

MASCULINITY AND CHIVALRY: THE
TENUOUS RELATIONSHIP OF THE SACRED
AND SECULAR IN MEDIEVAL ARTHURIAN
LITERATURE

by

KACI MCCOURT

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
The University of Texas at Arlington
August, 2018

Arlington, Texas

Supervising Committee:

Kevin Gustafson, Supervising Professor
Jacqueline Fay
James Warren

ABSTRACT

Masculinity and Chivalry: The Tenuous Relationship of the Sacred and Secular in Medieval Arthurian Literature

Kaci McCourt, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2018

Supervising Professors: Kevin Gustafson, Jacqueline Fay, and James Warren

Concepts of masculinity and chivalry in the medieval period were socially constructed, within both the sacred and the secular realms. The different meanings of these concepts were not always easily compatible, causing tensions within the literature that attempted to portray them. The Arthurian world became a place that these concepts, and the issues that could arise when attempting to act upon them, could be explored. In this dissertation, I explore these concepts specifically through the characters of Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain. Representative of earthly chivalry and heavenly chivalry, respectively, Lancelot and Galahad are juxtaposed in the ways in which they perform masculinity and chivalry within the Arthurian world. Chrétien introduces Lancelot to the Arthurian narrative, creating the illicit relationship between him and Guinevere which tests both his masculinity and chivalry. The *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* takes Lancelot's story and expands upon it, securely situating Lancelot as the best secular knight. This *Cycle* also introduces Galahad as the best sacred knight, acting as redeemer for his father. Gawain, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, exemplifies both the earthly and heavenly aspects of chivalry, showing the fraught relationship between the two, resulting in the emasculating of Gawain. Finally, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* reestablishes the secular/sacred dynamic, attempting to elevate Lancelot again to best knight, but ultimately failing to resolve the issues that accompany the concepts of

chivalry and masculinity. I explore these works, and others, to analyze the ways that masculinity and chivalry are portrayed and how they work with – and against – one another in Arthurian literature.

Copyright by
Kaci McCourt
2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank Dr. Kevin Gustafson for all of his hard work, patience, and dedication while serving as my committee chair. He went above and beyond what was necessary in this role, and I know that I will never be able to adequately express my appreciation to him. My academic career has been one of many successes and accomplishments, but working with him over the past few years and the knowledge that I have gained from him has been the highlight of my time at UTA. I will certainly miss seeing him on campus, but am grateful for the time that he dedicated to me and this dissertation. I must also thank Drs. Jim Warren and Jackie Fay, both for their instruction and wisdom as my professors and for their time and expertise on my committee. I am truly grateful.

I also want to thank Drs. Penny Ingram, Amy Tigner, and Kathryn Warren for their role as graduate advisors. I always knew that I could go to them as a graduate student and that they would work on my behalf. I am grateful, as well, for being awarded a Dissertation Fellowship by the Graduate Studies department for Summer 2018, ensuring that I would be able to focus solely on this dissertation and defend at the end of the summer. And last, but not least, I am grateful to Jen Caro-Barnes for the many times she helped me throughout my career as a graduate student at UTA. Her help as a colleague and friend enriched this experience in so many ways.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the three people who have ensured I successfully finished my doctoral degree: my mom, my dad, and Kyle. To my mom and dad for giving me encouragement my entire life, ensuring that I always knew I could accomplish anything I wanted. They have supported me in so many ways, and I know that I can never repay them for everything they have done to ensure I got to this point. And to Kyle, who willingly stuck by me through the ups and downs, stress and anxiety, and every emotion possible while I worked on this dissertation. I know that I could not have done this without you. I will forever be grateful that you came into my life and that you will be in my life forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: MASCULINITY AND CHIVALRY.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: THE INTRODUCTION OF LANCELOT AND GALAHAD.....	45
CHAPTER THREE: GAWAIN'S CONFLICTING VIRTUES.....	76
CHAPTER FOUR: MALORY'S HERO.....	105
CONCLUSION.....	137
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	143

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation focuses on three key areas of medieval study: masculinity, chivalry, and views of the secular and the sacred in Arthurian literature. I analyze specific texts which center around several of the main characters in Arthurian literature and the ways in which they exhibit masculinity, portray heavenly and/or earthly chivalry, and act within a combined secular and sacred realm. Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain, and the works that feature them, are used to trace the tensions that arise with medieval ideas of masculinity and with authors attempting to fit both the sacred and the secular into one cohesive legend, specifically through the ideals of earthly and heavenly chivalry. There is much in the current state of scholarship that discusses different types of masculinity (such as Clare A. Lees' *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Jennifer D. Thibodeaux's *The Manly Priest*, and Ruth Mazo Karras' *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*), the complex nature of the secular and the sacred (such as Barbara Newman's *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred*, and Richard W. Kaeuper's *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*), and the ideals of chivalry, especially for a knight (Maurice Keen's *Chivalry* and Beverly Kennedy's *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*). However, there has not yet been on distinctive work that specifically looks at all three of these combined solely through an Arthurian lens. This work is meant to take these concepts and the scholarship that has previously been done on them and work through the ways in which they are portrayed in medieval Arthurian literature.

Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation is to look closely at specific works and passages of Arthurian literature in the medieval period in an attempt to understand and recognize some of the tensions and complicated concepts that dominated the matter and the genre of Arthurian romance. There is no one portrayal of masculinity or chivalry that stands out as the idealized form of knighthood in the medieval period. While Arthurian literature does work to create this ideal of knighthood and its portrayal of masculinity and chivalry within a world that merges the sacred and secular, it inevitably

fails. Many of the works in the matter are showcasing multiple versions of masculinity and chivalry, complicated at times by the presence of both sacred and secular ideals. While questions such as “what is the superior form of masculinity?” or “how should chivalry look within a romance?” persist, both in the time period and in Arthurian literature itself, there are too many conflicting views of these concepts. The multiple views and examples of masculine and chivalric production and their inability to be completely reconciled with one another make it impossible for a clear answer to emerge. Rather than attempting to provide one specific answer, I am working out just how these different concepts work alongside one another, often within the same narrative, to form the matter of medieval Arthurian literature.

Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain are important figures to discuss in this dissertation as they each represent a specific way in which masculinity, chivalry, and the sacred and the secular are portrayed in specific works. While Percival is the knight that introduces the audience to the legend and to the specific quests and tests that a Grail knight must undertake, it is Galahad that becomes *the* Grail Knight. When Galahad is introduced, he embodies the idea of a virgin knight and usurps Percival as the predominant knight in the Grail quest. With the inclusion of Galahad into the canon, Percival becomes important only in his relationship to Galahad and the quest for the Grail. The Grail itself becomes the predominant symbol of the sacred world in Arthurian literature; however, the Grail is transformed in this way from what could arguably be a secular beginning with the introduction of both it and Percival by Chrétien de Troyes c.1180. Galahad’s introduction decades later shows the push for a more sacred version of the Grail legend, as well as a knight that better fits the sacred model for achieving the Grail quest. As the emblem of heavenly chivalry, Galahad becomes the knight that best exemplifies the sacred views of chivalry and masculinity, juxtaposed with his father.

While Galahad becomes the ideal knight of the sacred, Lancelot’s introduction and later transformation in the canon gives the audience the ideal warrior knight of the secular. He is one of the foremost knights of the Round Table, a character that can stand on his own in Arthurian literature.

Lancelot becomes both the embodiment of earthly chivalry and the production of a very secular masculinity. He also becomes the catalyst for the fall of the Round Table. Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere is predominant in his story, including his relationship with Arthur and the other knights. However, the introduction of Galahad changes the way in which audiences, and even the authors, view Lancelot. Much like Percival, Lancelot is now viewed in terms of his relationship to Galahad, his son. In the final major Arthurian text of the medieval period, Malory's *Morte Darthur*, there seems to be a very tenuous relationship between the sacred and the secular, with Lancelot and Galahad having seemingly competing narratives throughout the text. The juxtaposition of an earthly chivalry, portrayed by Lancelot, and chivalry with a more divine focus, portrayed by Galahad, ultimately acknowledges that there is not an easy way to fully bring together the sacred and the secular in the Arthurian legends. Rather than creating a book that neatly wraps up the legends, Malory's work leaves readers with the idea that there is not always an exact answer to all of the complexities that arise in Arthurian literature.

As Lancelot and Galahad clearly represent the secular and the sacred, Gawain might, on first glance, appear to be out of place in this dissertation. The juxtaposition of earthly and heavenly chivalry is best represented by Lancelot and Galahad, and they are the two knights that are typically discussed alongside one another when scholars engage with this issue. However, a discussion of Gawain here is necessary. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain takes on a dual role of earthly and heavenly, sacred and secular. His role as the masculine warrior knight that bravely steps in place of King Arthur to take on the challenge of the Green Knight is not easily reconciled with his other role of effeminate prey of the Lady, unable to capitalize on her sexual advances. What the *Gawain*-poet does is make it clear that while Lancelot and Galahad might embody different kinds of masculinity and chivalry separately, there are also times when they cannot be completely separated but are also unable to be joined together.

To discuss these characters within the matter, I will rely on specific strains of scholarship that already exist. Masculinity studies in the medieval period has become much more prominent over the

past few decades. A reaction to and development of feminist studies, masculinity studies sets out to discuss the role of men, in literature and culture, and the ways in which these ideals of “masculinity” are manifest in the writing of the time period. Gender as we separate and discuss it now is constructed; there were ideas of gender in the medieval period, but those were different from what we currently think of as “gender norms.” Because of this, masculinity studies must set aside these current notions of gender to look back at the writings of the medieval period to discern what masculinity meant and how it was being characterized. Clare A. Lees’ *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* discusses the way in which masculinity studies is a byproduct of feminist studies. This edited text engages with the role of men within gender studies in the medieval period. Vern L. Bullough’s chapter “On Being a Male in the Middle Ages” discusses the social construct of masculinity, especially in its perceived superiority to femininity, and the ways in which this masculinity was asserted. Clare R. Kinney’s chapter “The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” acknowledges that there is more than one type of masculinity represented in *Sir Gawain* and that no one specific definition or ideal of masculinity stands out over another. The addition of this chapter in the edited work acknowledges that Arthurian literature is a prime matter to use when engaging with ideas of masculinity and its construction and performance in the medieval period.

The complex relationship between celibacy and masculinity, specifically for clergy, is explored in Jennifer D. Thibodeaux’s *The Manly Priest*. In this work, Thibodeaux details the changing views of the Church towards clerical celibacy, complicating the way in which the clergy are allowed to express sexuality and masculinity. The social and cultural changes that accompanied the decision to no longer allow clergy to marry highlight the relationship that exists between sex and masculinity, and the ways in which masculinity can be expressed when there is a lack of sex. This text also exposes the complicated nature of the secular and sacred, as the sacred (clergy) are needing to fit into a more secular construct of masculinity. Ruth Mazo Karras’ *From Boys to Men* explores the ways in which masculinity and manhood were constructed and attained in the later Middle Ages. She identifies three specific ways in

which boys become men – as knights, university scholars, or craft workers. Her chapter on knighthood goes into further detail about the introduction to knighthood and the ideals that surrounded it which helped to shape ideals of masculinity. Chivalry, family name, Christianity, women, etc. all play a role in the shaping of knights and masculinity. Arthur, his knights, and medieval authors, such as Malory, who write about them are referenced as examples of this knightly version of masculinity and manhood. Additionally, Jacqueline Murray's *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler's *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* also work to present some type of masculinity, or maleness, that exists during the time period.

Barbara Newman's work *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* engages specifically with the crossover in medieval culture and literature of the sacred and the secular. She discusses ways in which the sacred and secular are in dialogue with one another, beginning with a chapter on specific terms and principles that shape their interaction. Both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and some Lancelot narratives are specifically analyzed throughout the text. The Grail itself, as a symbol of the sacred that is included in and shapes the more secular Arthurian romances, is also discussed at length. Richard W. Kaeuper's *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* focuses on the knight as warrior. The role of the secular and sacred is explored in the chapter that focuses on the knight's imitation of Christ (as Christ was often depicted as a warrior himself during the medieval period). This crossover of Christ/warrior teases out the tensions of the sacred and the secular, specifically in terms of virginity and the ideological problems in the time period with non-sacred men as virgins. This look at virginity and how it shapes masculinity within the sacred and the secular is important, as Galahad is Arthurian literature's virgin knight and the one example of a character in the matter that inhabits this particularly sacred space within the secular world.

Ideals of chivalry, and the ways in which the sacred and the secular define chivalry through the concept of knighthood, are important to understand when researching Arthurian literature, as Lancelot

and Galahad clearly represent two competing, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, ideals of chivalry. Maurice Keen's *Chivalry* is the essential work to study to best understand the concept of chivalry and its role within the sacred and the secular during the medieval period. First and foremost, Keen acknowledges that there is not easy way to define the concept of chivalry, especially during the medieval period, because it is dependent upon the role and context the word is used, especially in regards to knights. Keen explores both the secular and sacred origins of chivalry and knighthood and how those two concepts are not always compatible with one another.

While the concepts of chivalry are discussed in each chapter, the way in which Malory uses chivalry and its ideals, both in the sacred and the secular, is an important ending to this dissertation, as a culmination of everything that has been built upon before he wrote. Therefore, specific works on Malory and his ideas of chivalry are necessary foundations for the dissertation. Beverly Kennedy's *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* takes an historical approach to knighthood at the time that Malory was writing. She goes into detail about the different types of knighthood that had been established, breaking them into categories (feudal, courtly, and religious) which correspond to specific knights in Malory's work. Although these are not necessarily the categories of knighthood that I am using in this dissertation, this background work of knighthood and analysis of Malory's characters within his own time's views of knighthood is important work for establishing my own assertions of chivalry and the sacred and the secular in Arthurian literature.

Most of these scholarly works will be discussed further in the first chapter, setting up the theoretical concepts needed for the dissertation. These works and their views will be used to analyze specific works of Arthurian literature which highlight the relationship between masculinity, chivalry, and the sacred and secular as showcased through the characters of Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain. Chrétien's romances, sections of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Le Morte Darthur* will be the predominant works that are analyzed throughout the dissertation, as they best showcase the tensions between these concepts and these characters.

I have divided the dissertation into four chapters to address specific concepts and issues as embodied by the characters of Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain. The purpose of Chapter One is to explore different theoretical concepts that are needed before analyzing the characters of Lancelot, Galahad, and Gawain. This chapter first discusses the different types of masculinities that were present during the Middle Ages: the ways masculinity was performed (such as through sex and control) and, more specifically, how masculinity looked different in the secular realm and the sacred. The issue of sex and virginity as a way of expressing masculinity is discussed as well. Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and Chaucer's *Pardoner* are used as examples of tensions in masculinity when sex is not available. *How Culhwch Won Olwen* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* are analyzed to establish performances of masculinity through the defeating of giants. After establishing these masculinities within the time period, I move onto the concept of knighthood and the conflicting views and ideals of the sacred and the secular that also impacted the concept of knighthood. I will use Chaucer's *Knight* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* to analyze the way knights could fit within both the sacred and the secular world as well as to explain the performance of masculinity through knighthood. Finally, I discuss the ideals of chivalry within the sacred and the secular, as well as the term "courtly love" and the issues of whether or not it should be used to describe aspects of Arthurian literature.

Chapter Two focuses on the introduction of Lancelot and Galahad, as well as the history of the Grail narrative. Representations of masculinity, as well as the distinction between earthly and heavenly chivalry, as portrayed by the two knights are analyzed. I discuss Lancelot's arrival into the narrative by Chrétien as the groundwork for his character, though he is not yet the exact character that he later becomes. There are some conflicting issues of masculinity present in the work, potentially exasperated by the suggestion that his story was specifically written for Marie de Champagne. The more conflicting issues of the sacred and secular and the explicit nature of his role as best knight is more fully explored in later works, such as the *Lancelot Proper*, which is also analyzed in this chapter. Additionally, I will use

this chapter to discuss the mixture of sacred and secular within the Grail legend itself (the Christian symbols and motifs that become scattered throughout the literature in conjunction with the more secular role of the romance genre) and also bring in Galahad's role as he becomes the primary Grail knight. This will be done through analysis of progression of the Grail legend. I will discuss the importance of Galahad's status as virgin in his role as Grail knight and the way in which Galahad's virginity as a secular knight complements the merging of the secular and the sacred within the Grail legend throughout medieval Arthurian literature. Some of the primary texts that I will rely on to develop this chapter are Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History Regum Britanniae*, Chrétien de Troyes' Robert de Boron's *Merlin and the Grail: Joseph d'Arimathie, Merlin, Perceval, The Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, and Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart* and *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)*.

Chapter Three continues examining ideals of masculinity and chivalry, and the ideals of the sacred and secular in shaping these concepts. With the conception and beginning narratives of Lancelot and Galahad explored, identifying aspects of earthly and heavenly chivalry in the first chapter, Chapter Three will move on to the character of Gawain. This chapter specifically explores how Gawain encompasses some of the ideals of both Lancelot and Galahad and how in doing so he becomes caught in a situation that does not allow for the sacred and secular to both exist in a satisfactory manner. Using *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as the primary text to be analyzed, I trace the ways in which Gawain both asserts his masculinity in the beginning of the narrative while also becoming emasculated through his interactions with the Lady. The complex relationship between courtesy and cleanness is discussed, describing the ways in which they cannot always exist together. Displaying certain chivalric ideals that align with Lancelot and others that align with Galahad, Gawain's character in *Sir Gawain* indicates that the issues that are already present in Arthurian matter, and especially in Arthurian romance, are not easily resolved. The meta nature of the poem and its characters reasserts the notion that this is an issue within the matter and, also, within the medieval period that continues to be complicated and complex. The authorship of the text and its placement in the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript is discussed as well,

specifically in terms of the merging of the sacred and the secular both within the Arthurian narrative and in larger conversations outside of the Arthurian world.

Chapter Four focuses specifically on Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and the role that Galahad and Lancelot have in this text. As the primary text that ends the medieval period of Arthurian literature, *Morte* shows how the previous centuries' exploration of masculine performance and the sacred and the secular is finally portrayed. I examine the question of whether or not Malory's Galahad is still the "ideal" virtuous knight and if the medieval culture of virginity and its representation in secular literature has been upheld. While the Grail sections of Malory's *Morte* clearly have many Christian undertones, there is still the question at this point of whether or not Galahad is representing some sort of ideal of masculinity and virginity. I analyze the way in which Malory is presenting Lancelot as the hero and how his portrayal of a more secular ideal of chivalry is juxtaposed with Galahad. Essentially, this chapter analyzes how Malory recognizes the tensions that exist, especially between earthly and heavenly chivalry, and how those tensions are portrayed in his narrative.

The goal of my conclusion is to look ahead towards Arthurian literature after the medieval period. I use Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to discuss if and how these issues of masculinity and male virginity are still being questioned and discussed 100 years after Malory's work. While the story is set in the Arthurian world, it is Britomart, not Arthur or one of his knights of the Round Table, that becomes the focus. This further complicates conversations of masculinity, especially in Arthurian literature, by questioning the role of women in what was once considered a masculine-centric world, therefore showing that it is an issue that continues to plague the genre.

Overall, this dissertation analyzes and discusses the ways in which concepts of masculinity and chivalry, especially within competing goals of the sacred and secular, cannot be contained to a single definition or ideal. Rather than presenting specific questions and laying out specific answers, as I do not believe that there is any one answer that can be given to the issues presented in the chapters, I am exploring just how authors of the medieval period take these concepts and issues and create narratives

that are themselves attempting to work through the issues. These are complex concepts that are essentially socially constructed in multiple ways by different groups with different end goals. The Arthurian world allows for them to come together and be represented in a multitude of ways, but, in doing so, it also highlights the very complexities that arise within the concepts themselves. This dissertation aims to analyze just how specific narratives do represent masculinity and chivalry, even if there can be no final answer on just exactly what those concepts mean or how they should be produced.

CHAPTER ONE

MASCULINITY AND CHIVALRY

This dissertation will focus on traits and ideals of masculinity and chivalry of knights in Arthurian literature. More specifically, it will focus on the ways in which Lancelot and Galahad both embody masculinity and chivalry, but in two distinct and ways that can be broadly characterized as sacred and secular. As these ideals are the focus of the dissertation, it is necessary to first discuss the ways that masculine identity and chivalry manifest in later medieval Europe. This chapter will consider the ways masculine identity and the chivalric code change to fit both aristocratic ideals (secular) and clerical ideals (sacred). While masculinities are often changing and always socially constructed, there is a good deal of continuity during the later medieval period. Additionally, just as masculinity is constructed, so is the notion of chivalry, both in the sacred and the secular realm. Ideals of masculinity and chivalry, and how they both shape and are shaped by the culture at the time, are an important first step to exploring and understanding masculinity and the way it manifests in Arthurian literature.

A good deal has been written on the seemingly contradictory roles of the sacred and secular in the later medieval period, and the ways in which these two ways of life intersect and overlap. Barbara Newman's *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* is a seminal text for this subject matter. Newman points out what might be hardest for a modern thinker to grasp, but what must be at the forefront of this discussion: "Sacred and secular coexist in our world, after all, just as they did in the Middle Ages. But for us, the secular is the normative, unmarked default category, while the sacred is the marked, asymmetrical Other. In the Middle Ages it was the reverse."¹ Ultimately, the sacred controls the cultural and societal norms of the medieval period, even when there are combatting secular constructs that are followed. While not every person is in Church orders, they all are expected to and do

¹ Newman, Barbara, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), viii.

participate in the sacred. The ways in which they conduct themselves, especially when it comes to sexuality and gender roles, are dictated by the sacred. The secular world is but a smaller section of the larger sacred world. Newman writes that her book, and her understanding of this crossover, “interprets the secular as always already in dialogue with the sacred.”² However, even with the intermixing of the sacred and the secular through cultural expectations and realities, it is rare to find a character in literature that clearly embodies/exemplifies the mixture of the two.

Newman has dubbed this presentation of the secular and sacred in a text, as a way of working together even when it is difficult to reconcile them with one another, as both/and principle: “when sacred and secular meanings both present themselves in a text, yet cannot be harmoniously reconciled, it is not always necessary to choose between them ... sometimes incompatible meanings simply collide.”³ Arthurian literature is perhaps the perfect matter to delve into this principle, as it demonstrates precisely what Newman is discussing. The Arthurian world has elements of the secular – romantic love, knighthood and fealty to one’s king, etc. – but it also has elements of the sacred – the Grail comes to mind as the most prominent, which I will discuss further in the next chapter. In a world that is both historical and fictional⁴, which is not really a problem for the medieval reader, the secular and the sacred collide as well to create a distinct matter of literature which embraces this crossover and goes so far as to indulge in the crossover.

Masculinity

Masculinity is a complex topic, and many scholars have focused on this area with reference to the medieval period. The study of medieval men as a gendered subject – and different from the study of works in general as a man’s history, written by men and for men – really did not begin until a 1990

² Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, ix.

³ Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 7-8.

⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* is considered the first true piece of literature which tells the story of Arthur. Based on historical accounts of Bede, Nennius, and Gildas, Geoffrey seemingly mixes factual British history with what we can only consider now to be fictional – Arthur and his knights. However, medieval readers would have likely taken this account as truth, at least to the extent that Arthur had been a real person. The embellishments of later writers took the historical and made it fictional.

Fordham University conference on men in the Middle Ages. Thelma Fenster discusses this in the Preface of the edited collection *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, which is often considered the first in-depth collection of essays that focus on this type of study. Not even 30 years old, this area of study is one that still has a lot of room for growth and introspection at how cultural ideas of masculinity and manhood shaped medieval literature.⁵ While in the medieval period masculinity can typically be ascribed to a male, it is important to note that writers of masculinity studies do not necessarily ascribe 'masculinity' to a male body. Rather, it is meant to denote a social construction.⁶ This social construction is just as true for the medieval period and "individuals and societies did not ascribe manhood to men or femininity to women simply because they were born with particular anatomy; rather, they required men and women to perform gendered actions and assume gendered roles after which they would be described as male or female."⁷ The performance of masculinity was more important than the fact of being born a male. A male could be emasculated if he were not behaving in an appropriately masculine way.

The social construction of gender is, in itself, not straightforward and linear. Complexities arise that continue to add to the constructions and the ways in which they evolve and take form, how they continue to be presented in the time period. The three orders of men in the medieval period – *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*– are important to this, because even though they are all men, they do not necessarily all behave the same as men. For purposes of this chapter, I will be focusing on the *oratores* as performing sacred masculinities and the *bellatores* as performing secular masculinities. Even within those categories there can be differences and nuances for what it means to be masculine; however, it is easier to create a more standard version of masculinity within these two separately than as one whole for all men in the period.

⁵ Fenster, Thelma, "Preface," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), ix.

⁶ Beasley, Chris, *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 178. Here Beasley gives a brief overview of the history of masculinity studies as a whole, not just for the medieval period, and indicates the idea of masculinity studies as being separate from the study of "men."

⁷ Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture*, 102.

For most men in the medieval period, masculinity was defined by sexual action, as a form of control. Having sex did assert some amount of control over women. The men were likely the ones to choose their sexual partners, and having sex often was as much for reproduction as for pleasure. A man wanted to carry on his line. He needed a woman for this to happen, and he needed one who he assumed could provide this to him. The ability and willingness to have sex was as much about action as about dominance. For this reason, any discussion of secular masculinity immediately raises issues of virginity and how it is perceived and practiced during the medieval period. There are many ways to look at virginity in the medieval culture – Christianity most important for purposes of this dissertation. Peter Brown, writing of the earlier Middle Ages, notes that that, before Christianity, virginity was an entirely social act, rather than a virtue.⁸ It was a marker of a woman's economic worth to any future husband she might have. However, with Christianity, virginity moved from only being about economic impact in marriage to also include the virtuous aspect of remaining a virgin. Virginity, especially for women, went beyond just remaining intact for your husband. It became a point of self-worth and what one would strive to achieve for spiritual purposes. Of course, even in the medieval Christian world, virginity mattered in terms of marriage, specifically for females. Coming to a marriage a virgin ensured that there would be no chance of a sudden child who did not belong to the husband. This helped to keep the male lines legitimate.

Remaining a virgin seemed to rest much more with women, both in the secular and the sacred, than it did with men. In the monastic community, men were meant to remain virgins, but this was not an expectation in the secular world. Michelle M. Sauer writes, "Male virginity was important to, but not essential for, salvation, and was more important to religious than secular life."⁹ While the church would have agreed that virginity is the preferred status, it is clear that one did not have to remain a virgin to receive salvation. Men in particular did not seem to have the physical expectations of virginity that

⁸ Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 52.

⁹ Sauer, Michelle M., *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 48.

women did, as “virginity is often figured as wholeness, intactness, perfection, and the virgin as a conduit to the divine and/or an earthly prize to be won or bestowed.”¹⁰ The idea of wholeness and intactness is definitely a gendered one, with the female virgin being visibly intact in a way that can never be physically seen or discovered with a male virgin. Even the earthly prize is gendered because it is the woman virgin who can be “won” by a male – a man, especially one of nobility, wanting to marry a woman would seek the prize of gaining a virgin wife. Again, this would not matter for the male virgin because a man’s virgin status would not be a point of marriageability.

It can be challenging to specifically describe what secular masculinity is, as it can change from culture to culture and even from time period to time period. However, a very simplistic way of describing secular masculinity is threefold: “impregnating women, protecting dependents, and serving as provider to one’s family.”¹¹ This would be especially true for the medieval man., especially a *bellatore*. Lineage, especially the paternal one, was important to all men as having a son would carry on the family line. Protection of these dependents, including the wife, and serving as provider would go hand in hand, since the woman would be at home and the man’s job would be to provide for the safety and well-being of the family. There are, of course, other aspects of being “manly,” but these three are a good starting point for any discussion of masculinity.

These characteristics could be problematic for a man if he were to fail at achieving them, theoretically making him less of a man. These types of restrictions placed on a man can make his life burdensome, and there are very few ways in which a man cannot perform these tasks and still retain his masculine standing.¹² For the many hardships that a woman might face due to her gender alone, the

¹⁰ Kelly, Kathleen Coyne, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), ix.

¹¹ Bullough, Vern L. “On Being a Male in the Middle Ages,” in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 34.

¹² In the medieval period, becoming a part of the clergy would not necessarily render a man any less masculine, even though he would not be having children and there would be no need to protect a family. The Christian calling of celibacy for the sake of God and the church would not have been seen as weak or effeminate because it was also seen as the duty of men and women alike to renounce the physical in favor of the spiritual (as discussed before).

quest to remain solely feminine is not one of them. Bullough points out that it would be desirable for a woman to embrace more masculine qualities, as the masculine was deemed superior to the feminine. While women acting masculine are often depicted as transgressive in some way, there would be an understanding of the desire by women to act in a more masculine way, even if it is not appropriate. Taking on feminine qualities would not be an option for a male – to adopt more feminine qualities would show him as weak and less of a male. “Superiority of the male” must constantly be demonstrated by the male for it to remain.¹³

One of the primary ways in which a man showed his masculinity was through sexual action. A man must be doing, performing an action, to constantly assert his masculinity and make it known to others. Having female partners, keeping them satisfied, and begetting children were actions in which showed his vitality and masculinity.¹⁴ Impotence, then, would be a hindrance to the overall masculinity of any one man, as it would be a threat to both the man’s maleness and to society.¹⁵ Impotence would be grounds for divorce, and would have to be proven in a court of law.¹⁶ This is different, however, from the desire to remain a virgin and not engage in sexual activity. What matters to masculinity is the ability to perform. If one is missing that ability, it is a problem in the eyes of society and the law. With sex being the easiest and most obvious way to assert masculinity, it would be odd, in that culture, for a secular man to remain a virgin.

If sexual ability and action – and how this really signals to a way of controlling women – is what makes a man masculine, what did a medieval thinker of a man who has been castrated? This could be a

¹³ Bullough, “On Being a Male,” 34.

¹⁴ While there are, of course, contradictions with this line of thinking and the Christian thought of “purity,” these contradictions manage to work together. One should remain a virgin and chaste, having a pure heart only for God. If this is not possible, as even the Bible would point out is the case, then marriage is the answer and one should remain pure in marriage (and procreate). Therefore, God would approve of this form of overt masculinity and it could be reconciled with teachings of the Church.

¹⁵ Bullough further discusses this on pgs. 42-43 when he writes, “Ultimately, however, the male was defined in terms of sexual performance, measured rather simply as his ability to get an erection. This was essential for the functioning of society. It kept women from becoming hysterical, it led to pregnancy and childbirth, and, in brief, it was how a male was defined, both by himself and by society.”

¹⁶ Bullough, “On Being a Male,” 41.

complex question because it might depend on the reason why one has been castrated and the agency with which the man was able to employ with his castration. Origen, a third-century theologian and scholar, made the choice to castrate himself. In the account found in his *Church History*, Eusebius writes of Origen's self-castration that it was "a deed was done by him which evidenced an immature and youthful mind, but at the same time gave the highest proof of faith and continence," showing the warring notions of what it meant to be castrated.¹⁷ Here Eusebius is clear to call it immature, a sign that this was not meant to be an act that people should necessarily follow; however, he is also clear to say that it is the highest proof of faith, signaling a belief that is an act that should also be praised. The reason given for Origen's self-castration is based on the scripture of Matthew 19:12: "There are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake." Likely Origen chose to do this because, as a teacher, he was often around women. Rather than be tempted and possibly give in to that temptation, he chose to castrate himself and remove the temptation altogether.

Peter Brown discusses the problems with this self-castration and the idea that it would free a man from sexual temptation.¹⁸ While castration meant infertility¹⁹, it did not necessarily remove one from temptation or even guarantee chastity. But perhaps it was not the castration that was problematic in and of itself. While a man can still perform sexually, the fact that he could not produce children might be a problem. However, a man in the church, who was meant to be celibate, would not be looked down upon or seen as less masculine due to not procreating. So then what is the problem with castration? Brown asserts that it is instead the ungendering of the man. The castrated man would lose the ability to grow facial hair, something that all philosophers of the time period would have done. This ungendering

¹⁷ Eusebius Pamphilius, "Church History," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, last modified July 13, 2005, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.viii.html#fna_iii.xi.viii-p2.2.

¹⁸ Brown, Peter, *The Body and Society*, 168-69.

¹⁹ The mode of castration and what it specifically means is discussed in Yves Ferroul's "Abelard's Blissful Castration" in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, 135-39. Castration is only the removal of the testicles, not the penis. Ferroul's point that he is making is that Abelard could have maintained a sexual relationship with Heloise even after castration, as he would have still had his penis. If this is the case, then the temptation for and ability to still perform the act of sex would have still been available to Origen after his self-castration.

could create problems with masculinity because it is creating a man who has chosen to become more effeminate rather than more masculine.

Perhaps the most famous castrated man in the medieval period is Peter Abelard. As the result of an affair with Heloise, his student and the woman he loved, she became pregnant. Wanting to do the right thing, Abelard marries her, with her uncle's consent, but asks that it remain a secret. When Heloise's uncle, Fulbert, betrays their secret and tells others of the marriage, Heloise denies it and, according to Abelard, "denounced her own kin and swore that they were speaking the most absolute lies."²⁰ Abelard sends Heloise to become a nun so that she does not have to endure punishment by her uncle. All of this culminated in the episode of castration which Abelard recounts:

When her uncle and his kinsmen heard of this, they were convinced that now I had completely played them false and had rid myself forever of Héloïse by forcing her to become a nun. Violently incensed, they laid a plot against me, and one night, while I, all unsuspecting, was asleep in a secret room in my lodgings, they broke in with the help of one of my servants, whom they had bribed. There they had vengeance on me with a most cruel and most shameful punishment, such as astounded the whole world, for they cut off those parts of my body with which I had done that which was the cause of their sorrow.²¹

Abelard goes on to admit his shame over not just the castration, but all that he had done that led up to it, was greater than the pain he felt. He felt it just that God would see it fit to punish him in the very area that caused him to sin.

Abelard's masculinity is tested here in multiple ways. First, his sexual actions with Heloise are contradictory in that they physically show his masculinity, especially through his impregnation of her. His virility and ability to procreate would be seen as masculine. However, his loss of control with Heloise, having seduced his student and having an illicit affair, shows a lack of control. If masculinity is deeply rooted in exercising control, then here Abelard has both exerted control and lost it with one sexual act. His castration and self-imposed monastic life that followed again showed contradictions in

²⁰ Abelard, Peter, *Historia Calamitatum*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), accessed May 10, 2017, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/14268/pg14268-images.html>.

²¹ Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*.

his masculinity. His castration would have effectively left him feminized, taking away what made him male. However, his later control over his fate by joining the monastery somewhat undid the ungendering that the castration sought to do. Both masculine and feminized, Abelard occupies this precarious space within medieval literature. Bonnie Wheeler takes the argument of Abelard's masculinity further and suggests his intellectual prowess makes him masculine, and, therefore, the affair and subsequent castration do not play into his masculinity:

From the inception of the *Historia Calamitatum*, Abelard majestically and deviously recasts his readers' understanding of masculinity as a particular kind of intellectual performance rather than as a sexual or physical capacity. His definitions of the masculine are unconventional, located not in terms of sexual organs or sexual potency nor in terms of warrior prowess, but rather in terms of intellectual swordplay. The form of competition that he finds integral to his brand of masculine identity is dialectic and disputation. Abelard arms himself with knowledge of dialectics in order to prevail in intellectual competition; he deploys the language of warfare, demonstrating the link between conflict and masculine identity. As long as the masculine object is in open conflict with others, declaring war on opposing factions, his identity is complete.²²

Abelard's position as a dialectical warrior is what gives him his masculine identity and what allows him to retain it even after his castration. Perhaps this can be linked back to the idea of members of the clergy as masculine, even if they were not engaging in sexual activity. Their legal and moral superiority and control over everyone else allows them their masculinity in the same way that Abelard's intellectual superiority presents his own masculinity.

There is also the possibility that the way in which a eunuch chooses to act somewhat defines him, in one way or another. And, more specifically, that the eunuch often has to defend himself in some way, even if that defense cannot, at face value, be connected to the lack of gender brought about by castration. Chaucer's Pardoner, introduced in the *General Prologue* as a "geldyng or a mare," is an example of this anxiety surrounding a eunuch.²³ The Host alludes to the Pardoner as a eunuch at the end of *The Pardoner's Tale* when he says, "I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of relies"

²² Wheeler, Bonnie, "Origenary Fantasies: Abelard's Castration and Confession," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 113.

²³ Chaucer, Geoffrey, "General Prologue" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 691.

or of seintuarie. / Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie; / They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!”²⁴ The Host is shaming the Pardoner, making a joke about the taking of his testicles. There is little defense by the Pardoner. Carolyn Dinshaw discusses the need of defense in reference to Chaucer’s Pardoner, stating, “the Pardoner surrounds himself with objects – relics, sealed documents, even language, regarded as a kind of object – that he substitutes for his own lacking parts. But these objects are themselves fragments, and cannot properly fill the lack that hollows the Pardoner’s being.”²⁵ There is clearly anxiety by the Pardoner. Dinshaw goes on to address that the use of relics creates even more problems in terms of the fragmentation of a body. The Pardoner, in attempting to make up for his own fragmented body, takes pieces of other fragmented bodies to legitimize himself.²⁶

Chaucer clearly understands the complex issue of castration and what it means for a man’s masculinity. By creating the character of the Pardoner as a eunuch, Chaucer is making some kind of social commentary on castration and the Church. During the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, the Pardoner interrupts her as she begins to discuss the power that women have over their husband’s bodies. The Pardoner proclaims, “I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas! / What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere? / Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!”²⁷ The choice by Chaucer to have the Pardoner make this interruption and statement of marriage gives the reader pause, as the *General Prologue* has already pointed out the likely castration of the Pardoner. It is clear that the Pardoner is essentially putting on a show about marriage and his own sexual ability, likely to make up for what he is lacking. It is likely that Chaucer is specifically doing this to comment on what he believed to be the state of the Church at the time, as an institution that is all for show, hiding what it lacks.

The Fisher King in Arthurian literature is another example of the anxiety surrounding castration. As the Grail Keeper, the Fisher King has been wounded, portrayed differently throughout

²⁴ Chaucer, Geoffrey, “The Pardoner’s Tale” in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 952-55.

²⁵ Dinshaw, Carolyn, “Eunuch Hermeneutics,” *ELH* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 28.

²⁶ Dinshaw, “Eunuch Hermeneutics,” 31.

²⁷ Chaucer, Geoffrey, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 166-68.

Arthurian literature, but always in the thigh or groin area. He is first introduced in Chrétien's *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)* as the king of the castle that Perceval is staying in when he sees the Grail procession. Of his wound, Chrétien writes, "He was wounded and maimed in the course of a battle so that he can no longer manage on his own, for he was struck by a javelin through both thighs and is still in so much pain that he cannot ride a horse."²⁸ While castration is not explicitly mentioned here, the area in which he has been wounded signals that it likely affected him in this way. The need for Perceval to heal the king is first and foremost so that the land the king owns, which has died since the king has been wounded, can come to life again. But a deeper meaning of the need for the wound to be healed is the anxiety of castration and the need for that to become whole again. The healing of his wound means the taking away of a type of castration, and restoring sexuality, virility, and masculinity back to the Fisher King. Here sexual virility is also tied to another aspect of manhood for the aristocracy – owning lands as a symbol of prosperity, with the idea being that a man's prosperity would be directly linked to his sexual ability as a symbol of masculinity.

While sexual activity is clearly the most evident way of asserting masculinity, men had other ways of expressing their masculinity as well. Asserting control could be done in more ways than just through sex, such as hunting. Jacqueline Murray writes of "traditional male activities and rites of passage that could have played an important function in defining male identity. For example, hunting and poaching were important male activities in medieval England, which seems to have reinforced masculine identity."²⁹ Hunting gave men control over nature as well as over women – they were both killing animals and showing their superior nature because women would not be out hunting with the men.³⁰ The men were able to showcase their prowess and provide food for their families.

²⁸ de Troyes, Chrétien, *The Story of the Grail (Perceval)*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 424.

²⁹ Murray, Jacqueline, "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 134-35.

³⁰ Women might be riding along with the hunt, as is evidenced by the presence of Queen Guenevere in *Antwyr off Arthur*. However, the woman would not be actively engaging in the sport.

There are many instances of this in Arthurian literature. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is almost completely set around the sport of hunting, both physically, as Lord Bertilak does, and symbolically, as the lady does. The text somewhat inverts the control, as it is the lady who seemingly has control over Gawain; however, control is righted once again when Lord Bertilak asserts his dominance as the Green Knight. Chaucer's monk is a character who is described as being both masculine and a hunter: "A monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie, / An outridere, that lovede venerie, / A manly man, to been an abbot able."³¹ *The Riverside Chaucer* notes that this use of the word "manly" typically means generous or virile, more evidence of the overt masculinity that is being portrayed in this character. While the monk is meant to be celibate, as a member of the clergy, the suggestion here seems to be that he is constrained by his vows of celibacy, so his masculinity must be asserted in another way. The knight in Chaucer's "Sir Thopas" is also described as a hunter. A knight described as "fair and gent / In bataille and in tourneyment,"³² he is characterized as a hunter: "He koude hunte at wilde deer, / And ride an haukyng for river / With grey goshawk on honed; / Therto he was a good archer; / Of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer, / Ther any ram shal stonde."³³

Along with hunting, another way to assert control and establish masculinity is the ability to defeat giants. The ability to defeat giants allows the man to claim dominance. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen discusses giants and their function in the literature of the medieval period, offering that they are both masculine and feminine at the same time, a violently gendered body. This combination of the two would be unnatural to the medieval thinker, who sees men as being masculine only if they are renouncing any feminine traits. Cohen writes:

A corpus caught within the process of its own coming into being, the giant is encountered in the performance of a masculinity as necessary as it is obscene. The giant's hybrid flesh is, however, not reducible to some pure state of male identity. Because he incorporates so much of the sensuous physicality with which medieval writers characterized women, and because his body functions as a disavowed point of

³¹ Chaucer, "General Prologue," 165-67.

³² Chaucer, Geoffrey, "Sir Thopas" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 715-16.

³³ Chaucer, "Sir Thopas," 736-41.

origin, the giant shares more with the feminine, and specifically with the maternal, than his excessively male form might suggest.³⁴

Physically, the giant is displayed as male, even if it is a female giant. The size and strength of the giant are gendered as male and give the sense of masculinity to the creature. But, as Cohen points out, that the body also relates to the maternal, giving the giant a feminine quality as well. For protagonists in medieval literature such as Arthur, it is necessary for them to assert their dominance over the giant and to do so quickly as a way to retain their own masculinity.

The killing of giants would, of course, have Biblical roots, with the story of David defeating Goliath. It is prevalent in Arthurian literature as well. Erich Auerbach discusses the role of the knight and, in doing so, the role that the giant plays in Chrétien's *Yvain*. Auerbach specifically marks the difference between the "*vilain*" and the knight, Calogrenant. In discussion of the quest that Calogrenant is on, Auerbach writes, "apparently this secretiveness is one of his knightly duties, quite in contrast to the *vilain*, who withholds nothing of what he knows. What the *vilain* does know are the material circumstances of the adventure; but what 'adventure' is, he does not know, for he is without knightly culture."³⁵ Auerbach is making the clear distinction here between the "cultured" knight and the giant, with the latter unable to follow the rules of knightly culture – a culture steeped in masculinity – because he is not a part of that culture. He is not truly masculine. The Welsh story *How Culhwch Won Olwen* shows King Arthur helping Culhwch marry Olwen by killing her father, the giant Ysbaddaden.³⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth relates the story of Arthur killing a giant at Mont-Saint-Michel. Monmouth attributes Arthur's ability to kill the giant to his strength: "Arthur gathered his strength and quickly slipped out of the giant's clutches. Moving like lightning, he struck the giant repeatedly with his sword, first in this place and then in that, giving him no respite until he had dealt him a lethal blow."³⁷ He goes on to say

³⁴ Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xii.

³⁵ Auerbach, Erich, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 135-6.

³⁶ *How Culhwch Won Olwen*, in *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 213.

³⁷ Monmouth, Geoffrey of, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 240.

that this is not the first giant Arthur has killed, relating then the story of the giant Retho. He again gives Arthur an easy victory over the giant, stating, "Soon after the battle began, Arthur was victorious."³⁸ The control that Arthur shows over these giants works to further establish his masculinity as both King and as fighter.

Cohen analyzes Arthur's defeat of the giant and asserts that the giant's body is one that knows only immediate sensual gratification. Through his kidnapping of Helena, with sexual intentions implicit in the text but never seen due to the death of Helena first, the giant is the epitome of a creature with no self-control. The giant's face is "smeared with the clotted blood of a number of pigs at which he had been gnawing. He had swallowed bits of them while he was roasting the rest."³⁹ This depicts the giant as not quite human because men are able to control all of their appetites, a trait that is not given to giants. This lack of control is juxtaposed with the very control that Arthur has over himself and over the giant, further proving his masculinity, dominance, and superiority. Masculinity, in this case, is seen as a controlled virility. The man needs to be virile, but he also needs to be able to control it, asserting himself only when appropriate and expected.

With virility being a key component of the secular man for establishing masculinity, the sacred man did not have quite the same methods, at least not in the mid to late medieval period. Sex, especially, was often seen as a marker of masculinity for the lay person, but for a clergyman, this became a forbidden action and, therefore, a non-existent way of exhibiting masculinity. The Church itself has a complicated history of views on marriage and sex for its clergy. In the earliest history of the Church, it was not unusual for members of the clergy to be married.⁴⁰ It was not until the third and fourth centuries that the Church began to seriously debate clerical marriage. The Council of Carthage in 390 explicitly forbade the clergy from marriage, elevating chastity as the clerical ideal. However, the

³⁸ Monmouth, *History*, 240.

³⁹ Monmouth, *History*, 239.

⁴⁰ Much of the historical information about the Church's history of priestly celibacy comes from Anne Llewellyn Barstow's *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates* and Jennifer D. Thibodeaux's *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300*.

clergy did not completely adhere to the strict standard set forth with this decree. Many of the clergy kept the belief that marriage was fine as long as they were not performing the ministry at the altar, even though this became increasingly difficult with the growing custom of daily mass. Additionally, land disputes and ownership of property kept the need for clerical marriage even after the Church wanted it dissolved. And from a practical standpoint, there was the question of just what to do with the marriages that were already established:

Until the war on clerical marriage began, clerics lived like other men in their communities; they married, they had children, and they practiced a gender identity more similar to laymen than to monks. The laws prohibiting clerical marriage forced clerics into a dilemma, a choice between their marriage and their livelihood. Aside from the emotional aspects of separation, forsaking one's wife deprived the priest of his social status in his local community, for it removed one of the perceived markers of adult male identity. It also forced the cleric to delegitimize his children publicly. A priest who refused clerical celibacy could theoretically lose his livelihood and impoverish his family.⁴¹

The complex views and practices of marriage and chastity among the clergy continued for centuries. The First Lateran Council in 1123 officially ended the practice of clerical marriage and held chastity as the absolute for the clergy.⁴²

With the Church's complex view on marriage and chastity and with clergy unable to be fought, sex and war were not an option for them to showcase their own masculinity, and the fear of being seen as less than man, or worse effeminate, meant that they had to both establish and prove their own type of masculinity. A suggestion that perhaps there should be a "third" gender category for the celibate clergy is discussed by scholars. However, Thibodeaux goes on to assert – and with her, I agree – that our current ideas of gender fluidity cannot be placed upon those in the medieval period. If medieval people saw gender as distinctly binary, male and female, then we must study them through that same framework.⁴³ So, instead of trying to classify the clergy as something "different" in terms of their gender

⁴¹ Thibodeaux, Jennifer D., *The Manly Priest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 42.

⁴² It is important to note that this is also around the same time that Arthurian narratives are beginning to be written. Chrétien will write his romances, which work through issues of masculinity, later in the eleventh century and the *Queste*, which is very clearly teasing out the tensions between the sacred and secular, will be written in the early twelfth century.

⁴³ Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 9.

– or *manliness* – it is better to classify them as men who perform masculinity in a different way.

As discussed with secular masculinity, control is a way that a man can prove his worth as a man. While secular men had sex, hunting, and killing as options to assert this control, the clergy did not. They had to show their control – their dominance – in another way. For the clergy, control came in the form of celibacy and the control over one’s own body. Control over the physical body was directly tied to ideas of chastity – and that, of course, was directly tied to ideas to masculinity and femininity. Maud McInerney states that, when discussing men, the words “virginity” and “chastity” are likely interchangeable, as “chastity, for a man, appears to have to do not with keeping outside influences out, but with keeping what is inside in, with the retention of seed.”⁴⁴ For a woman, virginity itself means a woman who has not been penetrated. This is all that is necessary for a woman to be a virgin (though not necessarily chaste). However, for a man, the act of sex and the release of the man’s seed during sex are seen as the same. A man’s virginity is the same as chastity because it has to do more with what the man is able to control – the emission of his seed – versus what he is specifically choosing to do. Therefore, the actual emission of semen, a physical act, is something that must be controlled. Jennifer Thibodeaux writes, “Bodies that leak, that produce substances, are believed by many societies to cause pollution; in the Middle Ages, many religious men equated leaking bodies with feminized bodies ... seen as contaminating and feminine.”⁴⁵ The idea that the clergy could somehow control these nocturnal emissions not only solidified their masculinity, but also suggested that their own masculinity would be superior to the masculinity of the secular. Just as castration was frowned upon for the secular man, it was also thought to be an emasculating act for the sacred man. The masculinity of celibacy was due to the overcoming of the temptation. The control a man was able to take over his own body was what made him masculine and to be castrated “removed the potential for manhood.”⁴⁶ The man could not

⁴⁴ McInerney, Maud Burnett, “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr” in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 58.

⁴⁵ Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 7-8.

⁴⁶ Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest*, 34.

just remove the physical part of his body that could cause him to give in to temptation, as that would defeat the purpose of overcoming temptation. Rather, the man had to assert control over the physical body to prove his manliness. This idealized masculinity required a physical component that could not just be erased.

Knighthood

I have outlined some of the basic ways in which masculinity is, or is not, measured in the medieval period. An act of social construction, there are no completely set rules and the “rules” that do seem to be set can be flexible when needed. But for a study focusing on Arthurian literature in particular, it seems necessary to discuss how masculinity was seemingly defined for knights. Ruth Mazo Karras writes that there are three distinct forms of masculinity for men in the medieval period: knight, university scholar, and craft worker. In her discussion of knights and masculinity, she chooses to view masculinity in the fourteenth century, even though the “heyday” of knighthood in literature arguably is the twelfth century. She looks at the institutions of the knight as it has become actually institutionalized by this time period.⁴⁷ As I will be specifically discussing an Arthurian text from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries in this dissertation, using analysis from views of masculinity in the fourteenth century seems appropriate, although some of the other scholarship I will be referencing will be discussing knighthood from earlier periods.

Essentially, a knight was expected to display both physical prowess as well as an active sex life. This is not really any different from what has already been discussed, as power and sex are often synonymous, especially in the medieval world. What Karras notes, however, is that “the literature does not and cannot tell us how knights actually behaved, any more than cop shows tell us how police officers actually behave. It can, however, shows us what the expectations of its audience were, and something about how the audience understood the world.”⁴⁸ The social construction of masculinity is

⁴⁷ Karras, Ruth Mazo, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 11-17.

⁴⁸ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 22.

important as it shows that masculinity is not an inherent trait; rather, masculinity is learned and is performed. What Karras is pointing out here is that it is not only something that is learned through actions. It is also learned through literature, as literature itself is an important part of the social and cultural world of the medieval period. Therefore, what we know of knights might be exaggerated, as most fiction is, but it is also what would be considered the “ideal” during the time period. For masculinity, the actions of the knight were what one should strive for continuously.

But just as God has thus far been an important figure in the construction of masculinity, this is still the case for knights. Karras writes, “Knights could and did understand knighthood as part of the service of God, in which they could fulfill religious obligations without abandoning the masculine ideal of prowess.”⁴⁹ For knights, at least in literature, the exercise of fighting in the name of God allowed them to have both the prowess needed to achieve masculinity as well as being able to still serve God. In another example of converging the sacred and the secular, the literary knight, if not the actual knight of the time, could establish masculinity through both the importance of the sacred world as well as the secular world. These did not have to be mutually exclusive for a knight.⁵⁰

Chaucer’s Knight embodies all that was expected of a knight of that time in regards to masculinity. The narrator states, “A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man, / That fro the tyme that he first bigan / To riden out, he loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.”⁵¹ Here the narrator is stating that the knight embodies the virtues that would be essential for him – chivalry, truth, honor, nobility of character, and courtesy. The reader immediately knows that the knight is virtuous. But the narrator goes on to explain that the knight has fought, and won, many battles in the Crusades. In addition to being virtuous, he is also putting God above all else by fighting in the Crusades on behalf of Cristendom (probably more than England). Finally, the narrator notes that the next pilgrim he

⁴⁹ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 42.

⁵⁰ Galahad will, of course, do this in an even more meaningful way, even if that is not expressed as the “norm” during the time period.

⁵¹ Chaucer, Geoffrey, “General Prologue,” 43-46.

describes is the son of the knight. The full spectrum of masculinity is complete here, as the knight is virtuous, has military prowess, and has produced a male heir.

Becoming a knight in the medieval period is not a career that a man just happened into once he became an adult. A prospective knight would begin his education in childhood. Once the boy made it through his education and became a knight, there were certain modes to living that were taught and practiced. Community was one, and many of their activities, such as hunting, eating, and sleeping, were done communally so as to inspire and maintain loyalty. Service was another method by which knights had to prove themselves and this was also done in many ways – learning to serve a table, to serving one’s lord through obedience, and even keeping service to chivalry through the devotion to a lady.⁵² The knight, or warrior, was also expected to have not only a perfect physical form, but a specific way of dressing. The knight should be “handsome, tall, strong, and well-proportioned ... has pale skin, and his eyes, nose and mouth are in proper proportion ... A knight might also be recognized by his dress, which will be of fine quality and well-made.”⁵³ While this type of dress would have been looked down upon by some men of the time period, it seems as though a specific way of looking and dressing went along with the way in which a knight behaved. All of these features of the knight served to create a common type of man, and idealized masculinity within the knighthood. While inevitably not all knights were able to live up to this idealized model, it was the model to which they should strive.

Earlier Arthurian literature of the twelfth century shows an understanding and concern for these codes of behavior that were expected of a knight. Chrétien de Troyes is perhaps the first well-known and well-read author of knightly adventures that sets the tone for the idea of romance and chivalry. His depiction of knights and the ways in which they perform masculinity does not necessarily reach all areas of masculinity that were present in the medieval period. But they do show a specific type of masculinity that seems to be apparent in knighthood, and which has quite a few similarities to the

⁵² Bennett, M. “Military Masculinity in England and Northern France c. 1050 – c. 1225” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 73-4.

⁵³ Bennett, “Military Masculinity,” 79.

masculine performances I have already discussed.

Chrétien's first work, *Erec and Enide*, begins with a decision from King Arthur to revive the tradition of hunting the white stag. The tradition is that the knight who kills the white stag must kiss the most beautiful maiden in the court. This inclusion of the hunting tradition reinforces ideals of secular masculinity in two ways: first, it allows the knight to assert control through the hunt, and, second, it allows the knight to display masculinity through sexuality when he is awarded with the gift of kissing the maiden (who, presumably, has no choice in this game). As the hunt is set to begin, Erec enters the story, and it becomes clear to the reader just from the general description of the knight that he should be considered worthiest of winning:

A knight came spurring after them: his name was Erec. He was of the Round Table and had received great honour at court: as long as he had been there no knight had been so highly praised, and he was so handsome that there was no need to seek a man of finer looks anywhere. He was very handsome and valiant and noble, and hew as not yet twenty-five years old; never was any man of his youth so accomplished in knighthood. What should I say of his virtues? Mounted on a charger, he came galloping along the road; he was dressed in a fur-lined dmantle and a tunic of noble, patterned silk that had been made in Constantinople. He had put on silken stockings, very finely made and tailored; he was well set in his stirrups and was wearing golden spurs; he was unarmed except for his sword.⁵⁴

Erec is handsome, well-dressed, and accomplished. These are all the things that a knight must be to assert his masculinity.

In his fight with the knight in the first part of the tale, Erec continues to show his worth as a knight through masculine performance. It is said that he and the knight are evenly matched; yet, his prowess in this battle is evident when he gains the upperhand: "He gave him such a blow, unimpeded, on his helmet, that he quite stunned him. He struck him freely again and again: he gave him three blows in quick succession, broke the helmet completely apart and sliced the coif beneath."⁵⁵ Erec, even after a fierce battle that left him bloody, is able to show his strength in battle. His martial performance is only strengthened when he graciously chooses to not kill the knight. His strength and sense of nobility

⁵⁴ de Troyes, Chrétien, *Erec and Enide*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 38.

⁵⁵ de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, 49.

are showcased here. Additionally, the way in which Chrétien writes about Erec's infatuation with Enide reassures the reader of Erec's physical – namely, sexual – prowess as well. Erec's inability to keep from kissing her, mesmerized by her beauty⁵⁶, would have alerted the medieval reader to another type of masculine performance that was expected of the knight – sex.

However, this same enamor for Enide creates a crisis in Erec's masculine performance. After their marriage, Erec is no longer interested in the duties of a knight. Chrétien writes:

But Erec was so in love with her that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments. He no longer cared for tourneying; he wanted to enjoy his wife's company, and he made her his lady and his mistress. He turned all his attention to embracing and kissing her; he pursued no other delight. His companions were grieved by this and often lamented among themselves, saying that he loved her far too much.⁵⁷

This passage emphasizes the medieval understanding of effeminacy. The expectation would be that Erec would have sex with his wife. Sexual performance was one of the key components of masculinity for the secular world. However, to succumb so fully to his desire and to ignore all else for his wife would have had the opposite effect on Erec. Rather than showcasing him as a knight to be admired by other men, this attention to his wife in the place of all else served to emasculate him in front of his peers. His masculine performance was taken to the extreme, and it quickly became an emasculating performance. He is now ridiculed by his peers and friends, rather than admired by them.

Chrétien is quick, however, to rectify this emasculation of Erec and to have him regain his masculinity, beginning with a scene of Erec armored (again, with the armor that he wears being both expensive and stylish). And while he does not allow any other knights to accompany him on his new journey, rejecting the communal aspect of knighthood, his status as a lone knight is quickly used to again show his prowess in battle when he is able to defeat three other knights who were set to attack him. This performance reassures not only the reader of Erec's masculine status, but also Enide, who had originally questioned his ability to protect both himself and her against three knights.

⁵⁶ de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, 56.

⁵⁷ de Troyes, *Erec ad Enide*, 67.

Erec's final show of masculinity is in his performance of the Joy of the Court. Hearing that there is a great adventure to be found – and refusing to leave without embarking on that adventure – Erec chooses to take part in the Joy of the Court, much to the dismay of his wife. As this is a curse which has not yet been broken by any other knight, the assumption by all is that Erec will just be one more in a long line of knights who failed at this challenge. Reminiscent of the first fight that Erec had at the beginning of the text, he and the knight, Maboagrain, are fiercely matched in their fighting skills. And, once again, Erec is able to come out the victor, saving his own life and proving in the ultimate test that he is the greatest knight. Erec's masculinity, though somewhat tainted with his one emasculating performance of ignoring his knightly duties, is ultimately reestablished and confirmed.

While knighthood was an outward symbol of masculinity and, typically, a sign of devotion and duty to God, knights were from the secular world. The clergy themselves were not allowed to fight. Although they themselves could not be knights or enter into battle, the clergy did acknowledge the ways in which warrior attributes enhanced masculinity. Being barred from fighting did not mean that they could not take on their own version of warrior status – the *miles Christi*, or soldier of Christ. The sacred man could become a spiritual warrior. The Church was tied to war in many ways, and “the earliest leaders of the Church had inherited from pagan antiquity a conviction that prayers and related rituals helped ensure success in battle, and if became accepted practice for ecclesiastics to pray for the victory of Christian rulers allied to the Church.”⁵⁸ The ways in which the sacred and the secular began to intertwine for the clergy through war was important in the medieval period. Katherine Smith writes, “Medieval religious did not live, indeed, could not live, exclusively in the realm of the sacred, wholly isolated from the secular world and its concerns.”⁵⁹ The clergymen had to establish their own ideals of masculinity, as was previously discussed; however, they also had to use their own position within the Church to contribute to and interact with the secular world, at least in some matters. War was one of

⁵⁸ Smith, Katherine Allen, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture* (London: Boydell Press, 2013), 28-29.

⁵⁹ Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*, 3.

those matters and it bound the sacred and the secular together.

The Crusades was one obvious bridge between the sacred and the secular, the martial and the clerical. Sanctioned by the Church in the eleventh century, these holy wars required that men fight for God, though those men could not be the clergy. They had to come from the order of *bellatores*, but they also had to serve Christ in a way that had not necessarily been emphasized before. Andrew Holt writes, "Prior to the eleventh century, and in contrast to later images of knighthood as an institution governed by chivalric ideals, the knight was often a crude, brutish and violent figure whose behavior was rarely in accord with Christian principles."⁶⁰ The introduction of the Crusades turned these knights from men who were at odds with the overall ideals of the Church to knights who were actively working to help the Church and, more importantly, to help further the work of Christ.⁶¹ These warriors were now required to maintain vows, avoid sin, and receive the sacraments regularly. The framework for these new warriors, established by the clergy, very clearly rejected much of the ideals of secular masculinity, and created a warrior class that more closely resembled the clerics through their commitment to the service of Christ. Holt puts this best when he writes, "A new type of hybrid masculine identity emerged that embraced the traditional notions of warrior masculinity, such as extreme bravery and prowess on the battlefield, with a competing notion of clerical masculinity, in which humility, devotion and even chastity were upheld as the highest ideas of the holy warrior."⁶² Here we have yet another type of masculine ideal being performed.

The common background of men performing both types of masculinity contributed to the ability to bridge the sacred and the secular. Many monks were from noble families, so they had first-hand knowledge of the type of secular masculinity that was portrayed by the nobility. Growing up in a

⁶⁰ Holt, Andrew, "Between Warrior and Priest: The Creation of a New Masculine Identity during the Crusades," in *Negotiation Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 187.

⁶¹ This is not to say that the actions during the Crusades were always considered good; however, the Crusades would be seen as a primary moment in the merging of the sacred and the secular during the time period.

⁶² Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest," 197.

noble family likely meant that these monks had at least some knowledge of warfare and the equipment used by a warrior. They saw the secular masculinity performed by the men in their families. Their participation in a type of war, even if only through spiritual warfare, likely helped them to reconcile the type of masculinity they saw performed while growing up with the type of masculinity they were now performing themselves.⁶³ Additionally, the fact that many warriors chose to enter the religious life after time as a warrior also strengthened this link between the sacred and the secular. And finally, the way in which medieval writers described the two distinct types of men participating in the Crusades helped to acknowledge that, while different, both served a useful function that clearly needed to work together for success. In these writings, “secular men were described as Christian heroes and as soldiers of Christ, who readily accepted potential martyrdom. Clerical men were also part of Christ’s army but usually appeared as non-combatants whose function was to motivate and inspire the soldiers, or as visionaries emphasizing the moral purity required for victory.”⁶⁴ Both the secular and the sacred had a part to play in the Crusades, and their merrgence for one common goal helped to create this new type of hybrid masculine performance.

Chivalry

The representation of masculinity and the convergence of the sacred and secular via knighthood necessitates a discussion of chivalry. Knights were meant to follow a chivalric code, which often involves adhering to specific virtues. Readers see this in texts such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or in characters such as Chaucer’s Knight. However, the reality of this chivalric code in the medieval period was much more complicated. No one single definition can be used to encompass the meaning of chivalry without an examination of the thoughts and practices that went into the making of the concept, though many scholars have written on the subject in an attempt to grasp just what the

⁶³ Smith, Katherine Allen, “Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250,” *Speculum* 83, no. 3 (July 2008): 591.

⁶⁴ Mesley, Matthew, “Episcopal Authority and Gender in the Narratives of the First Crusade,” in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2013), 98. Mesley gives an example of this from Robert the Monk’s writings, c. 1106-7.

concept of chivalry was during the medieval period. Maurice Keen, whose work *Chivalry* is perhaps the leading work on this subject, writes on this complicated association of chivalry with knighthood and the difficulty of understanding chivalry as a whole:

One can define within reasonably close limits what is meant by the word knight, the French *chevalier*: it denotes a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is – who has been ‘dubbed’ to knighthood. But chivalry, the abstraction from *chevalier*, is not so easily pinned down.⁶⁵

We know that chivalry includes knights and ladies and values that are intrinsic to a specific knightly code, but it is not as easy to define chivalry as a whole. Both the Church and the secular world would have their own ideas of chivalry that helped to shape it as an ideal; however, those ideas of chivalry are not necessarily always compatible with one another while at the same time both being important to the overall makeup of this idea of chivalry.

There are specific aspects of chivalry that are important to point out before a discussion of the chivalric ideals as embodied by specific Arthurian knights in the following chapters. There are two important concepts of chivalry to be considered – heavenly (sacred chivalry as defined by the Church) and earthly (romantic chivalry, including the fraught idea of courtly love). These two concepts become intertwined in Arthurian literature, not easily recognizable as separate ideals. Keen writes:

Chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together. I say fused, partly because the compound seems to be something new and whole in its own right, partly because it is clearly so difficult to completely separate the elements in it. In a given context, one facet may be to the fore, but it remains hard to exclude overtones from elsewhere. Indeed, no one of the component elements in the compound is in itself simple in structure. The military aspect of chivalry is associated with skill in horsemanship specifically, a costly expertise which could be hard to acquire, for one not born to a good heritage. The aristocratic aspect is not just a matter of birth; it is connected with ideas of the function of knighthood and with a scale of virtues which implies that aristocracy is a matter of worth as much as it is of lineage. The Christian aspect is presented surprisingly free of the imprint of ecclesiastical prejudice and priorities. Chivalry, as it is described in the treatises, is a way of life in which we can discern these three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious; but a way of life is a complex thing, like a living organism; we have only the

⁶⁵ Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 1-2.

beginnings of a definition, and there is plenty left to explore.⁶⁶

The Church's view of chivalry is much more religious, clearly elevating the knight's life as a testament to God over any other aspect. However, in the concept of chivalry, it is not necessarily possible to separate the Church's view of chivalry from a more secular form of chivalry, even if they are different. Their very differences, fused together, create the concept that we now know as chivalry. While there is no specific date or event that officially combined these differences together to create the concept of chivalry as we think of it today, the concept can be applied to the entirety of the medieval period. As this was a time period when warring ideals of masculinity and the sacred and the secular were being fully explored and created, it is appropriate to understand the conception of chivalry as acting within this same timeframe.

Heavenly chivalry, as defined by the Church, was ground not so much in the virtues that are required to be a knight, but in the singular goal of fighting for God. In the sacred realm, chivalric values, such as piety, were associated specifically with God. Knighthood was a way to display this type of sacred chivalry, as the Christian knight was crusading for the Church. Working within a system of heavenly chivalry, the knight fought only for the purpose of God's work. The advent of the Crusades and the Church's role and approval of fighting in these helped to create this idea of heavenly chivalry. However, crusading and chivalry were not the same thing, and we should not conflate them, though the act of crusading did have an effect on the idea of chivalry.⁶⁷ Fighting in the Crusades was not what made a knight chivalrous, nor is it the only reason the Church created its own version of chivalry; rather, the Crusades highlighted the very way in which a knight should embrace heavenly chivalry and work towards that ideal in his vocation. Keen explains:

Under the church's influence, crusading, the martial pilgrimage, established itself firmly as the highest mode of expression of the chivalric virtues of courage and endurance. Ecclesiastical teaching also gave definition to the idea of chivalry as an order, possessing, as every order should, its rule of life, and instructed the knight about how he should view his individual discharge of his office as a Christian duty.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*, 16-17.

⁶⁷ Keen, *Chivalry*, 44-45.

⁶⁸ Keen, *Chivalry*, 76.

The Church's charge for the knight was not one of romanticized virtues, but instead was one that leaned specifically towards a way of leading a Christian life, with the knight acting on his own Christian duty in the world.

The dubbing of the knight ceremony is an example of the way in which the Church imposed itself on the ethos of knighthood, as the ceremony is representative of both the sacred and the secular. In addition to the presence of clergy at the ceremony, the ceremony was also steeped in religious symbolism: "The bath recalling baptism and signifying cleansing from sin, the white belt signifying chastity that is girded on the new knight's loins, the sword placed in his hand whose sharp edges remind him of his duty to protect the weak and uphold justice."⁶⁹ The religious symbolism that is associated with a knight is presented in medieval literature as well. In the *Lancelot Proper*, the Lady of the Lake explains to Lancelot the meaning of knighthood and its relationship with the Church:

'Above all, knighthood was established to defend the Holy Church, for the Church cannot take up arms to avenge herself or return harm for harm; and this is why knights were created: to protect the one who turns the other cheek when the first has been hit ... The shield that hangs from his neck and covers his chest signifies that, just as it protects him from blows, the knight must protect the Holy Church from all evildoers, whether thieves or unbelievers. If the Church is assailed or at risk of attack, the knight, as her son, is duty-bound to come forward and take the blows. He must be her champion and defender, for if a mother is beaten or insulted in front of her son and he does not avenge her, he should be denied his daily bread and locked out. The hauberk worn by a knight to protect all parts of his body signifies that the Holy Church is likewise to be enclosed and protected by the knight's defensiveness. He must be so keenly watchful and well prepared that no evildoer will ever come up to the front door or the back door of the Church and not find the knight there, alert and all ready to bar his way. The helmet on the knight's head, which is the most visible part of his armor, signifies that he must likewise be visible to all people as the enemy of those who would harm or injure the Holy Church. He must be like a watchtower, a sentinel's post that from all sides can be seen rising high above all other buildings to frighten off criminals and thieves. The lance that the knight carries, which is so long that it pierces his foe before he reaches him, signifies that, just as the solid wooden shaft and sharp steel head make unarmed people back away for fear of death, the knight must be so bold and brave and determined that fear of him will travel far and stop any thief or evildoer from daring to come near the Church. They will run away for fear of him, with no more power against him than an unarmed people have against the sharp-steeled lance. The sword girded to the knight is sharp on both sides, and not without good reason. The sword, of all weapons, is the most honored and noble, and the one with the greatest worthiness, for it can harm the foe in three ways: it can be used head on, to stab to death, or sidewise, to cut to the right or to the

⁶⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 64.

left. The double edge signifies that the knight must be a soldier of Our Lord and His people. With one edge, the sword strikes those who are enemies of Our Lord and His people, and mock His faith. With the other, it has the tasks of taking vengeance on those who try to shatter human fellowship, that is, those that rob one another and those that kill one another ... In that way you can see that the knight must be a lord over the people and a soldier of God, for he must protect and defend and safeguard the Holy Church.⁷⁰

This discussion of knighthood from the text is in line with the Church's own idea of chivalry: "The Church had defined its ideas of the knight's duties in the prayers of the knighting ceremony, as a defender of the weak and of the Church itself."⁷¹ The *Lady of the Lake* makes it clear that the duty of the knight is to the Church. There is no discussion from her about the chivalric values that are typically associated with a more secular chivalry and knighthood – courtesy, love, etc. – because to her, the role of the knight is clearly sacred. It is probable that this strongly sacred view of knighthood is due to the likely clerical authorship of the work: "Looking at matters through priestly eyes, as they naturally most often did, ecclesiastical authors showed a very general tendency to portray chivalry in terms of priestly priorities."⁷² A clerical author might write about secular chivalry, as clearly happens through the character of Lancelot in the *Lancelot Proper*, but the overall view of what knighthood and chivalry should be is grounded in the sacred.

The secular, romantic form of chivalry takes the sacred form of chivalry and expands on it, giving readers the type of chivalry that is most thought of today. The association of virtues to chivalry, made famous by medieval romance authors, helped create a secular form of chivalry:

From a very early stage we find the romantic authors habitually associating together certain qualities which they clearly regarded as the classic virtues of good knighthood: *prouesse*, *loyauté*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoisie*, and *franchise* (the free and frank bearing that is visible testimony to the combination of good birth and virtue). The association of these qualities in chivalry is already established in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (written c. 1165-c. 1185), and from this time on to the end of the middle ages their combination remains the stereotype of chivalrous distinction.⁷³

Although Chrétien did not invent this concept of chivalry, he is the first author of Arthurian romance

⁷⁰ "Part One," *Lancelot*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg and Carleton W. Carroll (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 112-14.

⁷¹ Barber, Richard, *The Knight and Chivalry* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1982), 47.

⁷² Keen, *Chivalry*, 5.

⁷³ Keen, *Chivalry*, 2.

who employs it in his texts. The complex heroes he presents are both fighters and lovers, navigating this world of “dual but often opposing roles.”⁷⁴ Additionally, Chrétien gave Arthurian romance stories of individual knights. Focusing on individual knights rather than the entirety of the court’s knights as a whole was a defining moment for advancement of secular chivalry.⁷⁵ Most of the secular ideas of chivalry that he introduces to the matter continue to be associated with Arthur’s court and individual knights throughout the remainder of the medieval period, interspersed with the already established sacred chivalry.

Perhaps the most important secular inclusion to the idea of chivalry is the knight’s relationship with the lady. For the knight, worship of fair ladies becomes bound with chivalry, and the knight’s purpose of prowess and glory as a warrior begins to shift from the Church to the love of the lady.⁷⁶ The knight’s role is no longer just a fighter: “The image of the warrior-knight — the one who successfully led the First Crusade and was still believed by many western apologists to be invincible, was being tempered (and softened, some would say) by more civilized values filtering into French-speaking domains and beyond. Being a successful fighter was no longer enough; now one had to be a good courtly lover as well, in order to legitimately represent the chivalric order.”⁷⁷ Chrétien’s Erec, Cligés, and Lancelot are all examples of knights who are acting in the dual role of warrior and lover, exhibiting the warrior prowess associated with knights while also falling in love with the beautiful lady. And especially in the story of Erec, these dual roles are not always compatible, even when they are together meant to represent the knight and his chivalric code.

It seems necessary to include a discussion of the concept of courtly love in an overall discussion of chivalry, even though the concept of courtly love is fraught and the term itself is contentious. While love of God – as displayed by the sacred clergy in their devotion and by the secular knights through their

⁷⁴ Farina, William, *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2010), 91.

⁷⁵ Barber, Richard, “Chivalry, Cistercianism, and the Grail,” in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 4.

⁷⁶ Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, 71.

⁷⁷ Farina, *Dawn of Arthurian Romance*, 94.

duty to God in the Crusades – is an important aspect of medieval life, the creation and popularity of Arthurian romances during the period highlighted earthly love and its place in literature. The tension comes when this earthly love is not easily reconcilable with a love of God, as I will show in the following chapters with the character of Lancelot. Here I will give a discussion of courtly love, as it is often a term that is used by scholars to name the depiction of earthly love that is seen in Arthurian literature.

Many modern scholars have weighed in on the meaning of courtly love and whether or not it is appropriate to use the term when discussing medieval romances. The term itself is not medieval; Gaston Paris coined it (*amour courtois*) in the nineteenth century, specifically in reference to Chrétien's Lancelot. His idea of courtly love can be summarized as the following:

It is illicit, furtive and extra-conjugal; the lover continually fears lest he should, by some misfortune, displease his mistress or cease to be worthy of her; the lover's position is one of inferiority; even the hardened warrior trembles in his lady's presence; she, on her part, makes her suitor acutely aware of his insecurity by deliberately acting in a capricious and haughty manner; love is a source of courage and refinement; the lady's apparent cruelty serves to test her lover's valour; finally, love, like chivalry and *courtoisie*, is an art with its own code of rules.⁷⁸

The relationship between the knight and the lady is defined by the inferior nature of the relationship. While the knight might be superior in terms of deeds and arms, his worth as related to his relationship with the lady is, in Paris' view of courtly love, inferior. The knight is encouraged to express his chivalric nature, specifically his warrior prowess, as a way to impress the lady and be worthy of her. And while the adulterous aspect of courtly love is inherent to Lancelot, the overall model of the courtly relationship can be used for knights who are not committing adultery. Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore* (in Latin, *De arte honeste amandi*) is typically translated as *The Art of Courtly Love* or simply *On Love*. A treatise that is typical of medieval courtesy literature, *De Amore* sets out to explain love and the situational ways in which one should express love. While the term "courtly love" is anachronistic and is not used by Capellanus, the idea that there are set standards for love and the way in which one would

⁷⁸ Boase, Roger, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 23-24.

be expected to behave is clearly laid out in this work. As a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes, both associated with Marie de Champagne's court, there seems to at least be basis for a connection between the idea of courtly love and the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. While current concepts of courtly love might not be accurate for the medieval period, there is at least some type of codified idea of love and the ways in which it should be expressed.⁷⁹

Gaston Paris' definition of courtly love is the starting point of the concept, but its actual definition and use in medieval literature is not concrete. C.S. Lewis adopts a similar notion of courtly love, further elaborating on Paris' idea:

The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim. There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man' ... only the courteous can love, but it is love that makes them courteous.⁸⁰

For Lewis, courtly love is intertwined humility and courtesy, making the love for his lady inseparable from these virtues that are necessary, both in being a knight and in his ability to love.

In contrast, D.W. Robertson argues that there is no such thing as courtly love in the Middle Ages. Works such as Chrétien's *Lancelot* "are, in fact, ironic and humorous ... What is being satirized in the works in question is not 'courtly love' at all, but idolatrous passion."⁸¹ Robertson's belief is that courtly love is a concept created in a more modern time and imposed on medieval texts, creating a medieval concept that never actually existed. Instead, what is actually happening in the medieval period is a satire of adultery and idolatrous passion, meant to be a type of love that was understood to be wrong, not noble and idealized. Larry D. Benson later argues that there was some kind of courtly system

⁷⁹Capellanus essentially ends his treatise with a rejection of the type of love that he has just laid out. However, this does not mean that what he has written is completely made up or inaccurate for the time period. There is no way to know his actual thoughts on the matter, but the writing of these rules and expectations indicates that there is some consensus of the idea of love and how to behave.

⁸⁰ Lewis, C.A., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 2.

⁸¹ Robertson, "The Concept of Courtly Love," in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.X. Newman (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1968), 3.

of love, which can be translated into a concept of courtly love, but that adultery is not part of it. And this courtly love is distinct from other forms of love because it is inexplicably related to all other virtues, to the point that only a lover can be virtuous.⁸²

R. Howard Bloch argues that there is a system of courtly love in the medieval period, but that the system is in place as a further embodiment of anti-feminism that is inescapable in the period. Anti-feminism is pervasive throughout the medieval period, as is seen in many forms of literature. Bloch writes, "The denunciation of women ... dominates ecclesiastical writing, letters, sermons, theological tracts, and discussions and compilations of canon law; scientific works, as part of biological, gynecological, and medical knowledge; folklore and philosophy."⁸³ In discussion of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*, Bloch asserts that there is a "link of the feminine to the seductions and the ruses of speech."⁸⁴ The idea of the female as the seductress, and their perceived talkative nature as transgressive, can be found within Arthurian literature. The entire idea of courtly love, even as a created motif in later centuries, centers around the woman as seductress, controlling her lover in a way that emasculates him. Chrétien's Erec is labeled effeminate because he is spending too much time with his wife, engaging in sexual activity. The Wife of Bath is quite talkative about herself, with her prologue dominating much of her time as the teller. The Lady of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is both seductress and talkative – she uses speech to attempt to convince Gawain to have sex with her.

The adulterous aspect of courtly love is a basis for Bloch's argument: "Like a totemic secret uniting Arthur's court, the complicity of cuckolds transforms the desires of woman into a scandalous excess that stains all who try to drink ... This suggest that Guinevere, far from an exception, is the figure of everywoman."⁸⁵ Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship represents the view of women as something scandalous and inferior to men. Rather than being the exception to the idea of marital

⁸² Benson, Larry D. "Courtly Love and Chivalry," in *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1984), 241.

⁸³ Bloch, Howard R., *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7.

⁸⁴ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 14.

⁸⁵ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 96.

fidelity, Guinevere represents the normal idea of women as unfaithful and impure. An intriguing point to note, especially in response to the idea that it is the illicit love between Lancelot and Guinevere that propels much of Lancelot's story and placement in Arthurian literature, is that while Lancelot becomes the knight who is known for his affair with Guinevere, he is not the first Arthurian character to be involved in an improper relationship with Arthur's Queen. Mordred, the actual villain of many Arthurian narratives, especially in the chronicle tradition, is also portrayed as having an illicit relationship with Guinevere. Geoffrey of Monmouth writes of Arthur's time at battle, "That his nephew Mordred, in whose care he had left Britain, had placed the crown upon his own head. What is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage. About this particular matter, most noble Duke, Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing."⁸⁶ The *Alliterative Morte Arthure* also relays the treason of Mordred. Arthur is told: "Sir, thy warden is wicked and wild of his deedes, / For he wandreth has wrought senn thou away passed. / He has castels encroached and crownd himselven, / Caught in all the rentes of the Round Table / ... He has wedded Waynor and her his wife holdes, / And wonnes in the wild boundes of the west marches, / And has wrought her with child, as witness telles!"⁸⁷ It is not clear here, as it is in the romances that involved the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, if the Queen is a willing participant in Mordred's deception of Arthur. Mordred's takeover of Camelot and the Queen, however, becomes a storyline in many works in the matter, making the Queen and her extramarital affairs a focal point in the fall of Arthur's kingdom.

The ideas and definitions presented about courtly love as it relates to the concept of chivalry are important to understanding the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. As the basis for Lancelot's embodiment of earthly chivalry over heavenly chivalry, the idea of courtly love has merit. The association of devotion to a lady and adultery with courtly love are intrinsic to any discussion of

⁸⁶ Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, 257.

⁸⁷ *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, in *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 3523-26, 3550-52.

Lancelot, and especially to a discussion of the warring values that are presented in Arthurian literature through the characters of Lancelot and Galahad. However, for purposes of this dissertation, I will not use the term courtly love to describe Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere, as the term itself is too contentious. Of course, a term is still needed, as the very concept of their relationship is an important theme throughout Arthurian literature. I agree with Robertson's assertion that courtly love is anachronistic and a modern conception that has been imposed on medieval works. The term that I will use is "secular love," to mean any kind of love that either surpasses one's love for God or that creates a problem in devotion to God.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INTRODUCTION OF LANCELOT AND GALAHAD

A key point to consider when discussing Arthurian literature is intertextuality. While intertextuality is a feature of most Western literature, it is very pronounced in Arthurian literature specifically, as even now, centuries after its inception, Arthurian material is still being produced. Because of this pronounced intertextuality among Arthurian matter, it is important to consider how intertextuality informs the reading process and even informs the canon itself. The legend as conveyed in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* is much more complex than the original legend provided in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. It is possible to read Malory without understanding that the basic premise comes from Monmouth, Chrétien, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, and many other texts from the medieval period. However, all of these texts are both informed by and inform one another, with the frame itself being basically the same, but the individual story lines becoming intermingled throughout. Norris J. Lacy writes, "Arthurian characters, themes, and motifs are no respecters of textual boundaries, and thus each work connects with another and yet another, until it can reasonably be argued that Arthurian literature constitutes an enormous, overarching cycle, each part of which is intended to be read against a background of all others."⁸⁸ While one can read a single piece of Arthurian literature and read it for pleasure, with no background or even interest in studying and/or reading other works in the canon, it is almost impossible to research and analyze a specific character or motif without further researching the texts that inform and are informed by that character or motif. While the Arthurian matter is not necessarily seamless as a narrative, there is still a need to view the progression of a character, theme, or motif throughout the narratives to fully understand its function within the matter.

⁸⁸ Lacy, Norris J., "Preface," in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Routledge, 2012), vii.

This chapter explores this intertextuality through a specific study of how masculinity and chivalry are presented and an examination of the ways in which the sacred and secular come together in Arthurian literature. The introduction of Lancelot and Galahad in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries presents the Arthurian matter with two interconnected knights who will both represent the medieval notions of masculinity and chivalry. Working within an already established tradition, both characters seem to uphold and question many of the preconceived ideals that are expected of knights. Lancelot and Galahad will represent two specific types of chivalry that are present within Arthurian literature: earthly (secular) chivalry, which heavily involves the actions towards ladies, and heavenly (sacred) chivalry, which is focused on the deeds geared toward God. With Lancelot embodying ideals of earthly chivalry and Galahad embodying ideals of heavenly chivalry, the two knights will emphasize the ways in which the Arthurian matter is portraying both types of chivalry, especially in a time that emphasizes prescribed notions of masculinity. Additionally, both earthly and heavenly chivalry are grounded in a world that is bridging secular and sacred ideals, showing that Christianity and romance are not separate, but rely on one another in a multitude of ways.

The specific texts that will be analyzed to discuss the relationship between Lancelot and Galahad with masculinity and chivalry are Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)* and the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Chrétien de Troyes essentially creates the idea of the courtly romance, especially for the Arthurian narrative. As discussed in the previous chapter, chivalry, especially as it embodies the idea of secular love, was a concept that many will know or at least be able to identify even before reading any works by Chrétien; "nevertheless, the concept began in a very real sense with the tradition he founded."⁸⁹ The concept of secular love includes these components: "the nobility of the lover, the sometimes insuperable distance between him and the lady, the exalting nature of his devotion, and the

⁸⁹ Farina, William, *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010), 88.

social context of the love.”⁹⁰ Chrétien’s *Lancelot* embodies these aspects of secular love, setting the foundation for future Arthurian narratives and perhaps the most widely recognized theme of Arthurian literature: the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere. Yet *Lancelot* is not without its complexities, possibly due to the widely held belief that it was Marie de Champagne who requested (or suggested) the more adulterous theme, as the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere is starkly contrasted with his other romances that better uphold the ideal of marriage. Regardless of the reasons for Lancelot’s introduction or Chrétien’s personal feelings about the love affair that he composed, *Lancelot* presents the Arthurian matter with what evolves into one of its primary examples of warrior masculinity and earthly chivalry.

However, for the complexities that arise within *Lancelot*, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* best establishes both Lancelot and Galahad within the Arthurian narrative as the knights as most readers know them today.⁹¹ The *Lancelot Proper*, the longest section of the *Cycle*, provides more specific context about Lancelot, giving more background information about the knight, including the establishment of his masculinity, his rise to become best knight, and his relationship with Guinevere. Yet it is the introduction of Galahad and the *La Queste del Saint Graal* that highlights the nature of chivalry, especially in both a sacred and secular context during medieval period, exploring the dueling roles of Lancelot and Galahad within the Arthurian narrative. Likely written by a Cistercian monk during the early part of the thirteenth century, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* is the best representation of the way in which the Arthurian matter combines the sacred and the secular to create themes and ideals that are particular to its characters while also challenging the very nature of those themes and ideals.⁹² With the inherently rivaling themes of secular love and purity, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* exposes the very tensions

⁹⁰ Ferrante and Economou, “Introduction,” in *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*, eds. M. Ferrante and George D. Economou (Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publication, 1975), 4.

⁹¹ While some might argue that it is actually Malory’s stories of Lancelot and Galahad that most people are familiar with, his primary source for those stories is the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, as I will further discuss in Chapter Four.

⁹² The general consensus among most scholars is that the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* was written within the Cistercian order, though the authorship, specifically whether or not it was just one cleric writing, is debated. With the knowledge that the last three sections of the *Cycle* were written much earlier than the first two, there is a possibility that multiple clerics created this narrative. However, for purposes of this dissertation, I will simply use the singular “author.”

that can arise from a matter that attempts to meld all aspects of the sacred with the secular.

Lancelot and Galahad represent two sides of chivalry – earthly and heavenly – and through them these knights display their own versions of masculinity. Additionally, they represent two different kinds of love – Lancelot’s secular love for Guinevere and Galahad’s sacred love for God. In discussing secular love, an aspect of medieval knighthood that cannot be ignored, especially when discussing Lancelot, George Economou writes:

It has been a commonplace in modern criticism of medieval literature to distinguish between two profoundly different kinds of love: Christian charity, *caritas*, or divine love and earthly love, *amor*. This point of view has undoubtedly led to a greater understanding of medieval poetry, for the distinction between earthly and divine love was one that medieval men made with great conviction and, at times, eloquence.⁹³

Lancelot and Galahad represent these two types of love and chivalry, as Lancelot will become the epitome of earthly love (Guinevere) and Galahad will become the epitome of Christian love (God). In addition to representing these two types of love, Lancelot and Galahad represent two types of masculinity, both of which are rooted in their objects of love. For Lancelot, a very secular form of masculinity is portrayed that revolves around his love for Guinevere. Conversely, Galahad represents a sacred form of masculinity, revolving around his love for God.

Introduction of Lancelot

As the most famous knight in Arthurian literature, even as a relative latecomer to the Round Table, Lancelot is meant to embody the ideal knight. He is the masculine warrior, able to best all other knights in adventures and arms. He is the perfected secular lover, faithful to the Queen, even if he is not faithful to the King. However, Lancelot’s inception in the canon is not quite as straightforward as is his representation by Malory, who is likely responsible for the idea of Lancelot as the perceived ideal knight. When introduced by Chrétien, Lancelot has faults and failures, instances where it is possible to question his masculinity, even when that very masculinity is eventually established for the reader. It is

⁹³ Economou, George D., “The Two Venuses and Courtly Love,” in *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*, eds. M. Ferrante and George D. Economou (Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publication, 1975), 17,

not until the *Lancelot Proper* that the reader gets a more in-depth look at Lancelot and his interactions as a knight of the Round Table and as the lover of Guinevere. By tracing the introduction of Lancelot and subsequent portrayal of him alongside his son Galahad, I will show the ways in which Lancelot represents some idealized form of knightly virtue within an earthly version of the knightly chivalric code.

Chrétien's *Lancelot* begins with little attention to the fanfare of courtly life; rather, the reader is aware that this is meant to be a lively court, with Chrétien writing, "After the meal the king did not stir from among his companions. There were many barons present in the hall, and the queen was among them, as were, I believe a great number of beautiful courtly ladies, skilful at conversing in French. And Kay, who had overseen the feast, was eating with those who had served."⁹⁴ This is the whole of courtly life that the reader is given before the action of the text is revealed, with a knight appearing and boasting:

'King Arthur, I hold imprisoned knights, ladies and maidens from your land and household. I do not bring you news of them because I intend to return them to you; rather, I want to inform you that you have neither wealth nor power enough to ensure their release. And know you well that you will die before you are able to come to their aid ... Sir, if at your court there is even one knight in whom you have faith enough to dare entrust the queen to accompany her into these woods where I am going, I give my oath that I will await him there and will deliver all the prisoners who are captive in my land – if he is able to win the queen from me and bring her back to you.'⁹⁵

Immediately the Arthurian court is challenged with a quest, one which should inevitably showcase both the masculinity of the knight who embarks on it and the devotion to ladies, here specifically the Queen, which would be expected of knights of the Round Table.

Kay initially volunteers for and embarks upon this quest, with Gawain following after him. Yet a new knight, Lancelot, will soon be introduced. The entrance of Lancelot, who is not yet named, presents the reader with what initially seems to be a lesser knight. Chrétien does not immediately let the reader know that this knight's quest is also to rescue the queen. What the reader first infers about Lancelot is that he is unable to make the appropriate decision when in a hurry. When asking Gawain for use of a

⁹⁴ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 207.

⁹⁵ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 207-8.

horse, the knight “did not take the time to choose the better, or the more handsome, or the larger, rather, he leapt upon the one that was nearest him, and rode off full speed. And the horse he had been riding fell dead, for that day it had been overridden and exhausted, and had suffered much.”⁹⁶ Lancelot here displays a lack of knightly expertise, though this is likely due to his enthusiasm for finding the Queen as opposed to a lack of actual expertise or experience; this characteristic will fade away as he is introduced in later Arthurian texts. Second, he is presented as willing to be humiliated in a public way. When he is, again, without a horse, he sees a cart, which was “for all criminals alike, for all traitors and murderers, for all those who had lost trials by combat, and for all those who had stolen another’s possessions by larceny or snatched them by force on the highways ... Since in those days carts were so dreadful, the saying first arose: ‘Whenever you see a cart and cross its path, make the sign of the cross and remember God, so that evil will not befall you.’”⁹⁷ At this point Chrétien makes it especially clear to the reader that Lancelot is acting out of love. While Lancelot has not been introduced here as the embodiment of a masculine, warrior knight, he is being introduced as a courtly knight who is invested in earthly chivalry towards the Queen. And much like Chrétien’s earlier knights, Lancelot does seem to become ineffectual as a knight due to love.

A closer examination of the cart scene shows the tension between Lancelot’s duty to Guinevere and his duty as a knight. On Lancelot’s decision to ride in the cart, Chrétien states that he “hesitated but two steps before climbing in. He would regret this moment of hesitation and be accursed and shamed for it; he would come to consider himself ill-used.”⁹⁸ Lancelot, knowing the significance of riding in a cart and the shame that it would inevitably bring him, momentarily hesitates before he climbs in. However, for Lancelot, the greater shame is that he did hesitate, as his love for Guinevere surpassed his own honor as a knight in this moment. Of this tension between the love for Guinevere and the duty to honor, Chrétien writes:

⁹⁶ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 211.

⁹⁷ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 211.

⁹⁸ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 211-12.

But Reason, who does not follow Love's command, told him to beware of getting in, and admonished and counselled him not to do anything for which he might incur disgrace or reproach. Reason, who dared tell him this, spoke from the lips, not from the heart; but Love, who held sway within his heart, urged and commanded him to climb into the cart at once. Because Love ordered and wished it, he jumped in; since Love ruled his action, the disgrace did not matter.⁹⁹

It is not possible, at this moment, for Lancelot to uphold his duty to Guinevere and his duty to his own honor as a knight. A choice is required and he chooses his duty to Guinevere. However, Guinevere is not comforted by his choice to ride in the cart – she cannot forget the slight hesitation that he had. Because of her contempt for his hesitation, Guinevere acts coldly towards Lancelot once he is finally in front of her. Guinevere “acted as if she were angered,” and states “I shall always deny that I feel any gratitude towards him.”¹⁰⁰ When she and Lancelot are reunited later, she explains to him that it was the shame he endured by not immediately entering the cart that caused her to behave the way she did but that she has forgiven him this transgression. In his actions, Lancelot has been shamed, both by the court as a whole for choosing to ride in the cart and by Guinevere for hesitating before making the decision. The tension between his two duties has caused more shame for Lancelot, because his duty to Guinevere and his duty to his own honor are not easily reconcilable.

Additionally, Lancelot's choice to ride in the cart creates even more shame in the form of the name that he becomes known by to others. Before the cart scene, he is referred to only as a “knight.” After his choice to ride in the cart, he is known by all as the “Knight of the Cart.” The shame that is imposed upon him for riding in the cart follows Lancelot, and this legacy precedes him wherever he goes. For the first half of the text, he does not have an actual name associated with him. It is not until Guinevere first glimpses him that she finally reveals his name as Lancelot of the Lake. It seems appropriate for Guinevere to be the one to officially state his name, as she is the only one who does not believe he is shamed by choosing to ride in the cart.

The overall juxtaposition of reason and love, of masculine, warrior knight and the earthly,

⁹⁹ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 212.

¹⁰⁰ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 256.

chivalrous knight, initially seems to create an ambiguity about the masculinity of Lancelot. Some critics think of Lancelot as a contradictory man:

While on the one hand the quality of his love and the purposeful actions which it inspires suggest that all Lancelot's strength and honor as a man have been directed toward his lady; on the other hand his ineffectuality, enforced by the negative horse symbolism, imply that he has no specifically manly strength to give. He has, as it were, become emasculated. The particular literary skill in this paradox is Chrétien's strong suggestion that commitment to love has caused the emasculation.¹⁰¹

The very fact that Lancelot seems to defer to love over reason is seen as an emasculating trait, at least in the eyes of the author. However, it appears this one characteristic of Lancelot as portrayed by Chrétien should not be the sole defining characteristic of the knight. While he clearly makes mistakes because of his love for Guinevere, Lancelot has not been completely emasculated. The social construct of masculinity holds heroism (prowess, fulfillment of quests) in high esteem. Lancelot's pursuit of the Guinevere, at all costs to him, reclaims any amount of masculinity that has been lost through his adherence to love over reason.

There are instances throughout the narrative which will both remind the reader of Lancelot's prowess as a knight, especially through heroism, while also presenting him as a love-struck man, at times unable to be efficient due to his love for Guinevere. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as "Chrétien praised a socially oriented code of courtly behavior combined with love as a powerful inspiration enhancing, not impeding the heroic virtues of knightly valor."¹⁰² In fact, in the other works by Chrétien, the reader is presented with knights who will fall in love but choose to continue in their knightly duties despite being in love. In contrast, Lancelot embarks on his adventure specifically because of love for the Queen, and the reader is at times given a knight who will be caught between chivalric duty and secular love. One such instance is when Gawain chooses the Underwater Bridge and leaves the Sword Bridge to Lancelot. Lancelot replies to this by saying, "Then it is right that I go to the

¹⁰¹ Condren, Edward I., "The Paradox of Chrétien's Lancelot," *MLN* 85, no. 4 (1970): 445.

¹⁰² Scaglione, Aldo, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 121.

Sword Bridge without complaint.”¹⁰³ This act of bravery in the face of danger is a sign of Lancelot’s masculinity. However, it is immediately after this display of masculinity that Chrétien once again elaborates on Lancelot following love over reason, having Lancelot so deeply in thought about Guinevere and his rescue of her that he does not see what is happening around him – an act that would not be befitting of a knight. And even when he must then fight the guardian, “the battle was so lengthy that the Knight of the Cart felt shame in his heart.”¹⁰⁴ While he does eventually gain the upper hand and defeat his opponent, Lancelot understands that his distraction has caused this battle to last much longer than it should have. This contradiction in masculinity plagues Lancelot throughout the text.

There are, of course, multiple instances that fully indicate the chivalric and heroic nature of Lancelot, with no contradiction. One example is when his courage is tested while staying at the house of the beautiful woman he meets. When he believes that she is being attacked, Lancelot rescues her:

He leapt in among the knights, jabbing one man down with his elbows and another after him. He struck the two nearest him with his elbows and forearms and beat them both to the ground. The third swung at him and missed, but the fourth struck him a blow that ripped his mantle and shirt and tore open the white flesh of his shoulder. Though blood was pouring from his wound, our knight took no respite, and without complaining of his wound he redoubled his efforts until he managed to grab the head of the knight who would have raped his hostess.¹⁰⁵

While there is a moment of hesitation before he attacks, Lancelot’s physical prowess and his ability to fight off many men at once is on full display here. The warrior aspect of knighthood might not be the primary characteristic that is portrayed by Chrétien, but it is nonetheless a characteristic that Lancelot possesses. Additionally, after Lancelot has ensured the release of Guinevere and meets with Kay, he is told that he has shamed Kay. When Lancelot asks what he has caused him, Kay replies, ““An enormous shame, because you have completed what I was unable to complete and have done what I was unable to do.”¹⁰⁶ Lancelot has bested a knight of Arthur’s court, foreshadowing his role as “best” knight within

¹⁰³ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 216.

¹⁰⁴ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 218.

¹⁰⁵ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 221-22.

¹⁰⁶ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 256.

the Arthurian tradition.

And at the tournament after the Queen's return, Lancelot proves himself to be a worthy knight in combat. Chrétien writes, "Lancelot performed such deeds with both his lance and sword that all the spectators marveled at what they saw. Even many of the knights participating in the jousts watched him with admiration and delight, for it was a pleasure to see how he caused both men and horses to fall."¹⁰⁷ He quickly surpasses all of the knights, cementing his place as the greatest of them all. Larry Benson discusses the actual use and action of tournaments during the medieval period as being a feat of arms to gain some type of material prize, such as horses or weapons. However, he writes, "For Chrétien's heroes, the tournament is not a place to gain prisoners and horses but purely a field of honor, where one fights only to gain glory."¹⁰⁸ Chrétien uses the tournament here not to allow Lancelot to gain anything materially, but to gain the honor and glory that can only be given through his show of prowess, especially against those that would be considered his equal as a knight. Even with the moments throughout the text that alluded to any sort of emasculation of Lancelot because of his feelings of Guinevere, he is now clearly realized as indeed the epitome of a great knight; he is a warrior, fully capable of besting all others.

There is clearly a specific type of love being displayed and explored in Chrétien's text. The chivalric code that consists of both the sacred and the secular is clearly at odds in this tale, with Lancelot consistently having to display his warrior prowess alongside his love for the Queen. Because these are not mutually exclusive, but also are not necessarily compatible, Chrétien's Lancelot is flawed, both as warrior and as lover. Perhaps Chrétien is, as Robertson suggested, satirizing the entire concept of an adulterous love as impossible to sustain within a chivalric code. Whatever the reason for Chrétien's choice of narrative, the Arthurian canon is changed with the inception of Lancelot and Guinevere's

¹⁰⁷ Chrétien, *Lancelot*, 280-81.

¹⁰⁸ Benson, Larry D., "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes and *L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Maréchal*," in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1980), 14.

affair, and the character of Lancelot will feature prominently in other medieval narratives, working through this idea of secular love associated with the knight that eventually becomes the best representative of Arthur's court.

Lancelot's place as best knight, both in terms of warrior masculinity and earthly chivalry, becomes fully exposed in the *Lancelot Proper*. The conversation between Lancelot and the Lady of the Lake gives insight into Lancelot's own views of knighthood and worthiness when he says:

Whoever lets fear stop him from taking up knighthood must feel base and worthless, for everyone should always aspire to improve himself and acquire good qualities. And a man should hate himself if he lets idleness rob him of something that everyone can have; I mean the powers of the heart, which are a hundred times easier to have than the powers of the body ... It seems to me that a man without bodily virtues can still have virtues of character. He can be refined and reasonable, gracious and loyal, fearless and generous and bold. These are all powers he can have within his heart, even if he can't be tall and strapping, or run fast, or look handsome or attractive. Such attributes, it seems to me, are bodily virtues; and I believe a man is either born with them the moment he leaves his mother's womb, or not. But traits of character, it seems to me, are in the grasp of anyone who is willing to make an effort; everyone, I'd say, can develop courteousness and graciousness and the other qualities that stem from the heart.¹⁰⁹

Even as a young man who has not yet entered knighthood, Lancelot is aware of the virtues, both physical and mental, that make a knight worthy. The reader is already aware of some of the physical attributes of Lancelot, but this speech by him indicates that he will always possess the mental (chivalric) attributes that are required. However, the Lady of the Lake replies with her own definition of knighthood, placing much emphasis on the devotion to God that is required of a knight. The author is clearly placing the masculine and chivalric aspects of knighthood in the same regard as the religious and devotional, with the two being contrasted against one another through the explanations presented by Lancelot and the Lady of the Lake.

The love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere that the reader is expecting begins very quickly after Lancelot arrives at Arthur's court to become a knight. Upon meeting Guinevere, the author writes, "The queen looked at him tenderly, and he looked at her, too, every time he could do so without

¹⁰⁹ "Part One," *Lancelot*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg and Carleton W. Carroll (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 111.

being noticed. He wondered where all the beauty could come from that he saw in her, and beside hers the beauty of the Lady of the Lake or of any other woman he had ever seen lost all its value for him.”¹¹⁰

From their first moment of meeting, the two are drawn to one another, as would be expected from Chrétien’s introduction of Lancelot as a character. Lancelot will soon after ask that he be allowed to help the Lady of Nohaut, wanting to prove himself as a knight. Upon his departure for this specific adventure, Lancelot and Guinevere have this exchange:

“My lady, if it were agreeable to you, I would, wherever I might be, look upon myself,” he said, “as your knight.”

“Yes,” she said, “go right ahead.”

“My lady,” he said, “now, with your leave, I will go.”

“Goodbye,” she said, “goodbye, my dear friend.”

And he whispered to himself, “All my thanks, my lady, for letting me be that.”

Then the queen took his hand to raise him, and he was thrilled to feel his bare hand touch his.¹¹¹

The reader is beginning to see Lancelot’s dual role of masculine warrior, through his volunteering to help the lady of Nohaut, and lover, engaged in earthly chivalry, through his initial interactions with Guinevere.

The *Lancelot Proper* does include Chrétien’s story of Lancelot, but only after Lancelot has already been established as a truly heroic warrior knight and displayed many examples of earthly chivalry – fighting for Guinevere, going on adventures, and helping his brothers of the Round Table. Very little about the original episode of Meleagant’s capture of Guinevere and Lancelot’s ride in the cart is changed, though the *Lancelot Proper* fills in details of the story. However, a small but important point is changed: Lancelot, in the *Lancelot Proper*, does not hesitate before he jumps into the cart, as he did in Chrétien’s text. There is no shameful moment of hesitation when Lancelot has to determine whether or

¹¹⁰ “Part One,” *Lancelot*, 123.

¹¹¹ “Part One,” *Lancelot*, 129-30.

not he should disgrace himself by riding in the cart, indicating that the relationship between him and Guinevere has been more fully developed here. Lancelot's secular love is strongly reiterated in this scene, even to the point of pitting his relationship with Guinevere against his own chivalric virtues as a knight. In Chrétien, when Lancelot realizes that he has been shamed by riding in the cart, "he was so dismayed that he nearly killed himself with his own sword. But when he reminded himself that he had ridden in the cart for his lady, he returned the sword to its sheath and stopped grieving."¹¹² Here the author is foreshadowing what will ultimately be the downfall of Lancelot in his spiritual journey as a knight – the affair with Guinevere and his love for the Queen as the most important aspect of Lancelot's life.

Emergence of Galahad

The importance of Galahad, especially as an example of purity and heavenly chivalry, requires some detailed analysis of the Grail's transformation within the Arthurian narrative, as the Grail quest highlights Galahad's perfection. The three important strains of the Grail legend are Chrétien's *Percival* (the introduction of the Grail into the canon), Robert de Boron's *Joseph of Arimathea* (the beginning of transforming the Grail from the secular to the sacred), and the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (which introduces Galahad and fully complicates the narrative of the sacred and the secular, creating a new, and not necessarily consistently employed, way in which the Grail legend is viewed). Tracing Chrétien's origin of the Grail legend, Robert de Boron's religious history of the Grail, and the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle's* introduction of Galahad as the Grail knight will show how the canon of Arthurian literature adjusted to allow for a smoother melding of the sacred and secular, using a specific symbol that becomes closely associated with Galahad. A closer look at these works also shows more of the ways in which works in the canon can and should be read alongside one another, while recognizing that the canon is not a seamless narrative.

One of the most significant moments in Arthurian literature is when Chrétien de Troyes

¹¹² "Part IV," *Lancelot*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 194.

introduces the Grail: "A maiden accompanying the two young men was carrying a grail with her two hands; she was beautiful, noble, and richly attired ... The grail, which was introduced first, was of fine pure gold. Set in the grail were precious stones of many kinds, the best and costliest to be found in earth or sea."¹¹³ Clearly there is something special about the Grail even here, as Chrétien makes it a point to specify the beauty and nobility of the maiden that carries it. He also points out that the stones within the Grail are the best and costliest, indicating that this particular dish should be revered in some way. However, rather than the cup, goblet, chalice, or any other number of words commonly used today to describe the vessel from which Christ drank during the Last Supper, Chrétien simply describes the Grail as some sort of serving dish. While it is possible that this serving dish is a cup of some sort, there is absolutely no distinction on Chrétien's part of it specifically being so. Nor does he make any connection between the Grail and Christ. This is not to say that Chrétien's Grail is not sacred. When Percival meets the hermit and discusses what he saw at the castle of the Fisher King, the hermit explains to Percival just what it was that he saw, stating, "such is the holiness of the grail!"¹¹⁴ Yet, it is not the Grail itself that is holy, or at least not on its own. Rather, the Host, the sustenance served inside the Grail that sustains the Fisher King, holds some type of power. The Grail's significance is here in Chrétien's work, but in a very preliminary way that only eventually leads to the idea of the chalice that is popularly conceived in Arthurian legend and literature.

Chrétien's reference to the dish as *a* Grail and not *the* Grail, along with his lack of connection between the dish and Christ, is evidence that, at least in its conception, the Grail was not necessarily meant to be the chalice of Christ. Joseph Goering discusses the instances of the word "grail," noting that the word *grail* itself was not common in most of Europe and was not developed from a Latin root. He goes on to give examples of the few places where the word, or a variation of it, was found in writings or literature. In most of these instances that predated Chrétien's use of the word *grail*, there was both

¹¹³ de Troyes, Chrétien, *The Story of the Grail (Percival)*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 420-21.

¹¹⁴ de Troyes, 460.

mention of a grail or grails and some type of cup.¹¹⁵ Tracing this history of the word itself can further confirm the idea that Chrétien's "grail" is not meant to be a cup, as it becomes to be known in the canon.

Robert de Boron's *Joseph of Arimathea*, likely written in the early thirteenth century, a few decades after Chrétien's work, associates the Grail with a cup, as we think of it today. De Boron first introduces the Grail when Jesus is captured after being betrayed by Judas, as the vessel in which Christ made the sacrament. At this point it is only being called a vessel, but its importance and what it must mean are clearly evident throughout the story. When the vessel is given to Joseph of Arimathea by Pilate, he uses it to catch the blood that is still coming out of Christ's wounds after he is taken from the cross and cleaned. Here we know that it must be a cup of some sort, or at least something more than just a type of serving tray, since it is able to catch and hold the blood of Christ. Later in the story, after Joseph of Arimathea's imprisonment, the vessel is named Grail: "Those who wish to name it rightly will call it the Grail, which gives such joy and delight to those who can stay in its presence that they feel as elated as a fish escaping from a man's hands into the wide water."¹¹⁶ Just as Chrétien gave significance to the Grail, so does Robert de Boron, as it is his version of the Grail's origin that allows Galahad to emerge as the Grail Knight, the epitome of perfection seeking the ultimate symbol of Christianity.

The actual relationship of de Boron's Grail to Jesus Christ becomes important when studying the Grail legend.¹¹⁷ The integration of the Grail into historical accounts such as that of Joseph of Arimathea allows the Grail to legitimize the canon of Arthurian literature through already-known Christian stories.

¹¹⁵ The will or testament of Count Ermengol I of Urgell, the testament of Ermengarda, daughter of Count Borrell of Barcelona, and the epic poem *Girart de Roussillon* all mention grails (*gradales*, *gradals*, and *greaus*, respectively) as well as beakers, cups, and/or goblets. This distinction of a grail from a cup seems to further argue the point that the original idea of a grail was not meant for it to be a cup or chalice.

¹¹⁶ de Boron, Robert, *Joseph of Arimathea*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 36.

¹¹⁷ The idea of the Grail in Christian sense here does not negate the implicit link between the Grail and Christ in Chrétien's *Percival*. Certainly the lance with the drop of blood on its tip would have recalled to readers of *Percival* in the medieval period the lance that was used to pierce Christ's side. The host inside the Grail would be reminiscent of the practice of communion. However, while all of these things might recall to a reader of *Percival* something specifically linked to Christ, it is not stated outright. The explicit way in which Robert de Boron links the Grail to the body of Christ allows for it to be the first to acknowledge the Grail as something specifically Christian, of the time of Christ, even though it is not the first story to tell of the Grail.

By giving the readers an origin for the Grail, Robert de Boron “helped to move the Grail from the world of romance into the realm of history.”¹¹⁸ The four Gospels already tell accounts of Joseph of Arimathea, acknowledging him as a follower, or disciple, of Christ. Furthermore, all four Gospels tell the story of Joseph of Arimathea asking Pilate for the body of Christ to bury it in a tomb.¹¹⁹ This legitimization of the Grail through historical accounts of Christ allows readers of *Joseph of Arimathea* to see the Grail as not only special, even holy, but also provides a clear link between Arthurian literature and the Gospel. |

The appearance of the Grail in *La Queste del Saint Graal*¹²⁰ is marked by symbolism related to both Christ and the Holy Spirit. While sitting at the table for dinner, Arthur and his court hear a loud thunderclap followed by a ray of sunlight that shines down, “making the castle seven times brighter than before. The people inside seemed to have been illumined by the grace of the Holy Spirit.”¹²¹ The reader has already been introduced to Galahad and his importance as a knight in Arthur’s court, so this act of nature clearly signifies something otherworldly is about to happen. At this point the Grail enters the story:

Then the Holy Grail entered the room, covered with a white silk cloth, but no one could see who carried it. It entered through the main door of the hall. And as soon as it arrived, the room was filled with a delicious fragrance, as if every earthly spice had been strewn there. The Grail traveled through the room, around the dais. And as it passed the tables, each place setting was filled with the food its occupant most desired. When everyone was served, the Grail left in such a way that no one knew what became of it; nor did they see which way it went.¹²²

The introduction of the Grail here invokes many of the senses – sight, through the bright light; sound, as once the Grail entered all of the people in the room are rendered completely speechless; smell, through the fragrance that fills the room; and taste, through the food that appears in front of the guests. It also invokes thoughts of Christ and the Eucharist. While not officially forming any type of Eucharistic ceremony, the fact that the Grail, which is often portrayed as filled with some type of life-giving Host,

¹¹⁸ Goering, 57.

¹¹⁹ Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:43-46, Luke 23:50-53, and John 19:38-42 all tell the story of Joseph of Arimathea getting permission from Pilate to bury Christ’s body. The verses in John also have Nicodemus accompanying Joseph of Arimathea in this task, just as it is in Robert de Boron’s account.

¹²⁰ *La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. E. Jane Burns, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010).

¹²¹ *Queste*, 12.

¹²² *Queste*, 12.

provides food to all is significant. While not the literal body of Christ, it is still a type of sustenance needed for survival, which can be provided by God. And while there is much more in the *Queste* concerning the Grail, we will first turn our attention to its appearance and meaning in the *Estoire del Saint Graal*. Although the *Estoire* was composed after *Lancelot Proper* and the *Queste*, it chronologically is the first text of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*.

In *Estoire* the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail's introduction is expanded upon by the unknown author. One of the key differences in the introduction of the Grail here from *Joseph of Arimathea* is that Joseph does not get it from Pilate. Instead, on the day of Christ's crucifixion, Joseph goes to the place where the Last Supper was held and retrieves the bowl which Christ had used to give his disciples communion. He then uses the bowl to collect Christ's blood after his death, with Jesus then showing himself to Joseph in prison, bringing him the bowl that he had hidden, still holding Christ's blood.¹²³ This expansion of the story gives more focus on the bowl as a connection to the sacrament through the Last Supper, furthering the idea that the Grail in this realm is meant to bring to mind the idea of communion and is closer to Christ himself.

Eventually the Grail legend shifts from purely representing Christ to representing chivalry as something heavenly.¹²⁴ An angel appears to Josephus and explains to him this connection between the symbolic marvels of Christ and the chivalric nature of the Grail quest. He states:

All these marvels will happen only because the good who will exist at this time will so desire knowledge of the Holy Grail and this lance that they will undertake to suffer the difficult burden of earthly exploits of chivalry in order to learn about the marvels of the Holy Grail and the lance. And then will take place its adventurous marvels to which the truly courageous will abandon themselves, and through this it will be known who possesses prowess. You may be sure that the marvels inside the Grail will be seen by only one mortal man, and he will be full of all the qualities that can or should be in man's body and heart, for he will be filled with every prowess, beauty, and bravery; he will also be good to God, for he will be filled with charity and great religion, and he will be the master

¹²³ *Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Carol J. Chase, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 16.

¹²⁴ While the history is the first volume of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, it was actually written after *La Queste del Saint Graal*. So technically, in the medieval period, the chivalric nature of the Grail quest would have already been shown through the *Queste*. However, the origin story of the Grail and the way in which it all ties in together only happens through the reading of the *Estoire*. That is why I say that this is the first point at which we see the shift from the representation of Christ to the representation of chivalry.

key of all chastity.¹²⁵

Through this speech the reader gets the first indication of the true nature of the coming Grail knight, Galahad. This foreshadowing of Galahad continues in the *Estoire* when Nascien, an ancestor of Lancelot and Galahad, has a dream about his lineage. The dream focuses on the “eighth one” and “ninth one” – Lancelot and Galahad. The eighth one appears in the dream as a dog, meaning he will be “vile and filthy,” a sinner, which readers of the Arthurian legend would already associate with Lancelot. But the description of the ninth one foreshadows Galahad as the perfect Grail knight. Galahad is represented as a river, cloudy at the beginning and then clearer than any other river by the end:

But in the middle of his life he will begin to reign. Then the river will become rapid and fast running; that is to say, then he will be so full of great knighthood and prowess that he will surpass all others and his entire lineage in earthly prowess and bodily goodness, for he will be a virgin all the days of his life, and his end will be more marvelous than that of any mortal knight of his time. None will be seen again like him, for he will be more gracious toward God and the world than any others.¹²⁶

While readers have already been exposed to Percival as the Grail knight through other preceding literature, he is never quite depicted as filled with all of those qualities. The blending of the chivalric, and even secular, nature of knights with the more sacred ideas of a life devoted to God and chastity is unique to Galahad as the Grail knight.

Essentially, the merging of the sacred and secular in the *Queste* does not just act as a way to ensure that the sacred, the Christian theology, makes its way into popular secular works. This merging is also an act of cultural importance that legitimizes the stories of Arthur and his knights through a larger social and cultural lens that more medieval readers could both understand and apply. Kathryn Talarico discusses the appearance and importance of Christian elements in the *Queste*:

The fictionalized Christian elements, as they appear in the *Queste*, open up the realm of literature and confer on Old French prose a new status in its ability to proclaim literary ‘truthfulness,’ to stake out fictional literature’s ability to treat lofty, serious questions not only in a delightfully entertaining way, but, and perhaps more importantly, to create a usable *cultural* past in the vernacular, grounded, as one critic has suggested, in ‘the delicious sweetness of fiction’ ... The Arthurian material appropriate into its sphere the

¹²⁵ *Estoire*, 94.

¹²⁶ *Estoire*, 221-22.

lessons of Christian spirituality, piety, redemption, etc., not in order to promulgate that doctrine – to make Cistercian doctrine, for instance, ‘clearer’ to the public. Rather, those lessons are used to broaden the purely secular, *merveilleux* world of the earlier verse romances. The *Queste* author, by transforming and fictionalizing those lessons, gives an importance, weight and seriousness to Arthur’s story while at the same time opening up the Arthurian time frame to larger concerns.¹²⁷

The way in which the secular and sacred merge and the appearance of Galahad was not just Christian in nature. It was cultural and meant to mimic the very culture in which it was being written.

As a character, Galahad inhabits this peculiar space of both warrior hero and virgin. In fact, his very virginity and chastity allow him to be the warrior hero. In addition to just a warrior knight of the greatest king of Britain, Galahad is also a religious hero. Neither a saint nor a member of the clergy, Galahad is able to take upon the ultimate task of Christianity – the search for the Grail. His chaste nature and status as virgin situate Galahad as the heroic knight of Arthurian literature. He is able to perform his knightly duties and complete his quest not in spite of his virginal status, but because of that status. Nor is virginity something that he must strive for at all times, but something that is inherent within him. He is pure. In contrast to his father, Galahad has a perfection that comes from his own heavenly virtues, and specifically his purity, which allows him to achieve the Grail and essentially surpass his father as the best of Arthur’s knights.

So what is Galahad’s narrative, specifically in *La Queste del Saint Graal*? From the beginning, the reader knows that it will be one rooted in the sacred, as is foreshadowed by the references to Christ and the lineage of Galahad. The first reference that links Christ with Galahad is subtle. At Camelot, the Perilous Seat shows an inscription that states, “Four hundred and fifty-four years have passed since the passion of Christ; on Pentecost, this seat will find its master.”¹²⁸ It will be Galahad alone that is able to occupy this seat. It is no coincidence that the telling of the coming of the one that will have the honor of occupying the seat is intermixed with references to Christ. Galahad’s lineage shows him related to both

¹²⁷ Talarico, Kathryn Marie, “Romancing the Grail: Fiction and Theology in the *Queste del Saint Graal*” in *Arthurian Literature and Christianity: Notes from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Meister (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.: 1999), 30-31

¹²⁸ *La Queste*, 5.

Joseph of Arimathea and King David. However, his narrative quickly delves into the secular, aided by the sacred, as it is a quest narrative. Galahad's trial is to find the Grail. He is aided in this quest by outside forces, but his own will and inner purity allow him to achieve his goal. Rather than a narrative that shows how he overcomes an outside temptation or how he is only able to remain true through supernatural intervention, the narrative shows how the truly pure can, through that purity alone, achieve his goal. The purity of Galahad is the quintessential component of his heavenly chivalry; his ability, and predestination, to remain pure alongside his loyalty to God and his knightly duties on the Grail quest allow Galahad to represent a specific heavenly chivalry that sets him apart from the other knights.

There is, however, a juxtaposition between the idea of a Grail quest and Galahad as predestined to achieve the Grail. The search for the Grail as a major theme within Arthurian literature had already been established by the time the *Queste* is written and Galahad is introduced. With this expectation of a quest for the Grail, the author of the *Queste* must continue with it as a theme; however, the author also introduced a new knight to the canon with the idea that he is predestined to be the Grail knight who is finally achieve the Grail through his purity and piety. Galahad has to embark on this quest along with the other knights of the Round Table, and an entire narrative is constructed that features this quest, even though the reader already knows that Galahad will ultimately be the knight to achieve the Grail.

A point to be made about the emergence of Galahad in the Arthurian canon is that he, essentially, is not interesting. With the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* likely being authored by Cistercian clergy, it seems obvious that the author would feel the need to create a character to counterbalance Lancelot. While the author does spend much of the *Cycle* expanding the story of Lancelot, basically creating the version that readers now know of as the best of Arthur's knights, there still needed to be some way to elaborate on the importance of heavenly chivalry over earthly chivalry. The answer to this was to create Galahad, the son of Lancelot who is able to act as redeemer and highlight the need for heavenly chivalry and a devotion to God above all else. However, in doing this, the author created a knight that is too

perfect to be relatable. Galahad is the embodiment of perfection, to the point that he has no real instances of temptation or sin that allow the reader to create a connection with him. The fact that he is rarely included in Arthurian literature after his creation in the *Queste* emphasizes the inherent lifeless nature of Galahad as a character. He does as he is told, he follows God, and he achieves the Grail. Very little happens to him or with him as a character outside of this, giving readers a knight that is almost robotic in his duty and his adventure.

To understand Galahad's emerging role as the Grail knight, one must understand the transition from Percival to Galahad as the primary Grail knight, starting with the reason for Percival's quest. Chrétien's Percival is not a knight who is primarily searching for the Grail on the behalf of King Arthur. In fact, originally, Percival is not a knight at all. While he is the son of a knight, his mother has kept this information from him, including even what a knight is and what it means to be a knight.¹²⁹ Yet she tells Percival that he was "destined for knighthood," were it not for the deaths of his two older brothers and his father.¹³⁰ Begrudgingly, his mother gives him her blessing and advice as he sets off to find King Arthur to become a knight. Percival's quest is for knowledge and learning, presented through the advice that his mother gives him. She gives him three specific sets of instruction – to always help a maiden in distress, to always ask for the name of the company that he keeps, and to pray to the Lord.¹³¹ This advice is rudimentary, information most knights in the Arthurian world would already know, showing that Percival has much to learn throughout his journey into knighthood. It also suggests that his is a quest for knowledge.

¹²⁹ In Chrétien's work, all we really know about Percival's lineage is that he is the son of a knight that has died and that he did not know this about his father. But his lineage does change in other texts. The *Didot-Perceval*, the continuation of Robert de Boron's lost *Perceval*, states that he is the son of Alain li Gros and the paternal grandson of the Fisher King. In *Perlesvaus*, the Fisher King is his uncle on his mother's side (Alain is still his father). *Parzival* has a fictional French king as Percival's father. While his lineage is not completely agreed upon in Arthurian literature, his role as a Grail knight and his connection to the Grail castle and the Fisher King is always prominent.

¹³⁰ de Troyes, 386. The idea here of who is meant to be a knight becomes a question of nature vs. nurture, highlighting the ways in which one's education in knighthood is important (as we see with Percival and his constant journey of learning how to be a knight throughout this text), but that lineage of a knight plays a key role in the predetermined status of knighthood (as will also be made clear with Galahad, as Lancelot's son).

¹³¹ de Troyes, 387-88.

One could argue that while this might have been the original intention of Percival's quest, the purpose of his journey evolves over the course of the story, eventually becoming a quest for the Grail. And while true that Percival does eventually embark on a Grail quest, the emphasis is still on his quest for learning with the Grail itself becoming the physical symbol of Percival's quest for knowledge. When Percival first sees the Grail procession at the castle of the Fisher King, he does not ask any questions because "he was afraid that if he asked they would consider him uncouth."¹³² The reader later learns that Percival made a mistake by not asking questions. If he had, he "would have brought great succour to the good king who is maimed: he would have totally regained the use of his limbs and ruled his lands, and much good would have come of it!"¹³³ The failure to ask and the consequences for this further emphasize the quest for knowledge as prevalent over the Grail itself.

While Chrétien's Grail might have been just a physical manifestation of Percival's quest for knowledge, the Grail is its own unique symbol within Arthurian literature by the time of Galahad's introduction approximately four decades later.¹³⁴ This transformation of the Grail itself leads to the advent of Galahad as a new Grail knight. Rather than the Grail needing a knight who is on a quest for knowledge, it is possible that the author of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* believed that the Grail now needed a knight who was compatible with the Grail as a symbol – that balance between the secular and the sacred. Percival originates as the Grail Knight because he is searching for something, and that pursuit is embodied by the Grail. Once the Grail itself transforms into the embodiment of Christian perfection, Percival is no longer the acceptable knight to fulfill the Grail quest. Instead, Galahad, the knight who embodies perfection and heavenly chivalry, is needed and able to reach the Grail.

The arrival of Galahad in the Arthurian canon is marked by many supernatural events, all of which explicitly point to him as the one true Grail knight and the most noble of knights, but also allow

¹³² de Troyes, 420.

¹³³ de Troyes, 425.

¹³⁴ I say "decades later" because there is not a specific year that we know *The Story of the Grail (Percival)* or *La Queste del Saint Graal* were published. William W. Kibler explains in his Introduction to Chrétien's works that *The Story of the Grail (Percival)* was likely composed between 1159 and 1191. Norris J. Lacy explains in the Preface to the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* that it was composed between 1215 and 1235.

for the merging of the secular and the sacred. Right before Galahad is introduced to Arthur, the King says that Lancelot is the best of all knights. The reader knows that he likely is the best, but only the best of all the knights that are already flawed. His “best” is not equated with perfection. His affair with Guinevere, especially as it has progressed beyond the emotional and into the physical, hinders Lancelot’s virtue. He not only is no longer chaste, but his loyalty to his king has faltered in his decision to betray the king’s marriage. However, where Lancelot can no longer be the best, his son Galahad can and is. After being tricked by Brisane, Lancelot sleeps with and impregnates the daughter of King Pellis. This all happens in the *Lancelot* text of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*:

And so the best and most handsome knight who ever lived and the most beautiful and highest-born maiden of that day were joined together ... Yet nonetheless the Lord, who is the font of every mercy and who does not judge sinners by their deeds, looked on this coupling in light of its value to the land, for He did not wish it to remain a wasteland forever: so He permitted them to engender and conceive a fruit, by virtue of which the flower of virginity that was corrupted and violated there blossomed forth in another flower whose goodness and tenderness would replenish and console many a land. For just as the *History of the Holy Grail* informs us, from this lost flower blossomed forth Galahad, the virginal, the most excellent knight, who achieved the adventures of the Holy Grail and sat in the Perilous Seat of the Round Table, where no knight had ever sat and lived to tell of it. And just as the name Galahad had been lost o Lancelot by the flame of desire, so too was it restored in this offspring by mortification of the flesh, for he remained a virgin in thought and fact until he died, as the story tells us.¹³⁵

Here the life of the virgin Galahad and his role as the Grail knight are foreshadowed through his conception.

Galahad’s fate as the most noble, or “best,” knight is made explicitly known when he is able to pull the sword from the stone. Earlier in the story, Arthur had asked Lancelot to attempt and pull the sword from the stone because of an inscription that stated: “No one will ever withdraw me from here, except the one who will hang me at his side. He will be the world’s best knight.”¹³⁶ Lancelot declines to try, telling Arthur that he knows that he is not the best knight. While Lancelot does not tell Arthur the reason he is not the best, the reader can assume that this is because of his indiscretions with Guinevere.

¹³⁵ *Lancelot*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. William W. Kibler, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 103-4.

¹³⁶ *Queste*, 6.

However, once Galahad is knighted and a member of the Round Table, he is able to pull this sword from the stone: “He put his hand on the sword and pulled it out of the stone so easily that it seemed not to be stuck at all.”¹³⁷ Eventually the difference between Lancelot’s earthly chivalry and Galahad’s heavenly chivalry will emerge and highlight just why Galahad usurps Lancelot as the “best.”

If the sword in the stone points to Galahad as the best knight, then an indication of Galahad’s role as Grail knight is when he is the only knight who is physically able to sit in the Perilous Seat at the Round Table. It is called the Perilous Seat because only the knight who is meant to be the true Grail Knight can sit there; anyone else who even tries will be killed. The seat immediately makes itself known as belonging to Galahad: “This is Galahad’s seat”¹³⁸ appearing on it once Galahad joins Arthur’s court and his knights at the Round Table. There is no longer any question that Galahad is truly the Grail Knight, the revelation of the possible attainment of the Grail coming to fruition. The Perilous Seat is another example of a common symbol in the canon that has been taken and repurposed by the author(s) of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. In Robert de Boron’s *Merlin*, Merlin explains to Uther Pendragon the significance of the empty seat at the Round Table, stating that it is reminiscent of the table of the Lord’s Supper.¹³⁹ The empty seat was originally meant to be occupied by Judas. This reminder of Judas and the Lord’s Supper recalls to the reader the Grail as the holy chalice used at the last supper. Later, in *Percival*, after outfighting all of the knights of the Round Table, Arthur asks him to sit in the empty seat. Percival asks why it has remained empty, to which Arthur replies, ““My dear friend, it has great significance, for it is the place destined for the finest knight in the world.”¹⁴⁰ The point when Percival sits in the Perilous Seat is when the Grail quest is announced and commences. |

Galahad, as Grail Knight, is typically linked back to Joseph of Arimathea. This connection is important not only because Joseph of Arimathea is the biblical figure who gave his burial tomb to Christ,

¹³⁷ *Estoire*, 10.

¹³⁸ *Estoire*, 8.

¹³⁹ de Boron, Robert, *Merlin*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 92.

¹⁴⁰ de Boron, Robert, *Perceval*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 118-19.

but because in Arthurian literature he is also known to be the original bearer of the Holy Grail, which will always be associated with his family. While this link is important, Emmanuele Baumgartner argues that the lineage of Lancelot's mother, Elaine, the grandmother of Galahad, is more important. Elaine is descended from King David, a prominent figure in the Old Testament, and an ancestor of Christ's earthly father, Joseph. Therefore, Galahad is not only immediately given the connection to Christ through Joseph of Arimathea but is also linked to Christ through his connection to King David.¹⁴¹ Building on Baumgartner's argument, I suggest that it precisely this connection to Christ through Lancelot's mother that enables Galahad to both be the Grail Knight, and a kind of redemption for Lancelot. The genealogy of Galahad also further highlights this merging of the secular and the sacred in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, especially as the types of chivalry that Lancelot and Galahad represent become focal points of the overall narrative.

Galahad needs to function as redeemer on the assumption that Camelot needs a truly virtuous knight. To have this redeemer in the Arthurian narrative, Galahad needs the connection to Christ that is given to him in the Lancelot-Grail Cycle. There are instances in the text in which readers, specifically those during the medieval period, would associate the way in which Galahad is written with biblical scenes. Richard Kaeuper writes:

Although the setting is that of a Round Table feast, the drama presented in the *Quest for the Holy Grail* soon incorporates elements from the biblical account of the meeting of the risen Christ with his disciples in the upper room, combined with aspects of Pentecost. As a prelude to Galahad's entrance, the doors and shutters close by themselves, without darkening the hall. A venerable man dressed in white miraculously appears, leading a knight in red armor (red and white being colors associated with Christ). The guide utters the characteristic blessing of the savior: 'Peace be with you.' The knight is Galahad, whose salvific career and actions – including the performance of miracles – will unfold in the romance.¹⁴²

The introduction of Galahad is reminiscent of the Pentecost as recounted in Acts 2, when a sound like

¹⁴¹ Baumgartner, Emmanuèle, "From Lancelot to Galahad: The Stakes of Filiation," in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Texts and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 19.

¹⁴² Kaeuper, Richard W., *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 125.

that of wind filled the hall. There is then described a light of fire that fills each of the people. Of course, in Christian thought, this is not actual fire, but the Holy Spirit that fills them with the light of Christ. The closing of the shutters and doors but without the darkening of the room in the introduction of Galahad recalls to medieval readers the wind of Pentecost that keeps light within the hall. With the author(s) of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* being clergy, it only makes sense that stories in the text would relate to specific Biblical occurrences.

The *Queste* specifically points out this idea of Galahad as representative of Christ. After lifting the tombstone, Galahad encounters a good man that elaborates on his significance to the Arthurian world:

‘Now the Father’s gesture of sending His son to free the people has been renewed. Just as error and folly flee before Him, revealing the truth, Our Lord has chosen you among all other knights to put an end to terrible adventures in foreign lands and to make their true origin known. We should compare your coming to the coming of Jesus Christ, in form if not in significance. Just as the prophet announced the coming of Christ and predicted, long before his arrival, that he would deliver the people from the bonds of Hell, so too the hermits and holy men have been announcing your arrival for more than twenty years.’¹⁴³

Here Galahad is specifically being told that he is comparable to Christ, as a redemptive figure meant to help the people of the world. Later, Galahad is again compared to Christ as a savior figure when a hermit explains to Gawain the significance of the Castle of the Maidens. The castle itself represents hell and the maidens represent the souls that are wrongly held in hell, with the seven knights representing the seven deadly sins. The hermit explains Galahad’s significance, stating, “‘But when the Lord of heaven saw that His creation had gone awry, He sent His Son to earth to liberate the fair maidens: they are the good souls. Just as He sent His Son who had ben with Him since before the world began, so too did He send Galahad as His chosen knight and servant to free the good maidens.’”¹⁴⁴ Both the knights and the reader are meant to understand Galahad’s role as a knight and his representation of Christ as redeemer and savior.

¹⁴³ *La Queste*, 25-26.

¹⁴⁴ *La Queste*, 36.

The characteristic of Galahad that so obviously relates the sacred with the secular is his role as the virgin knight. Male virginity was something typically reserved for the monastic life. Even male saints, while often virgins, were not praised for this aspect of themselves, in contrast with female saints, who are almost always virgins. Barbara Newman writes of this crossover:

Sir Galahad, the knight created for the express purpose of achieving the Holy Grail, is both a paragon of chivalry and a male counterpart to the virgin martyrs. For all practical purposes, the author of the *Vulgate Cycle* invented the male virgin. Many celibate monks may of course have been virgins, but their biographers take no special note of it, for the liturgical class of 'holy virgins' includes only women ... Galahad, the consummate male virgin, is admired for this virtue as much as any princess ... Galahad is, in effect, unfallen man.¹⁴⁵

Galahad's virginity is the ultimate merging of the sacred and the secular, giving us a knight that is not within a sacred text, but embodies the ideals of the sacred. The secular world that Galahad lives in is made sacred through his redemptive qualities, modeled after Christ. Additionally, what the virginal aspect of Galahad presents to the reader is a reminder of his emphasis on heavenly chivalry, resulting from his pure nature.

The Grail quest itself in the *Queste* is, surprisingly, focused as much on the other Grail knights and Lancelot as it is on Galahad. Additionally, the inclusion of hermits and their warnings and advice to the knights is important in establishing the different chivalries that Lancelot and Galahad represent. While Galahad is the chosen knight to achieve the Grail, the trials and adventures of the other knights are more interesting to the reader, as they point out more about the tensions in sacred and secular chivalry and the temptations of the other knights. Galahad himself is not instructed by hermits throughout the *Queste*, presumably because he does not need instructions as he is already the perfect knight. Just as the reader has already been told of Galahad's connection to Christ, the hermits are also reminding both Lancelot and the reader of Lancelot's inability to be the chosen knight because of his affair with Guinevere. The distinction between Lancelot and Galahad's chivalry is being made clear by the inclusion of the hermits.

¹⁴⁵ Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 51-52.

Lancelot, for the first time, acknowledges his relationship with Guinevere to a hermit. He admits, “I have fallen into mortal sin because of a lady whom I have loved all my life. She’s Queen Guenevere, King Arthur’s wife ... It’s because of her love that I undertook the great feats of prowess everyone recounts about me.”¹⁴⁶ Lancelot is admitting not only to his affair, but to his reliance on an earthly chivalry, fulfilling his duties as a knight solely for the love of the Queen. Much like Chrétien’s Lancelot, the reader is again shown that what Lancelot does, he does for love. The hermit responds, “Advice will be of no help to you unless you promise God that you will not repeat this sin. But if you want to extricate yourself from it completely and beg his mercy with repentance in your heart, I believe Our Lord will call you back among his servants and open the gates of heaven, where eternal life awaits.”¹⁴⁷ The hermit makes it clear that for Lancelot to truly amend his sin with God, he must be willing to leave it behind him. His life of earthly chivalry would need to be resolved, and Lancelot would need to focus on a more heavenly chivalry, free from the hold of Guinevere. Later, Lancelot is again confronted by a hermit for his affair with Guinevere and is even more harshly condemned for his sin. The hermit reminds Lancelot of the virtues he once had, beginning with virginity:

‘Before becoming a knight, you were endowed by nature with all virtues; I know of no young man who could have compared with you. First, you had a natural virginity, so pure that you never violated it in thought or in deed. You even had no desire to violate it. And many times when you thought about the carnal sin through which virginity is corrupted, you would spit in disgust, declaring that you would never fall into that misfortune. Then you would affirm that there could be no more chivalrous act than being a virgin, avoiding lust, and keeping one’s body pure.’¹⁴⁸

Here again virginity is being upheld as the highest virtue. It is the virtue that makes a knight the most chivalrous and most worthy of knighthood, acknowledging the sacred ideal of chivalry. After discussing the virginity that Lancelot once had, the hermit goes on to discuss his other virtues: humility, patience, justice, and charity. Together, these virtues are what originally allowed Lancelot to be the best of all knights. However, the hermit tells Lancelot that the devil knew he needed to relieve Lancelot of one of

¹⁴⁶ *La Queste*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ *La Queste*, 42-43.

¹⁴⁸ *La Queste*, 77.

these virtues, and it was through a woman that he chose to attack Lancelot. On losing this virtue of virginity and having a relationship with Guinevere, the hermit explains:

‘Thus did Our Lord lose you, Our Lord who had nourished and raised you, bestowed all the virtues upon you, and taken you into His lofty service. Just when He thought you were His soldier and would make use of the attributes He had given you to do His service, you abandoned Him. Just when you should have acted as the servant of Jesus Christ, you became the devil’s servant, taking on as many attributes from the devil as you had formerly held from Our Lord. In place of virginity and chastity, you harbored lust, which defeats them. In place of humility, you received pride and valued no one as much as yourself. Then you banished all the other virtues I have mentioned ... Just think what you could have done if you had preserved within yourself all the virtues that Our Lord had given you. Then, you would not have failed to achieve the adventures of the Holy Grail.’¹⁴⁹

Lancelot’s loss of virginity meant the loss of God. He not only was no longer able to be God’s servant once he lost his virginity through his relationship with Guinevere, but also lost his other virtues in the process. Virginity is here explained as the most important virtue and the one virtue that would allow a knight such as Lancelot to achieve the Grail. Additionally, the allusion to Lancelot as a soldier of God is reminiscent of the sacred chivalry that comes from the Church – the idea that a knight’s true calling, his chivalric nature, is based solely in his love for and devotion to God. When Lancelot loses his virginity, he falls from God’s grace and develops an earthly, secular chivalry to replace the heavenly, sacred chivalry that he has lost.

While *La Queste*, and really the entire *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, shows virginity in the secular world, and especially male virginity, as an ideal to be achieved, this is not necessarily true of the all texts in the Arthurian tradition. I have clearly laid out reasons in which it might have been important for Galahad to emerge as the Grail Knight; however, there is very little other medieval literature which features Galahad as the primary Grail Knight, or really a knight in the court at all. Other than Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*, written over two centuries after Galahad’s introduction to the canon, there is virtually no literature that claims Galahad as the Grail Knight. This lack of representation in the medieval canon indicates that the idea of Arthurian literature is not necessarily linear or even connected. It is fluid,

¹⁴⁹ *La Queste*, 78-79.

often taking different forms and being written for different purposes. Male virginity is a primary focus for the writer of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, as the entire collection gives focus to ideals of purity and goodness. But what was important for one author is not necessarily represented in other works of Arthurian literature. The importance of Galahad's purity, and its inclusion in prominence in *La Queste*, indicates that for the author(s) of that text, there is a distinction between earthly and heavenly chivalry. Lancelot represents the masculine warrior knight, renowned for his earthly chivalry; in such Arthurian matter, Lancelot is the "best" knight. But for the clergy writing *La Queste*, this type of chivalry cannot be held in the highest regard. Loyalty to God and devotion to purity, as represented through a knight of the Round Table, needed to emerge as a contrasting type of chivalry, working within the same belief system, but ultimately overshadowing the more secular version of chivalry that is characterized by Lancelot.

In fact, with the exception of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which focuses both on the Redcrosse Knight's and Britomart's chastity,, there is not another story featuring a virgin knight, and specifically a male virgin knight, before Tennyson's "Sir Galahad." Here, four centuries after Malory has written about Galahad, he is revived and the reader is once again confronted with the idea of the virgin knight. A poem that is meant to be about Galahad's Grail quest is more about his own pure nature. Tennyson writes:

My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thursteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.¹⁵⁰

These opening lines immediately remind the reader that Galahad is able to be the best knight because of his purity. Tennyson continues:

But all my heart is drawn above,
My knees are bow'd in crypt and shrine;
I never felt the kiss of love,
Nor maiden's hand in mind.
More bounteous aspects on me beam,

¹⁵⁰ Lord Tennyson, Alfred, "Sir Galahad," in *Poems* <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-sir-galahad>

Me mightier transports move and thrill;
So keep I fair thro' faith and prayer
A virgin heart in work and will.¹⁵¹

Galahad remains a virgin because of his love for God. He knows that the work he is doing – the Grail quest – is God's work, and he chooses to keep this his focus rather than any romantic relationships. This is further acknowledged when Galahad says "A maiden knight – to me is given / Such hope, I know not fear; / I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven / That often meet me here."¹⁵² This poem, written in the first person, gives the reader a glimpse into the mindset of Galahad and his reasons for remaining a virgin in the secular world. While medieval authors do not necessarily delve into the psyche of a character in such an explicit way, the author(s) of *La Queste* do acknowledge the two varying types of chivalry that exist and the way in which Galahad represents heavenly chivalry. While no other author in the medieval period, until Malory, will specifically include a focus on Lancelot and Galahad and their conflicting chivalries, at least one other work before Malory, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, will at least acknowledge the complexities and juxtapositions that exist.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Lord Tennyson, "Sir Galahad," 17-24.

¹⁵² Lord Tennyson, "Sir Galahad," 61-64.

¹⁵³ I will further discuss this text in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

GAWAIN'S CONFLICTING VIRTUES

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an Arthurian narrative that specifically focuses on both masculinity and chivalry. This narrative presents a view of masculinity and chivalry that speaks to both the established traditions of the Arthurian matter and the ways in which these ideals can work against one another, creating situations that have no clear solution for the parties involved. This particular tale indicates for the Arthurian tradition something meta: the acknowledgement that there are already prescribed conventions that need to be followed, and that knights who either do not follow these or are put into situations that do not allow for these to be followed will clearly stumble in their chivalric journey. Essentially what this text seems to point out is a large degree of self-consciousness, both as a narrative within the Arthurian matter and within the characters themselves. Gawain becomes the perfect Arthurian character to tackle this meta narrative, as Lancelot and Galahad are already firmly fixed in the roles of secular lover of the Queen and exemplary knight of chivalric virtue, respectively. Gawain shows that the Arthurian tradition contains something ordinarily transgressive – adultery is accepted in this world. This knowledge and acceptance of adultery in a transgressive world of Arthurian

literature is not confined to the French and British Arthurian texts. Dante alludes to it in his *Inferno*.¹⁵⁴ In “Canto V” Dante encounters Francesca da Rimini, who is reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere. Being confined to the circle of hell that is reserved for the lustful sinners, Dante alludes here to the transgressive nature of Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship, assuming that the reader of *Inferno* will clearly understand the allusion and meaning of including those two particular characters. This quick reference by Dante is similar to the reference by Chaucer to Lancelot in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* as well, again indicating that both medieval authors and medieval readers were aware of Lancelot and would understand even quick references made about him.¹⁵⁵ The reader sees the Arthurian tradition, and the expectations of its characters, being played out throughout the text, both by showing ways in which the characters clearly exhibit the characteristics and actions that are already expected of them, and by showing ways in which the Gawain fails in his ability to simultaneously uphold these ideals of masculinity and the chivalric code, especially the virtues of courtesy and cleanness.¹⁵⁶

Although this dissertation focuses primarily on Galahad and Lancelot, and the ways in which both knights fit into the masculine and secular and sacred chivalric world of Arthurian literature, this chapter on Gawain plays an important role, despite the fact that Galahad and Lancelot are not characters in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This chapter will consider how *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* engages with and reacts to the ideals of masculinity and chivalry. While Gawain might not be the knight who is most thought of when discussing these two important Arthurian themes, he is used in this text to tease out the already present tensions that exist when attempting to explore a theme that Lancelot and Galahad put into motion. Rather than contradicting the established masculinity of Lancelot, the tenuous relationship between Lancelot’s earthly chivalry and Galahad’s heavenly chivalry,

¹⁵⁴ Alighieri, Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Michael Palma (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

¹⁵⁵ Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale in The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

¹⁵⁶ Cleanness itself is an important aspect of this text specifically due to its placement in the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript. While there might be debate about whether one specific author wrote all the texts in the manuscript, the very fact that *Sir Gawain* was placed in a manuscript alongside two other texts that are working through ideas of cleanness, or chastity/virginity, is important.

and the ways in which all of this eventually manifests in Malory's *Morte* – to be discussed in Chapter Four – *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* brings to light the already-existing problems that face the Arthurian world. In a salacious world of affairs and how these are navigated within a knightly chivalric code, *Sir Gawain* reveals that the established standard inherently creates issues. Alongside the tensions that arise between two (courtly and sacred) systems of values, the text is exploring masculinity as defined within these two systems as well. While these problems were likely already known to the poem's original audience, *Sir Gawain* exposes the more nuanced ways in which these issues play out by detailing one specific knightly episode. Writing in the late fourteenth century, the author was aware, as likely was his audience, of the roles of Lancelot and Galahad within the Arthurian narrative, and how those two characters navigate issues of masculinity and chivalric ideals. *Sir Gawain* is a narrative of belatedness; addressing a time within Arthur's court before Lancelot's affair with Guinevere or Galahad's search for the Grail, the author presents through Gawain a commentary on the very issues that are already present within the tradition, exposing these issues as more than just affixed to the singular knights that typically represent them.

The assertion that the *Gawain*-poet clearly knows and understands the tensions presented by Lancelot and Galahad is predicated on the belief that he was aware of and familiar with French Arthurian romance. Ad Putter assumes as much when he states:

Comparisons of *Gawain* with the French Arthurian romances that his contemporaries would have read serve in many critical accounts only as a basis for contrast with the *Gawain*-poet, against which his achievements supposedly stand in sharp relief. But might it not be possible that the courtly romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the writers who followed in his footsteps represented for the *Gawain*-poet not an obstacle he needed to overcome but a genre whose imaginative possibilities and whose ethos were compatible with the *Gawain*-poet's own assumptions and ambitions?¹⁵⁷

Chaucer does indeed use the Arthurian world as the setting for *The Wife of Bath's Tale*; however, this is not in the same vein as the *Gawain*-poet using the Arthurian world for the setting of *Sir Gawain*.

¹⁵⁷ Putter, Ad, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2-4.

Chaucer uses many different genres of literature from the time throughout his frame narrative, and none are meant to stand out above any other. Additionally, the *Gawain*-poet's evident knowledge and preoccupation with courtly society in other works in the manuscript are evidence of his bias towards the Arthurian or, at least, courtly subject. The Arthurian matter creates a world that forces the contemplation of specific values, especially those of masculinity and the chivalric code, which was perfectly suited for the issues that the *Gawain*-poet clearly wanted to expose in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The comparisons that can be made between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the French Arthurian romances do not mean that there are no differences. John M. Bowers points out that the archetype of the quest itself is different between these, because in *Sir Gawain* "Sir Gawain is the lone hero setting out from the court, traveling on his mission into the wilderness, and then returning to Camelot with his duty accomplished and lessons learned."¹⁵⁸ According to Bowers, this structure is quite different from the narrative structures of the French Arthurian romances in that it focuses on one specific episode in a knight's life as opposed to creating a tale of the entire career of a knight over time. Additionally, Bowers goes on to state that the French knight Lancelot is sidelined in the story, and Galahad is not even present (though he is definitely a part of the canon by the time the *Gawain*-poet is writing and the *Gawain*-poet would have been familiar with him as a character). I suggest that these differences in narrative structure and focal knight are lending themselves to a more specific look at masculinity and chivalric ideals in the medieval period. The *Gawain*-poet's purpose is not to completely mimic French Arthurian literature but instead to take issues from those works and expand on them, creating a story that attempts to work through them in an earlier period of the Arthurian history.

Ultimately, what the *Gawain*-poet does is take an established tradition and challenge the very expectations that are, especially for the characters in the text, a foregone conclusion. The *Gawain*-poet acknowledges that much of the Arthurian matter has created specific ideals, but that these are not

¹⁵⁸ Bowers, John M., *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 28.

possible, either within the matter's texts or the world itself. As Helen Cooper states, "*Sir Gawain* maintains the genre's concern with perfectibility, but denies that it is possible. It is still deeply concerned with issues of sexuality and faith, courtesy, courage, the love of life, and *trouthe* – all the more so, indeed, in that Gawain is a failure in his own eyes, and challenges his readers as to whether he is in theirs."¹⁵⁹ The *Gawain*-poet uses the matter's own expectations and subverts them just enough to test the tradition itself. He gives us characters that are strikingly self-aware of what is expected of them and that must navigate scenarios in which these expectations are not met – or in which they are unable to be met. The role of masculinity and an adherence to a chivalric code create problems for Gawain. The awareness of this problematic nature of masculinity and the chivalric code by the *Gawain*-poet allows for a closer inspection of Gawain as a character, and a need for him to be analyzed alongside Lancelot and Galahad.

Part One: (De)Masculinity

Both the assertion of masculinity and the emasculating of Gawain are present in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, alerting the audience to the equal ease with which one can express his masculinity and then lose it. The *Gawain*-poet is clearly giving a specific view of masculinity (which will then be tested) in the text. First and foremost, he begins this text by recalling to the reader the historical Arthurian tradition that goes back to Aeneas and continues to the establishment of Britain.¹⁶⁰

And quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn ryche
 Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,
 In many turned tyme tene þat wroȝten.
 Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft
 þen in any oþer þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme.
 Bot of alle þat here bult of Bretaygne kynges
 Ay watz Arthur þe hendest, as I haf herde telle.
 Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,
 þat a selly in siȝt summe men hit holden
 And an outrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Cooper, Helen, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 370.

¹⁶⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 1-20.

¹⁶¹ *Sir Gawain*, 20-29.

The poet establishes Britain, and the court of Arthur, as the greatest, reinforcing a type of inherited masculinity through the lineage of Arthur, while also stating that the adventure he will recount is the greatest of all from this court. For the *Gawain*-poet, being a knight is already an assertion of masculinity. This includes all that comes with being a knight, especially the involvement in adventures (quests) for the king.

Additionally, the *Gawain*-poet clearly puts emphasis on physical prowess as an established show of masculinity, although in this case through the hostile mocking by the Green Knight. When Arthur assures the Green Knight that he will not fail to find a worthy opponent among his men, the latter responds, "'Nay, frayst I no fryzt, in faith I þe telle; / Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylde.'"¹⁶² After establishing the game that he is interested in engaging in with one of Arthur's knights and not one immediately engaged him, the Green Knight again antagonizes Arthur and his court:

'What, is þis Arþures hous,' quop þe habel þenne,
'þat al þe rous rennes of þurȝ ryalmes so mony?
Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
Your gryndellayk and your greme and your grete words?
Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wyȝes speche,
For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed!'¹⁶³

The Green Knight questions the reputation of Arthur and his knights, by questioning their deeds and valor. Arthur's shame is immediate and visceral: "þe blod schot for scham into his schyre face / And lere; / He wex as wroth as wynde; / So did alle þat þer were."¹⁶⁴ This questioning of their masculinity is the act that sets the remainder of the plot into action, because this is when Arthur will offer himself to participate in the game.

Gawain's interruption of Arthur entering into the game with the Green Knight is the first instance of masculinity that we see from the knight himself. Gawain chooses his king's life over his own, showing no real fear in this moment of what might happen to him: "And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe

¹⁶² *Sir Gawain*, 279-80.

¹⁶³ *Sir Gawain*, 309-15.

¹⁶⁴ *Sir Gawain*, 317-20.

sope.”¹⁶⁵ His intention to step up as a knight of the Round Table, especially as he is the only knight that does so, clearly sets him apart from the others. Further, Gawain exhibits excessive courteousness when taking on this task for his king. He specifically states that he is offering himself “wythoute vylanye” meaning “without discourtesy.”¹⁶⁶ Even the manner in which Gawain takes the axe from Arthur is done in a courteous manner: “þen comaunded þe kyng þe knyzt for to ryse; / And eh ful radly vpros and ruchched hym fayre, / Kneled doun before þe kyng and cachez þat weppen.”¹⁶⁷ Gawain ensures that he does not shame him by very clearly approaching him with the reverence that would be expected, allowing Arthur to pass on the task of the game to Gawain without being slighted. When he is given the go-ahead by Arthur, “Gawan gotz to þe gome with giserne in honed / And he baldly hym bydez – he bayst neuer þe helder.”¹⁶⁸ Gawain approaches this challenge without fear, establishing his masculinity and his adherence to a knightly code that requires protection of the King, while reaffirming the way in which masculinity, especially a type of masculinity that requires physical prowess, is entwined with the knightly code.

Another specific instance within *Sir Gawain* that highlights the perceived masculinity of Gawain is the arming of the knight in Fit II. This arming trope demonstrates the “meta”ness of the narrative, a specific understanding of the conventions of the arming tradition, implicitly reminding the reader of Gawain’s masculine status as a knight headed on a quest. The author devotes over 50 lines specifically to the description of Gawain’s arming and his actual armor.¹⁶⁹ The reader knows:

His thik þrawen þyzez, with þwonges to tachched;
 And syþen þe brawden bryné of bryz stel rynges
 Vmbeweued þat wyz, vpon wlong stuffe,
 And wel bornyst brace vpon his boþe armes,
 With gode cowters and gay and glouez of plate,
 And alle þe godlych gere þat hym gayn schulde
 þat tyde.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ *Sir Gawain*, 355.

¹⁶⁶ *Sir Gawain*, 345.

¹⁶⁷ *Sir Gawain*, 366-68,

¹⁶⁸ *Sir Gawain*, 375.

¹⁶⁹ *Sir Gawain*, 566-622.

¹⁷⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 579-85.

Much text space is given to this trope, ending with the description of Gawain's shield and the meaning of the Pentangle. While *Sir Gawain* is the first emergence of this trope since the thirteenth century, this commonplace was clearly used in classical and earlier medieval works. Descriptions of arming appear in Virgil, *Beowulf*, and Chrétien's *Eric et Enide*.¹⁷¹ While it is unlikely the poet knew *Beowulf*, the opening lines of *Sir Gawain* indicate that he held the *Aeneid* in high regard. While this trope might be fairly unique in later medieval Arthurian tradition, as not even Malory will refer back to this specific trope, the use of it by the *Gawain*-poet clearly reaffirms the tradition of bravery and chivalry, knightly quests and masculinity.

Chivalric romances glorify honor as the epitome of the heroic ideal, a trait which is prominent in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.¹⁷² With the overall idea of the knight himself and his heroics being a standard for masculinity, the show of honor that is present in *Sir Gawain* is yet another instance of Gawain's displayed masculinity. This motif is important in reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* because it gives the reader a starting place for teasing out the tensions of masculinity in the tale. The chivalric virtues represented in the Pentangle are all virtues which require honor of the knight; in fact, the presence of these virtues and the ability to maintain them make the knight honorable. Throughout the tale, the reader sees Gawain's virtues, and his honor, tested. Through these tests, Gawain's own masculinity is on the line as well, for to fail them is to fail as a knight. To fail as a knight means that Gawain will have somehow "lost" his masculinity. The emphasis on honor is important, as *Sir Gawain* is a text that is recalling the traits and issues that arise with Lancelot and Galahad.

While there are many examples of honor throughout the works of Chrétien and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one scene stands out in both as extremely similar: when Lancelot and Gawain both refuse to turn back from what is told to them will be a sure death sentence. At the Sword Bridge, Lancelot's response to the warning from the two knights is gracious, yet firm:

¹⁷¹ Brewer, Derek, "Armour II: The Arming Topos as Literature," in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997) 175-76.

¹⁷² Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, 156.

My lords, receive my thanks for being so concerned about me. It is sincere and springs from love. I know that you would never wish me to fall into any misfortune, but I have such faith and such conviction in God and in His enduring protection: I have no more fear of this bridge and this water than I do of this solid earth, and I intend to prepare myself to undertake a crossing. I would die rather than turn back!¹⁷³

Similarly, Gawain's response to his own warning of finding the Green Chapel mimics Lancelot's:

'Wel worth þe, wyȝe, þat woldez my gode,
And þat lelly me layne I leue wel þou woldez;
Bot helde þou hit neuer so holde, and I here passed,
Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme þat þou tellez,
I were a knyȝt kowarde, I myȝt not be excused.
Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle,
And talk wyth þat ilk tulk þe tale þat me lyste,
Worþe hit wele oþer wo, as þe Wyrde lykez
Hit hafe.
þaȝe he be a sturn knape
To stiȝtel, and stad with staue,
Ful wel con Dryȝtyn schape
His seruauntez for to saue.'¹⁷⁴

Both Lancelot and Gawain are embracing the challenges presented to them, and their responses to the warnings invoke similar ideals of honor. They thank the men who warn them for their words and care, both insisting that they are not a coward--Lancelot through his assurance that he is not afraid, and Gawain through his insistence that he would be marked a coward if he were to refuse to meet with the Green Knight. And both invoke their faith in and reliance on God as a reason to keep going forward on their journey. They are honoring themselves, their fellow knights, and their God. As noted in Chapter One, service to God is important in both the construction of masculinity as a whole, and in the role of the knight. The knight is entering into service for God, which is apparent in both of these scenes as they are entrusting in God and keeping their faith in Him throughout this potentially deadly adventure. Additionally, they are refusing to run away and be branded a coward, invoking their own masculinity by marching into a figurative type of battle that is expected of a knight.

The first inkling that the reader gets of Gawain's slipping masculinity is at the beginning of Fit

¹⁷³ de Troyes, "Knight of the Cart," 245.

¹⁷⁴ *Sir Gawain*, 2127-39.

III, when the poet first describes the men rising for their hunt. The description of the hunt itself is visceral:

þe does dryuen with gret dyn to þe depe sladez.
Per myzt mon se, as þay slypte, slentyng of arwes;
At vche wende vnder wande wapped a flone,
þat bigly bote on þe broun with ful brode hedez.
What! þay brayen and bleden, bi bonkkez þay dezen,
And ay rachches in a res radly hem folzes,
Huntermen wyth hyze horne hasted hem after
Wyth such a crakkande kry as klyffes haden bursten.
What wylde so atwaped wyzes þat schotten
Watz al toraced and rent at þe resayt,
Bi þay were tened at þe hyze and taysed to þe wattrez,
þe ledez were so learned at þe loze trysteres;
And þe grehounez so grete þat geten hem bylyue
And hem tofylched as fast as frekez myzt loke
Per ryzt.¹⁷⁵

These men are clearly on a quest of their own, to hunt their prey. Their masculinity is on display, with their prizes clearly won. This description immediately precedes a quite different one of Gawain: “Þus laykez þis lorde by lynde-wodez euez / And Gawayn þe god mon in gay bed lygez, / Lurkkez quyl þe daylyzt lemed on þe woves, / Vnder couertour ful clere, cortyned aboute.”¹⁷⁶ In complete juxtaposition to the hunters, Gawain is described in a more feminine nature, lazing in bed with curtains pulled around him. The poet is clearly maximizing the distinctions here between the lord of the castle’s day and Gawain’s day. Gawain’s initial reaction to the Lady of the castle entering his bedroom is equally feminized: rather than face the woman, as a knight might face an opponent, Gawain “layde hym doun lystyly and let as he slepte.”¹⁷⁷ It is not until he convinces himself that she is only there to talk that he “wakes up,” and confronts the Lady in his bed.

With the bedroom scenes, the reader begins to see a type of role-reversal happen between Gawain and the Lady. Gawain becomes the demure, feminized character with the Lady acting as the more assertive, masculine character. She insists on a truce between herself and Gawain, stating she will

¹⁷⁵ *Sir Gawain*, 1159-73.

¹⁷⁶ *Sir Gawain*, 1178-81.

¹⁷⁷ *Sir Gawain*, 1190.

“bynde yow in your bedde” if not.¹⁷⁸ And when Gawain insists on leaving the bed, the response is “‘Nay forsobe, beau sir,’ sayd þat swete, / ‘3e schal not rise of your bedde. I rych yow better: / I schal happe yow here þat oþer half als / And syþen karp wyth my knyzt þat I kazt haue.’”¹⁷⁹ She has claimed Gawain as a type of prisoner, capturing the knight for herself. Gawain’s physical prowess has essentially disappeared at this point, as he is unable to overcome the Lady for the sake of adhering to the courtesy that would be expected of a guest in her home. In direct contrast to the hunting scene of the Lord, including the about 30 lines after the first bedroom scene that details the dressing of the deer, Gawain is presented as a lesser man, one who lays about and chats with women all day while the better men go out on a hunting adventure.¹⁸⁰

The next two days are presented much as the first, beginning with a description of the hunt followed by a bedroom scene. And the exchanges at the end of the day are the same, until day three. With the gift of the girdle from the Lady, Gawain for the first time does not honor the terms of the game between himself and the Lord of the castle. As honor is clearly a sign of masculinity, as it is one of the heroic ideals of a knight, this inability by Gawain to honor the game he has agreed to shows yet another instance of Gawain’s emasculation. It is in the final bedroom scene that Gawain fully and knowingly betrays his own oath of virtue. The *Gawain*-poet writes:

And ho bere on hym þe belt and bede hit hym swyþe
 (And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wylle)
 And bisoȝt hym for hir sake disceuer hit neuer
 Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; þe leude hym acordez
 þat neuer wyȝe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne,
 For noȝte.¹⁸¹

At this point Gawain takes the girdle offered to him and agrees to keep it a secret from the Lord of the castle. Gawain taking the girdle is important, as there is a clear sexual suggestion with the garment. By taking a garment won around the Lady’s midsection, under her clothing, Gawain’s cleanness itself is

¹⁷⁸ *Sir Gawain*, 1211.

¹⁷⁹ *Sir Gawain*, 1222-25.

¹⁸⁰ The dressing of the deer is described in lines 1330-61

¹⁸¹ *Sir Gawain*, 1860-65.

compromised. He may not have indulged in sexual activity with the Lady but having the girdle would implicate him in that way. Additionally, the honor that he has, to this point, upheld has now been completely shattered with his willingness to betray his host.

The juxtaposition of the hunting scenes with the bedroom scenes are another instance that the reader sees of Gawain's emasculation, by dramatizing "a systematic assault upon his threefold masculine selfhood according to his same pattern of fighter, lover, and hunter."¹⁸² The bedroom scenes themselves are private, indicating that only Gawain and the Lady are aware of the seduction and resistance that takes place. In contrast to what has actually been happening in the bedroom scenes, the Lord's response to the kisses indicates a belief that it is Gawain that has been the seducer. The Lord jokes, "Hit may be such hit is þe better, and ȝe me breue wolde / Where ȝe wan þis ilk wele bi wytte of yorseleun."¹⁸³ Andrew and Waldron translate these lines to mean: "It may be of such a nature that it would turn out to be the better prize, if only you would tell me from whom."¹⁸⁴ The Lord indicates that the kiss is a prize that Gawain has won, creating the public perception that Gawain has been the aggressor and has won a prize for his actions. While the reader knows that this is not true, and eventually finds out that even the Lord knows that this is not true, the private emasculation of Gawain in the bedroom seems, at this point, to remain private. However, while Gawain's emasculation in the bedroom scene indicates a form of privacy from others, Gawain is emasculated in two additional ways by staying at the castle while the other men go hunt – it serves to question his status as a fighter, because he has accepted his imminent death against the Green Knight, and it questions his status as a hunter because he is not participating in the hunt. The juxtaposition of the hunting scenes and the bedroom scenes further illustrate this point. The men are the hunters, tracking their prey and eventually bringing it back as a prize. In the bedroom scenes, Gawain is the prey. The role reversals between Gawain and the Lady of the castle are self-evident. He has become the prize to be won by the

¹⁸² Bowers, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*, 40.

¹⁸³ *Sir Gawain*, 1393-94.

¹⁸⁴ *Sir Gawain*, Footnote, 1393-94.

Lady. Rather than engaging in the hunt, he has become the hunted. This role reversal within the typical masculine/feminine dichotomy in the Arthurian tradition is an important feature of the text. The *Gawain*-poet is highlighting the inability for a knight to act completely within the established tradition at all times, as the system itself is inherently contradictory and unsustainable.

Chaucer, as a contemporary of the *Gawain*-poet, also alerts readers to these questions of maintaining the prescribed masculinity of the time period in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, his only tale set within the Arthurian world. There are some key differences in the two texts, most notably the issue of rape and marriage within the texts, but it is worth noting that both texts use Arthurian matter to work out issues of masculinity and sexual continence. The authority of men is called into question by Chaucer first through the intervention of Guinevere in the sentencing of the knight. When King Arthur sentences the knight to death, the ladies of the court, led by the Queen, argue for a more appropriate punishment, thus saving the life of the knight in order to teach him and all men a lesson: "But that the queene and other Ladyes mo / So longe preyeden the kyng of grace / Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place, / And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille, / To cese wheither she wolde hym save or spille."¹⁸⁵ The king allows the ladies of the court, led by the Queen, to determine the fate of the knight, and the result is a form of emasculation by Guinevere:

'Thou standest yet,' quod she, 'in swich array
That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
What thing is it that women moost desiren.
Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
An answeere suffisant in this mateere;
And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
Thy body for to yelden in this place.'¹⁸⁶

This determination by the Queen makes women, specifically what women most desire, the focal point

¹⁸⁵ Chaucer, Geoffrey, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 894-98.

¹⁸⁶ Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," 902-12.

of the adventure that the knight must go on to find an answer. He must seek help from them while on his adventure.

Gawain will need to reassert his own masculinity, and Chaucer's knight will need to do this as well, to re-establish the proper sense of masculinity and order within the Arthurian world, even as that has been tested and subverted. After granting the Old Woman what she requests and marrying her, the knight is given a choice: she can stay and old and ugly, but always true wife to him, or that she be young and pretty, but there will always be the chance of her cuckholding him because of her youth and beauty. And the knight's response to this choice is to say "My Lady and my love, and wyf so deere, / I put me in youre wise governance; / Cheseth yourself which may be moost plesance / And moost honour to yow and me also. / I do no fors the wheither of the two, / For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me."¹⁸⁷ On the surface it seems as though the night is giving the Lady what she most desires, sovereignty over her husband, ensuring that she has a greater than equal role in the marriage. However, a more in-depth understanding of what has happened here indicates that perhaps the knight was actually able to reaffirm his own masculinity in this moment. He has already been absolved of any punishment for the rape that he committed and is now also rewarded with a beautiful and faithful wife. The woman had control in this one situation, but ultimately it was the knight that got exactly what he wanted and it is the woman that is now bound to a rapist. While maybe not the traditional way of establishing masculinity, this knight has clearly managed to revert the power struggle between male and female back to the "rightful" place, showing that the Arthurian world might allow for there to be a testing of masculinity, but, ultimately, the expected outcome will persevere.

Part Two: Courtesy, Cleanness, and the Pentangle

In addition to the subtle instances of emasculation of Gawain in the bedroom scenes, there is the very clear tension between courtesy and cleanness. These scenes reveal the real crux of the issue, as the *Gawain*-poet really teases out the complex relationship between the two virtues. The Pentangle

¹⁸⁷ Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale," 1230-35.

represents the chivalric virtues in general and their relation to Gawain specifically: “And quy þe pentangel apendez to þat prynce noble / I am in tent yow to telle, þof tary hyt me schulde.”¹⁸⁸ The poet is letting the reader know that it is necessary for him to interrupt the main plot of the story to describe the **P**entangle and its relationship to Gawain. While the reader will soon learn that this is actually important to the overall plot, as the tensions within the virtues of the **P**entangle are a primary focus of the *Gawain*-poet, at this point it seems to just be a way to uphold Gawain as the paragon of virtue. This praise for Gawain is made clear when the poet writes “Forþy þe pentangel new / He ber in schelde and cote, / As tulk of tale most trwe / And gentylest knyzt of lote.”¹⁸⁹

A textual analysis of the description of the Pentangle and its relation to Gawain is necessary to understand the specific virtues that Gawain is expected to both adhere to and exhibit. The interruption of the plot to describe the Pentangle alerts the reader to the importance of the Pentangle specifically in relation to Gawain. As the reader has already seen some of Gawain’s chivalric virtue when he stands Arthur’s place for the game and is now being more clearly While Gawain’s chivalric virtue has already been emphasized earlier in the text, the description of the Pentangle now clearly emphasizes all that Gawain should stand for:

Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyue wyttez.
 And efte fayled neuer þe freke in his fyue fyngres.
 And alle his afyaunce vpon folde watz in þe fyue woundez
 þat Cryst kaʒt on þe croys, as þe Crede tellez.
 And queresoeuer þys mon in melly watz stad,
 His þro þoʒt watz in þat, þurʒ alle oþer þyngez,
 þat alle his forsnes he fong at þe fyue joyez
 þat þe hende Heuen Quene had of hir Chylde.
 (At þis cause þe knyzt comlyche hade
 In þe inore half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted,
 þat quen he blusched þerto his belde neuer payred.)
 þe fyft fyue þat I finde þat þe frek vsed
 Watz fraunchyse and felazschyp forbe al þyng,
 His clannes and his cortaysye croked were neuer,
 And pité, þat passez all poyntez – þyse pure fyue
 Were harder happed on þat habel þen on any oþer.
 Now alle þese fyue syþez forsoþe were fetled on þis knyzt

¹⁸⁸ *Sir Gawain*, 623-24.

¹⁸⁹ *Sir Gawain*, 636-39.

And vchone halched in oper, þat non ende hade,
 And fyched vpon fyue poyntez þat fayld neuer,
 Ne samned neuer in no syde, ne sundred nouþer,
 Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,
 Where euer þe gomen bygan or glod to an ende.
 Perfore on his schene schelde schapen watz þe knot,
 Ryally wyth red golde vpon rede gowlez,
 Þat is þe pure 'pentaungel' wyth þe people called
 With lore.¹⁹⁰

The five virtues will become the most important point of the Pentangle in this story. Generosity (fraunchyse) and fellowship (felaʒschyp) are listed first, and these two have already been clearly exhibited by Gawain at this point. His generosity and fellowship are melded together in his stepping up to take on the game of the Green Knight in place of his king. As a knight of the Round Table, he has generously and selflessly placed the well-being of his king, and, therefore, the whole of his knightly brothers, above himself. Charity or compassion (pit ) is the last (though not least) listed virtue. Andrew and Waldron write on this virtue: "*Pity* and *piety* are not completely differentiated in meaning at this date (both forms of the word go back, through OF, to L *pietas*). Here, among the virtues of chivalry, the sense is primarily 'compassion' ... but 'devotion to duty' is also of obvious importance in Gawain's story."¹⁹¹ While the idea of compassion might be the premier idea promoted by the *Gawain*-poet, the notion that this virtue also encompasses a "devotion to duty" is important for Gawain. Here, with this subtle context, the poet is acknowledging just one of the ways in which prescribed masculinity is intermingled with the importance of chivalric virtues. Pairing pity/piety with the virtues of generosity and fellowship, the *Gawain*-poet is reminding the reader that Gawain's masculine display of standing in Arthur's place is intertwined with the expectation of a knight of the Round Table.

For most critics of the poem(?), Tte two most important virtues for the purpose of this text are cleanness (clannes) and courtesy (cortaysye). *Cortaysye* is defined as "courtesy, chivalry" and *Clannes* is

¹⁹⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 640-65.

¹⁹¹ *Sir Gawain*, Footnote 654.

defined as “cleanness, purity.”¹⁹² These two are mentioned together, described as “croked were neuer,” alluding to the “straightness” of these virtues as exemplified through Gawain. They were such a part of him at this point that he never strayed from either. And cleanness and courtesy will eventually butt against one another, as Gawain finds himself in a game that does not allow for him to be able to exhibit both virtues. Further, as Andrew and Waldron point out, this idea of not being “croked” is an allusion to the Ppentangle itself, with its straight lines that intersect and never break.¹⁹³ The Ppentangle is an interlocking symbol, with no clear beginning or end, with five points that stand alone, not touching another, yet not being possible without the lines that connect each virtue. The five virtues might be separate virtues, seemingly ones that can be individually dissected and examined on their own, but unable to be completely separate from one another. Generosity, for example, might stand on its own as a point in the Ppentangle, but it is not represented without all of the other four virtues (points) represented as well. It is this clear image of separate yet connected virtues that create the greatest moments of tension and, for a knight, failure for Gawain.

It is during the bedroom scenes with the Lady of the house that the *Gawain*-poet specifically teases out and presents the contradictions present between the virtues of courtesy and cleanness. Twice during the first bedroom scene the Lady alludes to the rumors of Gawain’s courtesy when she states, “Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praysed” and “For þe costs þat I haf known vpon þe, knyȝt, here / Of bewté and debonerté and blyþe semblaunt – / And þat I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee.”¹⁹⁴ *Hendelayk* is defined as “courtesy” and *debonerté* is defined as “courtesy, graciousness.”¹⁹⁵ In both of these passages, the Lady is invoking the already known idea of courtesy in Gawain, once again acknowledging the meta-ness of this text. Gawain is known throughout the world of Arthur to be courteous, a fact that is not hidden by the Lady of the castle. Additionally, there is likely a

¹⁹² Andrew, Malcolm and Ronald Waldron, “Glossary” *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 310 and 311.

¹⁹³ *Sir Gawain*, Footnote 653.

¹⁹⁴ *Sir Gawain*, 1228 and 1272-74.

¹⁹⁵ Andrew and Waldron, “Glossary,” 325, 312.

knowledge of courtesy as being the preeminent virtue of the court. A. C. Spearing writes, “*Cortaysye* is perhaps the central value of the courtly way of life, as indeed its name suggests: it is the virtue belonging to courts.”¹⁹⁶ With this thought in mind, the decision by Gawain to dismiss courtesy in favor of cleanness becomes more complex.

The tensions between courtesy and cleanness, two virtues that seemingly go hand in hand, become clear during that first day with the Lady, who overtly implies that a sexual encounter is her end goal with Gawain:

And now ȝe ar here, iwysse, and we bot oure one;
My lorde and his ledez ar on lenȝe faren,
Oȝer burnez in her bedde, and my burdez als,
ȝe dor drawen and dit with a derf haspe;
And syȝen I haue in ȝis hous hym ȝat al lykez,
I schal ware my whyle wel, quyl hit lastez,
With tale.
ȝe ar welcum to my cors,
Yowre awen won to wale,
Me behouez of fine force
Your seruant be, and schale.¹⁹⁷

The Lady is reminding Gawain not only that they are essentially alone in the house, with the men gone and the other women asleep, but also that they are behind a door “dit with a derf haspe.” The subtle implication is, of course, that they are free to do as they please--to do as Gawain, the knight, pleases, with no one the wiser. Spearing writes, “There is a persistent contrast between the outward *clannesse* of their conversation and the actual suggestiveness of the Lady’s behaviour, a contrast which offers a far more seductive temptation than greater openness and outspokenness could do.”¹⁹⁸ The suggestion is never outright asked, but it is clear. And throughout this scene and the ones to follow, she will become more explicit, even if still stopping just shy of bluntly asking for what she wants. The Lady here goes on to say “ȝe ar welcum to my cors, / Yowre awen won to wale,” obviously implying that her body is his. It is clear from this exchange that her challenge to him is direct, if spoken *cleanly*, and it is because she

¹⁹⁶ A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 11.

¹⁹⁷ *Sir Gawain*, 1230-40.

¹⁹⁸ Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*, 192.

would expect that he would comply.

As the two go back and forth over the implied sexual situation, it becomes clear to the reader that Gawain is going to be steadfast in his refusal to the Lady, as when the poet writes, “And ay þe Lady let lyk a hym loued much. / Þe freke ferde with defence and feted ful fayre.”¹⁹⁹ The cleanness that he must adhere to as one of the chivalric virtues insists that he will remain pure. However, the courtesy that is also an integral part of the P~~er~~pentangle is juxtaposed (in conflict with?) to his adherence to cleanness. Refusing the Lady of the castle is at least potentially discourteous, and she reminds him of this when she states “So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden, / And cortaysye is closed so clene in hymself, / Couth not lyztly haf lenged so long wyth a Lady / Bot he had craued a cosse bi his courtaysye, / Bi sum towch of summe trifle at sum talez ende.”²⁰⁰ Here the Lady clearly refers to Gawain’s reputation for courtesy and indicates that this courteous reputation should indicate that he would never lie with her in a bed all day and not even hint at the want for a kiss. The Lady is using the already established conventions of the Arthurian matter, specifically the virtues that are meant to describe a knight and his behavior, to admonish Gawain for his failure to live up to his reputation. The poet thus outlines the crux of the problem with these virtues and the ways in which they play against one another. By having the Lady herself continuously recall to Gawain that he has a reputation for courtesy and that this would be expected behavior of him, the *Gawain*-poet is reminding the reader that, while this episode might not involve Lancelot or Galahad, it does involve the very tensions that arises among the two and the ways in which this established tradition recounts these tensions.

While the intentions of the Lady in the first bedroom scene are first implied and then made more explicit as the scene unfolds, the *Gawain*-poet more explicitly states the intentions of the Lady in the second bedroom scene from the beginning: “Ful erly ho watz hym ate, / His mode for to remwe.”²⁰¹ Her purpose for this second visit is to convince Gawain to do as she wants. She once again alludes to the

¹⁹⁹ *Sir Gawain*, 1281-82.

²⁰⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 1297-1301.

²⁰¹ *Sir Gawain*, 1474-75.

reputation that precedes Gawain, stating:

And ȝe ar knyȝt comlokest kyd of your elde,
Your worde and your worchip walkez ayquere,
And I haf seten by yourself here sere twyes,
ȝet herde I neuer of your hed helde no wordez
ȝat euer long to luf, lasse ne more.
And ȝe, ȝat ar so cortays and coynt of your hetes,
Oghe to a ȝonke ȝynk ȝern to schewe
And teche sum tokenez of trweluf craftes.²⁰²

The expectation of Gawain is that he would engage in sexual activities with the Lady. His refusal to do so prompts an emotional reaction from the Lady:

‘Why! Ar ȝe lewed, ȝat alle ȝe los weldez,
Oȝer elles ȝe demen me to dille your dalyaunce to herken?
For schame!
I com hider sengel and sitte
To lerne at yow sum game;
Dos techez me of your wytte,
Whil my lorde is from hame.’²⁰³

She shames him for not sleeping with her while her husband is away, yet it is the very nature of the **Pentangle** that has brought about this shame upon Gawain. He is adhering to the virtue of cleanness, but in the process he is being discourteous. While it is possible that the Lady and Gawain have two different ideas of what courtesy means or how it should be displayed, Gawain clearly recognizes the Lady’s idea of courtesy while avoiding having to act on it. This acknowledgment of the Lady’s idea of courtesy and refusal to adhere to it while in her home might mean that he is upholding his own idea of courtesy, but he is still being discourteous to her. This day ends with the poet acknowledging “ȝus hym frayed ȝat fre and fondet hym ofte, / For to haf wonned hym to woȝe, whatso scho ȝoȝt ellez; / Bot he defended hym so fayr ȝat no fault semed.”²⁰⁴ Regardless of the amount of enticing and shaming from the Lady, Gawain does not succumb. That no fault was recorded of Gawain likely indicates specifically that he did not fault against the virtue of cleanness, as this is the virtue that he chose to uphold over

²⁰² *Sir Gawain*, 1520-27.

²⁰³ *Sir Gawain*, 1528-34.

²⁰⁴ *Sir Gawain*, 1549-51

others. Ad Putter writes, “The choice of sleeping with the Lady or desisting has been rephrased as a choice between honour and shame. The concept of honour we encounter here will be familiar. Not unlike the battlefield, the bedroom is a field of honour for the warrior, where glory depends on taking trophies.”²⁰⁵ The bedroom scene is likened to the battlefield, where the knight must perform as expected, taking something to show his success. The refusal of the Lady of the castle’s advances not only offends her, but also brings shame upon him for not living up to the expectations in this game. The expectation of a knight is that he will seduce women, as knights are inherently part of a court system and not part of a monastic system that upholds virginity in men. The very idea that this text holds cleanness, as a virtue, in such high regard is indicative of the struggle between the two types of courtesy that are both present within the value system of the medieval period.

The third bedroom scene plays out much like the first two, though there are some significant moments to be analyzed as further showcasing this choice that must be made between cleanness and courtesy. The reference to Mary by the poet would indicate the emphasis that Gawain, and likely even the poet himself, places on the virtue of cleanness: “Gret perile bitwene hem stod, / Nif Maré of hir knyzt mynne.”²⁰⁶ Andrew and Waldron translate these lines to say “There was great peril between them, unless Mary be mindful of her knight.”²⁰⁷ The danger of Gawain turning his back on cleanness is present without the watchful eye of Mary. The virginity of Mary is implied here; but there is no indication that Gawain is a virgin himself. In fact, there is strong implication from the Lady that Gawain is not a virgin. During the first bedroom scene the Lady makes this implication clear when she says:

‘þe prys and þe prowes þat plesez al oþer,
 If I hit lakked oþer set at lyzt, hit were little daynté.
 Bot hit ar ladyes innoze þat leuer wer nowþe
 Haf þe, hende, in hor holde, as I þe habbe here –
 To daly with derely your daynté wordez
 Keuer hem comfort and colen her carez –
 þen much of þe garysoun oþer golde þat þay hauen.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, 171.

²⁰⁶ *Sir Gawain*, 1768-69.

²⁰⁷ *Sir Gawain*, Footnote 1768-9.

²⁰⁸ *Sir Gawain*, 1249-55.

Both the Lady and Gawain are aware of Gawain's reputation, further complicating Gawain's ability to be both courteous and clean.

Gawain does exhibit cleanness, or purity, through his refusal to have sex with the Lady. The *Gawain*-poet then gives the reader some insight to the thoughts of Gawain in the form of an internal struggle:

For þat prynces of pris depressed hym so þikke,
Nurned hym so neze þe þred, þat need hym bihoued
Oþer lach þer hir luf oþer lodly refuse.
He cared for his cortaysye, lest crabayn he were,
And more for his meschef zif he schulde make synne
And be traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde aȝt.²⁰⁹

Gawain understands the need for courtesy and that refusing the Lady will go against his courteous nature. Yet Gawain still upholds his cleanness over his courtesy, showing the contradictions that can occur between the virtues if put in a specific position.

These issues of both masculinity and the chivalric virtues are confronted when Gawain finally meets the Green Knight. In this scene the reader not only finally realizes the identity of the Green Knight, but also understands the nature of the tests that Gawain has undergone, and the extent to which he has seemingly failed. When Gawain arrives, the Green Knight acknowledges the initial display of masculinity by Gawain by reminding him of his promise:

'Gawayn,' quop þat grene gome, 'God þe mot loke!
Iwysse þou art welcome, wyȝe, to my place,
And þou hatz tyled þi trauayl as true mon schulde;
And þou knowez þe couenauntez kest vus bytwene:
At þis tyme twelmonyth þou toke þat þe falled
And I schulde at þis Nwe ȝere ȝeply þe quyte.'²¹⁰

This reminder of Gawain's masculinity can be seen as a stark contrast to the ways in which Gawain clearly acted in a less than masculine way during his time at the castle, both through his role reversal with the Lady and his eventual shame in lying to his host.

²⁰⁹ *Sir Gawain*, 1770-75.

²¹⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 2239-44.

The expectation at this point, of course, is that Gawain is going to willingly and unflinchingly offer his neck to the Green Knight, especially in light of this reminder from the Green Knight: “Busk no more debate þen I þe bede þenne / When þou wypped of my hede at a wap one.”²¹¹ Just as the Green Knight did not argue, hesitate, or flinch, neither should Gawain. Yet, Gawain fails in this area: “Bot Gawayn on þat giserne glyfte hym bysyde, / As hit come glydande adoun on glode hym to schende, / And schranke a lytel with þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne.”²¹² The flinch from Gawain comes somewhat as a surprise – while the reader has clearly seen the ways in which he has both been emasculated and betrayed his own virtue, those instances happened in relative privacy, with only the Lady of the castle bearing witness. Yet now, in front of his enemy, Gawain has betrayed his own fear in the face of death, in spite of him knowing that he has the girdle that should protect him. And as his previous mistakes might have been private, here the Green Knight is quick to confront Gawain with this show of fear, stating:

‘þou art not Gawayn,’ quop þe gome, ‘þat is so goud halden,
 þat neuer arzed for no here by hylle ne be vale,
 And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez!
 Such cowardice of þat knyzt cowþe I neuer here.
 Nawþer fyked I ne flaʒe, freke, quen þou myntest,
 Ne kest no kaelacion in kyngez hous Arthor.
 My hede flaʒ to my fote and zet flaʒ I neuer;
 And þou, er any harme hent, arzez in hert.
 Wherefore þe better burne me burde be called
 þerfore.’²¹³

The Green Knight is very explicitly comparing himself to Gawain and asserting that he is the better man. Gawain has once again been emasculated, only this time by another man.

After this exposure of Gawain’s faltering masculinity by the Green Knight, Gawain very clearly works to reestablish his own masculinity and role as a knight of the Round Table by not flinching at either of the next two strokes. And after the third blow, Gawain will state that he has fulfilled his

²¹¹ *Sir Gawain*, 2248-49.

²¹² *Sir Gawain*, 2265-67.

²¹³ *Sir Gawain*, 2270-79.

promise, asserting that he has held true to his word. This claim by Gawain becomes the point of contention at this point in the game. The Green Knight recounts the three blows while interjecting the days that Gawain stayed at the castle and engaged with the Lady. The Green Knight finishes his explanation (and reveal) with this condemnation of Gawain: “Bot here yow lakked a little, sir, and lewté yow wonted; / Bot þat wotz for no wylyde werke, ne wowyng nauþer, / Bot for ʒe lufed your lyf – þe lasse I yow blame.”²¹⁴ The specific reference to loyalty (lewté) indicates yet another failure of the Pentangle – if fellowship can be interpreted as an adherence to the code of knights, specifically as knights are meant to work with one another, then here he has failed in that area. He has broken his own code in his failure of cleanness earlier in the text, and he has failed in his own word to the lord of the castle when he lied to him and betrayed the terms of the game. This rebuke by the Green Knight seems to be the most scathing review of Gawain and his actions over the past three days.

The juxtaposition between Gawain’s own harsher rebuke of his actions with the Green Knight’s rebuke indicate that Gawain’s honor has now been replaced with shame, as indicated by Gawain’s physical reaction: “Alle þe blode of his brest blende in his face, / Þat al he schrank for schome þat þe schalk talked.”²¹⁵ Again there is the present contrast of honor and shame that has been present in the text. More than just shame, however, is also the culture of guilt that is prevalent in the text. Helen Cooper writes, “Christian morality is an expression of a guilt culture, but romance also comprehensively embraces a belief in honour and renown, the public judgement characteristics of a shame culture. The two systems may coincide, but they need not, and romance, the genre poised between the two, sometimes sets them at odds.”²¹⁶ The guilt and shame that Gawain feels is expressed when he finally replies to his failing:

‘Lo! þer þe falssyng – foule mot hit falle!
 For care of þy knokke, cowardyse me tazt
 To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake:
 þat is larges and lewté, þat longez to knyʒez.

²¹⁴ *Sir Gawain*, 2366-68.

²¹⁵ *Sir Gawain*, 2371-72.

²¹⁶ Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 83.

Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer
 Of trecherye and vntrawþ – boþe bityde sorþe
 And care!
 I biknowe yow, knyȝt, here styлле,
 Al fawty is my fare.
 Letez me ouertake your wylle
 And efte I schal be ware.²¹⁷

This scathing review of his own behavior is starkly contrasted against the review the Green Knight offers. The Green Knight says, “I halde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade. / Þou art confessed so clene, beknoven of þy mysses, / And hatz þe penaunce apert of þe point of myn egge, / I halde þe polysed of þat plyȝt and pured as clene / As þou hadez neuer forfeþed syþen þou watz fyrst borne.”²¹⁸ The Green Knight indicates that the “penaunce” of his blade on Gawain’s neck is sufficient, and he easily forgives and dismisses any wrongdoing by Gawain at this point. The difference between these two reviews of his actions seems to be based on what exactly each man believes to be the wrongdoing. For Gawain, it is his complete failure to uphold his knightly virtues. His lamentation is that he is, as perhaps he is realizing for the first time, not exactly as virtuous as is portrayed by the Pentangle on his shield. While he might later reverse this severe condemnation of himself, at this moment, when he is first confronted with his actions, he recognizes what he has done. The Green Knight does not seem to see Gawain’s wrongdoing in such a broad light. Stephanie J. Hollis writes, “Gawain failed, in the Green Knight’s view, only in so far as the reverberations of his love of life, excusable in itself, were manifested in a slight lack of loyalty. Because he considers Gawain’s offence against him a trifling matter, he can pronounce it removed, in a metaphor which emphasizes that his failure is merely a surface spot.”²¹⁹ For the Green Knight, the misdeed is done and over with, forgiven and forgotten. These starkly different reviews of the failing of Gawain indicate the way in which loss of virtue can be waved away – the Green Knight, much like Arthur’s court later, is able to regard the tensions that arise within the chivalric code

²¹⁷ *Sir Gawain*, 2378-88.

²¹⁸ *Sir Gawain*, 2390-94.

²¹⁹ Hollis, Stephanie J., “The Pentangle Knight: ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’,” *The Chaucer Review* 15, no. 3 (1981): 277.

as something that can be overcome, even if only through repentance. The difference in rebukes highlights the contention that the text is dealing with at a new level, reasserting that there is no easy answer to tensions that are present or how best to deal with them once discovered.

Gawain must now find a way to reassert his masculinity; while he has clearly been emasculated in the bedroom scenes, that happened in a private space with no witnesses, other than a woman. He is now in a public space, and another man, one who has seemingly retained all of his own masculine qualities, is aware of Gawain's failings. Gawain, originally emitting harsh criticism of himself for his failings, will eventually invoke the many Biblical women who have seduced men, recalling Eve, Delilah, and Bathsheba. Gawain states:

And þurȝ wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorȝe;
Fro so watz Adam in erde with one bygyled,
And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson, eftsones –
Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde – and Dauyth, þerafter,
Watz blended with Barsabe, þat much bale þoled.
Now þese were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wynne huge
To luf hom wel and leue hem not, a leude þat coupe.
For þes wer forne þe freest, þat folȝed alle þe sele
Excellently, of alle þyse oþer vnder heuen-ryche
 þat mused;
 Alle þay were bywyled
 With wymmen þat þay vsed.
 þaȝ I be now bigyled,
 Me þink me burde be excused.²²⁰

Gawain is revising his own history with the woman and repurposing Biblical history to reassert his masculinity. The reliance here on the Biblical seems to indicate that Gawain is again emphasizing the more clerical aspect of the value system. Catherine S. Cox writes, "He adduces the Lady as an Eve-like temptress, thereby restoring his proper gender role: the victimized hero is a hero nonetheless, but only if his triumphant foe is a woman of compelling sexual attractiveness."²²¹ He was seduced in some way by the Lady, just as many other Biblical heroes have been seduced by attractive women. He places himself in this same category as them, men who still could be seen as a heroic type. Adam is the father

²²⁰ *Sir Gawain*, 2415-28.

²²¹ Catherine S. Cox, "Genesis and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 4 (2001), 381.

of all mankind, despite his eviction from the Garden of Eden. Samson sacrifices himself to kill his enemies, and David becomes a great king. All of these are in spite of their succumbing to the temptation of an attractive woman. Invoking these Biblical figures, Gawain has asserted himself in the annals of heroic man who happen to fall to seductive women, though the shift of blame is clearly self-serving and quite a retreat from his earlier rebuke of himself.

Gawain does seem, within the confines of the text and the characters of the text, to redefine his masculinity. Arthur's court welcomes him back easily, even after hearing his entire story:

þe kyng confortez þe knyȝt, and all þe court als
Laȝen loude þerat and luflyly acorden
þat lords and ledes þat longed to þe Table,
Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,
A bende abelef hym aboute, of a bryȝt grene,
And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were.
For þat watz accorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
For he honoured þat hit hade, euermore after,
As hit is breued in þe best boke of romaunce.²²²

Gawain is comforted by Arthur and immediately welcomed by the court, to the extent that the court takes on the green girdle as a symbol of the Round Table. There is no recorded conversation of Gawain's faults by the poet or any indication that his failure in anyway devalued him in the eyes of the court.

There are two important points to be made about this welcome. First, the **P**entangle knight has essentially looped back in an unbreaking line in the same manner as the unbreakable lines of the **P**entangle. Gawain is seemingly back where he began: a happy Arthurian court, without shame or condemnation, at least in the eyes of the court that he has returned to, as there is no indication of exactly how Gawain feels. Just as the **P**entangle is unending, the lines connecting the virtues being traced back and forth, over and over, with no explicit start and beginning, so is this story of Gawain. The ending gives an indication that, for Gawain, what happened on his journey is unimportant to the court, and he could once again begin a quest just as he did the first one. However, the second point to be made brings this point sharply into focus. The **P**entangle itself, the symbol that is of most importance

²²² *Sir Gawain*, 2513-21.

at the beginning of this poem, is replaced. A. C. Spearing writes, "Gawain began this adventure as the knight of the pentangle ... But as his adventure proceeded ... the pentangle disappeared from view. It did so quite literally, because his shield and coat-armour were stripped from Gawain on his arrival at the castle ... The girdle that she offered him then emerged to take the pentangle's place."²²³ The secular symbol of the girdle takes the place of the sacred Pentangle, a reminder from the *Gawain*-poet about the impossibility of simultaneously upholding all virtues of the Pentangle. While someone like Galahad can uphold these virtues, in the face of temptation it becomes impossible.

However, while the court seems to readily accept Gawain back, the readers are well aware of the full extent of Gawain's shame. Arthur and his court might believe in this newly established masculinity and code that Gawain presents, but the reader is not so easily fooled. The author has very carefully teased out the problems inherent within a strict masculine tradition that allows little room for mistakes. More specifically, the author has written a text that clearly outlines Arthurian matter as one that has specific expectations of its characters – their actions are already predetermined, and any straying from these expectations leads to the very issues that Gawain encounters. Coupled with the tensions that arise from the seemingly intertwined, but, in practice, warring values of the Pentangle, Gawain represents for the audience the ways in which Arthurian romance genre can fail itself, even if the characters do not believe it has failed. The characters might be aware of the expectations of one another, but they are not so self-aware as to understand the complexities of their own tradition. Perhaps it is this very lack of self-awareness that both hinders and helps Gawain – he is unable to reconcile all of the values to act appropriately with the host's wife and is unable of completely remaining strong in the face of death. These present challenges to the masculine model, but the overall sufficient ending with the knight successfully returning to Camelot allows Gawain to remain the hero even among his own failings.

With Lancelot and Galahad already being present in the Arthurian tradition, and clear

²²³ Spearing, A.C., *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 198.

indications that the *Gawain*-poet would have been aware of the French Arthurian romances and these characters, the character of Gawain becomes a sophisticated way to work through the masculine and chivalric tensions. Working in a place of belatedness, the *Gawain*-poet presents the reader with a Camelot that is still innocent. Guinevere is not adulterous, Arthur has not yet been betrayed, and the knights of the Round Table are at the height of their militaristic prowess. There seems to be an idea that this earlier version of Camelot will shield the characters from the very tensions and problems that Lancelot and Galahad bring to the court. Yet, this is not the case. These contradictions in masculinity and the chivalric code might best be embodied by Lancelot and Galahad, but that is because they are the two characters that best embody those very contradictions and tensions. Creating a tale that allows these to be explored with the use of Gawain before the other two characters enter the scene allows the reader to more fully understand the very ways in which the Arthurian model is not sustainable, paving the way for authors such as Malory to more clearly use Lancelot and Galahad to further explore the Arthurian world.

CHAPTER FOUR

MALORY'S HERO

As the culminating work of Arthurian legend in the medieval period, Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* attempts to take all of the various legends and past works and make them fit together into one complete narrative. This final medieval Arthurian text struggles even more than other texts with issues of masculinity and the roles of the sacred and the secular. There seems to be no straightforward resolution to either of these issues, and a complex narrative that implicitly and explicitly deals with them gives both contemporary and current readers an understanding of the tensions that arise when trying to fit masculinity and the sacred and the secular into a single narrative. From the making of Lancelot as the sinful hero, the battling forces of earthly and heavenly chivalry as embodied by Lancelot and Galahad, and the fall of the Round Table as representative of a failed masculinity, *Morte Darthur* tries, but does not quite succeed, in answering the lingering questions concerning masculinity and the way in which to rightfully converge the sacred and the secular. Still, the ultimate text on the legend leaves us with questions, making readers aware that these complex issues are not easily solved or negotiated, even after hundreds of years.

It is common knowledge that Malory's Lancelot is a complex character, meant to be a hero but within the confines of an already established Arthurian tradition. Malory could not make Lancelot *the* hero, as the relationship between him and Guinevere was always going to be in the way. With the Grail quest having become the primary way a hero is established, Lancelot could not prevail. It had to be Galahad. However, Lancelot could be Malory's hero in the knightly world of Camelot, where a focus on the warrior aspect of knighthood is prominent. Essentially, Malory is attempting to collapse the space that exists between the secular and sacred, though, I argue, he ultimately fails at this endeavor. Lancelot remains firmly rooted in the secular confines of the Arthurian tradition, exemplifying the warrior and secular love aspects of chivalry and knighthood. Galahad is the ultimate representation of the Christian aspects of knighthood, with Bors and Percival occupying some of this space. Malory is only able to keep Lancelot as a central heroic figure if he keeps clear boundaries between the secular and the sacred in his work. Additionally, the fall of the Round Table represents the way in which the secular and the sacred collapse. Galahad has achieved his quest and ascended to Heaven, leaving the Round Table without its perfect, savior knight. And Lancelot's affair with Guinevere is discovered, resulting in a collapse of masculinity and power of Arthur. Malory's tale, then, does more than just combine legends to create an authoritative text on the subject. *Morte* recognizes that, at least for Malory, the sacred and the secular are separate issues that might co-exist, but have a very tenuous relationship in the ways in which they interact with one another. The Round Table falls not because of the mistakes and imperfections of the knights; it falls because of the competing secular and sacred narratives within the legends.

Many scholars have written and argued about Malory's text, especially the roles of Lancelot and Galahad within the text. Malory uses the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* as one of the main source for his work, but scholars argue he was writing the *Morte* to be more of an English chronicle of Arthur and his

knights, not necessarily a romance.²²⁴ Helen Cooper agrees with this assessment of Malory writing more in a chronicle tradition than in a romance tradition, stating, “The effect is very different from that of a novel, and all the indications are that Malory would not have wanted to write one even if the form had been available to him. His style has been compared to that of a chronicle, and indeed he repeatedly insists on the fact that the Arthurian adventures were a matter of record.”²²⁵ Malory references the French books about seventy more times than any English work on Arthur and his knights; however, many of the episodes that he includes (minus the Grail quest/Galahad) are from the English tradition, especially the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. Edward Kennedy asserts that his reason for mentioning the French books, even though plenty of his material came from the English tradition, was to give the illusion that he was creating something new and different. By mentioning the French books he was signaling to a specific audience that he knew would be familiar with the French tradition: “His denigration of English Arthurian accounts and his emphasis on the French book is in part a reminder that he is presenting something different for English readers, and it is in part an appeal to snobbery, to point to the fact that his account is based on what the upper classes had been reading in French.”²²⁶ The entire premise was that of something new, exciting, and for a certain class of readers. However, a significant change in Malory from the typical English tradition is the primacy of Lancelot as the best of Arthur’s knights rather than Gawain.²²⁷ So, while he seemed to be writing in the English chronicle tradition, Malory was clearly favoring the French knight, Lancelot, over the English knight, Gawain.

Malory’s treatment of Lancelot and Galahad is widely agreed to be quite different from his French sources. Rather than Galahad as the hero of the story, Malory upholds Lancelot as the true hero.

²²⁴ Kennedy, Edward Donald, “Sir Thomas Malory’s (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle,” in *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

²²⁵ Cooper, “Introduction,” xvii.

²²⁶ Kennedy, “Sir Thomas Malory’s (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle,” 234.

²²⁷ Radulescu, Raluca L., “‘now I take upon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges’: Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood,” in *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

Raluca L. Radulescu calls Lancelot the “best sinful knight.”²²⁸ He is unable to completely erase or overlook Lancelot’s sin, but, regardless of this, Lancelot is who Malory chooses to be the empathetic, heroic knight. Malory understands the tension between earthly chivalry and heavenly chivalry, but he places the importance on earthly chivalry, as embodied by Lancelot.²²⁹ Malory seems to acknowledge the warring codes of conduct between secular romance and the medieval Church. He showcases the three standard threads that result from an adherence to both of these: love that results in marriage, illicit love, and the standard of virginity.²³⁰ Yet it still clear that Galahad is part of the story because he has to be part of the story – it would be expected of Malory to include Galahad, especially considering his emphasis on his French sources. Regardless, Malory chooses to showcase Lancelot and his deeds positively and more so than Galahad’s achievement of the Grail.

The tension that arises between Lancelot and Galahad, the secular and the sacred, is also present due to Malory’s choice of style. Leah Haught argues:

If, for example, Malory’s selection of the prose medium reflects a conscious effort to imitate the style, effect and, as a result, credibility of chroniclers like *Lazamon* or John Hardyng, how are we to understand his focus on Lancelot – a character mentioned only in passing (if at all) within the larger chronicle tradition of an historical Arthur, a tradition to which the printer William Caxton alludes in his 1485 preface to the first printed edition – as opposed to Arthur himself or Gawain? Alternatively, viewing the *Morte* as a traditional chivalric romance whose primary interest is the perfectibility of its central hero does little to elucidate the narrative’s obvious interest in the geopolitical origins of Arthur’s rule, or explain Lancelot’s own reputation as always-already superlative.²³¹

Lancelot’s primacy in the text seems to undermine the stylistic choice of writing the narrative as a chronicle, an historical account of this British matter. The tradition that Malory creates is the one that lived on, with most people knowing the stories of Arthur and his knights as conveyed by Malory, even if they do not realize that it is from Malory that they gained their understanding.

The best guess that we have as to the identity Malory is that he is Sir Thomas Malory of

²²⁸ Radulescu, “Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood,” 286.

²²⁹ Radulescu, “Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood,” 287-88.

²³⁰ Cooper, Helen, “Introduction,” in *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³¹ Haught, Leah, “Fleeing the Future, Forgetting the Past: Becoming Malory’s Lancelot,” *Parergon* 30, no. 1 (2013), 160.

Newbold Revel (c. 1415 – 1471). Though a knight, landowner, and public office holder, Malory eventually became a career criminal and was accused of being a thief, attempted assassin, and rapist. He wrote the *Morte* during times that he was jailed, finishing between 1469-70. Although a knight, Malory seemingly has nothing in common with the knights that he writes about and even glorifies in the *Morte*. However, the fifteenth century saw a “cult of chivalry,” so it is not surprising that his work would specifically elevate the ideals of chivalry as embodied by King Arthur and his knights.²³²

Originally the only copies there were of Malory’s work were Caxton’s edition. He treated the book as a complete and connected narrative, a whole book. His ending note stated, “Thus endeth this noble and joyous book entitled Le Morte Darthur. Notwithstanding it treateth of the birth, life, and acts of the said King Arthur, of his noble knights of the Round Table, their marvellous quests and adventures, the achieving of the Sangrail, and in the end the dolorous death and departing out of this world of them all.”²³³ The title that is still commonly associated with the work, *Le Morte Darthur*, comes from this closing, created by Caxton and not Malory.

In 1934, a manuscript was discovered. Now known as the Winchester manuscript, it is the only surviving manuscript of the text. Because of the manuscript’s division of the text into large sections, Eugene Vinaver, the first person to produce a version of the narrative that incorporated the Winchester manuscript, insisted that this was not a complete book but instead was a series of separate Arthurian tales. The following are the major differences between the Winchester and Caxton texts:

The major variant between Winchester and the Caxton is that the Roman War episode in Winchester is twice as long as that in the Caxton. The system of textual divisions also differs: Caxton divided the text into books and chapters, whereas the Winchester scribes divided it by explicits and incipits, and by large initial letters. There are also many minor variants between the two texts, such as different spellings, different word order and word divisions, or variant uses of prefixes and conjunctions.²³⁴

The specific differences between the two editions has been laid out previously by scholars, but the

²³² Cooper, Introduction, xi.

²³³ Cooper, “Introduction,” xxi.

²³⁴ http://maloryproject.com/textual_variants.php

general consensus is that both were created from an earlier copy of the narrative.²³⁵ Helen Cooper asserts that there few scholars that would believe as Vinaver did that the sections are meant to be autonomous, as there is more evidence from the manuscript itself that suggests Malory was trying to take all of his original sources and create one cohesive tale that could be read together. Throughout the stories, he will make references both to future episodes he will relate or back to previous ones that he has already written.²³⁶

I am using Helen Cooper's edition of the Winchester text. This version is divided into eight separate sections, detailing the rise of King Arthur, his war with Rome, accounts of individual knights' adventures (including Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere), the quest for the Grail, and the death of Arthur. Lancelot first appears in "From the Marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur," which ends with a textual note indicating that Lancelot is now coming to Arthur's court: "Here endeth this tale, as the French book saith, from the marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur that reigned after him and did many battles. And this book endeth there as Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristram came to court."²³⁷ This ending provides the assumption that the reader will understand who Lancelot is and his importance to the overall tale. The prophecy of Galahad's birth and his achievement of the Grail is in "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyonesse," before Galahad officially appears in Camelot in "The Noble Tail of the Sangrail."

Part One: Convergence of Masculinity and Chivalry

From the beginning of *Morte*, Malory attempts to establish a form of masculinity that could weave throughout the entire text. Although clearly working from source material, Malory creates a story of King Arthur, beginning with his conception and subsequent rise to the throne. Arthur's test of masculinity comes early in his reign, a year after his coronation, when the six kings came to challenge his authority. Of the battle that followed their challenge, Malory writes:

And always King Arthur on horseback laid on with a sword and did marvelous deeds of

²³⁵ William Matthews "A Question of Texts" and Carol M. Meale's "The Hoole Book': Editing and the Creation of Meaning in Malory's Text" both give specific detail about the differences between the Caxton edition and the Vinaver edition.

²³⁶ Cooper, "Introduction," xxi-xxii.

²³⁷ Malory, Sir Thomas, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 81.

arms, that may of the kings had great joy of his deeds and hardiness. Then King Lot broke out on the back side, and the King with the Hundred Knights, and King Carados, and set on Arthur fiercely behind him. With that Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press till his horse was slain underneath him; and therewith King Lot smote down King Arthur. With that his four knights received him and set him on horseback. Then he drew his sword Excalibur, but it was so bright in his enemies' eyes that it gave light like thirty torches. And therewith he put them aback, and slew much people.²³⁸

Arthur's first test of military prowess proves successful, as he forces the kings to withdraw, and he asserts himself as not only a masculine warrior figure but also as the rightful king.

The Pentecostal Oath, an early moment in the text between Arthur and his Round Table knights, establishes both a sense of masculinity and a specific chivalric code in the knights. With this oath, Arthur charged them:

never to do outrage nor murder, and always to flee treason, and to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always to do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen and widows succour; strengthen them in their rights, and never to enforce them, upon pain of death. Also that no man take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no love, nor for no worldly goods.²³⁹

These "guidelines" of correct chivalric knightly behavior set the tone for the entire narrative, weaving tales that challenge the knights of the Round Table to find their own success (and, possibly, failures) through this code.

Evidence of Arthur himself following the Pentecostal Oath is established early in the text. Specifically, this can be traced in "The Noble Tale Betwixt King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome." In Bonnie Wheeler's discussion of masculinity in Arthurian literature, she asserts, "Masculinity is transacted most completely through heroic leadership."²⁴⁰ Arthur emulates this idea of masculinity along with his adherence to the Oath here in this section of *Morte*. When the messengers arrive at Arthur's court to tell him of Lucius' demands, he responds:

'Thou sayest well ... but for all thy breme words I will not be too over-hasty; and therefore though and thy fellows shall abide here seven days. And I shall call unto me my

²³⁸ Malory, *Morte*, 14.

²³⁹ Malory, *Morte*, 57.

²⁴⁰ Wheeler, Bonnie, "The Masculinity of King Arthur: From Gildas to the Nuclear Age," *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 1.

council of my most trusty knights and dukes and regent kings and earls and barons and of my most wise doctors; and when we have taken our advisement ye shall have your answer plainly, such as I shall abide by.²⁴¹

Here Arthur has shown mercy to the messengers, one of which stated he was “so afraid when I looked in thy face.”²⁴² Arthur recognized that these men were messengers and that the demand of Lucius could lead to a potentially devastating war for his kingdom. He showed mercy to the men and sought council with those whom he kept around him to make the best decision for this situation. Additionally, the dream that Arthur has in which he is a dragon that defeats a bear seems to signify that Arthur has fate on his side and will win the battle against Lucius.

The reader makes it through the battle between Arthur and Lucius before the text begins to delve into the individual knights’ stories. Malory specifically establishes Arthur as the rightful king, ruling over the best knights of the world, before he begins relaying the stories of the knights themselves. By establishing Arthur’s masculinity, especially as it relates to his rule over the knights of the Round Table, Malory is able to move into the tales of individual knights and to work on the establishment of masculinity and the chivalric code through their own adventures.

While the Pentecostal Oath in Book Three establishes a sense of chivalric code among the knights of the Round Table, it also serves to promote the relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity. In this oath the knights are charged “always to do ladies, damsels and gentlewomen succor, upon pain of death.”²⁴³ Dorsey Armstrong asserts that “knightly combat and its language are, in a sense, produced and given meaning by Malory’s women, or, to put it more precisely, *by the text’s understanding and construction of women.*”²⁴⁴ The men – knights – are given a code, and in that code, they are specifically told how to react to and treat women. Their masculinity is boosted through their interaction with the women in the text. Bonnie Wheeler takes the masculine/feminine

²⁴¹ Malory, *Morte*, 82.

²⁴² Malory, *Morte*, 82.

²⁴³ Malory, *Morte*, 57.

²⁴⁴ Armstrong, Dorsey, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory’s Morte d’Arthur* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 2.

discussion of the Oath itself a step further in the connection of it, specifically, to the Round Table. Wheeler writes: "The Round Table binds male to female as it represents Arthur's union with Guinevere. Round Table chivalry is distinct from ordinary chivalry: the Pentecostal Oath of the Round Table weds the virtues of justice and mercy, and thereby joins traditionally masculine to traditionally feminine cultures."²⁴⁵ Malory has consciously created this specific oath, reinforcing the masculine/feminine dynamic. He ensures that men are able to both assert and retain their masculinity through his construction and show of femininity of the women in the text.

The episodes throughout the narrative that involve women articulate the reinforcement of the masculine through the feminine. Armstrong goes on to assert that "in essence, the Pentecostal Oath effects a disciplinary production of gender in both its particular focus – a structure that locates knights at the center, looking outward at the rest of the society – and in the particular articles it legislates, such as the ladies clause."²⁴⁶ I agree that knights are located at the center of this narrative, but this is not a static position. Perhaps they begin at the center, as stated in the Pentecostal Oath, but their position shifts as they navigate the women throughout the narrative. Knights fighting other knights or other masculine invaders does little to shift the position of the knights of the Round Table within the narrative. The fighting reasserts their masculinity and keeps them as the focus. However, once the women begin to appear, Malory allows their feminization to influence the direction of the narrative; they have shifted where the knights can be found in this circle. In order to retain their masculinity these knights are bound by the Oath that insists they help women in need. At this point, the feminine begins to define the masculine, both reasserting the importance and prominence of masculinity while bowing to the will of the feminine. Malory seems to recognize this juxtaposition and works to navigate through it, challenging the knights within the Oath itself to figure out how these potentially warring assertions of the place of the masculine within the Arthurian world are able to coexist.

²⁴⁵ Wheeler, "The Masculinity of King Arthur," 14.

²⁴⁶ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 36.

The conception of Arthur himself is an example of this shifting focus, with the masculine in the middle (King Uther) being influenced by the feminine in a way that changes the narrative. After seeing Igraine, “the King liked and loved this lady well.”²⁴⁷ The entrance of Igraine into King Uther’s life immediately sets the narrative into motion, changing the course of Uther and Igraine’s life, as well as the whole history of Britain. When Merlin disguises Uther as Igraine’s husband, Arthur is conceived, paving the way for the greatest king to be born. Igraine, rather than Uther, seems to be at the center of this conception. Uther may be king and Merlin may have disguised him to look like another man, but Igraine is the catalyst for it all, and the readers see that the women themselves will play an important role in the narrative, specifically in relation to the masculine actions of the men. Fighting (military prowess) and the conception of a son to carry on the family name are directly related to the introduction of Igraine in the text and her interactions with Uther.²⁴⁸

Another example of women controlling the narrative, even from the fringes, comes from Gawain’s first battle. After Gawain sets his greyhounds on a hunt that ends in the killing of a hart, the knight that this hart belonged to comes out and kills two of the greyhounds. The knight’s actions after the death of his hart are specifically because the hart was given to him by his lady. The fight, then, between him and Gawain can be traced, indirectly, back to a woman. And during this fight, the knight cries for mercy, yet Gawain “would no mercy have, but unlaced his helm to have struck off his head. Right so came his lady out of a chamber and fell over him, and so he smote off her head by misfortune.”²⁴⁹ These actions by Gawain, both his refusal to show mercy and his killing of an innocent lady, become the reason for the Pentecostal Oath. Once back at Arthur’s court, Gawain must tell of his

²⁴⁷ Malory, *Morte*, 3.

²⁴⁸ Armstrong reaffirms this when she writes “Malory’s text repeatedly demonstrates that the construction of masculine knightly identity occurs at the intersection of knightly prowess and romantic love.” The intersection here happens when Uther’s submission to romantic love clearly enacts the “knightly prowess” through his declaration of battle against the Duke of Cornwall.

²⁴⁹ Malory, *Morte*, 56,

adventure, and it is Guinevere who determines his punishment.²⁵⁰ The Pentecostal Oath, which specifically mentions the ways in which women should be treated, is forced upon Arthur and his knights through the actions of Gawain. The role of women here is clearly evident to the reader, as it establishes both a chivalric code for the knights while also reasserting the masculine value of knightly fighting.

Part Two: Lancelot

Malory very clearly situates Lancelot as the knightly epitome – he is the best in all ways at his introduction. Malory writes, “But in especial it was proved on Sir Lancelot du Lake, for in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms, both for life and death, he passed all knights.”²⁵¹ Malory explicitly establishes Lancelot as the best, especially in military prowess. This is reestablished throughout the narrative as well. When, in “Sir Lancelot du Lake,” Sir Kay realizes that Lancelot has taken his armor and horse, Kay says, “Now by my faith, I know well that he will grieve some of the court of King Arthur; for on him knights will be bold, and deem that it is I, and that will beguile them. And because of his armour and shield I am sure I shall ride in peace.”²⁵² Kay knows that Lancelot is the best fighter of the knights and that he will be saved from battles because he will be mistaken for Lancelot.

Malory makes it clear to the reader that Lancelot follows the Pentecostal Oath. As the guiding principal for the knights of the Round Table, Lancelot, as the best knight, needs to clearly follow the oath that was set by his King. When Lancelot, sleeping, is mistaken for another knight’s lady, the encounter escalates, first testing Lancelot’s masculinity before reaffirming both his masculinity and chivalry. The knight mistakenly begins to kiss Lancelot, and “when Sir Lancelot felt a rough beard kissing him, he started of the bed lightly ... and either of them got their swords in their hands ... and there by a little slade Sir Lancelot wounded him sore, nigh unto the death.”²⁵³ While the “threat” of homosexuality attempts to emasculate Lancelot, Malory is very quick and very clear to assert that Lancelot

²⁵⁰ This will recall to the reader that it is Guinevere that is allowed to determine the punishment for the knight in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.” A precedent has already been set in the Arthurian world for Guinevere to be involved with punishments of knights, especially as it pertains to crimes against women.

²⁵¹ Malory, *Morte*, 95.

²⁵² Malory, *Morte*, 112.

²⁵³ Malory, *Morte*, 100.

immediately stopped the encounter. This abrupt action helps Lancelot retain his masculinity throughout this episode, followed quickly by his action of grabbing his sword and wounding the knight. At no point, then, can Lancelot's masculinity be questioned.

In addition to asserting his own masculinity here, Lancelot also shows his knightly chivalry. When Belleus' lady comes upon the fight, she immediately asks for mercy from Lancelot on behalf of her lord. Her speech to Lancelot recalls to both him and the reader the oath that all of Arthur's knights take: The lady says, "But now would ye promise me of your courtesy, for the harms that ye have done to me and to my lord Sir Belleus, that when ye come unto King Arthur's court for to cause him to be made knight of the Round Table?"²⁵⁴ The lady seems to invoke both the mercy element of the Pentecostal Oath and the ladies' clause. She wants mercy to be shown to her knight by making him a knight in Arthur's court. That this is a reasonable request coming from a lady, whom the knights are instructed to help, creates a double example of the oath in action. As Lancelot has already reasserted his own masculinity, he is now able to abide by the oath and reaffirm his own courtesy and chivalric nature.

Military prowess was not the only way in which a knight was meant to establish his masculinity. Sex was also meant to reaffirm the masculinity of the knights, even when they were not necessarily supposed to be having sex. Yet with Lancelot, this show of masculinity becomes complicated. The reader knows from past Arthurian works that Lancelot's lady love will be Guinevere, the one woman that he truly cannot have. Malory foreshadows Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere, stating, "Wherefore Queen Guinevere had him in great favour above all other knights, and so he loved the Queen again above all other ladies days of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry."²⁵⁵ The reader immediately thinks of the relationship that is sure to come between Lancelot and Guinevere before Lancelot takes any kind of momentous action,

²⁵⁴ Malory, *Morte*, 101.

²⁵⁵ Malory, *Morte*, 95.

military or sexual, within the narrative.

While the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere would not be surprising to contemporary readers, hence the off-handed foreshadowing by Malory here, the importance that Malory places on Lancelot and on his affair with Guinevere likely would be surprising to those same readers. Elizabeth Archibald points out that the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere is very much of the French tradition and is not as readily discussed in the English tradition. Lancelot is created by Chrétien, as is his love affair with Guinevere. The *Queste* goes into greater detail about the relationship. However, most English narratives before Malory are not specific about Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere. Archibald argues that it is actually Gawain that is the focal knight in the English tradition, with Lancelot mentioned (as would be expected by readers) but not given much character depth.²⁵⁶ This choice by Malory begs the question of why he chose to focus on Lancelot and to give much of the narrative space to his relationship with Guinevere. I argue that this is because Malory is working within a perceived notion of masculinity, which he clearly shows is not as easily defined, maintained, and reaffirmed as perhaps it would have seemed. This unfixed notion of masculinity becomes even looser when it must confront the tensions of the sacred and the secular, which Malory shows through the Grail quest, specifically with the juxtaposition of Lancelot and Galahad.

Part Three: Chivalry

The juxtaposition between Lancelot and Galahad on the quest for the Grail shows the ways in which Malory is attempting to display masculinity within an already established Arthurian tradition. With Lancelot having to fail due to his relationship with Guinevere and Galahad having to succeed due to his ability to remain virtuous throughout the narrative, Malory must work within these confines to allow Lancelot to remain the hero, even without success on this quest. The way that Malory weaves this

²⁵⁶ Archibald, Elizabeth, "Malory's Lancelot and Guenevere," in *Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012) 313-14.

narrative, and navigates the sacred and the secular throughout, shows just how tenuous the relationship between the sacred and the secular could be during the time period. Raluca L. Radulescu writes, "The importance of this [Grail] section of the *Morte Darthur* cannot be overestimated, as Malory recontextualizes the Grail quest to fit into his worldly Arthuriad; in the process, he alters not only some of the narrative links, but also the portrayal of the Grail knights, and Lancelot in particular."²⁵⁷ Ultimately, Malory presents a story that follows the established tradition, but allows the focus to stay on the more human knight, making the reader relate to Lancelot even while Galahad becomes the hero. It is the very nature of Lancelot's "fallen" status, both in his affair with the Queen and in being surpassed by his own son, that allows contemporary and modern readers to relate to Lancelot in a way that is not possible with Galahad.

The relationship between Lancelot and Galahad is worth exploring, as it is indicative of both of their situations within this Arthurian world. Galahad's birth represents failure for Lancelot – both his failure to remain faithful to Guinevere and his failure to enter into a marriage with Galahad's mother. Karen Cherewatuk says of Lancelot as a father, "In creating Lancelot, Malory had to fashion a character who would refrain from sex if he could but who still represents the height of masculinity."²⁵⁸ Lancelot's complicated and illicit relationship with Guinevere affects his masculinity because of his ability to have sex. He both needs to be refrain from sex and to assert his masculinity in a world where sex – and the heirs produced from sex – matter. The night with Elaine represents a slippery relationship between sex and masculinity and the overall role of Lancelot. While having Galahad should ensure that Lancelot's line is secure and will continue (even if the reader knows this is not going to happen because of Galahad's key virtue – chastity), there is shame from many fronts that tamp down what should be pride from Lancelot.

²⁵⁷ Radulescu, Raluca L., "Malory and the Quest for the Holy Grail," in *Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012) 326.

²⁵⁸ Cherewatuk, Karen, "Born-Again Virgins and Holy Bastards: Bors and Elyne and Lancelot and Galahad," *Arthuriana* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 56.

Additionally, Galahad's ability to do what Lancelot cannot simultaneously emasculates and masculinizes Lancelot. He is emasculated through his own failure to pull the sword from the stone, making it known that something has happened to knock him down from his previous position of "best" knight. He has been bested; however, his besting comes from his own son, clearly indicating that Lancelot has done something right. Galahad might not now be the ultimate knight if he were not the son of Lancelot.

The reader already knows that Lancelot has been surpassed when he admits that he is unable to pull the sword from the floating stone, a sword which reads "Never shall man take me hence but only he by whose side I ought to hang; and he shall be the best knight of the world."²⁵⁹ Lancelot states to Arthur that he is not the one to pull the sword. But it is when the lady on the palfrey arrives that it is explicitly told to Lancelot. The exchange between the lady and Lancelot clearly defines the secular and sacred boundaries of Lancelot:

'Sir, I say you sooth,' said the damosel, 'for ye were this day in the morn the best knight of the world; but who should say so now, he should be a liar, for there is no one better than ye be. And well it is proved by the adventure of the sword whereto ye durst not set to your hand – and that is the change of your name, and leaving. Wherefore I made unto you a remembrance, that ye shall not ween from henceforth that ye be the best knight of the world.'

'As touching unto that,' said Lancelot, 'I know well I was never none of the best.' 'Yes,' said the damosel, 'that were ye, are yet, of any sinful man of the world.'²⁶⁰

The implication here is clear – of sinful men, Lancelot is the best; but with the appearance of the Grail and Galahad as the Grail knight, there is now someone who transcends sin and must take on the role of the best.

Galahad's entrance into the story, very similar to his entrance into the *Queste* and the Arthurian tradition as a whole, presents the reader with the knight that all should strive to be. Reminiscent of Arthur himself, Galahad's conception is due to supernatural interference and deceit. Lancelot only sleeps with Elaine because he believes her to be Guinevere, just as Igraine only sleeps

²⁵⁹ Malory, *Morte*, 312.

²⁶⁰ Malory, *Morte*, 315-16.

with Uther because she believes him to be her husband. This supernatural conception would also remind readers of the conception of Christ, which is also supernatural in a different way. More directly, the supernatural conception of Galahad will likely remind readers of the supernatural conception of Mordred. While not all medieval Arthurian texts write Mordred as the incestuous son of Arthur, conceived through deception, Malory does present Mordred's conception in this way. Malory writes, "And thither came unto him King Lot's wife of Orkney, in manner of a message, but she was sent thither to espy the court of King Arthur ... Wherefore the King cast great love unto her, and desired to lie by her. And so they were agreed, and he begot upon her Sir Mordred, and she was sister on the mother's side, Igraine, unto Arthur ... But all this time King Arthur knew not King Lot's wife was his sister."²⁶¹ Galahad's own supernatural conception – and his role as the pure knight that is able to achieve the Grail and redeem his father – is juxtaposed here with the conception of Mordred. Mordred will become the ultimate villain of the story, usurping his father rather than redeeming him, and ensuring the fall of Camelot.

Additionally, Galahad's entrance into Camelot mirrors Arthur's own entrance as well, with pulling a sword from a stone as a physical act to explain both his importance and his position within the narrative. Galahad is clearly presented as this new "best" knight, but not necessarily in physical prowess. Lancelot has clearly shown his own superior physical ability throughout the narrative; and while Galahad himself achieves victory in his own battles, these are not as numerous as the battles of Lancelot. Perhaps more importantly, though, physical battle does not seem to be Galahad's purpose within the Arthurian world. What the reader encounters, then, is a shift from the physical to the spiritual, from the secular to the sacred. Lancelot can retain his status in the secular world but must give up this status once the Grail is introduced and the narrative begins to delve more heavily in the sacred. The sacred is Galahad's domain, one that he navigates more effectively than any other knight. The introduction of the Grail legend into the narrative and the subtle shift from the secular to the sacred,

²⁶¹ Malory, *Morte*, 21.

manifested in Galahad, allow Malory the opportunity to explore the sacred and the secular together.

One specific instance in the narrative that merges the sacred and the secular is when Lancelot is at King Pellès' castle after having rescued a lady and slain a dragon, and "there came in a damosel passing fair and young, and she bore a vessel of gold betwixt her hands."²⁶² Lancelot and the reader have now both encountered the Grail for the first time. It is that very night that Lancelot and Elaine conceive Galahad, fulfilling the prophet of the Hermit that the one who will sit in the Siege Perilous and win the Grail will be born that very year. Charles W. Whitworth writes, "The Grail quest is for Malory a chivalric quest as well as a spiritual one; that the sacred and the secular aspects of it are not mutually exclusive, and that the two were fused in Malory's conception of ideal knighthood."²⁶³ While Malory clearly sees the sacred and secular as coexisting, I argue that he is unable to truly maintain this throughout the quest section of *Morte*. Their merging happens on the night of Galahad's conception – the Grail appears, the epitome of the sacred, and then Lancelot essentially betrays Guinevere with Elaine, an act rooted in the secular. Yet that secular act produces the knight who will fulfill the sacred space. As much as he tries, Malory is not completely able to do more than show Lancelot as the secular knight that goes on a sacred quest and show Galahad as the sacred knight that exists within the secular world. While the worlds are coexisting, they remain mutually exclusive.

The tension between the sacred and the secular as portrayed by Lancelot and Galahad indicates to the reader that Malory both acknowledges the differences between an earthly chivalry and a heavenly chivalry and places emphasis on an earthly chivalry through his elevation of Lancelot. With his source material being the French *Queste*, Malory is unable to completely change the narrative here; what he is able to do – and what he successfully does – is ensure that the reader's focus will always be on the earthly chivalry of Lancelot, even when Galahad and the other Grail knights are inhabiting the

²⁶² Malory, *Morte*, 283.

²⁶³ Whitworth, Charles W., "The Sacred and the Secular in Malory's 'Tale of the Sankgreal'," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 5 (1975): 20.

textual space.²⁶⁴ Radulescu states, “Malory subordinates religious values to chivalric ones so that a great proportion of the Grail events are inevitably seen through (and measured against) worldly, chivalric perspective.”²⁶⁵ The entire narrative of the *Morte* up to this point has been focused on worldly chivalry, embodied in the Pentecostal Oath. The relationship of knights to women and the specific quests that they go on and battles that they encounter are directly related back to that Oath. The Grail quest is different, as it is meant to be very specifically based upon a type of heavenly chivalry, dependent upon religious values. As the ultimate quest, the Grail itself represents the best of the best, which clearly becomes embodied by Galahad. Lancelot, however, needs to be involved in this quest as the focal knight of Malory. What Malory is able to do is situate Lancelot in the narrative, subjugating Galahad to him even as Galahad is clearly shown to embody all of the virtues and values needed to achieve the Grail.

The reader knows that Galahad is the embodiment of heavenly chivalry, yet Malory continues to insert and reaffirm this throughout the narrative. In Galahad’s first Grail section, the connection of Galahad to Joseph of Arimathea is reasserted through the introduction of the shield that only the most worthy – Galahad – is able to wear. Of the shield, it is told that Joseph stated, “And never shall man bear this shield about his neck but he shall repent it, unto the time that Galahad, the good knight, bear it, and, last of my lineage, have it about his neck, that shall do many marvelous deeds.”²⁶⁶ The heavenly chivalric of Galahad is made clear in more than way; first and foremost, this shield, meant to be a reminder of Christ, is meant only for Galahad, as he is the best knight. Second, Joseph has already prophesied that Galahad will be the end of his lineage, alluding to the chaste nature of Galahad and his ability to achieve “marvelous deeds” because of his abstinence.

The episode in which Galahad receives the shield seems to be in direct contrast to Lancelot’s

²⁶⁴ There have already been studies done on the comparisons/contrasts between Malory’s Grail version and that of the *Queste*, so I will not go into specific detail here about the differences that Malory is able to make. For further reading on this, please see Radulescu’s “Malory and the Quest for the Holy Grail” (*Companion to Arthurian Literature*) and Armstrong’s *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory’s Morte d’Arthur*.

²⁶⁵ Radulescu, “Malory and the Quest for the Holy Grail,” 327-28.

²⁶⁶ Malory, *Morte*, 323.

first episode on the Grail quest when he sleeps outside the chapel and has a dream of the Grail. When a voice tells Lancelot to leave the quest, Lancelot is despondent and says:

‘My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonor. For when I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires, I ever achieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfited in no quarrel, were it right, were it wrong. And now I take upon me the adventures to seek of holy things, now I see and understand that my old sin hindereth me and shameth me, that I had no power to stir nor speak when the holy blood appeared before me.’²⁶⁷

In a direct contrast to the heavenly chivalric of Galahad that the reader has just encountered, here Lancelot is clearly lamenting his own focus on a more earthly chivalry. He was clearly the best knight in that chivalric realm, but it is not enough to allow him a chance at the Grail. There is a clear boundary set between him and the quest, with the acknowledgment that he can participate in the quest but will never achieve the Grail. Yet, the reader is likely to sympathize more with Lancelot than Galahad. The human aspect of Lancelot that shows his mistakes and flaws is more relatable to readers, contemporary and modern. The conclusion is inevitable – it will be Galahad that will achieve the Grail. Yet it is Lancelot that the reader is drawn to and wants to follow on this adventure. Malory has clearly orchestrated this version of Lancelot and Galahad, drawing on the tensions that have existed between the secular and the sacred throughout the whole Arthurian narrative to this point. Malory skillfully uses his source material to present Lancelot in a positive light even though he still must present Lancelot as the flawed character that he is and Galahad as the superior knight that will achieve the Grail. Lancelot is not a failure in Malory’s version of the Grail quest – he is not exactly a success either, but there are moments of success that cannot be ignored.²⁶⁸

Lancelot’s presence on the Grail quest is an indication of the importance that is placed on him as a knight. While Malory is writing mostly from other sources – specifically the *Queste* for the Grail quest – he is very clear to include episodes that at least somewhat uphold Lancelot as a successful

²⁶⁷ Malory, *Morte*, 331.

²⁶⁸ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 145-6. Here Armstrong goes into more detail about Lancelot and Galahad and the tension between earthly and heavenly chivalry.

knight on the quest. When Lancelot leaves Percival, he finds a chapel and falls asleep. In a dream-like state, Lancelot sees that a wounded knight has come across the chapel as well. Here Lancelot encounters the grail: "So with that Sir Lancelot saw the candlestick with the six tapers come before the cross, and he saw nobody that brought it. Also there came a table of silver, and the holy vessel of the Sangrail, which Sir Lancelot had seen beforetime in King Pecheur's house."²⁶⁹ While he is unable to achieve the Grail, and in fact feels shame upon seeing it because of his sin, the glimpse that he is once again allowed to have of the Grail would indicate to the reader that he is important and, to some extent, successful.

The ways in which the secular and the sacred merge immediately become clear again here with Lancelot. The monk he meets tells him:

Ye ought to thank God more than any knight living, for He hath caused you to have more worldly worship than any knight that is now living. And for your presumption to take upon you in deadly sin for to be in His presence where His flesh and His blood was, which caused you ye might not see it with your worldly eyes: for He will not appear where such sinners be, but if it be unto their great hurt or unto their shame. And there is no knight now living that ought to yield God so great thanks as ye, for He hath given you beauty, bounty, seemliness, and great strength over all the other knights. And therefore ye are the more beholden unto God than any other man, to love Him and dread Him, for your strength and your manhood will little avail you and God be against you.²⁷⁰

While earthly and heavenly chivalry might not be completely in sync, it is clear from this passage that God is not against earthly chivalry. In fact, it is from God that Lancelot was able to embrace his own earthly chivalric values and become the best knight. This was not necessarily against God, as it was gifted to him from God. The disconnect happens, however, when Lancelot is unable to bridge the gap between the two and work within the realm of both types of chivalry.

What Lancelot is able to do is "provide a 'link' between the realms of the secular and the spiritual."²⁷¹ Lancelot cannot bridge the gap between the two worlds, but he is who has made it possible for other knights to embark upon the quest and to, eventually, achieve the Grail. What Malory is able to

²⁶⁹ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 330.

²⁷⁰ Malory, *Morte*, 332.

²⁷¹ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 151

tease out and make clear in a way that was not explicitly (or implicitly) done in the *Queste* is that Lancelot's importance cannot be understated. He is a hero of this story because of what he is able to put into action for the achievement of the Grail. It is his familial line that is necessary, and that happens through the conception of Galahad. Lancelot's type of earthly chivalry, including his mistakes and downfalls, are what pave the way for Galahad to enter into the scene and become the premier Grail knight. Lancelot gives the Arthurian world the one knight who is able to fulfill the most important quest of the narrative.

A key difference between Malory's treatment of Lancelot and the *Queste's* treatment of Lancelot is in the scenes where he confesses to and receives advice from hermits. While Malory does include many of the interruptions from the hermits from the *Queste*, the slight changes that he makes to these episodes aide him in continuing to uphold Lancelot as an emblem of earthly chivalry that should be admired. In Malory, upon waking from his dream-like state of seeing the wounded knight healed by the Grail, Lancelot proclaims,

'My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonour. For when I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires, I ever achieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfited in no quarrel, were it right, were it wrong. And now I take upon me the adventures to seek of holy things, now I see and understand that my old sin hidereth me and shameth me, that I had no power to stir nor speak when the holy blood appeared before me.'²⁷²

This speech can be compared to its counterpart in the *Queste*: "'From the moment I was knighted, I was covered with the darkness of mortal sin, for I, more than any other, immediately succumbed to debauchery and worldly abjection.'"²⁷³ The difference is subtle, but important. The author of the *Queste* makes a direct reference back to Lancelot meeting Guinevere for the first time. His introduction to the Queen, which happened on the same day that he was knighted, was the moment that he fell in love with her, beginning his downward spiral from the chivalric values he originally held. Acknowledging that his sin began "the moment I was knighted" reminds the reader that his sin is completely connected to

²⁷² Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 331.

²⁷³ *Queste*, 40.

his relationship with Guinevere. Malory, on the other hand, does not reference a direct link back to Guinevere. Lancelot acknowledges that sin and wickedness have dishonored him and that he sought worldly adventures for worldly desires, but this does not necessarily mean Guinevere, or at least it does not necessarily mean that his sin is solely because of her. His worldly desires could just as easily be the desire for earthly fame, rather than a duty to God.

There are slight, but important, differences in Lancelot's confession to the hermit as well.

Lancelot in the *Queste* says,

'I have fallen into mortal sin because of a lady whom I have loved all my life. She's Queen Guenevere, King Arthur's wife. She's the one who generously gave me the gold, silver, and rich gifts that I once distributed to poor knights. She's the one who elevated me to the luxury and high position I now enjoy. It's because of her love that I undertook the great feats of prowess everyone recounts about me. Because of her I went from rags to riches and from misfortune to enjoying all the good things in life. But I realize that Our Lord is fiercely angry with me because of this sin, as he demonstrated clearly last night.'²⁷⁴

Malory presents the following confession:

And then he told there the good man all his life, and how he had loved a queen unmeasurably and out of measure long. 'And all my great deeds of arms that I have done, for the most part was for the queen's sake, and for her sake would I do battle were it right or wrong; and never did I battle all only for God's sake, but for to win worship and to cause me the better to be beloved, and little or nought I thanked never God of it.'²⁷⁵

Perhaps the most striking difference in these two confessions is that Malory's Lancelot never specifically names Guinevere. Helen Cooper's note on this omission reminds the reader that part of penitence is to confess your own sins, not to name others in your confession. However, the omission of Guinevere's name also serves to foreshadow what Malory seems to blame for the fall of Arthur and his court – it is not the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere that is the catalyst; rather, it is the exposure of the relationship.

The other important distinction between these two confessions is the reference, or lack

²⁷⁴ *Queste*, 42.

²⁷⁵ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 332.

thereof, to God. Lancelot of the *Queste* makes it clear that everything he did was done for Guinevere. There is no mention of God as a reason for his desire to show himself a worthy knight. By omitting God from his reason, the author of the *Queste* makes it clear that Lancelot's sin has completely overtaken all areas of his life, including any devotion to God or duty to God that he had. Malory's Lancelot, however, does mention God, but acknowledges that "for the most part" his deeds were for the Queen's sake and that he never battled "only for God's sake." Malory allows the reader to believe that Lancelot did still acknowledge God as part of the reason for his prowess, even if it was only in small part. He shows Lancelot as somewhat in God's service, enabling him to remain, at least partially, heroic to the reader.

Finally, the hermit's advice to Lancelot also has a very small, but very distinct, difference between the two texts. The *Queste's* hermit says, "Advice will be of no help to you unless you promise God that you will not repeat this sin. But if you want to extricate yourself completely and beg his mercy with repentance in your heart, I believe Our Lord will call you back among his servants and open the gates of heaven, where eternal life awaits."²⁷⁶ Malory's hermit gives advice that is much more to the point, saying, "Ye shall assure me by your knighthood that ye shall no more come in that queen's fellowship as much as ye may forbear."²⁷⁷ The hermit in the *Queste* is very clear that Lancelot absolutely should not repeat his sin and should "extricate" himself all together. This explicit advice indicates that Lancelot should not, in any way, see Guinevere again. Additionally, the *Queste's* hermit places emphasis on the result of staying away from Guinevere, which is the full return of God's love and mercy. Malory's hermit is not quite so explicit. He advises Lancelot to stay away from the Queen as much as it is possible for him to do so, allowing for there to be some leeway in Lancelot's continuing interaction with her. This hermit also does not mention God in this advice, so there is not a connection given between Lancelot's ability to return to God's grace and his refusal to continue the affair with Guinevere.

²⁷⁶ *Queste*, 42-43.

²⁷⁷ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 332.

The narrative of separation of Lancelot from heavenly chivalry is continued in his second Grail episode. When encountering the white and black knights in a tournament, Lancelot chooses to help the black knights who are losing “in increasing of his chivalry.”²⁷⁸ The reader sees Lancelot attempting to act chivalrous, as he had promised to do after his conversation with the hermit. However, this battle he enters – and loses – is symbolic of a spiritual battle, and once again, Lancelot has chosen the wrong side. He soon learns that the covering of the black knights “betokeneth the sins whereof they be not confessed. And they with the covering of white betokeneth virginity, and they that hath chosen chastity.”²⁷⁹ Lancelot has been so firmly set in his earthly chivalric that he is unable to escape it even when he is attempting to enact a chivalry that is meant to help others. However, what this episode makes clear to the reader is that there is a very significant part of this division between the earthly and the heavenly that Lancelot cannot overcome – chastity. Not only is Lancelot not a virgin; he is also not chaste. Perhaps his night with Elaine could be overcome, as he was clearly under a type of spell when he slept with her. Unfortunately for Lancelot, it is not just the act of sex that is keeping him from achieving this heavenly chivalry that is needed to achieve the Grail. Lancelot was able to be seduced and tricked by Elaine because he believed her to be Guinevere. He was not just engaging in a sexual act – he was doing so with who he believed to be the wife of his king. Lancelot’s relationship with Guinevere, not his act of sex with Elaine, is what renders him unchaste.

Virginity becomes a focal point of the Grail quest, allowing Malory to further delve into the tensions that are present in the Arthurian narrative not only between the sacred and the secular, but also in the way in which masculinity fits into both. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, sex matters to the way in which masculinity is expressed both in the sacred and the secular. Just as the act of sex promotes masculinity for the secular, the lack of sex and the way in which control is established in other areas promotes masculinity for the sacred. Virginity’s role in the *Morte* is clearly established for Malory

²⁷⁸ Malory, *Morte*, 348.

²⁷⁹ Malory, *Morte*, 349.

through the centuries-old narrative. The three Grail knights – Bors, Percival, and Galahad – embody chastity in different ways. Bors is the only one of the three who is not actually a virgin, though the tale makes it clear that he should be treated as a virgin. Unlike Lancelot’s own tales, where it is explicitly told about his indiscretions, the episode of Bors’ loss of virginity is only briefly mentioned when Malory writes, “And this good man found him in so marvellous a life and so stable that he felt he was never greatly corrupt in fleshly lusts, but in one time that he begat Helian le Blanc.”²⁸⁰ The reader knows that Bors is not a virgin, but he leads a chaste life. The chastity of Bors seems to be the biggest difference between him and Lancelot and likely the reason that Bors is able to continue on the Grail quest and go to Sarras with Galahad and Percival.

Percival does remain a virgin, but what the reader sees with him is a temptation to have sex and the need to physically wound himself as a reminder not to have sex in the future. Percival is only able to stop himself from losing his virginity when he sees the cross on his sword, a reminder of his promise and of his chastity. After stabbing himself in the thigh, Percival states, “Wretch of all wretches, how nigh I was lost, and to have lost that I should never have gotten again, that was my virginity, for that may never be recovered after it is once lost.”²⁸¹ Percival here laments the potential loss of virginity, as it is not something that can be regained. The temptation of Percival and the potential loss of virginity show how easy it is to lose and impossible to regain. The key difference, however, between Galahad and Percival is that Percival is tempted. While Galahad is the ultimate chaste knight, it is not because he does more than Percival to resist temptation. Galahad simply is – he is chaste, he is virginal, he is the most pure knight. This is not disputed within the narrative by other knights, as it is, in fact, stated multiple times. But it is also not disputed with any kind of action. At no point is Galahad seen having to remove himself from a tempting situation or actively keeping his virginity. Rather, the reader comes into the narrative knowing that Galahad is pure and this knowledge never waivers and is never

²⁸⁰ Malory, *Morte*, 357.

²⁸¹ Malory, *Morte*, 344.

challenged.

It is the non-challenge of Galahad's chastity that Malory seems to focus on by way of describing and discussing the other knights. Lancelot is heroic because he is flawed, while Galahad is heroic because he is supposed to be. Masculinity for the secular knight is closely tied with the act of sex. On a sacred quest, this act of sex becomes complicated and convoluted, but it serves a purpose – the Arthurian world is able to have their perfect knight, Galahad, because of Lancelot's act of sex. The reader is unable to relate to Galahad because he is not flawed; Lancelot is accessible to the reader because he sins and is redeemed. He continues to embark on a life free from sin but is unable to accomplish this act. Modern and contemporary readers are able to be both sympathetic and empathetic to Lancelot in a way that is not possible with Galahad.

The culmination of the Grail quest for Lancelot and for the three Grail knights is the final juxtaposition of the sacred and the secular within this specific Arthurian narrative. Lancelot, our secular knight, encounters a sealed chamber and prays to God for it to open. His prayer is important, as he says, "Fair sweet Father, Jesu Christ, if ever I did thing that pleased Thee, Lord, for Thy pity have me not in despite for my sins done beforetime, and that Thou show me something of that I seek."²⁸² The door opens to Lancelot and he is able to view the Grail. His prayer was answered, as he was able to view what he has sought. More importantly, his prayer invokes God to answer it if Lancelot has done anything to please Him. What specifically Lancelot has done to please God is not necessarily known, but it is clear that even through his sin, Lancelot has not totally fallen from God. He has been redeemed in some way, even if that is likely through the birth of Galahad. Lancelot might be the secular knight, only ever able to fully embrace an earthly chivalry, but he is not so far removed from the sacred that God denies him. Here Malory seems to acknowledge very clearly that the sacred and the secular have a relationship, fraught and tenuous as it may be. And Lancelot is the embodiment of that relationship.

The fates of our three Grail knights, all different, seem to correlate with the level of purity that

²⁸² Malory, *Morte*, 391.

each maintains. Galahad, kneeling before the Grail, “so suddenly departed his soul to Jesu Christ, and a great multitude of angels bore it up to heaven in the sight of his two fellows.”²⁸³ Galahad, after achieving his quest, is essentially lifted to Heaven, with no human death befalling him. Again, reminiscent of Christ, is the departed soul and body being carried to Heaven, signaling his virtuous and pure state. Percival and Bors go to a hermitage, where Percival takes on religious clothing, but Bors does not. Two years later, Percival dies and Bors goes back to Camelot to tell Arthur and the other knights of the Round Table of their Grail adventure. As a chaste knight, though not quite as inherently pure as Galahad, Percival is allowed to die as a religious figure in the hermitage. Bors, the only non-virgin Grail knight, returns to the secular world to tell the tale. Yet what all three are able to do that Lancelot is not is be with the Grail for a year.

The Grail quest invokes the sacred world and reminds the knights of their allegiance to God as well as their allegiance to their king. However, once the Grail quest is over, never to be embarked upon again, the sacred world seems to disappear from the narrative, with the more secular world of Camelot, and the focus again on Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship, as the focal point of the narrative. This secular world with a focus on this very specific secular relationship cannot be sustained. The Round Table, a representation of the body chivalric of Arthur and his court, will fall and, with it, the last semblance of a shared masculinity. Lancelot, for example, immediately forgets his own promise of living a more Christian life as the sacredness of the Grail fades from memory and is far removed from his life back at Camelot. Malory says, “Sir Lancelot began to resort unto Queen Guinivere again, and forgot the promise and the perfection that he made in the quest. For, as the book saith, had not Sir Lancelot been in his privy thoughts and in his mind so set inwardly to the Queen as he was in seeming outward to God, there had no knight passed him in the quest of the Sangrail, but ever his thoughts were privily on the Queen.”²⁸⁴ Here Malory makes it clear that Lancelot cannot ever be free from his love for Guinevere.

²⁸³ Malory, *Morte*, 401.

²⁸⁴ Malory, *Morte*, 403.

The sacred world of the Grail cannot be sustained in the secular world of romantic love, and Lancelot and Guinevere are the primary example of this separation.

The episode of Lancelot, Guinevere, and Meliagaunt, adopted from Chrétien's "Knight of the Cart," signifies the end of the Round Table, and Camelot as a whole, as it is this point where Lancelot's affair with Guinevere directly affects the fellowship that keeps the knights of the Round Table together – the Pentecostal Oath. Lancelot's cut hand leaves blood in Guinevere's bed, clearly leaving evidence that someone has spent the night in her bed. Meliagaunt's response to this is outrage:

'Ha, madam, now I have found you a false traitress unto my lord Arthur; for now I prove well it was not for nought that ye laid these wounded knights within the bounds of your chamber, therefore I will call you of treason before my lord King Arthur. And now I have proved you, madam, with a shameful deed; and that they be all false, or some of them, I will make it good, if for a wounded knight this night hath lain by you.'²⁸⁵

Meliagant is boldly accusing the Queen of having an affair with one of the wounded knights; while the specifics are not exactly true – it was not one of the knights that was housed along with Guinevere that stayed in her room – the overall nature of his accusation is indeed true. Guinevere has been unfaithful to Arthur, and it did happen with a wounded knight. When Lancelot agrees to the duel with Meliagaunt, he is clearly violating the section of the Pentecostal Oath that states the knights should not enter into a wrongful battle for love. While Lancelot's fight with Meliagaunt is not the specific instance that brings down the Round Table, it clearly indicates the broken nature of the fellowship, especially with Lancelot. Lancelot agreeing to fight Meliagaunt on the Queen's behalf, even when he knows that he is wrong and that what the Queen is being accused of is true, shows that Lancelot's loyalty is not to his King or to his fellow knights – it is to his love for Guinevere. As this unchaste love has already been the reason for many of Lancelot's failures, most specifically his failure in truly being a Grail knight, the reader is being prepared for the eventual downfall of Camelot due to this affair.

Malory must, at some point, reconcile Lancelot's sin with Guinevere with the idea of Lancelot as the heroic knight. The reader is meant to sympathize with Lancelot, but this can only happen if

²⁸⁵ Malory, *Morte*, 454.

Lancelot can, in some way, be redeemed. While this redemption should have happened on the Grail quest, especially with the conversations that Lancelot has with the hermits and his own confessions, it is not fulfilled. Lancelot again begins his relationship with Guinevere after his return to Camelot. Malory is clear about the night that Lancelot spends with Guinevere: “So, to pass upon this tale, Sir Lancelot went to bed with the Queen and took no force of his hurt hand, but took his pleasance and his liking until it was the dawning of the day; for wit you well, he slept not, but watched.”²⁸⁶ Despite the warning he received from the hermit, Lancelot has again forgotten his promise to stay away from Guinevere. With this clear instance of adultery after Lancelot’s previous confession, Malory must somehow reassert Lancelot as the best knight, in deed as well as in prowess. The healing of Sir Urry allows Malory to continue to bolster Lancelot as the heroic knight. Sir Urry has seven wounds – three on his head, three on his body, and one on his left hand. A sorceress has ensured that “ever his wounds should one time fester and another time bleed, so that he should never be whole until the best knight of the world had searched his wounds.”²⁸⁷ Malory here actually lists out the knights of the Round Table that are still at Camelot – one hundred and ten of them – that come to Sir Urry and attempt to heal him. Of course, none of them are able to do so.

Lancelot arrives and is asked by Arthur to attempt to heal Sir Urry. Interestingly, Malory does make it a point to show Lancelot’s reluctance to try. Lancelot very clearly does not feel as though he is the “best knight” to heal Sir Urry. When first asked, Lancelot says, ““Jesu defend me ... while so many noble kings and knights have failed, that I should presume upon me to achieve that all ye, my lords, might not achieve.””²⁸⁸ Lancelot is aware of his shortcomings as a knight and assumes that it will not be possible for him to best every other king and knight that has tried. Additionally, he likely knows that his failure will not only shame him in front of his King, but it will also alert Arthur to something being amiss. Even though Galahad had previously taken over Lancelot’s role as the best knight in the kingdom, his

²⁸⁶ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 453.

²⁸⁷ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 460.

²⁸⁸ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 465.

achievement of the Grail resulted in being brought to Heaven. Galahad's earthly departure should have reverted Lancelot back to his prior status. Lancelot knows that to fail at this would be to give Arthur an indication that something has happened, even if Arthur is not, at that time, fully aware of the significance of Lancelot's transgression. However, when Lancelot approaches Sir Urry, he is able to heal him:

And then Sir Lancelot prayed Sir Urry to let him see his head. And then, devoutly kneeling, he ransacked the three wounds that they bled a little; and forthwith the wounds fair healed, and seemd as they had been whole seven years. And in like wise he searched his body of other three wounds, and they healed in like wise. And then the last of all he searched his hand, and anon it fair healed. Then King Arthur and all the kings and knights kneeled down and gave thankings and loving unto God and unto His blessed Mother.²⁸⁹

Lancelot's ability to heal the knight reaffirms his status within the chivalric world, especially since this ability seemingly came from God, as Lancelot prayed before the attempt.

Although Malory attributes the character of Sir Urry to a French book, there is no known source for this episode. Additionally, the placement of this episode seems unlikely for a French source, as it is clearly meant to reaffirm the heroic status of Lancelot even after his night alone with Guinevere. Helen Cooper explains, "Malory's interjection at this point of Lancelot's own personal miracle, immediately after his one explicit act of adultery in the whole work, makes it very clear that in his version God is not displeased with Lancelot. The Vulgate Cycle offers a much simpler moral cause-and-effect relationship between the shortcomings of earthly chivalry (as embodied in Lancelot's adultery and shown up in the Grail Quest) and the downfall of the Round Table."²⁹⁰ This departure from an emphasis on the sacred is unique to Malory and quite a divergence from his French sources. This likely self-created episode by Malory is "a sign of recognition of the importance of chivalric reputation and social values above the demands of religious doctrine."²⁹¹ The tensions between earthly and heavenly chivalry have collided and

²⁸⁹ Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 465-66.

²⁹⁰ Cooper, "Explanatory Notes," *Morte Darthur*, note 460.

²⁹¹ Radulescu, Raluca L., "'now I take uppon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges': Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood," in *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 288.

Malory has, with this episode, made it clear that it is the earthly chivalry of Lancelot that he will uphold as the highest virtue.

Additionally, the ending of this section of the *Morte* is denoted with the following: “And so I leave here of this tale, and overleap great books of Sir Lancelot, what great adventures he did when he was called le Chevalier de Chariot ... and here I go unto the morte Arthur, and that caused Sir Agravain.”²⁹² This ending is important for two reasons. First, the fault for Arthur’s death is attributed to Agravain. Rather than focusing on the adultery and betrayal of Lancelot, Malory is alluding that he will ultimately ensure that Arthur’s death and the downfall of the kingdom are due to Agravain’s plot to expose Lancelot and Guinevere. And second, the assertion that there are more of Lancelot’s adventures to be told but that he will skip past them could very well be Malory’s way of ensuring that the reader is left with the miracle of Sir Urry’s healing as the last great act by Lancelot.²⁹³ Malory has very carefully crafted the end of this section to keep Lancelot in regard for the reader, allowing Lancelot to remain the hero and for earthly chivalry to remain intact as a powerful virtue.

The exposure of the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere ultimately becomes the catalyst for the fall of Camelot and the death of Arthur, which ultimately leads to the death of the chivalric and masculine nature of the court. Lancelot’s affair pits the knights of the Round Table against one another, as some side with Arthur and some side with Lancelot. But it is the death of Gaheris and Gareth at the hands of Lancelot that ultimately severs the kingdom, as this is the moment that the Pentecostal Oath is completely broken. While rescuing the Queen, “it misfortune him to slay Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, the noble knight, for they were unarmed and unwares.”²⁹⁴ Here Lancelot breaks the Oath to not do outrage nor murder and creates an even larger divide in the Round Table, with Gawain demanding revenge on Lancelot and ensuring the end of the fellowship. Gawain’s insistence on following Lancelot for revenge results in Mordred being handed the kingdom – and ultimately the death of Arthur.

²⁹² Malory, *Morte Darthur*, 466-67.

²⁹³ Cooper, “Explanatory Notes,” *Morte Darthur*, note 467.

²⁹⁴ Malory, *Morte*, 480.

The complete breaking of the Pentecostal Oath, the chivalric code that held all of the knights together, ends the fellowship and the kingdom. The tenuous relationship between the secular and the sacred is never resolved. What Malory presents to the reader, in a work that is meant to mimic and bring together all the works that came before his, is a world in which clearly defined oaths, codes, and rules of masculinity do not work together perfectly – and, perhaps, not at all. The expectations of the knights and their behavior, as has been presented throughout the Arthurian narrative, does not allow for a happy ending, as would be suggested. Rather, these rules highlight the complex human nature of the different knights, and ultimately show that, other than Galahad, these knights are not infallible. Their narratives continue to be told because of their fallibility – their codes are a guide for all, but their stories allow readers to empathize and sympathize with them, as they are as prone to mistakes as the readers. Galahad, in his earthly and heavenly perfection, is meant to be the role model that all should strive to be, but he is presented as never being tempted and being, from the beginning, the result of the *felix culpa* of the story. It is the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot, and the ways in which that relationship affects all of the fellowship, that matters to the narrative and to the reader. And it is those relationships that highlight the continued tensions between the sacred and the secular and the role of masculinity throughout the narrative.

CONCLUSION

The Arthurian narrative of the medieval period clearly shows the ways in which masculinity, chivalry, and the secular and the sacred become both defined and undefined, followed and unfollowed, created and uncreated throughout Arthurian texts. With the final medieval Arthurian text, Malory seems to purposefully not give any kind of definitive closure to these ideals – the medieval period ends with an Arthurian text that ultimately speaks to the warring nature of the sacred and secular and the way in which masculinity fits into both. However, what this unresolved medieval narrative allowed for was a broader interpretation of the Arthurian tradition in the years and centuries to come. Chivalry and the virtues that are associated within the concepts of chivalry continue to be featured in Arthurian literature centuries after Malory's text. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, takes the work of Malory and the French Arthurian narratives and again creates a series of stories which focus on Arthur's knights and the ways in which they navigate the virtues of chivalry. The 1975 slapstick comedy *Monty Python and the*

Holy Grail uses the same issues of virtue, chivalry, masculinity, and virginity to create a surreal and ridiculous retelling of the Holy Grail quest. And while masculinity is often seen as a primary factor in medieval Arthurian tradition, even when it is challenged, this concept has changed. *Mists of Avalon* is one of the first modern works that focuses on the women of the Arthurian world, retelling the story from the women's viewpoint and focusing on their struggles within this world. This novel has paved the way for other modern works that focus on the female characters, such as the Metal and Lace series, the protagonist of which is Vivienne, an apprentice of Merlin within the world of Camelot.²⁹⁵ The changing landscape of the Arthurian tradition is a testament to the wholly unfixed nature of the original tradition. The tensions that have been present in the narrative clearly allow for medieval Arthurian literature to live on today, as well as to evolve and continue into a more modern landscape.

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, written about 100 years after the publication of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, continues to show the fascination and struggles with concepts of masculinity and chivalry. Written during a time that looks much different than the medieval world of Arthurian literature, the unanswered questions that escaped Malory appear once again in a work set in the Arthurian world. However, these questions and concepts appear in a drastically different fashion. This faerie world setting that Spenser created gives us King Arthur and his knights, but surprisingly it is not the knights and characters that readers of Arthurian literature might expect. There is no Lancelot, Galahad, Gawain, or Guinevere. Instead, Spenser creates new allegorical knights and characters that both represent specific virtues and continue to test out the concepts and questions that were found in medieval Arthurian literature. The narrative at this point has shifted. Rather than Galahad representing the sacred and heavenly chivalry, readers are introduced to Britomart, the female virgin knight that represents chastity, but within a secular world. The Redcrosse Knight, rather than Lancelot, is the heroic knight, representing holiness and searching for his own love, the character that represents truth. And

²⁹⁵ Both *Mists of Avalon* and the Metal and Lace series are written by women, also a departure from the male dominated field of medieval Arthurian literature.

even the sacred world has been changed, not necessarily by Spenser, though he represents this new sacred world, but in the time period. Queen Elizabeth had re-established the Church England after the rule of her Catholic sister, Mary, and the sacred rules and views of the Catholic Church were being directly challenged by the rise of the Protestant faith. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* encapsulates all of this, and more, once again proving that the Arthurian world is a perfect setting for cultural explorations.

The Redcrosse Knight is much like Lancelot in his deeds as the heroic, warrior knight. We see moments of Redcrosse running towards adventure, such as his entrance into the den of Errors or his decision to fight Despair. However, unlike Lancelot, the Redcrosse Knight represents Holiness. He encounters temptations and makes mistakes, but he is able to withstand and continue to uphold the virtue which he represents. When Archimago has two spirits tease the Redcrosse Knight, he first resists the temptation. After making him "dreame of loues and lustfull play, / That nigh his manly hart did melt away, / Bathed in wanton blis and wicked ioy," one of the spirits, disguised as Una, lies beside him.²⁹⁶ When the Redcrosse Knight awakes, "Lo there before his face his Lady is, / Vnder blake stole hyding her bayted hooke, / And as halfe blushing offred him to kis, / With gentle blandishment and louely looke."²⁹⁷ Where Lancelot's downfall is his desire for Guinevere, and specifically his acting upon that desire, Spenser's Redcrosse Knight is able to resist that sort of sexual temptation. However, once separated from Una, the Redcrosse Knight continues to look for her, signaling the search for truth that is necessary to maintain holiness.

In Redcrosse's search for truth and his adventures with Despair, he becomes weak and is brought to Caelia's castle. Caelia's "onely ioy was to relieue the needs / Of wretched soules, and helpe the helpless pore."²⁹⁸ With this task, she has her daughters help Redcrosse, using spiritual guidance and penance to heal him. Reminiscent of the hermits conversations with Lancelot in the *Lancelot-Grail*

²⁹⁶ Spenser, Edmund, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr (London: Penguin Books, 1987), l.i.47.

²⁹⁷ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, l.i.49.

²⁹⁸ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, l.x.3.

Cycle and Morte Darthur, Redcrosse is instructed in the Gospel, reminded of his sins, and eventually instructed in the good behavior that would ensure he does not fall back into his sin. Unlike Lancelot, however, Redcrosse heeds this advice. His search for truth is successful, and he continues to represent holiness. While Spenser is using allegory not only for virtues but also for the spiritual wars amongst the Catholic and Protestant believers, the idea that virtue could be tested is still present. Rather than succumbing to his sin as Lancelot does, Spenser provides the reader with a new “best” knight that is able to move beyond his sin and embrace both truth and holiness. Spenser’s emphasis here on the gospel indicates that, at least in his mind, there is a way to merge the secular and the sacred, by grounding the one’s self in Christ.

While the medieval tradition did clearly understand the role of women in the texts, and their importance to the overall Arthurian narrative, it is not until Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* that the narrative truly turns upon itself – the masculine focus shifts to a feminine focus and it is Britomart that becomes the virtuous, heroic knight. As the representation of chastity, Britomart takes the place of Galahad in Spenser’s Arthurian world, giving the reader a new way to value and strive towards chastity. Spenser begins Book Three by exalting the virtue, writing, “It falls me here to write of Chastity, / That fairest virtue, farre aboue the rest.”²⁹⁹ Spenser clearly describes chastity as the best of the virtues, a slight departure from medieval authors who do uphold chastity through the character of Galahad, but never explicitly state it is the best of all virtues. While chastity could be interpreted this way, as Galahad is representative of the best knight directly because of his chastity, medieval authors clearly see the juxtaposition of chastity with other virtues and the inherent issues that can arise from one attempting to hold all virtues at once (such as Gawain). However, Spenser makes it clear that chastity is to be thought of as the highest, and he chooses to give us Britomart to represent this virtue in a more secular fashion.

Britomart’s chastity is more secular than Galahad’s, as the implication from almost the

²⁹⁹ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.1.

beginning of her story is that she will eventually marry and, therefore, have sex. Yet she is still pure. Though sex might be in her future, it is not the lustful, all-consuming sex that overtakes Lancelot and Guinevere. When looking in her father's mirror, which eventually shows her the man that she will marry, Spenser writes of Britomart: "Not that she lusted after any one; / For she was pure from blame of sinfull blot."³⁰⁰ Britomart does not lust after anyone and is here called pure. In fact, the idea of lust is so far removed from Britomart that she does not immediately realize that it is love which has stricken her, as she "Yet thought it was not loue, but some melancholy."³⁰¹ Britomart has fallen in love, Spenser suggests, but it is a pure kind of love.

Not only is Britomart comparable to Galahad in chastity, she is also comparable to him as a type of savior or redeemer. While Galahad was introduced to the Arthurian narrative as a redeemer of his father, and of all of Camelot, through his ability to succeed on the Grail quest, Britomart is also a redeemer. Book Three, Canto Three, which relates the line of Britomart and Arthegall, begins with a praise of the God of love, but a distinction is made to the type of love which is being praised:

Most sacred fire, that burnst mightily
In liuing brests, ykindled first aboue,
Emongst th'eternall spheres and lamping sky,
And thence pourd into men, which men call Loue;
Not that same, which doth base affections moue
In brutish minds, and filthy lust inflame,
But that sweet fit, that doth true beautie loue,
And choseth virtue for his dearest Dame,
Whence spring all noble deeds and neuer dying fame.³⁰²

Spenser is praising is the type of love that is represented by Britomart: the sweet true love, different from love that is based in "filthy" lust. After this invocation of love, Spenser will have Merlin explain the offspring of Britomart and Arthegall and just what will be accomplished with that line, ending with this note on their offspring: "Then shall a royall virgin raine."³⁰³ Spenser is, of course, referring to Queen

³⁰⁰ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.ii.23.

³⁰¹ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.ii.27.

³⁰² Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.1.

³⁰³ Spenser, III.iii.49.

Elizabeth I. Britomart is being used not just to represent the virtue of chastity, but to legitimize the rule of the current Queen of England, in much the same way that the many medieval works use the lineage of Arthur to legitimize him as king, or the lineage of Galahad, relating back to Christ, to legitimize him as the accepted redeemer.

While *The Faerie Queene* is quite different from medieval Arthurian texts, both in its use of allegory and the lack of well-known characters present within the work, it is clear that Spenser is grappling with some of the same questions and issues as writers before him. With no clear answers given to issues of masculinity or chivalry by Malory, Spenser seemingly picks up where he has left off in an attempt to work through some of these same ideals. Spenser creates the Redcrosse Knight to be the hero in place of Lancelot, exhibiting holiness via truth in a way that was impossible for Lancelot, and Britomart as the champion of chastity, showing a new type of secular chastity that is more approachable than the sacred chastity and purity of Galahad. However, these new creations do not mean that Spenser has solved the lingering issues of masculinity and chastity within Arthurian literature. There is still the question of whether certain virtues can be exhibited at once, existing together cohesively. While Redcrosse and Britomart might be better examples of holiness and chastity, as something that readers can aspire to, they are each representing only one virtue at a time. There is no conflict between virtues, because these characters are not meant to represent more than one virtue. They can coexist together, but in different characters. This type of existence is not necessarily different than what has already been presented in medieval Arthurian literature, with Gawain being the character that shows just how unstable these characteristics are together in one representation. Arthurian literature, then, proves to be the perfect setting for exploring concepts and issues that are present within a culture, even if it is not able to answer any of the issues that arise within the different concepts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abelard, Peter. *Historia Calamitatum*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows. New York: Dover Publications, 2005.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*, trans. Michael Palma. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.
- Andrew, Malcolm and Ronald Waldron. "Glossary." In *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. Andrew and Waldron. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011.
- Archibald, Elizabeth. "Malory's Lancelot and Guenevere." In *Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2012.
- Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Barber, Richard. *The Knight and Chivalry*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1982.
- "Chivalry, Cistercianism, and the Grail." In *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover.

- Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003.
- Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates*.
New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982.
- Baumgartner, Emmanuèle. "From Lancelot to Galahad: The Stakes of Filiation." In *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Texts and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler, 14-30. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Beasley, Chris. *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.
- Bennett, M. "Military Masculinity in England and Northern France c. 1050 – c. 1225." In *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley. London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999.
- Benson, Larry D. "Courtly Love and Chivalry." In *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays*, ed. Robert F. Yeager, 237-257. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1984.
- "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes and *L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Maréchal*." In *Chivalric Literature: Essays on Relations Between Literature and Life in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1980.
- Bloch, R. Howard. *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Boase, Roger. *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*.
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Bowers, John M. *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*. Gainesville, FL. University of Florida, 2012.
- Brewer, Derek. "Armour II: The Arming Topos as Literature." In *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997.
- Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Bullough, Vern L. "On Being Male in the Middle Ages." In *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. In *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghlin Mifflin Company, 1987.
- Cherewatuk, Karen. "Born-Again Virgins and Holy Bastards: Bors and Elyne and Lancelot and Galahad." *Arthuriana* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 52-64.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Condren, Edward I. "The Paradox of Chrétien's Lancelot." *MLN* 85, no. 4 (1970): 434-453.
- Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "Introduction." *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper, vii-xxii. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "Explanatory Notes." *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper, 531-565. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Cox, Catherine S. "Genesis and Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 4 (2001): 378-390.
- de Boron, Robert. *Merlin and the Grail*, trans. Nigel Bryant. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001.
- de Troyes, Chrétien. *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Dinshaw, Carolyn. "Eunuch Hermeneutics." *ELH* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 27-51.
- Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Carol J. Chase. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010.
- Eusebius Pamphilius. *Church History*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Last modified July 13, 2005. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.xi.viii.html#fna_iii.xi.viii-p2.2.
- Farina, William. *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2010.
- Fenster, Thelma. "Preface." In *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Ferrante, Joan M. and George D. Economou. "Introduction." In *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in*

- Medieval Literature*, eds. Ferrante and Economou. Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publication, 1975.
- Goering, Joseph. *The Virgin and the Grail: Origins of a Legend*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Haught, Leah. "Fleeing the Future, Forgetting the Past: Becoming Malory's Lancelot." *Parergon* 30, no. 1 (2013): 159-177.
- Hollis, Stephanie. "The Pentangle Knight: 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'." *The Chaucer Review* 15, no. 3 (1981), 267-281.
- Holt, Andrew. "Between Warrior and Priest: The Creation of a New Masculine Identity during the Crusades." In *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- How Culhwch Won Olwen*. In *The Mabinogian*, trans. Sioned Davies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Kaeuper, Richard W. *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Kelly, Kathleen Coyne. *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Kennedy, Edward Donald. "Sir Thomas Malory's (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle." In *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004.
- La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. E. Jane Burns. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010.
- Lacy, Norris J. "Preface." In *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. Norris J. Lacy. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Lancelot*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg and Carleton W. Carroll. Cambridge: D.S.

- Brewer, 2010.
- Lewis, C.A. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951.
- Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Helen Cooper. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Matthews, William. "A Question of Texts." *Arthuriana* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 93-133.
- McInerney, Maud Burnett. "Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr." In *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999.
- Meale, Carol M. "'The Hoole Book': Editing and the Creation of Meaning in Malory's Text." In *A Companion to Malory*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, 3-17. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996.
- Mesley, Matthew. "Episcopal Authority and Gender in the Narratives of the First Crusade." In *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2013.
- Monmouth, Geoffrey of. *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Murray, Jacqueline. "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages." In *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.
- Newman, Barbara. *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.
- Putter, Ad. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Radulescu, Raluca L. "'now I take upon me the adventures to seke holy thynges'" Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood." In *Arthurian Studies in Honor of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004.

- "Malory and the Quest for the Holy Grail." In *Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012.
- Robertson, D.W. "The Concept of Courtly Love." In *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.X. Newman, 1-18. Albany: State University of New York, 1968.
- Sauer, Michelle M. *Gender in Medieval Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
- Scaglione, Aldo. *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Italian Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, 207-300. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011.
- Smith, Katherine Allen. *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*. London: Boydell Press, 2013.
- "Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250." *Speculum* 83, no. 3 (July 2008): 572-602.
- Spearing, A.C. *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- *Readings in Medieval Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- [Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. London: Penguin Books, 1978.](#)
- Talarico, Kathryn Marie. "Romancing the Grail: Fiction and Theology in the *Queste del Saint Graal*." In *Arthurian Literature and Christianity: Notes from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Meister. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "Sir Galahad." University of Rochester Library. Accessed June 5, 2018. <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-sir-galahad>.
- Thibodeaux, Jennifer D. *The Manly Priest*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Wheeler, Bonnie. "Origenary Fantasies: Abelard's Castration and Confession." In *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.
- "The Masculinity of King Arthur: From Gildas to the Nuclear Age." *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no 4.

(Winter 1992): 1-26.

Whitworth, Charles W. "The Sacred and the Secular in Malory's 'Tale of the sankgreal'." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 5 (1975): 19-29.

