

Introduction

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- Gustavus Howard Maynadier

This discussion is intended to study Arthur's various roles in Le Morte D'Arthur. **An Examination of Malory's Arthur** or **There And Back Again** During the course of its existence, Arthur's court undergoes a noteworthy metamorphosis from a society of rowdy warriors to a society tightly bound by commitments. Despite his best efforts to create a society that would outlast his own life, Arthur's society refines itself into one of the greatest works of societal existence the medieval mind could imagine, only to crumble under the weight of itself, returning to the chaotic state it had originally been.

Senior Honors Thesis

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Arthur's kingdom undergoes a vast transformation during Le Morte D'Arthur, the explanation of which relies upon a three-fold typology of Arthurian knighthood forwarded by Beverly Kennedy:

...I shall argue that the 'world' which Malory's text 'discloses' contains within it three quite different vantage points of perception. Each of these three different points of view on the Arthurian world is associated with a different 'place' or setting within that world. What is more, each of these views can also

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This discussion is intended to study Arthur's various roles in Le Morte D'Arthur. Anyone familiar with the tales of King Arthur and his Round Table knows that both he and it dwell perpetually under the shadow of their oncoming destruction. During the course of its existence, Arthur's court undergoes a noteworthy metamorphosis, from a loose amalgam of rowdy warriors to a society tightly bound by ideological commitments. Despite his best efforts to create a society that would outlast his own life, Arthur's society refines itself into one of the greatest forms of societal existence the medieval mind could imagine, only to crumble under the weight of itself, returning to the chaotic state it had originally been.

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...I shall argue that the 'world' which Malory's text 'discloses' contains within it three quite different vantage points of perception. Each of these three different points of view on the Arthurian world is associated with a different 'place' or setting within that world. What is more, each of these views can also

be related to a different type of knighthood. The point of view of the Heroic knight recalls the earliest stage of that development. He is most at home on the field of battle and, although nominally a Christian, he is also a fatalist like the warriors of the first feudal epics. On the other hand, the point of view of the Worshipful knight anticipates the latest stage of that development. He is most at home in the court of the King and, although culturally a Christian, he is also a rational pragmatist like the courtiers and princes of the early Renaissance. Finally, the point of view of the True knight reflects the middle stage of that development. He is most at home in the mysterious forests of 'adventure' or performing the sacred mode of doing justice by means of trial by battle. He is a radical Christian, a mystic and a providentialist who believes that knighthood is a 'high order' established by God to do 'true justice' in the world. (Knighthood in the Morte D'Arthur, 2-3)

Doctor Kennedy's typology accurately describes the stratification of knighthood within Le Morte; however, it is the purpose of this document, at least in part, to explore the notion that knighthood in Le Morte, and indeed Arthur's entire kingdom (the two go hand in hand, naturally), progress not as knighthood may have in reality (that is, from a Heroic to a True to a Worshipful state), but from a Heroic to Worshipful to True state.

In its broadest intent, this thesis will examine the dynamic nature of Arthur's kingdom: what it was before Arthur's arrival, what exactly were its Heroic, Worshipful and True attributes, and why and how Arthur's kingdom died when it did. More narrowly, I will examine Malory's use of Arthur as a figure within this rapidly changing society, studying Arthur's individual actions as determinants of the course of his kingdom's growth and death. The extent to which Arthur acts dynamically within his kingdom directly parallels the kingdom's aspiration to progress from a Heroic society to a True one. Of course, this effort fails.

Arthur's society never progresses past a Worshipful state. In the effort to become True, this society's most mortal weaknesses become all too apparent, and both the society and Arthur himself are broken by this failure to the extent that the kingdom can no longer preserve itself and the events which cause its destruction immediately begin to take form.

Arthur is Malory's only consistent thematic thread holding together Le Morte. However, he is more than the glue holding together Malory's masterpiece. Arthur is a figure who embodies his kingdom. Arthur's growth is his kingdom's growth; his death is the kingdom's, and only by studying his personal achievements throughout the Le Morte can we gain insight as to his importance to the dynamics of the Arthurian society. To this end, we will observe Arthur's various roles within Le Morte, as specific phases of development he will go through, from feudal chieftan to maintainer of the "Worshipful Society" to destroyer of his kingdom. Arthur's first role is, obviously enough, that of feudal chieftan, and will be this study's starting point.

Le Morte begins with a grim picture. The land is broken, the scenario a Heroic one, hardly supportive of a stable or centralized government much less a permanent, thriving society. Into this world Arthur is born, and the first chapter will examine Arthur's Heroic functions: his rise to power, reducing the land's internal disputes, cementing his personal authority, and securing the land against foreign invasion, to the extreme of conquering all possible external threats to England, including the Roman empire. At this junction, Arthur's role becomes a

Worshipful one. Realizing that a Heroic king's kingdom will more than likely die with him--the Heroic society's identity is directly derived from its leader--Arthur creates a kingdom which can outlive him. He will create an order which will perpetuate itself, and not depend entirely on Arthur's personal efforts. Arthur will become a Worshipful figure, and thus create a Worshipful society. The second chapter of this thesis will explore what exactly this Worshipful society is, how Arthur maintains it by reducing his role as a warrior and becoming more of an administrator, and why exactly the Worshipful society is unable to advance itself to True status. The third and final chapter will look closely at the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, more importantly, Arthur's return to his previous Heroic self to join in with his society's downfall. This final chapter will examine the reversion of Arthur's society, following its inability to attain True standing, to what it originally rose from, a chaotic Heroic mess.

"The trick to writing about Malory," one of my instructors told me, "is figuring out what not to write about." I hope I have not set too daunting a task before me, and if I have, let it be known that a systematic analysis of Arthur's personal actions will not only illustrate his individual progress from Heroic to Worshipful knight, but also provide a fair amount of material on the dynamics of the growth and death of Arthur's kingdom, including some explanations as to why it and, indeed, its king function in the way that they do.

(Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Volume Five, p.52). Feudalism is characterized by several

distinct elements which include the armed retainer (giving rise to a fragmentation of political authority) and, most importantly, the

**"So there com into the thycke of the prees Arthure,..."**

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As we page through the opening scenes of Le Morte D'Arthur, Malory bombards us with images of rapacious militarism, political balkanization and amoral aggressiveness. In fact, the text's very first image is of King Uther Pendragon abusing his authority in order to lie with Igrayne, wife of the Duke of Cornwall. When the Duke refuses to relinquish his wife to Uther's lusts, war ensues over who might enforce his will upon the personally defenseless Igrayne. Oddly enough, Uther's victory over the Duke and subsequent sexual endeavors with Igrayne result in the birth of Arthur, who, more than any other king, would unify his land just long enough for us to realize what is lost when the society ultimately crashes.

To better understand Arthur's specific role during the first days of his reign, we must examine the world into which he is born. The portrait of Malory's England in Le Morte is of a feudal society. Arthur's kingdom may change in purpose, mentality and mission, but it never ceases being a feudal institution. Feudalism, for the purposes of this study, and according to Malory's simplified portrayal of it, concerns itself mostly with "restraints on the power of the sovereign, the possession of public authority by private persons, and peculiar rules about the use and transfer of real estate" (Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Volume Five, p.52). Feudalism is characterized by several

distinct elements which include the armed retainer (giving rise to a fragmentation of political authority) and, most importantly, the fief.

The armed retainer was a soldier "bound to his superior by a private agreement and whose primary loyalty was to a lord who rewarded him with gifts and booty" (Dictionary of the Middle Ages, 52). An excellent example of an armed retainer would be a thane from Beowulf, Malory's Gawain, or any of Arthur's followers from the ancient Welsh tale, "Culwch and Olwen." In a feudal state, armies are comprised of such retainers, and Malory's England before Arthur is saturated with them.

A feudal society is also one of political instability and balkanization in which a lack of centralized authority (e.g., a monarchy) leads to an endless fragmentation of power into increasingly smaller units until the entire country has been covered by petty kingdoms, each hardly sufficient to support itself, much less provide stability to the rest of the land. The fief was an important link connecting the scrambled power structure of the land with the armed retainers and lords who populated it:

At the lower level the armed retainer had to have arms, armor, a place to live, and some support for his old age. Some of these retainers had small holdings of their own, but these were seldom large enough to meet all their needs. Others were originally companions in their lord's home...there were, however difficulties in such an arrangement. It must have been a nuisance to house and feed numbers of hungry, boisterous, quarrelsome fighting men year after year. Moreover, the young knight (as he was soon to be called) must have wanted to marry and to have a home of his own, an independent income, and some time to spend on his own affairs. The obvious solution was to give him a homestead, with sufficient income to support him and

his family. (Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Volume Five, 53)

The aforementioned homestead and income constitutes the fief, a grant of "an estate and the powers that went with it" to a lord's knight (or vassal, that is, holder of a fief). In return, the vassal owed his lord military service on demand. This agreement profited both parties: the vassal usually could not support himself any other way, and the lord needed dependable, loyal troops who could be called at any time, for any duration.

However, military service was not all the vassal owed his lord:

The vassal was required to attend the lord's court, which was both a court of justice and an administrative council. He also owed monetary contributions when his lord faced an emergency or a great expense. (Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Volume Five, 53)

Each lord, in turn, either enjoyed independence (as often was the case in this environment) or was a vassal himself to the king. In feudal England and Germany, where kingship still retained some power, most lords were required to become the king's vassals, but were still given much more autonomy than a knight would be given by his lord. Vassalage between lords and the king was, instead, "more like a nonaggression pact."

The feudalism Malory describes in Le Morte has its quirks--rarely, if ever, did a feudal king gain as much authority as Arthur does--but otherwise is an accurate, if simple account of what this kind of society was like. Malory's portrayal of feudal society illustrates a chaotic time, one in which fighting men had their loyalties (vassalage) bought by the plunder of their lord's campaigns and where political authority had the potential



lifespan of a mayfly, often cut short by a quick sword at the first sign of weakness.

Similarly, Uther Pendragon's England is, as Beverly Kennedy would have described it, a "Heroic environment." Kennedy describes the kind of knight who populates such a scenario:

The qualities admired and cultivated by the Heroic type of knight are those of a man who expects to spend most of his life fighting. Along with loyalty to his lord, his most important virtues are courage, or boldness, and prowess, which includes both strength and skill in the handling of weapons. (Knighthood In Le Morte D'Arthur, 83)

The Heroic environment is similar to the setting one might find in the sixth-century Arthurian tale, "Culwch and Olwen," where the stronger take by force what they desire from the weaker, where men are born, live and die by the sword, where petty warlords use what military clout they have to destroy their enemies and bolster their usually short-lived existence, and where knights (applied here as a euphemism, given the modern conception of the term "knight") use any means, amoral or otherwise, to pursue their goals and lusts. Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan offers an allegory pertinent to the kind of life offered by a Heroic state:

[In a state of nature] there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain...no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Feudalism and Heroism, at least in Le Morte, go hand in hand. Many feudal obligations mirror Heroic ones, and indeed the Heroic attitude finds a comfortable home within a feudalistic

context. Whereas feudalism provides the system of government found within the covers of Le Morte, Heroism is the mindset which makes the characteristics of feudal life more disruptive than constructive to society, be it fictional or real.

Uther's aforementioned desire for Igrayne typifies the Heroic environment. The older Pendragon lets his sexual desire subject his armed retainers to further and unnecessary risk by going to war to satisfy his libido, laying siege to the justifiably recalcitrant Duke of Cornwall:

So his wyf Dame Igrayne he putte in the castell of Tyntagil, and hymself in the castel of Terrabyl, the whiche had many yssues and posternes oute. Thenne in all haste came Uther with a grete hoost and leyde a syege aboute the castel of Terrabil, and ther he pyght many pavelyons. And there was grete warre made on bothe partyes and moche peple slayne. (Works, 3)

Uther's conduct implies a gross misuse of his power--in an age of constant warfare, how does a king justify going to war over this sexual appetite? However, Uther's behavior is not portrayed as wrong or even peculiar. Without a moral matrix imposed on their patchwork society, men like Uther represent the apex of personal Heroic achievement and are therefore held with great reverence by their Heroic peers.

While Heroic figures are often great warriors and able feudal leaders who bring temporary peace through arms, they unfortunately tend to follow their uncurbed passions, which lead them to blatantly amoral actions.<sup>1</sup> Just as certain Heroic misconduct can bring rewards, it can as easily provoke disaster--

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<sup>1</sup>Even after Arthur's kingdom has been set up, Heroic figures such as Gawain and Mordred continue to act with the same recklessness which typifies Heroic behavior.

Uther's slaying of the Duke of Cornwall wins him Igrayne, but also incites a counterattack, though ultimately ineffective, by the Duke's men that could have as easily succeeded:

Soe this was done as they devysed. but the duke of Tyntigail aspyed the kyng rode fro the syege of Tarabil. And therfor that nyghte he yssued oute of the castel at a posterne for to have distressid the kynges hooste, and so thorowe his owne yssue the duke hymself was slayne or ever the kyng cam at the castel of Tyntigail. (Works, 5)

The lack of a centralized power structure in Malory's early books, much like sixth- and seventh-century Britain, and ninth- and tenth-century feudal Europe, allows for severe political balkanization in which various feudal lords can establish military autonomy, as seen by the chaos which England falls into after Uther's death. Such independent warlords must preserve their autonomy militarily, against ancient tribal enemies and weak neighbors, capturing enough money and goods to fund one's own kingdom. Such warlords must gather enough strength to eliminate nearby political/military threats; and they must deter by a show of force (e.g., raiding and a display of plunder) other kingdoms from attacking. In this unstable climate where domestic, as well as foreign invasion appears equally imminent, a kingdom can not simultaneously defeat all of its rivals and must keep them at bay by other means.

These mechanisms used to achieve political stability adhere to no outstanding moral code or principle. All action is Heroic, as the situation demands, offering little or no consideration to the ethical after effects of one's deeds. Hence, such knights, perhaps more aptly described as Beowulfian thanes, and the kings

who lead them by personifying the kind of behavior the knights are expected to follow can at best create a regime acutely vulnerable to the Heroic shortcomings and downfalls which fracture any kingdom's solvency (e.g., lust, blood feuds, hotheadedness). Additionally, such Heroic kingdoms can only be as great as the men who lead them. Heroic knights attach their identity to their leader and his deeds, all too often dying with them. The Heroic world which opens Le Morte is one without any moral network and is too volatile to offer anything better than highly transient political and social security. It is the world into which Arthur is born.

Arthur's unique and rapid rise to power defies Heroic principle and the basic reality of feudalism as well, undercutting his legitimacy as ruler of England. We must remember that Arthur receives his authority without ever having ridden into battle, much less earned recognition from his military peers. Arthur is a squire when he becomes king, given power by high and various forms of authority. Uther passes his political authority, while on his deathbed, to his son Arthur, which might reasonably solidify Arthur's political future in a fifteenth-century monarchical Europe. But in the chaotic, feudal England of Le Morte, Uther's "swearing in" of Arthur will hardly be sufficient to guarantee his rule:

Thenne Uther Pendragon torned hym and said in herynge of them alle,

'I gyve hym Gods blissyng and myne, and byd hym pray for my soule, and righteously and worshipfully that he clayme the crowne upon forfeiture of my blessing,' and therwyth he yelde up the ghost. (Works, 7)

Arthur's kingship is significantly justified, however, by his encounter with a sword-impaled stone and anvil mysteriously found in the churchyard of "the grettest circh of London." Arthur pulls out the sword which had remained stuck fast in the stone, unable to be extracted by any other than the individual designated by a force greater than man (God? Destiny? Fortune?) to be England's king. Clearly, Arthur demonstrates his role as such by repeated removals of the sword. Initially while alone, he tries to replace his brother Kay's lost weapon, then Arthur repeatedly pulls the sword out before a host of lords vying to try their hand at the stone's prophecy: 'Whoso pulleth oute this swerd of this stone and anyld is rightwys kyng borne of all En(g)lond.' So difficult to convince are the lords who are apparently disappointed by their new found king being little more than an unproven child that Arthur is forced to several displays of pulling the sword from the stone. Each time Arthur proves his right as king, the disgruntled lords delay their acknowledgement of him with the hopes that a more Heroically acceptable candidate might duplicate Arthur's feat. This political stalemate solves itself as the common people bypass the stubborn lords and accept Arthur as their ruler unconditionally:

Soo at Candalmasse many moo grete lordes came thyder for to have wonne the swerde, but there myghte none prevaille. And right as Arthur dyd at Cristmasse he dyd at Candelmasse, and pulled oute the swerde easely, whereof the barons were sore agreved and put it of in delay till the hyghe feste of Eester. And as Arthur sped afore so dyd he at Eester. Yet there were some of the grete lordes had indignacion that Arthur shold be kyng, and put it of in delay tyll the feest of Pentecoste....

And at the feste of Pentecost alle manner of men assayed to pulle at the swerde that wold assay, but

none myghte prevaille but Arthur, and he pulled it oute afore all the lordes and comyns that were there. Wherefore alle the comyns cryed at ones, 'We wille have Arthur unto our kyng!...' (Works, 10)

Arthur receives one last confirmation of authority before the young king must physically justify his kingship. Soon after the Pentecostal feast at which Arthur becomes so well received by the "comyns," the issue of his illegitimacy arises, much as do the sordid details of a modern presidential candidate. Against the charges of Arthur's apparant bastardy, Merlin the "dremeder" steps in and does his best to counter this indictment, which, if left to stand, would largely destroy any political legitimacy Arthur could have:

'nay,' said Merlyn, 'after the deth of the duke more than thre houres was Arthur begoten, and thirtene dayes after kyng Uther wedded Igrayne, and therfor I preve hym he is no bastard....' (Works, 11)

Merlin's words work as well as one might expect, but they do not dispel the hostilities some of the lords feel toward their "bastard-king," and Arthur has arrived at the juncture where his legitimacy has been soldified as best as it can be without his direct actions to bolster it. Like any Heroic leader, Arthur must prove himself through satisfying his immediate feudal obligations and reducing the land's internal political and domestic chaos.

Arthur comes to power in a land divided into petty, squabbling kingdoms locked in constant conflict. While England had been unified by Uther Pendragon, the solidarity crumbled soon after his death; a political system dependent on an individual's personal achievement can not sustain itself after the focus of its unity dies. Uther's unification of England stemmed from his

personal victory over, and subjugation of, his military rivals. Once Uther died, the obligation his rivals held to him dissipated, and the society devolved back into the primordial political brew it had originally been.

These independent kingdoms must somehow be amalgamated into a single political entity in order to restore peace in the country and enable it to repel foreign invasion. Arthur, much like the legendary Ieyasu Tokugawa of sixteenth-century Japan, begins his task in the only way appropriate in a Heroic environment: encounter your enemies systematically, defeat them, and have the survivors bound to serve you under the dual systems of feudal vassalage and a Heroic brotherhood of arms. Thus, with each victory Arthur's enemies numerically decrease while his own host increases. However, several distinct problems obstruct his quelling of England's pockets of resistance so easily.

Arthur's providential rise to power, while making him more qualified to lead his countrymen than any other would-be Heroic king, is not enough to convince a coalition of powerful lords that they should follow their new king. Despite Merlin's assurances to the contrary, Arthur's rivals see him as a politically unviable bastard who has no military achievements to vouch for his ability. Combined, those traits make it very difficult for such independent kings to subordinate their personal authority when their own qualifications to rule seem to overshadow those of their "king." This skepticism goes doubly for any warrior-king who hoped to gain complete power over England by pulling the churchyard sword from the stone, and doubly again for

any who tried and failed, only to witness an illegitimate squire-boy become their political superior. Given the Heroic standards of this early Malorian society, we can hardly be surprised at the relatively widespread resistance to Arthur's authority.

Arthur's quick response to his rivals turns into a full-fledged bloodbath in which he and his small corps of loyal knights join battle with the host of King Lot, driving the lords' forces into rout, and ceasing pursuit only when Merlin intervenes and advises Arthur to give up the chase, presumably because further reinforcements from Lot's camp would prove too numerically overwhelming to withstand. This episode, among others, exhibits Arthur's adequate ability as a warrior, true, but more importantly indicates what kind of resistance he will meet in the future and, most importantly, that he needs help. Although Arthur's initial legitimizations earned him a small but loyal body of knights, his forces are too diminutive to eliminate those who would challenge his right as king, much less unify England. Arthur must make his host grow. He offers positions within his ranks through typically feudal inticements of money and, more importantly, land grants (fiefs), in a method somewhat similar to Beowulf's Hygelac, the ring-giver, but only under the advice of Merlin does Arthur truly begin to solve his shortage of warriors. Arthur increases his numbers most efficiently by striking a deal with Kings Ban of Benwick and Bors of Gaul, offering later military support against their joint enemy, the "drede King Claudas," if they help him against England's rebellious lords first. This deal, though devised and mostly enacted by Merlin is



one of the most shrewd maneuvers of the Arthurian regime; Arthur's numerically inferior force manages to fuse peacefully with that of Ban and Bors (after a mutual giving of gifts and friendly jousting to "close the sale," so to speak) without either side focusing so much on their own self-interest as to fracture the alliance.

The deal is perfect; it benefits all involved equally so as not to bruise any Heroic egos. Arthur gains a fighting force and can now unify the country. Ban and Bors will receive worship, material payment and personal recognition by Arthur while strengthening their kingdoms through Claudas' destruction.

Judging by Heroic behavior, such a deal would be difficult to solidify due to the unusually high amount of trust it requires.

How can Arthur trust Ban and Bors not to conquer his own kingdom once the rebellious lords have been destroyed? How can Ban and Bors be sure that Arthur will even win this campaign, much less be able to come through with the payments he promised them?

Clearly, Arthur's is a greater show of faith--he has much more than getting stiffed on a bill to contend with. By subordinating his Heroic anxieties, Arthur allows an agreement which other Heroic figures might have balked at, but wins the faith of his new allies and thus converts his motley band of loyalists into a

Equally notable are the joint efforts by each side to prevent what would normally be a friendly display of prowess from turning into a fight which would not only ruin the fledgling alliance but militarily jeopardize both parties by committing them to additional war efforts besides those they must already contend with:

When kynge Arthur and the two kyngees saw ban begynne  
wexe wroth on bothe parties, they leped on swais  
hakebeyes and lette cry that all men sholde departe  
unto theire lodgynges. (Works, 16)

valid army able to begin pacifying the country.<sup>2</sup> Arthur has become a diplomat as well as a warrior.

Once the alliance with Ban and Bors has been secured, Arthur has the manpower to face his enemies. Though still outnumbered, and through protracted fighting and great carnage is wrought by both sides, Arthur prevails, and scatters his enemy. Arthur fights hard and fair, struggling to achieve his final act of legitimization, battlefield recognition equal to that of his father, Uther. To this end, Arthur fights endlessly, rushing with mad, reckless courage into the fray, gathering enough battle merit to turn the convictions of any other lords who doubt Arthur's ability or right to his kingship:

But whan kynge Arthure saw the batayle wolde nat be ended by no maner, he fared woode as a lyon and stirred his horse here and there on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde, that he stynted nat tylle he had slayne twenty knightes. Also he wounded kynge Lotte sore on the shulder, and made him to leve that grownde, for sir Kay with sir Gryfflet dud with kynge Arthure grete dedis of armys there. (Works, 20)

Arthur's martial motivation here is not just to emulate his father's deeds. A Heroic king must lead by first and foremost by example, especially on the battlefield; cowardice will not reward itself with enthusiastic soldiers. Therefore Arthur is, as he must be, the best fighter on the field. The more inspiring he is

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When kynge Arthur and the two kynges saw hem begynne wexe wroth on bothe partyes, they leped on smale hakeneyes and lette cry that all men sholde departe unto theire lodgynges. (Works, 16)

to his troops, the better they will fight. Much as a Heroic kingdom must constantly reinforce itself with military exploits to brag of and plunder to show off, the Heroic king must do the same during battle, allowing himself to be outdone by no one, always setting the example for his men to follow and his enemies to fear. This is why we see Arthur charging to attack King Lot personally, though he may be the most dangerous man on the field to assault; it would only be logical to assume Lot's finest soldiers would be fighting along side of him. Yet Arthur never balks in his advance and actually wounds his highest adversary, the highest order of Heroic valor.<sup>3</sup>

Such exhibitions help illustrate why Arthur's host, though the underdog, achieves such a clear victory. However, there is a dark side to such Heroism, which we see as Arthur pursues his scattered enemy, seeking not just their defeat, but their liquidation. Arthur's valor has turned into rampant bloodlust, and the entire inspiration behind his deeds, to unify England, has gotten lost in the death and dust of battle. Only Merlin, the lone non-Heroic mind to guide the young king, realizes the extreme risk Arthur's rashness has placed himself in, and puts a stop to the slaughter before victory turns to tragedy:

With that com Merlion on a grete black horse and seyde  
unto kynge Arthure,

'Thou hast never done. Hast thou nat done inow? Of  
three score thousand thys day hast thou leffte on lyve  
but fyftene thousand! Therefore hit ys tyme to say  
"Who!" for God ys wroth with the for thou woll never  
have done. For yondir a eleven kynges at thys tyme woll

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<sup>3</sup>Admittedly, Arthur is at this point, "woode as a lyon" and probably as inspired as much by bloodlust as by his desire to earn military respectability.

nat be overthrowyn, but and thou tary on them ony  
lenger they fortune woll turne and they shall encres.  
And therefore withdraw you unto youre lodgyng and  
reste you as sone as ye may, and rewarde youre good  
knyghtes with golde and with sylver, for they have well  
deserved hit. There may no ryches be to dere for them,  
for of so fewe men as ye have there was never men dud  
more worshipfully in proues than ye have done to-day:  
for ye have macched thys day with the beste fyghters of  
the worlde.' (Works, 24)

Merlin's castigation rings long after the noise of Arthur's  
intial victory dies away. Arthur has proven himself and his men  
as the most powerful force in England. Arthur especially  
displayed his extraordinary military ability, not only shaking  
the last strands of uncertainty from his reputation but becoming  
a figure to be admired by all under his command, a Heroically  
virile and a well-rewarding man to serve under. His character has  
become as unassailable as Uther's ever was, and only increases as  
such once he finally unifies the lad under his single authority.  
Merlin's words above also stress the incompleteness of Arthur's  
mission, that his battlefield victories are only the first step  
to creating an England free of the faults which had so plagued it  
before. Arthur has quelled the country's internal political  
chaos; he must equally do so with its domestic chaos.

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Arthur realizes, intially through continued advice from  
Merlin, that a prosperous state is not one continually at war,  
even if the state is a military one. Once Arthur has defeated the  
major kernels of resistance within England, he cannot afford to  
miss capitalizing on this opportunity to secure his newly-won

peace. To do otherwise allows for rival warrior kings to rise in the heartland of his kingdom and strike a blow at any and all governmental stability. Arthur must convert his army to a roving police force--domestic security must be maintained to the extent that uprisings can be easily suppressed and renegade lords or knights committing criminal acts and promoting chaos can be apprehended. Only when such stability has been achieved and maintained can Arthur hope to defend his country against its final threat, foreign invasion. A confederation ofthane-tribes without order cannot hope to repel the Roman war machine of Emperor Lucius, for example.

Thus, Arthur must address any grievances or crimes reported and assign his knights to take care of the problem. Arthur distances himself from this duty so that his regime may break a classically Heroic weakness--dependence upon specific personal loyalty. Again, Japanese history provides us with a applicable allegory--Ieyasu Tokugawa unified Japan in the same fashion as Malory's Arthur unifies England. However, Tokugawa maintained his hold on Japan and made his presence felt for hundreds of years after his death by constructing a governmental system for his countrymen's loyalty to adhere to, instead of the personal loyalty which caused previous governments to die with their leaders. In much the same way, Arthur must redirect his warrior host's loyalties from himself to the kingdom, their energies from purely battlefield endeavors to maintaining peace and quiet within the land. Once Arthur has gained a foothold large enough against his enemies (those lords who still defy his authority),

he can establish a court from which he can fulfill his feudal responsibility to the lands he controls and thus maintains the peace. From this court, Arthur's warrior host, when not locked in direct battle with renegade lords, are expected to act as a law-keeping body that owes its loyalty not to Arthur, but to a more permanent government created to run the land.

However, this embryonic legal system is not without fault, which alerts Arthur to what needs to be done to solidify his society's legal order. The greatest problem Arthur faces within his system is its dependence upon Heroic figures to perform tasks which their characteristic flaws of rash judgment, inflated pride and extreme passion significantly jeopardize. The Heroic knight can be depended on to slay the king's enemies, but is less trustworthy when he must uphold a standard of conduct he so often breaks himself.

The adventure of Balin, or The Knight With Two Swords, pointedly illustrates this problem. When we meet him, he has been languishing in Arthur's prison for killing a relative of the king, a very grave offense indeed. However, the simultaneous happenings of the invasion by the rebellious King Royns and the arrival of an anonymous damsel, sent by the "grete Lady Lyle of Avilion," offers Balin a chance to improve his situation. The mysterious damsel enters the court encumbered by a sword which cannot be pulled from its sheath except by the worthiest of knights:

'...I may nat be delyverde of thys swerde but by a knyght, and he muste be a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson. And if I fynde such a

knyght that hath all thes vertues he may draw oute thys swerde oute of the sheethe....' (Works, 38)

Predictably, none of Arthur's knights are able to meet the damsel's standards, nor can Arthur himself. To this point, Arthur has been a good Heroic leader, but has not created a regime legally or politically stable enough to expend any of its energy on moral or spiritual betterment. As the distraught maiden is about to leave, Balin offers to have a try at the sword. Just as Arthur extracts the sword from the churchyard stone, Balin pulls the damsel's sword from its sheath and proves that he is the most virtuous knight in the court, though we should be cautious not to believe that he is morally perfect. Balin is every bit as Heroic as Arthur and his fellowship, but is distinguished by never having committed an act of villiany, or similarly succumbed to the animalistic behavior Heroic figures are so vulnerable to. Balin remedies that once he possesses the damsel's sword, proudly keeping it, despite her protest:

'Well,' seyde the damesell, 'ye ar nat wyse to kepe the swerde fro me, for ye shall sle with that swerde the beste frende that ye have and the man that ye moste love in the worlde, and that swerde shall be youre destruccion.' (Works, 39-40)

Balin subsequently decapitates the Lady of the Lake while she is enjoying the "sauffconduyghte" of Arthur's court. He justifies his actions by means of self-defense; the Lady of the Lake had asked a favor of Arthur, that she be given Balin's head. Balin's wrongdoing stems from his acting without Arthur's approval in a very delicate situation. Arthur had been pinned by contradicting obligations: either kill his greatest knight for the Lady of the Lake's sake (thus betraying the most fundamental trust between a

feudal lord and his armed retainer), or betray her trust by refusing to satisfy her favor, as promised when Arthur was given the sword Excalibur:

'Be my feyth,' seyde Arthure, 'I woll gyff you what gyffte that ye woll aske.'

'Well,' seyde the damesell, 'go ye into yondir barge, and rowe youreselffe to the swerde, and take hit and the scawberde with you. And I woll aske my gyffte whan I se my tyme.' (Works, 35)

Arthur's decision had not been made when Balin intervened and killed the Lady of the Lake. While Balin solved Arthur's dilemma, he still acted beyond his king's authority, and is summarily banished from the court as a result. Balin decides to destroy King Royns, and win back the king's favor. Though Balin ultimately defeats King Royns and preforms additional deeds of worship, he causes so much collateral damage during his adventures that his cumulative efforts seem to bring about more aggregate harm than good. Granted, Balin's calamities result from bad Fortune, and not Heroic misbehavior; he had no idea that his "dolorouse stroke" would lay waste to three kingdoms. However, Balin did initially bring all of his misfortune upon himself by accepting a cursed sword, which we later discover was sent to Arthur's court in order to sabotage its finest knight. Balin's only substantial shortcoming is his pride, but such a flaw is more than enough to destroy even this most valiant knight, ultimately killed at the hands of his own brother. Balin is only human, as we can expect from any of Arthur's champions, even Arthur himself. We can hardly condemn Balin for the mere trait of pride, but his particularly devastating misadventures sound an alarm to Arthur that unless the characteristics of his knights



change, he risks similar behavior and catastrophe each time a knight is to champion the court and keep the peace.

If Arthur is to create a more stable society, he must construct a behavioral system that will move his knights away from their tribal, mercenary mindset by offering them a goal that is equally attractive to pursue but separates itself from a direct correlation between deed and physical reward. Arthur must create a system where the knights within serve an ideological and moral standard that combines the profit motif of the Heroic thane with the personal selflessness and devotion to the king as a figure of the state, not an individual who demands strict personal loyalty. For Arthur to build a society that will stand, he must transform his Heroic society into a Worshipful one.<sup>4</sup>

To earn "worship" is to earn distinction, importance, or rank. In an Arthurian context worship means any recognition one receives for performing his knightly duties especially well. In a Heroic environment, worship is gained most easily by slaying an enemy. However, as Arthur's kingdom moves away from strictly Heroic behavior, the knightly duties one must excel at to receive worship change from mere fighting to showing restraint, pursuing honor, administering justice, and most importantly, executing all knightly tasks within strict behavioral parameters. To transform

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<sup>4</sup>We must bear in mind that the abandonment of Heroic principle is not an abandonment of feudal principle. Even when Arthur's fellowship receives their vision of the Sangreal (arguably the moral and chivalric apex of the Arthurian society), they are still members of an actively feudal society. The progression of Arthur's society from Heroic to Worshipful status supplements exclusively feudal values with chivalric practice and a firm, high morality.

his Heroic society to a Worshipful one, Arthur needs to satisfy two objectives: create and implement a chivalric code<sup>5</sup> for his knights to live by, and defeat the Roman Emperor Lucius, thereby neutralizing all political threat to the kingdom and its dependence upon Heroic behavior as a means of security.

We first see the creation of a chivalric code just after Arthur's wedding to Guenevere. The salvo of marvellous occurrences during the celebratory feast (in which Arthur performs the "supremely feudal act" of rewarding fiefs to, and exacting fealty from his men) prompts Arthur to send his newest knights-- Gawain, Tor and Pellinor--on the adventures the court has been challenged with. England's internal wars have not yet been entirely ended, and Arthur cannot afford to let himself lose worship by not pursuing these adventures. Each knight pursues his respective mission and achieves varying degrees of success, from Gawain's accidental slaying of a woman<sup>6</sup> to Tor's praiseworthy administration of proper chivalric justice<sup>7</sup>. Of the three

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<sup>5</sup>At its simplest, "chivalry" is that behavioral code which defines a knight's Worshipful conduct. This topic will be pursued in the next chapter.

<sup>6</sup>This results from Gawain's refusal to grant mercy to his obviously defeated opponent; his opponent must die only because he killed several of Gawain's hounds:

'Thou shalt dey,' seyd sir Gawayne, 'for the sleynge of my howndis.'

'I woll make amendys,' seyde the knyght, 'to my power.'

But sir Gawayne wolde no mercy have, but unlaced hys helme to have streken of hys hede. Ryght so com hys lady oute of a chambir and felle over hym, and so he smote of hir hede by myssefortune. (Works, 66)

<sup>7</sup>Tor finds himself caught between conflicting knightly duties. He has promised a damsel that he would carry out any task she would set before him. She asks him to behead the knight

questing knights, only one (Tor) receives whole-hearted accolades for his deeds. The other two return to a chorus of castigation from the ladies of the court for having so bolluxed their quests, through rage in Gawain's case, and chivalric tunnel-vision in Pellinor's. Arthur therefore implements a system which supersedes Heroic tradition by creating a code for the fellowship to swear by:

...than the kynge stablysshed all the knyghts and gaff them rychnesse and londys; and charged them never to do outrage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture [of their] worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [socour:] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde, both olde and younge, and every yere so were the[y] sworne at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste. (Works, 75-76)

This code is multi-functional. It first restrains the typically excessive behavior we have seen the Heroic knight

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Abelleus, whom Tor had just defeated. When Abelleus asks for mercy, Tor must choose between violating his promise to a maiden or betraying the mercy he must show Abelleus. Upon learning the extent of Abelleus' foul deeds, Tor beheads him. This is, of course, the most proper avenue of action--Abelleus has so violated his duties as a knight that he has also forfeited his privilege of knightly mercy:

'Now,' seyde sir Torre, 'aske a gyffte and I woll gyff hit you.'

'Grauntemercy,' seyde the damesell. 'Now I aske the hede of thys false knyght Abelleus, for he ys the moste outerageous knyght that lyvith, and the grettist murtherer.'...

So whan Abellyus herde thys he was more aferde and yelded hym and asked mercy.

'I may not now,' seyde sir Torre,...

And therwith he toke off hys helme, and therewith he arose and fledde, and sir Torre afftir hym, and smote of hys hede quyte. (Works, 70)

display. Such restraint will hopefully neutralize those flaws in Arthur's knights which had hurt their quests before: fights will no longer erupt over a slain dog, helpless maidens will not be ignored for a quest's sake, personal revenge will not supersede the behavioral parameters of the court. This does not mean that every knight obeys this code; Gawain remains a notoriously Heroic figure throughout most of Le Morte. Many of Arthur's knights in fact do adhere to the Pentecostal oath, Gawain and some others notwithstanding.

The code formalizes combat into a medium for justice and upholding Arthur's authority while making his knights ever watchful for wrong-doings and disturbances. Acting through this code, the knight no longer increases his knightly standing through purely military exploits, but through deeds which support the new code-oriented society. Knights will receive recognition for their valor, as we shall see in Arthur's war against Rome, but back in England, where there is peace, the warrior class's violent urges have been given an outlet which serves as a safety valve and a method to uphold a new stage of society.

Important to notice is the degree to which the code protects the women of Arthur's England. Until the Pentecostal oath, women were as powerless as children, subjected to the heated passions of the knights who ruled and roamed the land, exerting their violent and/or sexual urges upon any woman they pleased. As the code prohibits this kind of rapacity, for the first time women receive a position of authority over the military class, which now must reign its animal impulses and refine itself. As we see

Gawain, Tor and Pellinor return from their adventures, it is not Arthur who evaluates their progress, but the ladies of the court, seen best in the reaction to Gawain's chivalrically botched exploits:

Than the kynge and the quene were gretely displeased with sir Gawayne for the sleynge of the lady, and there by ordynaunce of the quene there was sette a queste of ladyes uppon sir Gawayne, and they juged hym for ever whyle he lyved to be with all ladyes and to fyght for hir quarels; and ever that he sholde be curteyse, and never to refuse mercy to hym that askith mercy. Thus was sir Gawayne sworne uppon the four Evaungelystis that he sholde never be ayenste lady ne jantillwoman but if he fight for a lady and hys adversary fyghtith for another. (Works, 67)

Gawain represents the archetypical Heroism Arthur has to suppress to prevent the knights of his fellowship from serving any more "dolorouse strokes." This suppression of Heroic desire also binds Arthur's men to a moral standard that promotes more dependable, less harmful actions than selfish Heroism tends to incite. Although Arthur will continue the feudal practice of rewarding his knights with "rychesse and londys," they will be encouraged to seek recognition (and hence greater reward from their lord) not through reckless feats of strength, but by succeeding in knightly duties in a manner according to the parameters set by the Pentecostal oath. This is what will make the fellowship evolve from a Heroic body to a Worshipful one, especially once it begins to be populated with knights who show up after the code's implementation (e.g., Lancelot and Tristram).

Arthur ironically sets his code into motion with the typically Heroic act of personally setting the example he would have his fellowship follow. In this adventure, which begins with

Arthur's marvelous imprisonment and reaching its apex with his personal transition from Heroic to Worshipful behavior, we see him free imprisoned knights from "the falsyst knyght that lyvyth" (Sir Damas), battle the evil devices of Morgan le Fey, and render a level-headed decision concerning the punishment of the feudally and chivalrically miscreant knight Accolon. Most important are Arthur's dealings with Accolon and Damas. Had an earlier version of Arthur triumphed in this episode, Accolon would have been slain for his treachery, and Damas would have been similarly killed and his lands confiscated. Sir Oughtlake, Damas' brother, would more than likely have been offered a place in Arthur's host as another skull-cracker.

What happens is far from the hypothetical result offered. Arthur recognizes Accolon's betrayal, softens his culpability, recognizing that he was under the power of Morgan le Fey. Having been equally duped by her, Arthur can sympathize with Accolon's actions, though hardly forgiving them--treachery against one's feudal lord can never be easily pardoned. Concerning Sir Oughtlake and Sir Damas, we see an Arthur who has become an efficient distributor of justice, insuring that the villainous are punished and the dutiful are rewarded:

'As to the, sir Damas, for whom I have bene champyon and wonne the felde of this knyght, yett woll I juge. Because ye, sir Damas, ar called an [o]rgulus knyght and full of vylony, and nat worth of prouesse of youre dedis, therefore woll I that ye gyff you a palfrey to ryde uppon, for that woll becom you bettir to ryde on than uppon a courser. Also I charge the, sir Damas, uppon payne of deth, that thou never distresse no knyghtes araunte that ryde on their adventure, and also that thou restore thyse twenty knyghtes that thou haste kepte longe presoners of all theire harmys that they be contente for. And ony of them com to my courte

and complayne on the, be my hede, thou shalt dye therefore!

'Also, sir Oughtlake, as to you, because ye are named a good knyght and full of prouesse and trew and jantyll in all youre dedis, this shall be youre charge I woll gyff you: that in all goodly hast ye com unto me and my courte, and ye shall be a knyght of myne, and if youre dedis be thereaftir I shall so proferre you by the grace of god that ye shall in shorte tyme be in ease as for to lyve as worshipfully as youre brother Damas.' (Works, 89)

Here, Arthur does none of this for immediate monetary, sexual or egotistical gratification, as a Heroic figure might be expected to do. Arthur undertakes this adventure (aside from being forced into it by magical means) out of a desire to right a wrong and reset things to their natural course. Granted, Arthur does profit from his effort--the prisoner knights and Sir Oughtlake join his fellowship--but most importantly he has succeeded in a Worshipful undertaking, proving that his system can turn England's feudal police force into a moral agency.

Finally, Arthur has put his field-tested code into action, and can let his fellowship assume its command. All Arthur needs to do is administer from court; he no longer needs to lead the charge for his knights' exploits on the domestic front, as would be expected in an otherwise Heroic setting. Having set up a reliable method to maintain internal domestic and political stability, and a way for the kingdom to morally further itself, one task remains for Arthur to complete before he will have made his kingdom fully independent of any political force, and able to shake off the last remnants of its Heroic nature in one swift stroke. The kingdom's external political threats must be eliminated.

Twice does Emperor Lucius of Rome send messengers to England, demanding of Arthur "his trewage that his auncettryes have payde before hym." On the first visit, the Roman envoys arrive at an "evyll time," which, coupled with the Heroic state of Arthur's regime at that point, would explain Arthur's enraged response to them, offering only the truage of a swordpoint for Lucius. The second time Arthur is far more cordial, and entertains these messengers for a week, exhibiting a markedly less vehement response. Not everything makes perfect, interlocking sense in Malory, and the discrepancy between these two visits may result from the same tale being told differently. Regardless, we should notice Arthur's second reaction. The second visit from Rome comes at an equally important time for Arthur; only now is he able to react to it beyond gnashing his teeth.

Arthur's fellowship reacts to the Roman assertion of authority over England with thane-like defiance. While some regard this as a wonderful opportunity for "warre and worshyp," others see a chance to revenge themselves upon the Romans for their past rule over the British Isles. Arthur's more rational response states that he has a hereditary right to the Emperorship, and is willing to fight to get it back, in the face of Rome's attempts to impress its influence upon England:

'...But yet they may nat be so answerde, for their spyteuous speche grevyth so my herte. That truage to Roome woll I never pay. Therefore counccyle me, my knyghtes, for Crystes love of Hevyn. For this muche have I founde in the cronycles of this londe, that sir Belene and sir Bryne, of my bloode elders that borne were in Bretayne, and they hath occupied the empyreship eyght score wyntyrs; and aftir Constantyne,oure kynnesman, conquerd hit, and dame Elyneys son, of ingelonde, was Emperor of Roome; and he recoverde the



Crosse that Cryste dyed uppon. And thus was the Empyre  
kepte be my kynde elders, and thus have we evydence  
inowghe to the empyre of holy Rome.' (Works, 114)

This response seems to carry more weight than Arthur's first one. His rejection of Lucius' messengers is a final statement of his feudal intentions: to reduce the greatest political threat to his kingdom to a mere vassal. This will create a kingdom so politically, militarily and domestically solvent it will bow to no external force. Only now does Arthur have the military wherewithal to stake such a claim. The weight of Arthur's aspirations is magnified when we see the extent of the Roman force he opposes. Lucius' legions vastly outnumber Arthur's, but more importantly, they come from all over the world, and if defeated, insure Arthur's independence in that there will be no other nations able to fight or challenge England:

Than the Emperour sente furth his messyngers of wyse  
olde knyghtes unto a country called Ambage, and Arrage,  
and unto Alysundir, to Ynde, to Ermony that the rever  
of Eufrate rennys by, and to Assy, Aufryke, and Europe  
the large, and to Ertaye, and Elamye, to the Oute Yles,  
to Arrabe, to Egypte, to Damaske, and to Damyake, and  
to noble deukis and erlys. Also the kynge of Capydos,  
and the kyng of Tars, and of Turke, and of Pounce, and  
of Pampoyle, and oute of Preter Johanes londe, also the  
sowdon of Surre....(Works, 116-117)

Arthur's refusal to bow to any foreign force is not simply indignation towards Rome, but an assertion that not until the world cannot threaten England will its king be satisfied. If Arthur defeats Lucius' armies, there will remain absolutely no external threat to Arthur's kingdom, which will then be able to concentrate its efforts from Heroic endeavors such as maintaining national security to more Worshipful ones, such as maintaining the domestic peace.

While Arthur's defeat of Lucius would signify his society's departure from its Heroic status, this episode against Rome is one in which such a mindset becomes a very valuable asset. The Roman war is the Heroic knights' last hurrah, and it is to their effort that Arthur can attribute a large portion of his success here. Once Lucius is destroyed, the Heroic personality will be a harmful influence on (Worshipful) Arthurian society, and must be suppressed by chivalric measures such as the Pentecostal Oath.

We must note that the Heroic war effort against Lucius is not confined to Gawain and his lot of fellow thane-like die-hards, but also includes to more Worshipful figures such as Lancelot, and even Arthur. His Heroic conduct initiates this episode, or he refuses to bow before Rome's authority, and ends it by personally killing Lucius and laying waste to the remainder of his armies. The carnage here reminds us of Arthur's first military victory, in which only Merlin could put an end to the young king's slaughter. Arthur's initial rejection of Lucius' messengers is a typically Heroic function. As leader of a little more than a patchwork war-tribe, Arthur must either fight for his further independence or surrender his authority. Once feudally subservient to Rome, he will have lost the personal command which binds his men so closely together. The order he had imposed on England will crumble as the Roman war machine takes over, imposing a foreign doctrine upon the land, covering up the splintered frustration and anger of a still un-united people, forcing their bitterness to fester until Roman influence might

mission against Lucius has a largely Heroic origin which is

leave, and England reverts to a worse state of balkanization than ever before. Arthur's cause is further justified as we learn that he actually has a legitimate claim to the Emperor's throne, and deserves to have his familial right restored. Thus, Arthur's need to conquer Lucius is two fold: cement national security (the aim of all Heroic chieftans) and restore the family name to its highest degree. The second function is the most important. Here, Arthur's motivation comes not from any desire to advance his kingdom morally (ala the Worshipful Society), but from loyalty to his kin. In a Heroic environment, the tightest form of fellowship is the blood tie, and it holds the most priority in any knightly concern. Gawain proves this time and again, as does Arthur, whose kingdom-ruining war with Lancelot years later will stem from a harmfully intense loyalty to one's kin before law, morality and society. Once Arthur becomes able to restore his family's position by taking it from Lucius, he is obligated to do so; it is a most basic duty he cannot deny, and is the ultimate extension of his kingdom's efforts before it becomes converted into something beyond simple Heroism.

We know why Arthur fights Lucius; now we should examine how. Arthur's men are an unruly bunch, ready to jump into bloody combat with their Roman adversaries. We might expect disaster to await a host of this over-anxious temperament, especially when reading Malory. However, it is the very Heroism of these knights that propels them through the Roman armies they oppose. Arthur's mission against Lucius has a largely Heroic origin which is

coupled with an extra-Heroic inspiration that signals Arthur's elevation, if only temporary, to a higher, more Worshipful figure than he once was. Arthur's desire to stop Lucius' burning of all villages before him stems from a nobler intent to champion those being cruelly pressed under the Roman's boot. Otherwise, Arthur's rescue of these territories from Roman terror is a wonderfully feudal exercise--obtaining authority over these people by offering them the protection that only a feudal overlord can provide. Arthur additionally offers Lucius a chance to withdraw from the oncoming bloodbath by extending a command to leave the country or face the consequences:

Than the kynge byddis sir Borce: 'Now bowske the blythe and sir Lyonel and sir Bedwere, loke that ye fare with sir Gawayne, my nevew, with you, and take as many good knyghtes, and loke that ye ryde streyte unto sir Lucius and sey I bydde hym in haste to remeve oute of my londys. And yf he woll nat, so bydde hym dresse his batayle and lette us redresse oure ryghtes with oure handis, and that is more worshyppe than thus to overryde masysterlesse men.' (Works, 123)

Ironically, Arthur's final effort to prevent fighting is the very thing which causes it, for Gawain strikes dead one of Lucius' knights during the meeting in which they were to deliver the king's message. The fighting spreads quickly and what started as a skirmish becomes full-scale war. Arthur initially criticizes his men for beginning the fight so outnumbered ("I calle hit but foly to abyde whan knyghtes bebe overmacched"), but soon must enter the battle to rally his men to victory, before the Romans overwhelm them:

So forth they wente wyth the kynge, tho knyghtes of the Rounde table. Was never kyng nother knyghtes dud bettir syn God made the worlde. They leyde on with long swerdys and swappd thorow braynes. Shyldys nother no

shene armys myght hem nat withstonde tyll they keyde on  
the erhte ten thousand at onys. Than the Romaynes reled  
a lytyl, for they were somewhat rebuked, but kyng  
Arthure with his pryce knyghtes preced sore aftir.  
(Works, 132)

Only when Arthur personally leads his men to meet their  
enemy, his role fully reverted to that of a warrior-chieftan,  
does the suicidal stalemate turn into a surprise rout. Again,  
this is the Heroic knight's greatest hour, for deeds such as this  
are his first, best destiny, and only will Heroic courage and  
fortitude will win the day. This "last stand of Heroism"  
progresses; Arthur rejoins the battle to avenge his wounded  
brother Kay, and gains his compensation by personally slaying  
Emperor Lucius, which triggers the final, largest rush, as  
Arthur's entire army converges upon the defeated Romans and  
massacres all who fail to escape:

But for all that the Romaynes and the Sarezens cowde do  
other speke to y[e]lde themself ther was none saved,  
but all yode to the swerde. For evir kyng Arthure rode  
in the thyckeste of the pres and raumped down lyke a  
lyon many senators noble. He wolde nat abyde uppon no  
poure man for no maner of thyng, and ever he slow slyly  
and slypped to another tulle all were slayne to the  
numbir of a hondred thousand, and yet many a thousande  
ascaped thorow prevy frendys. (Works, 134)

At last we see the full destructive potential of unrestrained  
Heroism; a simliar scene would have certainly ensued had Merlin  
not stopped a younger Arthur from obliterating the routed lords  
of England. The battle ends, but Arthur's savagery must not  
abate. Pockets of resistance remain across the land, striking a  
familiar tune with the state of England shortly after Arthur's  
ascent to kingship.

Arthur and his men maintain their momentum, and systematically root out any and all opposition with as much sympathy as a wolverine. Arthur pacifies the lands outside England's borders just as he did inside them, and forges a world where his original kingdom exists safely at the heart of hundreds of leagues of land where no political or military threat will soon raise its head against the crown. But, as stated before, Arthur's annihilation of his enemies, regardless of the morality of his means, has made possible a society in which the Heroic figure no longer serves a purpose, where his love for battle and disregard for chivalric practice will only serve as a corrosive against the progress of society. Arthurian Heroism has committed suicide of the grandest order, and given birth to a morally refined age which will have its own shortcomings, strengths, victories and defeats, a Worshipful society that will bring Arthur's achievements to their highest pinnacle...and reveal its peculiar frailty at the sublime moment of apex, making plain the uppermost limitations of such a society and its inability to maintain itself, especially once its greatest weakness has been acknowledged.

After the war with Lucius, Arthur's next major "phase" of personal activity is his appearance within his court during the annual Pentecostal feast:

"I woll se that mervayle."

Lucius' defeat and the death of the Heroic society gives birth to a new Worshipful one. in which Arthur's role has shifted from one who adventures with his fellow knights and leads their charge in battle to more of a "chivalric administrator," remaining at court to evaluate the progress of his knights as they journey throughout the kingdom pursuing worship. We therefore see very little of Arthur for much of Le Morte after the war with Lucius, as can be expected--Arthur's greatest phases of personal activity concern the creation and destruction of his kingdom. But during the interim in which Arthur's kingdom reaches its height of achievement and stability (the "ascendancy" phase of the kingdom's lifespan) there is a portion of Le Morte which merits a close look because it discloses Arthur's personal role in the goings-on of his kingdom: the beginning of the quest for the Sangreal.

The actions which we will study here differ from those which we would normally expect to see from Arthur. Sitting at the top of his Worshipful society, Arthur's greatest actions are words rather than sword-strokes. In the Worshipful society, Arthur is the final authority. What he says transcends the physical actions of those below him. Thus, our attention is drawn to Arthur's most notable exclamation in the several hundred pages of text between the creation and destruction of his kingdom.

After the war with Rome, Arthur's next major "phase" of personal activity results from the Holy Grail's appearance within his court during the annual Pentecostal feast:

Than entird into the halle the Holy Grayle coverde with whyght samyte, but there was none that myght se hit nother whom that bare hit. And there was all the halle fulfilled with good odoures, and every knyght had such metis and drynkes as he beste loved in thys worlde.

And whan the Holy Grayle had bene borne thorow the hall, than the holy vessell deaprted suddenly, that they wyst nat where it becam. (Works, 521-522)

We must remember that the Pentecostal feast is when Arthur's fellowship annually rededicates itself to its Worshipful duties, i.e. upholding its code of behavior, the Pentecostal Oath. Thus, much like the appearance of the "mervailous adventure" which spurred Gawain, Pellinor and Tor to undertake the quests which led to the creation of the Pentecostal Oath, the appearance of the samite-covered Grail signifies the greatest challenge to the Worshipful court. This quest, to seek and find the Grail so that it may be plainly viewed, presents itself to a fellowship which by nature cannot refuse such a task. Being a Worshipful organization, when Arthur's fellowship sees the grail appear in their court, a challenge to quest for worship has been issued, but on a scale of unprecedented magnitude (what could be greater than questing for the cup of Christ?):

'Now,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'we have bene servyd thys day of what metys and drynkes we thought on. But one thyng begyled us, that we myght nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so preciously coverde. Wherefore I woll make here a vow that to-morne, withoute longer abydyng, I shall laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall, and that I shall holde me oute a twelve-month and a day or more if nede be, and never shall I returne unto the courte agayne tylle I have sene hit more openly than hit hath bene shewed here. And iff I may nat spede I shall



returne agayne as he that may nat be ayenst the wyllle  
of God.'

So whan they of the Table Rounde harde sir Gawayne  
sey so, they arose up the moste party and made such  
avowes as sir Gawayne hathe made. (Works, p.522)

Arthur's immediate response to the aforementioned passage,  
in which his fellowship decides to pursue the Grail, is his first  
noteworthy activity after personally defeating Emperor Lucius.  
That Arthur reacted at all draws our attention alone, but the  
substance of his reaction is equally important:

...Anone as kynge Arthur harde thys he was gretely  
dyspleased, for he wyst well he myght nat agaynesey  
their avowys.

'Alas!' seyde kynge Arthure unto sir Gawayne, 'ye  
have nygh slayne me for the avow that ye have made, for  
thorow you ye have berauffte me the fayryst and trewyst  
of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme  
of the worlde. For whan they departe from hense I am  
sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys  
worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste. And so  
hit forthynkith nat me a litill, for I have loved them  
well as my lyff. Wherefore hit shall greve me ryght  
sore, the departicion of thys felyship, for I have had  
an olde custom to have hem in my felyship.'

And therewith the teerys felle in hys yen, and  
than he seyde,

'Sir Gawayne, Gawayne! Ye have sette me in grete  
sorow, for I have grete doute that my trew felyshyp  
shall never mete here more agayne.'

'A, sir,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'comforte  
yoursel! For hit shall be unto us a grete honoure,  
and much more than we dyed in other placis, for of  
dethe we be syker.'

'A, Launcelot!' seyde the kyng, 'the grete love  
that I have had unto you all the dayes of my lyff  
makith me to sey such dolefull wordis! For there was  
never Crysten kynge that ever had so many worthy men at  
hys table as I have had thys day at the Table Rounde.  
And that ys my grete sorow.' (Works, p.522)

After studying this passage, we must address two key issues  
concerning Arthur's conduct: why there has been such a long lapse  
of time between his periods of personal activity, and why

Arthur's reaction to his knights' decision to pursue the Grail is so negative.

Before we examine the nature and intent of Arthur's lamentation over his knights as they swear themselves to the Grail quest, we must further address why there is in Le Morte D'Arthur a several-hundred-page span (documenting the maintenance of Arthur's Worshipful society by following the deeds of some of its greatest knights--Gareth, Tristram and Lancelot) in which Arthur is hardly mentioned, much less shown to be especially active in his duties at the court. What little we see of Arthur shows him as an administrator overseeing the goings-on at his court, not as a wandering adventurer, like the rest of his fellowship. What qualities of the Worshipful society remove him from the functional dynamics of his kingdom (i.e. worship-winning)? Why do we not see Arthur personally contributing to the efforts of his kingdom in the manner that his knights do? These questions can best be answered by answering a different question: what exactly did Arthur's efforts, from his beginning as a king to the victory over Lucius, produce for his kingdom?

Arthur's society, after the destruction of Lucius, has transformed itself fully from a Heroic society, in which, as Ramon Lull, a thirteenth century Majorcan knight-turned-religious hermit, wrote in The Book of the Order of Chivalry: "...the job of the Knight was to pacify people and bring them to agreement by force of arms" (p.39). In the Heroic society, exercising morality is but an option for warriors to follow. This society has become a Worshipful society, in which the king is not required, as he

had been under Heroic circumstances, to involve himself "in the field," personally defeating the kingdom's external political enemies or upholding the domestic peace. This is because the Worshipful society is an organism which rests not on its knights' personal loyalty to their lord, but on their adherence to a code of behavior (i.e. the Pentecostal Oath). Whereas Heroic knights followed their king's personal example and forwarded his cause by murdering his enemies and plundering their riches, in this Arthurian version of "the new world order," the Worshipful knights' loyalty to their code of behavior endures beyond their loyalty to their king. The Worshipful knight therefore advances the kingdom by promulgating the Pentecostal Oath through his pursuit of worship.

Worship-winning does for Malory's fictive knight what the idea and practice of chivalry did for his real-world counterpart, as "an ideal which aimed to soften the rough ways of the soldier and substitute a controlled and disciplined way of life for the old heroic frenzy" (Barber, The Knight & Chivalry, p.330).

Worship, at least within a Malorian context, is the recognition a knight receives from his lord and peers for adhering to, and thereby advancing, the Pentecostal Oath through chivalric deeds. Worship is a method of reward which largely replaces the physical rewards (e.g., money or valuables) Heroic knights expected to receive for their duties with an abstract incentive that rewarded knights with public recognition of their knightly integrity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Worshipful knights did receive physical rewards for their troubles, especially in the form of fiefdoms, as we see Arthur give out during his wedding celebration and the establishment of

Thus, Lancelot earns and maintains his distinction as the Round Table's greatest knight by successfully performing more deeds of worship than any other knights of Arthur's fellowship, and has additionally done the least number of misdeeds to discredit his name (unlike other figures, such as Gawain). Because a Worshipful knight's personal worth can only be measured by his adherence to the practices and principles detailed in the Pentecostal Oath, he freely roams the kingdom looking for as many opportunities as possible to do so.

Such adventure sought by the Worshipful knight might include fighting in a tournament to display his physical prowess as well as a sense of fair play, or dispensing justice accurately and effectively in a chivalricly "sticky" situation (such as what faces Tor during his initial Pentecostal quest, pulled between the need to dispense justice, to grant a lady a favor, and to extend mercy to one who requests it) to display a firm grip on arranging knightly priorities in the face of conflicting demands, or serving/defending a lady to display a sense of courtesy. We can gain a more eclectic understanding of the Worshipful character from a passage of Maurice Keen's 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*, *loyaute*, *largesse* (generosity), *courtoisie*, and *franchise* (the free and frank bearing that is visible testimony to the combination of good birth with virtue). (p.2)

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the Round Table. This aside, Worshipful knights did not act primarily for monetary payment as much as they acted to live up to abstract ideals. Their physical awards were little more than an understood detail of living in a feudal environment.

Ramon Lull further describes a knight's duties, which in the context of his Book of the Order of Chivalry were to be taken to heart by knights in reality. While we need not focus on the strictly historical effects of Lull's intentions, his writings apply especially well to illustrating the duties of the knights Malory writes of in Le Morte D'Arthur:

The duty of a Knight is to support and defend his earthly lord...

Knights ought to take horses to jousts and attend tournaments...

To administer justice badly or to neglect the customs that are most essential to his knightly duty is simply to despise the Order itself; therefore, as all these things aforementioned concern a Knight's physical preparedness and all other similar virtues pertain to the preparedness of the Knight's soul. Thus the Knight that practices all of the endeavors that concern his physical preparedness for chivalry but who, nevertheless, has none of these virtues in his soul is not a true friend to the Order of Chivalry....

...The duty of a Knight is to support and defend women, widows and orphans, and sick or enfeebled men. For just as it is both reasonable and customary that the greatest and mightiest should help the lesser and the feeble...so the Order of Chivalry...should succour and help those...who are less powerful and honored....

...For just as the axe is designed for the job of cutting down and destroying worthless trees, so the office of a Knight is established to punish evildoers and delinquents. (Lull, pp.26, 27-28, 34-35, 37)

Lull's words strike a familiar note after we have read the Pentecostal Oath of Arthur's court. The code exists to set behavioral standards for Arthur's knights according to certain moral standards. Given the warrior class's restlessness and Arthurs need to mke sure his fellowship keeps the peace within the kingdom, the Pentecostal Oath directs Arthur's knights to pursue worship in order to fulfill their knightly duties and obtain distinction among themselves. Worship is best won, as we have seen time and again, by those who find situations in which

the words of the Pentecostal Oath are upheld by being translated into physical deeds, such as protecting a defenseless woman. In this manner, the Oath has made the knights uphold the kingdom, which relies upon it as the sole restraint and influence on its champions and caretakers. The deeds which are most appropriate for the code-following knight are also those deeds which increase the stability of the kingdom. Thus, upholding the kingdom upholds the man who represents it--in this case, Arthur. While Worshipful knights swear loyalty to their lord as a primary function of their duties, directly acting on his behalf, as was the Heroic standard, has, in the words of Professor Sidney Coulling, "gone the way of the dodo bird."

The exemplar of Worshipful knighthood is Lancelot, commonly addressed as "the worsypfullyest knyghte of the world" (Works, p.171). More than any other knight of Arthur's fellowship, Lancelot represents through his deeds the finest in knighthood and what every knight should strive to be.

We best see Lancelot's Worshipful aptitude in "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lake" during an adventure which begins as the villainous sir Tarquin captures sir Ector, who had been riding with Lancelot, himself similarly imprisoned by Morgan le Fay. Literally "caught napping" by her witchcraft, Lancelot awakes to find himself not only jailed but faced with a dilemma advanced by his captors:

...I am quene Morgan le Fay, quene of the londe of Gore, and here is the quene of the North Galys, and the quene of Estlonde, and the quene of the Oute Iles. Now chose one of us, whyche that thou wolte have to thy peramour, other ellys to dye in this preson. (Works, p.152)

Lancelot has previously pledged his romantic energies to Queen Guenevere, and would ordinarily face the dilemma of how he could reconcile his fidelity to a previous vow in the light of a request by a woman, something no knight can ignore. In this particular case, Lancelot's troubles have been somewhat alleviated in that Morgan's treachery brought him to this dilemma and therefore frees him from any knightly courtesy he would have to otherwise extend to her and her cohorts.

Facing death for his refusal to cooperate, Lancelot is thankfully rescued by the daughter of King Bagdemagus, who frees him on the condition that he fight for her father in an upcoming tournament. Certainly, this is a request which should be easy to fulfill--until Lancelot discovers that he must do battle with other knights of the Round Table who will be present at the tournament. Again, Lancelot is in a bind of conflicting interests. He owes his life to King Bagdemagus' daughter, whose father truly needs Lancelot's help; his kingdom is located in the hinterlands of Arthur's domain, where heroic renegades lurk in greater numbers than they do near Camelot. Bagdemagus must be able to have a great deal of worship to his name to keep such scoundrels at bay. However, Lancelot cannot publicly fight his fellow knights and undermine the solidarity of the Round Table's fellowship by engaging in what would normally be a heroically reckless endeavor. Perhaps one of the most important restraints on the worshipful knight, and also one of the strongest forces keeping the worshipful society from reverting to a heroic one, is the implicit understanding that one's worship should not be

sought or obtained at the expense of a fellow knight's worship. Doing so reduces the worship of not only the vanquished knight but the whole fellowship as well. Worship is to be gained by spreading the influence of the Round table and the Pentecostal oath, not by attacking one's comrades.

Lancelot's solution exemplifies the cool-headed thinking (that is, the knight's detachment from self, or chivalric objectiveness) which is the mark of a successful Worshipful knight. He fights in the tournament anonymously, concealing his identity by using a white shield in lieu of his personally customized (and instantly recognizable) one. Thus, Lancelot pays his debt to Bagdemagus' daughter, wins the tournament (and worship) for her father, avoids the chivalric misstep of openly combatting his brother knights, and even advances his own physical prowess by performing great deeds of arms during the tournament:

Anone therewithall sir Launcelot gate a speare in his honde, and or ever that speare brake he bare downe to the erthe syxtene knyghtes, som horse and man, and som the man and nat the horse; and there was none that he hitte surely but that he bare none armys that day.  
(Works, p.156)

Lancelot's adventure continues in his rescue of Ector, still held prisoner by the renegade Tarquin. Tarquin is a patently villainous, if not retroactive knight best distinguished by an adherence to Heroic principles in order to justify his evil deeds:

'Feythfully,' seyde sir Terquyn, 'his name is sir Launcelot de Lake, for he slowe my brothir sir Carados at the Dolerous Towre...And for Launcelottis sake I have slayne an hondred good knyghtes, and as many I



have maymed all uttirly...and many have dyed in preson.  
(Works, p.158)

Lancelot discovers Tarquin's sinister operation while saving Gaheris, who was in the process of being thrown in Tarquin's dungeon. Once Tarquin reveals himself and his motivations, Lancelot administers the only appropriate sentence, death, to the renegade. Gaheris' unjust imprisonment is prevented, and his numerous fellow knights are liberated. Lancelot has not only administered justice, but he has enabled his fellows to resume doing the same.

A final example occurs near the end of the book, as Lancelot comes across "a knyght chasyng a lady with a naked swerde to have slayne hir" (Works, 170). This is an opportunity for Lancelot to uphold, arguably, the most morally important duty of the Worshipful knight--to champion otherwise defenseless women. Lancelot, in defending a woman who cannot defend herself, is performing an equally important task, punishing any false knight who would dare attack a lady. What follows is a complex tangle of chivalric priorities which Lancelot must somehow unravel as the knight in question, sir Pedevere, claims his wife has been unfaithful to him (and therefore deserves to die) while his wife naturally insists that she is innocent.

Given that Lancelot has no choice but to defend her, he uses the respect his high amount of personal worship affords him and subtly orders Pedevere to stand down ("'Sir,' seyde the knyght, 'in your syght I woll be ruled as ye woll have me.'" [Works, p.171]). Pedevere does so, but not a second later, after distracting Lancelot, he beheads his wife, betraying not only

Lancelot's authority over him, but the most fundamental of his Worshipful vows. Before Lancelot can administer justice to Pedevere, the knight cowardly "gryped sir Launcelot by the thyghes and cryed mercy" (Works, 171). Lancelot now faces a new conundrum: he must make Pedevere pay for defiling one of the most sacred duties of Worshipful knighthood, yet he cannot do the same by slaying Pedevere while he is begging for mercy. Lancelot again takes the most appropriate course of action by forcing Pedevere to carry his wife's remains as a badge of shame until he can seek atonement from Queen Guenevere:

'Well,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'take this lady and the hede, and bere it uppon the; and here shalt thou swere uppon my swerde to bere hit allwayes uppon thy bak and never to reste tyll thou com to my lady, quene Gwenyver.' (Works, p.171)

Pedevere's kind of punishment is especially harsh to the Worshipful knight, for it marks the culprit with a badge of shame that both negates what worship he may have already won and prevents the winning of any further worship until the crime has been atoned for. This form of shame is the usual result from the chivalric misdeeds Lancelot is generally free from and Gawain continues to commit. Many of Arthur's knights can and do perform as admirably as Lancelot does, but only Lancelot does so with such consistency and such an insignificant margin of error. For this, Lancelot naturally is able to win more worship than any of his knightly peers and maintain his position as the Round Table's supreme champion.

Given our understanding of how the Worshipful society works, why its knights act the way they do, and how the Worshipful society precludes Arthur from having to directly involve himself with the grittier workings of his kingdom, we can now examine the effect of the Grail quest on this society and the source of Arthur's sorrow at his knights' insistence upon pursuing the elusive cup of Christ.

That the Grail appears during the Pentecostal feast is not merely an aesthetic coincidence. Its appearance presents a "mervaylous tydyng" which is more than a quest to pursue and win worship from. As the Grail, "coverde with whyght samyte," vanishes from Arthur's court, it dares the fellowship to unveil it. To this Worshipful society, a challenge of the highest order has been issued, to quest after the holiest physical object the human mind arguably could conceive. Gawain's response to this glimpse of the Grail is that he should venture forth to physically obtain it, bringing greater glory to himself and his temporal lord. Gawain's perception of what the Grail quest should be is an extreme case of the misinterpretation shared by most of the fellowship: that this is a holy quest, but one rooted in the physical world, and God is to be glorified as much as one's king or self.

However, the Grail is not just a glittery treasure to be retrieved and placed on Arthur's mantle, but a challenge to Arthur's fellowship, daring them to undertake a quest which carries extra-worldly ramifications. The Grail's appearance at the Pentecostal feast (a time of Worshipful trials via Arthur's wedding feast (also during Pentecost).

marvellous, quest-inspiring occurrences, that now offers a much more spiritual endeavor) is a physical manifestation of the greatest undertaking the Worshipful society, one based on the idea and practice of questing<sup>9</sup> as a primary means of worship-winning, can assume.

If the Grail quest is to be completed successfully, the majority of Arthur's fellowship must be able to adapt to the kind of spiritual characteristics needed to become worthy of "winning" the Grail. The fellowship has already embraced the Pentecostal Oath and thus ascended from a Heroic to a Worshipful state; if it could again be so able to transform itself into a higher form of knighthood, the Worshipful society would evolve into a True society, the highest form of knighthood, in which all worldly motivation is discarded, and one's energies are directed solely to promoting the glory of God.

Given the gravity of the Grail quest and what it can do to elevate Arthurian society, it may seem odd that Arthur so laments its undertaking. Arthur's cries are superficially motivated by the physical loss this quest could mean for the kingdom--with all of the fellowship's best and brightest away chasing the Grail, the kingdom is much more vulnerable to renegade knights than it would otherwise be. The lack of Round Table knights means that the kingdom will not be as well-policed as it normally would be. Arthur's apprehension could also be traced to what might happen

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<sup>9</sup>Questing is, for the purposes of this discussion, reacting to an extraordinary occurrence by pursuing it, as if it is a problem solveable by any knight who deftly plies his Worshipful sensibilities, e.g. the strange appearance of the hart and hinds at Arthur's wedding feast (also during Pentecost).

if many would die on the quest. In purely Worshipful terms, the kingdom would lose much of its worship and ability to win worship. With many of its knights dead or misplaced, the Worshipful society could lose its ability to support itself. We could theorize that an insufficient upholding of the Pentecostal Oath would undermine the stability of the kingdom, there being no one to prevent renegade knights or lords from wreaking havoc, and a reversion to a Heroic society could occur.

Undertaking the Grail quest will prove to be too much of a strain for the Worshipful society to endure. All who pursue the quest will more than likely fail and many of the Round Table knights ("more than halff" [Works, p.599]) will die as a result. Thus, we must satisfy another question in order to explain Arthur's protest against his fellowship's undertaking the Grail quest. Why is the Grail quest too much for the Worshipful society? What are the limits of the Worshipful society? Why is it so difficult, even impossible, for the Worshipful society to become a True society?

First, we must define the True society by those knights who would populate it. True knighthood equates spiritual perfection and a minimal attachment to the material world. True knighthood is a total commitment to promulgating a love for God rather than a love for codified (worldly) behavior. A crucial distinction between Worshipful and True knighthood is the degree to which each displays self-concern. The True knight is a selfless, "radically Christian" figure for whom knighthood is a medium for serving God. Although the True knight's actions may resemble

those of a Worshipful knight upholding the Pentecostal Oath, whether or not a temporal lord is upheld is not a concern, or intended effect. For the Worshipful knight, contrarily, the self must be a concern. What gives the Worshipful knight his sense of purpose is the self-worth he achieves by serving worldly motives and desires, however refined they may be (e.g., worship-winning or courtly love). Even more crucial is the fact that only True knights can, and indeed do, complete the Grail quest.

Sir Galahad is the only perfect knight we see in Le Morte D'Arthur and thereby is True Knighthood's exemplar. His character is never below pure holiness, and his actions have never broken the hymen of Worshipful motivation, as described by the blind king Mordrains, who, while lying on his death bed, jubilantly receives the spiritually pure presence of Galahad during his final worldly moments:

' Sir Galahad, the servaunte of Jesu Cryste and verry knyght, whos commynge I have abyddyn longe, now embrace me and lette me reste on thy breste, so that I may reste betwene thyne armys! For thou arte a clene virgyne above all knyghtes, as the floure of the lylly in whom virginite is signified. And thou arte the rose which ys the floure of all good vertu, and in colour of fyre. For the fyre of the Holy Goste ys taken so in the that my fleyssh, whych was all dede of oldenes, ys becom agayne yonge.' (Works, p.600)

Mordrains' description of Galahad tells us that because Galahad has never fallen out of touch with the intense religious motivation that should, but often does not define a knight's identity, he has retained a multi-faceted sense of "virginite." Obviously, Galahad has never physically forsaken his virginal status, but more importantly, this metaphor applies to the degree to which a knight has not given himself to the world and instead

saved himself for God alone. Just as Lancelot is the greatest Worshipful knight because he has (in part) committed the fewest chivalric misdeeds, Galahad is the greatest True knight because he has the least contact with the Worshipful world, living constantly in its presence but spiritually degrading himself to reform his deeds for the love of a king, code or woman, instead doing so solely for the love of God.

Galahad's entry into Arthur's court is as significant as Arthur's entry into Heroic England. In terms of moral sophistication, Galahad is to the Worshipful fellowship what the Worshipful Arthur was to his Heroic peers. Galahad easily fits within the description Beverly Kennedy gives of the True, or as she also puts it, "religious-feudal" knight:

The religious-feudal knight believed that God Himself had ordained the High Order of Knighthood and that therefore he was obliged to serve God first, even before his temporal lord....Lull defined the 'veray' knight as a man dedicated to God and to his temporal lord, eager to defend women and helpless men and children from harm, and totally committed to the notion that his sword was given him to do justice. To do less than justice would be to betray God and the High Order. (Kennedy, p.88)

Galahad is also the on-going inspiration for his fellow Grail knights. His purity assures him success while pursuing the Grail, which gives the less perfect Grail knights a spiritual model to follow so that they might also successfully complete their quest:

Than all the knyghtes of the Table Rounde mervayled gretely of sir Galahad that he durst sitte there and was so tendir of ayge, and wyst nat frome whens he com but all only be God. All they seyde,

'Thys ys he by whom the Sankgreall shall be encheved, for there sate never none but he were myscheved.' (Works, p.519)

The only other True knights are Bors and Perceval, both former Worshipful knights who, through their efforts, were able to sufficiently separate themselves from their Worshipful lives and spiritually rededicate themselves wholly to God. Because Bors and Perceval were not born as True knights as Galahad was, and must earn that distinction, they must bow to him as True knighthood's exemplar. Bors and Perceval are, however, prime examples of what kind of reaction the Round Table's knights should but do not have--being so spiritually inspired from glimpsing the Grail, they should strive to transform themselves during the course of their adventures from being unworthy of viewing the Grail to being privy to its secrets.

Juxtaposed to the successful True knights is Lancelot, the most notable failure among the Grail knights. He fails, having never performed the necessary shedding of Worshipful motivations to become a True knight. Faithful to Worshipful form, Lancelot seeks the Grail for personal worship, as he tells Guenevere upon leaving for the quest, "'A, madam, I pray you be nat displeased, for I shall com agayne as sone as I may with my worship'" (Works, p.524). What is most striking about Lancelot's failed efforts as a Grail knight is how close he comes to succeeding, as Bors, Perceval and Galahad did. Lancelot makes it as far to the Castle of Corbenic, until he, against the advice of a disembodied voice warning him that he is not worthy of seeing the mysteries of the Grail, attempts to enter the room containing the Grail, incurring drastic results:

Ryght so entird he into the chambir and cam toward the table of sylver, and whan he cam nyghe hit he felte a



breeth that hym thought hit was entromedled with fyre, which smote hym so sore in the vysayge that hym thought hit brente hys vysayge. And therewith he felle to the erthe and had no power to aryse, as he that was so araged that he loste the power of hys body and hys hyrynge and syght. Than felte he many hondys whych toke hym up and bare hym oute of the chambir doore and leffte hym there semyng dede to all people. (Works, p.597)

Lancelot's particular failure illustrates his inability to succeed in his quest because he, like any other failed Worshipful knight, wishes to obtain the Grail to satisfy a worship-winning end. Even Lancelot's self-inflicted damage when trying to get within the presence of the Grail was motivated by a Worshipful intent, to help what appeared to be a swooning priest, excessively filled with spiritual energy:

And than sir Launcelot mervayled nat a litill, for hym thought the pryste was so gretely charged of the vygoure that hym semed that he sholde falle to the erth. And whan he saw none aboute hym that wolde help hym, than cam he to the dore a grete pace and seyde, 'Fayre fadir, Jesu Cryste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe the good man whych hath grete need of helpe.' (Works, p.597)

At this point, Lancelot is not worthy of being received into the Grail's presences, which is what would ordinarily happen if he were to enter the room in which he sees the swooning priest. Lancelot is required to stay from pressing on in the Grail quest - he has gone as far as he can go because he is too Worshipfully motivated to progress any further. This swooning priest seems to be a final, if not punitive reminder that Lancelot's Worshipful intentions, no matter how noble, simply are not acceptable in an environment calling for strictly religious inspiration. Additionally, Lancelot's main lament after being initially rebuffed from the Grail's presence ("...for he was overtakyn with

synne, that he had no power to ryse agayne the holy vessell." [Works, p.537]) concerns what will be his subsequent lack of worship: "And so departed [Lancelot] sore weynge and cursed the tyme that he was bore, for than he demed never to have worship more" (Works, p.537-538).

Beyond his specifically Worshipful actions, which are insufficient to complete the Grail quest, a greater permeation of Worshipful principle into Lancelot's character further hinders him. Although Lancelot had cleansed himself several times (through penance) of the moral failings which can result from leading a Worshipful life, he was never in contention to see the Grail because his intentions were ultimately Worshipful. Every action of Lancelot's is motivated by his desire to win the earthly love of a woman (Guenevere). This love can never be legally legitimized (it is adultery with the king's wife, after all), evidenced by Lancelot's continued affair with Guenevere after the Grail quest has ended:

Than, as the booke seyth, sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste; for, as the booke seyth, had nat sir launcelot bene in his prevy thoughtes and in hys myndis so sette inwardly to the quene as he was in semynge outewarde to God, there had no knyght passed hym in the queste of the Sankgreall. (Works, p.611)

Just as Lancelot failed the Grail quest because he was unable to shake his Worshipful attributes, so will nearly every other Grail knight likewise fail. As exemplar of Worshipful knighthood, Lancelot's failure to "achieve" the Grail is emblematic of nearly every other Worshipful knight's failure to do the same.

The road to True knighthood is strenuous, one which not all who travel it can endure. The path to be followed by those knights who would seek the Grail is metaphorically represented as we observe Galahad's journey during the quest. Galahad, upon teaming with Sir Melias, comes to a point in his travels in which his path parts ways at the need to abandon one's Worshipful self for a higher spiritual standard:

'Now ye knyghtes arraunte which goth to seke knyghtes adventurys, se here two wayes: that one way defendith the that thou ne go that way, for he shall nat go oute of the way agayne but if he be a good man and a worthy knyght. And if thou go on the lyffte honde thou shall nat there lyghtly wyne prouesse, for thou shalt in thys way be sone assayde.' (Works, p.529)

Although we do not see every Grail knight arrive at this particular juncture, it is one which they all must confront within themselves as they pursue the Grail, and it is in this sense that the road to the Grail makes its importance known. This road also details the Worshipful inability to successfully complete the Grail quest. Gawain's overtly inappropriate attitude to the Grail quest as a purely physical challenge seems far less sophisticated a shortcoming than Lancelot's inability to love God more than a woman, but both knights are equally ineligible to experience the unmasked Grail, for the same genus of spiritual flaw, if not the same species.

The Worshipful knight's nature makes him susceptible to chivalric failure. This kind of risk will always shadow him until he sheds his Worshipful status for a True one. This critical stepping-stone to True knighthood is one which the Worshipful

knight simply isn't able to navigate very successfully, as explained to the defeated knight sir Melias:

'...And whan the devyll saw your pryde and youre persumcion for to take you to the queste of the Sankgreal, and that made you to be overthrowyn, for hit may nat be encheved but by vertuous lyvynges.' (Works, p.531)

The Grail books externalize the interior nature of the Worshipful Grail knights, exemplified by the comparison of Lancelot's chivalric imperfection (which could equally, if not more so stand for any Worshipful knight's failings) by an allusion to "an olde rottyn tre":

'Now have I shewed the why thou art harder than the stone and bitterer than the tre; now shall I shew the why thou art more naked and barer than the fygge-tre....Than oure Lorde cursed the tre that bare no fruyte; that betokenyth the fyg-tre unto Jerusalem that had levys and no fruyte. So thou, sir Launcelot, whan the Holy Grayle was brough before the, He founde in the no fruyte, nother good thought nother good wylle, and defouled with lechory.' (Works, pp.539-540)

As we see the interior nature of the Grail knights externalized, either through explanation, as above, or by physical retribution for one's sinfulness (e.g., Lancelot's burning, or Gawain's numerous smittings), we see them fall prey to their shortcomings, disqualified from succeeding in the Grail quest. Worshipful behavior, specifically any Worshipful motivation for pursuing the Grail quest, will produce this result. Worshipful knighthood entails a constant proximity to miscarrying one's knightly duties. Those who can constantly avoid committing such chivalric misdeeds (True knights) do so by abandoning Worshipfulness altogether. Those who remain Worshipful will either always have some blot on their character, or the possibility of the same

happening. Being able to commit Worshipful mistakes is enough alone to disqualify one from the Grail quest.

The members of Arthur's fellowship undertaking the Grail quest are a Worshipful lot, pursuing the Grail under Worshipful motivations. They pursue something which they can already never obtain unless they advance themselves spiritually. However, most of this fellowship (except Percival and Bors) are unaware of the evolution to True knighthood they must make. They drive themselves into the ground by chasing the Grail through methods they think should work, but can not understand why they fail. To become worthy of the Grail and "the mysteryes of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste," Arthur's knights must become like Galahad, for whom the Grail is a manifestation of the merging of the physical and spiritual, something which offers him a view of ordinary bread actually becoming the body of Christ:

And at the lyfting up there cam a vigoure in lyknesse of a chylde, and the vysage was as rede and bryght os ony fyre, and smote hymselff into the brede, that all they saw hit that the brede was formed of a fleyshely man. And than he put hit into the holy vessell agayne, and than he ded that longed to a preste to do masse.  
(Works, p.603)

Whereas Lancelot (Worshipful exemplar of the failed Grain knight) wants to experience the Grail physically, Galahad wants to experience a precursor of his transfiguration out of this life, a fusion of his physical and spiritual selves, an abandonment of his human frailty to reach a higher level of spiritual purity.

Lancelot's emblematic failure shows us that what motivates Arthur's Grail knights is the desire to obtain physically the cup, not the True desire to experience the Grail's mysteries as a

precursor to the merging of physical and spiritual that comes at death, exemplified by Galahad's sublimation into Heaven while in the city of Sarras:

And therewith he kneled downe tofore the table and made hys prayers. And so suddeynly departed hys soule to Jesu Cryste, and a grete multitude of angels bare hit up to hevyn evyn in the syght of hys two felowis.  
(Works, 607)

Hence, as Arthur's fellowship pursues the Grail under erroneous motivations, the quest fails miserably and its knights suffer decimation. Few men return at all; even fewer are able to transform their Worshipful motivations into True ones and complete the Grail quest.

This is the root of the Arthurian failure. The Arthurian society, at first a Heroic entity, can only improve itself by becoming a Worshipful society. It does so, and eventually the Worshipful society arrives at the same point the old Heroic society came to--a time either to stagnate or to progress to a higher level of existence. The Heroic society could advance itself by modifying and restricting its behavior in order for the kingdom to evolve into a Worshipful society. Because the problems addressed by the societal progression from a Heroic to Worshipful society were worldly ones (restraining the destructive urges of the warrior class, devising a method to insure prolonged political stability within and without the kingdom's borders). The progression from a Worshipful to a True society does not concern similarly Worshipful issues, and cannot be addressed by Worshipful means. A True society entails a wholesale rejection

of the worldliness that Arthur's society, in becoming Worshipful, has enslaved itself to.

The Grail quest is undertaken in accordance with the noblest of Worshipful aspirations, and, if successfully completed by Arthur's fellowship (by transforming themselves from Worshipful to True knights as Bors and Perceval did), would prompt a societal progression from Worshipful to True status. However, one's success concerning this quest can only be measured by the degree to which loyalties to Arthur and the Pentecostal Oath are abandoned for a strict loyalty to God alone, and thus this Worshipful aspiration undermines itself. The closer Arthur's knights are to become True through the Grail quest, the more they must betray their original motivations for undertaking it. This is indeed a tall order, one which is ultimately met by only Bors and Perceval. The rest of the Worshipful fellowship fail this challenge, illustrating that no amount of worldly codification will ever bring Gawain or even Lancelot to Galahad's spiritual level. As long as Arthur's society is typified by Lancelot and Gawain instead of Galahad, endeavors like the Grail quest can never be anything more than a society-wide, destructive confrontation with the fallibility that comes with the territory of being human.

It is this unravelling of Arthur's Worshipful society over the fine tapestry of chivalry to a quarried tangle of hatred which causes the destruction of the kingdom. As Eugene Vinaver clearly reminds us,

The tragedy of the Round Table was not that it was not just an example of the medieval ideal, but that it was the result of the failure of the knights to achieve the quest of the Grail, the final catastrophe

"...now ys thys realme holy destroyed and myscheved..."

We have seen how Arthur transforms his Heroic society into a Worshipful one, and how and why this Worshipful society fails to successfully carry out its greatest challenge, the Grail Quest. Moving past the phase of minimal activity required of Arthur during his kingdom's Worshipful period and his extremely noticeable lament at the beginning of the Grail quest, we shift our attention to the sharp increase of Arthur's personal involvement with his kingdom as it sharply reverts from a Worshipful to a Heroic environment, shortly after the failed Grail quest. This reversion to Heroism marks the beginning of the Arthurian society's destruction. The change back to Heroism is too drastic for the kingdom to withstand, and thus it shakes itself apart, like an old biplane's wings peeling away from the fuselage during an excessively steep dive.

We cannot accurately explain what causes Arthur's kingdom to go from a Worshipful to a Heroic state, nor can we attach importance to its occurrence after the failure of the Grail quest. We can only, as we must, recognize that such a devolution does occur and that it is this unravelling of Arthur's Worshipful society from the fine tapestry of chivalry to a gnarled tangle of Heroism which causes the destruction of the kingdom. As Eugene Vinaver wisely reminds us,

The tragedy of the Round Table as Malory saw it was not just an example of the mutability of man's destiny nor the result of the failure of the "worldly" knights to achieve the quest of the Grail. The final catastrophe



was to Malory a human drama determined first to last by the tragic clash of loyalties. (Works, 773)

The juxtaposition of Gawain's loyalty concerning his kinship ties with Lancelot's extremely Worshipful behavior catches Arthur between the two, unable to hold them together any longer. This aforementioned juxtaposition leads to conflict and quickly sunders the Round Table's fellowship, sending it spiraling downward, from pinnacle to pandemonium, from acme to anarchy.

We also cannot solely finger Arthur, Gawain, Lancelot or Guenevere for the kingdom's death; they all play equal hands in it. Only Aggravain and Mordred (a grim reminder of sins committed by a younger, more Heroic Arthur than the one who laments the siege of the Joyous Garde) are especially to blame here, but they are only the catalysts to a crisis which had already primed itself to occur. Aggravain and Mordred are mere symptoms (albeit blatantly achivalric ones) of a more pervasive problem which will destroy the Arthurian kingdom, despite its best efforts to hold together: the resurgence of the Heroic warrior ethic and the disintegration of Worshipful, chivalric behavior.

The "domino effect" which destroys Arthur's kingdom can be traced to Aggravain's loud decrying of Lancelot and Guenevere, speaking "opynly, and nat in no councyle, that manye knyghis myght here," (673) of the adultery (and on Lancelot's part, treachery) that he knows, but cannot prove is repeatedly occurring. Mordred, who publicly attaches himself to Aggravain's cause, further puts into motion a very sticky situation in which "it is not adultery but speaking about adultery, not private sin but public shame, which matters." (McCarthy, 105)

Why is this important? Clearly, Lancelot and Guenevere have been carrying on their affair from at least the beginning of "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," if not before, but their adulterous goings-on have never adversely affected the kingdom, or even lowered Lancelot's standing within the fellowship. We might even speculate that Lancelot's worship has increased as a side-effect of this affair; successfully defending Guenevere's honor against all accusers has netted him more than one battle victory. Lancelot is obviously guilty of a severe Worshipful misdeed (Malory himself admits in his narrative that the couple "loved togydirs more hottir than they dud toforehonde" [Works, 611]), but not until he is publicly accused and proven to be guilty will he have to accept responsibility for his passion.

Such an accusation and verdict comes through a test of arms between the accuser and the accused--the winner is obviously the man in the right, for God would certainly not favor an unjust claim. We can hardly wonder that, being the greatest knight of the fellowship, he has not been found guilty for his affair with the queen. Lancelot's battlefield maintenance of his innocence foils Aggravain's previous attempts to expose him. His plans defeated, Aggravain is denied the opportunity to further maintain Lancelot's guilt, aside from making a new charge and risking a beating while trying to "make the charges stick." In Arthur's society, there is (thankfully) no double jeopardy. Any dissention we see among the fellowship as to Lancelot's guilt or innocence is safely defused by a Worshipfully satisfactory solution-- Lancelot makes a clean defense of his innocence. However, this

kind of situation is made exponentially more difficult by Aggravain's handling of it in "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthure Saunz Guerdon," in which he bypasses the Worshipful safety valve that has kept this scenario from becoming a serious issue within the kingdom. Aggravain discards the normally accepted method of accusing another knight of wrong-doings by, in a most Heroic fashion, hoping to catch Lancelot red-handed by finding him in the queen's chambers, supposedly committing the act he has been accused of.

Aggravain is an "unhappy" knight who jealously wished to destroy those who are worshipfully superior to him (e.g. Lancelot) to vindicate his bruised (Heroic?) ego. Thus, he has no qualms about ignoring the behavioral restrictions placed on him by the Pentecostal Oath. he will stop at nothing to destroy Lancelot, and so we are hardly surprised that Aggravain's approach is archtypically Heroic. First, his plan hinges on being able to somehow justify that Lancelot's being in the queen's chambers is the same as sleeping in them. Secondly, that Aggravain would even wish to carry out such a plan illustrates his Heroic nature, easily dominated by his unethical methods to serve a selfish, petty cause. That Lancelot's chivalric love for Guenevere had become a physical romance is largely common knowledge in the realm, yet the Worshipful knights of Arthur's fellowship have refrained from accusing Lancelot out of recognition for Lancelot's supreme rank among them. If Lancelot has not personally knighted any of his potential accusers, he certainly has more worship than them, an issue most Worshipful

knights would find sufficient enough cause to stay their tongues and look the other way. Aggravain does not (while obviously Lancelot's Worshipful inferior), and his insisting on bringing this point to the king's attention drags Arthur into this rapidly growing mess.

Aggravain and Mordred cannot simply administer justice as they see fit to their fellow knights without some higher approval. Otherwise, they subject themselves not only to the Worshipful punishments which would be placed upon them, but also to the same kind of revenge-taking they are plotting (their deeds run the risk of inducing further Heroic activity within the fellowship). Thus, they extract from Arthur the permission they need, by calling in a Heroic favor, reminding him that "we be your syster sunnes," and "may suffir hit no lenger" (Works, 674). Aggravain's and Mordred's bulletin is couched in what would seem to be chivalric duty, exposing a false knight in order to mete justice to him ("And all we wote that ye sholde be above sir Lancelot, and ye ar the kynge that made hym knyght, and therefore we woll preve hit that he is a traytoure to youre person." [Works, 674]), but still necessitates a typically Heroic tactic, Aggravain and Mordred's use of a fourteen-man posse to overwhelm the lone Lancelot. Why then, does Arthur agree to such methods when they clearly go against the grain of his Worshipful society ("'I woll well,' seyde the kynge. 'Than I counceyle you to take with you sure felyshyp.'" [Works, 675]), and more curiously, why does Arthur offer advice to Aggravain and Mordred as they ready

themselves to apprehend Lancelot ("'Beware,' seyde kynge Arthure, 'for I warne you, ye shall fynde hym wyght.'" [Works, 675])?

Arthur's actions here are not as Heroic as they seem but are manifestations of what is perhaps the most binding factor of Worshipful behavior--mutual trust between Worshipful knights. Arthur, like most other knights of the fellowship, withholds his judgement of a knight unless witnessing one committing a misdeed or observing his "guilty verdict":being Worshipfully defeated by the knight who accused him. Arthur's approval of Aggravain's and Mordred's plan is less a Heroic condoning of a fourteen-to-one ambush than it is the belief that there will be nothing for Aggravain, Mordred, and their posse to apprehend Lancelot for. If Arthur anticipated Aggravain and Mordred discovering Lancelot committing the crime they accuse him of, we could speculate that he would not approve of such an unfair handling to the situation. When Mordred limps back to Arthur after the botched ambush upon Lancelot (for which the group had no proof that Lancelot was actually doing anything wrong, and paid for it with their lives), Arthur is taken aback that Lancelot had actually been found in a questionable position: "A, Jesu, mercy! How may thys be?' seyde the kynge. 'Toke ye hym in the quenys chambir?'" (Works, 681)

Unfortunately for Arthur, his faith in Lancelot's innocence and Aggravain's and Mordred's inability to prove otherwise, creates more problems than it solves. Upon hearing of Lancelot's flight from the court, Arthur's faith in Lancelot falters--why would he run away if he were not guilty?--and even he admits the possibility that Lancelot has committed sexual misconduct with

Guenevere. Her lot is little better; Arthur feels she must now be burned to cleanse himself of such "marked goods" (a typical feudal punishment for a woman's treason to her husband), salvaging as much of his damaged reputation as possible and extracting restitution for the thirteen knights who died fighting over her. We should note that we never know for certain if Mordred's and Aggravain's specific charges are justified. As they demanded entrance into Guenevere's locked chambers, we are never shown what actually transpired beforehand inside. Malory, rather than telling us if Lancelot and Guenevere are guilty as charged, covers his narrative eyes for fear of what he might see--not even Malory, it seems, can truly put his faith behind Lancelot:

For, as the Freynshhe booke seyth, the quene and sir Launcelot were togydirs. And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes. (Works, 676)

Oddly enough, it is Gawain who, like Merlin of Arthur's younger days, reminds the king of the duties he must perform in the light of this: that Heroic knee-jerk speculations based on inconclusive evidence are not the proper way to approach this situation. Guenevere's intentions, Gawain argues, could easily have been innocent when she invited Lancelot to her chambers, and Lancelot is still, as far as anyone challenging him has yet to prove, an unblemished knight who has done nothing to deserve punishment or even doubt from his peers and superiors:

'My lorde Arthure, I wolde councyle you nat to be over hasty, but that ye wolde put hit in respite, thys jougemente of my lady the quene, for many causis....And peradventure she sente for hym for goodnes and for none evyll, to rewarde hym for his good dedys that he had done to her in tymes past....And as for sir Launcelot,

I dare say he woll make hit good uppon ony knyght  
lyvvyng that woll put uppon hym vylany or shame, and in  
lyke wyse he woll make good for my lady the quene.'  
(Works, 682)

Gawain is correct, after all, and had Arthur taken his advice, a great deal of harm could have been prevented. Instead, Arthur supports the flimsy evidence pointing to his possible cuckolding at the hands of his best friend, and decides to avenge these apparant betrayals by killing those who wronged him (e.g. vowing to put both Guenevere and Lancelot to the stake). Worshipful motivation, as well as Heroic rage could be spurring Arthur to this action, especially if he fears that if he does not somehow right this situation, he will personally lose worship by being seen as incapable of managing his Worshipful society.

As Lancelot expectedly rescues Guenevere from her burning, thus foiling Arthur's self-vindication, he unfortunately slays the unarmed Gareth and Gaheris with errant blows while "amonge the thyckyste of the prees." Guenevere's rescue instantly changes the focus of the kingdom's crisis from a malicious framing of Lancelot to a blood feud against him, as Gawain discovers his accidentally slain kin, and swears to avenge them at any cost:

'My kyng, my lorde, and myne uncle,' seyde sir  
Gawayne, 'wyte you well, now I shall make you a promyse  
whych I shall holde be my knyghthode, that frome thys  
day forewarde i shall never fayle sir Launcelot untyll  
that one of us have slayne that othir. (Works, 687)

Gawain's reversal of policy is a typically Heroic response to hearing that his kin had been slain--revenge!--enhanced in that he has two brothers to avenge. Gaheris' death comes as a harsher blow to Gawain, who sees it also as a form of betrayal by Lancelot, having killed a man who implicitly trusted him. Gaheris

and Gareth's death do more than send Gawain on the warpath; they pull Arthur into the vendetta as well.

As Heroically angered Arthur might be (aside from his Worshipful interests) concerning Lancelot's actions with Guenevere, not the least of which is her apparant kidnapping from the burning stake, the king's concern shifts from insuring Lancelot's punishment to mitigating Gawain's resonse to the accidental slaying of Gareth and Gaheris. While Arthur by no means forgets his wrath at Lancelot, he also realizes Gawain's legendary obsession for revenge. Once the king comprehends the full ramifications of Gawain's vendetta, he sees the damage that has been done to his fellowship:

'Well,' seyde Arthure, 'the deth of them woll cause the grettist mortall warre that ever was, for I am sure that whan sir Gawayne knowyth hereoff that sir Gareth ys slayne, I shall never have rests of hym tyll I have destroyed sir Launcelottis kynne and hymselff bothe, other else he to destroy me....' (Works, 685)

We must note that Arthur's acknowledgement of the oncoming war which faces his fellowship is less an affirmation of his desire to punish Lancelot than it is a realization that Gawain's need for personal justice will more than likely draw the kingdom into a self-destructive conflagration. While Arthur's quarrel is with Lancelot, it is with Lancelot only, evidenced by his (however Heroic) desire to end the conflict through single combat ("'Com forth,' seyde kynge Arthur unto sir Launcelot, 'and thou darste, and I promyse the i shall mete the in myddis of thys fylde.'" [Works, 688])). Of course, Arthur's host does much collateral damage to "both the towne and the castell" of Joyous Garde, where Lancelot has taken refuge. We should take care to



notice that as rash and Heroic Arthur has acted in this affair, he still has the sense to understand that this business of vendetta can cost him more than his bruised ego stands to profit if the entire fellowship destroys itself in the process. Given the semblance of level-headedness Arthur still has, the Lucius-like pursuit of Lancelot is much more likely to be of Gawain's doing and not Arthur's, especially when we remember his charge to Arthur:

'...And therefore I requyre you, my lorde and kynge, dresse you unto the warres, for wyte you well, I woll be revenged uppon sir Launcelot; and therefore, as ye woll have my servyse and my love, now haste you thereto and assay youre frendis....' (Works, 687)

Arthur's compliance with Gawain's idea of storming the Joyous Garde would appear to evidence Arthur's personal fall from Worshipful reasoning to Heroic wrathmongering (otherwise, why would the loss of Gawain's personal "servyse and...love" be a matter of great concern for Arthur?). If we look closer at the above passage we find that there are subtler, albeit Heroic forces at work here. Gawain's proclamation of vendetta against Lancelot not only announces his intentions, but binds Arthur to his cause, like it or not. Arthur's personal plans to extract justice from Lancelot, now modified to include the kidnapping he has been charged with after Guenevere's rescue, do not include an agenda to avenge Gaheris' and Gareth's deaths:

And so unto kynge Arthure drew many knyghtes, deukes, and erlis, that he had a grete oste, and whan they were assembeled the kynge enfourmed hem how sir Launcelot had beraffte hym hys quene... (oOrks, 687)

Gawain's request of Arthur to "assay youre frendis" contains the concealed threat that any action besides compliance with this

vendetta could be construed as betrayal, thus jeopardizing the peace between the king and his nephew. Now, Arthur has no choice but to act out of Heroic self-preservation, for his situation has, at least for the moment, largely boiled down to Heroic principle. Firstly, Arthur must comply with Gawain's demands in order to prevent losing his notable services as a warrior. Secondly, Arthur must do what he can to keep the peace between himself and Gawain by fully participating in the campaign against Lancelot (which he hardly minds, since he still wants to avenge himself upon Lancelot for "stealing" Guenevere from him), for to do otherwise not only would lose Gawain's fellowship but most likely spark him into war against the king, lord and uncle who failed to look out for his own, and betrayed the closest bond a man can know--his blood. However, once Arthur yields to Gawain and amasses an army to pursue Lancelot, his lot has become completely Heroic. His concessions to Gawain only intensify the danger of what could happen if he wished to break with Gawain's agenda later on. This is why Arthur so laments this entire war, once he desires to forgive Lancelot and Guenevere and reconcile his kingdom: because to do so would spark an equally huge conflict between himself and Gawain. If anything is tragic about Arthur's final days, this is it--a man so bent on revenge that he cannot free himself from it once involved, even if it kills him. "The art of kanly (vendetta)," Frank Herbert writes in his science fiction classic, Dune, "is still alive." Arthur is about to find out that it is also too robust to escape, once befriended.

Arthur's first contact with Lancelot at the Joyous Garde is a challenge to single combat:

'Now, fye uppon thy fayre langayge!' seyde the kynge, 'for wyte thou well and truste hit, I am thy mortall foo and ever woll to my deth-day; for thou hast slayne my good knyghtes and full noble men of my blood, that shall I never recover agayne. Also thou haste layne be my quene and holdyn hey many wynters, and sytthen, lyke a traytoure, taken her away fro me by fors.' (Works, 688)

Arthur charges Lancelot with a multifaceted crime to answer for. Lancelot has violated the solidarity of the Round Table's fellowship by slaying his brother knights. The crime is intensified by the damage dealt to Arthur's kingdom through the loss of the knights killed by Lancelot's hand. The crime is further intensified by Lancelot's motivation for doing so: to lie with his lord's and friend's wife, a treachery of the most intimate variety. Lancelot's reply is all he can do to calm Arthur from the Heroic fervor he has worked himself into (Arthur's pains stem from the personal damage inflicted on him, not necessarily to the kingdom, or the concept of chivalry), fiercely maintaining that his loyalty is still pure, and offering to undertake trial by combat against any man who believes the contrary, save Arthur or Gawain--Arthur, because he will not fight his lord, and Gawain because he is slightly too "wrothe oute of mesure" to properly deal with. Lancelot never actually denies his possible adultery with Guenevere, offering only the opportunity to defend himself worshipfully against all comers. Lancelot's words sufficiently move Arthur toward peace, but to no avail. Arthur's involvement with Gawain has become too tight to

extract himself from without inviting the wrath of his nephew and his host:

But the Freynsh booke seyth kynge Arthur wolde have takyn hys quene agayne and to have bene accorded with sir Launcelot, but sir Gawayne wolde nat suffir hym by no maner of meane. And so sir Gawayne made many men to blow uppon sir Launcelot, and so all at onys they called hym 'false recrayed knight.' (Works, 689-690)

Again, Arthur's impotent desire to end this conflict arises as both armies clash about the Joyous Garde. Lancelot, ever-faithful to his sworn chivalric loyalty to Arthur, prevents the king's death during the fight, content to answer his hostilities only with a poignant lament of his own. Lancelot reminds Arthur that, in pursuing the justice needed to uphold the kingdom, he has wrongly harrowed its finest knight. A man of such proven loyalty and worship, Lancelot would argue, does not deserve the treatment he is now suffering:

'My lorde the kynge, for Goddis love, stynte thys stryff, for ye gette here no worshyp and I wolde do myne utteraunce. But allwayes I forbeare you, and ye nor none off youre forberyth nat me. And therefore, my lorde, I pray you remembir what I have done in many placis, and now am I evyll rewarded.' (Works, 691)

For Gawain, the only satisfactory penance Lancelot can do to atone for the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris is forfeiting his life on their avenging brother's sword. Until that happens or Gawain dies, Arthur will be bound to oppose Lancelot, regardless of how Lancelot's freeing of Guenevere or proposed penance for Gareth and Gaheris might find sympathy in Arthur. Arthur may be Gawain's king, but, practically speaking, as long as Gawain's vengeance is unsatisfied, Arthur simply cannot afford to "betray" Gawain by reconciling with Lancelot. Ultimately, that would alienate Arthur

from the Heroic, feudal ties which comprise the basis of his fellowship.

This point is further elucidated once Lancelot agrees to withdraw from the Joyous Garde and relocate across the Channel, taking most of the Worshipful contingent of Arthur's fellowship, those who stuck with Lancelot during the seige of the Joyous Garde, with him. As Lancelot and his fellows leave, Arthur's fellowship has effectively expelled from itself a noticeable amount of its Worshipfulness, that which denied them the Grail and spiritual peace but gave them worldly stability. As the fellowship begins to separate between Heroism and Worshipfulness (Arthur's fellowship still retains some noteworthy Worshipful figures), we see precisely why Arthur must maintain good relations with Gawain. Arthur's Worshipful society is no more, and Heroic measures are all Arthur has left to preserve his kingdom, even if they dictate leaving England in the hands of the chivalricly questionable Mordred,<sup>10</sup> or that Arthur be party to a Lucius-like scourge of Lancelot's lands while continuing to pursue the beleaguered knight to the city of Benwick:

And there kynge Arthur made sir Mordred chyeff ruler of all Ingelonde, and also he put the quene undir hys governaunce: bycause sir Mordred was kynge Arthur's son, he gaff hym the rule of hys londe and off hys wyff.

And so the kynge passed the see and landed uppon sir Launcelottis londis, and there he brente and wasted, thorow the vengeaunce of sir Gawayne, all that they myght overrenne. (Works, 700)

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<sup>10</sup>Arthur has few other choices--he must remain true to his kin and give them first consideration in the delegation of his power.

We soon see the effect of leaving Mordred in charge of England: he usurps Arthur's power and attempts to take his stepmother, Guenevere, as his wife. Mordred's villainy, perhaps the most vile in the whole Le Morte D'Arthur, quickly forces Arthur to break off the siege of Benwick and return home (eliminating the threat Mordred poses is far greater a priority than the vendetta against Lancelot--even Gawain recognizes that) to an England reduced to the political anarchy we saw during Uther's reign. England, like Arthur's fellowship, has equally plummeted from a Worshipful state to a Heroic one, following the war against Lancelot. All that is left is a land of fickle loyalties, where the law is enforced at sword point, emblematic of a Heroic environment:

Than cam there worde unto sir Mordred that kynge  
Arthure had areysed the sege frome sir Launcelot and  
was commynge homwarde wyth a greate oste to be avenged  
uppon sir Mordred, wherefore sir Mordred made wryttes  
unto all the baronny of thy londe. And mucche people  
drew unto hym; for than was the comyn voyce amonge them  
that with kynge Arthur was never othir lyff but warre  
and stryff, and with sir Mordrede was grete joy and  
blysse. Thus was kynge Arthur depraved, and evyll seyde  
off; and many there were that kynge Arthur had brought  
up of nought, and gyffyn them londis, that myght nat  
than say hym a good worde. (Works, 708)

Arthur's efforts as king are rapidly dissolving before him; he finds himself storming the beaches of Dover, driving back Mordred just to return home. Even Arthur's subjects turn on him, anticipating Mordred's successful usurpation of his father's authority. As in Arthur's earliest days as king, he must now scramble against Mordred to gain as much popularity and military support as he can just so he can survive as a warlord, much less a king. Upon Gawain's death, bought while fighting Mordred's host

on the Dover beaches, Arthur finds himself bereft of his greatest friends, Gawain and Lancelot, caught in a desperate power struggle with his illegitimate son. Arthur's fight is no longer for the good of the kingdom--he hasn't one left. Arthur has been reduced to a mere warlord, alone and desperate:

'Alas! sir Gawayne, my syster son, here now thou lyghest, the man in the worlde that I loved moste. And now ys my joy gone! For now, my newew, sir Gawayne, I woll discover me unto you, that in youre person and in sir Launcelot I moste had my joy and myne affyaunce. And now have I loste my joy of you bothe, wherefore all myne erthely joy ys gone fro me!' (Works, 709)

Without joy or hope, Arthur's predicament has degenerated so that he can only remedy it from the ground up--destroying his closest, greatest threat (Mordred) and re-establishing himself from there. His task will hardly be easy. Arthur's return to the Heroic environment brings with it a renewed susceptibility to Fortune's Wheel, first alluded to by a "wonderfull dreame," a thinly veiled allusion to the doom he faces on the battlefield against Mordred:

So uppon Trynyte Sunday at nyght kynge Arthure dremed a wondirfull dreame, and in hys dreame hym semed that he saw uppon a chafflet a chayre, and the chayre was faste to a whele, and thereuppon sate kynge Arthure in the rychest clothe of golde that myght be made. And the kynge thought there was undir hym, farre from hym, an hydeous depe blak watir, and therin was all maner of serpentis and wormes and wylde bestis fowle and orryble. And suddeynly the kynge thought that the whyle turned up-so-downe, and he felle amonge the serpentis, and every beste toke hym by a lymme. (Works, 711)

This message is confirmed by the ghost of Gawain, returning to offer a final bit of advice (as Merlin used to), to forestall or even prevent what Destiny would otherwise prescribe to Arthur:

'...And for the grete grace and goodnes that Allmyghty Jesu hath unto you, and for pyte of you and many mo

other good men there shall be slayne, God hath sente me to you of Hys speciall grace to gyff you warnyng that in no wyse ye do batayle as to-morne, but that ye take a tretyse for a moneth-day....' (Works, 712)

Try as he might, Arthur cannot escape the inevitable; his truce with Mordred quickly breaks down as an anonymous knight draws his sword to kill a hostile adder, touching off the jumpy armies on both sides, sending the peace into flames, and the remnants of Arthur's fellowship into ruins as they engage in what is to be their and Arthur's last battle.

It would take very little to prompt us to attach a causal relationship between this last set of events and an abstract form of Destiny. Even Lucan (one of the two remaining Arthurian knights after the onslaught) advises Arthur not to personally engage Mordred, the only enemy left standing:

'Sir, latte hym be,' seyde sir Lucan, 'for he ys unhappy. And yf ye passe this unhappy day ye shall be ryght well revenged. And, good lord, remembre ye of your nyghtes dreame and what the spyryte of sir Gawayne tolde tou hyddirto. And for Goddes sake, my lorde, leve of thys, for, blyssed be God, yo have won the fylde: for yet we ben here three on lyve, and with sir Mordred ys nat one on lyve. And therefore if ye leve of now, thys wycked day of Desteny ys paste!' (Works, 713)

However, we should observe that more worldly forces predetermine the "endgame" of Arthur's life; his Heroic circumstances determine his actions and their consequences as much as anything else. The mysterious adder, whose sting begins the final battle between Arthur and Mordred would have done no real damage (save to the man bitten) if both armies were not so distrustful of each other. Given the Heroic nature of the scenario, neither Arthur or Mordred can afford to trust the other. Arthur cannot trust Mordred, a proven back-stabber and usurper. Conversely, Mordred



is so achivalric that he trusts no one or thing except himself. He cannot trust Arthur because his father is the enemy, who surely must be counted on to be as sneaky and underhanded as Mordred himself is, if Arthur really wants to achieve victory. This lack of trust, more than any reptile, is what primes this disastrous conflict, and the sight of a drawn sword, not the biting of an ankle is what sends jumpy Heroic warriors into their apocalyptic battle. Moreover, Arthur's refusal to accept victory except at the point of Mordred's death makes him fall prey to what Lucan calls "thys wycked day of Desteny," but Arthur has little other choice. As long as Mordred lives, even if without other knights to help him, he will threaten all that Arthur could ever strive for. Given the Heroism of the moment, Arthur's slaying of his bastard son will insure his uncontested rule over England (even if it is through a fellowship that consists of two men). Mordred must die, if not to insure Arthur's future, then to atone for past misdeeds he has committed:

'Now tyde me dethe, tyde me lyff,' syde the kyng,  
'now I se hym yondir alone, he shall never ascape myne  
hondes! For at a bettir avayle shall I never have hym.'

'God spyede you well!' seyde Bedyvere.

Than the kynge gate his speare in bothe hys  
hondis, and ran towarde sir mordred, cryng and saying,

'Traytoure, now ys thy dethe-day com!' (Works.

713-714)

This Heroic need to eradicate Mordred personally (just as Arthur had to do the same with Emperor Lucius for slightly different, however equally Heroic reasons) is more than an invisible, extra-worldly magnet which draws Arthur and his son into their last, fatal pass. Arthur has committed his last able-bodied act much as he committed some of his first, trying to

bring peace to a chaotic land through the force of arms. As his life drains out of him, Arthur's status as a man has returned to what it had originally been, a lone warrior trying to carve a place for himself and his people in a scrambled, chaotic world.

Unable to do so himself, Arthur commands Bedevere to return Excalibur from whence it came by throwing it to the nearest pool of water. Arthur's final relegation of authority is also his surrender of it as he relinquishes command of Excalibur, the talisman for his mission to forge a society, a state of being better than the Heroic chaos that had surrounded him. Arthur's influence on the world fades just as his life does in its final minutes. The Utherian scenario has returned while Arthur at death's door; he even interprets Bedevere's hesitancy to cast away Excalibur as a simple desire to steal it:

'A, traytour unto me and untrew,' seyde kyng  
Arthure, 'now hast thou betrayed me twyse! Who wolde  
wene that thou that hast bene to me so leve and dere,  
and also named so noble a knyght, that thou wolde  
betray me for the ryches of thys swerde?...' (Works,  
715)

As Arthur dies, so does his society, leaving behind only the bones of what it used to be, scavenged by those who act as if Arthur's kingdom had never bettered their circumstances by bringing peace to the land, or, for that matter, ever existed:

So sir Lucan departed, for he was grevously  
wounded in many placis; and so as he yode he saw and  
harkened by the moonelyght how that pyllours and  
robbers were com into the fylde to pylle and to robbe  
many a full noble knyght of brochys and bees and of  
many a good ryng and many a ryche juell. And who that  
were nat dede all oute, there they slewe them for their  
harneys and their ryches. (Works, 714)

As Bedevere watches his king borne into the barge that will bear him off, never to be seen thereafter, he (understandably) loses heart, unable to bear the loss of his king, a lament answered by Arthur's last and most profound words:

'...Than sir Bedewere cryed and seyde,  
'A, my lorde Arthur, what shall becom of me, now ye go frome me and leve me here alone amonge myne enemyes?'

'Comforte thyselff,' seyde the kynge, 'and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in....' (Works, 716)

Our last words from "the once and future king" shed light upon Arthur and especially on the kingdom he created out of the quagmire of Utherian "scorched earth" politics. Arthur's every effort was to advance the condition of himself and more importantly, those around and under him. His reign began as a frantic struggle to achieve enough political solvency to insure his (and his followers') security and prosperity as well as bringing peace to the land. His struggle continues: to amalgamate his land's balkanized states into a union strong enough to squash any external military threat to the realm as well as to maintain the domestic peace. Once done, the establishment of a moral code coverts his domestic peace into a moral one, insuring justice as well as stability.

But at their height, Arthur's achievements are still vulnerable to the human shortcomings they exist to eliminate, and thus we have a failed Grail quest, a society's champion who is not so perfect that he cannot resist sleeping with his friend's (and king's) wife while using chivalric principle as a cheap justification for it, a pair of "unhappy knyghtis" all too eager

to start a controversy which would wreck the kingdom, a nephew so blinded by anger that he drags his king into a needless and self-defeating conflict, a king so desperate to prevent the complete dissipation of the society he forged that he readily subjects himself to what would prove to be a fatal risk in combat.

The "trust not to trust in," so to speak, has deeper implications for the reader than Arthur's words could have for Bedevere. To Arthur's last remaining follower, the king's final words could be seen as invective against the heroic world which has brought down Arthurian England. For the reader, we might see an additional meaning to Arthur's words: that the "trust not to trust in" is our desire to see in Arthur the ability to transform human existence into something which it is not. We are and will always be the animals we see "in the days of Uther Pendragon," who squabble and betray each other to serve their basest needs. It is a grim life we lead, one which we can never escape, for it defines our nature, though we so long to break free of its frightening parameters that we project our hopes (and fears) into specific individuals, hysterically hoping that they can help us evade the inevitable circumstances and consequences of our often grimy lives.

Arthur is one such individual, an earthly messiah approved of by a stone, an apparent agent of an extra-worldly force sent to improve our condition. But ultimately, even the Arthurs we turn to run headlong into their own limitations. They too are human, and as we watch them and their brief but fading legacies, we must realize, as Arthur's dying words tell us with such

sublime wisdom, that the only refuge from the the world we live  
in is within the lives we lead, spending our energies  
celebrating, instead of denying, who and what we are--frightened  
creatures who live, fail, laugh and love as much as our lives are  
limited.

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### Note

Throughout the years in which I have slowly accumulated the knowledge and insight required to write this paper, I have unfortunately not kept a very accurate track of what critical ideas of mine were inspired by what pieces of criticism, nor am I able to produce a completely accurate documentation of my intellectual progression from when I first encountered Malory to now, having completed my most in-depth work on Le Morte D'Arthur to date.

The reader will probably notice a distinct lack of footnoting (of sources) in this thesis. My intentions were not to hijack the scholarly efforts of others, but I am afraid that after intensively reading and re-reading Le Morte and its criticism, all of the information I have taken in has smeared into something of a grey haze. To un muddy this situation and try to give credit where it is due, I have included here two bibliographies. The first is a comprehensive list of the works which I have consulted in the writing of this thesis. I have therefore taken the liberty of including all works, unless I have forgotten one or two more obscure references (entirely possible, given my poor memory), and arguments forwarded here. The second bibliography is a list of works cited, a subset of the first list of references, and a guide for the reader to use in identifying the works from which I quoted.

I hope these efforts will mitigate the haziness which might surround the integrity of this thesis' research. My literary insights are small and quiet compared to the many I have been

inspired by, and I only hope that the measures taken here properly acknowledge a body of works which this thesis can only pay a tiny kind of homage to.

I would like to thank also Professor John E. ... of this work, and his careful observations ...

I also want to express my thanks to the entire English department of ... University. Not only did the faculty vote to give me the permission to carry out a thesis project (for which I am eternally indebted), but only through their expert advice and teachers was I ever able to cultivate a life-long love for literature and the ability to effectively write about it. When I came to this institution, I thought I was well prepared, but now I realize how little I know, and how much I have learned which will be helpful in my future life's journey of continual education. My eternal thanks to all.

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Bill Coffin