nons. Si en fu
li rois Pelles de Listenois qui encore estoit de chelui lignage li plus haus quant il viuoit. Et ses freires
Helains li gros. (III, p.117)83

[There was Joseph of Arimathea, the noble knight who with his own two hands took
Jesus Christ down from the Holy Cross and laid him in the sepulchre. And there was
his son Galahad, the great king of Hoselice, which was later called Wales in his
honour, and there were all the kings descended from him, whose names I don’t
know. There was King Pelles of Listenois, who was also of that line and the greatest
of them all in his lifetime; and his brother, Helain the Fat.] (II, p.60)84

82 Examples can be found in both Old and New Testaments, such as the naming of Ishmael in
Genesis 16:11, Isaac in Genesis 17:19, the birth of John the Baptist foretold in Luke 1:13 and the
annunciation in Luke 1:31. Other cases of the annunciation type-scenes that do not involve a
supernatural source naming the child are discussed in Timothy D. Finlay, The Birth Report Genre
in the Hebrew Bible, Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2. Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

83 This and subsequent quotations of the Old French Vulgate Lancelot-Grail Cycle are from The
Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington:
Carnegie Institution, 1910), Vol. III, p. 117. Volume and page numbers are indicated in the brackets
following the quotations.

84 The English translations of the Vulgate Lancelot-Grail Cycle are quoted from Lancelot-Grail: The
Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols
(London: Garland, 1993), Vol. II, p. 60. Volume and page numbers are indicated in the brackets
following the quotations.
Lancelot's baptismal name, Galahad, was changed by his own father 'por remenbrance de son aiel qui issi avoit non' [in remembrance of his ancestor who also had this name].

In another passage alluding to his renaming, the narratorial comment reveals its impact on Lancelot's life:

Et tout ausi comme li non de Galehad avoit esté perdus en Lanselot par escaufement de luxure, tout ensement fu convrés en cestui par estinance de car, car il fu virges en volenté et en œuvre et en autre cose jusques a la mort, si conme l'Estoire le devise. (Ménard VI, §35)

[And also since the name of Galahad had been missed by Lancelot because of his burning lust, all has been transmitted onto this boy by his abstinence of flesh, for he is a virgin in will, in deeds, and in all other things until his death, as was told in The History of the Holy Grail.]

This commentary reveals the prognostic significance of the name Galahad, but unlike the biblical patterns, this is revealed through biological descent without any reference to the divine agency. Noticeably, moral rectitude as well as blood lineage determine the naming of the two knights – they constitute the ideological apparatus that elevates the status of this name. This passage in the prose Tristan was interpolated from an earlier Cyclic text, the prose Lancelot, which indicates its importance for the understanding of the Arthurian Cycles as a whole.

Although Malory uses both names, Lancelot and Galahad, he interprets their value in a different manner. He removes the narratorial comment on the providential significance of the name Galahad, and invents a practical cause for Lancelot’s name-change:

And as faste as her tyme came she was delyverde of a fayre chylde, and they crystynd hym Galahad. And wyte yow well that chylde was well kepthe and well noryshed, and he was named Galahad bycause Sir Launcelot was so named at the fountayne stone and aftir that the Lady of the Lake confermed hym Launcelot du Lake. (625.8-14)

The causal link, marked by 'bycause', and the subject 'they', clarifies that people who know Lancelot well decide to name the infant after his father’s baptismal name. The Lady

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86 This quotation from the prose Tristan is an interpolation from the prose Lancelot; for the same passage in English translation, see Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, trans. by Roberta L. Krueger, William W. Kibler, and Carleton W. Carroll, 5 vols (London: Garland, 1995), Vol. III, p. 165.
of the Lake changed Lancelot's name when she adopts him, but the author is reticent about her motivation. Later on, Malory introduces a prophesy concerning the coming of the Grail-knight in the book of 'The Sangreal': 'never shall no man beare thys shylde aboute hys nekke but he shall repente hit, unto the tyme that Galahad, the good knyght, beare hit, and – laste of my lynayge – have hit aboute hys nekke, that shall do many mvraylous dedys' (681.35-682.4). Although this statement anticipates a knight named Galahad, from the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea, to finally achieve the Holy Grail, it does not assign the name itself with moral determinacy. The naming is only presented as an event followed by the wonderful achievement of the named individual in a chronological order.

Another unique case in the prose Tristan is the naming of the eponymous hero. Unlike names such as Arthur, Gawain, and Mordred, Tristan rarely appears in the chronicles. This name appears mostly in medieval folklore, lyrical inventions and artefacts. As previous studies suggest, the name Tristan might have been a derivative of Drust, a popular name in medieval Celtic texts. Drust, Talorc, and other derivatives such as Drostan and Talorcan, appear repeatedly in the chronicles of the Picts and Welsh literature. According to poetic inventions, Tristan is said to derive from the word 'triste'. In some narratives, this name not only reflects on the death of Tristan's parents at his birth; it also anticipates the tragic events that take place later in the hero's life. In the earliest verse versions of the legend, the naming is followed by an etymological interpretation foreshadowing Tristan's suffering as an adult. The narrator interrupts into

89 Although the first part of the Tristan of Thomas is no longer extant, similar narratives can be found in the Old Norse saga and the Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg. Published editions consulted in this study are Tristan et Iseut: Les Poèmes français, la saga norroise, ed. by Daniel
the flow of descriptions and comments on the significance of the name. ‘Tristan’, he says, is appropriate for the new born boy who is doomed to suffer many misfortunes: ‘Il s’appela Tristan à juste titre, car il s’éveillait triste, s’endormait triste, et mourut triste, comme pourront l’apprendre ceux qui écouteront cette histoire plus avant’ [He was rightfully called Tristan, because he woke up in grief, slept in grief, and died in grief, as those who shall hear more of this story will understand]. This prognostic shadowing seems to imply that the parents’ illicit union determines the fate of their child following the logic of retribution or ‘generational sin’.

The conventional interpretation of the name Tristan clearly has an intellectual appeal, which is witnessed by its transmission through several generations of texts. It is echoed in the verse adaptations of Thomas’ Tristan, and also in the Parliament of the Three Ages: ‘and sir Tristrem the trewe, full triste of hym-selven, / and Ysoute his awnn lufe, in erthe are thay bothe.' In the prose Tristan, however, the meaning of the name Tristan is destabilised. This topos is first remembered in the mother’s dying lament:

‘Triste vig ci, et en tristor acochai, et la premiere feste que je ai eüe puis que je acochai est tornee en tristor et en dolor. Et quant por tristece iës en terre venuz, tu avras de ta premiere aventure non ; car de moi triste et de tristesse seras appelez Tristans.’ (Curtis I, §229)

[‘I came here in grief and I gave birth in grief, and the very first celebration I had had since I gave birth has turned into grief and pain. And since you came to this world for (my) grief, you shall be named after your first adventure; you will be called Tristan because of my sorrow and grief.’]


90 The Modern French translation is from Lacroix and Walter, pp. 508-9. The English translation is my own.

91 Cooper, The English Romance, pp. 384-85. The idea of ‘generational sin’ in medieval narratives probably alludes to the Bible verses, Exodus 20:5, ‘for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me’, and Exodus 34:7, ‘he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."


This reflexive interpretation of Tristan’s name, expressed through the mother’s voice, is reinforced in the following narratorial comment. The narrator foretells the hero’s later suffering for the love the Yseut:

En tel maniere com je vos ai devisié, fu nez Tristanz, li biax, li bons chevaliers, qui sofri puis poine et travail por les amors ma dame Yselt. En tel dolor fu nez Tristanz, de cui no vos devisorons l'estoire, si bele et si delitable que bien la devront oir tuit gentil home qui aiment por amors, et tuit haut home. (Curtis I, §229)

[In such a manner as I have narrated to you was Tristan, the handsome, the good knight, born. Later, he shall suffer great pain and labour for the love of my lady Yseut. Tristan was born in such a pitiable situation, whose story I shall narrate to you. It is a beautiful and sweet story which all noble men who love truly and all men of high birth should hear.]

The comment is reminiscent of the etymological interpretation we have seen in earlier versions of the legend, but it does not serve the same purpose, since no explicit correspondence between the name and the hero’s suffering for love is assumed.

Interestingly, the same narrative contains a debate between Tristan and Segurade over the interpretation of the former’s name, in which the conventional approach is challenged. Both knights are shipwrecked on a strange island whose lord keeps enslaving customs. When Segurade recognizes Tristan, he immediately ‘predicts’ that Tristan is doomed to die there: ‘A vostre mort iestes venuz tot droitement, ensi com je sai certenement. Or vos est ensi avenu qu’a la Tristece iestes venuz. Tojorz sera mes Tristanz Tristes, et en Tristece fenira sa vie’ (Curtis II, §594) [‘I know for sure that you have directly come to your own death. Thus it has come about that sadness has befallen you. Henceforth Tristan will always be sad and shall end his life in sadness’]. In linking the current event with the naming of Tristan, Segurade rehearses the conventional interpretation as if to show off his knowledge about the latter. However, Tristan immediately rebukes his pessimistic view: ‘tu as le cuer perdu’ [‘you have lost your heart’].

He then makes a statement in which he re-interprets the significance of his name:

‘Je sui Tristanz, qui ocist le Morholt et qui tant ai fait par le monde que tant com li siecles durra en sera parlé. Je sui Tristanz, qui de tristor deliverra toz ces de cest pais et qui adventure aportera mes en ceste valee. Et sachiez tot certenement que onques Tristanz ne mist si grant franchise en Cornoaille com il metra en ceste valee. Des ores mes soies seürs, que saches certenement que Tristanz t’ostera de cestes tristece ou tu iés orandroit et de cest anieus servage.’ (Curtis II, §595)

[‘I am Tristan, the knight who killed the Morholt, and who has done so much for the world that as long as this world lasts, these deeds will be talked about. I am Tristan,
who shall deliver all the people of this country from sadness and who is brought to this valley by adventure. You should know for sure that Tristan shall bring more freedom to this valley than he did for Cornwall. Now you shall be certain, for you should believe that Tristan will deliver you from this sadness in which you now are, and free you from this deplorable servitude.'

This discourse uses the same etymology of Tristan’s name to create the contrary meaning: the name promises great chivalric deeds of delivering people from sadness (‘de tristor’). Tristan’s speech expresses not only the desire to rectify his reputation, but also the determination to struggle against fate. In the following episode, Tristan succeeds in changing the fortune of the slaves on the island. This dialogue invented by the author no doubt improves the consistency of Tristan’s character, and renews the onomastic discourse introduced into the narrative earlier. The author challenges the conventional paradigm through Tristan’s voice, and changes the expectation of what he is to become. In other words, the character gains a new intellectual dimension ‘in the subjectivist impulse to be the authority behind his or her own existence and name’.94

Malory completely omits the conventional interpretation and only allows the name to reflect on the condition of Tristram’s birth. When the dying mother gives this name to her new-born baby, she explicitly instructs her maid: ‘And by cause I shal dye of the byrthe of the I charge the gentylwoman that thou pray my lord kynge Melyodas that whan he is crystned lete calle hym Trystram, that is as moch to saye as a sorouful byrthe’ (290.27-30). In the following episode the same interpretation is echoed in a different voice: ‘the kynge let entyre hir rychely, and aftir he let crystyn his chylde as his wyff had commaunded byfore hir deth. And than he lette called hym Trystrams, the sorowfull-borne chylde’ (290.12-14). This treatment of the naming scene turns the name into a commemoration of the queen’s sorrowful death. Malory thus removes any trace of the naturalist-realist interpretation, and represents the name as a sign chosen by the person who has the authority to give a name to the child.

The naming of Tristan and Galahad demonstrates how different authors approach the meaning of specific romance identities. The Old French authors tend to preserve the link between a name and the nature/fate of the named individual. Malory restricts

narratorial intervention, and in his adaptation the name cannot reveal the named person’s life events in the diegetic future. This contributes to what Field termed ‘Malory’s chronicler style’: in most cases the narrating persona is ‘hardly distinguishable from the characters in his tale, and scarcely more knowledgeable than they’. This highly controlled narratorial stance necessitates the removal of onomastic hermeneutics: the act of naming alone cannot have any bearing on the life of the named individual. The character thus claims independence from a fate predetermined by his or her social identity. The conventionalist-nominalist understanding is perhaps most famously expressed in Romeo and Juliet: ‘What’s in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet’. Although Malory’s characters seldom blame their names for what they experience in life, the author makes it clear that a given name is detached from the nature of the named individual, who struggles to gain control over the meaning of his or her social identity.

The Problem of Reputation

Galahad and Tristan are rare cases in Arthurian texts, yet they represent how authors can construct identity markers for thematic objectives. Bliss observes that in romances, the narrator’s ‘emphasis is on the performative function of name: what it can do to characters in the story and what effect it can have on the audience’ – knights such as Gawain and Lancelot seem to know the ‘meaning’ of their names in terms of their reputation or fame. The knights’ self-consciousness of their reputation implies that they constantly feel the need to meet external expectations based on their understanding of an identity.

As discussed earlier, romance borrows characters from popular legends and folklores, therefore authors must create characters within the boundaries delineated by

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95 For example, the narrator speaks directly to his audience/reader or refers to an event in the diegetic future, such as his comment on Tristram’s skills of hunting and harping or the foreshadowing of Tristan’s death at the hands of King Mark.
98 Bliss, p. 15.
these conventions. At least in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, names such as King Arthur, Gawain, Lancelot and Tristan were so familiar to a certain readership that in most cases they enter the story carrying the baggage of their fame. Malory keeps this ‘horizon of expectations’ in sight and refrains from relating the coming-of-age stories of Gawain or Lancelot which his sources, the prose Merlin and Lancelot, adapted from earlier versions (this will be discussed in more details in ‘The Fair Unknown’). Young Gawain, however, proves undeserving of his high status in his very first adventure as a knight, which then prompts the King to establish the Round Table Oath. On the other hand, Lancelot is introduced as a knight proven ‘in all turnementes, justys and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth’ (190.8-9) at the beginning of ‘Sir Launcelot du Lake’, before his proper adventures begin.

Most chivalric romances express a keen interest in the phenomenon of fame. During their adventures in strange lands, characters are conscious of how they are seen in the community that receives them. The dichotomy between name and fame is therefore indicative of the dialectic interaction between two types of the discourse of identity: the individual’s self-fashioning through performance and the public reception and evaluation of his performance. In Malory, this constant dialogue about identity and reputation centres around ‘worship’, ‘one of the most searched-for qualities’ in Malory’s world of knighthood. The meaning of worship is somewhat elusive and much has been discussed about its narrative function. Larry D. Benson notices a thematic ‘vertical’ structure of competition and proof of knighthood in the ‘Tristram’, which posits each named knight in parallel with or in contrast to Lancelot in worthiness. Lynch suggests that the amount of worship attached to a name by qualified judges constitutes identity. Both studies regard worship as an essential parameter of the characterization of knights, but their assumptions that a unified perception of worship is equivalent to honour recognized by the community must be challenged. For Field, worship in Malory denotes

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99 This plotline follows the Suite du Merlin, in which the character of Gawain has already degenerated. The Oath, which responds to Gawain’s failure to do justice in his adventures, is sometimes referred to as ‘the Pentecostal Oath’, because it was sworn on the day of the Pentecost. More references to this Oath will be found in the following chapters.
100 Radulescu, pp. 84-87.
101 Benson, pp. 122-23.
102 Lynch, p. 10.
the ideal moral quality of the mind and the reputation thereof. Radulescu observes that worship embodies the duty towards the chivalric fellowship and the king, and displays the qualities necessary for the stability and coherence of the group. Here I argue that all the above interpretations are voiced in Malory's narrative, which presents stratified views of identity.

In Chrétien’s *Perceval*, the confusion between fame and name is embedded in the linguistic ambiguity of the word ‘non’. For example, in a much discussed episode, the mother of Perceval teaches him that knowing the name is an essential step towards knowing the man:

*Biaus filz, ancor vos vuel dire el:
Ja an chemin ne an ostel
N’aiiez longuemant conpeignon
Que vos ne demandiez son non ;
Le non sachiez a la parsome,
Car par le non conoi I’an l’ome.* (Vss. 557-62)

[But I’ve more to tell you, dear son. When you’re in lodgings or on the road, don’t wait too long to ask your companions’ names: learn their names, complete and entire, for a name tells you a man.]

The ‘non’ in the mother’s speech can mean either the name or the fame, but the second interpretation would make better sense in this context because of the phrase ‘par le non conoi I’an l’ome’. A proper name allows society to keep a record of an individual’s deeds, which then become his or her reputation. This view, however, also proves problematic for the interpretation of this narrative.

A corresponding polysemy occurs in Middle English texts: the noun ‘name’ can also mean ‘one’s name as the bearer of his fame’. This is reflected in the use of ‘name’ in a damsels’s comment on Lancelot’s identity in the ‘Tristram’:


104 Radulescu, pp. 84-87.

105 This and subsequent quotations of the same poem are from Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, ou, le conte du Graal*, trans. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 1997). Line numbers are indicated in the brackets following the text.


107 The definitions of Middle English words are cited from the online Middle English Dictionary, [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/). See [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED29051](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED29051) [accessed March 2018], definition 1a. (d).
‘Sir, I say you sothe,’ seyde the damesell, ‘for ye were thys day in the morne the best knyght of the world. But who sholde sey so now, he sholde be a lyer, for there ys now one bettir than ye be, and well hit ys preved by the adventure of the swerde whereto ye durst nat sette to your honde. And that ys the change of youre name and levyng. Wherefore I make unto you a remembraunce that ye shall nat wene frome hensforthe that ye be the best knyght of the worlde.’ (672.8-15)

The ‘name’ in the highlighted phrase refers not to the signifier ‘Lancelot’, but to the public knowledge of his reputation as the best knight in the world. In this case, the ‘name’ of the best knight of the world is neither permanently attached to a name nor determined by the knight’s prowess. The honour is transferred from Lancelot to his son, not through physical contests, but through a mystical revelation. Readers do not know the source of the nameless damsel’s knowledge about the knights’ ranking, but her speech serves as a transcendental revelation. This proves that Lancelot’s current position on the spectrum of chivalric excellence seems to depend on his blood lineage and moral innocence. Hence, chivalric ranking is not subject to competitive efforts: the Grail knight must be the best knight, whether or not he has proven himself in battles.

The episode discussed above echoes a similar passage in Perceval. The eponymous boy suddenly acquires the knowledge of his name from a mysterious source of inspiration after a miraculous encounter with the Fisher King:

Et cil qui son non ne savoit
Devine et dit que il avoit
Percevaus li Galois a non,
N’il ne set s’il dit voir ou non;
Mes il dist voir, et si el set.
Et quant la dameisele l’ot,
Si s’est ancontre lui dreciee
Et li dist come correceee:
« Tes nons est changiez, biaux amis.
– Comant ? – Percevaus li cheitis !
Ha ! Percevaus maleüreus,
Con fus or mesavantureus. (Vss. 3573-84)
[And then, not knowing his name, he somehow knew, and said he was Perceval from Wales, not knowing if he spoke the truth, - but he did, though he did not know it. And hearing this the girl rose and faced him, and spoke as if in anger, ‘you’ve just changed your name, my friend.’ ‘Really?’ ‘You’re Perceval the Unhappy, the Miserable, the Unfortunate!’] (p.113)
Through this paratactic account of divine intervention, the narrator hints at a transcendental knowledge of identity. The girl’s lament over the ‘change’ of Perceval’s name conveys an emotive response to his previous conduct in the house of the fisher king. The ‘non’ in her speech certainly does not mean his proper name, but refers to a type of reputation that serves as a moral reflection on the boy’s progress in adventures. The knowledge thereof seems to belong to a source which is external to Perceval’s subjective cognition of his identity.

In the poem *Perceval*, the precise term for fame, ‘renon’ [renown], only appears once.¹⁰⁸ It signifies intermediary information about an individual acquired from an inferior source, such as public talk or gossip. The renown of an individual travels through verbal references that may or may not derive from experiential encounters. In the prose *Tristan*, a similar understanding of fame is expressed in the adjective ‘renomée’, which can prompt the testing of the renowned subject. ‘Renon’ corresponds with the word ‘fame’ in ‘Tristram’, signifying the recognition of an individual’s chivalric achievements within a time-span. An examination of all the entries of the word ‘fame’ in the concordance of *Le Morte Darthur* shows that when not qualified by adjectives such as ‘good’ or ‘noble’, ‘fame’ is a morally neutral term and attracts competition. For example, the Irish knight of the Round Table, Marhalt, is ‘called one of the famosest and renoumed knyghtes of the world’; this information is first introduced by the narrator (294.30), and then echoed in Tristram’s speech (299.2). Tristram thinks of Marhalt’s fame as the reason for their encounter: ‘for never yett was I proved with good knyght’ (299.1-4). Later, Tristram’s own fame also engenders jealousy: ‘all the noyse and brewte felle to Sir Trystram, and the name ceased of Sir Launcelot. And therefore Sir Launcelottis bretherne and his kynnysmen wolde have slayne Sir Trystram bycause of his fame’ (618.35-619.2). In this case, name and fame are interchangeable and neither accurately captures the essence of what they seek to

¹⁰⁸ Vss. 8151- 56: ‘-Dame, oil, deus de grant renon. / Li uns mes sire Yvains a non, / Li cortois, li bien afeitiez ; / Tot le jor an sui plus heitiez / Quant au matin veoir le puis, / Tant sage et tant cortois le truis.’ [‘Two sons, my lady, both very / Well known. One’s name is Yvain, / Famous for courtesy and breeding. / I count the morning fortunate / When I see him, at the start of the day, / so wonderful are his wisdom and his manners] (p.257). See G. Andrieu, J. Piuolle, and Félix Lecoy, *Perceval, ou le conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes: Concordancier complet des formes graphiques currentes, d’après l’édition de Félix Lecoy* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976).
describe. Fame becomes the measurement of public exposure or popularity of an individual. Lancelot, although a better knight than Tristram in Malory’s story, sees his own name ‘cease’ when Tristram becomes more active in the Arthurian lands.

Another word for reputation, honor (OF) / honour (ME), signifies a more informed and positive public acknowledgement than fame. Most knights desire to increase their honour and avoid dishonour or shame to the best of their abilities. Mark Lambert identifies the notion of honour in Malory to be typical of a shame-culture: ‘Le Morte Darthur is of rather than about a shame ethos’.\(^\text{109}\) Shame is an experience that involves self-objectification and depends on other people’s presence and judgment; guilt, on the other hand, involves self-evaluation according to certain internalized ethical standards. A. McTaggart distinguishes shame from guilt by highlighting the opposite direction of their effects on people: ‘what differs between shame and guilt, then, is the direction of the causal agency and the metaphors through which it is expressed: in shame, the reactions of others (real or imagined) act on the self, and selfhood is imagined as a spectacle; in guilt, the self acts on others and is imagined as an agent’.\(^\text{110}\) It is usually suggested that honour in shame-culture is external, whereas guilt-culture emphasizes a person’s internal conscience.\(^\text{111}\) In a competitive context, honour is measured primarily by the ability to achieve victory or success, whereas shame occurs if an individual or a group loses a battle or fails to complete a mission. Honour therefore is perceived as a scarce social resource, since it is achieved through victories in competitive engagements. The inherent finitude of this type of reputation means that it can easily generate jealousy, resentment and hatred. As McTaggart points out, ‘the combination of these factors – the limited amount of honour to go around and the basis of honour in the physical person - renders vengeance inevitable’.\(^\text{112}\) This aspect of chivalric honour will be discussed more closely in Chapter Two.

\(^\text{111}\) Detailed discussion of the theoretical debates can be found in Whitley Kaufman, 'Understanding Honor: Beyond the Shame/Guilt Dichotomy', *Social Theory and Practice*, 37, 4 (2011), 557-73.
\(^\text{112}\) McTaggart, p. 13.
Compared with ‘fame’, ‘honour’ and ‘worship’ often appear side by side in Malory’s text. Honour and worship are the most desirable types of reputation and have clear constructive functions in the chivalric community. Lynch argues that the exemplary knights sometimes consult their own reputation when choosing their course of action. They are more concerned with their ‘honour and worship’ rather than ‘fame’, and they play active roles in constructing a communal ‘database’ of honour and shame, indicators of the individual’s social worth. An individual can ‘do’, ‘yelde’ or ‘send’ honour to another, and they may also ‘gete’ or ‘have’ it just through speech acts. Honour and shame therefore depend on verbal interactions as well as the individual’s observed deeds. Expressions such as ‘callyd a good knyght’, ‘calle one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde’, and ‘Sir Launcelot ys called pereles of curtesy and knyghthode’, are reminders that reputation is a type of discourse. A knight has knowledge of what things will bring him worship also plays a part in the transaction of worship by doing others lip service (‘speke of … grete worship’). Hence a just distribution of honour within the chivalric community becomes an ethical obligation.

The difference between fame and honour / worship lies in the latter’s inherent ethical requirements: a knight may increase his fame by participating in and winning as many contests as possible, but he will probably not win worship by demonstrating his prowess alone; rather, he receives shame if the community rejects or condemns his conduct. Therefore, worship represents the communal acknowledgement of an individual’s abilities as well as their moral character. The ethical requirements embedded in this type of reputation embody the interests and values shared by the group. In this sense, worship moralises chivalric conduct by subjecting individual behaviour to the evaluation of the community. In other words, worship harnesses internal competition by making moral virtues such as peace, friendship, and faithfulness more desirable for a knight who practices arms.

When adapting the discourses of reputation in his source text, Malory highlights the empirical basis of reputation - the historical records of an individual’s contribution to the community. For example, in the prose Tristan, on hearing Tristan report his name,
Blioberis responds: ‘tant oî bien dire de vos a plusors genz’ (Curtis I, §392) [I have heard so much about you from many people]. Rather than condensing the text, Malory amplifies this general reference of Tristan’s reputation into a detailed account of his knightly career: ‘ye ar he tha slewe Marhalte the knyght honde for honde in the ilonde for the trwayge of Cornwayle. Also ye overcom Sir Palomydes, the good knyght, at the turnement in Irelonde where he bete Sir Gawayne and his nyne felowys’ (317.5-9). These words suggest that reputation is substantiated by the public memory of historical events, and is an echoing of Tristan’s earlier speech of his own deeds (396-97). In this rare instance of epideictic oratory in Malory’s text, Tristram uses the anaphoric structure, ‘well am I rewarded for …’, to recount his toils and express his frustration at the treatment he has received in Cornwall (‘and now have I my waryson!’). Malory’s Tristan is fully conscious of the need to exert some control over his own ‘fame’. His speech introduces a concept of reputation that interprets past achievements as the manifestation of inner qualities and erases the binary opposition between external honour and internal virtue. From the knight’s point of view, his past victories in monitored competitions deserve reward and recognition. On the other hand, new records in competitions may either confirm or modify the ranking of his name among other knights.

While a character’s proper name remains constant, his reputation evolves as the plot unfolds. Both the prose Tristan and Malory employ the mechanism of keeping and updating the record of ranking through discursive exchanges. For example, Tristan corrects his host’s impression of the ranking of the Round Table knights in a casual conversation:

‘Or me dites, fait li ostes, deus cevaliers u trois ki soient mieudre que Hestor de Marés. – Chertes, fait mesire Tristrans, deus u trois en nommeroi je bien de son lignage meïsmes, et bien mieudres: monsigneur Lanselot du Lac tout avant, monsigneur Boorth de Gaunes et monsigneur Blyoblerys ; et d’autres lingnages en trouveroi je bien a mon escient de mieudres. Je croi bien que Gaherïes, li frères monsigneur Gavain, soit mieudres chevaliers a l’espee : du glaive, voirement, ne di je pas. – Sire, fait li preudom, pour coi ne mesistes vous ore avant monsigneur Gavain que Gaheriet ? Ja quidoie je tout chertainnement que mesire Gavains fust assès mieudres chevaliers et plus preudom. – Non est, sire, fait mesire Tristrans, je ai bien esprouve l’un et l’autre. Gaheriès vauroit tes deus com est mesire Gavains, a mon escient, puis que ce venroit a la forche.’ (Ménard III, §§183-84)

[‘Then tell me,’ the host said, ‘two or three knights who are better than Ector de Mares.’ ‘Certainly,’ replied Tristan, ‘I can name two or three from his own lineage
that are much better knights: first of all, Lord Lancelot du Lac, and then Lord Bors de Gaunes, and also Lord Blisbleris. I know a few better knights from other lineages too. I believe that Gaheries, the brother of Lord Gawain, is better when it comes to sword-fight; as for glaive fighting, it is so evident that I don’t even need to say. ‘Sir,’ the worthy man asked, ‘why don’t you put Lord Gawain before Gaheries? I truly believe that Lord Gawain is better and worthier.’ ‘Not so, sir,’ Tristan said, ‘I have tried the one and the other. Gaheries is worth two Gawains, in my view, when it comes to their strength.’

In this passage, Tristan’s account of the ranking of knights draws on technical details of each knight’s specific abilities, such as fighting with lance or sword. In Malory’s adaptation, the technical details in the above comments are all omitted:

‘Sir,’ he seyde, ‘here lodged the laste nyght Sir Ector de Marys and a damesell with hym. And that damesell tolde me that he was one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde.’ ‘That ys nat so,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for I know foure bettir knyghtes of his owne blood. And the firste ys Sir Launcelot du Lake, calle hym the beste knyght, and Sir Bors de Ganys, Sir Bleoberys de Ganys, and Sir Blamour de Ganys, and also Sir Gaherys.’ ‘Nay,’ seyde hys oste, ‘sir Gawayne ys the bettir knyght.’ ‘That ys nat so,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for I have mette with hem bothe, and I have felte Sir Gaherys for the bettir knyght. And Sir Lamorak, I calle hym as good as ony of them, excepte Sir Launcelot.’ (439.6-18)

Verbs such as ‘mette’ and ‘felt’ instead of ‘prove’ to draw attention to the authenticity of their body-to-body encounter. However, there is no mentioning of their characters. A contrasting case is Balin le Sauvage: he is depicted as a strong and loyal knight - ‘a good man named of his body’ and proven to be ‘without treason’. The specific references to body and treason in the evaluation of Balin anticipate the revealing of his somewhat flawed character in the following episodes (48.35). In most other cases, when a good name is not specifically associated with the body, it stands for both physical prowess and a respectable character. This may explain why Malory distinguishes ‘fame’ / ‘renown’ from the more trustworthy terms ‘honour’ and ‘worship’ – the last two embody communal knowledge of an individual that has empirical ground and includes the affective evaluation of moral character.

**Heraldry**

If names reveal the identities of the individuals and, in the cases of Galahad and Tristan, their immediate parents, medieval heraldry mostly serves to mark out a collective
identity. Bloch observes that from the eleventh century onwards, the relation of noble families to land ownership began to shift. This brought a fundamental change in the family’s definition of itself, and chivalry was transformed from an economic status into ‘a hereditary sign of superiority’.\footnote{114}{Bloch, p. 68.} Change in marital structures and the law of primogeniture resulted in what he termed ‘the aristocratic practice of signs’, which turned noble families into a sign-producing organism of genealogical coherence. Historically, the conferring of arms was symbolic of the feudal bonds between a lord and a vassal. This ritualized act originated in the Germanic past, and during the early twelfth century the verb \textit{adouber} meant no more than equipping a man with arms.\footnote{115}{Coss, pp. 52-53.} The acquisition of arms signifies not only the right to fight in war, but also the bond of fealty and service to the provider.\footnote{116}{For example, in \textit{Érec et Énide}, the hero borrows a set of armour from his future father-in-law.} This phenomenon was attested by the proliferation of heraldry in relation to both lineage and land, and a high consciousness of patronymic continuity.\footnote{117}{Bloch, pp. 75-79.} The same practice became popular among the gentry class by the end of the Middle Ages.\footnote{118}{Adrian Ailes, ‘Heraldry as Markers of Identity in the Medieval Literature. Fact or Fiction’, in \textit{Marqueurs d’identité dans la littérature médiévale: mettre en signe l’individu et la famille (XII-XIII siècles)}, ed. by Catalina Girbea, Laurent Hablot, and Raluca Radulescu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 181-91 (p. 182).} In the prose \textit{Tristan}, the heraldic design on the shield can both represent a knight or the social group that he belongs to. In Malory, heraldic designs not only signify military allegiance, but also distinguish one knight from each other. For practical reasons, knights needed to be able to read shields: shiny, new shields are signs of novices, and the author of the prose \textit{Tristan} anachronistically describes the custom of letting new knights carry single-coloured shields in tournaments:

[\textit{S}elon la coustume de celui tans, ne les veïst adonc nus ki bien ne guidast sans faille tout chertainnement k’il fuissent andoi cevalier nouvel, pour seulement les escus k’il portoient si nouveaux et cascun d’un seul taint.‘] (Ménard II, §122) [According to the custom of that time, no one who saw them would not have thought that they were undoubtedly two new knights, since the shields they held were so new and were each of a single hue.]

Similar customs are mentioned in the Middle English stanzaic \textit{Morte Arthur}:

\textit{Thane had the erle sonnys two}
That were knightis makid newe
In pat tyme was the maner so
Whan yonge knightis shuld sheldis show,
Tille þe friste yere were agoo
To bere armys of one hewe
Rede or white, yelew or bloo
Thereby men yonge knightis knew.\(^{119}\)

Heraldry provides certain information about a knight's experience, status, and bonds of allegiance. However, because the link between the signifier and the signified identity is subject to the will of the individual, these identity markers often prove unreliable in romance texts. In the later parts of *Le Morte Darthur*, the more experienced knights often deliberately carry ‘false’ shields to change people’s expectations of their behaviour: Lamorak, Tristan, Lancelot and Palomides all carried blank, covered, or single-coloured shields in some tournaments to remain unknown for fear of danger, or to manipulate the expectation of their opponents in combat.

A particular case is the Cornish shield which often prompts mockery and contempt from King Arthur's knights. Dorsey Armstrong suggests that geographic identities in *Le Morte Darthur* tell much about gender and kinship struggles.\(^{120}\) Both Armstrong and Anderson suggest that Cornwall plays an important role in Malory's representation of regionalism and loyalty within King Arthur's realm, especially in the 'Tristram'.\(^{121}\) Armstrong notes the historical marginal existence of Cornwall during the War of the Roses. In addition to its marginal location and linguistic difference,\(^{122}\) Cornwall was also marked out by a ‘lawless independence’, which historian Philip Payton reads as ‘resistance to the Tudor regime’.\(^{123}\) Anderson sees Malory's Cornwall as a touchstone of Arthurian ideals, and demonstrates that the comparison between the two courts exposes


\(^{122}\) This is reflected in a detail invented by Malory: ‘whan Sir Lameroke herde Kynge Marke speke, than wyste he well by his speche that he was a Cornysh knyght.’ ‘Sir knyght,’ seyde Sir Lameroke, ‘I undirstonde by your tunge that ye be of Cornewayle,...’(456.21-24)

\(^{123}\) Armstrong and Hodges, p. 28.
the hypocrisy within Arthur’s establishment. Much of the Arthurian knights’ attitude towards Cornwall are revealed in their speech about the coat of arms. Malory uses the discourse of heraldry to show that the honour associated with the collective identity, after all, cannot determine individual moral behaviours.

Since heraldry represents the collective identity, it can only tell people the most superficial facts about an individual; this also means heraldic information can engender false expectations. For instance, Arthurian knights consider the Cornish shield a symbol of shame and cowardice, and concludes that anyone who carries the shield is likely to be a fraud:

‘Certes, fait Hestor, je di bien tot plainnement k’il n’est mie cevaliers ne en conte de cevalerie ne doit il pas estre, car il est des mauvais cevaliers et des couars et des hounis de Cornuaille, et a celui escu k’il porte le pois vous connoistre vraiment. Il est ore tout noouvelement venus de Cornuaille. Que maleoite soit la nef ki u roiaume de Logres l’amena! Veés que chil escus est nouviaus et flamboians, et toutes ses armes autresi.’ (Ménard II, §16)

[‘Surely,’ Hestor said, ‘I can tell you plainly that he is not a knight, nor should he have anything to do with chivalry, because he is one of the cowardly and shameful knights of Cornwall, which you can see from the shield he is carrying. He has just come out of Cornwall. Cursed be the ship that brought him to Logres! Look how his shield and arms are shiny and flashy, and the rest of his armour likewise.’]

Although Hestor identifies the shield correctly, his prejudice against the Cornish knights is soon proven wrong as he finds himself defeated by this knight, who turns out to be no other than Tristan. Soon, Tristan explains that he has just been exiled from Cornwall. However, he claims to have nothing to do with Cornwall, but carries the shield for another reason:

Et puis que je voi, biau sire, que vous m’alés si durement blasmant les armes de Cornuaille que je port, je les couverrai a plus que je porai, car bien saciés, biau sire, tout certainnement que je ne suis pas de Cornuaille ne a Cornuaille ne voeil je nul bien, mais je les port pour une autre ocoison. (Ménard II, §19)

[And since I understand, fair lord, that you scorn me harshly for the Cornish shield that I carry, I shall cover it as much as I can, because you see, fair lord, surely I am not a Cornish man, nor do I wish any good for Cornwall, but that I carry it for another reason.]\(^{124}\)

\(^{124}\) In the political framework of the prose Tristan, Léonois is of equal status as Cornwall, therefore Tristan has reasons to think of himself as the prince of Léonois rather than a liegeman of King Mark of Cornwall. In Malory, Tristram’s father seems to be of lower status than King Mark (‘by fortune he wedded Kynge Markis sister of Cornuayle’), which indicates that the country of Lyones
Tristan’s denial of the Cornish identity is partly valid, because he originally comes from Leonois. This statement and the stereotype mentioned in this conversation seem to validate the inherent shame of being a Cornish knight. After losing his combat with Tristan, Bors hurls his shield and spear onto the ground and begins to lament the shame of being defeated by a Cornish knight (Ménard II, §18). This defeat fails to teach him anything new about wise judgement.

Malory seeks to correct rather than encourage regional prejudice through his adaptation of this conversation. Rather than denying his association with Cornwall, Tristram mocks the knights’ false assumptions based on the collective reputation. This meme is repeated several times in the ‘Tristram’, the first of which takes place in Cornwall:

So whan this was done Sir Trystrames asked them, ‘Fayre knyghtes, wyll ye ony more? Be there ony bygger knyghtes in the courte of Kynge Arthure? Hit is to you shame to sey us knyghtes of Cornwayle dishonour, for hit may happyn a Cornysh knyght may macche you.’ (315.16-20)

Tristram defeats the two knights as ‘a Cornysh knyght’. He confronts the shame associated with this identity and simply proves that he is not what they expect him to be: the fact speaks well for itself. In Malory’s version, the two Arthurian knights Sagramor and Dodinas feel no shame for being overcome by a Cornish knight, but rather feel glad for having encountered Tristram, and invites him to join their fellowship (315.30). This response to an unexpected turnout becomes possible when honour is not perceived as a finite social resource fixated on an external identity. Honour becomes dependent on the

is subordinate to Cornwall. In the sixteenth century Lyonesse was still believed to be a land overwhelmed by the sea off the coast of Cornwall. See A. D. H. Bivar, ‘Lyonnesse: The Evolution of a Fable’, Modern Philology, 50 (1952), 162-70. Also see Philip Payton, Cornwall: A History (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2017), p. 32.

The sources disagree on whether or not the name Leonois (Lyonesse/Lyonnesse) corresponds with any historical place. Richard Carew in his Survey of Cornwall (1602) implies that Lyonesse is an echo of Lethowsow, the Cornish word for the waters between Cornwall and Scilly, and offers an account of the evidences of this lost land. See Payton, p. 33. Loomis, on the other hand, argues for Scottish origin and says that Lyonesse is a corrupt form of Lothian. See Roger Sherman Loomis, ‘Scotland and the Arthurian Legend’, in Studies in Medieval Literature: A Memorial Collection of Essays, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis and Ruth Roberts (New York, 1970), pp. 135-55 (p. 154). Also see Sigmund Eisner, The Tristan Legend: A Study in Sources (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 84-85. The Leonois described in the prose Tristan and Malory’s ‘Tristram’ is likely to be located near the coast of Cornwall.
deeds of the individual, and the desire for honour can motivate the formation of new fellowship bonds.

Later, when Tristram arrives in King Arthur’s land, he is underestimated again because of the shield he carries:

And than Sir Trystram wolde have justed with Sir Bors, and Sir Bors seyde that he wolde nat juste with no Cornyssh knyghtes, ‘for they ar nat called men of worship.’ And all thys was done uppon a bridge. And with thys cam Sir Bleoberys and Sir Dryaunte, and Sir Bleoberys profird to juste with Sir Trystram, and there Sir Trystram smote downe Sir Bleoberys. Than seyde Sir Bors de Ganys, ‘I wyste never Cornysh knyght of so grete a valure nor so valyaunte as that knyght that beryth the trappours enbrowdred with crownys’ (397.23-31).

Unlike the character of Bors in the prose Tristan, Malory’s Bors easily accepts his defeat because he recognizes the exceptional valour of the ‘Cornish knight’ and believes what he sees. This empirical approach expresses the nominalist view of the heraldic sign (seeing no necessary connection between the substance and the sign), which is consistent with Malory’s presentation of naming. These characters evaluate each other based on observable deeds, and adapt their knowledge of certain identities accordingly.

Malory’s vision of a chivalric fellowship without discrimination is fundamental to his construction of the chivalric moral ideal. Every knight of the Round Table may consider himself representative of an honourable ‘universal’ community in Le Morte Darthur regardless of his origins. This communal identity, however, does not involve land tenure and title shift, and is not represented by any heraldic sign – it exists only on the conceptual level. Although members of such a fellowship are expected to share a common bond of loyalty to King Arthur, their self-identifications are primarily based on kinship and territorial bonds. Malory uses heraldic discourse to reveal the inner tension between the conceptual and practical identities of the Arthurian knights.

In the passage quoted above, the heraldic detail – ‘trappours enbrowdred with crownys’ – is adapted from the source with subtle changes. In the prose Tristan, the Cornish coat of arms is described as ‘un escu vermeil as deus couronnetes d’or et est droitement de la fachon de Cornuaille’ (Ménard II, §57) [a vermillion shield with two golden crowns and is straightly made according to the fashion of Cornwall]. Malory transfers this design onto the horse trapping, probably because the Cornish shield in his day did not
have crowns.\textsuperscript{126} Heraldic identification became important after horse amour and pot-helmet were introduced to Europe in the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{127} When Chrétien de Troyes described fully armed knights, he was probably introducing the latest fashion to a courtly audience.\textsuperscript{128} The type of helmet that covers the head and face of the armed knight often appears in manuscript illustrations from the thirteenth-century onwards. For example, in a manuscript of the prose Tristan, Bnf.fr 334 (1301-1400), the fully armed knights depicted by the artist clearly need to rely on heraldic symbols to identify each other:

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{126} Field suggests that Tristram is carrying the arms of Ireland, `which in M’s day were usually thought of as azure, 3 crowns or’; see Sir Thomas Malory, The Morte Darthur, 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), II, p. 338. However, the same arms are described as the arms of the great king of the Bretons, see Christine Ferlampin-Acher, ‘L’écu du « petit » Artus de Bretagne: héraldique et réception arthuriennne à la fin du Moyen Âge’, in Marqueurs d’identité dans la littérature médiévalle: mettre en signe l’individu et la famille (XII-XIII siècles), ed. by Catalina Girbea, Laurent Hablot, and Raluca Radulescu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 93-107 (p. 94). In another article in the same collection, Field shows that this device was dominantly that of Arthur in popular imaginations. See P. J. C Field, ‘The Heraldry of the Historical Arthur in the Middle Ages’, in Marqueurs d’identité dans la littérature médiévalle: mettre en signe l’individu et la famille (XII-XIII siècles), ed. by Catalina Girbea, Laurent Hablot, and Raluca Radulescu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 109-16 (p. 110). These contradicting claims concerning the heraldic symbols expose the complexity of identification of (fictional) medieval heraldry.

\textsuperscript{127} Coss suggests late twelfth century, but Thomas’ Tristan, the Roman de Troie, and Chrétien’s Lancelot offer evidences of heraldic housings on the horses around mid-1100s, hence heraldry must have reached a high state of development at the beginning of the century. See Coss, p. 24; Lucy M. Gay, ‘Heraldry and the ‘Tristan’ of Thomas’, Modern Language Review, 23 (1928), 472-75.

\textsuperscript{128} Illustrations of the crusaders in the twelfth-century show some of them wearing helmets with significant nasals but they do not entirely cover the face. Such is as the helmet described in La Chanson de Roland: « sun cumpaignun, cum il l’at encontrê, I l’fiert amunt sur l’elme a or gemêt; I tutsiut li derenchet d’içê qué al nasel, I mais en la teste ne l’ad mie adesêt» [So when he comes to where his comrade waits, I On the gold helm he smites at him again, I Down to the nasal he splits the jewelled plates, I Only his head is not touched by the blade] (Vss.1994-97). This and subsequent quotations of this poem are from La Chanson de Roland, ed. by Frederick Whitehead and T. D. Hemming (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993). Translations are from Dorothy L. Sayers, The Song of Roland (London: Penguin, 1957). A transitional form of the helmet is witnessed in the illustration of ‘Murder of St. Thomas Becket’ (c.1210 A. D. in situ Cathedral, Chartres, France), which has a flat top and fixed face-mask visor but offers no protection over the sides or back of the head. This evidence suggests that some early face-masks may have been removable, see David Nicolle, Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era, 1050-1350, 2 vols (New York: Kraus International Publications, 1988), I, pp. 305-06 (756A-C).
\end{footnotesize}
The first miniature accompanies the narrative of Tristan’s duel with Blanor on behalf of the king of Ireland. It shows Tristan with the shield marked by the heraldic sign of a lion. The heraldic device of a lion rampant lampassé on Tristan’s shield, is traditionally associated with this hero. However, while other traditions attributes the sign of a boar to Tristan, whereas the lion is frequently shown on other knights’ shields, including those of Lancelot (Lancelot, v.4794) and Persides (Le Morte Darthur, 407.21). The device of a lion does not appear on the hero’s shield in the prose Tristan either. It is clear that the miniaturist

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was following an artistic rather than literary tradition, which appeared to dominate Tristanian illustrations during 1440-1520.\footnote{See Roger Sherman Loomis and Laura Alandis Hibbard Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 47. Also see Pastoureau, p. 51. Particularly illustration no.29 on p.229, from Paris, BnF, ms. Fr.4613, fol.12.}

In both the prose *Tristan* and the ‘Tristram’, the coat of arms can either manifest or conceal a knight’s identity, because the pot-helmet covers one’s facial features and prevents effective identification.\footnote{The pot-helmet, also called the Great Helm, has minimal exposure of the face for the purpose of sight and ventilation. See Nicolle, pp. 295-6 (734A-P). It seems that in the fourteenth century the Great Helm fell out of popularity, giving way to the bascinet – an open faced helmet with moveable visor.} The witty knight Dinadan is adept at using the information of heraldry for diplomatic or affective purposes. While some knights hide their identity to facilitate more combats, Dinadan imagines using a Cornish shield – a shameful identity in the eyes of the Arthurian knights – to avoid fighting. For example, before Tristan forces Dinadan to fight against thirty knights with him, Dinadan protests and proposes they exchange shields: ‘for ye bere a shylde of Cornwayle, and for the cowardyse that ys named to the knyghtes of Cornwayle by youre shyl dys ye bene never forborne’ (398.24-26). In another episode, Dinadan fools King Mark by telling him that Lancelot carries ‘a shylde of sylver and blacke bendis’ (463.15-16), which actually belongs to Mordred. Dinadan then lets Dagonet carry the shield of Mordred to confront King Mark, and all those present laugh at Mark’s speedy escape. Malory imports these episodes directly from his source, only occasionally changing the details of the heraldic design that may appear foreign or inappropriate to local readers.\footnote{For example, in the source text, the charge on Mordred’s shield is ‘un serpent blanc’ [a white serpent], which Malory turns into ‘sylver and blacke bendis’. In the episode of La Cote Mal Tayle, the shield brought by the damsels is ‘tot vert sans entreseigne fors tant solement que el milieu avoit une men tote blanche qui tenoit une espee nue’ (Curtis II, §643) [all green without any symbol other than a white hand holding a bare sword in the centre], but Malory changes the colour to black. At other times he only mentions the charge of the design but omits other details, such as turning ‘un escu vermeil as deus couronnetes d’or et est droitement de la fachon de Cornuaille’ (Ménard II. §57) [a red shield with two golden crowns and is rightly the fashion style of Cornwall] into ‘the trappours enbrowdred with crowns’ (397.31).} Often the heraldic details in the prose *Tristan* are ornamental and have little bearing on plot development or characterization, such as the reference to Breuse Saunz Pite’s ‘escu noir a un lyon blanc’ (Ménard II, §92).
[black shield with a white lion]. Malory omits most of these details, which shows he is more interested in the communicative function of heraldry in an individualistic circle.

The increasingly individualised heraldic design allows characters to use heraldic objects for affective purposes in the chivalric narrative. The prose Tristan contains several episodes in which ladies give armoury as gifts to their knights for various purposes. For example, in the prose Tristan, the Cornish shield which Yseut gives to Tristan doubles his strength:

\[\text{Car bien saciés que li escus vait ausi com doublant ma force; li escus, quant je le sent sour moi, m’est ausi com uns aguillons et uns esmouvemens de prouece faire. Et certes, s’il vous pooit hui valoir autretant com il vausist a moi, bien porriés dire seûrement que vous vaunriés miex que tel troi cevalier con vous valés orendroit.} \]

(Ménard II, §30)

[Because you see, this shield will work so that it doubles my strength; the shield, when I feel it on me, pricks me and gives me the impulse to prove myself. And certainly, if it has the same effect on you as it does on me, you can certainly claim that you will be three times better than the knight you are now.]

Tristan’s account of the ‘magical’ effect of the shield, however, could be no more than an expression of love’s influence on his performance. In fact, Tristan changes his shield several times later in the narrative, but there is no mentioning of his strength diminishing as the result. Malory clarifies this by only mentioning the affective bond: ‘I woll na departe frome my shylde for her sake that gaff hit me’ (398.28). In a later episode in the prose Tristan (Ménard V, §94), Dinadan’s helmet provokes the King of a Hundred Knights to fight with him, because it looks like the one owned by his paramour, the Queen of North Wales; Dinadan claims that it was a gift given to him as a gift by Yseut, but the king wouldn’t believe him. The narrator suggests that these are different helmets which look alike. Malory changes this detail and suggests that it is the same helmet, passed through the hands of a king, two queens and two knights:

So as they cam aythir by other, the kynge loked uppon Sir Dynadan, and at that tyme Sir Dynadan had Sir Trystrams helme uppon his shuldir, whyche helme the kynge had seyne tofore with the Quene of Northe Galys, and that quene the kynge loved as paramour. And that helme the Quene of Northe Galys had gyven to La Beall Isode, and Quene La Beall Isode gaff hit to Sir Trystram. (558.16-21)

These details invented by Malory highlight the helmet’s function as a symbol of affectionate bonds. It envisions a more complicated social network which extends beyond
the familiar circle of King Arthur’s court. The helmet does not signify the bond of vassalage, but is passed on from one person to another as a symbol of friendship; this means that the transmission of armoury functions not only as a symbol of hierarchical relationships of dominance and subordination. The lateral transmission of heraldic objects changes their social significance.\(^{135}\)

The motifs of naming and heraldry distinguish the paradigms of identity in Malory’s ‘Tristram’ from that depicted in the prose Tristan. Both motifs centre on the individual’s experience and performance in public life rather than his native background and feudal attachment to a lord or a bloodline. Malory’s interpretation of naming and the affective usage of heraldic objects mirror the knights’ struggle to gain control over the social perception of his identity. This new paradigm seeks to bridge the gap between the external and the internal beings of the individual, as the knight seeks to establish a reputation through action, and thus changes preconceived opinions or inaccurate expectations based on a particular aspect of his identity. Malory updates the paradigm of identity to reconstruct a fellowship of knighthood, whose discursive construction of reputation combines secular honour with ethical exemplarity. The motif of the ‘Fair Unknown’ will allow us to examine the problems of reputation and the construction of identity in a much more focused manner.

**The (?) Fair (Un)Known**

*Overview*

The name of the motif, the Fair Unknown, is inspired by the Old French poem of the same name, which tells the story of young Gingalain’s quest for his identity. A group of Arthurian texts witness the growth of this motif, including Li Bias Descouneüs and its Middle English analogue, Chrétien’s Perceval and its analogues in other languages, the Middle High German Wigalois by Wirnt von Grafenberg, its close analogue Wigamur, the

Occitan *Jaufré*, and the Italian *Carduino*.\(^{136}\) The narrative of the Fair Unknown in chivalric romances has the features of a coming-of-age story.\(^{137}\) First, the hero’s chivalric aspiration is suppressed in childhood. He grows up in a forgotten place or a faraway land, unknown to the courtly society. As he approaches adulthood, he decides to become a knight and embarks on an adventure. He encounters mockery and scorn, but matures in the process, becoming a good knight. Finally, he proves his excellence and gains recognition in court, which often coincides with the discovery of a hidden biological identity. Previous studies on Malory’s employment of this motif mostly focus on ‘The Tale of Sir Gareth’ and its sources.\(^{138}\) The current discussion will consider a wider range of texts to illustrate how Malory borrows and transforms a conventional topic.

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\(^{137}\) This statement disagrees with the genre distinctions formulated in Bakhtin’s studies. According to Bakhtin, the *Bildungsroman* as a genre in the eighteenth century novel is markedly different from chivalric romance, in that the idea of testing lacks ‘the necessary means to deal with a man’s “becoming”’. What distinguishes the *Bildungsroman* from chivalric romance, Bakhtin argues, is the idea of becoming – the chivalric romance ‘beings with an already formed person and subjects him to a trial in the light of an ideal also already formed’; in the *Bildungsroman*, life events reveal themselves as the hero’s experience that shapes his character and world view. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 393. The discussion below shows that the Fair Unknown narratives also allow the shaping (or the changing) of the hero’s character through experience.

\(^{138}\) Studies on the narratives of Gareth in *Le Morte Darthur* generally acknowledge Malory’s indebtedness to the earlier versions of the Fair Unknown: ‘Gareth’ may well have borrowed from *Li Biaus Descouneis* and the story of Brunor (or *La Cote Mautailliee*) in the prose *Tristan*. Vinaver summarizes the similar elements of the two narratives: ‘[b]oth Brunor and Gareth are young noblemen who conceal their high parentage and begin their career in a humble way. They are both at first ridiculed by Kay. […] The young man obtains Arthur’s permission to undertake the adventure, but the lady is unwilling to recognize the merits of her champion, and for a long time shows nothing but contempt for him’. Eugène Vinaver, ‘A Romance of Gaheret’, *Medium Ævum*, 1, 3 (1932), 157-67 (pp. 165-66). R. H. Wilson and Field support the general resemblance theory which suggests that there are wider similarities between the Gareth story and other narratives of the Fair Unknown, which could also have served as the source of La Cote Mautailliee. Robert H. Wilson, ‘The “Fair Unknown” in Malory’, *PMLA*, 58, 1 (1943), 1-21.; P. J. C. Field, ‘The Source of Malory’s Tale of Gareth,’ in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 57-70. Benson compares Gareth with another Fair Unknown, Ipomeden. Benson, pp. 92-108. Others have argued for Celtic sources. Roger Sherman Loomis, *Malory's Beaumains*, *PMLA*, 54 (1939), 656-68; Paul Beekman Taylor, *Myths and Etymologies Behind Malory's Gareth*, *English Studies*, 78, 6 (1997), 506-12.
The name of the motif suggests that the hero should have two attributes: an attractive appearance (‘fair’) and an obscure identity (‘unknown’). Sometimes one or both features are missing from the narrative, yet the plotline still has features of a Fair Unknown story. The following chart shows a few examples from Arthurian texts:

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<th>Fair</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
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| 1. Balin in the prose *Merlin* and *Le Morte Darthur*. |\(^{139}\)
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| 1. The young Arthur in *L'Histoire de Merlin*. | The Disfigured Tristan (when he first arrives in Ireland) in Gottfried's *Tristan* and *Le Morte Darthur*. |
| 2. Lancelot in the prose *Lancelot*. | |

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\(^{139}\) Balin is described as a poor and despised knight who resides at King Arthur’s court after imprisonment.

\(^{140}\) Arthur is deported at birth and grows up with foster parents until he becomes king through the adventure of the sword in stone. In the prose *Merlin*, Igrain conceives Arthur when she is still married to the Duke of Cornwall, and therefore Arthur is a bastard son and Merlin suggests that he must be sent away so that the mother and her son will not live in shame. In Malory’s version, the timing of the events is changed to emphasize the legitimacy of Arthur’s right to be king. Merlin himself acknowledges Arthur’s heirship: ‘after the deth of the duke more than thre houres was Arthur begoten, and thirtene dayes after Kyng Uther wedded Igrayne, and therfor I preve hym he is no bastard’ (12.27-29). The original causation for Arthur’s loss of identity no longer applies, and Merlin apparently manipulates the events before and after the birth of Arthur. The boy Arthur’s ‘adventure’ of becoming a king happens only after his miraculous performance of drawing out the sword in stone: the rebels who refuse to accept him as their lord besiege his land, making it necessary for the new king to consolidate his power through military campaigns. Arthur’s endurance of trials after his coronation is similar to the Fair Unknowns’ quest of identity.

\(^{141}\) Lancelot first comes to King Arthur’s court as the ward of the Lady of the Lake.
All the figures listed here are first seen by the court as unqualified or foreign, but later prove themselves to be good knights through trials and combats. The story of Brunor showcases a knight whose name and background are known, but has a disappointing appearance due to his unfitting coat. Tristan’s disfiguration caused by poison and his later recovery and disguise in Ireland delay the recognition of his chivalric identity. The court’s reception of these young strangers reveals their misconception about what makes a good knight. As the table illustrates, examples of ‘known + not fair’ and ‘unknown + not fair’ knights can both be found in the Tristan tradition. Some female characters in romance texts also exhibit certain Fair Unknown attributes. This adaptation process can serve either to challenge or to consolidate institutionalized discriminations. Malory presents chivalric merits as distinct from external manifestations of nobility, such as fame, wealth, and mannerism. His adaptation of ‘La Cote Mautailleie’, in particular, renews the interpretation of chivalric success as well as the narrative purpose of adventures.

The many transformations of this motif in Arthurian romances expose the problems of socialization in a well-established hierarchical milieu. As shown in previous discussions, names can have special significance as they constitute an index of honour and shame commemorated in the chivalric community. A Fair Unknown is unknown in the sense that one or more aspects of his identity is kept secret to other characters (and sometimes to the audience of the story as well). He enters a community where people constantly refer to an established hierarchy based on blood lineage and chivalric achievements. His lack of apparent credentials leads to ill-reception and mistreatment. His final success is sometimes attributed to a hidden noble lineage. Malory’s Fair Unknowns, except for Tor, all have some knowledge about their parentage. They know who they are before they embark on their first adventures. Nevertheless, they all appear to be less than capable at the beginning of their adventures, and the mysteries of their past become a motivation for revelation as the plot moves forward.

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142 Such as the heroines in *La Manekine* and *Le Roman de Silence*. See Bliss, pp.56, 105.
143 In *Perceval*, the nameless protagonist demonstrates courage and prowess through winning against strong opponents, but the revelation of his identity proves that his excellence comes from blood. In *Le Bel Inconnu*, the protagonist loses his identity at birth, and the unfolding of adventures coincides with the rediscovery and restoration of his inheritance.
Malory’s adaptation of the Fair Unknown episodes in his source shows that he is familiar with the generic expectations as well as the ethical concerns that romance narratives engage with through this motif. Through reinvented discourses, the adaptor reinterprets keywords such as courtesy and fellowship. His main interest lies in the individual’s relationship with the chivalric community. His adaptation exemplifies Arthur and Lancelot’s attitudes towards the young knights, and emphasises the importance of charitable guidance in the chivalric community.

**The Reception Topos**

The reception of the Fair Unknown usually involves a theatrical tension of *courtoisie*. The dictionary definition of this word is ‘all that which conform to the courtly ideal (*l'idéal courtois*)’,\(^{144}\) the meaning of which extends from maintaining politeness in human interactions, to virtues such as discretion and generosity. Inherited title is not mentioned in this ideal, nonetheless it seems to be a taken-for-granted precondition. The newcomer often violates the courtly code of conduct in somewhat childish ways. For example, in *Li Biaus Descouneüs*, the protagonist refuses to dismount until the king grants him a gift. In Chrétien’s *Perceval*, Percival behaves in a similar rude manner and is despised by Kay the seneschal. In the prose *Lancelot*, the Lady of the Lady advises the young hero to demand that King Arthur makes him a knight ‘when he requests it and with such arms and equipment as he has’.\(^{145}\) As mentioned earlier, the feudal lord’s provision of chivalric equipment for his knight is symbolic of their bond of allegiance. The king is understandably reluctant to comply with Lancelot’s terms, since it is not the customary practice and deprives the king of his right to seal the bond of loyalty and service. However, Arthur eventually concedes, thanks to Lancelot’s handsome appearance. In the prose *Tristan*’s account of Brunor’s adventures, the young hero wears an ill-fitting coat and refuses to tell his name again. His apparent inappropriateness almost prevents him from becoming a knight.

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\(^{144}\) Translated from the entry ‘courtoisie’ in the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (1330-1500): http://www.atilf.fr/dmfr/definition/courtoisie.

The purpose of the reception topos is not to ridicule the young knight’s lack of manners, but to reveal the superficiality of the court’s practice of judging people according to their external manifestations of status. The prototypical Fair Unknown usually comes to court at the time of a feast with the expectation of the king’s generosity towards his guests. In the earlier versions, a young man simply comes straight before the king and asks to be knighted by him. For example, in *Perceval*, the protagonist insists to receive accolade without dismounting:

‘Ja n’estoient pas descandu
Cil que j’ancontrai an la lande,
Et vos volez que je descande ?
Ja, par mon chief, n’i descendrai ;
Mes feites tost, si m’an irai.’
– Ha ! fet li rois, biaus amis chiers,
Je le ferai mout volantiers
A vostre preu et a m’enor.’ (vss.986-93)

[‘The knights that I met in my hometown had not dismounted from their horses, and yet you want me to dismount? No, I swear by my head that I shall not dismount. Just do it quickly, and I’ll leave!’ ‘Ah!’ said the king, ‘Dear beautiful friend, I’ll gladly do as you wish, as your worthiness and my honour so require.’]

In a similar manner, the eponymous hero in *Li Biaus Descouneüs* bluntly asks for a gift and receives the king’s grant without much trouble. These narratives exemplify the courtly ideal through the king’s indiscriminate generosity towards a stranger.

In most cases, the Fair Unknown’s request would be thwarted because of his failure to meet the courtly expectations. The request of the accolade, in particular, sits at the centre of the debate, because it raises questions about what makes up the chivalric identity. Knighthood is by definition a professional identity and requires military service. If a medieval knight could not fight on horseback, he would soon lose his claim to chivalry.\(^{146}\) At the same time, knighthood also became a rank associated with manners

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\(^{146}\) According to Maurice Keen, one of chivalry’s meanings is a collective of knights just as gentry means the all those belonging to this social group. See Keen, p. 35. He also points out that since the ninth century, young men were placed in noble households to be trained and equipped at the lord or his father’s expense. This fostered ‘a sense of identity among those who, by one means or another, could manage to fit themselves out as mounted warriors.’ It was the later developments in tactics and technology that ‘strengthened the aristocratic bias of recruitment into knighthood, and sharpened in its ranks the awareness of a common bond, called chivalry, uniting all who could aspire to ride to wars and tournaments.’ Keen, pp. 26-27.
and values, and certainly so in fourteenth and fifteenth-century England. Thus, the inheritability of the title can be in tension with the professional and moral requirements of the chivalry.

Malory highlights the priority of noble character in his narrative of Tor's accolade, adapted from the *Suite du Merlin*. In this episode, two young men request to be made knights on King Arthur's wedding day. The king's different responses expose the ideological threshold that hinders the low-born from pursuing a chivalric career. When Gawain asks Arthur to knight him, Arthur immediately agrees: "'I woll do hit with a good wylle," seyde Kynge Arthure, "and do unto you all the worship that I may, for I muste be reson ye ar my nevew, my sistirs son'" (78.9-11). However, when Tor's father, 'the poore man' and 'cowherde' Aryes, asks for the same gift on behalf of his son, Arthur changes his tone: '[h]it ys a grete thynge thou askyst off me' (78.28). Nevertheless, he eventually consents to make Tor a knight merely on the basis of his physical appearance which marks him out from his (half) brothers. Since Tor is a bastard son, he has no right to inherit his father's title, but his physical competence evidently comes from his blood. One should not take it to mean more than an expression of rudimentary medieval understanding of genetic heredity. Kim argues that that this case elucidates Malory's bias for heredity and suggests that Malory reduces the 'vestiges of meritocracy' in the Old French original. This interpretation, however, fails to consider the juxtaposition between Gawain's failure and Tor’s success in the following adventures. Gawain is clearly superior in blood lineage compared with Tor, yet his failure to be faithful to his promise exposes his lack of noble virtue, whereas Tor, despite his mother's low birth, demonstrates noble character.

A case of the Fair Unknown in the prose *Tristan* criticises the identity prejudice through the conversation between King Arthur and young Brunor. When Brunor asks Arthur to make him a knight, the king demands further information: 'Si te plest, di moi aucune chose de ton linaige, et lors par aventure te feré chevalier et par aventure non' (Curtis II, §637) [If it pleases you, tell me something about your lineage, and then perhaps I will make you a knight, or perhaps I won't]. The young man immediately protests:

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Brunor’s expression of disappointment articulates the key ethical problem dramatized in the reception topos. He suggests that true courtesy demands the king to behave generously towards a stranger, which implies that he should not reject a man’s request to become a knight because of the latter’s blood lineage. Here the king loses the opportunity to show his cortoisie because he demands the information of Brunor’s lineage before making him a knight. Both Gaheries and Lamorak support this argument and remind the king that Lancelot was a nobody at the beginning of his chivalric career. In Malory, a similar argument is voiced in the collective discourse characteristic of his ‘archaic’ style.149

These dialogues effectively guide the king into the right course of action, and his reputation is enhanced after Brunor’s accolade: ‘voirement faisoit li rois Artus a prisier sor toz les autres princes dou monde qui ensi se penoit d’onorer les chevaliers estranges ausi com les privez qui estoient si ami charnel’ (Curtis II, §642) [evidently, King Arthur was praised more than all the other princes of the world since he took pains to honour the foreign knights as much as he did those who were his relatives]. The reception topos in

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149 Here two characters say the same words at the same time in a chorus, which is a feature of Malory’s style. See Lambert, pp. 16-19.
this episode articulates the ethical expectations of the king’s benevolence and generosity towards humble knights regardless of their origins.

Malory’s approach to this ethical problem appears to be more pragmatic than his sources: he recognizes the inherent physical requirements of knighthood. One popular manual on military practice, *De re militari*, emphasises the physical qualifications that are essential for fighting, along with other medieval treatises on warfare. Malory certainly expresses the belief that some chivalric qualities such as physical stature and prowess are passed down the bloodline. In his narrative these qualities seem to be transmitted from father to son. This message is explicit in the narrative of Tor: his physical appearance is exceptional compared with his brothers (79.14), which is later revealed by Merlin to have come from his biological father, King Pellinore. Other good knights in Malory’s book all have fathers or brothers that are physically strong: Balin is as good a knight as his brother Balan, Gareth is a son of King Lot and a brother of Gawain, and Tristram’s father, King Melyodas, is ‘a lykly knyght as ony was that tyme lyvyng’ (289.9-10). Hence, the ‘equalitarianism’ embodied by the ideal of *courtoisie* in Malory’s source, which encourages the king to give anyone an opportunity to try their hands in military leadership, is eliminated in Malory’s adaptation. The conventional topos of generosity is only briefly alluded to in the episode of Balin, but completely omitted in the narrative of Tor.

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151 In the episode of Balin’s adventure of the sword, the protagonist persuades the damsel to give him a chance by saying, ‘Damsell, I pray you of youre curteysy suffir me as well to assay as thes other lordis. Thoughe that I be pourely arrayed, yet in my herte mesemyth I am fully assured as
Brunor’s story in the prose Tristan is innovative in several ways: first, the protagonist is neither fair nor unknown. He does not look exceptionally attractive, only ‘bien taillié’, well-shaped, nor does he have a prominent patronage like Lancelot. There is nothing special about his origin – he does not come from afar like Gingalain. Moreover, his inappropriate coat becomes the subject of Kay’s mockery. The author innovatively changes the reason of Brunor’s obscurity: although the young man knows well his parentage and his proper name, he deliberately conceals the information to test the king’s fairness. In many Fair Unknown narratives, the protagonist receives a functional pseudonym in the absence of a proper name. Names like ‘Le Bel Inconnu’ or ‘Beaumains’ are descriptive rather than derogative. The prose Tristan adds another twist: Kay invents the nickname ‘La Cote Mautailliee’ to mock Brunor’s poor presentation. Brunor understands Kay’s despise and adopts this nickname with an edifying purpose: ‘tel non come Kex li Senechauz me dona quant je ving a cort tendrai je dusqu’a tant que ma dolor sera finee et tornee en joie, et ma tristesce esleescie’ (Curtis II, §650) [I shall keep that name which Kay the Seneschal gave me when I came to court until the time comes, when my sadness shall cease and become joy, and my sadness relieved]. Malory shifts the ethical focus in his adaptation. In his version, when King Arthur requires the information about Brunor’s identity, the young man directly replies, ‘my name is Brwnor le Noyre, and within shorte space ye shall know that I am comyn of good kynne’ (360.7-8). This removes any practical necessity of giving the young knight a pseudonym. Therefore, Kay’s habit of nicknaming the humble newcomers in court simply exposes his lack of kindness and moral judgement.\footnote{In the following scene, Malory further exposes Kay’s malevolence towards Brunor. While in the prose Tristan, Brunor meets the king’s fool Dagonet in his first joust by chance, in Malory’s version it is by Kay’s design that Arthur’s fool should ‘folow Sir La Cote Male Tayle and profyr hym to juste’ (363.15-16). Kay’s evil intention is revealed through a damsel’s observation: ‘Now arte thou shamed in Kynge Arthurs courte, som of thes other, and mesemyth in myne herte to spede right well’ (49.8-11). Balin suggests that it is not courteous to reject him because of how he looks.}

\footnote{Kay also despises and nicknames Gareth before bringing him into the kitchen: ‘And sythen he hath no name, I shall gyff hym a name whyche shall be called Beawmaynes, that is to say Fayre Handys.’ (225.2-4) This characterization of Kay as an arrogant and shortsighted steward is in line with the conventional portrayal of Kex in the Old French narratives.}
whan they sende a foole to have ado with the, and specially at thy fyrst justys’ (363.21-23). These changes turn the reception topos into a trial of Brunor’s patience.

Malory also modifies the speech of King Arthur to reveal this character’s prejudice. In the source text, Brunor does not need to explain why he wears the ill-fitting coat until he has received King Arthur’s grant of accolade. In the ‘Tristram’, although Brunor promises that he is ‘comyn of good kynne’, the king still thinks that the young man lacks qualification and is reluctant to make him a knight. He replies in the exact words as he replied the ‘father’ of Tor: ‘hit is a great thynge that thou askyste’ (360.12). Brunor then reveals the reason why he wears the ill-fitting coat: it reminds him of the unrevenged death of his father, who was a good knight. Malory’s changes reflect the exclusivity of the chivalric identity in fifteenth-century England, where knighthood was perceived as an elitist identity.¹⁵³ Not only is the king more cautious when giving the promise of accolade, Brunor also knows that it is necessary to reassure the king of his identity and purpose. Only a selected few could have access to the title, and its scarcity in turn enhances its desirability as well as the knights’ exemplary roles in the community.

The Arthurian court’s reception of Brunor and his lack of noble credentials necessitates a less worldly motivation for the Fair Unknown’s quest of the chivalric identity. Malory highlights the providential theme first in his narrative of Brunor’s first adventure of killing a lion.¹⁵⁴ The prose Tristan explains that the lion’s sudden appearance in court is caused by a chain of unlikely events: the lion has been kept in a chamber for two years, but breaks loose when the king and his knights are away hunting and attacks the ladies left in the castle. Malory’s narrative omits most details and sums up in a typical Malorian phrase: ‘by a suddeyne adventure’ (361.6-8).¹⁵⁵ The word ‘adventure’ captures the stunning coincidence of two rare events - a hart being found on the day to draw the men away from the court, and a lion breaking loose from a stone tower. Apart from

¹⁵³ In the fifteenth century, the status of knight was expensive to maintain, and its acquisition marked the gentry’s social advancement. The knights made at the coronations in 1461 and 1465 were ‘not only exceptionally wealthy but also of high standing among local gentry’. See Radulescu, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁴ This narrative may have been influenced by the story of Samson in Judges 14:5. The encounter with a lion is Samson’s first adventure, through which his extraordinary strength empowered by the Spirit of God is revealed.

¹⁵⁵ The significance of this phrase has been discussed in Mann.
proving Brunor’s qualities such as courage, prowess, and willingness to protect the weak, the adventure of the lion proves the providential purpose of the Fair Unknown’s desire to embark on a chivalric career. In Malory’s narrative, such adventures usually take place on the very day of the knighting ceremony, and they provide the protagonists with opportunities to show their aptness for the tasks they will undertake as knights. In this case, the adventure of the lion confirms Brunor’s chivalric identity before he officially becomes a knight, hence it suggests that the endowment of knighthood is subject to divine will rather than the will of the earthly king, who is sometimes unwilling to grant a free gift to a stranger.

The Chiding Damsel

The chiding damsel is another topos that the prose Tristan inherits from the earlier versions of the motif, whose function Malory updates to incorporate new ethical dimensions. Conventionally, soon after the knighting of the Fair Unknown, a damsel would appear with the request of a knight’s help. She explicitly requires the king and his knights to meet the expectations of cortoisie, which in this case demands generosity, compassion for the needy, and courage to take necessary risks. However, her request involves such a challenging task that even the proven knights are unwilling to help her. It would have to be the new knight (the Fair Unknown) who steps forward to offer help. However, as soon as the king gives permission to the Fair Unknown to go on this adventure, the damsel feels offended by the offer of such an ‘incompetent’ candidate. Hélie in Li Biaus Descouneüs is an archetype of the chiding damsel. She indignant rants before leaving the court unaccompanied:

De cort m’en vois come faillie!  
Dehë ait la Table Reonde  
Et cil qui sient a l’esponde,  
Qui le secors ne veulent faire!  
Ha! doce dame debonaire  
De secors point ne vos amain  
N’est mervelle se je me plain  
Qu’artus ne vos secorra mie;
Ains i sui bien de tot faillie. (vss.247-55)\textsuperscript{156}

[Now I shall leave this court in disappointment! Cursed is the Round Table and those who sit around its board, who are unwilling to offer any help! Ah! sweet gentle lad, you cannot be helped. It is no wonder if I complain that Arthur won’t help you; thus I am let down by everyone.]

From the damsel’s point of view, the court’s offer of an inexperienced knight equals no help. Her lament in contempt of the volunteering knight is in fact a rejection of the latter’s offer of service. King Arthur regrets how this event has turned out, but he cannot retrieve what he has verbally promised to the Fair Unknown. In the end, the protagonist gets to follow the damsel despite her mockery. In the prose Tristan, the character nicknamed the damsel mesdisant acts out a similar role. This damsel is not only difficult to please, but also rude in her speech. She first rejects the poor knight’s company and puts Brunor in a moral dilemma: the knight is to be blamed no matter which course of action he would choose. If he relinquishes the adventure, he fails to be faithful to his words, but if he follows the damsel against her will, he would break the rules of cortoisie. Despite other knights’ warning that ‘ce n’est mie cortoisie d’aler avec la demoiselle puis qu’il ne li ples’ (Curtis II, §649) [it is not courteous to travel with the damsel because it does not please her], Brunor ventures forward to show that his priority is to be faithful to his promise of service. In Le Bel Inconnu, a dwarf intervenes to support the young knight’s decision. Brunor, however, does not have anyone on his side, but justifies his decision by evoking the divine will: ‘tou voist en l’aventure de Dieu et si com il plera a Fortune’ (ibid.) [may all happen according to God’s providence]. The urgency of his mission, it seems, gives him reason to follow the damsel at the risk of losing cortoisie.

In the source text, the drama continues to build up during the adventures. The damsel keeps humiliating the knight to get rid of him. At one point, she deliberately leads him into a dangerous trial: ‘et pense a soi meismes qu’ele ne finera mes d’aler devant qu’ele soit au Chastel de Mal Acuel. Illec metra ele son chevalier en espreve, et s’il i reçoit mort ou honte, ele en sera delivre dou tout’ (Curtis II, §667) [and she thought to herself that she would not stop until they arrive at the Castle of Ill Reception. There she would put her knight to trial, and if he dies or is shamed, she would then be delivered from all]. Her

\textsuperscript{156} Subsequent quotations are from Perret and Weill. Line numbers are indicated in the brackets following the text.
malevolence is criticised by both male and female characters in the story. For example, when they sojourn at a house, the lady tries to correct the damsel’s behaviour: ‘Cele nuit blama la dame de leanz la demoiselle, quant ele ot entendu les dures paroles qu’ele disoit au chevalier a la Cote, ne cil ne li respondoit se cortoisie non, et se rioit de quanque ele disoit’ (Curtis II, §663) [That night the lady of the house blamed the damsel as she heard the harsh words which she said to La Cote Male Tayle, to which he replied nothing that would harm courtesy, and laughed no matter what she said]. Mordred also criticises her, saying ‘ne vi demoisele tant anieuse com vos iestes, qui onques ne cessez de dire vilenie a cest chevalier, et sanz deserte’ (Curtis II, §681) [I have never met such an annoying damsel as you are. You never stops insulting this knight without reason]. These comments suggest that the damsel does injustice to her knight through in her unkind words. Her behaviour is immoral in the eyes of other characters.

In the prose Tristan, the crisis of cortoisie comes to a climax when Lancelot arrives to help Brunor. The disguised Lancelot, here playing the role of a senior knight, supports the young knight’s conduct in a playful dialogue:

‘Demoiselle, fait Lanceloz, si n’avez cure de ma compagnie?’
‘En non Dieu, fait ele, ce poise moi que tant i avez esté.’
‘En non Dieu, fait Lanceloz, en vostre compagnie iré je, et avec ce chevalier qui ci est, se ma compagnie li plest.’
‘En non Dieu, fait cil a la Cote Mautailliee, il me plest mout.’
‘Par Dieu, fait la demoiselle, la compagnie de vos deus est mout bone, car bien estes assemblé emedui!’ (Curtis II, §685)

[‘Damsel,’ said Lancelot, ‘do you not wish to have my company?’
‘For God’s sake,’ she said, ‘it burdens me that you have been here for so long.’
‘For God’s sake,’ said Lancelot, ‘I shall accompany you, together with this knight, if it doesn’t bother him.’
‘For God’s sake,’ said La Cote Male Tayle, ‘it pleases me very much.’
‘By God,’ the damsel said, ‘it is good that you have joined forces, because you are well suited together!’]

Both Lancelot and Brunor deliberately violate the codes of courtesy to make fun of the damsel’s rejection of their kindness. Their echoing of the damsel’s invocation of the divine,

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157 Where the source text uses the nickname ‘La Cote Mautailliee’, I have translated it into Malory’s spelling, La Cote Male Tayle. Both mean ‘the badly tailored coat’, or in Malory’s words, the ‘Evvll-Shapyn Cote’ (360.11). The same rule applies to the translation of La damsel mesdisant, which becomes the Dameselle Maledyseu in Malory.
‘En non Dieu’, clearly intends for a comic effect. The audience are encouraged to laugh at the badly tempered messenger. Her discourteous speech invites discourtesy in return, and the audience is likely to sympathise with Lancelot and the protagonist who have to endure the company of the badly tempered damsel for a chivalric mission.

The moral purpose of educating the damsel is later revealed through the damsel’s inner speech. As soon as she discovers Lancelot’s identity, she regrets having humiliated the best knight in the world:

Quant la demoisele entent ceste parole, el est tant durement esbahie qu’ele ne set qu’ele doit répondre. Ele se test sans dire nul mot dou monde, et pense mout durement, et mout es dolente et correcie de ce qu’ele a parlé en tel maniere encontre si bon chevalier. Volentiers tornast autre voie, s’ele poist; mes ele ne puet mie tres bien, car ele metroit son cors en aventure s’ele voloit chevauchier sans compaignie de chevalier, a ce que en cele contree areste l’en volentiers les demoiselles que l’en troeve sans conduit, car encor n’estoit pas seù par le pais que la costume del Chastel Uter fust failliee. (Curtis II, §747)

[When the damsel heard these words, she was so abashed that she did not know how to reply. She kept silence without saying a word, and fell into a deep thought, and was very sad and perplexed that she had spoken to such a good knight in that manner. She would rather have taken another path if she could. However, she could not really do so, because she would be putting herself in danger if she rode without the company of a knight. In that area anyone could stop a damsel he desires if he finds her on her own, because it was not yet widely known that the customs of Uther’s Castle had been abolished.]

The revelation of the identity of Lancelot and the realisation that she has humiliated the best knight of the world compel the damsel to repent. She also acknowledges that she needs the knights’ protection because of the local customs that allow any man to seize and possess her. Through humility, Lancelot teaches the damsel the moral lesson that the narrative keeps delaying. After this moment, however, the prose Tristan completely leaves Brunor out of the story, as Lancelot eclipses the young knight in the final part of the quest and puts the mission to an end. Ironically, this clumsy conclusion implies that the damsel’s initial doubts about Brunor’s competence for the adventure are not unreasonable after all.

158 Uther is the father of King Arthur. The customs of Uther’s Castle must refer to the old practices that were common under Uther’s ruling. It seems that after bringing the independent kingdoms under his sovereignty, King Arthur also unified the laws and customs through his knights.
Despite its disappointing conclusion, the prose *Tristan* innovatively uses the motif of the Fair Unknown to teach a lesson of *courtoisie* for both male and female audience. Malory, on the other hand, gives the narrative a new moral significance. He offers a different motivation for the damsel’s criticism of her knight: it expresses her genuine concern for the young knight’s life. Kay’s rebuke, by contrast, are likely to have been motivated by jealousy. This is implied at the beginning of the story. Kay is the first knight to volunteer for the adventure, but the damsel immediately replies: “Sir,” seyde the damsell, “lay downe that shylde, for wyte thou well hit fallyth nat for you, for he muste be a bettir knyght than ye that shall welde this chylde” (362.18-20). When Brunor steps forward, however, she allows him to take the shield and follow her after warning him of the dangers. This twist suggests that the damsel instinctively knows Brunor is a better knight than Kay. Also, in Malory’s version, the damsel’s criticism of the young knight is not targeted at his appearance or abilities. She constantly reminds him of the high expectations of the chivalric ideal. When the damsel shouts at her knight ‘turne agayne, cowarde!’ her words provoke him to interpret his own defeat in a realistic light: ‘I calle me never the worse knyght though a marys sonne hath fayled me, and also I counte myself never the worse man for a falle of Sir Beleoberys’ (364.1-3). These arguments help both characters to arrive at a more objective view of chivalric progress.

Malory also reinvents the conversation between Lancelot and the damsel. Lancelot tells the damsel that that he will only remain in their company if the damsel stops speaking badly about her knight. The damsel then reveals the reason for the harshness of her words:

‘A, Jesu thanke you!’ seyde the damesell, ‘for now I woll sey unto you and to hym bothe, I rebuked hym never for none hate that I hated hym, but for grete love that I had to hym, for ever I supposed that he had bene to yonge and to tendur of ayge to take upon hym thys aventure. And therefore be my wyll I wolde have dryvyn hym away for jelosy that I had of hys lyff. For hit may be no yonge knyghtes dede that shall enchye thys adventure to the ende.’

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159 Both Brunor and the damsel disappear from the narrative after Lancelot’s combat with the lord of the castle. The narrator suggests that the adventure is destined for Lancelot rather than Brunor and forgets to arrange an exit for the Fair Unknown and the chiding damsel. This conclusion significantly reduces the strength of the two interesting characters that the author invents in imitation of *Le Bel Inconnu*. 
‘Pardé!’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘hit ys well seyde of you! And where ye ar called the
Damesel Maledysaunt, I woll calle you the Damsell Byeau-Pansaunte.’ (371.11-20)

This conversation constructs a much better image of the chiding damsel’s moral character, and conveys an entirely different message about criticism: her chiding is caused by the concern for her knight’s safety, which Lancelot understands and praises. The story has a happy ending: the two characters reconcile, their reputations restored, and their friendship ends in marriage.

Compared with his source, the narrative structure is much more balanced in Malory’s version. The prose Tristan’s thematic concern of cortoisie, which induces discrimination against those who do not act according to the courtly codes and expectations, disappears in the adapted narrative. The chiding damsel becomes the female parallel of the Fair Unknown as she also appears to be lacking in gentle qualities. At the end of the adventure, as the knight finally proves himself in the first two battles, the damsel also receives a positive evaluation: ‘aftir she was called the Lady Byeaue-Vyvante’ (375.26). The change of the qualifier from Maledysaunte (ill-speaking) to Byeau-Pansaunt (well-intending), and eventually, Byeau-Vyvante (well-living), is juxtaposed with Brunor’s chivalric growth in adventures. Moreover, the damsel’s final pseudonym manifests the community’s appreciation of her conduct despite her apparent lack of gentility in speech. Malory’s narrative teaches a two-fold lesson about the inevitable discrepancy between appearance and truth.

The Growth on the Road

Since the courtly community knows little about the Fair Unknown, they can hardly interpret his identity apart from what they see. Therefore, the conduct of the protagonist is his reputation. In Perceval and Le Bel Inconnu, the nameless protagonists prove their abilities from the very beginning of the adventures. Brunor’s journey, however, is full of failures and struggles. In the prose Tristan, these failures seem to foreshadow his inability to complete the adventure. The initial encounters are particularly frustrating: his first opponent in battle turns out to be the king’s fool – not a true knight in others’ eyes – hence his victory brings shame rather than honour. Then he loses the jousts with Blioberis and Palamedes. Afterwards, he has to reject a knight’s challenge because of a promise made
to the latter’s father. The chiding damsel keeps reminding him that these failures will be seen as signs of cowardice. However, Brunor finally proves to be a good knight by fighting off six knights, because of which the damsel begins to see him differently: ‘la demoisele mesdisant, qui mout prise la chevalerie de celi a la Cote, car trop vigureusement et trop bien l’avoyt veü defendre encontre les sis chevaliers, et tant i avoit fait qu’ele le prisoit orandeoir plus qu’ele ne soloit’ (Curtis, §745) [the Dameselle Maledysaunte, who thought highly of the chivalry of the knight of the ill-fitted coat because she had seen him fighting against the six knights so valiantly, now cherished he who had done so much for her more than ever]. Nevertheless, the young knight appears to be a tragic figure, because he fails to complete the adventure and disappears from the storyline.

Malory’s interpretation of the story is more constructive than in the source text. He presents an empirical view of chivalric growth, and formulates the story to record Brunor and the damsel’s progresses in their understanding of chivalry through the adventures. He also modifies the comments made by the observers such as Mordred and Lancelot to teach lessons about the relationship between aspiration and achievement. In an attempt to defend Brunor’s efforts, Mordred reminds the damsel that every knight has to go through the stage of losing due to the lack of martial experience:

‘But as yette he may nat sytte sure on horsebacke, for he that muste be a good horseman hit muste com of usage and exercise. But whan he commyth to the strokis of his swerde he is than noble and mighty. And that saw Sir Bleoberys and Sir Palomydes; for wete you well they were wyly men of warre, for they wolde know anone, whan they sye a yonge knyght, by his rydynge, how they were sure to gyffe hym a falle from his horse othir a grete buffett. But for the moste party they wyll nat lyght on foote with yonge knyghtes, for they ar wyght and stronly armed.’ (366.20-29)

Mordred counsels the damsel though the example of Lancelot, and proves that a knight’s initial failures cannot predict what he will become in the future. Through the voice of Mordred, Malory addresses the importance of learning through failures, and suggests that the damsel should not be short-sighted when she evaluate her knight’s potential. Benson agrees with this explanation and suggests that it resonates with modern rational views of education.  

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160 Benson thus comments on Mordred’s ‘lecture’: ‘in an early part of Sir Tristram, we are shown that chivalric combat is a skill that must be acquired by painful experience [...] All this strikes us
Malory’s adaptation of the Fair Unknown motif also draws attention to the educative role that a chivalric community can undertake to support the young knights. In both ‘Sir Gareth’ and ‘La Cote Male Tayle’, the duty of overseeing the Fair Unknown’s safety and progress is voluntarily shared by the knights belonging to the Round Table fellowship. In early verse versions, King Arthur often plays the role of the guardian and expresses concern for the young knight’s safety. For example, In both Perceval and the prose Lancelot, the king tries to stop the Fair Unknown from leaving the court, not because he is worried about the reputation of his court, but because he fears the young knights may perish in the adventure. In the Middle English Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the king is blamed by the public for the risky undertaking of his nephew:

Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take
As knyȝtez in cauelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez!'

In these narratives, even though the adventurous knights made decisions according to their own will, the king is considered to be responsible for the safety of his subjects. Malory adopts this conventional image of kingship in ‘La Cote Male Tayle’, where Arthur tries to stop Brunor after hearing his request: “Sir, I wold nat,” seyde the kynge, “be my wyll that ye toke uppon you this harde adventure” (363.6-7). This guardian responsibility is also shared by Lancelot. When he hears that the new knight has gone after ‘the adventure of the blacke shylde, whyche was named at that tyme the hardyest adventure of the worlde’ (367.7-9), Lancelot immediately criticises the court for letting the young man take such risks:

‘So God me save!’ seyde Sir Launcelot unto many of his felowys, ‘hit was shame to all the good noble knyghtes to suffir suche a yonge knyght to take so hyghe adventure on hym for his distruccion’ (367.10-13).

Lancelot then sets off to pursue the young knight and remains his companion and mentor until the end of his adventure. This reflects Lancelot’s de facto leadership and sense of responsibility for those who belong to King Arthur’s fellowship.

moderns, who no longer joust, as obviously true, and it must have struck fifteenth-century readers, accustomed to romances that seldom made such concessions, with even more force.’ Benson, p. 111.

161 Vss. 682-683.
The same message is conveyed in ‘Gareth’ through the characterisation of Lancelot and Gawain. When Kay announces that ‘I woll ryde aftir my boy of the kychyn to wete whether he woll know me for his bettir’, both Lancelot and Gawain advise him to ‘abyde at home’ (227.30-32). Kay refuses to listen and is soon defeated by Gareth. Lancelot has followed Kay to the site and is challenged by Gareth to a joust. Gareth has a fall and invites Lancelot to fight on foot. After a while, Lancelot ‘dred hymself to be shamed’. He then relinquishes the combat and encourages Gareth:

‘Beawmaynes, feyght nat so sore! Your quarell and myne is nat so grete but we may sone leve of.’
‘Truly that is trouth,’ seyde Beawmaynes, ‘but hit doth me good to fele your myght. And yet, my lorde, I shewed nat the utterance.’
‘In Goddys name,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘for I promyse you be the fayth of my body I had as muche to do as I myght have to save myself fro you unshamed, and therefore have ye no doubt of none ethely knyght.’
‘Hope ye so that I may ony whyle stonde a proved knyght?’
‘Do as ye have done to me,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘and I shall be your warraunte.’
‘Than I pray you,’ seyde Beawmaynes, ‘geff me the order of knyghthod.’ (228.27-229.5)

Field thinks this episode shows that ‘Lancelot is now so established that it is natural for Arthur to call on him to test Sir Gareth’s strength’. However, nothing in the text suggests that it was King Arthur who commanded Lancelot to follow the young knight. The narrative is clear that Lancelot does so according to his own will, probably out of concern for Gareth’s safety. Gareth prove his own competence in his fight with Lancelot and receives the latter’s confirmation. As Lancelot brings the wounded Kay back to court, he seizes the chance to teach him a moral lesson: ‘Sir Launcelot seyde that hit was nat his parte to rebuke no yonge man: “for full lytyll knowe ye of what byrth he is com of, and for what cause he come to the courte”’ (229.22-24). This speech highlights two key elements of the chivalric identity: birth and motivation. Gareth deliberately covers both in his performance of obscurity, which enables him to test the morality of King Arthur’s knights.

In both narratives of the Fair Unknown in Le Morte Darthur, Lancelot fulfils the role of an educator and a protector of inexperienced knights. The narrative of Gareth exemplifies Lancelot in comparison and contrast with Gawain and Kay. Malory further

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illuminates this point through a narratorial comment on Gawain and Lancelot’s attitudes towards the Fair Unknown: ‘But as towchyng Sir Gawayne, he had reson to proffer hym lodging, mete, and drynke, for that preffer com of his bloode, for he was nere kyn to hym than he wyste off; but that Sir Launcelot ded was of his grete jantynnesse and curtesy’ (225.27-30). This rare authorial comment highlights an unpreceded ethical expectation of ‘nobility and courtesy’: good knights ought to be kind to the humble in their community.

Malory’s adaptation of the motif shows how the chivalric ideal demands less identity prejudice from both insiders and outsiders. Different interpretations of lineage and qualification, youthful ambition, experience, and competence are expressed through the voices of King Arthur, Kay, the chiding damsel, Mordred, Lancelot, and others. Lancelot is exemplary in recognizing and cultivating chivalric qualities in others: he offers patient guidance and timely help to the aspiring young man, but does not discourage him from yearning for higher achievements. Compared with his sources, Malory’s Lancelot shows a clearer vision of his role as a leader in the community and a tutor of young knights. This can be seen in the last scene of the story of ‘La Cote Male Tayle’. After defeating Sir Plenorius, Lancelot invites him to King Arthur’s court: “I woll undirtake,” seyde Sir Launcelot, “at the next feste, so there be a place voyde, that ye shall be Knyght of the Rounde Table” (375.1-2). Lancelot’s concern about the integrity of the fellowship suggests that his reputation and leadership are founded not only on his prowess, but also his concern for other knights in the fellowship.

The Fair Unknown episodes in Le Morte Darthur borrow from the narrative convention to convey a more sophisticated moral message. The thematic weight of the motif shifts from a quest of true identity towards the edification of the chivalric fellowship. The Fair Unknowns in earlier narratives, such as Wigalois, Gingalain, or Gawain himself in De ortu Waluuanii nepotis Arturi, grow up in isolated places. Often they have lost one or both parents as well as their rightful inheritance; some are bastard sons or are separated from their parents since childhood. The access to knighthood provides them with the impetus of an upward move, and they reverse their fortunes through the chivalric

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163 Wigalois and Gingalain are both sons of Gawain, but never appear together in one text, nor are they mentioned as brothers, therefore it is possible that these are two linguistic forms of the same name.
adventures.\textsuperscript{164} There are of course knights who deliberately conceal their true identity, such as Ipomedon and Tristan. In such cases, identity covers are a means of reclusion as the disguised knights also abstain from chivalric competitions. Gareth, however, does not have to conceal his true identity, but chooses to for a moral purpose. When King Arthur asks his name, Gareth only replies: ‘Sir, I can nat tell you’ (224.26). The king assumes that the young man does not know his name: “That is mervayle,” seyde the kynge, “that thou knowyste nat thy name” (224.27-28), but in fact Gareth means ‘I do not wish to tell you’. His anonymity causes him to work in the kitchen and suffer different kinds of mockery. Significantly, Gareth requests to be knighted by Lancelot instead of the king, which shows that Lancelot is seen as the most qualified individual at court. Evidently, Gareth expects the courtly community to receive outsiders without prejudice and nurture the young knights, an expectation that is met only by Lancelot among all the knights of the Round Table.

The two Fair Unknowns in \textit{Le Morte Darthur} develop a new moral theme out of a conventional motif. Arnold Sanders suggests that the Fair Unknown dispenses wisdom to others ‘by changing their minds about his identity’.\textsuperscript{165} Moreover, his identity as an outsider allows him to test the judgment, generosity and kindness in each individual he meets on the way. If the conventional identity mystery that drives the Fair Unknown narrative resembles a tragi-comedy because of the protagonist's initial suffering and failures, Gareth’s deliberate performance of anonymity is a satire turned into a comedy. Malory, however, keeps this information from the readers to increase the anticipation of a dramatic unfolding of identity through tests. The real subversive test only becomes clear when we consider the narrative in retrospect: more than a conventional hero trying to prove his chivalric qualities, Gareth controls the information of his identity to test the integrity of the others at court. The chiding damsel in the story of ‘La Cote Mal Tayle’ can be seen as a female version of Gareth, whose apparent conduct serves only as a mask of the moral purpose. Both episodes contribute to the moral consistency of King Arthur, Kay, Lancelot

\textsuperscript{164} This may be interpreted as reacting to the laws of primogeniture. The historical context in England is discussed in Cooper, \textit{The English Romance}, pp. 335-36.

\textsuperscript{165} Arnold Sanders, ‘Sir Gareth and the “Unfair Unknown”: Malory's Use of the Gawain Romances’, \textit{Arthuriana}, 16, 1 (2006), 34-46 (p. 36).
and a group of minor characters in *Le Morte Darthur*. Through these changes, Malory communicates a more inwardly-focused understanding of chivalric identity, detachable from external identity markers and difficult to discern at first glance.

The motifs discussed in this chapter demonstrate Malory’s ethical concern behind his adaptive strategies. Through the stratification of interpretive perspectives and the modification of conversations, he opens up new dimensions of ethics without changing the traditional forms. The action-focused motifs in the next chapter will illustrate the same tendency in Malory’s adaptation of other episodes. We shall see that he uses various forms of chivalric competition to reveal the disappointing reality that few knights manage live by the moral precepts of chivalry.
Chapter Two: Violence

Jousting and sword-fight are commonplace in chivalric romances; they can form or break social bonds, reshape power structures, reveal the characters’ political allegiance, and generate motivation for subsequent action. In the Arthurian tradition, they are important devices of characterization – knights must fight their way through the chivalric world. Combats sometimes furnish the narrative with a sense of direction: the adventures do not end as long as a knight still has opponents waiting for him in strange lands. In both the prose Tristan and Malory’s ‘Tristram’, most violent action is described in a succinct and formulaic manner. The authors do not document variations of the techniques of fighting; instead, they are interested in the degree of harm caused by violence, and the interpretation of its outcome. Some moments, such as the deaths of Mordred and King Arthur, are treated differently in proportion to their thematic relevance.166 The minimization of details points to the moral focus of combats in chivalric romance: individuals resort to violence for reasons such as love, justice, and freedom on personal and social levels.

Comparisons between Malory’s narratives of combats and tournaments with historical cases of chivalric events in fifteenth-century European countries show that Malory is not merely updating the literary form to meet the expectation of his contemporary readers.167 While historical evidence show the omnipresence of the chivalric ideal in fifteenth-century collective consciousness, especially among aristocracy and gentry, they are mostly inspired by the literary formulas, not the other way around. The models of chivalry were not created by military men, but by poets and the prose romanciers of the previous centuries. Some historians suggest that the bourgeois imitations of romance, widely seen across Europe, ‘wanted to flaunt its wealth and social

167 A certain nostalgia of a past golden age is often associated with the practices of chivalry in the fifteenth century. Léon Gautier and Gustave Cohen claim that chivalry declined ‘sooner than one is apt to believe’ after the twelfth century. Other scholars point out that the influence of chivalric literature on the nobility in the fifteenth century was an emulation based on earlier literary inventions. Efforts to revive the ‘ancient moral codes’ begins with the looking back on the mirror of chivalry in the past and ends with the lament of its degeneration and decline in one’s own time. See Benson, pp. 138-47.
breeding, and formed useful vehicles for families like the Medici'.

However, in Arthurian narratives the spotlight is almost always given to the relationship between individual characters shaped by the chivalric events.

Studies on the context of fifteenth-century romance suggest that both the authors and the readers shared anxiety about political instability and excessive violence. Malory uses the romance elements that he inherits from the sources to dramatize the conflicting ambitions of the Arthurian knights. The two motifs discussed below, the ‘incognito combat’ and the ‘tournament’, provide the author with the narrative space to shape the chivalric ideal in relation to violence. Both evolved into complex scenarios where the established chivalric models are challenged and, sometimes, refined. They provide the authors with the space to build up the architectonics of characters and relationships in the Arthurian world. The prose Tristan renovates the two motifs’ function, which allow Malory to develop new themes and a moral treatment of the relationship between chivalry and violence.

Fighting scenes are the flesh and bones of the ‘Tristram’ to such an extent that the conventional theme of the doomed love only serves as an excuse for violence. Radulescu notes that the phrase ‘oute of mesure’ appears forty-nine times in Malory’s book, most of which occur in the ‘Tristram’ and the last two tales. This indicates that it is in the ‘Tristram’ section that the excess of violence and passion emerges as the shadow of turmoil over Arthur’s great establishment. Lynch comments, ‘for as long as it lasts, the Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones is the very heart of Le Morte Darthur and its combat pageant’. The understanding of combat as a public demonstration of power, allegiance,
and ideology, however, undervalues the elasticity of this literary form. As this and next chapters seek to demonstrate, violent encounters constitute a powerful literary device for characterization and thematic dramatization in romance. They manifest physical qualities as well as spiritual forces such as will and desire. The two motifs examined here explore various ethical problems behind the competitions of violence, where fighting is artistically presented as a means of interacting with the world.

The adaptability of the ‘incognito combat’ and the ‘tournament’ allow Malory to address ethical and ideological concerns that are not sufficiently treated in his source. Apart from bringing the customs of fighting up-to-date, Malory is still more indebted to his source than to the historical realities of his own time in the variety of dramatic scenarios leading to violence, competition, and deaths. The comparison shows that the English writer borrowed all cases of combats and most of the situational settings directly from the prose *Tristan*, and studied them closely to speculate on the origins of domestic strife. His original understanding of the evil roots of war can be perceived in the significant changes he made to the direct speeches embedded in the narrative of fighting. Through his adaptation of the two motifs, the author exemplifies moderation of violence in chivalric contests and illustrates the importance of peace as well as the dangers of sexual rivalry within the community of military elites.

**The Incognito Combat**

**Overview**

Knighthood was primarily a vocational identity in the Middle Ages, hence a good knight must fight frequently and fight well. According to the fifteenth-century writer Christine de Pizan, the love and practice of arms and boldness in battle form primary conditions of noble knighthood.¹⁷³ Combats, tournaments, and quests are common elements in an Arthurian narrative. It is not difficult for a romance writer to depict a knight who fights. However, it is not easy to depict knights who fight ethically, and it is harder to teach a moral lesson through the depiction of armed conflicts. As a knight who lived

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during a period marked by political instability and civil strife, Malory articulates his anxiety about the ethical soundness of chivalric competition.

The relevant moral principles have been laid out in the Round Table Oath after the initial adventures: ‘never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfeiture of theire worship and lordship of Kynge Arthure for evir more’ (97.28-31). The king’s subjects are expected to uphold this law in combats, but few of them consistently behave accordingly, especially when they are faced with hard choices. This close comparison between Malory’s text and his sources, with the focus on the motif of incognito combats, shows that the English writer enhances the moral consciousness of his characters in the discourse of combats, and renews the ethical standard for chivalric competitions in his adaptation of this motif.

**The Purposes of Violence**

Arthurian romances do not usually entertain the audience by vivid depictions of bloodshed. Combats in these narratives are usually motivated by a higher purpose than the pure desire for dominance or individual honour. Even though most romance authors do not initiate debates on whether or not an act of killing is justifiable, they tend to moralize the knights’ feats of arms through carefully manipulated ideological stances. For example, some narratives assign the knights’ opponents with certain types of otherness. Dragons, wild animals, giants, and pagan tyrants are easily presented as external threats needing be removed. In some other cases, noble quests are justified by a sense of destiny, and the deaths of minor and insignificant characters become part of the collateral damage. Since a famous knight’s résumé often consists of numerous mutilated or killed enemies, the celebration of chivalric honour at the end of a romance inevitably raises questions about the purpose of violence. Is it possible to introduce ethics into such a framework of reference? The following discussion shows that Malory changes the paradigm of chivalric reputation and warns against the unreasoned use of violence.

The simplest form of incognito combats is a violent contest between two strangers motivated by their desire for physical domination. An archaic type of the incognito combat is the confrontation between Roman gladiators. In this public spectacle in ancient Rome, the knowledge of identity is suppressed because it adds no value to the entertaining
function of the combat. For the gladiators, the cost of losing is extremely high, and the winner has the chance to gain all he desires: life, freedom, and recognition of his value as a fighter. In the context of the chivalric romance, the incognito combat is no less than a form of violent competition, motivated by the individual's desire for reward and fear of loss. The winner may receive the reward of honour and some form of material reward.

Historical practices from ancient times to the present show that the association between victory and individual honour can serve the military ambitions of the state. Roman philosopher Cicero suggests that honour is a necessary incentive to the performance of social duties. This is partly why chivalric reputation can play such an important role in the community of knighthood. Medieval knights sought to increase individual honour beyond their duties in war. They would willingly participate in tournaments and jousts even when they have no obligation to do so. Many would be motivated by material prizes; others are more interested in individual glory. Historical figures, such as Richard Beauchamp or Anthony Woodville, suggest that certain knights did engage in incognito combats to establish their chivalric reputation. The premise of the unknown identity at the beginning of the combat facilitates a competition regardless of the individuals’ status or wealth.

*Le Morte Darthur* reflects a fictional context where a knight’s social value is largely determined by his military competence. ‘Heroes are assessed on a scale of chivalric prowess, and the climactic moments of the work, whether erotic, spiritual or tragic, all invoke this overriding ideal’. The conventional paradigm of honour and shame depends on the outcome of the contest: the winner receives honour, and the loser suffers shame. This view sees combat as essentially a zero-sum game: one knight’s gain equals another knight’s loss in terms of reputation. The distribution of honour and shame, determined by the outcomes of the combats, is acknowledged and commemorated in the elite

175 Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick, fought with a French knight, and Anthony Woodville fought with ‘the Bastard of Burgundy’. Woodville’s own account of the combat reveals that he and his opponent had never met before the combat: ‘turnyd his hors sodeynely and beheelde hym; the which was the first sight and knowlege personelly betwene them.’ See Henry Noble MacCracken, ‘The Earl of Warwick's Virelai’, *PMLA*, 22, 4 (1907), 597-607. Also see Samuel Bentley, *Excerpta Historica, or, Illustrations of English History* (London: Bentley, 1833), p. 199.
176 Barber, p. 19.
community’s daily discursive interactions. Understandably, such a paradigm creates emotional tension between those who meet in combats, and the tension is only released when the contest comes to an end. Under this paradigm, combats are easily perceived as opportunities to increase a knight’s chivalric prestige.

In the prose *Tristan*, numerous cases of incognito combats are fought between two knights who have never met before. Their identities would remain unknown until one side initiates a conversation to find out who he is fighting with. This ‘common practice’ is referred to as ‘la coustume de Logres’ in the following dialogue between Dinadan and a knight-errant:

> Comment? Dynadant, fait li chevaliers. Ne volés vous donc maintenir la coustume du roiame de Logres? Ja estes vous chevaliers errans!
> Chertes, ce est voirs, fait Dynadans. Mais quant je voi que mout grant acoison ne me mainne a joustre ne a combatre, je m’en suefre mout volentiers, car je ne vieng mie granment en liu u je ne truise tel encontre. Tous jours truis je chevaliers ki me dient quant il m’encontrent: « Gardés vous de moi, sire chevaliers! A joustre vous couvient. » Ce est orendroit une coustume si commune par tout le roiame de Logres que li chevalier errant ne sevant dire li un as autres fors que « Gardés vous de moi! » Je truis chestui salu en tant de lieus que, s’il m’anuie, ce n’est mie mout grant merveille. Pour coi je les refus du tout et refuserai en tous lieus a mon pooir.

(Ménard IV, 118)

‘What? Dinadan,’ the knight said, ‘don’t you wish to keep the custom of the Kingdom of Logres? But you are a knight-errant!’

‘That is certainly true,’ Dinadan said. ‘But when I saw that often I did not have a great cause to joust or fight, I am more than happy to suffer such a loss, because I have not been to many places where I could not find such encounters. All the time I would find knights who said to me when we met: “On guard, sir knight! You shall joust with me!” This now is such a common custom across the land of Logres that a knight-errant hardly knows what to say to one another other than “On guard!” I hear this salutation in so many places that it is not surprising if it annoys me. This is the reason why I refuse to fight at all and I shall always refuse wherever it lies in my power to do so.’

Knights in the prose *Tristan* and Malory’s ‘Tristram’ naturally encounter each other without the courtesy of self-introduction. The main characters, such as Tristan, Lancelot, Palomides, and Gawain, establish their renown through countless combats on the way of an adventure or in tournaments. Such fights often result in the change of their relationship with each other as well as other social bonds. Therefore, combats can be read as an important narrative device shaping the architectonics of the Arthurian world of power.
The dramatic conclusion of an incognito combat depends on the unexpected revelation of identity. The difficulty of recognition is not always caused by the face-concealing helmets and other parts of armour; often knights deliberately disguise themselves so that they can take part in more competitions. Some of the well-known knights, such as Lancelot and Tristan, could easily avoid many random jousts because few knights would want to be in their way. On the other hand, clear identity markers may also attract unwanted attention from jealous or vengeful enemies. In an episode adapted from the prose *Tristan*, a group of knights set up an ambush to take revenge on Lancelot, but as soon as they see Lancelot coming in their direction, they decide to flee from his presence. Lamorak remarks that their behaviour violates the chivalric code: ‘false cowardis! That pité and shame hit ys that ony of you sholde take the hyghe order of knyghthode’ (380.17-21).

**The Dilemma of Anonymity**

Although most of the dramatic fighting scenes in Arthurian narratives are revenge combats in which both sides identify each other, some incognito combats also feature intense emotions. Even when knights fight with strangers, their moves can be fuelled by a dangerous and unreasonable enmity. An early case can be found in *Le chevalier au lion*. Two cousins, Gawain and Yvain, have never met each other before. They have both agreed, on different occasions, to act as the champions of two sisters, who quarrel about their portions of inheritance. In the middle of the combat, the poet digresses to comment on the dilemma of emotions:

\begin{verbatim}
Mes ne s‘antreconurent mie
Cil qui combatre se voloient,
Qui molt entr‘amer se soloient.
Et or donc ne s‘antreainment il ?
Oïl, vos respon, et nenil ;
Et l‘un et l‘autre proverai
Si que reison i troverai.
[...]
n‘est ce Amors antiere et fine ?
Oïl, certes ; et la Haïne
Don ne reste le tote aperte
Oïl, que ce est chose certe
Que li uns a l‘autre sanz dote
\end{verbatim}
Voldroit avoir la teste rote,  
Ou tant de honte li voldroit  
Avoir feite que pis valdroit. (Vss. 5991-6014)\textsuperscript{177}

But those who were about to fight did not recognise each other, though their relations were wont to be very affectionate. Then do they not love each other now? I would answer you both 'yes' and 'no.' and I shall prove that each answer is correct. […]

Is not that a perfect and lofty love? Yes, surely. But, on the other hand, is not their hate equally manifest? Yes; for it is a certain thing that doubtless each would be glad to have broken the other's head, and so to have injured him as to cause his humiliation.\textsuperscript{178}

Through this inquisitive dialogue between the narrator and his audience, the poet slows down the narrative speed to lament the contradiction between love and hatred. What is manifested on the battle field is no doubt hatred, as both sides seek to injure and humiliate the other. However, the poet uses ‘amors fine’ [love refined], a phrase which often refers to romantic love, to draw attention to the affectionate bond that has existed between the two cousins long before this contest takes place.\textsuperscript{179} When the knights are disguised and engage in a fierce combat, they ignore the possibility of loving their opponents. When Gawain and Yvain eventually recognize each other, the immediate recovery of their kinship bond contrasts sharply with the broken bond between the two quarrelling sisters. It is the sisters’ conflict that nearly causes the mutual destruction of Gawain and Yvain. A modern reader of the poem blames Gawain for disguising his identity on purpose, and reads this combat as a reminder of ‘the futility of knightly valour

\textsuperscript{177} This and subsequent quotations of this poem are from Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes édités d’après la copie de Guiot (Bibl. nat. fr. 794), ed. by Félix Lecoy, Mario Roques, and Alexandre Micha, 6 vols, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Âge (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1978-83), Vol. IV (Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain), ed. by Mario Roques, 1981).


\textsuperscript{179} Fin’amor as an ethical love whose object is not marriage, but the lover’s progress and growth in worthiness, was an important concept in troubadour poetry. The moralist Marcabru defines it as a love based on joy, patience, self-control, mutuality of desire, trust, purity, honesty and freedom from greed, courtesy, controlled speech, personal worth, liberality, and monogamy. His view had a profound impact on the development of canso. See Linda Paterson, ‘Fin’amor and the development of the courtly canso’, in The Troubadours: An Introduction, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 28-46 (p. 32).
when divorced from a discriminating purpose'. It seems to me, however, that this case provokes thoughts on the customary practice of representative combats. If the lack of identification can have such a psychological impact on the combatants, is it ethical to let knights engage in a combat without identification? It seems that the customary practice of the day leaves individual knights little space to discern and make ethical choices.

Chretien's invention of an incognito combat between two close kinsmen (and friends) may have inspired not only the combat between Balin and Balan in the prose Merlin, but also several similar cases in the prose Tristan. In the narrative of Balin's adventure, the protagonist meets his brother in an incognito combat because of a strange custom practiced at a castle. Unlike Gawain and Yvain who start a conversation in time to prevent deaths, Balin and Balan recognise each other too late to survive the damage that they have inflicted on each other. In both cases, the performance of violence is orchestrated by people whom the knights have met by chance during their adventures. Also, in both cases, at least one of the knights haphazardly loses his identity marker (the shield) by which he could have been recognised. However, Malory's adaptation of this episode reveals deeper insights about the psychology of honour and shame leading to the irreconcilable hatred on the battle field. He hints that Balin's decision is not prompted by the desire for honour, but rather, by the fear of shame. The narrator tells us that just before the combat, the lady in charge of the castle entraps Balin through a conversation:

‘Knyghte with the two suerdys, ye must have adoo and juste with a knyght hereby that kepeth an iland, for ther may no man passe this way but he must juste or he passe.’
‘That is an unhappy customme,’ said Balyn, ‘that a knyght may not passe this wey but yf he juste.’
‘Ye shalle not have adoo but with one knyghte,’ sayd the lady.
‘Wel,’ sayd Belyn, ‘syn I shalle, therto I am redy; but traveillynge men are ofte wery and their horses to, but though my hors be wery my hert is not wery. I wold be fayne ther my deth shold be.’ (71.7-10)

Balin's phrase 'unhappy customme' expresses his unwillingness to participate in the duel arbitrarily imposed on the passengers. But the lady manipulates Balin by implying that to

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180 Tony Hunt, Chretien de Troyes: Yvain (Critical Guides to French Texts), Grant & Cutler: 1896, p.49.
refuse the battle would be a sign of cowardice – ‘ye shalle not have adoo but with one knyghte’. Balin changes his mind for shame, accepts the challenge, and predicts his own death before he goes to the field.

Malory’s characterisation of Balin has a psychological depth and ethical significance which proves his originality. In the source text, the *Suite du Merlin*, Balin does not seem to have an opportunity to make a choice according to his free will. When he hears the custom of the castle, he immediately discerns the evil intent of such a practice, but he is forced to go to the battlefield as if he cannot return. There is no mocking lady in the narrative who would talk Balin into the combat. Malory’s Balin has a tragic flaw in his character. He willingly chooses to answer the challenge because he does not wish to be seen as a coward by the lady of the castle. This echoes the heroic conceit in the epic narrative of *Chanson de Roland*. Roland knows that Canelon has suggested to the King that Roland should be the rear guard is of treacherous design, yet he willingly accepts the challenge to demonstrate his valour:

\begin{quote}
Li quens Rollant quant il s’oït juger.  
Dunc ad parléd a lei de chevaler:  
‘Sire parastre, mult vos dei aveir cher,  
La rereguarde avez sur mei jugiét.  
N’i perdrat Carles, li reis ki France tient,  
Men escientre palefreid ne destrér,  
Ne mul ne mule que deiet chevalcher,  
Nen i perdrat ne runcin ne sumer  
Que as espees ne seït einz eslegiét.’ (vss. 751-59) \footnote{181}
\end{quote}

When Roland hears what he’s appointed to, he makes reply as chivalry bids him do: ‘my noble stepsire, I owe you gratitude that I’m assigne d the rearguard at your suit. Charles, King of France, the loss shall never rue. No saddle-beast, nor hinny neither mule, Pack-horse nor sumpter thereby he shall not lose, save first the sword has paid the reckoning due.’ \footnote{182}

‘Lei de chevaler’, here simply translated as ‘chivalry’, sums up the chivalric ideal in the Carolingian context. Its emphasis on the outward demonstration of courage causes Roland to ignore wise counsels and reject Olivier’s advice to sound the horn three times until it is too late. This flaw is resonated in Balin’s reluctance to stop the fight even when

\footnote{181 As noted in Chapter One, this and subsequent quotations of this poem are from Whitehead and Hemming.}  
\footnote{182 Translations are from Sayers.}
he has a chance to preserve the lives of both combatants. However, in Malory’s narrative, Balin’s decision also has an external stimulator:

> Thenne Balyn smote hym ageyne with that unhappy swerd and wel-nyghe had fellyd his broder Balan, and so they fought ther togyders tyl theyr brethes faylled.

**Thenne Balyn loked up to the castel and sawe the towres stand ful of ladyes.**

Soo they went unto bataille ageyne and wounded everyche other dolefullly. […] (72.6-12)

The highlighted sentence and the word ‘soo’ in the next clause indicates a strong causal link. At this crucial moment of the combat, Balin has a chance to step back and find out who he is fighting with. He and his brother have just stopped fighting because they have run out of breaths. The decisive event is his glance at the ladies watching from the tower - it shows that Balin is sensitive to how he is seen and worries about losing his reputation for courage. Balin’s concern about the evaluation of the female spectators increases his fear of losing the combat, and delays his recognition of and reconciliation with his brother Balan.

The case of Balin and Balan also sheds light on the role of public spectatorship in the discursive construction of chivalric reputation. In most cases, however, when close friends or kinsmen unknowingly fight with each other, chance or fate is blamed. As Tristan comments on his incognito combat with Palomides, ‘Onques, se Diex me saut, ne l’oi souspechonneus en tant k’il le feïst a escient. Et se il par aventure le fist a escient, si voit on bien avenir que frere carnel le font et portent armes li uns encontre l’autre’ (Ménard V, §256) [Never, if God saves me, have I suspected that he did it deliberately. He may well have done everything by chance, since it so happens that chance causes even brothers to fight with each other]. In a later episode adapted from the prose Tristan, Malory presents a more ethical response in the scene of the fierce combat between Tristram and Lancelot.

In the source text, Tristan expects to meet Palomides in a duel, but mistakes the disguised Lancelot for his opponent. As soon as Tristan realises that the disguised knight is stronger than Palomides, he wants to know his name. The conversation allows Lancelot and Tristan to recognise each other and become friends in fellowship. In Malory’s text, the spotlight in this scene innovatively falls on the two observing squires:

> ‘A, lorde Jesu!’ seyde Governayle, ‘I mervayle gretely of the grete strokis my maystir hath yevyn to youre maystir.’
‘Be my hed,’ seyde Sir Launcelottis servaunte, ‘youre maystir hath not yevyn hym so many, but your maystir hath resseyved so many or more.’
‘A, Jesu!’ seyde Governayle, ‘hit is to muche for Sir Palomydes to suffir, other Sir Launcelot. And yet pyté hit were that aythir of these good knyghtes sholde dystroy otheris bloode.’
So they stoode and wepte bothe, and made grete dole whan they sawe there swerdys overcoverde with bloode of there bodyes. (450.16-25)

This dialogue is Malory’s own invention. It brings a realistic perspective into the narrative of the combat. While the squires begin with an argument about who is going to win, they end up expressing heartfelt pity for both knights’ loss of blood. Through these minor characters, Malory articulates the communal hope for peaceful coexistence between the armed elites. It may have been an echo of the wish of his contemporaries, whose lives would have been constantly disturbed by the skirmishes between the warring magnates during the War of the Roses.

Most of the incognito combats end with conversations in which the opposing knights willingly reveal their identities. In the prose Tristan, if a knight decides to speak to his opponent, he is usually motivated by the fear of defeat or death. For example, when Palamides meets his brother Saphir in an incognito combat, he knows that he is unlikely to win the combat easily. The narrator tells us that Palamides decides to talk to his opponent because of fear:

_Palamidés, qui sages cevaliers estoit, et qui voit bien tout apertement que il n’a le meilleur de ceste bataille, ne le meilleur n’en avoit il pas, et pour ce que un poi se redoute, veut il le cevalier connoistre s’il onques puet avant qu’il en face mais plus._
(Ménard VI, §13)

[Palomides was a wise knight and saw clearly that he was not the better of the two involved in this combat, nor did he have the upper hand. Therefore, he felt somewhat afraid, and wished to get to know the knight if ever he could before they engage in more fighting.]

In Malory’s narrative, Palomides is equally surprised by the performance of Saphir.

However, his emotional response is different from that in the source text:

Than sir Palomydes had _mervayle_ what knyght he myght be that was so stronge and so well-brethid durynge, and at the laste thus seyde Sir Palomydes: ‘Knyght, I requyre the, telle me thy name.’
‘Wyte thou well,’ seyde that knyght, ‘I dare telle the my name, so that thou wolt tell me thy name.’ (608.29-609.4)
The sense of marvel (mervayle) is a more positive emotion than fear. While fear is self-centred, to marvel at another knight’s martial ability means to wonder and admire his or her good qualities. This emotive term captures a more benevolent attitude towards one’s competitor. It seems that the two knights only engage in fighting because they want to try out their hands. The following scene of reunion is not overshadowed by regret or hatred, since neither has been excessively injured during the combat.

In his treatment of the other incognito combats, Malory consistently improves the ethical conduct of his knights and removes the discourse of honour and shame that is traditionally tied to the outcome of the combat. This strategy is most visible in his adaptation of the less significant combats that are purely motivated by the competitive spirit of chivalry. For example, the prose Tristan describes an incognito encounter between Neroneus and Lancelot. The narrator later reveals that if the two knights had recognized each other, they would not have jousted, because Neroneus was knighted by Lancelot in the first place and considers himself indebted to the latter’s kindness. Neroneus soon relinquishes the battle when he realises that his opponent is the strongest knight he has ever met. Lancelot, however, insists to continue until one of them gets killed. The character of Lancelot is entirely changed in Malory’s text: he receives Neroneus and warmly encourages him: ‘I am right glad that ye ar proved a good knyght, for now wyte you well my name ys Sir Launcelot’ (368.35). This discursive strategy transforms the paradigm of chivalric honour: although Neroneus loses the combat, not only does he avoid shame, he is honoured in Lancelot’s comment. The incognito combat can therefore become a learning experience in which knights try out their fighting techniques without the risk of humiliation or excessive harm.

Winning and Mercy

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the moral precepts of King Arthur’s Order of Knighthood are addressed in the Pentecostal Oath, formulated shortly after the initial quests of Gawain, Tor, and Pellinor. It requires the knights to ‘never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy’ (97.28-30). Malory explains later that ‘alle maner of murtheres in tho dayes were called treson’ (320.25-29), thus equating murder with treason. If semantic consistency in Le
Morte Darthur may be assumed, the Oath formally prohibits killing in all private conflicts outside of war, with the possible exception of a trial combat where the losing knight does not ask for mercy. In other words, knights ought not endanger the lives of their opponents unless they have no other choice. In practice, however, knights can arbitrarily meet this moral expectation if they are in control of the outcome, when they can physically subdue or disarm their opponents in combats. Showing mercy becomes a hard choice only when the combatants are equally matched, as one of them must refrain from injuring the other more before it becomes fatal. Malory’s knights enhance their chances of reconciliation by being courteous in their discursive interactions, which usually begin with the enquiry of names. For example, in an incognito combat between Palomides and Lamorak,

Palomides speaks to his opponent after ‘assaying’ for a while:

‘Now, fayre knyght,’ sayde Sir Palomydes, ‘mesemyth we have assayed ayther other passingly well; and yf hit may please you, I reqyre you of your knyghthode to tell me your name.’

[...] And therewith he pulled hym up wyth his bothe hondis, and seyde, ‘Sir Palomydes, the worthy knyght, in all this londe is no bettir than ye be, nor more of proues, and me repentys sore that we sholde fight togydirs.’

‘So hit doth nat me,’ seyde Sir Palomydes, ‘and yet I am sorer wounded than ye be’. (477.11-34)

The verb ‘assayed’ suggests that the purpose of this incognito combat is to test each knight’s prowess. Neither of the two has a pressing cause to subdue or defeat the other. Palomides’ willingness to cease in the middle of a combat shows his merciful attitude, since his decision is not conditioned by the recognition of his opponent. After learning each other’s name, the knights are glad to know that their ethical decision has prevented them from mutilating a beloved brother.

Since the risk of harming a friend is inherent to incognito combats, we may ask why knights choose to fight in disguises at all. The verb ‘assay’ corresponds with ‘esprouver’ in the prose Tristan. Esprouver means to test for proof. For example, ‘je ai esprovee vostre bonté par moi meesmes que par autre, car je conois orandroid mout mieuz la valor de vos que je ne la conoissioie par öir dire’ (Curtis III, §721) [I have tested your goodness by myself rather than by another’s testimony, so I now know your valour better than what I could ever learn from other people’s words]. The use of these verbs in both texts suggests
that knights often initiate combats for the purpose of proving each other’s abilities. Face-to-face encounters supply individual knights with a surer knowledge of their relative competitiveness in the chivalric world, compared with the information collected from second-hand report (ōir dire). In Malory’s narrative, these two sources of information are marked out by the verbs *witten* and *knowen*. The former means to hear about and the latter means to witness through watching or taking part in a physical contest. The emphatic tone is evident in a passage already referred to in Chapter One, but I will quote it again here for the convenience of discussion:

’Sir,’ he seyde, ‘here lodged the laste nyght Sir Ector de Marys and a damesell with hym, and that damesell tole me that he was one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde.’ ‘That ys nat so,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for I know foure bettir knyghtes of his owne blood; and the firste ys Sir Launcelot du Lake – calle hym the beste knyght – and Sir Bors de Ganys, Sir Bleoberys de Ganys, and Sir Blamour de Ganys, and also Sir Gaherys.’ ‘Nay,’ seyde hys oste, ‘Sir Gawayne ys the bettir knyght.’ ‘That ys nat so,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for I have mette with hem bothe, and I have felt Sir Gaherys for the bettir knyght – and Sir Lamorak, I calle hym as good as ony of them, except Sir Launcelot.’(439.6-17)

In his clarification, Tristram explains the meaning of *knowen* – he has met Gaheris and Gawain in person and has tested their competence in combats. It is the experience of fighting with the two knights that gives Tristram true knowledge of their relative abilities. *Knowen* is synonymous with the Old French verb *esprouver*, such as in the expression ‘je ai bien esprouvé l’un et l’autre’ [I have well tested the one and the other]. These verbs allow knights to differentiate between two sources of information, and prioritize empirical knowledge. Hence, combats can function as a form of interaction between knights, as they reveal much about their chivalric capacities.

Although both narratives lay stress on this function of the combats, Malory’s knights demonstrate a better sense of moderation and moral constraint in competition. The courtesy in their speech also distinguishes them from their archetypes in the prose *Tristan*. This can be seen in the following case, in which Lamorak shows mercy to his enemy even when the latter refuses to yield. Malory makes subtle changes to the narrative of this episode to envision a different solution to this ethical dilemma. In the source text, the disguised Lamorak rescues a knight named Frolant from a gang attack, and they become companions on the way to Camelot (Curtis II, §§618-22). Later, Frolant
hears the name of Lamorak and identifies him to be his mortal enemy who has killed his father. After an outburst of resentment, Frolant leaves Lamorak. Then Lamorak severely injures a knight called Luce in an incognito combat to win his female companion, only to let Gawain carry her away. Luce’s cousin Belinans meets Gawain in a combat to rescue the lady. When he hears about Luce’s death, Belinans challenges Lamorak to a duel. Lamorak notices the burning hatred in his opponent and finds out that he is fighting with Belinans. He regrets and begs for mercy because of what the latter has done for him in the past (§§623-32). However, Belinans refuses to relinquish the combat and threatens to kill Lamorak, who then subdues him by force before they finally reconcile (§§633-34).

Malory changes the moral significance of the episode through a careful sifting of the narrative details. He removes Lamorak’s record of killing Froll’s father (the name Froll is the equivalent of Frolant in the source text). Froll leaves Lamorak’s companionship because the latter wouldn’t reveal Lancelot’s name to him. This character’s resentment towards Lamorak is less reasonable than that in the source text, which is caused by his father’s death. Malory also substitutes Froll for Luce as the companion of the lady abducted by Gawain, and provides Lamorak with a new motivation to fight with Froll: he fears that Gawain will dishonor him in the king’s court (357.19-20). Lamorak kills Froll in the duel, but the lady runs away and seeks help from Beliance (the equivalent of Belinans in the source text), who then fights with Lamorak. Beliance’s challenge introduces a new moral dimension into the evaluation of chivalric conducts:

[W]ithin a whyle he [Beliance] overtoke Sir Lamerok and bade hym turne, ‘and leve that lady, for thou and I muste play a new play: for thow haste slayne my brothir Sir Froll that was a bettir knyght than ever was thou.’
‘Ye may well sey hit,’ seyde Sir Lamerok, ‘but this day in the playne fylde I was founde the bettir knyght.’ (357.30-35)

This dialogue contains two contradicting views on what makes a ‘bettir knyght’. Beliance judges Froll to be a much better knight than Lamorak, whereas Lamorak argues that he has proven himself to be the better knight in his combat with Froll. Later on, Beliance reminds Lamorak of their bond in the past: ‘I slew my sunnys for thy sake where I saved thy lyff, and now thou haste slayne my brother Sir Froll’ (358.7-8). When Lamorak recognizes Beliance, he immediately acknowledges his indebtedness, and kneels down before Beliance for his forgiveness (‘kneled adowne and besought hym of grace’, 358.13).
Beliance, however, compels Lamorak to continue their combat. Lamorak's reaction in this narrative highlights his guilty conscience, which he prioritizes over winning their physical competition. Both knights are aware of the moral expectations of chivalry, and the memory of Beliance's kindness in the past brings Lamorak to repentance, since he ought not do harm to his lifesaver. Lamorak may well be the strongest among all the characters mentioned in this episode, but he finds himself in a weak moral position due to Beliance's great sacrifice in the past.

Malory also makes subtle changes to the conclusion of this episode. In the prose Tristan, Belinans collapses to the ground because he has lost too much blood near the end of the combat, and Lamorak refrains from killing him out of pity. The same happens in Malory's adaptation, but Lamorak and Beliance have a conversation in which Beliance verbally forgives Lamorak:

‘Well,’ seyde Sir Bellyaunce.
‘A, sir, yet shall I shew you favoure in youre male ease.’
‘A, knyght,’ seyde Sir Bellyaunce unto Sir Lamerok, ‘thou arte a foole, for and I had the at suche avauntage as thou haste me, I sholde sle the. But thy jantynnesse is so good and so large that I muste nedys forgyff the myne evyll wyll.’
And than Sir Lameroke kneled adowne and unlaced fyrst his umbrere and than his owne, and than aythir kissed othir with wepynge tearys. (358.30-359.3)

Lamorak proves to be the stronger knight and should be in the position of showing mercy to his opponent, but even though he has the chance to physically subdue or kill Beliance, he willingly kneels down before the overcome opponent for a second time only to ask for his forgiveness. In the source, it is Lamorak's physical superiority that forces Belinans to reconcile with him, but in Malory's version, Beliance gives up his vengeful purpose because he recognise Lamorak's sincerity and kindness: he forgives the latter when he realises that Lamorak's 'jantynnesse is so good and so large'. This treatment of the episode renders a better impression of Lamorak's conscience, as he is willing to humble himself before a respectable yet weaker knight out of regret and gratitude.

Both the prose Tristan and the 'Tristram' confirm the importance of the ability to fight well: without first subduing his opponent in a combat, Lamorak could have died in the combat with Beliance, and there would be no reconciliation. Prowess therefore is instrumental in the achievement of peace before a vengeful opponent. As soon as Lamorak recognizes his moral debt to Beliance, the nature and the dynamics of the
combat are changed. In Malory’s narrative, Lamorak shows a higher consciousness of his need of forgiveness from Beliance. Their initial comment on who is the better knight highlights the superiority of moral character over prowess. In this case, Lamorak’s act of humility and his gentle speech finally bring about peaceful reconciliation. The conclusion of this episode shows that moral consciousness occupies a central place in the relationship between knights and is an essential determinant of the chivalric order.

**The Importance of Information**

Without moral constraints, the vicious cycle of violent competition and revenge cannot be broken. If knights can enjoy more peace by restraining from killing an enemy, wouldn’t they benefit more by recognising friends before they enter into a combat? In most cases, improved intelligence allows knights to recognize a friend without formal identification. In Malory’s text, the exemplary knights are motivated to avoid confronting each other in combats. For example, King Arthur made a special legislation by asking the Round Table knights to take the vow of peace within the fellowship at the beginning of his establishment. This is revealed in a conversation between Yvain and Gaheris:

   And whan Sir Uwayne saw Sir Gaherys shylde he rode to hym and seyde, ‘Sir, ye do nat youre parte; for the firste tyme that ever ye were made knyght of the Rounde Table ye sware that ye shuld nat have ado with none of youre felyship wyttyngly. And, pardé, Sir Gaherys, ye know me well inow by my shylde, and so do I know you by youre shylde. And thaughe ye wolde breke youre othes, I woll nat breke myne, for there ys nat one here, nother ye, that shall thynk I am aferde of you, but that I durst ryght well have ado with you. And yet we be syster sonnys!’ Than was Sir Gaherys ashamed. (429.20-28)

This passage has no parallel in the source text, and is likely to be Malory’s own invention. It expresses a deep concern with the knights’ awareness of the ethical constraints that are inherent to their chivalric identity. This unwritten agreement of peace, if well observed by the knights of the Round Table, should sufficiently hold together individuals of diverse lineages and ranks in a functioning political body. In the Arthurian kingdom, no other moral requirement can make greater contribution to peace between its competitive knights. As the narrative implies, the maintenance of peace becomes attached to individual honour – when Gaheris knowingly initiates a combat with a fellow knight, he is ‘ashamed’ because another knight of the Round Table has caught him breaking the rules of peace. This
additional requirement internalises the moderation of competition and makes the love of peace part and parcel of chivalric honour. Knights of the Round Table fellowship are faced with a moral paradox: on the one hand, they must engage in combats to gain knowledge and experience; on the other, they cannot knowingly compete with those belonging to the same fellowship, who are the best knights living in King Arthur’s realm. This can help to explain why knights often ride out in disguise and conceal their names even when they are politely asked. Disguise entails a range of benefits as well as risks, and therefore knights must adopt different strategies to discern the identities and intentions of their opponents in the absence of visual cues.

One interesting case in the ‘Tristram’ shows how a crisis is removed through the knights’ diplomatic communication. During a tournament, the incognito King Arthur approaches Tristram’s companions in order to appreciate the renowned beauty of Isode. Lancelot is aware of the danger of such an action but fails to stop the king. Arthur’s gaze on Isode prompts Palomides to attack and unhorse him. Lancelot has the duty to take revenge for his liege lord, so he charges at Palomides and gives the latter a fall. Tristram is next in line to take revenge for his companion, but Lancelot prevents a fierce combat in time by explaining the situation in a coded language:

‘As for to juste wyth me,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘I woll nat fayle you for no drede that I have of you; but I am lothe to have ado wyth you, and I myght chose, for I woll that ye wyte that I muste revenge my speciall lorde and my moste bedrad frynde, that was un horsed un warfare and un knyghtly. And therefore, sir, though I revenge that falle, take ye no displesure, for he is to me suche a frynde that I may nat se hym shamed.’Anone Sir Trystram undirstood by hyspersone and by his knyghtly wordis hit was Sir Launcelot du Lake; and truly Sir Trystram demed that hit was Kynge Arthure that Sir Palomydes had smyttyn down. And than Sir Trystram put hys speare frome hym, and gate Sir Palomydes agayne on his horse backe; and Sir Launcelot gate Kynge Arthure agayne to horsebacke, and so departed. (586.29-587.8)

This dialogue is Malory’s original invention and it well demonstrates his skill of characterisation. In the source text, Lancelot simply refuses to fight and compels Tristan to leave him in peace by reference to the ‘raison de cevalerie’ [reason of chivalry], which forbids a knight to fight with someone who has no will to fight. Malory’s construction of this encounter is much more intelligent. His Lancelot uses phrases such as ‘speciall lorde’ and ‘my moste bedrad frynde’ to hint at the identity of King Arthur without mentioning his
name. Tristram recognises the speaker to be Lancelot 'by hys persone and by his knyghtly wordis'. Such a deep mutual understanding between the two knights involves complicated psychological and cognitive processes. It demonstrates that the exemplary knights in Malory's narrative have enhanced diplomatic competence. The conversation also conveys the message that the sensitivity to the information of identity has the ethical benefit of engendering empathetic response.

Malory portrays a chivalric community whose primary concern is peace. While knights have limited resources of identification, other characters such as Merlin, Governail, Guinevere and Isode use their intelligence and discernment to prevent their knights from clashing with one another. For example, the earlier legends of Tristan and Iseult portray the Irish princess as a beautiful and cunning woman, who mainly uses her intelligence to conceal her adultery with Tristan. Malory borrows this female archetype and elevates her moral character by allowing Isode to apply her wit for the purpose of making peace. This can be seen in the following episodes: shortly after Isode arrived in Cornwall, she intervenes in the middle of a duel between Tristram and Palomides and strategically sends the latter into exile. Later on, Tristram and Isode set foot in the land of King Arthur. Tristram defeats fourteen knights of the Round Table in a row and nearly gets himself in trouble. Just as Lancelot is about to take revenge for his defeated companions, Isode sends a secret message to Lancelot to let him know that his opponent is Tristram:

Whan Sir Launcelot saw thes knyghtes of the Rounde Table thus overthrowen he dressed hym to Sir Trystram, and that sawe La Beall Isode, how Sir Launcelot was commyn into the fylde. Than she sente unto Sir Launcelot a rynge to lat hym wete hit was Sir Trystram de Lyones. Whan Sir launcelot undirstood that he was Sir Trystram he was full glad and wolde nat juste. And than Sir Launcelot aspyed whydir Syr Trystram yeode, and aftir hym he rode, and than aythir made grete joy of other. (537.20-27)

In the source text, Tristan himself reveals his identity to Lancelot so that they may reconcile without a combat: ‘quant il reconnut monsigneur Tristran, ki a lui se fist connoistre tout maintenant, s’il li fist grant joie et grant feste’ (Ménard V, §1) [when he recognized Tristan, who instantly made himself known, he received him with great joy and celebration]. Malory changes this detail and assigns Isode with the role of disclosing the identity of Tristram through a ring. Her active participation in this chivalric encounter demonstrates how women can use their own resources to promote peace.
As the above cases demonstrate, the prose *Tristan* provides Malory with many transformations of the conventional motif of the incognito combat. In his adaptation, Malory re-interprets the psychology of competition and offers a new discursive model, which incorporates ethical consciousness into the honour-shame dynamics of combats. Through rewriting the narratives of combat and the conversations around chivalric competitions, Malory constructs a chivalric community which highly values peace and friendship between the elites. His treatment reveals a deep compassion for the individual losses resulted from unreasoned pursuits of victory in violent competitions. This soberly reflects on the unceasing domestic warfare and military campaigns which troubled the author’s own time. Malory’s narrative of the combats offers exemplary figures who are not only better informed, but also more conscious of the moral codes pertaining to their chivalric identity. This emphasis is evident in Malory’s adaptation of the tournaments, as the analysis in the next section shall prove.

**The Tournaments**

**Overview**

The motif of the tournament is one of the most common in medieval romances. The word ‘tournament’ derives from the Old French verb *tornoier*, which means to turn. This is because the earliest historical form of the tournament involves two groups of up to two hundred armed knights, who would joust and fight with the other side in normal armour and with normal weapons used in war over a large area in the countryside.  

This was called the ‘mêlée’, which resembled a real battle in war and was practiced for the training of the soldiers. Later, additional elements of pageantry, feast, and the presence of participants.

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184 The tournament’s function of getting young men prepared for war was recorded in Roger of Hoveden (twelfth century) and Matthew Paris (thirteenth century). ‘The tourney was quite distinct from a joust, where only two men were engaged, for the tourney was always a combat in troops […] Even in later times the tourney was still a general encounter – a mêlée – fought perhaps with more civilized weapons, but none the less bloody and often fatal’. Léon Gautier, *Chivalry*, trans. by D. C. Dunning (London: 1965), pp. 268-9. Also see Barker, pp. 15-16. The tournament was a dangerous activity even for the well-equipped nobilities. For example, Robert of France, sixth son of Louis IX was struck violently on the helmet during a tournament in 1277 and never fully
female spectators transformed the tournament into a public spectacle. In late medieval tournaments in England, knights used blunted weapons (called ‘arms of courtesy’) and the participants were prohibited from killing their opponents, hence the savagery of the play was much reduced while its competitive spirit remained. In Malory’s time, the manner of fighting in tournaments was regulated and the event became a moderate contest under public surveillance.

There are many cases of tournaments in the prose *Tristan*, and Malory updates the customs and the interactions between the jousting knights in his adaptation of these events. Some of his changes reflect on the customary practice in fifteenth-century England. For example, the ordinances made by John Tiptoft (Earl of Worcester) imposed a penalty on whoever killed horses or struck at the wrong part of an opponent’s body in a formal tournament. A similar view is expressed in Malory’s narrative: when Palomides kills Lancelot’s horse, ‘there were many knyghtes wrothe wyth Sir Palomydes bycause he had done that dede, and helde there ayenste hit, and seyde hyt was unknighly done in a tournemente to kylle an horse wilfully, other ellys that hit had bene done in playne batayle lyff for lyff’ (582.6-10). This detail is not found in the source text and was clearly invented to update the ethical constraints of fighting that would seem more reasonable to a fifteenth-century English reader of romance.

Like the incognito combat, the tournament is also a form of violent contest between medieval knights. Hence, this motif can serve to develop the moral theme in the conversations which touch on the use of violence in relation to identity, social bonds, and the ideal of chivalry. Minor themes associated with this motif, such as marriage-match and romantic love, politics between the magnates, and the rise-to-fame of individual knights, provide the author with opportunities to refine chivalric characters. The feasts during the tournaments also facilitate conversations about the performance of and relationship

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Gautier, p. 269.

between different characters.\footnote{Feasting as an important part of the tournament is reflected in the historical practice in England. Fifteenth-century records show that certain wedding celebrations and coronations at court included lists interspersed over several days. G. A. Lester, ‘Fifteenth-Century English Heraldic Narrative’, The Yearbook of English Studies, 22 (1992), 201-12 (pp. 204-05).} The prose Tristan contains four major tournaments, which all play important structural roles in the unfolding of the stories. Malory condenses them according to a moralising scheme, and draws attention to the conduct and evaluation of the performance of the exemplary knights.\footnote{Certain customs mentioned in Malory’s text resonate with the practice in fifteenth-century England, such as ‘For the custom and the cry was suche that what knyght were smitten doonne and myght nat be horsed agayne by his felowys othir by his owne strengthe, that as that day he sholde be presonere unto the party that smote hym downe’ (579.21-25). This differs from the rules of the prisoners in tournament as described in the source: ‘a celui tans estoient les prisons des tournoiemens teles que cil ki pris estoit ne portoit puis armes en tout le tournoiement, se ce n’estoit par le congïé de celui ki pris l’avoit, ne autre raiençon il n’em paiïoit’ (Ménard V, §195) [at that time the prisons of the tournaments functioned thus: whoever was caught could not take arms any more through the entire tournament, unless he received permission from the knight who had captured him, or that he paid a sum for his release]. He turns the tournament motif into a theatrical locus, where knights act out their perceptions of love, courage, jealousy, hatred, and leadership in live actions.

**Spectatorship**

As we have seen in the case of Balin, public spectatorship can have a great impact on the psyche of the combatants. A tournament is an organized chivalric event, hence the identities of the spectators is as important as, if not more important than, those of the participants. Even though the spectators are not directly involved in the game, their presence can sometimes have a significant impact on the knights’ performance. In Old French narratives, aristocratic ladies seem to be the keenest spectators of the tournaments. These ladies do not conceal their interests in observing and commenting on the knights on the field. For example, Le Chevalier de la charrette includes a dialogue between some courtly ladies who eagerly exchange information about the participants’ identities:

\begin{quote}
Antr’ax dient : ‘veez vos or
Celui a cele bande d’or
Par mi cel escu de bernic ?
C’est Governauz de Roberdic.
Et veez vos celui après,
\end{quote}
Qui an son escu pres a pres
A mise une aigle et un dragon ?
C’est li filz le roi d’Arragon
Qui venuz est an ceste terre
Por pris et por enor conquerre. (vss.5773-82)
[One said to another: ‘do you see the one bearing a red shield with a golden bend?
That's Governauz of Roberdic. And do you see the one behind him, who put an
eagle and a dragon side by side on his shield? That is the son of the king of Arragon
who came to this land for the prize and to win honour.]

The poet describes courtly ladies watching the procession of the knights from their *loges*
(special accommodation), only to reveal the superficiality of the pompous display of
status. When Lancelot comes into the field with an unrecognizable shield, he easily beats
all the other knights, but deliberately acts as a coward on the second and third days
because of Guinevere’s command. Lancelot’s true identity and chivalric competence is
only known to the queen. His incognito and feigned cowardice are sacrificial, since they
put him in great shame and danger. However, the humiliation Lancelot endures in
obedience to the queen makes them all the more significant, as it proves that the lover is
willing to sacrifice his honour to please the queen. The poet’s careful manipulation of
perspectives turns the tournament into a trial of love. This innovative employment of the
conventional motif foregrounds the same theme underlying Lancelot’s adventure of the
cart. It stresses that external honour and victory are insufficient, but the true lover must
endure trials of obedience and suffer shame and pain to achieve the lady’s heart. This
notion is contrary to the conventional idealisation of individual glory.189

In the prose *Tristan*, female spectators are seated in special rooms on high to
perceive the proceeding of the event through the windows:

```plaintext
La ou li tornoiz devoit ester
Ot unes granz loges de fust,
Por ce que la reine i fust
Et les dames et les puceles ;
Einz nus ne vit loges si beles,
Ne si longues ne si bien faietes.
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189 Vinaver points out that in the prose *Lancelot*, ‘tournaments generally have some connexion with
at least one of the themes of the story, in the prose *Tristan* they are divorced from the general
scheme of the work in much the same way as the pageantry of real tournaments at the close of the
Middle Ages was divorced from real life.’ Eugène Vinaver, ‘The Prose *Tristan*’, in Arthurian
Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford:
La si se sont l’andemain traites
Trestotes, après la reïne,
Que veoir voldront l’ahatine
Et qui mialz le fera ou pis. (vss.5580-89)

[In the place where the tournament was to be held were large rooms where the queen, the ladies and the maidens would be seated: such fine, long, well-constructed stands had never before been seen. Following the queen, all the ladies gathered there, wanting to see the contest and who would perform better or worse.]

Similar customs also appear in the prose Tristan: the ladies of high status are always seated in a special zone apart from the others. The narrator includes this detail to showcase the decorum of the high society:

Et toutes les dames de haut pris, roïne, ducoises et contesses convenoit par coustume qu’eles laissent as assemblees; et cele ki n’i aloit, a grant orgoeil et a grant mauvaistë li estoit atourné de cascun. Pour cele coustume que je vous di, que on ne laissast a celui tans en nule maniere du monde, estoit venue au Castel as Puceles la roïne Genievre, et toutes les gentiex dames du roiaume de Logres i etoient autresi venues. Les loges u eles devoient venir pour regarder le tournioient estoient toutes apareilles pour recevoir si hautes dames comme eles estoient toutes. (Ménard II, §119)

[And all the ladies of high estate, queens, duchesses and countesses, they agreed that they will go together, as is the custom; whoever did not come would be held by everyone as being arrogant and ill-mannered. Because of the custom I have described, which was not in any way ignored at that time, Queen Guinevere had come to the Castle of Maidens, together with all the noble ladies of the kingdom of Logres. Their accommodations for watching the tournament had all been prepared to receive even the ladies of high estate as were all of them.]

In Malory’s narrative the gendered perspective seems to be missing. In most of the cases, women are not seated in a special place, as the order of the four nouns in the following description indicate: ‘many kynges, quenys, lordys and ladyes stoode and behelde them’ (418.12-13). However, when it comes to the evaluation of chivalric performance, female spectators are ostensibly left out: ‘all knynges and lordis and knyghtes seyd of cleyere knyghthode and of pure strengthe and of bountë and of curtesy Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystra, bare the pryc of all knyghtes that ever were in Kyng Arthurs dayes’ (585.6-9). This might have been caused by the requirement of empirical knowledge and expertise for the accurate evaluation of chivalric performance.

In an episode in the prose Tristan, Yseut is mentioned to be seated in the ladies’ lodge with other highborn women. However, Malory changes this arrangement to enhance
the psychological realism of his characters. He tells us that when Isode comes with Tristram and his companions to Lonezep, she is arranged to observe the tournament from a seat set apart from all the others: ‘and so they lad La Beall Isode thidir as she sholde stande and beholde all the justes in a bay-wyndow; but allwayes she was wimpled, that no man might se her vysayge’ (576.7-10). This special arrangement draws attention to Isode’s identity as the queen of Cornwall. Since her presence will draw unwanted attention and her beauty often attracts sexual envy, it would make things easier if she is not seen by the public. Tristram’s strategy to conceal the presence of his lady shows his practical wisdom which agrees with his character. In a later episode, Malory mentions Isode’s dread of public to show her intelligence. Isode knows that men tend to compete for her favour when they perceive her beauty, therefore she chooses not to accompany Tristram to a feast: ‘and hyt please you, I woll nat be there, for thorow me ye bene marked of many good knyghtes, and that causyth you for to have mucho more laboure for my sake than nedyth you to have’ (658.21-24). Malory invents this speech to demonstrate that the female character can actively contribute to the ethical outcome of the chivalric events (mainly by staying out of the sight of men).

**The Theme of Love**

In the prose *Tristan*, the first tournament in which Tristan formally participates takes place in Ireland. As is often the case, Tristan enters the field in disguise. He has just recovered from the poisonous wound received from his combat with Marhault, and has fallen in love with the princess. He hears about the tournament held by a rich lady to find herself a competent husband. His armour is provided by Yseut’s maid, Brangain. In the first round of the tournament, Palomides has defeated ten knights of the Round Table and won the prize, but rejects the prize of the lady and her land. The King of a Hundred Knights, in love with Yseut and determined to impress her, arranges a second round of jousting (Curtis I, §325). Palomides agrees to participate again and sojourns in the King of Ireland’s castle, where he falls in love with Yseut as soon as he sees her. Tristan becomes jealous when he notices Palomides’ fervent pursuit of the princess, and he borrows a set of armour from Brangain to enter the tournament. He defeats Palomides.
Yseut is absent from the narrative of this tournament, and the love theme is constructed only through the competition between two knights.

Malory transforms the thematic significance of this episode by focusing on the lovers' competition through the female perspective. He condenses the plot and merges the two rounds of competitions into a tournament which lasts for two days, omitting most of the conversations between the male participants. His Isode knows when she needs to be more actively involved in the tournament. Tristram's participation in the game is motivated by Isode's love and encouragement rather than his jealousy for Palomides. Just before the second day of the tournament, Isode meets Tristram in private and urges him to joust with Palomides for her love. Their conversation forms a secret bond that assigns the young knight with a new role:

‘A, Tramtryste!’ seyde La Beale Isode, ‘why woll ye nat have ado at that turnamente? For well I wote that Sir Palomydes woll be there and to do what he may. And therefore, Sir Tramtryste, I pray you for to be there, for ellys Sir Palomydes ys lyke to wynne the degré.’

‘Madam, as for that, hit may be so, for he is a proved knyght, and I am but a Yonge knyght and late made, and the fyrste batayle that ever I ded hit myssehapped me to be sore wounded, as ye se. But and I wiste that ye wolde be my bettir layd, at that turnemente woll I be, on this covenaunte: so that ye woll kepe my councelye, and lette no creature have knowlech that I shall juste but yourself and suche as ye woll to kepe your councelye, my poure person shall I jouparté there for youre sake, that peradventure Sir Palomydes shall know whan that I com.’ (302.34-303.12)

Like in the prose Tristan, the hero goes to the tournament in disguise: his purpose is not to win honour, but to put his competitor to shame. In the source text, Tristan defeats Palomides in order to drive him away from his lady in a rather coercive manner. In Malory's text, Tristram goes to the tournament because of his agreement with Isode. Through his service at her explicit request, Tristram proves his loyalty as well as competence as her knight. This renewed characterisation of Tristram provides a more ethical motivation for the lovers' competition in the tournament.

The theme of love is also highlighted in the ‘Tristram' through the symbolism of heraldic colours. When Isode asks Tristram to join the lists as her knight, she promises to provide him with a horse and a suit of armour. This changes the meaning of his incognito presence, since Isode's private provision for Tristan means that she would be the only one who knows Tristram's identity, just like Guinevere’s strategy in La Chevalier a la charrette.
Isode’s provision also consolidates the bond of allegiance between her and her knight. The prose Tristan adopts a general focalization to describe all actions on the field, but Malory focuses only on the performance of Palomides on the first day of the tournament and his combat with Tristram on the second day. In Malory’s narrative, a description of the lovers’ activities reveals the psychological progress of Isode between the two days of the tournament. Tristram first refuses the king’s invitation to the tournament, but when Isode notices a squire kneeling before Tristram, she suspects that Tristram is ‘som man of worship preved’ (304.12). Then we are told that she ‘comforted herselfe and kyste more love unto hym, for well she demed he was som man of worshyp’ (304.11-14). The triangular relationship between Palomides, Tristram, and Isode climaxes in the encounter of the two knights:

And so, on the morne Sir Palomides made hym redy to com into the fylde, as he dud the fyrste day, and there he smote downe the Kynge with the Hondred Knyghtes and the Kynge of Scottis. Than had La Beale Isode ordayned and well arayde Sir Tramtryste with whyght horse and whyght armys, and ryght so she lette put hym oute at a prevy postren; and he cam so into the felde as hit had bene a bryght angell. (304.17-21)

Malory’s description of this encounter is original. Right in the middle of a fierce combat, he mentions the activities of ‘La Beale Isode’, whose sudden appearance in the narrative of a violent tournament is unexpected. This innovative twist generates an unparalleled dramatic effect. Tristram’s feats of arms are all about serving Isode, since he is armed and ‘released’ into the field by her. The verbs ‘ordayned’ and ‘arayde’ reminds the reader of his new chivalric identity as the knight of Isode. This becomes more meaningful when the readers remember that this is the second formal chivalric contest that Tristram ever participates in. The change of his identity after his near-death experience in the combat with Morholt anticipates the motivation of love in Tristram’s chivalric pursuits after this point. The simile comparing Tristram to ‘a bright angell’ draws attention to the symbolism of the heraldic colour white. Isode may well have deliberately chosen this colour for her knight to signify her preference of Tristram over the Saracen knight Palomides, whose heraldic colour is black. Malory’s changes allow this female character to play an unprecedented role in the shaping of the tournament, which becomes a contest of love.
Malory’s ideal of love is demonstrated in his characterisation of Isode. Her love for Tristram does not depend on his chivalric ability, since she does not know his past; her confidence in Tristram’s ability to defeat Palomides is intuitive, almost childlike, because she has no knowledge of his past or his chivalric competence. If most medieval romances show that the love of a lady is won through victories in chivalric competitions, Malory shows that Tristram is loved before he wins the prize in the tournament. It may well be that her love motivates him to perform his best in the competition. Such an interpretation of love rebels against the paradigm of ‘might equals right’, because the lady chooses her champion by an intuitive (even mysterious) trust without any knowledge of his fighting ability. The knight is inspired by such love to strive for honour. Her role as a trusting patroness turns Tristram’s first experience of the tournament into a test of love, and the same theme of proving oneself for the love of a lady can be found in the other tournaments later in the story.

In both the prose Tristan and Malory’s ‘Tristram’, the competition between the male lovers becomes a leitmotif resonated in many adventures and episodes. In the prose Tristan, the characterisation of Tristan and Palomides appears peripheral in the narratives of the grand tournaments. Malory omits much description of the movement of the knights in the field, and invents detailed description of the developing friendship between Tristram and Palomides. As a result, the coherence of all three major tournaments is enhanced through the consistency of the characters’ psychological transformation.

Malory’s Palomides exhibits continuous moral growth as a result of his desire for Isode’s favour. His first attempt to possess Isode by force fails because Tristram comes to her rescue. During their combat, Isode intervenes in time to preserve Palomides’ life and exiles him from Cornwall. His next encounter with Tristram before the tournament at the Castle of Maidens reveals the flaw in his moral character, as he unhorses Tristram before he gets ready for the joust. Nevertheless, Tristram defeats him again during the tournament. In the tournament of Surluse, Palomides fights for a female companion and achieves recognition. This episode is only found in five out of over eighty extant manuscripts of the prose Tristan and has little to do with the main characters such as King
Arthur, King Mark, Tristan, or Dinadan. Malory includes it in his adaptation to highlight two important themes: the chivalric growth of Palomides and the Lot-Pellinor feud (discussed below). Later, Palomides becomes Tristram’s companion and single-handedly accomplishes the adventure of the Red City. His chivalric reputation has increased, yet he still struggles with sexual jealousy. The fellowship between the two competitors breaks down during the fourth tournament where Palomides betrays Tristram and leaves Isode.

The difficult relationship between the two knights is punctuated by their direct physical opposition and fellowship on the field. The narrative of the first day of the tournament at Lonezep records Palomides’ reaction when he perceives Yseut among the spectators: ‘quant il regarde vers les loges u il voit madame Yseut tant bele riens et tant avenans que u monde n’a si bele dame, sa force li croist et double; il en vaut miex en toutes guises’ (Ménard V, §202) [When he looked towards the room, where he saw my lady Yseut in her beauty and such graceful array that no one in the world could compete with her beauty, his strength increased and doubled, and he did better in every way]. This description renders an impression of Isode’s beauty as a static object, and implies that the surge of Palomides’ strength is caused by his erotic desire. In Malory’s narrative, the cause and effect in this scene are explained differently:

And as hit happened, Sir Palomydes loked up toward her where she lay in the wyndow, and Sir Palomydes aspyed how she lawghed. And therewith he tooke suche a rejoysynge that he smote downe, what wyth his speare and wyth hys swerde, all that ever he meet, for thorow the sight of her he was so enamered in her love that he semed at that tyme and bothe Sir Trystram and Sir Launcelot had bene bothe ayenste hym they sholde have wonne no worshyp of hym. (580.33-581.5)

The phrase, ‘tooke suche a rejoysynge’, conveys Palomides’ emotional response to his glimpse of Isode’s happiness of loving her knight. It is in resonating with her emotion that Palomides feels the same joy of being in love. The preceding passage shows that her

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190 This section is an interpolation from the Prophécies de Merlin attributed to Richard of Ireland. According to Field, this part of the text belongs to the Version IV of the prose Tristan manuscripts. The editions of Curtis and Ménard do not include this interpolation, but a version of the text has been edited by Oskar Sommer from London, British Library, Additional 25434. See Malory, The Morte Darthur, pp. 406-8. I have compared the text in Bnf fr.99 (a manuscript that is close to Malory’s exemplar copy) with Sommer’s text and found them to be close, hence the text is quoted from The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1908), Vol. II, p. 291.
laugh is caused by Tristram’s performance in the tournament. The phrase ‘he was so enamered in her love that he seme […]’ strengthens the causal link between love and performance which has been established in the episode of Tristram’s first tournament. When Palomides perceives his lady’s happiness, his empathetic response brings about an intense physiological change. Through this subtle manipulation of the narrative, Malory interprets Palomides’ love as an edifying force, which drives the knight to pursue the honour chivalry. Malory seems to suggest that the love of a noble lady enables the knight to envision and act out a better self.

**Moral Education**

Through the characterisation of Palomides, Malory demonstrates that the love of a noble lady not only improves the knights’ performance in violent competitions, but also enhances his moral discipline. The description of the final tournament offers insight into such a change in the character of Palomides as the result of Isode’s rebuke. During this tournament, the conflict between Tristram and Palomides culminates as their temporary fellowship collapses under the tension of sexual jealousy. In order to put Tristram to shame, Palomides secretly changes his armour and turns against his companions. In the prose *Tristan*, Yseut fails to understand Palomides’ betrayal. She does not know that Palomides could recognise Tristan despite the latter’s change of armour: ‘Ne ele ne quidoit mie que cele bataille venist par envie de Palamidés ne par le courous, ains quidoit bien que ce fust par mesconnissance’ (Ménard V, §253) [Yet she did not know that this battle took place because of the envy and anger of Palomides, but she believed that it was caused by misrecognition (between the two knights)]. Nonetheless, she is angry with Palomides because ‘ele savoit bien certainnement que Palamidés estoit cevaliers de si haute prouece k’il n’estoit mie hom que autres cevaliers peüst metre au desous sans mout grant peril’ (ibid.) [she knew for a truth that Palomides was a knight of such great valour that he was not a man to be overcome by another knight without great risks]. This description reveals Yseut’s partiality in judgement, because her anger is caused only by her concern for Tristan.

In Malory’s narrative, Isode’s perplexity is caused by the perception of Palomides’ treacherous intent. She saw Palomides following Tristram out of the field and she knew
that Palomides pretended he did not recognise Tristram in order to fight with the already weary knight out of jealousy and evil will:

And full well knew La Beall Isode that hit was Sir Palomydes that faught wyth Sir Trystram, for she aspyed all in her window where that she stood, how Sir Palomydes chaunged hys harness wyth the wounded knyght. And than she began to wepe so hertely for the dyspyte of Sir Palomydes that well-nyghe there she sowned. (592.33-593.3)

The highlighted phrase conveys a sense of disgust – Isode is exceedingly distressed because of an obvious act of treason among her companions. Even though Palomides’ challenge fails to endanger Tristram’s life, it threatens the peace and unity of their fellowship. As Leitch observes, ‘treasonous ideas and actions are the ever-present opposites to fellowship; traitors are situated at, and are therefore used to test, the boundaries of community, of inclusion and exclusion’. Later, as Isode meets the knights after the tournament, she expresses contempt for Palomides in her direct speech to Tristram: ‘I sawe thys day how ye were betrayed and nyghe brought unto youre dethe. Truly, sir, I saw every dele, how and in what wyse. And therefore, sir, how sholde I suffir in youre presence suche a felonne and traytoure as ys Sir Palomydes’ (596.31-32). Such harsh speech rarely comes from Isode, and her accusation reveals a sense of justice. It is the sense of guilt and the realisation that he has lost the friendship and respect of his beloved lady that compel Palomides to recognize the importance of morality. This episode pictures the friendship of Tristram and Isode as an ennobling love which does not tolerate bad intents. The lady’s judgment helps to enhance the moral standards of the knights who desire her love.

Moral judgment and evaluation are also articulated through the voice of the observers. The kings and knights at the tournament comment on the performance of the participants. The authors may have invented such speech with the intention of cultivating ethical response to violent competitions. Vinaver notes that Malory frequently substitutes direct speech for third-person narratives. This strategy contributes to the stratification of perspectives in the presentation of the tournaments: the characters’ chivalric

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192 Vinaver, Works, pp. 1545, n.853.
performances are assessed by various figures of authority in the narrative, or in Lynch’s words, ‘from a point of vantage within the text, rather than directly as a spectacle to readers’. Although often neglected in the criticism on Malory’s style, the third-person evaluation supplements the paratactic description of actions with psychological insights.

Among all the male characters in the tournament episodes, King Arthur and Lancelot have formal authority to evaluate other knights’ performance. King Arthur in particular frequently plays the role of a judge and determines to whom the prize should go. Lancelot, on the other hand, sometimes diverges from truth to maintain peaceful relationship between the knights. For example, when Arthur and Lancelot pay a visit to Tristram after the second day of jousting at the tournament of Lonezep, Arthur criticises Palomides’ turning against Tristram: ‘that was unkyghtly done of you as of so good a knyght’ (598.29-30). Palomides excuses himself by lying that he failed to recognise Tristram, and is immediately excused and defended by Lancelot:

‘Sir,’ seyde Sir Palomydes, ‘I knew nat Sir Trystram, for he was so disgysed.’
‘So God helpe me,’ seyde Sir Launcelot, ‘hit may well be, for I knew hym nat myself.’
‘But I mervayle whye ye turned on oure party.’
‘Sir, hit was done for the same cause,’ seyde Sir Launcelot. (598.32-599.2)

This conversation shows Malory’s remarkable skill of revealing the characters’ inner qualities through dialogues. He reveals that Lancelot and Arthur have different priorities in their minds: Arthur’s primary concern is justice and peace among his subjects, but Lancelot is eager to console and maintain affective bonds even at the expense of truth. The prose Tristan lacks such psychological depth and allows King Arthur to jest with Palomides and Tristan in a similar manner (Ménard V, §262-64). Malory’s King Arthur puts more weight on the intents of loyalty and betrayal, and his speculation proves to be accurate. Palomides betrays Tristan again on the following day and leaves his fellowship in anguish. Feigned reconciliation cannot appease the internal conflicts within Palomides caused by his sexual envy. The dialogues between these main characters in the tournaments bear witness to how different characters perceive the ethical significance of the chivalric ideal.

\footnote{Lynch, p. 54.}
The characters in the ‘Tristram’ are better informed than their originals in the source. For example, Malory invents a conversation between Lancelot and King Arthur to reflect on Tristram’s performance in the tournament at the Castle of Maidens from an internal perspective. In the source text, King Arthur thinks that Tristan is the best (‘mieudres’) knight among all who attended the tournament. This praise is amplified in Malory’s narrative to highlight the moral rectitude of Tristan’s conduct: ‘one of the nobelyst knyghtes that ever I saz holde speare in honde or swerde, and the moste curtayse knight in hys fyghtyng’ (421.17-18). The superlatives ‘nobelyst’ and ‘curtayse’ highlight the manner of fighting rather than the outcome. The king next refers to Tristram’s behaviour in his sword combat with Palomides: ‘For full harde I sye hym bested… when he smote Sir Palomydes uppon the helme thryse, that he abaysshed hys helme with hys strokis’ (421.18-21). Lancelot judges Palomides’ conduct to be ‘unknyghtly’, as the latter forced Tristan to a fierce battle even though he knew that Tristan was already exhausted due to his earlier efforts and the wounds he received from Lancelot. Malory’s amplificatio of these evaluative conversations furnishes abstract moral terms with examples so that readers are informed of not only ‘who deserves the prize in the tournament’, but also ‘how to worshipfully win the prize’. This type of discourse serves for the moral education of the readers as it prioritizes ethical conduct over a knight’s physical prowess. The direct speeches of the knights in the tournament as well as the observers constantly measure the ‘worth’ attached to each individual name. Hence, the tournament becomes a topical space where the essential virtues of knighthood are formulated and refined.

The participants share their evaluation from the ‘insider’ point of view during the tournaments, and their speech often reinforces the association between ethical competition, fellowship, and love. For example, at the tournament at the Castle of Maidens, when Tristram witnesses how Lancelot and his companions stand in unity to defend themselves against a large group of opponents, he expresses admiration for Lancelot’s leadership: “‘well may he be called valyaunte and full of proues that hath such a sorte of noble knyghtes unto hys kynne. And full lyke ys he to be a noble man that ys theire leder and governoure.” He mente hit by Sir Launcelot du Lake’ (414.13-17). Tristram also intervenes when his team members violate the moral codes of knighthood: ‘Sir, leve your fyghtynge with tho twenty knyghtes, for ye wynne no worship of them, ye be
so many and they so feaw’ (414.21-22). Similarly, Lancelot ‘put up hys swerde’ because he would ‘do shame to’ himself if he fights with Tristan when he has done ‘so mervaylous dedys of armys’ (414.3-4). When Lancelot hears that the prize is given to him at the end of the tournament, ‘Sir Launcelot made another cry, “Sir Trystram hath won the fylde, for he began erste, and lengyst hylde on, and so hathe he done the firste day, the secunde, and the thirde day!”’ (421.3-5) The community enthusiastically responds to Lancelot’s expression of generosity towards his friend:

‘[T]han all the astatis and degrees, hyghe and lowe, seyde of Sir Launcelot grete worship for the honoure that he ded to Sir Trystram, and for the honour-doyng by Sir Launcelot he was at that tyme more praysed and renowned than and he had overthrowyn five hondred knyghtes.’ (421.6-10)

The praise and renown Lancelot receives for his ‘honour-doyng’ changes the paradigm of shame and honour in this public spectacle: it is no longer a zero-sum game since, by voluntarily doing honour to a friend, Lancelot’s honour also increases and he wins more honour than he would ‘and he had overthrowyn five hundred knyghtes’. Again, honour is something that is not only subject to the outcome of a contest, but can be ‘done unto’ someone by the community. Malory uses these descriptions to elevate the moral rectitude of the exemplary characters without harming the spirit of competition. His formulation of the friendship between Tristram and Lancelot shows that it is possible to increase the total amount of honour in a competitive event through the act of honouring each other.

The shift between different perspectives is reflected through direct speech, and the subtle differences even out the subjectivity of individual judgments. Lancelot proposes to give the prize to Tristram, saying, ‘he began erste, and lengyst hylde on, and so hathe he done the firste day, the secunde, and the thirde day’ (421.3-5). However, King Arthur modifies Lancelot’s evaluation in his comment: ‘he was the firste that began, and the lengyst that hylde on, save thysh laste day’ (422.8-9). The two characters are not merely echoing each other’s words. King Arthur corrects Lancelot’s mistake based on his

194 Mark Lambert notes that speakers in Malory tend to ‘confirm’ each other’s viewpoints by repetition of words and phrases, and the cumulative effect of such confirmation becomes ‘part of the normal pattern of reality’, Lambert, p. 11. LaFarge, on the other hand, argues that Malory allows his characters to repeat words ‘in differing senses, and thereby disrupting any final sense of unified perception’, Catherine LaFarge, ‘Conversation in Malory’s Morte Darthur’, *Medium Ævum*, 56, 2 (1987), 225-38 (p. 225). The case under discussion shows that the repetition of words in
observation of Tristram’s deeds on the third day of the tournament. Malory invents this conversation to enhance the objectivity of the evaluation and further reveals the two characters’ difference – Arthur is more prudent in judgement than Lancelot, since the latter is more likely to manipulate facts in his praise due to personal affection.

At the tournament at Lonezep, Lancelot again gives up the prize out of sympathy for Palomides. On the first day of the tournament, Palomides outperforms other knights to impress Isode, and knowing that he cannot overcome Lancelot by normal means, he kills Lancelot’s horse. Lancelot judges this act to be ‘the grettyste dispyte that ever ony worshipfull knyght’ (582.19-20) did to him, and prepares to take revenge. However, Palomides reveals his identity and implores Lancelot to be compassionate:

‘I undirstonde a parte for whos love ye do hit, and well I wote that love is a grete maystry. And yf my lady were here, as she is nat, wyte you well, Sir Palomydes, ye shulde nat beare away the worshyp! But beware youre love be nat discovered, for and Sir Trystram may know hit, ye woll repente hit. And sythyn my quarell is nat here, ye shall have this day the worshyp as for me’ (582.32-583.3).

Malory again subtly improves his source, where Lancelot only gives up the fight with Palomides because the latter has already laboured much: ‘je ne voeil pas a ceste fois que tu perdes pour ocoison de moi l’ounour de ceste journee, se aventure le te donne, ains le voel bien.’ (Ménard V, §209) [I do not wish this time that you lose the honour of this day because of me; if fortune grants it to you, so would it be my wish too.] Lancelot’s speech in the adaptation contributes to the consistency of his character, as it reveals that Lancelot is sympathetic with Palomides that the love of a lady takes precedence over truth and justice.

**The Political Subtext**

Historically, the tournament was a miniature warfare before it was turned into a public spectacle. Knights compete in the tournament as groups, even though they individuals may come from a different background. The dynamics in the jousting field can sometimes reflect the politics in the Arthurian realm. Both texts – the prose *Tristan* and the
‘Tristram’ – address the political significance of the knights’ action and appearance in the
tournaments. For example, in the tournament at the Castle of Maidens, Lancelot uses
heraldic disguise to signify his allegiance with Tristan. Before the tournament, Tristan has
fought with thirty knights who are enemies of Lancelot. Lancelot hears about his deed and
orders his kinsmen to bear shields of Cornwall as a sign of solidarity, even though Cornish
knights are reputed to be cowards.\footnote{\textit{Tristram} text.} Lancelot’s decision turns the shield into a medium of
political statement. When King Mark hears about Lancelot’s action, he feels threatened by
this bond between his nephew and the powerful knights of King Ban’s lineage:

\textit{Il ne voloit a nule gent si grant mal com il voloit a chiaus de celui lingnage ne il
n’avoit nule si grant paouur com il avoit de ce que mesire Tristrans ne se meiist en
lour compaingie, car il savoit certainnement que, se il en lor compaingnie se metoit
et il voloient faire leur pooir de grever le roi March, il le porroient metre par fine
force a doeil et a destrusion, et ce estoit ce dont toute la paouur venoit au roi Marc : il
n’avoit d’autre cose paouur fors que du lingnage le roi Ban ; plus avoit grant paouur de
celui lingnage k’il n’avoit du roi Artu proprement. (Ménard II, §58)}

[He has never felt such malice towards any man other than the knights of this
lineage, nor was he more afraid of anything than the fellowship between they and
lord Tristan, because he knew for sure that if Tristan becomes their companion, and
that they want to use their force against King Mark, they could easily bring damage
and destruction by real [military] power; and this was why all such fear came to King
Mark: he had no greater fear for anyone other than the kinsmen of King Ban; this
fear was even greater than the fear he had for King Arthur himself.]

Lancelot’s diplomatic use of heraldry is highly innovative compared to other romance
texts. The Cornish shield is turned into a powerful statement of the affective bond between
two knights of equal status. Even though Tristan and Lancelot fight on opposite sides
during the tournament, the shield ensures that a friendly message is exchanged before
their formal competition begins.

In both texts, the motif of the tournament exposes the political campaign of the
different factions within the Round Table fellowship, especially that between King Arthur,
King Lot’s sons, and King Pellinor’s sons (the Lot-Ban feud becomes the central theme in

\footnote{For example, this is revealed in a conversation between Kex and Saigemor: ‘\textit{se chis cevaliers
ne fust de Cornuaille, il n’en portast mie l’escum a ce que tout sevnt bien communaument que nus
hom ne puet ester despriés si durement com par porter ler armes de Cornuaille, et pour ce di je
bien que cis cevaliers est de Cornuaille}’ (Ménard II, §68) [‘if this knight did not come from Cornwall,
he would not carry this shield, because everyone knows well that no man can be despised more
than for carrying the arms of Cornwall, and it is for this reason that I say this knight is from
Cornwall’]. Also see the discussion in Chapter One on Heraldry.
the books after the ‘Quest of the Holy Grail’). Later, the private ‘counceyle’ between Gawain and all his brothers reveals that Gaheris caught his mother in bed with Lamorak and murdered her in his rage. The Lot faction’s enmity against King Pellinor’s sons becomes public knowledge for the first time during a ‘justenynge at a priory frome the justys’ (481.6-7). When Lamorak triumphs the field and puts Gawain’s brotherhood to shame, ‘the kynge was gladde and so was all the felyshyp of the Rounde Table excepte Sir Gawayne and his bretheren’ (482.23-24). In most of the manuscripts of the prose Tristan, the tournament at Surluse is the last time Lamorak ever presents at a chivalric event; he is soon murdered by Gawain during Tristan’s imprisonment by King Mark (Ménard IV, §248).

As the event of the tournament is not just a competition of chivalric prowess, the involvement and influence of the female characters become more significant in Malory’s adaptation. For example, Queen Guinevere acts as a surrogate judge in the place of King Arthur at the tournament of Surluse. At this event, she communicates with the knights with a clear political purpose. In the source, she watches the tournament in the ladies’ room and is in charge of leading the ladies and damsels to dinner as usual:

Quant li hauz princes vit que leure de disner estoit la passee, il fet soner le core en mi le tournoiement, & quant li chevalier orient la voz du cor, il se traient en sus les uns des autres & s’en vont chascun a leur gonfanon. La Reyne Guenieure & les dames & les damoiseles descendent des loges & s’en vont conduire la Reyne. Et ele retint auec lui pour disner vne partie des dames & des damaoiseles. 196

[When the high prince saw that dinner time had passed, he let blow the horn in the middle of the tournament. When the knights heard the sound of the horn, they left the field one by one and each returned to his banner. Queen Guinevere, and the ladies and damsels descended from their accommodation. They escorted the queen, and she kept the company of the ladies and damsels to have dinner together.]

Malory changes her role: before the tournament, she asks for permission from King Arthur to go to the tournament alone with some knights chosen to be her company. At the tournament, Guinevere shares the authority with the host, Galahalt the High Prince, and

196 The narrative of the Tournament of Surluse is not included in the modern edition of the prose Tristan, but has been edited and published as appendix in Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer and William Caxton, 3 vols (London: David Nutt, 1890), Vol. III, p. 314. Subsequent texts are quoted from this edition with page numbers indicated in the brackets following the texts.
sometimes with Lancelot: ‘Quene Gwenyvere and Sir Launcelot let blow to lodgynge, and every knight unarmed hym and dressed them to the feste’ (519.27-28).

Malory invents certain scenes unparalleled in the source to reinforce Guinevere’s political influence. In the source text, Galahalt alone oversees the judicial duel between Palomides and a Saracen knight; but in Malory’s version, the queen also holds judicial authority: ‘the Quene and the prynce and Sir Launcelot were sette to behold them’ (520.7-8). Later, despite the Gawain brothers’ hostility against Lamorak, the queen openly shows her favour towards the young knight:

Than Quene Gwenyvere commended hym, and so did all good knyghtes, and made muche of hym, excepte Sir Gawaynes brethirne. (522.6-8) But whan Lamerok was com unto the cours Quene Gwenyvere enbraced hym in her armys and seyde, ‘Sir, well have ye done this day!’ Than cam the Haute Prynce, and he made of hym grete joy, and so ded Sir Dynadan, for he wepte for joy. But the joy that Sir Launcelot made of Sir Lamerok there myght no tonge tell. (523.25-30)

The queen’s favour for Lamorak seems to render a certain protection over him, therefore the vengeful intentions of Gawain’s brothers cannot be carried out in the open. In this case, Guinevere’s sense of justice is reflected in her speech, which gives honour to Lamorak. These modifications are significant, as they reflect a different model of queenship. Guinevere seeks political influence and resists marginalisation through direct involvement in military and political events. Her marital bond and her coalition with the magnates in the king’s court give her authority in a male-dominated world. This model of female ruling is very different from the one imagined in the prose Tristan, but can be seen in the historical figures of Malory’s own time, such as Margaret of Anjou.197

The source text mentions very little about the Lot-Pellinor feud, but this theme is foregrounded in Malory’s tournament of Surluse. Malory condenses the episode of the Saracen knights Palomides, Sephar, and Corsbrane and shows that the major threat to peace comes from within. In the prose Tristan, Lamorak’s participation in the tournament is mentioned in no more than one sentence. In Malory’s adaptation, his participation in the

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tournament receives much attention, and later he is warmly received and praised by all knights ‘excepte Sir Gawaynes brethirne’ (522.8). This description is immediately followed by the Queen’s warning to Lancelot: ‘Sir, I require you that and ye juste ony more, that ye juste wyth none of the blood of my lorde Kynge Arthur’ (522.9-11). The queen’s concern is foreshadowed in a previous event, where Lancelot, Tristan, and Dinadan ‘suffryd Sir Gawayne for the love of Kynge Arthure wyth his bretherne to wynne the degré yf they myght’ (481.9-11). Gawain and his brothers’ intolerance has an impact on the peace and justice in King Arthur’s realm, and is presented in a negative light.

In order to develop the theme of the Lot-Pellinor feud, Malory even makes a rare mistake of inventing a logically impossible anecdote in his narrative of the fifth day of the tournament. Although previously the readers are told that King Arthur did not come to the tournament, he suddenly appears and speaks on the fifth day.198 After Palomides gains irrevocable victory against the Gawain brothers on the field, King Arthur emerges from nowhere ‘to have made hym redy to juste’ (524.15). Lamorak volunteers to joust with Palomides and defeats him. The conversation between King Arthur and Lamorak alludes to the brewing schism in his own court due to the hatred of the Lot band:

‘Syr,’ seyde Sir Lamerok, ‘wyte you well I owghe you my servyse, but as at this tyme I woll nat abyde here, for I se off myne enemyes many aboute you.’
‘Alas!’ seyde Kynge Arthure, ‘nowe wote I well hit is Sir Lamerok de Galys. A, Sir Lamerok, abyde wyth me! And, be my crowne, I shall never fayle the: and nat so hardy in Sir Gawaynes hede, nothir none of his bretherne, to do the wronge.’
‘Sir, grete wronge have they done me and you bothe.’ (524.29 – 525.1)

Lamorak reminds Arthur that Gaheris’ matricide is a great wrong against the king, since Morgause is also Arthur’s sister. The king is pressed to recognise the moral flaw in his closest subjects, and this flaw is soon to become fatal to his reign. As unlawful sexual bonds between men and women grow to occupy the centre of the political stage, civil

198 As mentioned before, the tournament of Surluse is only found in four manuscripts of the prose Tristan, and has the features of a late interpolation. Neither King Arthur nor Tristan is present at this tournament, and the highlight falls on the interaction between Lancelot, Guinere, Galahalt, Palomides, and Gawain’s brothers. King Arthur’s supposed absence in this tournament is consistent in the source text (Sommer and Caxton. ed. by Caxton & Sommer, III, p.327). Malory should know this because at the beginning of this episode, his King Arthur says: “I woll gyff you leve,” seyde Kyng Arthure, “but wyte you well I may not be there myself” (515.10-11). Hence, Arthur’s emergence at this point must be a mistake.
strife increases. Hence, the queens’ problematic moral standing and adulterous affairs contribute to the likelihood of dynastic struggles.

Malory’s adaptation of the last two tournaments shows skilful improvement of the structural unity: he weaves the threads of separate episodes into a tapestry of Arthurian politics. The chronological evolvements of coalition and opposition are mirrored in the tournaments. The reputation of the Lot brothers, except for Gareth, deteriorates quickly as their hands become stained with Lamorak’s blood. In the ‘Tristram’, the murder takes place between the second and the third tournaments and is only indirectly presented by characters including Dinadan, Palomides and Tristram at different moments. The theme of the feud between the descendants of Lot and Pellinor is suspended during the tournament of Lonezep, and is remembered again in the episode of the poisoned apple. However, Queen Guinevere’s comment on the competition between Palomides and Tristram at the conclusion of the tournament of Lonezep conveys a strong disapproval of the growing strife within the Round Table fellowship:

‘Than shall he never wynne worshyp,’ seyde the queen, ‘for and hyt happyn an envious man onys to wynne worship he shall be dishonourely twyse therefore. And for this cause all men of worship hate an envious man and wull shewe hym no favoure, and he that ys curteyse and kynde and jantil hath favoure in every place.’

Her concern over the inherent moral expectations of chivalric exemplarity – or in Malory’s word, worship – anticipates the internal erosion that threatens the fellowship of the Round Table.

Compared with the knights and the spectators at the tournaments depicted in Chrétien’s poems or the prose Tristan, the chivalric community in Malory explicitly rewards ethical behaviour through evaluative discourses. The commentators in these competitive events aspire to distribute honour in accordance with a more defined set of moral codes. They encourage knights to compete in the games without causing excessive damage to

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199 One evidence of improved narrative unity is that Malory uses Lamorak’s death as motivation for Pinel’s plot to kill Gawain: ‘Sir Pynell le Saveayge, which was cosine to Sir Lameroke de Galis, the good knyght that Sir Gawayne and hys brethirn slew by treson. […] For Sir Gawayne was a passynge hote knyght of nature, and thys Sir Pyonell hated Sir Gawayne bycause of hys kynnesman Sir Lamorakes dethe; and therefore, for pure envy and hate, Sir Pyonell enpoysonde sertayn appylls for to enpoysen Sir Gawayne.’ (793.17-31)
one another. Ill intents and immoral behaviours are criticised by the fictional characters with certain authority. Evidently, the moderation of violence in chivalric competitions serves to strengthen the fellowship bond rather than weaken its stability. However, Malory also considers knights who fail to meet the moral expectations because of sexual rivalry. His treatment of the tournaments renders the impression that a political institution founded on martial competition cannot eliminate the extreme types of violence motivated by personal ambition, hatred, and sexual jealousy. In the next chapter, we will examine a more positive impact of chivalric violence. The motifs of ‘Rash Promise’ and the ‘Judicial Duel’ demonstrate how knights contribute to the improvement of social justice through sacrificial chivalric actions.
Chapter Three: Justice

The two motifs examined in this chapter – the ‘rash promise’ and the ‘judicial duel’ – derive from two ancient institutions, namely the social contract and the feudal judiciary. In the Arthurian narratives, both institutions are defended by the chivalric community consisting of military elites, who hold governing authority over the lives of their subjects. Such power may often conflict with common interests when it is abused, and therefore must be regulated according to moral principles, human law, and divine law. The ethical aspects of the chivalric ideal are voiced in didactic poems such as *L’Ordene de chevalerie*, epics, and prose romances, which are rich in ritualistic symbolism. However, in practice problems often arise because of the inherent flaws within the institution of knightly government as well as human weaknesses.

Romance writers are interested in the individual agencies that sanction, judge, or correct wrong-doings. In the later Middle Ages, knights were not only soldiers in warfare, but also, local governors in times of peace. ‘The knight, as lord of his small and often self-contained world, became dispenser of justice and keeper of the peace, as the structure of society became more hierarchical and the freemen less numerous. […] so the knights became the acknowledged administrators of justice at this local level, save in those matters reserved to the crown.’ In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, law formed an important part of everyday life, and justice was much wanted on every social level.

Knighthood, meaning the rank, prestige, vocation, service, or the collective body of knights, was inseparable from different models of political governance in Malory’s time. Beverly Kennedy points out that the king himself was a knight, and his greatest magnates were dubbed knights and considered themselves the king’s natural counsellors in matters concerning governance. Cherewatuk notes that the great books circulated among gentry families in fifteenth-century England contained similar arrangements of texts on chivalric

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200 In the *L’Ordene de chevalerie*, the author emphasizes that the two edges of the sword symbolize *droiture* (justice) and *légauté* (loyalty), with which the knight shall defend the poor and the weak (vss.205-21). Related works include *L’Armure du chevalier*, *Le conte dou Baril*, *L’Enseignement des princes* and *Libre que és de l’orde de Cavalleria*, *Girart de Roussillon*, *Le Conte du Graal*, and the prose *Lancelot*. See *Le Roman des esel; Ordene de chevalerie: Critical Editions with Introductions, Notes, Glossary and Translations*, ed. by Keith Busby (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1983), p. 89.


203 All these are mentioned in the definition of ‘knighthood’ in the Oxford English Dictionary: [accessed Mar. 2018]

204 Kennedy, p. 19.
ideals and princely practices. Radulescu observes that the chronicles and genealogical rolls circulated among kings, noblemen, and gentry families in fifteenth-century England show the growing political awareness of the importance of political counseling and governance. Chivalric romances are interested in the social duties of knighthood and often present different views about social justice and the enforcement of law.

As Cherewatuk suggests, ‘the Morte Darthur presents in one volume a syncretic vision of knighthood’. This chapter will examine how different is Malory’s vision from that presented in his source, and in what way Le Morte Darthur contributed to the development of chivalric ethics. Given that Malory was imprisoned several times and lived the life that a criminal would have lived in his time, he would certainly have contemplated the nature of law and justice. Christopher Cannon argues that The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry, printed by Caxton around the same time as Le Morte Darthur, constructs a flawed concept of social and political structure, because ‘it is always just as aware of evil as it is of good, but, since it is also based upon the belief that its members are good, it must deny evil even as it identifies it’. He suggests that the punishment for crime depicted in Malory’s book only repeats the crime itself, such as Garlon’s death at Balin’s hands. However, Cannon’s analysis fails to recognize the moral expectations of the chivalric ideal. Defenders of justice will always be present as long as crimes exist in an established society. What determines the condition of justice is subject to the proficiency of the legal system, and its individual agents can only use available instruments to maximize the possibility of justice in a less-than-perfect fictional world. The cases discussed in this chapter show that the prose Tristan imagines a past world full of life-devouring customs, innocent deaths, and outcries for vengeance. Malory accepts the bleak worldview presented in his sources but improves the model of chivalry, so that those who desire honour may follow its rules to bring better justice rather than more chaos into the wider society.

Medieval laws and customs vary greatly from one court to another. For the convenience of our discussion, it is useful to introduce the concept of stare decisis in jurisprudence. This principle, also called the doctrine of precedent, relates to the practice of judges applying the same principles promulgated in a previous case that has similar facts or adopting the earlier judge’s interpretation of the law. The strict rules as they now appear in the English legal system were formulated in the nineteenth century, but as early as the time of Bracton, the ‘a similibus ad similia’ – reasoning by analogy – was commonly practiced in

206 Radulescu, pp. 60-81.
207 Cherewatuk (1997).
208 Cannon, p.160.
English judicial procedure. Christ Dent and Ian Cook argue that *stare decisis* is an internalised discursive practice which allows lawyers and judges to self-regulate. The repetition of the ethical paradoxes in the chivalric romance reflects this discursive practice. By presenting the similarities and differences in the cases of the rash promise and the judicial duel, each author creatively contributes to the interpretation and evolvement of judiciary reasoning in a relatively static context.

A case by case study of the variations of the two motifs, the ‘rash promise’ and the ‘judicial duel’, in the ‘Tristram’ and relevant Arthurian texts is essential for a deeper understanding of the transmuting laws and ethics in romance narratives. Malory exposes the insufficiency of unreasoned arbitrary ruling through violence alone, and consolidates certain principles that may justify chivalric action. His changes reveal the writer’s concern about the sustainability of a political entity that is constantly at risk from encroachment by its own agents of violence. On the other hand, the device of the chivalric adventure also proves to have unparalleled ethical and aesthetic potential in Malory’s adaptation of the two motifs.

### The ‘Rash Promise’

**Overview**

‘Do not promise something you will regret to deliver’ sums up the simple moral lesson underlying the motif of the ‘rash promise’. It sounds like a cliché that most people would know regardless of their cultural background. In reality, or at least in the reality of romance, things are often more complicated, and there are many reasons why a rational person might grant an unknown gift to his or her own regret later on. The rash promise is also called the ‘blind promise’ or the ‘rash boon’ in Stith Thompson’s motif index. This motif refers to a narrative that involves the granting of an unspecified gift. The gift may be seen as a one-off reward, whose content is subject to the desire of the receiver. Once the verbal agreement is given, the gift-giver becomes exposed to exploitation and ethical risks. In the rash promise episodes, the giver of the gift is usually a lord or a lady. Once the gift is granted and its

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content defined by the receiver, the gift-giver often finds him or herself trapped in a moral dilemma, since fulfilling the promises can harm the interests of the community.

In an oral culture, the individual’s faithfulness to his or her words is highly valued. In chivalric romance, a promise given in public has the binding power of an oath, even though a promise of gift and an oath of fealty represent two types of relationships. The offer of a gift seals a temporary and horizontal bond, which differs from the long-term vertical bond between a lord and a vassal. The vertical bond involves a vassal’s homage and a lord’s reward in the form of land tenure, sanctioned by an oath. Gifts that are not in the form of land tenure mark the so-called ‘Bastard Feudalism’, which characterizes the social structure founded on the bond of service in late medieval England.

According to medieval laws and customs, to betray one’s oath was not only a serious sin but also a punishable crime. The oath was modelled on sacred covenants, whose validity is defined by the correspondence between words and actions. It symbolized a relationship built on trust. For a feudal lord, being unfaithful to his words can undermine his credibility and his authority among his subjects. This cultural insurance was the foundation of the governing structure, and is recognized by all the subjects: ‘reciprocity was the hallmark of the feudal bond, and the specification of mutual obligation gave a measure of security to the vassal. If the vassal was alleged to have violated his oath by failure to perform his service, or by disloyalty, the lord could not punish him without first securing the judgment of the vassal’s peers in a formal court proceeding’. Hence, a verbal promise

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served as a form of social contract. The validity of the agreement, therefore, also depends on a community with necessary means to punish those who fail to keep their promises.

Largess, or the reputation of generosity, is one of the key virtues of chivalry and nobility. The root of this word, *generosus*, means noble birth. The most powerful knights were also fief-holders and lords of many retainers, and were expected to be generous with their possessions. Further, generosity encourages the loyalty of the subjects and increases the likelihood of timely help and political alliance in war. The ‘generosity topos’ sometimes anticipates a rash promise.

The flexibility of the blind promise can be exploited. Some gift promises are not forced to be kept by law. For example, the thirteenth-century jurist of Clermont Philip de Beaumanoir writes the following custom concerning risky gift-giving:

> Chascuns doit savoir que tuit li don qui sont fet contre Dieu, ou contre sainte Eglise, ou contre le commun pourfit, ou contre bonnes meurs, ou en desertant autrui, ne font pas a tenir; ainçois doivent estre despecié et anienti comme cil qui sont de nule valeur; et aussi disons nous que nule pramesse qui soit fete contre aucune des choses dessus dites ne doit estre paeie. (§1969)

[Everyone must know that all gifts that are made against God, or against the Holy Church, or against the common wealth, or against morality, or which disinherit someone, are not to be kept; instead they must be broken down and destroyed like those of no worth; and we also say that anything promised in exchange for any of the above gifts should not be paid.]

This legal explanation shows that not all acts of generosity are ethically sound. In the world of romance, however, the failure to fulfil a promise incurs shame, thus a rash promise often prompts a chain of reactions until justice is restored. Romance authors invent various situations where the act of gift-giving demands ethical constraints, and showcase individual approaches to the ‘damage control’ after the promises are fulfilled.

In the prose *Tristan*, the horizontal bond formed through gift-giving is sometimes reversed. In the conventional cases, a stranger requires a blind gift from a lord or a lady in order to get what he cannot have. In the reverse cases, the feudal lord may request a blind

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217 Richard Firth Green notes that the spread of literacy and the shift to written record are the end products of a slow transition from ‘a local, oral, and traditional culture to a centralized, literate, and progressive one’. Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 123.

218 Barber, pp. 33-34.

219 The verbal promises in literary texts are more reliable than the written covenants used historically for social transactions. Nevertheless, it was the written contract that eventually developed into a legalized institution. See Richard Biernacki, ‘Cultural Coherence in Early Modern England: The Invention of Contract’, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 2, 3 (2014), 277-99.


221 Akehurst, p. 720.
gift from a subject to manipulate his or her action. These transformations of the conventional motif are developed in the adaptation to reflect the changed relationship between feudal lords and their subjects. Malory critically reconstructs the cases of the ‘rash promise’ to demonstrate the importance of precautions in speech. In Walter Ong’s words, every individual in such a context must never let down his or her ‘oral guard’. His adaptation shows that even in the absence of rituals, an individual involved in the promise of a gift should be morally conscious in the use of speech. In particular, the narratives highlight reason and honour (or ‘worship’) as the premises of gift-giving. The benefactor may call upon communally accepted moral principles to avoid deliberate manipulation without sacrificing generosity or faithfulness.

**Why Rash?**

“Rash” indicates a lack of prudence in the process of decision-making. Promising a gift to be defined by the gift-seeker is an irrational act of grace, as it exposes the gift-giver to unforeseeable costs. Conventionally, the king who gives a rash promise will have to pay the price for his imprudence. An archetypal case of a rash promise can be found in the New Testament (Mark 6:22-29): King Herod was pleased with his daughter’s dance and granted her a gift. She received instruction from her mother Herodias to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The king regretted his promise, but kept his word and presented John’s head to her in a platter. In Oscar Wilde’s interpretation of the story in *Salome*, the causes of Herod’s rash promise were inebriation and incestuous lust. In the folkloric transformations of this motif, several features are detectable. First, an individual acquires the rash promise from a king or an overlord through some form of sensual temptation. Second, an unexpected request is made and the gift-giver regrets the promise; third, despite his reluctance, the benefactor delivers the gift and suffers the loss with his community.

In medieval romances, music can be a form of sensual temptation. A good performance can lure the audience into granting a blind promise. This is the case in the lay *Sir Orfeo* and the earlier versions of the Tristan legend. In *Sir Orfeo*, the king of the underworld promises a gift to the ‘minstrel’ as a reward or payment for his service:

‘Menstrel, me liketh well thi gle.
Now aske of me what it be,
Largelich ichil the pay;
Now speke, and tow might asay.’ (vss.449-52)

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Orpheus asks for the return of his wife. The king first expresses his regrets and rejects it, but when Orpheus insists that the king keep his word, the latter eventually delivers the queen as promised.

The Middle English *Sir Tristrem* also presents musical performance as a form of sensual temptation, but adds a twist to the conventional scenario. First, King Mark loses his queen to a harper because of a rash promise:

Mark seyd, "Lat me se
Harpi hou thou can
And what thou askest me
Give Y schal the than."
"Blethely," seyd he;
A miri lay he bigan.
"Sir King, of giftes fre,
Herwith Ysonde Y wan
Bidene.
Y prove the for fals man
Or Y schal have thi Quen." (vss. 1827-38)224

Mark lets Isode go with the harper in order to preserve his 'manhood' ("Lesen Y mot mi manhed / Or yeld Ysonde me fro", vss. 1840-41). Later, his nephew wins the queen back also through a musical performance. Disguised, Tristram plays the rote to cheer Isode up and to get closer to her so that they may escape together on a steed. Tristan’s winning by music in this narrative demonstrates both his Wittiness and his renowned musical skills (vss.1913-14). A similar plot is found in the Old Norse Saga of the *Tristan* legend, which narrates the abduction of Isode from Ireland by a stranger with a golden harp.225 This indicates that the rash promise episode was transmitted from an earlier version of the Tristan legend, possibly that attributed to Thomas.226 Both *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Tristrem* are of Celtic origin and both greatly mystifies the power of minstrelsy.

In the historical setting of the stories discussed above, married women were considered men’s lawful possession, therefore the will of the wives is seldom considered. The ethical focus falls on the response of the deprived husbands. In the cases discussed above, the blind promise becomes a clever tactic to ‘legally’ rob the kings of their wives. No reader or audience would condemn Orfeo’s use of the blind promise, since his queen was

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225 Lacroix and Walter, pp. 562-63.
226 This episode also appears in other derivatives of Thomas’s version, such as Gottfried’s poem, the Oxford *Folie Tristan*, and the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*. See Helaine Newstead, ‘The Harp and the Rote: An Episode in the Tristan Legend and its Literary History’, *Romance Philology*, XXII, 4 (1969), 463-70 (p. 463).
‘snatched away’ by force in the first place, and he only uses his intelligence and skill to regain his own wife. However, the harper’s strategy to win Isode in *Sir Tristrem* would appear immoral to a reader who sympathizes with the queen, but the blind promise allows the harper to use moral accusation against King Mark to achieve his goal: ‘Y prove the for fals man / Or Y schal have thi Quen’. The king sees not keeping his oral agreement as the greater evil, and surrenders his queen. The blind promise is thus used to subvert the vertical relationship between a king and a subject (or an inferior like a minstrel). The king is compelled by his own words to submit to the latter’s will.

In a perfectly normal situation, a rational person will demand an evidence of trustworthiness before forming the bond of gift with a stranger. The person requesting the favour will need to justify his or her motivation. This is shown in a passage adapted from *L’Histoire du Merlin*, which Malory reworks to a great extent. In the original text, Merlin is disguised as a freeman who has just caught some wild birds. King Arthur asks to buy the birds, and Merlin asks for a third of Arthur’s treasure yet to be dug up from the ground.\(^{227}\) Malory adds a ‘rash promise’ twist to this episode. In his version, when the disguised Merlin asks King Arthur for an unspecified gift, the king first demands an explanation:

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\[\begin{align*}
\text{‘Sir,’ seyde Merlion unto the kynge, ‘woll ye geff me a gyffte?’} \\
\text{‘Wherefore,’ seyde Kynge Arthure, ‘sholde I gyff the a gyffte, chorle?’} \\
\text{‘Sir,’ seyd Merlion, ‘ye were bettir to gyff me a gyffte that ys nat in youre honde than to lose grete rycheesse. For here in the same place there the grete batayle was, ys grete tresoure hydde in the erthe.’ (31.9-15)} \\
\end{align*}\]

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King Arthur, unable to see through Merlin’s disguise, questions the latter’s trustworthiness as well as his right to be rewarded. It is possible that Merlin, a shapeshifter and a trickster, does this both to test the king’s judgment and to convince the king of his supernatural abilities. Merlin’s response is interesting in that he does not directly answer the king’s question, but proposes an exchange - he warns the king of losing ‘grete rycheesse’ because of his reluctance to give a gift. This conversation shows that Arthur is prudent in speech, for he does not easily promise an unspecified gift to a ‘churl’.\(^{228}\)

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\(^{228}\) In Middle English, this noun can either refer to those who do not belong to the class of nobility or clergy, or ‘a person lacking in refinement, learning, or morals’. Merlin disguises himself ‘in blacke shepis skynnnes, and a grete payre of bootis, and a boowe and arowis, in a russet gowne, and brought wylde gyese in hys honde’ (31.4-7). King Arthur’s judgement of Merlin is based on the latter’s appearance and manners, therefore it is likely that he is emphasizing on Merlin’s lack of refinement rather than his low birth. Merlin often appears as the Wildman in romances such as *L’Histoire du Merlin* and *Le Roman de Silence*. See MED: [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED7461](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED7461).
The gift-giver allows himself to be exploited when he lacks discernment or is over-confident about himself. He assumes the capacity to satisfy any desire of another individual. In practice, however, it is only ethical to fulfil another's desire when what is desired is good and attainable. In most cases, however, the reason for securing a promise of an unspecified gift in advance is because the request is going to be extravagant or transgressive, and it would not be granted if asked in normal ways. Malory reveals that over-confidence, or pride, in one’s own ability to meet another’s need can cause a knight to be too generous in his promise, like in the case of Sir Tor:

‘What wolle ye with me?’ seyde Sir Torre.
‘I beseche the,’ seyde the damesell, ‘for Kynge Arthurs love, gyff me a gyffte, I requyre the, jantill knyght, as thou arte a jantillman.’
‘Now,’ seyde Sir Torre, ‘aske a gyffte and I woll gyff hit you.’
‘Grauntemercy,’ seyde the damesell. ‘Now I aske the hede of thys false knyght Abelleus, for he ys the moste outerageous knyght that lyvith, and the grettist murtherer.’
‘I am lothe,’ seyde Sir Torre, ‘of that gyffte I have gyvyn you, but lette hym make amendys in that he hathe trespassed agayne you.’ (90.12-22)

Knowing that Tor is eager to prove himself, the damsel tempts him by making several references to his new identity as a knight in King Arthur’s court. She requests the gift in the name of ‘Kynge Arthurs love’, and calls him a ‘jantill knyght’ and ‘jantillman’. This newly acquired title no doubt flatters the young man, who up to this point has been seen as the son of a cowherd. Pleased with her ‘confidence’ in his ability to solve her problems, Tor recklessly trusts a stranger whom he barely knows. As a result, he is troubled when he finds out that the girl demands the life of another knight. Fortunately, it turns out that the damsel has good reason to request such a gift, for the knight has mercilessly killed her brother, and is ‘the falsyste knyght lyvynge, and a grete destroyer of men’ (30-31). Tor chooses to keep his promise, and later Merlin prophesies to King Arthur that Tor will prove to be ‘jantyl and curteyse and of good tacchys, and passyng trew of hys promyse, and never shall he outerage’ (91.33-35). Hence, the importance of being true to one’s promise cannot be overemphasized in Malory’s narrative.

Positive Motivation and Outcomes

Other reasons for granting a blind gift can be natural love or the desire for good reputation. The person giving the gift does not doubt the trustworthiness of the person receiving the gift, and expresses love and trust by promising to fulfill any wish the latter may have. In some cases, the requested gift can result in an ethical outcome for those involved. For example, in the prose Tristan, the young hero uses a rash promise to save his
stepmother’s life. Prior to this event, the evil stepmother tries to murder the prince in order to secure royal inheritance for her son. Her plot is discovered by the king and she is sentenced to death. Just before the execution, Tristan asks for an unconditional gift from his father:

Et quant il entent que la roïne devoit morir por ceste achoison, il n’en parole plus, ne a cesti, ne a cest autre, enz s’en vient droit devant le roi, son pere, et s’agenoille, et li prie qu’il li doint un don. Et cil ne pensast jamés qu’il li vosist ce demander, car sanz faille il ne li donast pas adont; si dit : ‘Filz, demande, et je te donrai, car tu iês la chose ou monde que je plus aim, si ne te veeroie je riens ; moi meïsmes metroie je por ta vie sauver, se je le poioie faire.’ (Curtis I, §255)

[And when he heard that the queen ought to have died for this reason, he said nothing more, neither to this or to that, but went straight to the king, his father, kneeled before him, and asked if he might grant him a gift. The king never thought what his son was going to request; had he known, he surely would not have granted it; but he said: ‘son, ask and I will give it to you; because I love you more than anyone in the world, I shall refuse you nothing; I would forsake my own life to save yours, if I could.’]

As it turns out, Tristan desires his father to pardon the queen. The king expresses regret at once, and tries to persuade his son that it is reasonable to punish ‘murte et traison’(Curtis I, §256) [murder and treason]. He suspects that someone else had taught his son to make such a request, since in his eyes the false queen does not deserve forgiveness from by the very child she attempted to kill. Tristan reassures his father that his request is motivated purely by ‘reson et droiture’ [reason and righteousness], and achieves his end. This episode exemplifies a positive employment of the rash promise, since it proves to be a necessary strategy for ethical optimization, which is forgiveness and reconciliation.

Malory modifies this episode to introduce a debate on law and mercy. The conversation between the father and the son highlights the conflicting views concerning just punishment and forgiveness:

‘That is unryghtfully asked,’ seyde the Kynge Melyodas, ‘for thou ought of ryght to hate hir, for she wolde have slayne the with poysion, and for thy sake moste is my cause that she sholde be dede.’

‘Sir,’ seyde Trystrams, ‘as for that, I beseche you of your mercy that ye woll forgyn hir. And as for my parte, God forgyn hir and I do. And for hit lyked so muche youre hyghenesse to graunte me my boone, for Goddis love I requyre you holde your promyse.’

‘Syetthen hit is so,’ seyde the kynge, ‘I wol that ye habe pryf,’ and sayde: ‘I gyff hir to you, and go ye to the fyre and take hir, and do with hir what ye woll.’ (292.22-28)

As the supreme judge in his kingdom, King Meliodas deems Tristram’s request to be ‘unryghtful’ because the victim ‘ought of right to hate’ the criminal. In Middle English, the
term ‘right’ can refer either to moral rectitude or legal justice. Here it highlights Tristram’s legal power to seek revenge according to the law of retaliation. The protagonist, however, emphasizes the moral superiority of forgiveness. He justifies his will to ‘forgyff’ the trespass referring to divine grace - ‘God forgyff hir and I do’, and ‘for Goddis love’ the king ought to be faithful to his promise. This conversation exemplifies Tristram’s virtue of compassion, which causes him to strive for a more ethical outcome than the legal solution through a rash promise.

Malory further reveals the power of forgiveness by changing the ensuing narrative of the queen’s reaction to Tristram’s kindness. In the source text, the queen continues to plot against Tristan until he leaves Lyoness. In Malory’s version, she experiences a transformation of heart because of her gratitude towards Tristram. We are told that the queen ‘never hate hym more afftir, but ever loved hym and gaff hym many grete gyftys; for every astate loved hym where that he wente’ (293.29-32). Through the renewal of this episode, Malory demonstrates the desirability of merciful acts in terms of affective and material benefits.

As mentioned above, liberality is a defining virtue of nobility. Poets and romancers often remind those belonging to the noble and gentry classes of their reputation concerning gift-giving. For example, in the thirteenth-century didactic treatise, Le Roman des eles, the author suggests that a miser is unwilling to fulfill a gift promise, and therefore his promise is considered worthless:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Mes li avers est d’autre afere,} \\
\text{Que se il done, tant tendra} \\
\text{Son don que gré ne l’en savra} \\
\text{Cil qui reçoit ; et s’il promet,} \\
\text{Tantes aquiteüres met} \\
\text{En sa promesse, qu’esraument} \\
\text{Puet l’en savoir certainement} \\
\text{Que sa promesse est nule chose. (vss. 84-91)}
\end{align*}
\]

[But the miser is of a different nature, for if he gives, he will hold his gift back so long that he who receives it will not feel any gratitude towards him; and if the miser makes a promise, he will place so many conditions on it that one can certainly tell at once that his promise is worthless].

The author does not forget to advise that a knight should only make a promise if he is ready to give what it requires or pay the price (vss.193-208). This moral expectation is often

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229 The relevant definitions of ‘right’ in the MED are: 1.b-moral rectitude, righteousness, c-a right action, good deed; 2.a-that which is just, justice, equity, c-justice as opposed to mercy; 3.a-a rule of conduct, a law; also, the law of a land. See https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED37508.

230 Busby, p. 33., translation is from the same edition, p.162.
implied in the ‘generosity topos’ in romance narratives, where a stranger coming from the outside world uses the praise of the lord’s or his court’s reputation of generosity as the prompt of a request. The generosity topos often functions as a prelude to the rash promise.

In the ‘Fair Unknown’ narratives, most of the unspecified gifts are no more ambitious than the ritual of the accolade or the permission to go on a quest. The obscure young man may employ the strategy of the rash promise to receive knighthood, particularly when his apparent identity or background does not meet certain requirements of nobility. The need to evoke the ‘generosity topos’ is explicit, because even though a person’s desire for the accolade seems harmless, his lack of credentials challenges the court’s endorsement of inherited titles. For example, Tristan knights a French squire when he stays in Ireland. In the source text, the squire manipulates Tristan when he learns the latter’s fear of discovery. He agrees to keep the knowledge to himself in exchange of a blind gift:

Et quant Tristan le voit, il a paor qu’il ne le face reconoistre; si li defent qu’il ne die son non a home qui li demant. Et il dit que non fera il. ‘Mes je vos pri por Dieu que vos me doigniez un don.’ Et il dit que volentiers, ‘se c’est chose que je puisse faire, ne ne doie.’ Et cil l’en mercie mout durement, et li dit: ‘Sire, savez vos quel don vos m’avez doné?’ ‘Nenil,’ fait Tristan. ‘Sire, fait il, ce est que vos me feroiz demen chevalier, sans plus de delai.’ ‘Et je le ferai, ce dit Tristanz, puis que je le t’ai otroie.’ (Curtis I, §320)

[And when Tristan saw him, he feared that the squire might expose him, so he forbade him to tell his name to anyone who should ask. The squire said he would not do so. ‘However, I pray, for God’s sake, that you grant me a gift.’ And Tristan said he would give it willingly, ‘if it is something I can do, and not that I shouldn’t.’ The man thanked him sincerely, and said: ‘Sir, do you know what you have given me?’ ‘No,’ said Tristan. ‘Sir,’ he said, ‘it is that you make me a knight tomorrow, without delay.’ ‘And I will do it,’ thus answered Tristan, ‘since I have promised you.’]

The squire takes advantage of Tristan’s fear to secure a conditional exchange. Tristan only adds two restraints as the terms of the exchange: he will only do what he can do (‘puisse faire’), and he will do nothing that he shouldn’t do (‘ne doie’). Tristan’s formulation of the promise implies that he may reject a request if it is beyond his ability or violates his moral principles, therefore it greatly reduces his risk. Nevertheless, it remains a ‘rash promise’ because the gift is considered ‘doné’ [given] at a point when Tristan is still ignorant of its content.

Malory seems to have found such a use of the motif redundant, because he turns the request of the squire, whose name is Hebes, into a straightforward demand. The promise of a blind gift is completely omitted in his adaptation:

‘Sir,’ seyde Hebes, ‘I woll nat discovir your name but yf ye commaunde me.’
Than Sir Trystramys asked hym what he ded in this contreys.
‘Sir,’ he seyde, ‘I com hydir with Sir Gawayne for to be made knyght, and yf hit please you of your hondis that I may be made knyght.’
‘Well, awayte on me as to-morne secretly, and in the fylde I shall make you knyght.’
(304.3-10)

In this conversation, the squire agrees to keep the secret unconditionally, thus he avoids the unethic element of exploiting another person’s fear for personal gain. When Tristram asks his purpose of visiting Ireland, he reveals that his original plan was to be made a knight by Gawain. However, he prefers to be knighted by Tristram, to which the latter immediately consents. At this point, Tristram is still a young knight whose only chivalric deed is the single combat with Marhalt. His fame and social status cannot possibly match Gawain. Hebes’ decision to be secretly knighted by the young knight who is hiding in a foreign land sheds interesting light on the mystery of chivalric identity. Malory’s modification of this dialogue improves the morality of both characters.

As mentioned previously, the generosity topos often begins the narrative of the ‘Fair Unknown’. For example, in the prose Tristan’s version of ‘la Cote Mautaillee’, the young protagonist praises ‘la grant renomee’ [the great renown] of the king’s generosity and justice, especially towards ‘les orfelins et les veves’ (Curtis II, §637) [the orphans and the widows]. He then asks the king to make him a knight, because it will not bring him dishonor. In Malory’s ‘Book of Sir Gareth’, which is probably adapted from the narrative of la Cote Mautaillee, the same strategy is employed to initiate a rash promise. Gareth knows that the king is unlikely to grant him three blind gifts without good reasons, therefore he adds self-imposed conditions to his request:

‘[T]hey shall nat be unresonablé asked but that ye may worshypfully graunte hem me, and to you no grete hurte nother losse. And the fyrste done and gyffte I woll aske now, and the tothir too gyfftes I woll aske this day twelve-monthe, whereso\-mer ye holde your hyghe feste’ (224.7-11).

Gareth mentions three moral constraints: first, they will not be unreasonably asked, hence his wishes will be in accordance with reason; second, the gifts will be worshipfully given, meaning they will increase the king’s honour; third, they will not cause harm or loss to the king, therefore the king can be reassured of Gareth’s good will. These conditions reveal the moral consciousness of Gareth, and provide the king with evidence to believe that his generosity will have an ethical outcome. The speech invented by Malory exemplifies Gareth’s moral character.

One of the qualifiers that often accompany ‘worship’ in Malory’s text is the fidelity to one’s pledge. The phrase ‘true of his promyse’ is an important aspect of a knight’s chivalric identity and noble character. Leitch notes that ‘Malory writes about and valorizes an imagined period when oral oaths underpinned society, yet he also traces fifteenth-century
legality onto it, bringing it closer to contemporary experience’. Written covenants were used in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries concerning such diverse matters such as land tenancy, horse-lending in a jousting event, and marriage. Verbal agreements in Malory hold the same legal power as any written contracts, and the characters acknowledge their moral obligation to act out their words. It is only desirable for the community to enforce an agreement if it is based on good will and mutual consent. The added conditions of reason and worship therefore appeal to the communal expectation of ethical motivation.

As we have seen in the case of Hebes’ request for the accolade, the prose Tristan narrator’s attitude toward the rash promise is neutral: it is just a means to an end. Malory’s knightly characters are more reluctant to employ this strategy even when they have a chance to do. This attitude is more evident in his adaptation of Tristan’s quest to seek Isode’s hand for King Mark. In the earlier versions, the Irish King promises that whoever slays the dragon can claim Isode as his bride, and Tristan succeeds in this quest but gives her to his uncle. In the prose Tristan, the protagonist’s ship is first carried by a storm to a place near Camelot, and he learns that the King of Ireland has been accused in King Arthur’s court and needs a champion to fight for him in the trial combat. Tristan comes to King Anguish and offers to fight the duel for him, but requests a blind gift in exchange:

Quant Tristanz entent ceste parole, il en est mout liez et mout joianz, car or li est il bien avis qu’il porra tant faire a cest point que li rois li otroiera Yselt, et li donra a faire sa volenté; si respont: ‘Sire, mout avez fait por moi, et je referai por vos ceste chose par covent que vos m’otroiez un don après ce que je avrai mené a fin ceste chose.’ Et li rois li otroie. (Curtis I, §410)

[When Tristan heard this speech, he was delighted and overjoyed, because now it seemed clear to him that he could then do such things so that the king will give him Isode to do what he wants with her; thus he replied: ‘lord, you have done much for me, and I shall do this for you in return if you promise me a gift after I bring this trial to an end.’ And the king granted it.]

The king has reason to trust Tristan because the latter had served in his court not long ago, but Tristan’s request leaves the king no choice but to grant a blind gift. This conversation reveals Tristan’s opportunistic tendency in character. Malory reduces the role of chance and the potential risk in the speech of both Tristan and the King. Before Tristram meets the king of Ireland, he hears about his situation and perceives the latter’s urgent need: ‘I dere say there is no knyght in this contrey that is nat of Arthures courte that dare do batayle wyth

231 Leitch, p. 105.
233 Another example is Malory’s rationalization of the ‘rudderless boat’ motif by providing Tristan with a good cause to seek remedy for his poisoned wound in Ireland, ‘the same contrey that the venym cam fro’ (301.16-17).
Sir Blamoure de Ganys. And for to wynne the love of the Kynge of Irelonde I woll take the batayle uppon me’ (322.1-4). He is prompted by compassion to do the battle, in the hope of winning the love of King Anguish. Further, before Tristram demands a reward for his service, he first asks the king to promise that his cause will be a just one:

‘Sir,’ seyde Sir Trystrames, ‘for the good lordehyp ye shewed unto me in Irelonde and for my lady youre doughtirs sake, La Beale Isode, I woll take the batayle for you uppon this conclucion, that ye shall graunte me too thynges: one is that ye shall swere unto me that ye ar in the right and that ye were never consentynge to the knyghtis deth. Also sir,’ than seyde Sir Trystramys, ‘whan I have done this batayle, yf God gyff me grace to spede, that ye shall gyff me a rewarde what thyng resonable that I woll aske you.’ (323.5-12)

Tristram reveals his primary concern for moral probity. He first needs to know that he is championing for the right cause (‘ye ar in the right’), and then sets an ethical constraint on his own behaviour. He promises to ask a gift that is ‘resonable’. The qualifier ‘resonable’ shows the hero’s reluctance to exploit the king in his distress. These terms ensure both sides of the agreement behave according to shared moral principles.

After winning the combat, the protagonist asks the king to give his daughter to Mark. In the prose Tristan, King Anguish immediately consents to this arrangement. In Malory’s text, however, he urges Tristram to marry Isode himself, and expresses his regret when he sees that the knight is determined to satisfy his uncle’s desire: ‘“[a]las!” seyde the kynge, “I had lever than all the londe that I have that ye wolde have wedded hir yourself”’ (327.3-4). The king’s regret shows his foresight and reveals that despite his trust in Tristan’s moral character, his blind promise turns out to be rash after all. In King Anguish’s eyes, Tristram’s request is unreasonable, since Isode has evidently fallen in love with Tristram. The narrator tells us that when Tristram returns to Ireland with the king: ‘the joy that La Beale Isode made of Sir Trystrames there myght no tunge telle, for of all men ethely she loved hym moste’ (326.28-30). The young hero insists to fulfil his uncle’s desire, and the king of Ireland finally concedes: ‘if that ye lyste to wedde hir yourselff, that is me leveste; and yf ye woll gyff hir unto Kynge Marke your uncle, that is in your choyse’ (327.10-13).

Malory’s adaptation of King Anguish’s rash promise shows that the constraints of reason and worship are not sufficient to ensure an ethical outcome. The author is silent about Isode’s reaction, and clumsily covers up her inevitable sense of disappointment with the phrase ‘so, to make shorte conclusion, La Beale Isode was made redy …’ (327.14-15). As Cooper suggests, in Middle English romances, marriages are more often arranged...
according to the heroines’ desire. Malory’s treatment of the events preceding the conventional *topoi* of the love affair between Tristram and Isode turns the heroine into an unhappy victim of arranged marriage. Her tragedy is not caused by the magic-induced lustful passion, but by her lack of authority to marry the man she loves.

**Resistance and Restoration**

The cases discussed above show that the rash promise can be used to manipulate a person. Since the gift-giver has given consent to the demand in the first place, the person making the request is exempted from legal punishment or moral condemnation even if his or her intention harms the benefactor’s personal interests. The gift-giver is then left to choose between two evils: to suffer the loss of possession or bad reputation. In some cases, the cost of keeping a promise can be so high that acting against one’s words becomes the lesser evil.

The most obvious way to resist an immoral request is the direct refusal to fulfil the promise. King Arthur uses this strategy once in the episode of ‘Balyn le Sauvage’, and the outcome is disastrous. Previously, the king asked for the sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake and promised to give her ‘what gyftte that ye woll ask’ (43.32-33). When the lady arrives at court and asks for either the head of Balyn or that of a damsel, King Arthur immediately declines. He defends himself by referring to ‘worship’ despite the fact that worship was not part of their original agreement. ‘Truly,’ seyde Kynge Arthure, ‘I may nat graunte you nother of theire hedys with my worship; therefore aske what ye woll els, and I shall fulfille youre desire.’ ‘I woll aske none other thynge,’ seyde the lady. (51.14-17) In the source text, the *Suite du Merlin*, Arthur shows more respect for his promise and reacts to this request with strong emotions: he is stunned and perplexed. He explains why he cannot give such a gift – ‘a mauvaisce e a folonie nel peust atorner si ieo fesoie occire aucun de ces .ii. qui de riens ne m’ont forfait’ (fol.248v) [‘I must not commit such evil and felony as to kill either of these two people who have done nothing against me’]. He asks the damsel to change her mind, but before she could answer, Balin beheads her with a sword and thus puts an end to the king’s dilemma. In Malory’s version, King Arthur’s rash promise is caused by his greed for the sword, and his failure to fulfil the promise and do justice to the lady’s request leads to the astonishing murder in his court. The same flaw of arbitrariness is reflected in Balin’s decision to keep the sword he achieved from the damsel against the

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234 In the prose *Tristan*, up to this point Isode has shown no particular preference for any of her suitors in Ireland, including Tristram. In Malory, however, she has given Tristram a ring and promised him not to marry for seven years. For the active role of the heroines in Middle English romances, see Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 222.
latter’s will. Neither behaves morally in this episode, and as a result Balin goes into exile and
dies of his own sword.

When faced with the dilemma, most characters in Malory’s narrative choose to honour
their words and deliver the gifts despite the risks. However, both king figures – King Arthur
and King Mark, fail to honour their words in certain situations. As shown above, King Arthur
fails to fulfil his promise to the Lady of the Lake, and in a later episode, King Mark fails to
keep his promise to King Arthur. This takes place when Mark follows Tristram to Arthur’s
court. King Arthur requests a blind gift from King Mark just before he returns to Cornwall with
his nephew, to which Mark consents. Arthur demands that the latter shall ‘be good lorde
unto Sir Trystram, for he is a man of grete honoure’ (483.10-13). Even though King Arthur
takes extra caution and compels Mark to ‘swere that uppon a booke’ (483.21), Mark still
betrays his promise and imprisons his nephew at the first opportunity.

Malory brings out the ethical significance of this episode through communal witness
and condemnation. Knights who are good friends of Tristram and know Mark’s character
predict Mark’s treachery:

Sir Trystram made hym redy to ryde with hym, whereof the moste party of the Rounde
Table were wrothe and hevy. And in especial Sir Launcelot and Sir Lameroke and Sir
Dynadan were wrothe oute of mesure, for well they wyste that Kynge Marke wolde sle
or destroy Sir Trystram.
‘Alas!’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘that my lorde Sir Trystram shall depart!’ (483.27-33).

Lancelot directly confronts King Arthur and uses a strong expression to reveal that the ritual
of oath-taking cannot change King Mark’s moral character: ‘fye on that accorde! For ye shall
here that he shall destroy Sir Trystram other put hym into preson, for he is the moste
cowarde and the vylaunste kynge and knyght that is now lyvyng’ (484.7-10). Lancelot’s
words turn out to be true. This conversation invented by Malory presents a disillusioned
understanding of ritualized oaths: where there is no powerful agency to monitor or punish
the execution of a promise, a formal oath of an immoral person is as useless as any of his
utterance. In other words, the rash promise strategy only works if the law-maker upholds his
ethical principles. It would not pose real challenge to any feudal lord who cares little about
their honour and are not ‘true of their promises’.

Communal witness turns a verbal agreement into a binding contract, whose validity
depends not only on the gift-giver’s conscience, but also on external pressure. Historically,
the feudal court may send out knights as its agency to supervise law enforcement or to
judge in local courts. Since the rash promise often results in a regretful transaction, its
fulfilment would involve the benefactor’s personal sacrifice. Often the expected ‘poetic
justice’ is then achieved through a loyal knight’s quest. As romance is more interested in the
interpersonal bonds that motivate decisions, it interprets the knight’s willingness to rescue a lady in terms of private dedication, even a sexual bond. It is often argued that in the French roman courtois, a knight’s fealty to the feudal lord is expressed in the form of amorous devotion to his liege lady. ‘What really happens is that the object of loyalty is transferred from one plateau to another.’

Scholars suggests that Malory tried to move away from the romantic inclination to emphasize kingship and male friendship (fellowship) following the epic and chronicle traditions. Malory’s unique approach to the question of love and duty can be observed in the conclusions of the following rash promise episodes.

The early versions of Arthurian romance condemn the exploiter who abuses trust through the rash promise. For example, in Chrétien’s Le Chevalier de la charrette, Meleagant comes to King Arthur’s court and challenges the king to send Guinevere on a quest with the company of a single knight. The king refuses to answer the challenge, but Kay feels ashamed and threatens to leave the court. When the king sends Guinevere to talk to Kay, she agrees to give the latter a blind gift in order to retain him at court. In this case, the queen seems to deserve sympathy rather than blame:

\[
\begin{align*}
Avoec la reïne an va Kes ; \\
Si sont devant le roi venu : \\
‘Sire, je ai Keu retenu, \\
Fet la reïne, a grant travail ; \\
Mes par un covant le vos bail \\
Que vos feroiz ce qu’il dira.’ \\
Le roi de joie an sopira \\
Et dit que son comandemant \\
Fera, que que il li demant. (vss.161-70)
\end{align*}
\]

[So Kay goes away with the Queen to the King’s presence. The Queen says: ‘I have had hard work to detain Kay; but I have brought him here to you with the understanding that you will do what he is going to ask.’ The King sighed with joy, and said that he would perform whatever request he might make.]

Later, Kay recites the queen’s promise to force Arthur and Guinevere to allow him to go on this dangerous adventure with the queen. He is blamed by the whole court for the shameful loss that the court has to suffer, which is then restored through Lancelot’s intervention.

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236 Ibid. pp. 61-63. Also, Cooper, ‘The Book of Sir Tristram’, p. 185.
In the case discussed above, the poet draws attention to the affective manipulation by Meleagant and Kay. Both knights manage to exert emotional pressure on their subjects to achieve what they desire. Guinevere is less to blame since she acts on King Arthur’s behalf to persuade Kay to stay in court. Hence, the duty of restoring the queen is communally shared. The two best knights, Gawain and Lancelot, both set off to rescue the queen, but Gawain diverges from the course when he finds the quest too dangerous or humiliating. Only Lancelot is able to endure the trial, motivated by his passionate love for the queen. This treatment of the motif where a courtly lady’s rash promise allows another knight to carry her off, only to be saved by her lover, is present in the Tristan legends. In the verse versions, as shown above, it is the king who makes the rash promise to a minstrel. In the prose Tristan, Yseut entrapns herself in a rash promise and leaves the court with Palomides.

As it often does, the prose Tristan contains a former event that contrasts with Yseut’s experience. Tristan has a love affair with the wife of a knight in King Mark’s court before Yseut arrives in Cornwall. One day, Blioberis arrives at the court with the request of a blind gift. The conversation between Blioberis and King Mark reveals the latter’s imprudence:

Li chevaliers entre dedenz et salue le roi et puis toute la compaignie, et puis dit: ‘Rois Mars, done moi un don. Chevaliers erranz sui. Se tu m’en escondiz, honiz iës.’ Li rois, qui voit devant li toz les meilleurs chevaliers de Cornoaille, n’ose escondire le chevalier aventureus, enz li otroie ce qu’il li demande; mes ençois li demande son non. ‘Rois, fait il, je sui apeler Blioberis ; del parenté le roi Ban de Benoïc sui estraiz. Assez po me poez conoistre, car je n’ai pas esté granment chevaliers erranz. Et neporquant, quiez que je soie, bons ou mauves, me veus tu doner ce que je te demanderai?’ ‘Oïl, fait li rois, je le te doing, se je bien i devoie avoir grant domaige.’ ‘Granz merciz, fait li chevaliers. Et sez tu que tu me dones ?’ ‘Nenil’, fait li rois. ‘Tu m’as donë, fait li chevaliers, que je en porterai avec moi une des dames ou des demoiseles qui mieuz me plera.’ ‘Et vos l’oiez’, fait li rois. (Curtis I, §375)

[The knight entered and greeted the king, then all his companions. Then he said to him: ‘King Mark, grant me a gift. I am a knight errant. It will be your shame to reject my request.’ The king, who saw all of the best knights in Cornwall before him, dared not refuse this adventurous knight, and promised to give him what he requested; but first he asked his name. ‘King,’ he answered, ‘my name is Blioberis; I am a descendent of King Ban of Benoïc. You could not have heard much about me, because I have not been a knight errant for very long. Nevertheless, whether I be good or bad, will you give me what I am about to ask?’ ‘Yes,’ the king answered, ‘I shall give it to you, even if it should do me great harm.’ ‘Many thanks,’ the knight replied. ‘Do you know what you have given me?’ ‘No,’ the king said. ‘You have granted me,’ said the knight, ‘to take the lady that I like most away with me.’ ‘And you shall have it,’ said the king.]

It seems that what causes King Mark to satisfy Blioberis’ desire is his fear of being seen as a miser. After learning about the latter’s identity, the king agrees to give Blioberis whatever he demands, even if it means great loss to himself. Malory uses the narratorial voice to reveal King Mark’s psychological activity and makes it clear that the king trusts Blioberis because of
the latter’s reputation: ‘[w]han the kynge herde hym aske so he mervayled of his askynge, but bycause he was a Knyght of the Rounde Table and of a grete renowne, Kynge Marke graunted hym his hole askynge.’ (312.31-33). As the ensuing narrative shows, Blioberis’ chivalric prestige in the Arthurian world does not guarantee that he behaves reasonably or respects other knights’ marital bonds.

In the prose Tristan, the loss is caused by King Mark’s imprudence, but suffered by the lady’s husband. Malory suggests that the shame is communally shared: ‘whan Sir Bleoberys was gone with this lady Kynge Marke and all the courte was wroth that she was had away’ (313.9-11). Blioberis’ blatant request violates the right of King Mark’s subject, and the king’s failure to prevent this transgression is a clear sign of political incompetence. The following adventure reveals the power relationship between the two courts. ‘The fayrest lady’ in King Mark’s court is to be rescued by the best knight in Cornwall, and the adventure is eventually achieved by Tristram. Blioberis later reveals his intention to challenge King Mark’s court: ‘because Kynge Marke gaff me thet choyse of a gyffte in this courte, and so this lady liked me beste – natwythstondynge she is wedded and hath a lorde – and I have also fulfylled my queste’ (318.19-21). A quest is also a test: had Blioberis successfully carried the lady away, he would have proven that the knights in Cornwall cannot defend their lord against the knights of the Round Table.

In both texts, the conversation between Tristan and the lady touches on the problem of duties attached to social bonds. In the prose Tristan, the protagonist is criticized for his failure to take immediate action after hearing that his mistress has been carried off. After winning the battle with Blioberis, Tristan finds out that he has lost the lady’s love: ‘quant je ai veū que vos si mauvés et si coarz fustes que de la cort vostre oncle m’en lessastes mener a un chevalier sol, sachiez que jamés ne vos amerai’ (Curtis I, §393) [‘when I have seen that you were so evil and acted so cowardly, that you allowed me to be carried away by a single knight from the court of your uncle, you should know that I shall never love you again’]. After hearing the lady’s verdict, Tristan silently returns to the court, frustrated and heart broken.

In Malory’s adaptation, when ‘sertayne ladies’ rebuke Tristram for not immediately taking action to rescue his mistress, he argues that the duty falls next on him:

‘Fayre lady, hit is nat my parte to have ado in suche maters whyle her lorde and husbonde ys presente here. And yf so be that hir lorde had nat bene here in this courte, than for the worship of this courte peraventure I wolde have bene hir chamyon. And yf so be Sir Segwarydes spede nat well, hit may happyn that I woll speke with that good knyght or ever he passe far fro this contrey.’ (313.19-25)

Tristram’s excuse refers to his understanding of the duties defined by law. He justifies himself by suggesting that he cannot act as the lady’s champion while her husband is
present. Even though Tristram has an illicit affair with the lady, he still publically acknowledges the superiority of marital bonds. The lady, however, is unconvinced by Tristram’s self-defence and chooses to leave him. Interestingly, Blioberis endorses the Lady’s judgement: ‘Ye ar in the blame, for I hyre by this ladyes wordis that she trusted you abovyn all erthely knyghtes, and, as she seyth, ye have dysseyved hir’ (318.4-6). Tristram, however, considers this to be a moral lesson about love: ‘as I am a trew knyght, I shall know hir passyngly well that I shall love other truste’ (318.27-29). This shows that trust cannot be fully established between Tristram and his mistress because there is no clear definition of duties for extramarital sexual relationship in the public space.

Malory constructs the parallel case of Isode’s rash promise to teach a different lesson. This event happens after Isode has become the queen of Cornwall. Tristram’s competitor Palomides has followed the lovers to Cornwall and secretly plots to carry off Isode. Both the source and the adaptation portray King Mark as an incapable king and husband, but the two narratives render completely different impressions of the queen’s character. In the prose Tristan, Yseut falls into Palomides’ trap because of her own moral flaw: she fear that her maid Brangain will reveal her secret affair with Tristan, so she orders a man to murder Brangain in the woods. However, Brangain is left alive and bound to a tree, and is soon released and kept by Palomides. Chastened by her guilt, Yseut goes to a fountain alone to mourn the death of her best friend. Palomides has been waiting for her there and tells her that Brangain is still alive. The queen immediately promises to give him a gift if he brings her maid back to her. Palomides asks the queen to remember her promise: ‘dame, fait il, or vos soviegne bien de ceste promesse, car se vos covenant me tenez, je ne demanderai plus rien dou monde’ (Curtis II, §493) [‘lady,’ he said, ‘now you should remember your promise well, because if you keep this covenant with me, I will not ask for anything else in the world’], and she confirms her offer. After Brangain is reunited with Yseut, she tells Palomides again that she will give him what he asks, and repeats her promise in King Mark’s court. Palomides then reveals to the king that he desires the queen herself. The narrator suggests that Yseut’s initial distress is caused by her intent to murder Brangain, therefore she is partly to blame for what she suffers later on. Nevertheless, readers may find it difficult not to blame Palomides for taking advantage of Yseut’s perplexity.

Malory first enhances Isode’s moral standing by removing her guilt: she is not responsible for Brangain’s disappearance from court. Malory changes the plotline and tells us that the attempted murder of Brangain is arranged by some lords and ladies at court ‘for hate and enveye for to distroy Dame Brangwayne’. When Isode is mourning at the well, Palomides catches her off guard (‘suddeynly there cam Sir Palomydes unto her’), and uses
the news of Brangain as a bait for the rash promise: ‘the quene was so glad of his profyr that
suddaynly unavysed she graunte all his askynge’ (335.1-2). Malory also improves Isode’s
prudence in the following dialogue:

‘Now, madame,’ seyde Sir Palomydes, ‘remembr uppon your promyse, for I have
fulfylled my promyse.’
‘Sir Palomydes,’ seyde the quene, ‘I wote nat what is your desyre, but I woll that ye
wete, howbehit that I profyrde you largely, I thought none evyll, nother, I warne you,
none evyll woll I do.’
‘Madame,’ seyde Sir Palomydes, ‘as at this tyme ye shall nat know my desyre, but
byfore my lorde your husbonde there shall ye know that I will have my desyre that ye
have promysed me.’ (335.12-20)

Isode remembers Palomides’ personality and is alarmed by the potential risks implied by her
own promise, so she adds the condition of ‘none evyll’. She is less to blame for what
happens to her later on. The chain of ensuing actions in Malory’s narrative further
encourages the readers to sympathise with the situation of Brangain and Isode.

The analysis above shows that the rash promise can be used for both good and bad
purposes. Malory’s revision tightens the moral and ethical constraints on either party through
references to reason and worship. The promise signifies a horizontal bond of trust, protected
by honour and the moral principles recognized by a community that rewards ethical conduct
of individual agencies. Malory also warns against emotional manipulation and showcases
several psychological causes that can lead to regretful promises. In most cases the loss can
only be restored after the promise has been fulfilled, which suggests that a gift-giver should
not circumvent carrying out an agreement despite his or her regrets. This exposes an
inherent flaw of the institution of oral bonds, which the immoral individuals can take
advantage of. In his adaptation of the motif of the judicial duel, Malory further exposes the
problem of justice in the Arthurian world, which we shall see in the next section.

The Judicial Duel

Overview

In the previous discussions on the ‘rash promise’, numerous cases present chivalric
acts as an agency of justice on the individual level. The knight’s willing service to make up
for the loss of a lord or a lady through going on a quest suggests that the chivalric
establishment guards the rights of the governing class. That, however, is not the whole
picture of chivalric responsibility, since the matter of justice concerns not only those in
power, but also those who are powerless. When the rights of the powerless and the poor are
violated, the chivalric responsibility to uphold justice is put to trial as they may choose to fight for either side of the quarrel.

In the account of chivalry’s social function presented in the prose *Lancelot*, the defence of the people is said to be one of a knight’s primary responsibilities:

‘Et quant li foible ne porent plus souffrir ne endurer encontre les fors, si establirent desor aus garans & desfendeors por garandir les foibles & les paisible. Et tenir selonc droiture. Et por les fors bouter ariere des tors qu’il faisoient & des outrages. A cheste garanie porter furent establi chil qui plus valuoient, a les gart del commun des gens. Che furent li grant & li fort. & li bel & li legjer & li loial & li loeu & li hardi. Chil qui des bontes del cuer & del cors estoient plain. Mais la chevalerie ne lor fu pas donee a gas, ne por noient. Anchois lor en fu mis desor les cols moult grans fais. & saves vous queus au commenchement quantli ordres de chevalerie commencha, fu devise a chelui qui voloit estre chevaliers, & qui le don en avoit par droite election, qu’il fust piteus sans vilonie, deboinaire sans felonie, piteus enuers les souftraite & larges. Et appareilis de secoure les besoigneus pres & appareilis de confondre les robeors & les ochians. Drois jugieres sans amour & sans haine & sans amor daider au tort por le droit grever. & sans haine de nuire au droit por traire le tort avant.’

[But then came a time when the weak and the peaceable could no longer withstand or hold out against the strong, so they established over themselves champions and defenders who would protect them and uphold justice and drive back the strong who were wronging and oppressing them. This task of defence was conferred upon those men whom people commonly deemed the most worthy: men who were tall and strong and handsome and lithe, loyal and brave and bold, men who had all the virtues of heart and body. But knighthood was not given to them lightly or without a price; no, a heavy burden was placed on their shoulders. Do you know that in the beginning, when the order of knighthood began, it was required of anyone who wanted to be a knight and was legitimately chosen that he be courteous and not base, gracious and not a scoundrel, compassionate toward the afflicted, generous and helpful to the needy, ready and able to foil thieves and murderers, an upright judge unswayed by love or hatred – love that might weigh against the right or hatred that might plead in favour of the wrong.]

This speech of the Lady of the Lake has a clear didactic tone. As the guardian of young Lancelot, who is destined to become one of the best knights in the world, the Lady of the Lake outlines the ‘social responsibility scheme’ of the genesis of knighthood. The genesis of knighthood assigns the chivalric order with the responsibility of promoting a meritocratic and ethical government for the people. It articulates the *raison-d’être* of moral education in the upbringing of a young knight: courtesy, grace, compassion, generosity, and justice all contribute to his chivalric identity. It also warns him against a false type of love which may cause him to stray away from the righteous course – love that might plead in favour of the wrong. The same requirement is echoed in the Oath of the Round Table in Malory’s adaptation: ‘Also that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no

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Both authors suggest that a true knight should not covet private love or material gain when he chooses sides in battle. In reality, however, most Arthurian knights fight in duels to win the love of a lady or some material gains.²⁴²

**What is a Judicial Duel?**

The judicial duel is a special type of combat in chivalric romance. The outcome of a violent confrontation between two individuals serves as the arbitration of a dispute. In the previous chapter, we have seen how the motif of the Incognito Combat can offer romance writers the opportunity to interpret the knights’ desires for victory in relation to their perceptions of honour and shame. Winning an incognito combat can increase the knight’s individual honour. When involved in a judicial combat, however, the acquisition of honour is not the knight’s primary concern – he fights to win a cause for himself or for another person whom he represents. The outcome of the battle can sometimes fail to do justice, and whether or not the process of the combat had anything to do with justice had often been debated in literature from ancient times till now.

The authors’ worldviews determine how the outcomes of the judicial combat are interpreted. The conceived judicial validity of the combat did not arise from the so-called ‘might equals right’ argument. Medieval people saw a formal duel, usually sanctified by the presence of a clergyman and the ritual of oath-taking at the beginning of the combat, to be an ordeal. Like in the Biblical narrative of the battle between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17:23-54), they hoped that God will intervene and punish the liar in the form of defeat. Apart from the religious interpretation of the judicial duel as a manifestation of *iudicium Dei*, there coexists the rationalist interpretation, which sees the outcome of the duel as determined by physical prowess and chance. Numerous combats in *Le Morte Darthur* have little to do with the perception of justice or judicial efficacy. These cases are not counted as judicial duels in this thesis despite their apparent similarities. Only the duels that are fought in public witness for the purpose of arbitration are considered here.

Kennedy suggests that both the religious and the rational views are voiced by different characters in Malory.²⁴³ Swanson thinks Malory adopts the rationalist stance while using the judicial combats as a ‘vehicle for the emotional commitments and intuitive judgments’ which

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²⁴² Typical duels are fought for honour or ‘subjective standpoint’ such as who is the fairer lady. Jacqueline Stuhmiller, ‘Iudicium Dei, Iudicium fortunae: Trial by Combat in Malory’s Le Morte Darthur’, *Speculum*, 81, 2 (2006), 427-62 (p. 442).

²⁴³ Kennedy, pp. 276-77.
make up for the insufficiency of rational methods. Both Lynch and Stuhmiller, however, criticise the arbitrary association between martial prowess and ‘goodness’ in Malory’s narrative of combats.\textsuperscript{245} Lynch thinks that Malory’s description of the trial by combat is generally positive, whereas Stuhmiller suggests that the author subtly destroys the readers’ confidence in this judicial method. More recently, Taylor reads Malory’s use of this motif as a critique of existing structures of justice, which limits the access of individual agencies, especially women, to the judicial process.\textsuperscript{246}

The judicial duel was introduced into England by the Normans. Theodore Plucknett suggests that the combat was either fought in person if the accuser and the accused are in a criminal case, or fought by champions representing the opposing parties if it is a civil case.\textsuperscript{247} Robert Bartlett distinguishes the duels that serve as ordeals from private acts of violence or battles during warfare: a proper judicial combat ends the state of war, as it allows both parties ‘to seek vengeance for the misdeed through judicial process’.\textsuperscript{248} Earlier historical cases of the duel ‘à outrance’ in the English common law tradition are mostly deadly. George Neilson observes that the champions appealed for felony fought bare-legged and bare-headed, and used a particular weapon: a baton tipped with horn, designed by Britton.\textsuperscript{249} In the fifteenth century, the trial by combat was seen as a degrading solution in civil and criminal disputes. An often rehearsed case is the 1455 duel between Thomas Whithorn and James Fisher recorded in \textit{Gregory’s Chronicle}.\textsuperscript{250} The duel between two knights, as the \textit{Coutumes} attests, is carried out in another manner,\textsuperscript{251} and a more regulated form of duels was introduced by the monarchs, beginning with Philip the Fair of France and Edward III of England, for the judgments of treason and felony. This type of duel was popularized after the establishment of the Court of Chivalry during the reign of Richard II.\textsuperscript{252}

\textsuperscript{249} George Neilson, \textit{Trial by Combat} (Glasgow: W. Hodge, 1890), pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{250} This case is first discussed in ibid. It is then quoted in the papers by Cannon, Stuhmiller and Taylor.
\textsuperscript{251} For example, §1714: if a gentleman appeals against a gentleman, and each one is a knight, they fight on horseback, armed with any armor they wish, except a pointed knight or a mace. In the way of sharpened weapons each may carry only two swords and his spear; and if they are squires, also two swords and a squire. Akehurst, p. 629.
\textsuperscript{252} Neilson, p. 177.
The judicial duels in *Le Morte Darthur* are fought by knights according to the rules of chivalry. However, not all of them are trials of treason.\(^{253}\)

Fifteenth-century England saw a significant decline of chivalry in the number of knights and the duels of chivalry.\(^{254}\) Most cases of the judicial duel in Malory are imported from Old French texts including the prose *Merlin*, *Tristan*, *La Queste del Saint Graal* and *La mort le roi Artu*. York identified eleven duels in *Le Morte Darthur* to be judicial, including four murder trials, six land disputes and one treason trial,\(^{255}\) whereas Kennedy categorizes fifteen cases into *holmganga*, land claims and treason duels. Kennedy’s list is adopted by Swanson and Stuhmiller with minor changes.\(^{256}\) These studies tend to focus on a few cases such as the duels between Arthur and Accolon and that between Gawain and Lancelot, and tend to ignore most of the cases adapted from the prose *Tristan*. This study examines eight cases of the judicial duel in Malory’s ‘Tristram’ fought to judge different social crimes such as murder, land settlements, marriage dispute, and diplomatic conflicts. Malory’s adaptation of this motif shows that he foregrounds the charitable bond between individual agencies of justice and the collective body of those involved.

**Oath and Truth**

In historical cases, a formal appeal of treason is equivalent to a wager of battle, and the defendant’s failure to respond to the challenge carries the force of confession.\(^{257}\) The *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* contains a sample of the oaths before the duel:

> « Sire, je di seur tel – et le doit nommer – qu’il, mauvesement et en traïson m’a murtri tele personne – et doit nommer le mort – qui mes parens estoit, et par son tret et par son fet et par son pourchas. S’il le connoist, je vous requier que vous en faciés comme de murtrier ; s’il le nie, je le veuil prouver de mon cors contre le sien ou par homme qui fere le puist et doie pour moi, comme cil qui a essoine, lequel je mousterrai bien en tans et en lieu. » (§1711)\(^{258}\)

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\(^{253}\) Ernest C. York suggests that the duels of law belonged to the common law tradition, whereas the duels of chivalry were a new mode that required participants to fight with the sword and the spear and involved the ritualized manners of appeal and oaths. Ernest C. York, ‘The Duel of Chivalry in Malory’s Book XIX’, *Philological Quarterly*, 48, 2 (1969), 186-91 (pp. 187-88). Stuhmiller further divides the cases of the duels of law into civil and criminal, and suggests that the duel of chivalry ‘was usually, but not always, fought by aristocratic combatants, primarily at the allegation of treason’. Stuhmiller (2006), p. 429. Similar categorizations are mentioned in Daniel Jaquet, “Personne ne laisse volontiers son honneur être tranché”: Les combat singuliers “judiciaires” d’après les livres de combat’, in *Armes et jeux militaires dans l’imaginaire: XIIe - XVe siècles*, ed. by Catalina Girbea (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016), pp. 389-412.


\(^{256}\) Kennedy, pp. 38-47.


\(^{258}\) Beaumanoir, p. 376.
[Sire, I declare concerning so-and-so – and he should name the person – that he, unlawfully and treacherously, has murdered so-and-so – and he should name the murdered person – who was my relative, by his act and by his deed and by his procurement. If he admits it, I request you to treat him as a murderer; and if he denies it, I wish to prove the fact in personal combat against him, or by means of a man who can and should do it for me, because I am a person who has a legal excuse, which I will make known in the proper time and place.]\textsuperscript{259}

The phrase qualifying the act of killing, ‘unlawfully and treacherously’, is frequently used in the accusations made by knights in the prose \textit{Tristan}. The accused is expected to answer the appeal and formally deny the accusation.

The definition of treason in \textit{Le Morte Darthur} is very close to the customary law definition: ‘the custom was suche tho dayes that an ony man were appealed of ony treson othir of murthure he sholde fyght body for body, other ellys to fynde another knyght for hym. \textbf{And alle maner of murthers in the dayes were called treson}’ (320.25-29). This is echoed in Mador’s accusation in the episode of ‘the Poisoned Apple’: ‘and ever Sir Madore stood style before the kynge and appeled the quene of treson - \textbf{for the custom was such at that tyme that all maner of shamefull deth was called treson!’} (794.24-26). Words including murder, shameful death, and treason all refer to unnatural deaths caused by agencies having bad intention in their minds, who act outside of law.

For the trial combat to have judicial credibility, the ritual of oath-taking is important because it formally turns the arbitration of a criminal act into the arbitration of perfidy. The efficacy of the trial as an ordeal depends on the conviction that breaking a sacral oath will lead to divine punishment. Even though the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 formally forbade clerics to act as judges in extreme criminal cases, or take part in matters connected with judicial tests and ordeals’ (canon 18), the ordeal proved to be a persistent form in medieval literature. Bloch observes, ‘There are few sustained narrative works belonging to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that do not contain a trial... from the initial branches to the \textit{Roman de Renart} to the last, the inclusion of at least one scene of judicial combat, oath, or ordeal appears to have been a \textit{sine qua non} of poetic production’\textsuperscript{260}

The prose \textit{Tristan} presents the ritual of oath-taking in a judicial duel which takes place at the Tournament of Surluse. Palomides comes to the tournament and is accused by an anonymous knight of treason. The ritual before the judicial combat is described in details:

\textit{Les sainz furent aportez. Li chevaliers iura seur sainz que Palamedes avoit ocis son frere en traison & en desloiaute coume celui qui plains est de traison. ‘A non Dieu, dansz chevaliers,’ dist Palamedes, ‘je ne vous vi onques mes selonc mon avis!’ et lors}

\textsuperscript{259}Akehurst, p. 628.

\textsuperscript{260}Bloch, \textit{Medieval}. 
iura Palamedes sa foi & son creant que il ni ot onques point de traison en lui quant il ocist le chevalier.\footnote{Sommer and Caxton, p. 320. Translation is mine.}

[The saints' relics were brought forth. The knight swore on the relics that Palomides had killed his brother treacherously and disloyally like a man full of treason. 'By the name of God, sir knight,' Palomides said, 'I don't think I have ever seen you before!' and then Palomides swore his faith and belief that there was no [thought of] treason in him when he killed the knight.]

This description raises several issues concerning the validity of the oaths: first, Palomides is a Saracen knight, yet he is asked to swear on Christian saint's relics. Second, the contradiction in their testimonies lies in whether or not Palomides killed the knight's brother with treasonous intent. Palomides confirms in his oath that he has indeed killed the knight, but he denies that he did it ‘en traison & en desloiaute’ [treacherously and disloyally]. In late medieval France, treason is defined both in customary law and formal feudal law: the \textit{Coutumes de Beauvaisis} and the \textit{Livres de justice et de plet} emphasise that the crime is an act of killing prompted by hidden hatred, whereas the \textit{Summa de Legibus Normannie} defines treason by infidelity, or the breach of faith.\footnote{S. H. Cuttler, \textit{The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 3-4.} Since the truth of both the accusation and defence depends on \textit{mens rea} [guilty intent], it remains unclear whether or not the outcome of the combat manifests divine justice. The interpretation that Palomides wins the duel because he is physically stronger remains tenable.

Malory's adaptation offers a better justification for Palomides' victory in the duels. He gives the name Sir Gomoris to the knight who died in a duel with Palomides in the previous day. Gomoris has robbed a damsel of 'all her londis', and the damsel found Palomides to be her champion in the quarrel. Although this is not described as a judicial duel, Palomides and Gomoris jousted together before the day of the tournament ends. At the end of the sword fight, Palomides 'raced of his helme and smote of his hede' (517.32-33). On the next day, Gomoris' brother Archade appeals Palomides of treason:

\begin{quote}
And he was nat so sone in his lodgynge but there cam a knyght that hyght Archade. He was brother unto Sir Gomoryes that Sir Palomydes slewe afoore in the damesels quarell. And this knygh Archade called Sir Palomydes traytoure, and appeled hym for the deth of his brother. (519.31-35)
\end{quote}

R. Howard Bloch suggests that the trial by combat expresses the 'primitive sense of justice in which legal process remains indistinguishable from divine process, human will from godly will, positive law from divine law'.\footnote{Bloch, \textit{Medieval}, pp. 17-18.} This idea is expressed in Dante's \textit{Monarchy} (1312-13),
Chapter ix, where he enumerates both biblical and classical cases of the trial as a way of resolving disputes between nations and tribes.\textsuperscript{264}

Despite the widespread practice, scepticism and opposition were expressed in both secular and clerical voices from the earliest days.\textsuperscript{265} In fifteenth-century England both learned and unlearned circles were highly sceptical about the validity of the judicial combat as a means of determining truth.\textsuperscript{266} Nevertheless, most texts acknowledge the uncertainty of combats and sometimes attribute unexpected outcomes to divine intervention. For example, Vegetius suggests that ‘[f]or some obscure, or indeed, one might say, divine reason, some men fight better against others, and those who have conquered the stronger are often themselves defeated by the weaker’.\textsuperscript{267} Malory seems to agree with this view as he comments on the unpredictability of the battles’ outcome: ‘Here men may undirstonde, that bene men of worshyp, that man was never fouermed that all tymes myght attayne, but somtyme he was put to the worse by malefortune; and at som tyme the wayker knyght put the byggar knyght to a rebuke’ (379.5-8). Even in modern literature, the trial by combat is still present in various forms as an expression of ‘the immanence of supernatural powers within the natural sphere’.\textsuperscript{268}

Malory’s approach does not conform entirely to either the religious or the rationalist view. His attitude can be seen in the changes he made to the narrative of the trial combat between King Mark and Armant. Armant appeals King Mark of the murder of Bersules in King Arthur’s court. Although King Mark is truly guilty, he still manages to kill Armant in the judicial duel. The narrator in the prose \textit{Tristan} suggests the unjust outcome is caused by the absence of the oath-taking ritual before the duel:

\begin{quote}
Chelui jour se combati il a Armant et l’ochist sans faille, voiant le roi Artu meïsmes et voiant tous chiaus qui la estoient. Et ja fust il ensi toutesvoies que Armans se combatist pour loiale querel et pour droituriere, car bien estoit verités que li rois March avoit ochis Bertholais, et mauvaisement, si fu Armans vaincus de chele bataille. Et puis fu il recordé que cele bataille fu la premiere ki onques fust vaincue par tort en la maison le roi Artu, et fu dit a chelui point que desloiautés avoit mis loiauté au dessous; par coi li sairement des batailles furent adonc mis avant premierement, ki encore sont maintenant. Ne devant ce n’estoient sairement fait de nule batille, s’il ne lour plaisoit. (Ménard IV, §88)
\end{quote}

[It was certain that on that day he fought with Armant and killed him, as witnessed by King Arthur himself and all those who were present. And what happened was clear to

\textsuperscript{265} Bartlett, pp. 117-25.
\textsuperscript{266} Swanson (1992), p. 156.
\textsuperscript{267} Milner, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{268} Bloch, \textit{Medieval}, p. 19. An obvious modern example is the ‘The Force’ in the Star Wars series, where the providential power determines the struggle between good and evil through the agency of individual warriors.
all that Armant defended himself for the loyal cause and for the right, because it was true that King Mark had killed Bertholais; unfortunately, Armant was vanquished in this battle. Afterwards, this battle was recorded as the first ever wrongful victory in King Arthur’s household, and it was said then that disloyalty had overcome loyalty. This is why the oaths of duel were put forth for the first time, and they endure to this day. Never before this incident were oaths sworn in any battle, if people did not wish to.]

This narratorial comment draws attention to the absence of the oath before the duel. The narrator argues that the ritual is an essential condition for a just outcome. Without the sacral oath, no perfidy can be judged. The emphasis on the oath implies that as long as the ritual is performed, ‘the trewe knyght that fyȝteth for the ryȝt may not be surmounted’, as expressed in Ramon Lull’s Book of Chivalry. Since the prose Tristan was composed in the thirteenth century, and the sacral oath has always been an essential part of the ordeal, this anachronistic invention may well have served as a critical response to the abolition of clerical involvement in the ordeals decided in the Fourth Lateran Council.

Like he did in the previous case, Malory strips the narrative of any reference to or commentary on the ritual of oath-taking. The action of the duel is condensed into a paratactic account from a rationalist perspective:

And the same day he founde there Sir Amant the knyght redy, that afore Kynge Arthure had appelyd hym of treson. And so lyghtly the kynge commaunded them to do batayle. And by mysadventure Kynge Marke smote Sir Amante thorow the body; and yet was Sir Amaunte in the ryghtuous quarell. (468.7-14)

The word ‘mysadventure’in this passage is poignant. The primary meaning of the Middle English word ‘adventure’ (or aventure) is chance, but Jill Mann illustrates that adventures often play a revelatory role in Malory’s narratives. James Wade suggests that adventures generate aesthetic knowledge through paratactic expositions of their outcomes. In the passage quoted above, the prefix ‘mys-’ before ‘adventure’ signifies a negative emotional response. When the word ‘mysadventure’ appears in direct speech elsewhere, it usually

272 Jill Mann compares the adventure in Malory with the definition of a theatrical happening: ‘a bizarre event which, because it does not fit into familiar patterns of occurrences, because it strikes the spectators as something remote and alien, challenges them to find some way of coming to terms with it’. Mann, p. 75.
273 James Wade argues by presenting adventures in a style of arbitrariness, Malory changes the aesthetic experience of the readers. Wade (2013).
conveys disappointment or disgust, in response to the missing sense of fulfilment in the outcome of an event. In legal discourse, ‘misadventure’ also means a crime committed by accident. For example, the thirteenth-century Coutumes de Beauvaisis contains a chapter on ‘misadventures’, in which the jurist of Clermont discusses various situations in which ‘lords have great need to be merciful and have pity and not always apply the law strictly’. Two such cases in this category can be found in Le Morte Darthur: the first case is that Tristram was shot by an archer by accident in a hart chase, and Malory uses the phrase ‘by mysfortune’ (617.10); later, a huntress misses the target and shots Launcelot in the thigh – again, Malory uses the phrase ‘by mysefortune’ (833.25) and ‘myscheve’ (834.1). This careful choice of words suggests that the word ‘misadventure’ occupies a different place on the semantic spectrum and, unlike ‘mysfortune’, is not associated with unpredictable chance. Misadventure invites the readers to consider the corporate implication of an incident, as it has impact on the status of justice of a collective body. In this case, the outcome of the duel signals the imperfection of justice in King Arthur’s court.

A subtle moral critique can be detected in the adverb ‘lyghtly’. ‘Lyghtly’ can both mean ‘with little effort’ or ‘hastily’. Malory uses this word to suggest that King Arthur’s decision to give approval to a trial by combat is imprudent. Since the king has the judicial authority in his court, he is expected to resolve the dispute according to ‘reason’ and ‘worship’ before allowing his subjects to resort to the deadly duel. The death of Amant should not have happened if King Arthur had acted differently, and therefore the king share the blame for the death of the knight who is ‘in the ryghteous quarrell’. Malory’s use of the words ‘mysadventure’ and ‘lyghtly’ in this passage implies that he is not convinced of the judicial efficacy of the trial by combat.

Both in the source and Malory’s ‘Tristram’, King Mark’s treason is revealed through the outcry of female characters. However, in the source text, the maidens make an appeal against King Mark before the duel. Malory alters the sequence and uses the maidens’ testimonies to condemn Mark’s second murder just after the public has witnessed the outcome of the duel:

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275 Akehurst, pp. 710-11.

276 The spelling of this name is slightly different in the source and in Malory’s text. This may suggest a scribal deviation in the manuscript that Malory used. Malory’s spelling of the name may have a positive symbolic meaning (‘Amant’ means lover in French).
Than the too maydeyns cryed alowde, that all the courte myght hyre, and seyde, ‘A, swete Jesu that knowyste all hydde thynges! Why sufferyst Thou so false a traytoure to venqueyshe and sle a trewe knyght that faught in a ryghteuous quarell?’ (468.27-30)

While the complaint is addressed to ‘swete Jesu’, it appeals to the collective sense of justice – ‘that all the courte myght hyre’. The maidens are nameless in both texts, but their identity is treated differently. The source text says that the damsels originally came with King Mark, witnessed his murder of Bertholais, and came to Arthur’s court with Armant (Ménard IV, §8). In Malory, the damsels were sent by Isode to learn about Tristram’s experience in Logres. Before Armant’s death, he asks the damsels to report to Isode, but they remain in Arthur’s court instead and expose the injustice of the duel (468.19-30). The damsels exemplify a type of personal loyalty motivated by affective attachment beyond the formal bond of service. Their decision to appeal in King Arthur’s court seems to be entirely self-motivated. Their sympathy for Bersules and Armant, who sacrificed their lives to stop King Mark from harming Tristram, is an extension of their loyalty to Isode. Unlike in the source where the communications happen in a private space, Malory’s damsels directly speak in court. These changes assign minor female characters the role of overseeing justice in their community.

Without the oath-taking ritual, King Mark’s victory in his duel with Armant has nothing to do with the question of fidelity in speech. However, this character is frequently called a ‘false traytoure’ in Malory’s narrative. In fact, Mark identifies himself as a traitor when he reveals his plan to Bersules and Armant: ‘I woll that ye wete my commynge hydir is to this entente, for to destroy Sir Trystram by som wylys other by treson, and it shall be harde and ever he ascape oure hondis’ (455.9-12). Here the phrase ‘by treson’ is in parallel with ‘by som wylys’. ‘Wylys’ means deception, trick, and the preposition ‘by’ indicates dishonesty in the manner or method in which Mark achieves his purpose. As soon as Bersules hears the king’s plan, he calls the latter a ‘traytoure’ even though the plan has not yet been carried out. This suggests that treason belongs to the category of mens rea, determined by the intention rather than the deed.

In both the prose Tristan and the ‘Tristram’, King Mark is frequently associated with treason and treachery. Mario Botero García points out that the ‘felon’ and ‘deloial’ nature of King Mark in the prose Tristan has root in ‘la perfidie de Marc et de sa famille’ [the perfidy of Mark and his family line]. As demonstrated previously, in customary law and the court of chivalry, felony and treason were under the same category of crime. Hence, these negative terms have the same implications as the terms associated with treason in Malory. Richard Firth Green suggests that in the late medieval English minds, ‘traitor’ meant someone who

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277 García, p. 333.
had betrayed a trust between the members of the same family or household. Leitch also observes that words like ‘treason’ and ‘traytour’ are mostly employed in direct discourses, and always carry an ethical value attached to individual identities. Malory uses the word treason to refer to a taint in character or the immoral tendency, which does not depend on a fait accompli – a committed crime. Instead of articulating the disapproval of certain conducts, treason voices the subjective discernment of a person’s overall unfaithfulness in his or her social interactions.

**The Struggle for Justice**

Similar to the theatrical chorus in a Greek play, the two maidens’ outcry exerts communal pressure on the judicial authority. Thus, by eliminating the condition of rituals, Malory turns the conventional ordeal into a dramatic event which engages the observer in the evaluation of its efficacy. In this case, the narratorial voice exposes the judicial duel as a flawed judiciary institution, since it allows the legal authority to ‘lightly’ resort to a deadly combat.

Since chivalry can function as an agency of justice, ‘worship’ aligns individual knights with the ethical expectations of their community. Malory foregrounds this link through a polyphonic construction of the meaning of worship in the dialogue before Tristram’s duel with Marhalt. In a speech to justify his motivation for taking up the challenge, Tristram says: ‘Yf Sir Marhalbte sholde thus departe into Irelonde, God let me never have worship: and I were made knyght I sholde macche hym’ (295.29-30). This shows that worship is determined by Tristram’s decision to answer Marhalt’s challenge, rather than the outcome of the fight. Tristram has never fought in a combat before this moment, and he does not know how well he can fight. His resolution to fight against Marhalt is a decision of faith. Tristram’s speech reveals that worship is attached to fighting for the right cause. It does not depend on Tristan’s ability to subdue his enemy, nor the result of the combat.

Tristram’s understanding of what constitutes ‘worship’ contrasts sharply with the view expressed in the source text, where honour is tied with the blood lineage of an individual.

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280 Historical cases, such as the case of Ankarette Twynho (1477), also indicate that the courts were vulnerable to pressure from the powerful members of society. Powell, pp. 35-38.
281 Different characters each have their own understanding of what constitutes worship. For example, Guinevere associates worship with ‘noise’ (gossip): ‘and bettir ys pees than evermore warre, and the lesse noyse the more ys my worship’ (849.22-23); Balin associates worship exclusively with physical prowess: ‘manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannens person; and many a worshipfull knyght ys nat knowyn unto all peple’ (49.19-21).
For example, when Pernehan urges his brother King Mark to end the terms of tribute through a military campaign, his argument is based on the honour of a lineage and a people:

‘Ne vos desconfortez, sire, ne ne vos esmaiez de ces noveles, mes prenez vos armes et vos genz ausi, et alez a estrous sor cez d’Yllande, et defendez le treü qu’il vos demandent. Se vos i morez, ce vos tornera a honor; se vos i vivez, ce vos tornera tote vostre vie a gloire, et a honor a tot vostre linaige.’ (Curtis I, §241)

[‘Do not be disconcerted, lord, nor let yourself be dismayed by this news, but take up your weapons and gather your people, and attack the Irish without hesitation and resist the tribute they demand. If you die there, it will turn to your honour; if you survive it, this will turn all your life to glory and increase the honour of your entire lineage.’]

In this speech, honour is tied with fighting for the sovereignty of the king; it expresses the conviction that is often articulated in historical narratives: ‘la couronne et l’épée sont donc ici inséparables’ [the crown and the sword are therefore inseparable in this case]. Later in this episode, the same dynastic concern motivates Tristan to volunteer for the combat: ‘se a Dieu pleëüst que je la victoire en eüssee, tot mon linaige i avroit honor, et s’en seroie plus prisiez tote ma vie’ (Curtis I, §290) [if it pleases God that I will have the victory, all my lineage will have honour, and I will be praised all my life]. The idea of an honourable death is briefly touched upon in Pernehan’s speech, but disappears in Tristan’s interpretation. The hero believes that honour is the reward for victory.

The prose Tristan constructs the link between the individual and the collective appeal from justice in two ways. The first is the Cornish people’s emotional suffering: the ‘lamentation’ (complaint) and ‘dolor’ (distress) of the ladies mourning over their children’s fortune expose the coercive nature of Marhalt’s challenge. Before the duel, the Cornish people attended an all-night vigil and the mass on the following morning. As Bloch observes, the narrative of sacraments before a judicial combat establishes ‘a direct rapport between the divine judge and the human instruments of his judgment’. This view is also expressed through Tristan’s interpretation: ‘Sire, ce dit Tristanz, n’aiez dotance, que Dieu plest, il ne nos obliera mie a cesti point. Priez Dieu qu’il me secore ici, et je croi que honor vos croistra’ (Curtis I, §298) [‘Lord,’ thus said Tristan, ‘do not have fear, if it pleases God, he shall not forget us at this point. Pray to God that he would help me here, and I believe that the honour will be yours’]. The sacrament and the prayer establish an apparent causal relationship between individual victory and divine will.

In Malory’s narrative, faith in the divine justice is expressed through the concept of worship, which is different from honour and does not depend on immediate and observable outcomes. People of worship seem to share common understanding and sentiments: ‘there

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282 García, p. 335.
283 Bloch, Medieval, p. 24.
was nother man nother woman of worshyp but they wepte to se and undirstonde so yonge a knyght to jouparté hymself for theire ryght’ (297.26-28). Malory suggests that the ‘men and women of worship’ have deep compassion for Tristram’s decision to fight in the duel because they understand the uncertainty and risk in such an act. From Tristram’s point of view, worship derives from his conviction of acting according to divine will, and the last sentence expresses his faith in the final achievement of justice regardless of how he fares in this duel:

‘And sytthen I toke the order of knyghthode this day, I am ryght well pleased, and to me moste worshyp, that I may have ado wyth suche a knyght as thou arte. And now wete thou well, Syr Marhalte, that I caste me to grete worshyp on thy body. And yef that I be nat proved, I truste to God to be worshypfully proved upon thy body, and to delyver the contrey of Cornwayle for ever fro all maner of trewayge frome Irelonde for ever.’ (299.4-10)

Tristram’s statement bridges the gap between divine providence and the temporary uncertainties of human struggles. This view constructs an ethical dynamic of worship, which is not attached to a specific lineage, but the individual agency that does the will of God. The inner resolution sufficiently motivates chivalric action and renders the ritualised utterance of conviction superfluous.

The opposite understanding of worship is expressed through the voice of Marhalt. Before leaving Ireland, Marhalt declares: ‘for to avaunce my dedis and to encrece my worshyp I woll ryght gladly go unto this journey’ (294.21-22). The Irish knight subjects ‘worship’ to observable achievements as he juxtaposes the outcome of ‘avaunce my dedis’ and ‘encrece my worshyp’. This understanding of worship fails to perceive the inherent ethical requirement of fighting for the righteous cause – in this case, freeing a people from the burden of an unfair treaty. The narrator tells us that Marhalt is ‘nobly proved’, ‘one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde’, and ‘called one of the famuste knyghtes of the worlde’, but never refers to him as a knight of worship. Moreover, Tristram admits that it is Marhalt’s ‘noyse and fame’ that prompts his action, thus the ‘noyse and fame’, or the public recognition of a knight’s physical superiority, have little to do with the type of worship that Tristram has in mind. This strategic choice of words reveals the individual differences in the knights’ understanding of chivalric honour.

The judicial combat between Tristan and Blamour de Gaunes further extends the hermeneutics of worship. In the prose Tristan, both Blamour and Tristan believe that to withdraw from the duel for fear brings shame [‘honte’]: ‘Tristanz conoist bien qu’il ne puett sa querele gahaignier s’il n’ocist Blanor, car Blanor est de si haut cuer qu’il ne diroit riens por paor de mort qui a honte li tornast ; Blanor reconoist ce meïsmes de Tristan’ (Curtis I, §425)
[Tristan knew well that he could not win this fight if he doesn’t kill Blamour, because the latter is of such a proud heart that he would not say anything because of the fear of death which would shame him; Blamour knew Tristan was of the same mind]. When he realises that he must lose the duel, Blamour urges Tristan to kill him immediately: ‘Ha! Tristanz, por Dieu, copez moi le chief, si fineront a un cop totes mes dolors’ (Curtis I, §428) [Ah! Tristan, for God’s sake, cut off my head, and you shall finish all my sufferings with one strike]. Tristan then persuades the king to stop the duel, but he first reduces Blamour’s shame in his a speech: ‘Por Dieu, ne sofrez mie que li uns de nos face pis a l’autre que fait nos entresomes, car ce seroit trop granz domaiges se je cesti ocioie, que trop a enduré; et sachiez que li granz cuers de li ne soferroit pas qu’il deïst chose dont il eüst honte et reproche’ (Curtis I, §429) [For heaven’s sake, do not let either of us do worse to the other than what has been done, since it would be too great a loss if I kill a man who has endured so much; you should know that his great heart will not allow him to say anything that would put him to shame or reproach].

Contrary to his normal practice of condensing the dialogues, Malory reinvents a dialogue to articulate a different paradigm of shame and worship. Blamour’s speech exhibits an interpretation similar to the one expressed in the source:

‘I wolde nat lyve to be made lorde of all the erthe; for I had lever dye here with worshyp than lyve here with shame. And nedis, Sir Trystrames, thou muste sle me, other ellys thou shalt never wynne the fylde, for I woll never sey the lothe worde. And therefore, yf thou dare sle me, sle me, I requyre the!’ (325. 8-13)

Before the battle began, Bleoberys asked Blamour to remember the honour of his kinship and ‘suffir deth than to be shamed’. Bleoberys describes yielding as an act that is ‘recreaunte’. To be recreaunte is to betray one’s faith and integrity, hence it may destroy the good reputation of any knight. Both Bleoberys and Blamour believe that worship requires the determination to fight to death. The verb ‘dare’ in Blamour’s last sentence implies that, to a certain extent, the confidence in his kinsmen’s ability to revenge his death contributes to his principle of not-yielding. This is reiterated in Bleoberys’ speech to the kings, in which he explicitly rejects mercy for his brother and requires his death.

The shame-or-death rationale of the judicial duel leaves both participants no choice other than shameful surrender or death. The consequence is often disastrous. Tristram is fully aware of the prohibition of reconciliation in the duel, which can result in the death of a good knight like Blamour. His inner speech exposes an ethical flaw embedded in the institution of knighthood:

Whan Sir Trystrames herde hym sey so knyghtly, in his herte he wyster nat wbat to do with hym, remembrance hym of bothe partyes, of what bloode he was commyn of and
This expository passage exemplifies Tristram’s empathy with Blamour. The protagonist perceives that this ethical paradox is consolidated by the discourse of shame as well as the legal institution of the duel. The violent confrontation internalises cruelty against an enemy as a virtue of knighthood (as the phrase ‘sey so knyghtly’ indicates). If chivalric honour abhors ‘asking for mercy’, it leaves Blamour and Bleoberys no reason to choose mercy over death.

The comparison between the two authors’ treatments of this episode reveals that the meaning of worship and shame is perceived differently, and can be redefined through individual and communal efforts. Both worship and shame prevent the knights from making decisions based on individual interests alone, but the outcome is not always ethical when the knight shuns any act that is deemed shameful by others. The prose Tristan solves this dilemma through the intervention of external judicial authority. Malory, on the other hand, transforms the ethos in his reinvention of Tristram’s speech:

There he kneled downrighte tofore them and besought them of theire worshippis, and for Kynge Arthurs love and for Sir Launcelottis sake, that they wolde take this mater in theire hondis. ‘For, my fayre lordys,’ seyde Sir Trystrames, ‘hit were shame and pyté that this noble knyght that yondir lyeth sholde be slayne, for ye hyre well, shamed woll he nat be. And I pray to God that he never be slayne nother shamed for me.’ (325.21-28)

In this narrative, shame is reinterpreted from Tristram’s perspective, who considers it a matter of worship to preserve the life of the losing knight. The meaning of shame is extended in Tristan’s concluding sentence, which suggests that shame does not necessarily accompany defeat in the duel; the winner can exempt the defeated from shame through an act of grace.

Historically, if the defendant loses the judicial duel but is still alive, he would be hanged on the gallows. In chivalric romances, the winning knight usually determines whether or not to kill the defeated, as illustrated in the case above. Under this system of justice, the physically stronger has the de facto judiciary authority in a duel. When a knight formally yields to the winner, he expects to receive mercy, although the fear of shame can prevent him from yielding in public. At times, the winning knights in Le Morte Darthur seem ruthless in how they treat a defeated opponent. In particular, the Sarasin knight Palomides often whips off an opponent’s helmet and beheads him on the spot without giving the latter an

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284 Plucknett, p. 117.
opportunity to ask for mercy (examples include Gomoryes, Archade, and Helyus in the Red City episode).

The majority of the deadly duels in Malory’s narrative are directly borrowed from the sources. However, Malory sometimes modifies the details so that some ethical justification for the deaths in judicial duels can be inferred from the text. In the two examples cited below, the winning knights urge their opponents to yield without success:

I.
And ever Sir Trystram seyde to Sir Elyas, ‘Yelde the!’
And whan Sir Trystram saw hym so stakir on the grounde, he seyde, ‘Sir Elyas, I am ryght sory for the, for thou arte a passynge good knyght as ever I mette withall excepte Sir Launcelot.’
And therewithall Sir Elyas fell to the erthe and there dyed. (498.27-31)

II.
And therewithall he (Palomides) raced of his helme and seyde, ‘Yelde the, Corsabryne, or thou shalt dye!’
‘Fye on the,’ seyde Sir Corsabryne, ‘and do thy warste!’ (526.31-33)

Malory invented the above conversations to suggest that the decapitations of the Elias and Corsabrine happen because they refuse to acknowledge their mistakes. Elias is the leader of the Saxon army which invaded Cornwall, and the duel between Tristan and Elias is a typical trial by battle fought by the champion from each side to end the state of war. In both medieval and modern laws, the act of killing during warfare is judged in a category separate from killing in peace times. Corsabrine’s crime, on the other hand, does not involve human life or property. He destroyed a damsel’s reputation in order to prevent her from marrying someone else, but he has done her no harm in physical terms. The dialogues expose the stubborn unrepentance of Elias and Corsabrine: they not only fight for the wrong causes, but also refuse to submit to mercy and amend their wrongs. The word ‘ever’ in the first quotation shows Tristram’s sincere attempt to spare the life of his enemy. In the second, Corsabrine’s answer to Palomides’ threat is equivalent to actively choosing death. The conclusion of these duels, therefore, resembles the death penalty of dangerous criminals who are resolute in their evil will against other people.

In both texts, the suppressed and powerless people cry out to the defenders of justice, who are moved to action by compassion. The prose Tristan more often attributes the origin of injustice to paganism. For example, in the source text’s narrative of Tristan’s adventure at the ‘Weeping Castle’, a giant named Dialetes has killed many Christians including his own sons and established an evil custom to prevent Christianity from spreading on his island.

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285 For the first duel, see Ménard IV, §240; for the second, see Sommer and Caxton, p. 331.
286 The contemporary definition of war crimes, which gives rise to individual criminal responsibility in war, is a recent concept that grew out of the International humanitarian law.
According to this custom, any knight who comes to the castle must fight with the lord in a duel until one of them is killed. Their ladies are then compared together so that the less beautiful one must lose her head. Tristan comes to the castle by adventure and kills the lord Brunor in the duel. Although Isode is judged to be more beautiful than Brunor’s lady, Tristan is unwilling to kill the latter. Nevertheless, he kills her at the request of the crowd. The conclusion of this episode shows that, despite his victory in the duel, Tristan cannot abolish the old customs for the obstinacy of the local people.

Malory’s adaptation conveys a different political vision. In his narrative, the ladies are first compared, and Isode is judged to be more beautiful. Before executing Brunor’s lady according to the rule, Tristram states his reason for executing her in the witness of all:

‘How now?’ seyde Syr Trystrames. ‘Mesemyth hit were pyté that thy lady sholde lose hir hede, but bycause thou and she of longe tyme have used this wycked custom and by you bothe hath many good knyghtes and fayre ladyes bene destroyed, for that cause hit were no losse to destroy you bothe. [...] And bycause of thyne owne jugemente thou woldist have done to my lady if that she had bene fowler, and bycause of the evyll custom, gyff me thy lady,’ [...] and with an awke stroke he smote of hir hede clene. (330.12-16)

In this narrative, Tristram kills the lady to demonstrate the intolerance of the evil customs upheld by Brunor and his lady. When Tristram wins the duel and kills Brunor, he shows that he decides to punish evil to free the people from their bondage. The most significant change Malory made to his source is the collective support for Tristram’s governance. The people of the Island ask Tristan to ‘abyde stille there a lyttyll whyle to fordo that foule custom’ (331.6). Malory envisions a more enlightened community that openly responds to the call for reform. This mode of direct interaction between the governor and the people shows a type of democratic ruling, where the law can be improved through the cooperation between the people and the powerful reformers.

Tristram’s action in this episode reflects the civil and administrative duties associated with knighthood in fifteenth-century England. The knights who achieve lordship may exercise their political authority to improve the ethical outlook of the laws and customs at the demand of a people. This view is reinforced in a similar episode. Nabon le Noir, the lord of the ‘Isle of Slavery’ (Ile of Servayge), is executed in a duel because of his tyrannical governance. In the prose Tristan, he is identified to be a malevolent giant with an inborn monstrosity in his nature. In Malory’s adaptation, Nabon a human knight and a ruler. His cruelty is caused by hatred: he ‘hated all the knyghtes of Kynge Arthures courte, [...] there com never knyght of Kynge Arthurs, but he distroyed hym’ (349.23-26). Tristram beheads

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Nabon without any hesitation to punish his many violent crimes. This execution is again supported by the people of the land: 'all the contrey seyde they wolde holde of Sir Trystrames, all the hole valay of Servage' (353.34-35). The collective voice justifies Tristan’s victory, by which many prisoners are set free and good governance is restored. Once again, the affective resonance between the knight and the governed people proves that the outcome of the duel is desirable on the social level.

The emotive alignment between the knight and the suffering people is best manifested in the ‘Red City’ episode. On the way to the tournament at Lonezep, Palomides learns about the usurpation of Helius and Helake and decides to fight with them to liberate the Red City. In the prose Tristan, Palomides first feigns to be losing, but later uses his full strength to dramatically overturn the outcome of the duel. In Malory’s text, Palomides encounters a matching opponent. Just as he is about to lose, he catches a glimpse of the grieving crowd:

Sir Palomydes, whyche had suffyrde an hondred strokes, and wondir hit was that he stoode on his fyete, so at the laste Sir Palomydes loked aboute as he myght waykely unto the comyn people how they wepte for hym and than he seyde to hymselff, ‘A, fye for shame, Sir Palomydes! Why hange ye youre hede so lowe?’ And therewith he bare up his shylde and loked Sir Helyus in the vysoure and smote hym a grete stroke uppon the helme, and aftir that anothis and anothis [...] (567.17-27)

This narrative illustrates the affective bond between the fighting knight and the common people who desire justice. At the turning point of the duel, the knight perceives the compassion of the people who are observing his struggle, and is inspired to outperform himself. The mutual desire for justice miraculously boosts the knight’s physical strength and allows him to achieve victory. Through this dramatic scene, Malory highlights the theme of the knight as a holder of justice, a defender of those who mourn, and a compassionate governor.

As demonstrated above, the motif of the judicial duel appears to be an instrumental form in chivalric romance. Nevertheless, the ‘evil customs’ depicted in these episodes bear striking similarities to some practices and events in history. In abstract terms, most judiciary systems were founded on certain forms of regulated violence. Knights who were land-holders were expected to uphold justice in their communities, because they had power to subdue evil. Malory’s knights represent social elites who share responsibilities of justice on a larger scale. His treatment of the judicial combats expresses a democratic vision of

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288 For example, Benson comments that ‘in The Book of Sir Tristram the “evil custom” abolished by Lamerok at one castle is simply the ordinary rule of tournaments in the earlier period: each passing knight must joust, and if he loses, “he shall lose his horse and harnes and all that he hath, and harde if he ascape but that he shall be presonere.” That was the whole point of jousting in William’s time.’ Benson, p. 165.
governance. The duels are presented as theatrical happenings that give voice to shifting interpretations of treason and worship, whose insistent repetitions point to the theme of justice. The anonymous voices, such as that of the maidens, the common people, and the hermits, reveal the invisible bond between the governor and the governed. Malory reveals that the collective body’s appeal for justice has an important role to play in motivating chivalric acts of defending the right of the weak and the poor.

The next chapter analyses two motifs that focus the emotional and moral perplexities of individual characters: the ‘Damsel in Distress’, and the conversations at the fountain. Both male and female characters in chivalric romances often experience emotional struggles caused by the betrayal of friends, the failure to protect a beloved one, or unrequited service of love. The common source of these struggles, including disproportionate desires of dominance and sexual immorality, is presented as a continuous threat to the peace of the community. Malory addresses the causes of emotional suffering in an increasingly individualistic world through modifying the discourse of passion in relevant episodes.

Chapter IV: Passion

The previous chapters examined motifs that shape the chivalric ethos on the social scale. This chapter turns to two motifs concerning private lives in the romance world, the ‘Damsel in Distress’ and the ‘conversations at the fountain’. These episodes facilitate dialogues on human attachments in a society governed by military elites. Through sophisticated conversations and debates on the questions of individual will and desire, the authors are able to introduce moral and sentimental dimensions into the hierarchical framework of dominance and subordination.

The ethics of chivalry expects a good knight to help women in need if he encounters them. As mentioned previously, heterosexual love often serves as the primary impetus for chivalric performance. The appreciation of heterosexual bonds brings about new ethical problems: while some knights succeed in achieving the love of their ladies through chivalric service, others experience more suffering than joy, and when they cannot obtain their lady’s favour, they often resort to force.

The ‘Damsel in Distress’ refers to a situation where a woman suffers injustice and seeks help from a knight either to recover her loss or to be freed from bondage. The passions of the suffering victim often result from another knight’s abuse of power. The adaptations of this motif in various narratives reflect such an ethical obligation – to defend the rights of the weak (in this case, women in distress). In reality, acts of rescue are often motivated by explicit promises of sexual or material reward. The motif of the ‘conversations at the fountain’, on the other hand, features the knights’ emotional struggles when their desire for the love of a lady is unfulfilled. The allegorical expressions of passions and lyrical complaints are overheard in the solitary space near the fountains. They trigger contemplative dialogues on the subject of love. Malory reduces the lyricism of these scenes; his knights communicate their emotions in realistic terms which reveal the moral hazards hindering their erotic pursuits. Malory’s decoding of the knights’ devotional zeal leads to a different interpretation of the symbolism of the fountain, which points to an edifying love that may free knightly lovers from sexual jealousy and competition.

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Overview

The ‘Damsel in Distress’ motif is one of the most common motifs in chivalric romances. A typical scenario involves a suffering woman and a knight-rescuer. The ‘damsel’, or the female subject in this narrative, is in distress because of another person’s trespass against
her. The most common types of trespasses fall into the categories of crime, including rape, abduction, slavery, and physical abuse.\textsuperscript{290} The knight-rescuer delivers her from danger, administers some form of punishment for the crime, and very often receives reward for his service. The episode usually concludes with the restoration of justice for the female victim.

Existing studies on medieval and modern laws regarding sexual abuse reveal a lack of respect for the subjectivity of the female victims. The changing definition of rape, in particular, has been studied in discussions about Malory’s life and work. For example, Kathryn Gravdal suggests that medieval ecclesiastic law treated \textit{raptus} (abduction or forced coitus) with explicit concerns over the father’s rights to determine the daughter’s marriage.\textsuperscript{291} Citing the definition in the \textit{Etymologies} of Isidore of Seville (c.33.4), Gratian interprets \textit{raptus} in moral terms from a male perspective: it is a form of debauchery that brings corruption to sexual activity that is against legal rights and outside marriage \textit{[contre droit et hors de mariage]}, and so is similar to fornication, adultery and incest. One of the cases talks about a man who invites a woman to eat in his house without asking her father’s consent and has sexual intercourse with her. The father then gives the woman to the man as his wife. Gratian emphasizes that this man has committed rape \textit{[raz in OF, raptus in Latin]}, since he did not first obtain the right to marry the victim by her father’s verbal permission. In the French translation, no term corresponds with the modern concept of ‘consent’,\textsuperscript{292} although in 1200, Pope Innocent III allowed the rapist to marry the victim by the latter’s (or possibly her father’s) agreement.\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{290} This comprises the motifs grouped under ‘abducted maiden’ (Thompson., VI, p.486) including Q53.3 (maiden offering her hand as reward), Q.244 (punishment for ravisher), R111 (rescue of maiden), R161.1 (Lover rescues his lady from abductor), R225 (elopement), T151.0.1 (captive maiden assigns quest, agreeing to marry when it is accomplished), etc. The common feature, as stated above, is that they all involve transgression against the body or possession of female characters, and the rescue or punishment through male agency.


\textsuperscript{292} Gravdal quotes the full passage from Gratian’s \textit{Decretum} C.36, q.i, d.p.c. 2: \textit{cum ergo hec illicito coitu sit corrupta, cumque ita sit abducta, id est a domo patris ducta, quod de eius nuptiis nichil actum ante fuerit, raptam appellandam nigari non potest} [since therefore this woman was corrupted by illegal sexual intercourse, and since she was abducted in this manner, that is to say taken from her father’s house, and because nothing had been previously settled concerning her marriage, it cannot be denied that she is to be termed \textit{raptus}]. Ibid., p.8. The Old French translation emphasizes the man’s lack of right to marry the woman before the intercourse: ‘raz est fet, quant pucele est menee a force hors de la meson som pere por corrompre la et avoir la puis a fame, a qui la force soit fete, ou a la pucele tant seulement ou a som pere, ou a l’un et a l’autre’ [rape is committed, if a maiden is snatched from her father’s house by force to be violated and later to be married as wife by force, either against the maiden’s will or her father’s, or both] (translation is mine). \textit{Gratiani Decretum: La Traduction en ancien français du Décret de Gratien}, ed. by Leena Löfstedt, 5 vols (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1997), Vol. IV, p. 161. The text and the translations do not recognize the importance of women’s verbal consent.

\textsuperscript{293} Gravdal, p. 9.
Catherine Batt’s study shows that English laws after the twelfth century are far from interested in the autonomy and integrity of women themselves. In earlier English law, it was the female victim who took her assailant to court. However, the Statues of Westminster of the thirteenth century punished ‘ravishment’ of a woman even if the woman expresses willingness afterwards. The Statute of Rapes of 1382 ‘accords the husband, the father, or next of kin, the right to make the accusation of rape even though the woman may have consented’, and disinherit both the accused ‘ravisher’ and the ‘ravished’. The accusation of rape against Malory, ‘the criminal of Newbold Revel’, was made by the husband on behalf of Joan Smith and without the testimony of the woman involved. In any case, forced coitus within marriage is not of legal or canonical concern, following the Pauline doctrine (1 Cor. 7:4-5). The Richardian legislative silencing of women’s voices exonerates both arranged marriage and forced coition within marriage bonds against women’s will. The Book of Margery Kempe shows how a wife may suffer emotionally in that situation. The disregard for the consent and integrity of women in medieval patriarchal laws creates a lacuna in the textual formulation of heterosexual relationship, which is filled only by literary genres. As the Tristan legend and other chivalric narratives well attest, medieval romance engages with male and female psychology in such matters more than other genres of literature. Romance expresses a keen interest in passions that can influence or motivate chivalric actions, especially as dangerous psychic powers that can cause men and women to break away from normal social bonds. While the previously discussed motifs expose the insufficiency of legal institutions in the romance world, the ‘Damsel in Distress’ episodes allow authors to examine the emotional consequences which result from the abuse of power. Both rational discourse and emotional discourse in these episodes reflect the different views of gender in the medieval context.

Words Ignored

The Pentecostal Oath contains a specific warning about the violation of women’s rights. All the Round Table knights are called to ‘do ladies, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes soccour, strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them uppon payne of

295 Ibid. p. 82.
297 Margery describes her tribulation when her husband demands the right of marriage against her will: ‘[h]e wold have hys wylle, and sche obeyd wyth greet wepyng and sorwyng for that sche myght not levyn chast’. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 63.
dethe’ (97.31-33). Several possible sources for this passage can be found. The first and most likely model is a passage from _Lestoire du Merlin_, where Nascien, chosen by the knights as a representative, voices the following oath:

‘[L]i compaignon de la table roonde qui chi sont veuent a dieu en oiance de vous & de tous les barons que chi sont, que por ce que vous aues fait le uostre ueu, en fonz il . j. autre a tous les iours del monde que la pucele qui besoing ait ne vendra a uostre court por secors querre ne por aide qui puisse estre menee a chief par le cors dun seul cheualier encontre . j . autre qu’il ni aillent volentiers por li delurier quel part que cil ou chele l’en uaudra mener. & tant fera qu’il fera adrecier les tors que len li aura fais.’

This oath is evidently different from that in Malory’s text. First, it specifies that the female recipient of the charitable aid should be a ‘pucele’ [highlighted in the text], literally a virgin or a maiden. Second, it specifies the place where such an appeal can be heard – the court of King Arthur. Another possible source has been suggested, which is the ceremonial oath of the Knight of the Bath: ‘ye schall sustene wydowes in their right at every tyme they wol requere yow and maydenys in their virginite and helpe hem and socoure hem with yowre good that for lak of good they be not mysgovenyd’. Although widows and maidens are both included, the married women – ladies and gentlewomen – are not mentioned. It seems that Malory himself invents an oath to include the different types of women and thus makes it a charitable act to help married women who are in need.

The most significant change in Malory’s formulation of the Round Table oath is the specific requirement to respect women’s will. Barber and Batt both note that the command, ‘never to enforce them upon Payne of dethe’ (97.33), is significant. Batt suggests that this phrasing is reminiscent of earlier English jurisdiction on rape and military provision for women’s safety in time of war. The explicit prohibition of manipulating women by force is consistently exemplified through Malory’s adaptation of the ‘Damsel in Distress’ episodes. As we shall see in the following analysis, Malory’s male characters give unprecedented attention to women’s verbal expressions of will and desire.

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298 Sommer, _The Vulgate Version_, p. 320.
301 Batt (1997); Richard Barber, ‘Malory’s _Le Morte Darthur_ and Court Culture under Edward IV’, _Arthurian Literature_, 12, 134 (1993), 133-55.
One classic example of the mental and physical harm that a knight may carelessly inflict on a girl can be found in Chrétien’s *Perceval*. Before the hero sets off, his mother counsels him on handling a maiden’s affection with foresight:

*Dames et puceles servez,*
*Si seroiz par tot enorez ;*
*Et se vos aucune an proieiez,*
*Gardez que ne li enuiiez*
*Ne feites rien qui li despleise.*
*De pucele a mout qui la beise ;*
*S’ele le beisier vos consant*
*Le soreplus vos an desfant*
*Se leissier le volez por moï.*
*Et s’ele a anel en son doi*
*Ou a sa ceinture aumosniere,*
*Se par amor ou par proiere*
*Le vos done, bon m’iert et bel*
*Que vos en portoi zo an anel :*
*De l’anel prandre vos doing giê*
*Et de l’aumosniere congïe.* (Vss. 533-56)

['If you serve a lady or a maiden, you should honour her above all; and if she should pray you anything, be careful that you do not annoy her nor do anything that may displease her. A maiden makes much of the one who kisses her; If she allows you to give her a kiss, you shall refrain from asking for more. And I want you to leave it there. And if she has a ring on her finger, or an alms purse buckled to her belt, And either for love or for pity, She gives it to you, I should think it good and well that you wear her ring: I give you permission to keep the ring and the alms purse too.]

Perceval’s mother outlines some moral boundaries concerning physical interaction and reward during a knight’s encounter with a maiden. Noticeably, the acceptability of his behaviour is defined in terms of acquisition: Perceval is permitted to receive a kiss, her ring and her alms purse. Above all, he should do nothing that may displease her, that is, against her will.

Several phrases in the mother’s speech, including ‘*en proiezte*’, ‘*vos consent*’, and ‘*par proiere*’, highlight the importance of the verbal communication of desire and consent prior to the physical actions. This specific requirement, however, fails to impress the young hero. In his first encounter with a girl, he ignores her verbal protest and robs her of all three things that his mother has permitted him to take. She tries in vain to stop Perceval from kissing her and taking away her possessions. When her male companion returns, he also ignores her complaints and refuses to listen to her honest words. This jealous lover named the Proud Knight blames the girl for having failed to defend herself:

*Ne sai queus voies il ala ;*
*Mes tant fist que il la beisa*
*Par force, si le me conut.*
*S’ele me manti, que li nut?*
He then cruelly punishes her and makes her travel on foot in ragged clothes until Perceval meets them again, subdues the knight by force, and restores the girl to her honour and health. This type of accusation is common in medieval literature and in trials of sexual abuse.\footnote{A similar passage occurs in the thirteenth-century La Clef d’amours: Jamès fame n’oseroit dire / de bouch cen que tant desire:/ mès mont li plést que nen la prenge / mal gré soen, comment qu’il avenge. / Pucele soudement ravie / a grant joie, que qu’ele die [Never would a woman dare say with her own mouth what she desires so much; but it pleases her greatly when someone takes her against her will, regardless of how it comes about. A maiden suddenly ravished has great joy, no matter what she says]. Quoted from Gravdal, pp. 4-5. Modern studies on rape cases recognize victim pleasure and its psychological impact on the victims’ evaluation of the event. See D. J. Angelone, Damon Mitchell, and Laura Grossi, ‘Men’s Perceptions of an Acquaintance Rape: The Role of Relationship Length, Victim Resistance, and Gender Role Attitudes’, \textit{Journal of Interpersonal Violence}, 30, 13 (2014), 2278-303; Damon Mitchell, Richard Hirschman, and Gordon Nagayama Hall, ‘Attributions of Victim Responsibility, Pleasure, and Trauma in Male Rape’, \textit{The Journal of Sex Research}, 36, 4 (1999), 369-73.} Sadly, even Perceval seems to agree that the girl is partly responsible for what happened against her will. His reply begins with the phrase ‘ele a faite sa penitance’ [she has done her penance], which implies that she deserves the physical suffering, even though it would not have happened if Perceval had acted wisely in their first encounter, or that her lover had believed her when she said that Perceval took the three ‘gifts’ from her by force.

The narrative of \textit{Perceval} exposes the problem of the knights’ tendency to ignore female consent without a satisfactory solution. Even though Perceval is the knight who has caused the girl’s disgrace in the first place, he is not blamed, but rather receives chivalric honour through rescuing her from the punishment of her companion. After defeating the Proud Knight, Perceval orders him to report the case in King Arthur’s court. This male-dominant approach to justice is inevitably flawed, as a Damsel in Distress cannot make her plea heard unless through the help of another man. The damsel’s anonymity in the episode discussed above implies that her role in this narrative is only meaningful in relationship with
the two knights, and since both have caused her distress, the one who does less harm receives honour despite his culpability.

The case of the Damsel in Distress in *Perceval* covers up a moral hazard rooted in a system of justice which relies on the exertion of masculine power. The verbal expression of a female subject is powerless without the assurance of a capable male agent to validate its content. In the romance world, women without male companions are easy targets of aggressive behaviours. They are often victimized by knights who do not take the moral precepts of chivalry seriously. As discussed in previous chapters, Balin is a typical knight who refuses to listen to the words of the powerless female characters. After helping a distressed damsel by drawing out her sword, Balin decides to possess the sword: ‘*car il m’est avis que jeo l’ai gaigné*’ [it seems to me that I have won it] (fol.247v, col.2). In Malory’s adaptation, Balin’s behaviour appears to be much more aggressive. Even though the damsel begs him and addresses him as a ‘*jantyll* and *curtayse knyght*’, he refuses to listen to her but replies: ‘for thys swerde woll I kepe *but hit be takyn fro me with force*’ (33-35).

Romance authors recognize that the problem of consent is fundamentally a problem of verbal communication. They draw attention to the frustration and distress of the female speakers who are deliberately ignored or silenced. In the prose *Tristan* and Malory’s ‘*Tristram*’, the female characters show strong will and emotions in words more than in action. The knight shows how much he respects a woman’s will in the way he responds to her verbal expression. Malory elevates the exemplary knights’ moral character by changing the motivation and the evaluation of their rescuing acts, as we shall see in the discussions below.

**Passions that Matter**

In medieval chivalric romances, emotional responses often conform to a gendered formula. Radulescu notices that Malory frequently uses the phrase ‘oute of mesure’ to refer to the knights’ excessive anger (especially when they discover treachery or feel envious), whereas female characters are more likely to experience excessive love and/or sorrow. The gender distinction is more evident in the prose *Tristan*, where the Damsels in Distress always experience fear and sadness. Anger and hatred seldom make their way into female discourse. Malory characterises strong-willed female figures who readily seek remedy or revenge by appealing to other knights’ compassion and charity. This distinguishes his narratives of the motif from that in his source text. One episode involving the character

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304 Radulescu, pp. 123-27.
Breuse Sans Pité, an outlaw guilty of serial crimes against women, shows how Malory changes the characterisation in the prose *Tristan* through adaptation. Once, Dinadan encounters a damsel by chance and notices her distress. She tells him that her suffering is caused by Breuse Sans Pité.

When communicating her emotions, the damsel only mentions sadness, fear, and doubt ('doeil', 'paour', 'doute'). Dinanan’s response reveals his charity and compassion: ‘je me combaterai a lui pour vostre amour et pour vostre delivranche’ [I shall fight with him for your love and for your freedom].

Malory’s narrative of this scene depicts a woman who not only grieves, but is also filled with anger and hatred. In this text, the lady ‘makyng grete dole’ directly requires Dinadan to take revenge for her:

So as Sir Dynadan rode by a well, he founde a lady makyng grete dole. ‘What aylith you?’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘Sir knyght,’ seyde the lady, ‘I am the woful lady of the worlde, for within thyse fyve dayes here com a knyght called Sir Breuse Saunz Pite, and he slewe myne owne brothir, and ever syns he hath kepe me at hys owne wylle, and of all men in the
I hate hym moste. And therefore I requyre you of knyghthode to avenge me, for he woll nat tarry but be here anone.' (435.22-29)

Unlike the damsel in the prose Tristan, the lady in this scene does not mention the emotion of fear, but recognises the cause of her ‘dole’ to be her inability to restore justice. She directly asks Dinadan ‘to avenge’ her by appealing to his ‘knyghthode’ after making her complaint. This speech reminds the knight of his commitment to the charitable duties of chivalry, that he is obliged to defend the rights of the weak. This conversation effectively demonstrates the relevance of justice and women’s honour in the chivalric ideal: Dinadan is motivated by a sense of justice to fight with Breuse ‘bycause of the honoure of all women’ (435.30-31) and not just because of his compassion for the suffering one. The victim’s expression of hatred (or anger) towards evil changes the conventional gender stereotype: although the Damsel in Distress is still physically weak, she may have a strong will to bring the abuser to just punishment.

As mentioned earlier, the prose Tristan contains an episode of Palomides’ abduction of the queen. Once Yseut manages to run away from Palomides, she nearly commits suicide out of despair and affliction. The first knight she encounters on the way notices her unusual emotions and is moved to action:

Quant il voient la roïne, il ne la reconoissent pas, car il ne l’avoient mie granment veüe. Et neporquant au riche ator qu’ele avoit pensent il bien et apercevent qu’ele est de grant afaire ; mes mout se merveillent de ce qu’ele est si espoentee. Et por ce li viennent il au devant et li demandent que ele a. ‘Que je a! Fait ele. Je ai tant d’anui et de corroz que je me veil perir en ceste eve, car mieuz veil morir que aler après un chevalier qui a force m’en moine. Et je sai bien qu’il me suit, et qu’il est pres de ci.’ Et li chevaliers qui bien conoist qu’ele se voloit metre en l’eve et soi perir de duel, la prent par le froin et dit: ‘Ha! dame, merci, ne vos desconfortez si durement. Je vos conseillerai assez mieuz.’ ‘Dites,’ fait ele. ‘Dame, ci pres a une tor qui mout est bele et mout riche. Se vos leanz vos estiez mise, vos n’avriez garde dé deus meillors chevaliers dou monde qu’il venissent a vos a force. Venez i tost et vos metez dedenz, et je vos aseür que ja puis n’avrez garde d’ome de ceste terre, se ce n’est del roi Marc ou de Tristan, son neveu, des deus sanz faille ne vos oseroie je garantir, car il sont mi seignor lige.’ (Curtis, §502)

[When they saw the queen, they did not recognize her, because they had not seen her much. Nevertheless, they thought and were convinced by the rich clothes on her that she was of high status; but they were astonished to see her so terrified. So they went forward and asked what troubled her. ‘What troubles me!’ She said, ‘I am so afflicted and miserable that I wish to drown myself in this water, because I would rather die than follow a knight who forcibly abducts me. I know very well that he follows me, and that he is very close to this place.’ And the knight, seeing that she wanted to jump into the water and is to die of sorrow, seized the bridle of her horse and said: ‘Ha! My lady, please do not lose heart! I can give you good counsel.’ ‘Tell me,’ she said. ‘Lady, nearby is a beautiful and rich tower. If you hide yourself in there, you don’t need to worry even if the two best knights of the world come to you with armed might. Go there quickly and hide yourself inside, and I promise that you don’t need to worry about any
man in this land, unless it be King Mark or Tristan, his nephew – I certainly cannot promise to defend you against those two, since they are my overlords.

The knight feels pity for Yseut and selflessly decides to deliver her from danger, but he also shows reservations about confronting his two immediate overlords. His reason seems self-explanatory, and it justifies Tristan’s role of eventually rescuing the queen. This shows that in the context of the prose Tristan, an overlord may possess a woman against her will without the need to worry about opposition from his subjects.

Malory rewrites this episode and renders a fast-paced account of the event. He gives the knight-rescuer, who is anonymous in the source text, a proper name – Adtherpe. His paratactic narrative better conveys the urgency of the situation, since all the unnecessary details about the queen’s clothes and the highly emotional speeches are omitted.

So the quene ran into the foreste, and there she founde a welle and therein she had thought to have drowned herself. And as good fortune wolde, there cam a knyght to her that had a castell there bye, and his name was Sir Adtherpe. And whan he founde the quene in that mischeff he rescowed her and brought hir to his castell. And whan he wyste what he was he armed hym and toke his horse, and seyde he wolde be avenged uppon Sir Palomydes. (337.16-26)

In this passage, the emotional responses of Isode and Adtherpe are no less intense than the source, but are communicated in a different manner. Isode is partly responsible for her miserable situation as she gave Palomides the opportunity to carry her away through her blind promise. Malory eliminates the source text’s interpretation of Adtherpe’s motivation in the description of his decision. It seems that Adtherpe already knows who Isode and Palomides are when he decides to rescue the queen, as he says ‘he wolde be avenged uppon Sir Palomydes’. If the knight-rescuer in the prose Tristan is moved by pure compassion, the absence of verbal communication in Malory’s text makes space for rational and ethical judgement. Adtherpe shares the chivalric duty of confronting evil and punishing an offense against the queen’s integrity, as he later tells Tristram: ‘for her sake I toke uppon me to do batayle with Sir Palomydes’ (338.18-19).

**Incentives and Rewards**

Rescuing a Damsel in Distress involves the risk of coming into direct conflict with a powerful opponent, therefore a knight may not readily respond to a cry for help. In the episode discussed above, Isode’s identity helps the knight-rescuer to make the hard decision to risk his body. In another situation, a Damsel in Distress may struggle to find a knight who is willing to rescue her. One of the strongest incentives which can move knights into courageous action is romantic love. Another is material reward in terms of title, land, or
a beautiful wife. In most narratives of the Damsel in Distress, the female messengers and
victims are physically attractive, even though they do not always end up in sexual
relationship with their rescuers. In his adaptation of the Damsel in Distress episodes, Malory
often removes conventional incentives such as the physical beauty of the female victim and
the promise of reward.

The generic overtone of the damsels’ beauty and the expectation of material reward in
the prose Tristan can undermine the charitable intention. Malory consistently improves the
knight’s sense of charity and justice in these episodes. For example, in the episode of
‘Alexander the Orphan’, the protagonist wins a damsel's love through his performance in a
tournament. The damsel then comes to him with the request of help:

*Mes la damoiselle fu venue devant lui & li dist, ‘Sire chevalier, vous avez assez
gaagnie si bele damoiselle con je sui & si biau chastel & quan qu’il japent & tant me
dites que baez vous afere, il vous estuet combatre a vn mien voisin se vous voulez
que cestui pais soit empes.’ ‘Or viengne,’ fet li Orfelins Alixandre ‘que ja neli faudrai de
la bataille.*

[But the damsel came before him and said, ‘sir knight, you have won such a beautiful
damsel as I am and such a seemly castle; as much as they boast and as you tell me
so much about what you aspire to do, you should fight with a neighbour of mine if you
would, so that this land could be properly yours.’ ‘Let him come,’ Alexander the Orphan
said, ‘and I shall not fail him in the battle.’]

The damsel in this episode appears to be a rich heiress. She asks Alexander to fight an
aggressive suitor and promises that the knight can marry her and obtain her land as rewards
for his service. Alexander’s decision to encounter the girl’s neighbour therefore is not
motivated by charitable love. In the end, Alexander fails to acquire the damsel and her land
only because Morgan le Fay forces him to reject her and marries her to another man
according to custom.

In Malory’s version, the Damsel in Distress does not promise rewards when she asks
Alexander to fight with ‘an evil neighbour’:

*So turne we to the damesell of the castell, that whan Alysaundir le Orphelyne had
forjusted the foure knyghtes she called hym to her and seyde thus: ‘Sir knyght, wolte
thou for my sake juste and fyght wyth a knyght of this contrey, that is and hath bene
longe an evyll neyghboure to me? his name is Sir Malegryne, and he woll nat suffir me
to be maryde in no maner.’

‘Damesell,’ seyde Sir Alysaundir, ‘and he com the whyle that I am here, I woll fyght
with hym.’ (507.16-21)*

The damsel expects Alexander to do justice for her as she points out that her neighbour’s
intention is immoral, and condemns his behaviour of not allowing her to marry freely.

305 The narrative of Alexander in the prose Tristan is quoted from Sommer’s transcription in Sommer
Alexander agrees to help on the condition that her neighbor comes while he stays in the castle, which implies that he does not expect to possess the castle or her land. Hence, his willingness to fight for the damsel is not motivated by the hope of gain. It is only after Alexander has won the combat against her neighbor and received deadly wounds that the damsel offers to marry him: ‘for he hath wonne me with his hondis’ (509.10), but soon Morgan le Fay prevents this marriage, and she asks to be married to another knight of her choice. Malory improves the ethical ground of Alexander’s chivalric undertaking by removing the incentives of matrimonial rewards from the conversation leading up to the combat.

Malory’s intentional improvement of the knights’ ethical standards is also evident in another episode, as he turns an abduction into a typical scene of the Damsel in Distress. In the source, Lamorak challenges a stranger to a combat because he lusts for the latter’s beautiful damsel. Just as he finishes the knight’s life, Gawain arrives on the scene and forces the woman to go with him. She protests, and when Lamorak perceives Gawain’s intention, he tries to stop King Arthur’s nephew but fails:

Quant Lamorat ot et entent que cele se demante si fort, il s’en vient tot mentenant a monseignor Gauven et li dit: ‘Sire chevaliers, lessiez la demoisele, que vos n’i avez droit.’ ‘Or sachiez, fait mesire Gauvens, que la demoisele en menré je, se je puis.’ ‘Qui estes vos, fait Lamoraz, qui si vos esforciez de mener la demoisele?’ ‘Et vos qui estes, fait il, qui tolir la me volez?’ ‘Je sui, fait il, Lamorat de Gales, qui la vos contredirai.’ ‘Et je sui, fait il, Gauvens, li nié le roi Artus, qui me combatrai tant com je porrai ferir d’espee avant qu’ele ne me remeigne.’ (Curtis II, §626)

When Lamorak heard the damsel lamenting so bitterly, he went immediately to lord Gawain and said to him: ‘Sir knight, let go of the damsel, because you have no right to possess her,’ ‘I tell you,’ said lord Gawain, ‘that I shall keep the damsel as long as I can.’ ‘Who are you,’ asked Lamorak, ‘that you want to keep her by force?’ ‘And who are you,’ he asked, ‘that you want to take her from me?’ ‘I am Lamorak de Gales,’ he said, ‘and I refute your claim of her.’ ‘And I am,’ he said, ‘Gawain, the nephew of King Arthur, and I will do what I can with my sword before she is taken from me.’]

Lamorak argues that he has the right to possess the damsel because he has won the combat with her original companion. He accuses Gawain of doing wrong in legal terms such as ‘vos n’i avez droit’ and ‘vos esforciez’, even though his own conduct is not any nobler. Neither of the two knights ever shows any concern about the damsel’s consent, as both try to keep the damsel for themselves by force. The narrator gives no account of the damsel’s speech but only describes her sadness and fear.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Malory builds up a more positive character of Lamorak through rewriting this episode. In his version, Lamorak does not take the initiative to seize the damsel by force. He happens to pass by when Gawain forces her to go with him, and then tries to stop Gawain out of pity for the damsel. However, once Lamorak learns that his opponent is a fellow knight of the Round Table, he refrains from rescuing her and
allows Gawain to carry her off. Soon the damsel’s lover arrives on the scene, and defeats Gawain. Lamorak feels the responsibility to take revenge for Gawain, otherwise he might be shamed in King Arthur’s court. He fights with the damsel’s lover and eventually kills him. Meanwhile, the woman escapes from the fighting knights and reports her lover’s death to his brother, Beliance. Beliance arrives to fight with Lamorak and eventually causes the latter to acknowledge his mistake. Malory’s modification shows that he tries to enhance the moral character of Lamorak and change the ethical focus of the narrative. The original debate over who has the right to possess the damsel shifts towards a different topic: is maintaining the peaceful bond of fellowship sufficient reason to refrain from rescuing a Damsel in Distress? The conclusion of this event reveals that Malory prioritizes justice over fellowship, since Lamorak’s unethical defense of his fellowship bond with Gawain reduces his honour in the eyes of others.

**Affective Bonds**

Women’s physical attractiveness can prompt acts of transgression as well as of protection or rescue, as romantic love serves as the primary drive behind chivalric actions. In Malory’s narrative, heterosexual attachment can have a great impact on how the community functions as a whole, even though the author evidently tones down the eroticism in his sources. The social cost of extramarital attachments is sufficiently demonstrated throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, and particularly in the last books. Earlier Tristan narratives present the problem of passion through the sympathetic unfolding of the lovers’ tragic adventures. The prose *Tristan* extends the discussion by introducing various characters as Tristan’s foil, analogue, or contrast into the narrative. The most interesting characters of this crew are perhaps Dinadan and Palomides, who appear to be at the opposite ends of the spectrum. While Dinadan plays the role of a witty sidekick who deliberately shuns heterosexual attachment, Palomides tends to be ruled by his passion more often than his reason. Both characters are capable of noble and charitable deeds.

In the prose *Tristan*, Dinadan’s deliberate efforts to avoid romantic attachments is often interpreted as an excuse for cowardice. Malory turns it into a form of pragmatic wisdom of avoiding self-destruction in a dangerously competitive world. In both texts, Dinadan’s

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306 Vinaver thus summarizes Dinadan’s view of love: ‘A love that torments and murders its servants merely punishes them for their folly […] The love that is in my heart gives me joy, delight and merriment… It never deceives me because I never ask of it more than it can give … and never do I lose my heart: ceul ci son ten trop fort prison qui pensent a dame et a demoiselle.’ Vinaver, ‘The Prose *Tristan*’, p. 344.
down-to-earth view of the chivalric values often appears comical. For example, Isode playfully tests Dinadan’s attitude through an imagined Damsel in Distress situation:

‘Now I pray you, for my love,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘wyll ye fyght for me wyth thre knyghtes that doth me grete wronge? And insomuche as ye bene a knyght of Kynge Arthurs, I requyre you to do batayle for me.’
Than Sir Dynadan seyde, ‘I shall sey you ye be as fayre a lady as evir I sawe ony, and much fayrner thans is my lady Quene Gwnyvere, but wyte you well, at one worde, I wolle nat fyght for you wyth thre knyghtes, Jesu me defende!’
Than Isode lowghe, and had good game at hym. So he had all the chyre that she myght make hym, and there he lay all that nyght. (549.16-25)

Dinadan first acknowledges Isode’s beauty, but then determinedly refuses to rescue her despite her need for a champion to do justice. To a reader who is familiar with chivalric romance, Dinadan’s candid refusal indeed provides comic relief in a much too serious world of violence, and his humbleness almost turns him into a type of Sancho Panza. Malory’s characterization of Dinadan makes a case for keeping one’s chivalric ambition within the bounds of reason.

As the only Saracen knight who is also a main character in the story, Palomides occupies a unique place in Malory’s Arthurian world. Compared with Dinadan, Palomides is apparently more capable of performing a chivalric rescue. However, he is also less conscious of the moral requirement of the chivalric ideal. At the beginning of the narrative, his passionate pursuit of the queen causes chaos and conflicts. However, in both the prose Tristan and the ‘Tristram’, Palomides’ character develops as he learns lessons through the troubles caused by his virile competitiveness, which allows him to accomplish charitable deeds. For example, after betraying Tristan at the tournament of Lonezep, Palomides feels shamed because of Yseut’s contempt, and leaves Tristan’s fellowship in sadness. Soon afterwards he encounters a knight named Epinogris, who also suffers for the love of a lady. Palomides learns that the lady of Epinogris has been abducted by a strong knight, and offers him help out of pity:

Quant Palamidés voit cest plait et il connoist la mesaise du cevalier et le grant doeu, pitié l’em prent et forment l’em poise ; auques vait son doeil oubliant pour le doel au cevalier. Trop volentiers li aidast de cestui fait et secoureüst se il seüst quel guise il le peïst faire. (Ménard VI, §7)
[When Palamide saw this pledge and learned about the suffering and pain of this knight, he was seized by pity and his heart was heavy for his misfortune. He soon forgot his own sorrow because of that of the knight’s. He would gladly help and save him from this situation if only he knew how he could do so.]

Palomides’ wish to help the knight to reunite with his lady shows that he is able to empathize because of his own suffering in love. The affective resonance creates a strong bond between the two knights, and the conventional gender paradigm is changed. Palomides
offers chivalric service to a ‘knight in distress’ so that both the knight and his lover can rejoice. This episode reveals that the ‘Damsel in Distress’ is never just about the suffering of a damsel: both men and women can feel too weak to protect their love when their freedom is undermined by the powerful and immoral knights. The male lover is no less pitiable than the woman, since their suffering is mutual. Since Palomides does not desire to possess the lady he is rescuing, his decision means a personal sacrifice and is motivated by charitable love.

In *Le Morte Darthur*, Palomides’ pledge to Epinogris in this episode echoes that of Gawain in an earlier section of the book. Palomides promises Epinogris, ‘yf I can mete with Sir Helyor, *that I shall gete to you your lady agayne, other ellys he shall beate me*’ (607.14-16). This reminds the readers of Gawain’s pledge to Pelleas in ‘The Book of Adventures’: ‘Now,’ sayde Sir Gawayne, ‘leve your mournynge, and *I shall promise you by the feyth of my body to do all that lyeth in my powere to gete you the love of your lady*, and thereto I woll plyghte you my trouthe’ (132.8-11). Although Gawain, too, is impressed by the suffering of the knight who cannot have his lady, he proves to be unfaithful to his promise. As soon as Gawain meets Pelleas’ lady Ettaerde, he lies to her that he has killed Pelleas and manipulates her through a rash promise (133.25-30). Palomides, on the other hand, succeeds in his adventure, fights with a strong knight who turns out to be his own brother, and faithfully returns the lady to Epinogris. Malory emphasizes the emotional aspect of the reward that Palomides receives because of his charitable deed: ‘and there was grete joy betwyxte them, for aythir sowned for joy whan they were mette’ (609.10-12).

Despite his kinship bond with Saphir, Palomides chooses to do justice in this matter. His choice results in the reunion between Epinogris and his lady. In the prose *Tristan*, the narrator judges Epinogris to be the winner of the greatest joy:

> La joie est mout grans et la feste merveilleuse que Espynogres fait a sa dame. Cele nuit demourerent laiens a grant joie et a grant feste, qu’il ont oubliés lour maus. Palamidès est si joians de ce que il a son fere avoeuques lui qu’il en oublie toute l’ire et tout le courous qu’il a envers monsigneur Tristran. S’il est bien liés, Sephar n’est mie mains joians. Grant joie fait li uns frere de l’autre, mais entr’aus n’a mie si grant joie que Espynogres n’ait encore grigneur, que il a tout çou qu’il veut. (Ménard VI, §14)

[They had great joy as Epynogres held marvelous celebrations for his lady. That night, they celebrated and feasted there until they had forgotten about their misfortune. Palamides was so happy that he had his brother’s company that he forgot all his anger and misgiving towards Tristan. Sephar was filled with even more joy compared with Palamides. The brothers enjoyed each other’s company very much, but no one was happier than Epynogres, who had nothing to complain about, since he had all he ever desired.]

This narratorial comment describes the happiness of the three men in different terms, and rather strangely leaves Epinogris’ lady out of the account. From the narrator’s point of view, Epinogris, ‘que il a tout çou qu’il veut’, is the most satisfied among all. Malory, on the other
hand, introduces a different kind of joy: ‘And so was Sir Epynogrys and hys lady horsed uppon a soffte ambler, and than they rode unto his castell. And there they had grete chere and grete joy, as ever Sir Palomydes and Sir Saffir had in theire lyvys’ (609.24-27). As the narrator focuses on the emotional experience of Palomides and Saphir, the superlative quality of their happiness suggests that their sacrificial decision has enabled them to experience something they have never experienced before. The collective pronoun ‘they’ eliminates the individual differences and celebrates an empathetic and honourable delight that can be shared by all.

The problem of transgressions becomes more evident in the later episodes of the prose Tristan. The cry for help can often come from male characters who do not have the means or power to protect their rights and their female companions. Palomides in particular suffers exclusion and group persecution. Malory demonstrates that the injustice that disturbs the peace in the Arthurian realm is far from a gender problem. Both male and female are victims of the violence that result from the powerful knights’ lack of moral constraints. As male characters increasingly become victims of violence, fellowship becomes the most versatile and dynamic bond on which the community is structured. Charity and the communal sense of justice bind individuals together through affective networks, which helps to maintain the peace, albeit temporarily. The moral degeneration of those who occupy higher positions in the chivalric establishment cannot be efficiently eliminated through individual actions.

Conversations at the Fountain

Overview

An iconic scene from the earliest versions of the Tristan legend, ‘The Tryst beneath the Tree’, became a popular decorative motif on medieval artefacts. The storyline is well known: Tristan sends the request for a meeting carved on a piece of wood, which flows down a stream into Yseut’s chamber. The message is soon discovered by Mark’s dwarf, and the king decides to catch the lovers suddenly. Their secret meeting takes place in a garden, where King Mark hides in a tree to eavesdrop on the conversation between his wife and nephew. In the original narrative, the moonlight casts Mark’s shadow on the ground and is perceived by the lovers. Interestingly, although there is no mention of a well in the texts, medieval artists have managed to incorporate it into their presentations. The reflection of the eavesdropper’s face in the well is substituted for the shadow in the moonlight. For example, a fourteenth century ivory mirror case now preserved in the Musée de Cluny in Paris
presents a pine tree in the centre, with the two lovers on each side and a well underneath the tree. The shape of King Mark’s head in the tree is also shown in the middle of the well. This motif is found on many mirror cases, possibly because of ‘the essential role reflection plays in the scene’.

Outside the Tristan tradition, the image of the fountain or the well has rich symbolic meanings in medieval literary traditions. In Biblical exegesis, the fountain of life symbolizes the words of God (Ps 36:9), righteous or wise speech (Prov 10:11 & 13:14), and the understanding of divine grace (Prov 16:22). This imagery appears in devotional lyrics such as that of Hildegard von Bingen: ‘Ipse velox cervus cucurrit / ad fontem purissime aque/ fluentis de fortissimo lapide / qui dulcia aromataa irrigavit’ [This swift hart ran to the fountain of clearest water flowing from the most steadfast stone, which fountain has watered the sweet herbs]. In classical mythology, the fountain is associated with the Greek Muses in Mount Helicon and the Roman Carmenae as a source of poetic inspiration. The garden with a source of water often appears in medieval imaginative writings, such as the fountain of Narcissus in Roman de la Rose, or the fountain of Venus, Paris and Helen in Machaut’s Livre de la fonteinne amoureuse. The association between fountain, contemplation, and lyrical expression in medieval literature is a possible response to the rediscovery of Aristotelian ethics that perceives contemplative activity as a source of human happiness.

In chivalric romances, the symbolic meaning of the fountain is reflected in its function as a transposed or illusionary locus amoenus, secluded yet eventful, where secret confessions are sometimes overheard.

Natural springs in a forest or in a woodland were once places of rest in the wild. As The Life of Gildas records, fountains were part of the scenery on the road to be found in Britain:

Fontibus lucidis crebrisque gaudet, ex quibus rivuli leni murmure serpentes suave pignis soporis tribuunt vintoribus essis.

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It rejoices in numerous lucid fountains from which brooks issue forth with gentle murmur, and which afford to weary travellers the sweet assurance of sleep.\footnote{Two Lives of Gildas, ed. by Hugh Williams (Felinfach: Llanerch Enterprises, 1990), pp. 14-15.}

Demartini suggests that despite the progress of clearing and deforestation, the forests remain a mythical space of stretched imaginations in the thirteenth century.\footnote{Demartini, p. 136.} In romance narratives, when knights and ladies come to the refreshment of the fountain in solitude, they let down physical and psychological guards to lament the realities of frustration and pain. Fountains in the prose Tristan appear to be natural water sources. However, the assumed tranquility, privacy, and peace are somewhat illusionary, as any stranger can intrude into this unconfined space. Hunters, wounded knights, enemies and friends converge at the fountain and momentarily diverge from their adventures.

Emmanuèle Baumgartner lists several narrative functions of the fountain in classical and medieval literary traditions: it can serve as a place of encounters, narcissistic reflections, dangerous adventures, brief repose, or a new turn of the plot. She points out that only in the Tristan narratives does the fountain serve as a discursive space of la folie d’amour.\footnote{Baumgartner, pp. 76-78.} In medieval genres such as debates, allegorical poems and dream visions, the solitary space at the fountains in the wild allows travelers to momentarily retreat from worldly affairs and meditate on the topic of love. Although these episodes do not involve much action, their importance for narrative development is not to be underestimated, as they elucidate the motivations behind individual characters’ decisions.\footnote{The verse texts and lyrical insertions are often discussed in studies on the prose Tristan. E. Baumgartner first studied 26 versified passages in the prose Tristan and highlights the apparent simplicity of their forms. Emmanuèle Baumgartner, Le Tristan en prose: Essai d’interprétation d’un roman médiéval (Geneva: Droz, 1975), pp. 298-307. Sylvia Huot studied the verse riddles in the earlier part of the prose Tristan and argues that these verses confront the question of personal identity and the individual’s relationship to sin and divine grace. Sylvia Huot, 'Unspeakable Horror, Ineffable Bliss: Riddles and Marvels in the Prose Tristan’, Medium Ævum, 71 (2002), 47-65. Maureen Boulton suggests that the lais performed by the characters other than Tristan resonate with the protagonist’s experience of love and reinforce the romance’s central theme of the love affair. See ‘Tristan and his Doubles as Singers of Lais: Love and Music in the Prose Roman de Tristan’ in Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative, ed. by Karen Pratt and Elspeth Kennedy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 53-69. Hüe argues that the versification testifies the archaism and orality of the narrative. See ‘La Parole Enchâssée: Écriture de l’insertion lyrique dans le Tristan en prose’ in Harf-Lancner and others pp. 43-62.}

As Philippe Ménard observes, ‘les pièces lyriques semblent donc l’apanage des héros de premier plan. Elles surgissent aux heurés de déchirement intérieur, aux moment où tout bascule, où tout s’effondre, où la tension se fait ardente et vive.’\footnote{Ménard, p. 146.}
In the prose Tristan, the solitary complaints at the fountain are marked with pessimism and frequent references to death.\textsuperscript{317} The narrator recognizes men’s inner desires as the causes of worldly events and warns against excessive emotions. Compared with the description in his source, the scenery in Malory’s narrative lacks naturalistic details.\textsuperscript{318} His rendering of the events, however, reflects on the narrative function of the space, and shows a keen understanding of the powers and dangers of human passions. Evidently familiar with the symbolism and literary conventions associated with the fountain, Malory reinvents the discourse of passion to render different interpretation of the characters. He adopts a more concrete vocabulary to highlight the ethical constraints in matters of love, and shows that passions may bring about positive and transformative changes through the example of Palomides.

**Allegory and Lyricism**

The Medieval European literary discourse of carnal affection, or cupiditas in Augustinian terms as opposed to caritas, is evidently influenced by Ovidian rhetorics of love. The two well-known texts on this subject, Andreas Capellanus’ De Amore and the Roman de la rose both witness the influence of Ovid, one inheriting the didacticism of Ars amatoris, the other imitating the allegorical mode of Amores. Both features can be found in the prose Tristan, voiced by different characters. In the fountain scenes, the soliloquies are characterized by a lyricism which carries across the allegorical love language from other genres. Scholars sometimes use the term ‘lyrical insertions’ to refer to the lais sung by different characters in the prose Tristan, but these lais are original inventions. They communicate a specific view of the situations that the characters are going through.

The first of these lyrical inventions appear in the narrative about Tristan’s madness in the forest of Morroiz. After Tristan discovered Yseut’s letter to Kahedin, he is consumed with jealousy and runs into a forest. A damsel is sent to find him. She follows a stream leading to a fountain where she finds Tristan. ‘Et voit qu’il pensoit si durement qu’il n’entendoit a riens fors a ce solement d’ou son corroz li vient.’ (Curtis III, §86) [And she saw that he was so lost in thought that he couldn’t hear anything except for that which caused his affliction] The damsel is moved by compassion and begins a conversation with Tristan, but he soon runs


\textsuperscript{318} The reduction of naturalism or visual descriptions is one of the principles of Malory’s presentation of space in Le Morte Darthur. See Dhira B. Mahoney, ‘Symbolic Uses of Space in Malory’s Morte Darthur’, in Re-viewing Le Morte Darthur, ed. by K. S. Whetter and Raluca Radulescu (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 95-106.
away from her to lament in solitude. He comes before ‘une tor ou il avoit une fontaine mout belle et mout envoisiee’ (Curtis III, §864) [a tower where there was a very beautiful and pleasant fountain (nearby)], and begins to contemplate and mourn his love. Later, the damsel brings him a harp, and Tristan composes the first of many lais:

\[
\text{Mort et amor me font finer,} \\
\text{Ma joie en dolor definer.} \\
\text{Avant jor me font terminer,} \\
\text{Le col me font mes acliner.} \text{(Curtis III, §870, VIII)}
\]

[Death and love have rung my knell, 
and turned my joy to sorrow. 
Before my day they led me to hell, 
And caused my head to bow.]

The lai mentions the names of Lancelot, Guinevere, and Yseut, as well as the allegorical figures of Death and Love. The lyrical language allows the speaker to make a complaint without referring to the actual cause of his suffering, which is his suspicion of the lover’s unfaithfulness. It mystifies the origin of Tristan’s negative emotions and creates a mask that conceals the ethical failure at the heart of the problem. Such expressions confine the speaker’s thought in a prison of pessimism and self-pity.

Malory’s narrative of this episode is highly condensed. His omission of the emotional dialogues and complaints seems to communicate doubts about the psychological benefits of this type of musical invention:

And othirwhyle, whan he founde the harpe that the lady sente hym, than wolde he harpe and play thereupon and wepe togydirs. And somtyme, whan he was in the wood, the lady wyst nat where he was. Than wolde she sette hir downe and play uppon the harpe, and anon Sir Trystramys wolde com to the harpe and harkyn thereto, and somtyme he wolde harpe hymselff. Thus he there endured a quarter off a yere, and so at the laste he ran hys way and she wyst nat where he was becom. (389.35-390.8)

Although playing music does not heal Tristram of his madness, it is a sign of his unharmed intelligence and a willingness to have human contact and communication despite everything. When Tristram abandons harping, he also loses his last contact with society and begins to live in a completely uncivilized manner – ‘naked, and waxed leane and poore of fleyshe’ (390.9).

In a previous episode, a similar complaint in the allegorical mode is overheard at a deserted chapel. The speaker later reveals that his name is Meleagant, the knight who abducts Queen Guinevere in Le Chevalier de la charrette. Meleagant addresses his complaint to ‘Love’ together with “Envy”, “Dishonour”, “Destruction” and “Death”:

\[
\text{Hé! Amor, fause chose et dealeal, plaine d'anui et de contraire, replenie de duel et de lermes et de pors, garnie et de traision et de deleauté et d'envie, destruction et essil,}
\]
 gastement de cors, plene de honte et de vergoigne et de desonor, racine de tote amertume et de tote poverté et de tote misere, plene de fausses covenance et de fauses promesses, car ja ne diras verité, qui tojorz prend et rien puis ne soz, qui mez a mort celi qui plus te sert, qui feras morir a honte et a desonor celi qui plus te sert et mieuz s’acorde a toi! (Curtis III, §796)

[Alas! Love, false and disloyal love, full of troubles and unhappiness, filled with sorrows and tears, garnished with treason, disloyalty, envy, destruction and exile, devastation of the body, brimming with disgrace, shame and dishonour, root of all bitterness, all poverty and all misery, full of false covenants and false promises. You never speak truth, and you keep taking until I am left with nothing, and bring to death he who serves you most, and you make your most obedient servant die for shame and dishonour!]

The abstract terms in this speech effectively conceal the speaker’s adulterous intent and avoid ethical judgement. The speaker seems to be an innocent victim of love, and an uninformed listener cannot understand the true subject and cause of his pains. The allegorical mode masks the moral hazard embedded in the speaker’s pursuit, which is later exposed through Lamorak’s interior speech.

In the monologue the speaker addresses Queen Guinevere in phrases that are similar to those used in Marian verses – ‘the lady of ladies, the queen of queens’. This phrase confuses his erotic desire for the queen with the religious devotion of the heavenly queen. However, the nature of Meleagant’s love is entirely different from devotional love, as cupiditas is distinguished from caritas. If love is a devotion, Meleagant’s expression is almost blasphemous. He knows that his obsession is dangerous, not only because Guinevere is the wife of King Arthur, but also because Lancelot is too strong a competitor.

Hence, Lamorak is alarmed when he understands Meleagant’s intent:

Lamorat […] se merveille trop qui il peut estre qui ensi haut osa mettre son cuer s’il n’est trop bons chevaliers. « Et neporquant, comment qu’il soit de sa chevalerie, je cuite tant conoistre Lancelot et tant savoir de son estre que s’il avoit oï dire a cesti les merveilles qu’il a dites, il ne leroit por tot le monde qu’il ne l’oceïst. ‘Mout pensa Lamoraz cele nuit aus paroles que Meleaganz avoit dites, et le tient a fol et a nice. »

(Curtis III, §797)

[Lamorak […] wondered much who the knight might be that he dared venture his heart so high if he is not a very good knight. “Nevertheless, however good a knight he might be, I know Lancelot and what a man he is so well that I know if he ever hears the marvellous words of this knight, he would not spare his life for anything in the world.” This night, Lamorak thought much about Meleagant’s words and took him for a fool and a madman.]

319 Concerning this phenomenon in medieval lyrics, C. S. Lewis suggests that ‘there is no evidence that the quasi-religious tone of medieval love poetry has been transferred from the worship of the Blessed Virgin: it is just as likely – it is even more likely - the colouring of certain hymns to the Virgin has been borrowed from the love poetry’. Clive Staples Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 8.
Lamorak translates the allegorical terms into concrete facts from an informed perspective, and reveals the ethical problem behind Meleagant's denigration of love. Ironically, Lamorak is no better at solving this problem, as his affair with Queen Morgause ends tragically despite the fact that she was a widow then. In a later episode, Lamorak laments at a fountain and is overheard by King Mark (Ménard IV, §§11-15). He not only complains in prose, but also composes a lai:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Amours, comment souffrir poës} \\
\text{Que moi caitiff, dolant n'oës?} \\
\text{Je, ki ere vostre avoës,} \\
\text{Sui par vous a mort avoës! (Ménard IV, §13)} \\
\text{[Love, how can you suffer your prisoner to be in pain? I, who had sworn to be yours, now am sworn to death because of you!]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘Amour’ is again pictured as the worst master, the cause of ‘felonnie’ and ‘mort’ (Ménard IV, §14). At the end of the lai, Lamorak finally acknowledges that it is Morgause’s son Gaheries who has thwarted his love affair.

The allegorical discourse is widely used in Old French Romance. For example, in *Le Roman de la rose*, the Garden of Pleasure and the Garden of Heaven symbolize the lover’s progression from obsessive, narcissistic passions to self-knowledge and the realization of free will through introspective and intellectual inquisitions. The prose *Tristan* was composed around the same time as the *Roman de la rose*. It witnesses the literary fashion for combining love allegory with chivalric romance. In one of the fountain episodes, Kahedin compares his love of Isode with that of Narcissus (Ménard I, §102), which is a possible reference to the fountain of Narcissus in *Le Roman de la rose* (vss.1497-1502). Meleagant’s complaint, however, clearly lacks such psychological insights. Baumgartner recognizes that variations of love monologues constitute the privileged domain of subjective discourse in the *romans antiques*. She further suggests that the lais sang by various male characters in the prose *Tristan* voice inner truths, and endorse ‘the authenticity of one’s passion’ in an artistic gesture. At the same time, she acknowledges that these

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322 The similarity between the two texts’ treatment of the fountain motif is discussed in Holbrook (2013).
expressions do not release the lovers from their suffering but rather intensifies it - ‘to compose and sing the *Lai mortel* is take one’s life.’

As in the previous case, Malory consistently omits the allegorical expressions and condenses the long monologues. His narrative focuses on the actions and interactions that affect the development of the plot:

"[A]nd Sir Lamerok rode untill he cam to a chapell, and there he put hys horse unto pasture; and anone there cam Sir Mellyagaunce that was Kygne Bagdemagus sonne, and he there put hys horse to pasture, and was nat ware of Sir Lamerok. And then thyss knyght Sir Mellyagaunce made hys more of the love that he had to Quene Gwenyver – and there he made a woefull complainyte." (379.18-24)

Malory uses the generic term, complaint, to refer to Meleagant’s speech. He evidently expects a contemporary reader to be familiar with the genre. Moreover, he directly informs the readers of the subject of Meleagant’s desire, thus suggesting that the emotional problem arises from an ethical dilemma. In the same way, in his adaptation of Lamorak’s monologue, the complaint achieves a plain, matter-of-fact tone devoid of lyricism or sentimental expressions:

Than this was a grete complaynte: he cryed and wepte and sayde, ‘O thou fayre Quene of Orkeney, Kygne Lottys wyff, and modir unto Sir Gawayne and to Sir Gaherys, and modir to many other, for thy love I am in grete paynys!’ Than Kygne Marke arose and wente nere hym, and seyde, ‘Fayre knyght, ye have made a piteous complaynte.’ ‘Truly,’ seyde the knyght, ‘hit is an hondred parte more rufulyer than myne herte can uttir.’ (fol.237r)

Instead of using abstract terms, Lamorak’s speech recognizes the obstacles in concrete and factual terms. He knows that his love affair with Morgause will invite envy and hostility from her sons - Gawain, Agravain, Gaheris – for they would never accept it. The conflicting interests of the individuals affected by this bonds are irreconcilable, and so is the passion of the lovers. As Radulescu demonstrates, excessive passions, particularly love, sorrow, jealousy, and hatred, accompany the growing political tension in the last books of *Le Morte Darthur*.

**The Ethics of Love**

The lover’s jealousy is the central problem in all narrative of Tristan, albeit it is presented in different ways. In the *Tristan* of Thomas, Tristan is tormented by jealousy whenever he contemplates King Mark’s physical possession of Isode. In Béroul’s text, King Mark becomes jealous when he sees Tristan and Isode lying side by side, but forgives them

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324 Ibid. p. 196.
325 Radulescu, p. 126.
when he fails to find evidence of their sexual attachment. In the prose *Tristan*, the king accuses his nephew of treason merely because he saw Tristan and Yseut talking to each other in the queen’s bedroom, even though there were other people present. Tristan too is consumed with jealousy when he discovers Yseut’s letter to Kahedin. His jealousy is so destructive that it leads to Kahedin’s death and nearly causes the deaths of Yseut and himself. Despite the similarity of the lovers’ violent responses to the discovery of unfaithfulness, in most cases the narrator seems to sympathize more with Tristan’s situation, possibly because of Yseut’s love for him. In the medieval context, the practice of political marriage overlooks women’s will and consent. The love between Tristan and Yseut seems to deserve moral justification because it is founded on ‘mutual consent’, even though this claim becomes problematic when we consider the agency of the love potion.

In the earlier versions of the legend, the love potion does not serve as a meaningful device for the imagination of consensual love. Different authors communicate different views concerning the nature of the passion between Tristan and Isode. In Béroul’s *Tristan*, the love generated by the potion is predominantly carnal: the potion generates such a strong desire for physical union that it is lethal to the wrong consumers. Béroul suggests that the potion’s effect has an expiration date:

> *La mere Ysout, qui le bollit,*  
> *A .iii. anz d’amistié le fist.*  
> *Por Marc le fist et por sa fille:*  
> *Autre en pruva, qui s’en essile.*\(^{326}\) (vss. 2139-42)  
> [Isode’s mother who brewed it, created it for three years of love. She made it for King Mark and her daughter: another tried it, and therefore was exiled.]

The narrator later explains that potion’s magic deprives the lovers of their ability to make decisions according to free will – ‘*s’el m’aime, c’est par la poison. Ge ne me pus de lié partir, n’éle de moi, n’en quier mentir*’ (vss.1384-86) [if she loves me, it is because of the potion. I cannot be without her, neither can she be without me, to tell you the truth]. Such unnatural physical interdependence condemns the magic’s tyrannical manipulation, and is condemned by the lovers and a hermit who helped them to end their exile in the forest.

In most verse versions of the Tristan legend, the lovers cannot endure any form of physical separation due to the effect of the love potion. In the *Tristan* of Thomas, their physical distance causes bitter suspicion in their hearts. At one point the narrator pauses and invites the audience to consider which one of the four unfulfilled lovers (King Mark, Tristan and the two Yseuts) gains or suffers most:

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Hici ne sai que dire puisse,
Quel d’aus quatre a greignor anguisse,
Ne la raison dire ne sai,
Por ce que esprové ne l’ai.
La parole mettrai avant,
Le jugement facent amant,
A quel estoit mieuz de l’amor
Ou qui en ait greignor dolor. (vss. 1084-91)\(^\text{327}\)

[I know not what I could say here as to which of the four was in greater torment, nor can I give the reason for it, because I have not experienced it. I will put the case before you – let lovers pass their judgement as to who was best placed in love, or who, lacking it, had most sorrow.]

For Tristan, not being able to physically possess his lover is no doubt the greatest source of pain, for Yseut, the pain is double, because she also needs to submit to the marital bond with the king. In the prose Tristan, however, it is not the difference, but the similarity between the lovers, that is emphasized. The narrator of the prose Tristan is usually reluctant to intrude upon diegetic progression, but he cannot help suggesting a different interpretation of this crucial event:

\[\text{Or ont beü: or sont entré en la riote qui jamés ne faudra tant com il aient l’ame el cors.} \]
\[\text{Or sont entré en cele voie dont il lor covendra sofrir engoisse et travail tot lor aaige.} \]
\[\text{[...]} \]
\[\text{Lor cuer lor change et si lor mue. Maintenant qu’il ont beü lis uns regarde l’autre, et sont ausi com tuit esbahi. Or pensent a autre chose qu’il ne pensoient devant. Tristanz pense a Yselt, et Yselt a Tristan. Toz est obliez li rois Mars. Tristanz ne demande autre chose fors que l’amor d’Yselt.} \]
\[\text{(Curtis I, §445)} \]

[Now they have drunk it; now they have stepped into the conflict that shall never leave them while their souls remain in their bodies. Now they have embarked on a road that will lead to a life time of anguish and torments. [...]. Their hearts changed and are completely transformed. As soon as they drank it, they looked at each other, and were both astonished. Now they were thinking about things that they had never thought about before. Tristan thought of Yseut, and Yseut of Tristan. They forgot all about King Mark. Tristan desires nothing other than the love of Yseut.] (p.86)

This description points out that the potion transforms the lovers’ hearts– ‘lor cuer lor change et si lor mue’. The love experienced by Tristan and Yseut is only carnal: it reorients their lives and causes them to forget their identities in the world. It has the effect of regenerating characters. The prose Tristan represents the love between Tristan and Yseut in the form of their synchronicity in emotion, speech, and action. Their songs and letters echo each other, and their suffering for love proves to be so contagious that other characters begin to ‘imitate’ them.\(^\text{328}\) Like Tristan’s performance of desperation just before he completely loses sanity,

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both Yseut and Kahedin composed lais of lamentation before their suicide attempts (Curtis III, §§932-33; Ménard I, §163).

The tragic end of Kahedin shows that with or without the magic potion, passion can have such a powerful influence on a man’s mind as to completely change his life. Hence, the narrator warns his readers through the voice of Dinadan not to love beyond themselves:

‘(I)l couvient l’ome maintenir selonc ce k’il est. Ki boins cevaliers est et preus si doit baer a hautes cases, mais cil ki n’est mie de haut afaire si se doit tenir as basses cases. De moi vous sai je bien tant a dire que ja pour amours ne porroie a si haute cose monter con mesire Tristrans est montès u Lanselos du Lac. Mais se folie me montoit en la teste par aucune aventure, je em porroie assès tost venir a ce que Kahedins en vint, li fieus le roi Hoël de la Petite Bretaigne, ki a grant dolour morut pour les amours de madame Yseut, la roïne de Cornuaille. Cil baa plus haut qu’il ne dut, et pour ce caï il en mort de ce k’il avoi t couvoitié. Cil m’est essamples et amonnestemens que ja ne quier par amours amer! Kahedins me disoit tout adés: “Dynadant, garde toi d’amours, car se tu aimmes plus haut que tu ne dois, tu n’en aras ja autre guerredon que la mort, et se tu aimmes bassement, tu t’avilles.”’ (Ménard V, §54)

[‘(I)t beseems a man to sustain himself according to his status. He that is a good and worthy knight should aspire to achieve high matters, but he who is not of high status should keep himself to lowly things. As for me, I can tell you that I will never love so high a lady as Lord Tristan or Lancelot du Lac has done. However, if madness were to creep into my head by any chance, I might soon end up like Kahedin, the son of King Hoel of Brittany. He died in great pain for the love of my lady Isode, the queen of Cornwall. He pursued higher love than he ought to have done, and because of what he had coveted, he dropped dead. His example was a lesson for me to never seek to love passionately! Kahedin used to say to me: ‘Dinadan, guard yourself against love, because if you love above your station, your only reward will be death, and if you love too low, you humiliate yourself.’]

This speech expresses a view of love which corresponds with that presented in Andreas Capellanus’ De Amore: the love and embrace of women are reward for hard toil. Kahedin’s warning against passion, ‘se tu aimmes plus haut que tu ne dois, tu n’en aras ja autre guerredon que la mort, et se tu aimmes bassement, tu t’avilles’ [if you love above your station, your only reward will be death, and if you love too low, you humiliate yourself], echoes Andreas’ advice on how to behave towards a women of various status. Commoners are entitled to courtship, but farmers are excluded, and if the woman is low-born, the author permits the male lover to take what he wants by ‘rough embraces’ [violenteto potiri amplexu].

Both advise lovers to conform to the hierarchical expectations based on their social standing. When Tristan discovers the letters exchanged between Kahedin and Yseut, he is thrown into a mental turmoil not only because of jealousy, but also because

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330 This observation was informed by Yaozong Li’s review on the variety of arguments concerning this work and the concept of ‘courtly love’ in modern criticism. Yaochung Li, “Courtly Love” and the Modernity of European Medieval Studies”, Foreign Literature Review, 3 (2012), 5-18.
Yseut’s choice is ‘irrational’ – she ought not love a knight who is weaker than Tristan, because such a decision would disturb the established chivalric order.

Malory’s characterization of Isode is highly original in that her love for Tristram demonstrates unprecedented freedom of will. Before Tristram leaves Ireland for the first time, he has a conversation with Isode which is unparalleled in the source text:

‘Madam,’ seyde Sir Trystramys, ‘ye shall undirstonde that my name ys Sir Trystrames de Lyones, gotyn of Kyng Melyodas and borne of his quene. And I promyse you faithfully, I shall be all the dayes of my lyff your knyght.’

‘Gramercy,’ seyde La Beale Isode, ‘and I promyse you thereagaynste I shall nat be maryed this seven yerys but by your assente, and whom that ye woll I shall be maryed to, hym woll I have and he wille haue me, if ye woll consente thereto.’

And than Sir Trystrames gaff hir a rynge and she gaff hym another, and therewith he departed fro her, leuynge her makynge grete dole and lamentacion. (308.34-309.9)

Even before Isode realized that Tristram is a good knight, she already ‘began to have a grete fantasy unto hym’ (302.12-13). The above passage shows that Isode commits herself to a promise of marriage through the gift of the ring. Her affection for Tristan had begun long before the consumption of the potion. Isode’s promise cannot invalidate the marital arrangement made by her father, yet it may linger in the readers’ memory and change their impression of the characters. The motif of the potion brings the narrative back to its conventional track, as it motivates the sexual bond between the two lovers. Nonetheless, the detail of the ring-exchange plants the seed of Isode’s betrayal and suggests a more natural explanation of the dramatic tension which persists through the later episodes.

The Hart Chase

The symbolic significance of the fountain is enriched in the chivalric context of romance, which conveniently allows the knight to arrive at the fountain in the middle of a chase. The stag hunt is particularly rich in meaning, since the iconographic images of the stag evokes the sacrifice of Christ.\textsuperscript{331} The symbolism derives from Ps 41:1: ‘\textit{Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fonts aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus}’ [As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God].\textsuperscript{332} Another common imagery in medieval romance is a thirsting stag in a chase. The excessively harried stag in an intense


\textsuperscript{332} Quoted from the Vulgate Bible. The verse in the King James Version is Ps 42:1: ‘As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.’
chase would frequently descend to the water, a sign that it is ready to be taken. The word often used to describe this state was malméne – ‘a word used just as commonly elsewhere in the figurative sense, of heroes, martyrs, and lovers driven to extremes of suffering or to death’. Thiébaut notes that there are five principal iconographic types of stag, among which the thirsting stag and the serpent-slaying stag are often conjoined. Malory reveals his knowledge of the symbolism of the stag in a vision in ‘The Sankgreal’:

And well ought Oure Lorde be signifyed to an harte. For the harte, whan he ys olde, he waxith yonge agayne in his whyght skynne. Right so commyth agayne oure Lorde frome deth to lyff, for He lost ertyhely fleyshe, that was the dedly fleyssh which He had takyn in the wombe of the Blyssed Virgyne Mary. And for that cause appered oure Lorde as a whyghte harte withoute spot. (765.2-8)

In the religious context, the thirsting stag symbolizes the soul’s longing of divine healing and love; but in the secular context, the same image may apply to a knight longing for the fulfilment of his desire, or pursued by evil enemies. For example, in the episode of ‘The Red City’, the hunting of a hart leads to the death of the king:

My lorde and kynge rode unto the foreyste hereby by the advyse of thes too traytoures, and there he chaced at the rede deare, armed at all peacis full lyke a good knyght. And so for labour he waxed drye, and than he alight and dranke at a well. And whan he was alight, by the assente of thes too traytoures, the tone whyche hyght Helyus he suddeynly smote oure kynge thorow the body wyth a speare. (561.29-35)

The colour of the game, ‘rede’, also appears in the name of the city, which suffers as a result of this chase. Its rightful ruler of the city is chased by the traitors just like a red deer chased by the hunter, and the real victim that dies at the water is the exhausted king, a hunter entrapped. Thiébaut points out that this motif of the hunter’s paradox has a much longer literary tradition, already elaborated in the works of Sophocles and Euripides. Ibid. pp. 51-54.

The frequent references to the fountains in the prose Tristan, especially their function of prompting the complaints of love, point to the dangers of adulterous courtship and erotic pursuits. There seems to have been a shift in attitude towards the courtly life in the prose

333 Thiébaut, p. 35.
334 This refers to the legend of a stag rejuvenating its strength after devouring a venomous serpent. This imagery is repeated in Isidore’s Etymologies, and is fused with the thirsting stag in Peter Lombard’s gloss of Psalm 41:1 – ‘The stag is the catechumen who, having swallowed the poisons of earthly vice (that is, the serpent), thirsts for the waters of the baptismal font. The poison is thus quenched and the catechumen rejoices like the newly youthful stag, for he has become a new man.’ See ibid. p. 41.
335 Thiébaut points out that this motif of the hunter’s paradox has a much longer literary tradition, already elaborated in the works of Sophocles and Euripides. Ibid. pp. 51-54.
336 Ibid. p. 44.
Tristan, which is evident in the treatment of Tristan and Yseut’s sojourn in the Forest of Morrois. In Béroul’s text, the wild forest is a place of danger and hardship, and the lovers stay there only because they are forced to leave the comfort afforded by their courtly occupations. In the prose Tristan, the protagonist brings his lover to his private mansion in the forest, which is described as an idyllic and amenable place, full of freedom and bliss. In Malory the lovers sojourn in a pastoral manor in the ‘fayre foreste’ (346.19-20), compared with which King Mark’s court becomes the less desirable place to dwell, full of danger, conflicts, and hypocrisy. However, the narrative consistently reveals that the dangers of the courtly society are caused by the evils of the human heart. Malory demonstrates through the knights’ personal tragedies that the strife and violence in society, is always caused by the passions originating from evils such as pride, anger, envy, and greed. The pressing of dangers can be so present in a knight’s consciousness that, as soon as Balin hears a horn blown as it would be for a game, he immediately concludes, ‘That blast [...] is blown for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede’ (70.30-31).

In secular poetry, the deer may represent either a male or a female subject chased by eros or cupiditas. The image of the wounded heart often mirrors a lover’s inner suffering, such as in Chaucer’s ‘Merciles Beaute’:

And but your word wol helen hastily
My hertes wounde, while that hit is grene,
Your yen two wol slee me sodenly;
I may the beautee of hem not sustene.
Upon my trouthe I sey you fithfully
That ye ben of my lyf and deeth the quene;
For with my deeth the trouthe shal be sene. (vss.4-10)339

The hunters of love come to the fountain and reflect on their wounded or strained selves as they savour the pains of rejection or betrayal. This trope is projected in the German version of Tristan by Gottfried von Strassburg, where King Mark’s huntsman follows a hart to the spring and discovers Tristan and Isode’s secret hiding place. The king arrives at the cave and is falsely consoled by what he sees:

337 This is expressed in the speech of Tristan: ‘Quant je vos ai avec moi, et je puis a vos parler sol a sol sansz doute et sansz paor d’autrui, que me faut il adonc? Je ne quier ne escu ne armes fors que vos; je ne quier ne seignor ne dame fors que vos. Je vos aim plus que je ne fais tot le monde, car se toz li mondes estoit orandroit avec nos, je n’i verroie fors que vos, ne je n’i ameroie que vos seule.’ (Curtis II, §550) [‘As long as I have you by my side and can speak with you alone, without fear or caution of others, what more do I want? I desire no shield or armour except you; I want no lord or lady except you. I love you more than the whole world, for if all the world were with us now, I would see no one but you, and I would love no else than you alone.’]


‘He found them just as the huntsman had done, well away from each other, one on one side, the other on the other, with the naked sword between them. … Then Love, the Reconciler, stole to the scene, wondrously preened and painted. Over the white of her face she wore the paint of golden Denial, her most excellent cosmetic ‘No!’ The word gleamed and shone into the King’s heart.’

The poet slows down the pace of the narrative and suddenly changes his language from the realistic to the allegorical. He masterfully introduces psychological revelation into a static scene. Although King Mark digresses from his deer hunt to quench his thirst for the truth of his wife’s love, he fails to find true consolation, as he only sees what he is willing to see. This flaw in Mark’s character traps him in a labyrinth of lies and prevents him from doing justice.

The hart chase is also mentioned in the prose Tristan in a significant episode of the fountain motif. After Tristan discovers the letters between Yseut and Kahedin and runs into the forest, Kahedin also is heartbroken because of Yseut’s anguish, and flees. He loses his way in the darkness of the night, and following the sound of a horn, he discovers a horse near a beautiful clear fountain. It turns out that the horse belongs to King Mark,

…qui tote jor avoit chacié un cerf, et estoit venuz de forest en forest, et avoit toz ses homes perduz si enterinement qu’il ne l’en estoit un remés, ne ne savoit qu’il estoient devenu. (Curtis III, §901)
[…who had chased a hart for a whole day, and had gone from one forest to another until he had lost all his men, and there was not even one man left in his company, nor did he know what had happened to them.]

The chase of a hart had brought King Mark to the fountain, where he encounters Kahedin and Palomides. These three lovers all desire the love of Yseut, yet their efforts prove to be in vain. Even Tristan the good hunter is wounded in this chase and lingers at a fountain in the company of shepherds. As for the other unfulfilled competitors, this event fully exposes the painfulness of their experience. However, while Tristan can consciously blame the love potion for his betrayal of King Mark, Kahedin does not have an unfortunate instrumental excuse for his betrayal of Tristan’s trust caused by the lust for Yseut. While Palomides and King Mark find momentary consolation in each other’s suffering, Kahedin cannot face the blame and eventually dies.

Malory’s treatment of this episode shows that he is familiar with the imagery of the ‘harried stag’ in the secular context. He condenses the description of the fountain and the lengthy complaints of the two knights into a meaningful phrase ‘by aventure’:

So Sir Keyhydys departed with a dolerous harte, and by aventure he mette with Sir Palomydes, and they felyshyppyd togydiers, and aythir complayned to other of there hote love that they loved La Beall Isode.

340 Chapter 27, quoted from Strassburg, p. 272.
'Now lat ws,' seyde Sir Palomydes, 'seke Sir Trystramys that loveth her as well as we, and let us preve whether we may recover hym.' (390.32-391.3).

Despite the absence of the fountain in this scene, the phrase ‘dolerous harte’ is a reminder of the ‘hart’ pun and anticipates the death of Kahedin. The word ‘dolerous’ echoes that of the ‘dolerous stroke’ and the ‘dolerous lady’ in Malory’s book, and it indicates a deep, painful wound which cannot be easily healed. Even though Kahedin’s wound is invisible, it is no less lethal than a wound caused by a supernatural weapon. The same imagery of a wounded heart is suggested in the phrase ‘recover hym’, which reminds the readers that Tristram, too, is a victim in this romantic pursuit just like his three competitors. Later, Palomides and Kahedin meet King Mark, and become ‘fryndys’ (391.24). Their similar experiences of unrequited love seem to enable them to sympathize with not only each other, but also Tristram. Nevertheless, Malory uses the phrase ‘thus excused hymselff’ to hint at King Mark’s insincerity in his speech.

One of the reasons why the romancers favour the motif of the fountain is that it allows the characters to perceive the courtly society from a distance. As knights chase after various worldly gains in a hierarchical and competitive society, they often go astray, forced to abandon their free will and desire, or to live in the fear of others’ revenge. When exhausted by the dangers of such lives, they often venture into the forest and seek momentary relief in the solitude of the wild. As mentioned before, the fountain is originally a place where knights acknowledge the wounds and longings in their heart. Malory modifies the narrative function of this motif and uses it as a signpost to spiritual struggles and progress in different characters through unexpected encounters and conversations.

**The Passions of Palomides**

In the episodes following Tristram’s recovery from madness, the fountain scenes in Malory’s text are mostly associated with the passions of Palomides. Holbrook’s study that the five scenes of Palomides’ mourning at the fountains pinpoint the trajectory of his psychological development, leading to his final reconciliation with Tristram and his baptism. This arrangement of the fountain motif shows Malory’s familiarity with the rich symbolism of the fountain in medieval textual traditions. In the source text, Palomides laments at the fountain every time he is defeated in chivalric competitions. For example, after the tournament at the Castle of Maidens, he addresses a lengthy complaint to Tristan: ‘Tristran, tu m’as mort sans doutanche, tu m’as ochis, tu m’as houni, tu m’as traite l’ame du cors’

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341 Holbrook (2013).
(Ménard II, §163) [‘Tristan, you have certainly caused my death, you have killed me, you have put me to shame, and you have extracted my soul from my body’]. When questioned by the disguised Tristan, Palomides expresses his envy at Tristan’s chivalric excellence: ‘La grant bonté de lui m’ochist; sa courtoisie et sa valours, sa gentillece et sa biauté, et ce k’il vaut miex de tous autres me fait morir! Li grans biens de lui me fait mal, et a tous autres si fait bien’ (Ménard II, §164) [‘his great goodness kills me; his courtesy and his valour, his nobility and handsomeness, and the fact that he is worthier than all the others put me to death! His many virtues hurt me, though they benefit the rest of the world’]. Malory, however, improves the knight’s moral character and provides his action with a different motivation. In his version, Palomides’ perplexity is caused by the ‘falsehed and treson’ of Bors and Ector (416.14-16) combined with his defeats in the contests with Lancelot and Lamorak (416.25-26). Despite his jealousy, Palomides admits that Tristram ‘ys the jantyll yste knyght in thys worlde lyvynge’ (416.35). He is aware of the ethical expectation of gentility in the chivalric ideal, yet remains unable to behave gently towards Tristram, a friend and competitor.

Like other knights’ lamentations in the prose Tristan, Palomides’ expression of his passions demonstrates clear influence from the other literary genres of the period. His complaint in the next fountain scene addresses Amour, the personification of love:

‘Amours, fait il, en grant dolour et en grant travail, en grant torment, en grant paine et en grant malaise me faites mon cors travailler et user ma vie et finer, che m’est avis. Amours, de vous ai je travail, mais de repos je n’en ai point; dolour en ai et jour et nuit, mais de repos n’voi je riens ne de nul assouagement. Vous me poigniés dusques u cuer et de cele pointure ne truis je nule medecine. Amours, je vous ai ja donc lonc tans servi se entientiuement que je n’avoie en chestui monde nul autre signeur, fors que vous. Je ai mis en vostre service volenté, espoir, creanche et esperanche, et cuers et cors et volenté et pooir et savoir et forche et ame et esperit!’ (Ménard IV, §81)

[‘Love,’ said he, ‘it seems to me that you have, with great sadness and great suffering, with great torment, with great pain and great wretchedness, made me struggle, worn out my life, and ended it. Love, I have laboured for you, but I have not had any rest; I suffer for you day and night, but I found neither refreshment nor relief. You have pierced me right through my heart and I found no medicine for this wound. Love, I have served you for so long and with such great care that I have no lord over me in this world other than you. I have laid down my will, hope, faith, aspiration, heart, body, desire, power, knowledge, force, strength and soul in your service!’]

The imagery of a heart wounded by Love’s piercing force is mentioned again as a metaphor for the character’s experience of eros. Palomides is unable to find a cure for himself, even though he knows that his desire cannot be fulfilled.

Like in the episode of Lamorak and Meleagant, the cause of Palomides’ suffering is analyzed through the detached perspective of Dinadan. In his commentary, Dinadan points out that Palomides’ suit does not benefit anyone involved: ‘tele amour si est trop amere; che n’est pas amours, ainchois est suie et amertume droite, assez pire que ne soit venin de
serpent’ (Ménard IV, §82) [‘such love is too bitter; this is not love, quite the contrary, it is truly soot and gall, even worse than the venom of the snake]. He then compares Tristan to a rich man and Palomides to a poor man, and predicts that Palomides will lose all his possessions in the end if he does not act according to ‘sens’ [sense or perception], ‘raison’ [reason], and ‘mesure’ [measure or self-restraint]. The meeting between the two knights and their dialogue brings a rational perspective on the problem of passions, yet it fails to change Palomides’ heart.

Malory’s Palomides is fully aware of the ethical and realistic constraints that prevent him from achieving love:

‘A, fayre lady, why love I the? For thou arte fayryst of all othir, and as yet shewydyst thou never love to me, nother bounté, pardé – and yet, alas, muste I love the. And I may nat blame the, fayre lady, for myne eyen caused me this sorowe. And yet to love the I am but a foole, for the beste knyght of the worlde lovyth the and ye hym agayne, that is Sir Trystram de Lyones. And the falsyst knyght and kynge of the worlde is your husbande, and the moste cowarde and full of treson is youre lorde, Kyenge Marke. And alas, that ever so beaweuous a lady and pereles of all othir sholde be matched with the most vylaunce knyght of the worlde!’ (467.24-35)

Palomides acknowledges that he is ‘but a foole’ to desire Isode, especially when she is loved by Tristram and married to King Mark. His final lament for the unfitting match between Isode and King Mark seems to be inspired by same ideological approach to the rational matching between a lady’s beauty and her love’s chivalric merits. Palomides imagines Isode to be a ‘Damsel in Distress’, entrapped in her marital bond with a treacherous villain, and assigns himself the chivalric mission of setting her free.

In the following scene, Malory further reveals Palomides’ spiritual progress in his lamentation over the loss of ‘the felyshyp of Sir Trystram and the love of La Beall Isode’ (606.15). Palomides acknowledges his betrayal of Tristram deserves this consequence, and confesses to Epinogris that the cause of his sorrow is not envy, but the guilt and the loss of the friendship of the two people he loves:

‘And yet I well deservyd that rebuke, for I ded nat knightly, and therefore I have loste the love of her and of Sir Trystram for ever. And I have many tymes enforsd myself to do many dedis of armys for her sake, and ever she was the causer of my worship-wynnynge. And alas! Now have I loste all the worshyp that I ever wanne, for never shall befalle me suche proues as I had in the felyshyp of Sir Trystram.’ (606.25-31)

This interpretation of events is Malory’s own invention. In the source text, Palomides continues to see himself a victim of injustice and accuses Tristan of ‘felenie’ and ‘desloiauté’ (Ménard VI, §3). Malory deliberately improves this character’s moral consciousness by changing his own interpretation of the event. Through this conversation, Palomides conducts an honest self-examination and shows repentance for his misconduct: ‘I well deservyd that
rebuke’. He also recognizes the positive impact of Tristram and Isode’s friendship on his character, and admits that his friendship has caused him to win more worship than he is ever able to do on his own. Palomides’ reflection on his passions allows him to see the harm of sexual jealousy. The character’s critical examination of his own conduct anticipates a profound inner transformation.

In the next fountain scene featuring Palomides, Lancelot finds the Saracen knight bound and led to his death by a group of twelve knights. Lancelot rescues him and brings him to Joyous Garde. Although Palomides manages to remain in the fellowship of Tristram for over two months, he pines at the sight of his lady. Then the last fountain scene in ‘Tristram’ brings us back to the Christian iconography of the baptismal font: one day Palomides perceives the reflection of his own visage in a well, which is ‘discolowred and defaded, a-nothynge lyke as he was’ (614.22-23), and he decides to take his life. Before he commits suicide, he makes a song to lament his fantasy for Isode (614.29-30), which happens to be overheard by Tristram. The two knights agree to a duel, but finally reconcile with each other when Palomides acknowledges his defeat and decides to receive baptism. This decision is not a sudden one. Apart from Palomides’ spiritual progress demonstrated in the previous fountain scene, Malory has prepared his readers for this moment in the adventure of the Red City:

And though he were nat crystynde, yet he belyved in the beste maner, and was full faytheful and trew of his promyse and well-condyssyonde; and bycause he made his avow that he wolde never be crystynde unto the tyme that he had enchyeved the Beste Glatysaunte, the whyche was a full wondirfull beyste and a grete sygnyfycasion; for Merlyon prophesyed muche of that byeste. And also Sir Palomydes avowed never to take full Crystyndom untyll that he had done seven batayles within lystys. (565.31-566.3)

Holbrook argues that the well scenes leading up to the baptismal vessel demonstrates ‘a variation on friendship, one that binds Tristram to Palomides in religious conviction and resolves their differences’. However, religious conviction is not a problem of social bonds in Malory’s text. A significant detail which proves this is that Malory departs from his source in making Palomides a knight of the Round Table long before he converts to Christianity.343

342 Ibid. p. 92.
343 In the source text, Palomides’s baptism takes place at a much later point during the quest of the Holy Grail, and he only becomes a knight of the Round Table after the baptism (La Version post-vulgate de la ‘Queste del Saint Graal’ et de la ‘Mort Artu’ : troisième partie du Roman du Graal, ed. by Fanni Bogdanow, 4 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1991), Vol. III. §564; Field II, p.543). In Malory, Palomides’s name is mentioned among the ten knights of the Round Table that are absent on King Arthur’s party at the tournament at Lonezep: ‘So went Sir Kay and saw by the wrytyng in the syeges that there lacked tend knyghtees, and thes were hir namys: Sir Trystram, Sir Palomydes, Sir Percivall, Sir Gareth, Sir Gaherys, Sir Epynogrys, Sir Mordred, Sir Dynadan, Sir La Cote Male Tayle, and Sir Pelleas, the noble knight’ (576.21-25).
Palomides’ conversion would not have taken place until Palomides decides to die, as he realizes that his will and efforts cannot lead him anywhere near the love and honour that he desires. Palomides accepts Tristram as his godfather to signal his full submission to Christian ethical values, which requires him to prioritize peace over competition.

The sacrament is also significant for the reconciliation between Palomides and Tristram on a personal level. Since Christian ethics prohibit adultery, Palomides must commit to a non-sexual love of Isode and actively resist any erotic temptation:

‘All that I have offended ys and was for the love of La Beall Isode. And as for her, I dare say she ys pyerles of all other ladyes and also I profyrd her never no maner of dyshonoure, and by her I have getyn the moste parte of my worshyp. And sythyn I offended never as to her owne persone, and as for the offence that I have done, hyt was ayneste youre owne persone, and for that offence ye have gyvyn me thys day many sad strokys and som I have gyffyn you agayne, and now I dare sey I felte never man of youre myght nothir so well-brethed but yf hit were Sir Launcelot du Laake, wherefore I requyre you my lorde, forgyff me all that I have offended unto you.’ (663.10-17)

Through his characterisation of Palomides, Malory examines the problem of jealousy and competition which results from erotic cupiditas. In his narrative, the Saracen knight’s formal conversion is the outcome of self-criticism which happens in the process of vainly pursuit. If at the beginning of Malory’s ‘Tristram’, Palomides wishes to become a Christian in Ireland so that he can marry Isode (‘in wyll to be crystynde for hir sake’), his conversion at the end of this narrative is a much delayed reconciliation with himself. To some extent, the acceptance of his personal limitations allows Palomides to avoid excessive competitiveness without relinquishing chivalry. As he returns to the mission destined for his lineage, the hunt for the Questing Beast, Palomides is reconciled with himself and rechannels his passion from erotic pursuits into the path of chivalry.

Like his contemporaries, Malory demonstrates the impossibility of extinguishing passion either by force or through rational debates. He frees emotional expressions from the confining ambiguity of allegorical language, and allows the lovers to perceive and address the ethical and external in realistic terms. Malory inherits from the earlier poetic conventions the concept that steadfast love may lead to genuine introspection and self-discovery, but he is more interested in the vicissitudes of external circumstances which cause individual experiences of love to fluctuate. Through the dialogues in the fountain scenes, Malory shows that passions can have a cathartic function, particularly in the case of Palomides, whose love for a lady transforms into a charitable and edifying friendship, leading to the final reconciliation. Malory’s adaptation of this motif highlights the importance of sympathetic
conversations that engender self-realisation. The reinvented discourse of passion sheds light on Palomides’ spiritual journey towards inner peace.
Conclusion

This thesis offers a detailed analysis and evaluation of what Malory does to the generic elements in the prose *Tristan* and other romance narratives. The discussions confirm what T. S. Eliot has said in ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’:

The necessity that he [the poet] shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.344

Malory’s approach to romance motifs, as the previous discussions hope to demonstrate, changes both what this genre is expected to do and what it is capable of. The novelty of his creative efforts lies in the way he makes use of old materials to express the yearnings of his time. The versatile interpretations of the romance motifs and the flexibility of their forms contribute to the timelessness of the chivalric mode.

As previous discussions demonstrate, chivalry has a moral purpose and function from both historical and literary views. Malory rediscovers those moments when the moral aspects of chivalry make a different to the characters’ decisions and speak into the situations in which the characters find themselves. Although *Le Morte Darthur* may be read as a nostalgic recollection of past legends, the author finds a way to give chivalry unprecedented relevance, especially through his re-imagination of the inner experiences of the knights, and their ups and downs in the world of knighthood. He emphasizes the importance of moral response in these moments, either by condensation or by amplification of speech, to address the emotive effects resulting from the fictional characters’ choices. On the other hand, the significance of his innovation cannot be fully appreciated without reading each episode against the backdrop of the texts that already form the tradition of Arthurian literature. As different authors venture into the same narrative form with the cultural missions and visions of their times, they enrich the artistic potential of this form. That is partly why the motifs discussed in this thesis can still be found in today’s creative literature.

Almost every scholar of *Le Morte Darthur* has commented on the significance of worship in this narrative, and has drawn a conclusion that is somewhat different from that presented in previous studies. The concept of worship in Malory has clear ethical implications, which is related to the rules as articulated in the Round Table oath.345 However,

345 Radulescu, pp. 84-87.
as already shown in the first chapter, *Le Morte Darthur* contains many instances of equivocally referencing worship in different voices. For example, in his conversation with Marhalt prior to their combat, Tristram claims that ‘worship’ is a matter of faith and requires a knight to fight for the right cause: ‘I truste to God to be worshipfully proved uppon thy body, and to delyver the contrey of Cornwayle for ever fro all maner of trewayge frome Irelonde for ever’ (299.9-11). Marhalt, although echoing the word in his reply, thinks that worship depends on martial courage: ‘sytthen hit is so that thou castyste to wynne worshyp of me, I lette the wete worshyp may thou none loose by me gyff thou may stoned me three strokys’ (299.12-14). In another episode, Blamour loses in his duel with Tristram. Although he fought on the wrong side, he would not yield for the purpose of preserving his worship: ‘I had lever dye here with worshyp than lyve here with shame’ (325.9-10). Such divergence in the characters’ understanding of worship reflects the difficulty in achieving unity in moral judgement in a secular context. Nonetheless, the turnout of the events often confirms that a character cannot gain worship by beating up other knights of worship. Hence, Marhalt’s understanding of worship is incorrect, and in his case, the incorrect understanding of worship coincides with his failure to achieve it.

The direct speeches in Malory’s ‘Tristram’, whose originality becomes evident through the comparative study, offer us glimpses into the characters’ inner worlds. At the same time, Malory still reminds his readers that human approaches to moral probity are limited. The Arthurian court may disperse honour to the individual knights based on their observable moral conduct and chivalric performance, but honour is not the ultimate aim of knighthood. Malory, among all the Arthurian writers, presents knighthood as a calling with a divine purpose. The distance between the world of adventures and the court of King Arthur points to an objective and superior source of knowledge about the characters’ essential beings. In particular, the books that immediately follow the ‘Tristram’ contain references to the mystical origin of knighthood’s legitimacy. In the book ‘Sir Urry of Hungary’, the narrator suggests that King Arthur is ‘at that tyme the moste man of worshyp crystynde’ (862.29-31). However, the king fails to heal Urry, whereas the healing miracle proves that Lancelot is the best knight of the world. Lancelot’s humble speech and his secret prayer (867.22-26) suggest that the success of this adventure depends on his faith rather than worship. This mystical dimension suggests that knighthood in *Le Morte Darthur* teaches not only about worship, but that will be the topic of another study.

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346 ‘Their “worship” becomes identified with their essence – with the continuity and integrity of their being, and with the continuity between their essential beings and the exterior world.’ Mann, “Taking the Adventure”, p. 75.
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