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LOVE, FREEDOM, AND MARITAL FIDELITY IN MALORY'S *MORTE DARTHUR*

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Sir Thomas Malory has little to say about women in his *Morte Darthur*, but this is hardly surprising. His decision to retell the entire history of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table necessarily entailed a primary focus upon knighthood (and its principal functions, war and governance), from which women were barred by virtue of their sex.¹ Therefore, the relative lack of interest which Malory shows in women should not necessarily be taken as a sign that he is, as one feminist critic has alleged, "misogynistic" or "homoerotic" (Stiller 94). In fact, if we examine closely Malory's representation of courtship and marriage — a sphere of human activity within knightly society where men's and women's interests and activities converge — we will realize that he is not at all "misogynistic." On the contrary, he is remarkably sympathetic towards women.

I

In Malory's day, young women were expected (and sometimes forced) to marry according to the wishes of their family, even though the Church taught that the sacrament of marriage was not valid unless both parties freely consented to it. This had been the teaching of the Church since

the twelfth century (Noonan, Sheehan). Nevertheless, even three hundred years later, among Malory's social milieu, i.e., the gentry and lesser nobility, families continued to arrange marriages for political and economic benefit, without much regard for the feelings of their children. Contemporary documents like the letters of the Paston family reveal that young women were much more likely than their brothers to be coerced into marriage (Haskell). In theory, of course, a young woman coerced into marriage could have the marriage annulled. In practice, however, without the help of her family or her new husband, she would find it impossible even to bring her case before the ecclesiastical court.²

Late mediaeval romances went much farther than the Church in positively advocating that young people be free to choose their mates for love. Since the late twelfth century and the innovative courtly romances of Chrétien de Troyes, mediaeval romances had often made erotic love the basis for marriage, the only major exceptions being the romances of adultery connected with the legend of Arthur: Lancelot and Guinevere (whose adulterous love either Chrétien himself or his patron, Marie de Champagne, invented) and Tristram and Isode. It was not until the fourteenth century, however, that poets and romancers began to argue that true love, or "bon' amour," *ought* to be consummated in marriage. This fourteenth-century argument appears to be the consequence of a conscious synthesis: to the courtly values of freedom and fidelity in love was added the Christian value of chastity, thus enabling "fin' amour" to become "true love," passionate but also chaste, and so ideally consummated in marriage.

Possibly the earliest expression of this synthesis is to be found in an Anglo-Norman "Art d'aimer" written either in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The poet insists that true love is chaste, "Que bone amur ne quert peché" (line 658). No matter how much the lover ardently desires his lady, he must not touch her "S'il ne soit de baisere, / Taunt que il ad esposé" (lines 659-60). For through the sacrament of marriage God makes true lovers "un char et un saunk" and blesses their union. Indeed, there is no better life for lovers than to serve God in this joyous manner (lines 676-83).³

Much better known to English readers, however, is the rather different expression of this synthesis in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*. The Franklin begins his tale by telling briefly of Arveragus's courtship of Dorigen and her acceptance of him as husband. This happy conclusion then becomes the occasion of some philosophical remarks upon the nature of love in which the Franklin stresses the importance of freedom:

Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
 Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
 Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
 Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
 Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
 And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
 And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal. (V. 764-70)

A few lines later, the Franklin pauses to reflect upon the paradox at the heart of the lovers' marriage: Arveragus, who was Dorigen's servant in love, is now also her lord in marriage, whereas she, who was his lady in love, is now also his wife. Is it possible for two people to be at one and the same time both ruler and ruled? Yes it is, concludes the Franklin, because their seemingly contradictory roles are in fact "acorde[d]" by "that lawe of love" (798) which decrees that love must be free. With this conclusion, the Franklin goes beyond the notion that young people should be able to freely choose their mates, to the much more radical notion that, if they wish to remain lovers, they must also remain free, unconstrained by "maistrye," after they are wedded.⁴

Neither the teachings of the Church nor romances like *The Franklin's Tale* could alter the marriage customs of the gentry, however. The *Paston Letters* suggest that by the late fifteenth century, even though young people of both sexes were influenced by the romantic ideal of marrying for love, their parents still expected to be able to arrange their children's marriages for profit. In 1469, Richard Calle addressed Margery Paston, as his "owne lady and mastres" and spoke of the "greete loue" which had long been between them (No. 861). In 1477, Margery Brews addressed John Paston III as her "welebeloued Volentyne" (No. 416). Both pairs of lovers eventually married, but the contrast between the manner of their marrying is even more instructive than this one romantic likeness in their courtship. Margery Brews was able to marry John Paston only because their respective families finally, and after great difficulty, agreed upon the financial terms of the marriage contract. In contrast, Richard Calle was able to marry Margery Paston only because the young lovers managed to defy Margery's parents by entering into a valid clandestine union.

Margery was probably only seventeen at the time, but her parents had been looking for a suitable husband for her since she was fourteen. She may well have been aware of, and determined to avoid, what had happened to her aunt, Elizabeth, when she was young. Elizabeth had been coerced into accepting a marriage repugnant to her, by beating, starving, and imprisonment (No. 446). Margery must have realized that her parents would never

agree to her marrying Richard Calle, the family's steward, and so secretly she betrothed herself to him, apparently knowing that words of betrothal spoken in the present tense would create a binding union in canon law.⁵ Her mother, Margaret Paston, went to the Bishop of Norwich to have the clandestine marriage annulled. But after questioning Margery and Richard separately, the Bishop concluded that their vows of betrothal were indeed sufficient to make a valid marriage. The family were powerless to prevent this unsuitable match, but they made Margery pay a heavy price for her disobedience. They disowned her, refusing ever to see her again, even though they continued to employ her husband as their steward for some years thereafter (Haskell 468).

II

In the way he handles the three main stories of love and marriage in his book, Malory shows not only that he is aware of the more difficult position of young women with regard to courtship and marriage but also that he sympathizes with them. Only the first of these stories — the marriage of Guinevere and Arthur — is an essential part of the history of King Arthur's reign. The other two Malory chose to include in his version. In fact, the second — the marriage of Lyonesse and Gareth — he may have invented, although the possibility of a lost source remains.⁶ The third — the marriage of Isode and King Mark — he added as a consequence of choosing to include the adventures of Tristram within his Arthurian history. Both of these added stories of courtship and marriage provide significant contrasts to the Guinevere-Arthur story, particularly with regard to the lady's freedom to choose her husband.

Of the three stories, that of Guinevere and Arthur is both the briefest and has the least to say regarding the woman's feelings. We learn that Arthur fell in love with Guinevere when he brought an army into her country to help her father defeat king Royens (39.18:1.18). We learn that Merlin tried very hard to dissuade Arthur from marrying her, because Lancelot was destined to love her ("scholde love hir" and "sche hym agayne") (97.29-31:III.1), but that Arthur decided to marry her anyway. And so we find ourselves wondering, *does Arthur not believe in prophecy? Does he simply not care whether his queen should love another man? Or does he have a reason for marrying her, other than her beauty and his desire, which is strong enough to override the fear of cuckoldry?*

When Arthur first expresses his desire to marry Guinevere, he describes her as follows:

"I love Gwenyvere, the kynges doughtir of Lodegraunce, of the londe of Camelerde, the whyche holdyth in his house the Table Rounde that . . . he had . . . of my fadir Uther. And this damesell is the moste valyaunte and fayryst that I know lyvvyng . . ." (97.16-20:III.1)

Having defined Guinevere as the daughter of the king who possesses the Round Table that once belonged to his father, he concludes that she is the "moste valyaunte" woman he knows. This suggests that he thinks of her as "moste valyaunte" in the original French meaning of "most worthy or valuable" (*de la plus grande valeur*) rather than in the more common English meaning of "brave" or "courageous."⁷ In other words, it suggests that Arthur has his heart set upon Guinevere as much for the sake of the Round Table (which he might reasonably expect as a marriage gift, given its origin in his father's house) as for her own beauty. Certainly, this estimation of his motives is borne out by Malory's subsequent development of their love story — or rather, elimination of their love story — for he begins systematically to omit all evidence of Arthur's love for Guinevere soon after their marriage (E.D. Kennedy).

Moreover, near the end of the book, when Guinevere's alleged adultery with Lancelot has caused the death of many Round Table knights, Arthur freely admits that he regrets the loss of his knights far more than the loss of his queen,

". . . for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company" (1184.1-5:XX.9)

This passage is Malory's addition to his source and confirms what we already suspected, that Arthur never truly loved Guinevere. He only desired her as the beautiful means to an end: the Round Table and its fellowship of knights.

More importantly, we have no reason to believe that Guinevere ever loved Arthur. King Lodegraunce is delighted to give his daughter in marriage to a king of such "prouesse and nobelesse" and "so," as Malory puts it rather laconically, he "delyver[s] hys doughtir Gwenyver unto Merlion, and the Table Rounde with the hondred knyghtes" (98.14-15:III.1). We are given no indication that Lodegraunce had to coerce his daughter into this marriage, but we are also given no indication that he consulted her about the transaction, any more than he consulted the one hundred knights — or the table.⁸

The story Malory chooses to tell next — the story of Dame Lyonesse and Gareth — is a conventional late mediaeval romance of courtship leading to marriage.⁹ The contrast between this story and the preceding one is stark indeed. Throughout that brief narrative Guinevere remained a silent and passive object of diplomatic negotiation. By contrast, as soon as Gareth has liberated Dame Lyonesse from the odious siege of the Red Knight of the Red Lands, she takes the initiative in their courtship.

Gareth expects that Lyonesse will instantly reward him for his victory with her “love.” In his view, he deserves it, for he has “bought [it] with parte of the beste bloode within [his] body” (327.16-17:VII.19). But Dame Lyonesse is determined to be more than a beautiful object, a prize of war. She sends Gareth away to “laboure in worshyp this twelve-monthe” and then sets about making arrangements for them to get to know one another better, in a more intimate, domestic setting. She persuades her brother to lure Gareth to his own castle so that, disguised as a “strange” lady, she may discover his “ryght name” and “kynrede,” but there are several reasons for believing that this is only a pretext. First, Lyonesse already knows that her rescuer is the “kynges son of Orkeney,” for the dwarf has told her so (317.20-4:VII.14). Next, she has already decided, on the basis of his words and actions in dealing with the Red Knight, that she will love him and no other for the rest of her life. And finally, she has already had ample evidence that he desires her as a beautiful object. It seems clear, therefore, that there is only one thing she can hope to discover through this ruse and that is whether or not he can love her for herself, as a woman.

In the intimate domestic setting of Sir Gryngamour’s castle, Gareth does not recognize Lyonesse as the lady he liberated from the Castle Perilous (he has, after all, only seen that lady from afar), but he falls in love with her anyway, rather humorously finding her much more beautiful than that other lady (331.20:VII.21). The final proof that Lyonesse has engineered this entire situation only to see if Gareth can love her for herself, is that she is not angered by this outcome. His faithlessness to the Lady of the Castle Perilous does not bother her at all. On the contrary, she is delighted that he should have fallen in love with her in disguise. She quickly reveals her identity, making Gareth even “more gladder than he was tofore,” and they immediately engage to marry. In Malory’s words, “they trouthe plyghte othe to love and never to fayle whyle their lyff lastyth” (332.35-6:VII.22). We cannot tell if this mutual pledge of life-long love and fidelity was spoken in the present tense, in which case, as with Margery Paston and Richard Calle, their marriage is valid without sexual union, or in the future tense,

in which case sexual union would make it valid; but it hardly matters, for they plan to consummate their love and their marriage at once, right there in the great hall of her brother's castle.¹⁰

There is evidence that some members of both families have doubts about the suitability of this match. Even though Lyonesse's brother seems delighted with her choice of husband, her sister, Lynet, goes to great lengths to ensure that she will not be able to consummate this clandestine union. Later on King Arthur publicly offers Gareth a choice between marrying Lyonesse, or else taking her as his paramour. Lyonesse is a great heiress, but she is not a royal princess. Arthur may hope that his nephew will follow his own example and take the lady as paramour until such time as a more appropriate marriage can be arranged, just as he took the Lady Lionors as paramour before his marriage to Guinevere was arranged. But Gareth is not like Arthur. He believes that true love ought to be consummated in marriage, regardless of fine distinctions of rank. At the same time, as a true lover he will not presume to make such a decision *for* his lady. And so it is Lyonesse who first responds to Arthur:

"My moste noble kyng, . . . wete you well that my lorde, sir Gareth, ys to me more lever to have and welde as my husbonde than ony king other prynce that is crystyned; and if I may nat have hym, I promyse you I woll never have none. For, my lorde Arthure, . . . wete you well he is my fyrste love, and he shall be the laste; and yf ye woll suffir hym to have his wyll and fre choyse, I dare say he woll have me." (359.31-360.02:VII.35)

Gareth instantly echoes her sentiments:

"That is trouthe, . . . and I have nat you and welde you as my wyff, there shall never lady nother jantyllwoman rejoyse me." (360.3-5)

With these words, both lovers explicitly endorse the late mediaeval idea that true love ought to be consummated in marriage.

In these first two stories of courtship and marriage the contrast with regard to the woman's freedom of choice is *so* extreme that it invites us to read the third story with increased sensitivity to this issue. In addition, Malory has altered the French prose version of Isode's story in ways which draw attention to her efforts to gain some freedom of choice.

In Malory's version Isode has grown to love Tristram during his first stay in Ireland, disguised as Tramtryst. When Tristram is forced to leave because he has been discovered as the slayer of Marhalt, she makes an extraordinary move to increase her chances of eventually being able to marry him. As he takes his leave of her, promising to "be all the dayes of [his] lyff [her] knyght,"

she promises in return that she "shall nat be maryed this seven yerys but by [his] assente." Then they exchange rings (392.9-18:VIII.12). Malory has added the exchange of rings to show that Isode's promise is tantamount to a betrothal. If during the next seven years, her father should decide to arrange a royal marriage for her, she can refuse it on the grounds that she is not free to marry without Tristram's consent. For she is already betrothed, in a conditional sense, to Tristram.

It is a tragic irony, therefore, that Isode's promise to Tristram, the man she loves, should have the effect of obliging her to marry King Mark, whom she does not love. In Malory's version Tristram admires Isode very much but is not passionately in love with her after his first visit to Ireland. He is also unaware that since his return to Cornwall, Mark has become his mortal enemy as a result of his affair with Sir Segwarydes' wife. Consequently, he has no idea that Mark's real motive for sending him back to Ireland to negotiate a royal marriage, is to have him killed. Tristram is fully aware of the risk he runs in returning to the country where he is hated as the slayer of Marhalt, but his loyalty to Mark is such that he will not refuse the mission. Later, this same loyalty prevents him from agreeing to marry Isode himself, even though, in Malory's version, her father asks him to. As for Isode, she has promised to marry according to Tristram's wishes, and so she has, in a sense, chosen this marriage to King Mark of Cornwall.

III

If we look back at these three marriage stories with a view to the woman's freedom of choice, an interesting pattern emerges. Guinevere seems to have had no freedom of choice at all. Lyonesse enjoyed complete freedom of choice. And Isode had a kind of conditional freedom, dependent upon Tristram's choice, a freedom which turned into its opposite only when Tristram chose not to marry her himself.

If we look at these three marriage stories with a view to the woman's subsequent fidelity to her husband, an even more interesting pattern emerges. Lyonesse, the one most free to choose her husband, is also the happiest and most faithful of wives; although perhaps it would be more accurate to say that, in true romance fashion, Malory simply leaves her and Gareth to live happily ever after, never adverting to their marriage again. On the other hand, Isode, who enjoyed only conditional freedom, is only a conditionally faithful wife. That is to say, having consented to marry Mark because it

was Tristram's wish, she is also a loyal wife to him, but only so long as Mark fulfills his part of the marriage contract.

The most remarkable of Malory's many alterations to the French prose version of the story of Isode, Mark, and Tristram, is the lovers' initial loyalty to Mark. In Malory's version, there is no bed-substitution plot on the royal wedding night. Despite the effects of the love potion, which has made Tristram love Isode just as passionately as she has long loved him, Isode does not need to ask her maid, Brangwain, to take her place in the royal marriage bed. This implies that she herself is still a virgin. She and Tristram have restrained their mutual passion and refrained from consummating their love so that she could fulfill this most essential part of the marriage contract: to deliver her body to her new lord, intact.¹¹

Malory continues to suggest that Isode and Tristram remain true to Mark after the marriage by completely eliminating from his version any evidence of an illicit liaison between them. He continues to alter his source in this way until *after* Mark has proved that he is a traitor to both lovers.¹² Mark first proves that he is a traitor to Tristram by trying to have him killed, merely for speaking with Isode "in a wyndowe" (426.13:VIII.32). Then he proves that he is a traitor to Isode by trying to have her and ninety-five other ladies of the court burned at the stake, merely for failing to drink cleanly from Morgan le Fay's horn of chastity. Tristram's response to the first treason was to make war on Mark's knights. Isode's response to the second treason is to invite Tristram into her bed (430-1:VIII.34). When later they leave Cornwall to live in exile in Arthur's kingdom, everyone seems to understand that the marriage between Isode and Mark has been broken by Mark's treachery. And King Arthur, in particular, is delighted that now Isode and Tristram can be "togydir" (757.17:X.78).

Finally, Guinevere, who had the least freedom of all, is also the least faithful. Malory alters her story as given in the French prose *Lancelot* to make her faithful to Arthur for a very long time after their marriage. In his version she does not betray her husband until after the Quest of the Holy Grail, in the Knight of the Cart episode. Unlike Isode, she betrays her husband without cause, for Arthur has never betrayed her. Still Malory does not judge her harshly. On the contrary, he goes out of his way to praise her as the "true lover" of Lancelot (1120.12:XVIII.25). We can only infer from this that she would have been a faithful wife to Lancelot, had she been free to marry him.

IV

The Fair Maid of Astolat might have provided a fourth story of courtship and marriage, if she had been able to win the love of Lancelot. Even so, her sad story of unrequited love is just as important as the story of Lyonesse in demonstrating Malory's sympathy with the romantic ideal that true love be consummated in marriage.

As with the story of Isode, Malory has made significant additions to the Fair Maid's story. One of the most important is the passage in which the dying Maid speaks of her feelings for Lancelot as "good love":

“. . . for my belyve ys that I do none offence, though I love an erthely man, unto God, for He fourmed me thereto, and all maner of good love comyth of God. And othir than good love loved I never sir Launcelot du Lake." (1093.5-8:XVIII.19)

Both words and sentiments echo those expressed in the Anglo-Norman "Art d'aimer" cited above. "Bone amour" or "good love" comes from God and is both chaste and passionate. Elaine's only trespass, as she subsequently admits, is that she loved Lancelot "oute of mesure." That is why, in desperation, she asked him to take her as paramour when he would not wed her (1089.xviii.19) and why she now dies for his love.

After the death of the Fair Maid, Malory adds another passage in which he echoes the language of *The Franklin's Tale* regarding the nature of love.¹³ When Guinevere chides Lancelot for failing to do anything to save the Fair Maid's life, he reminds the queen that love must be freely given:

"For, madame," seyde sir Launcelot, "I love nat to be constrayned to love, for love muste only aryse of the harte selff, and nat by none constraynte."

Before Guinevere has a chance to respond, however, Arthur leaps in with what he thinks to be hearty agreement:

"That ys trouth, sir," seyde the kyng, "and with many knyghtes love ys fre in hymselfe, and never woll be bonde; for where he ys bonded he lowsith hymself." (1097.22-27:XVIII.20)

Lancelot, who truly loves the queen, not only echoes the Franklin's words but also understands their meaning: love must arise spontaneously, from the heart. Any attempt to coerce love must necessarily destroy it. On the other hand, Arthur, who no longer loves the queen, does not understand Lancelot's words at all. Rather like Walter in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, he confuses commitment with "constraynte," the marriage "bonde" with bondage. And

it is hard not to see in his statement an unwitting explanation for the phenomenon we have already noted above, that he stopped loving his queen soon after they were married.

V

Malory's handling of stories involving true love, courtship, and marriage shows that he sympathized with the plight of those women who were not able to marry the man of their choice, for whatever reason, whether arranged marriage, as in the case of Guinevere and Isode, or unrequited love, as in the case of the Fair Maid of Astolat. His handling of the Fair Maid's story also implies, however, that she might not have suffered so, if she had known from the beginning that Lancelot was unattainable. Lancelot is like Gareth, a true lover who would never marry anyone except his first (and last) love, Guinevere.¹⁴ But Elaine had no way of knowing this until it was too late. And this suggests that Malory's sympathy for Isode, Guinevere, and the Fair Maid, may be read as an implicit criticism of the entire system of arranged marriages that has, directly or indirectly, caused their suffering.

Certainly Malory's narrative pattern, correlating the wife's degree of marital fidelity with her prior degree of freedom in choosing her husband, strongly implies a causal link between the two. Lyonesse, who freely chose to marry Gareth, is the happiest and most faithful of wives. Isode, who consented to, but did not choose, her marriage to Mark, was only conditionally faithful to him. And Guinevere, who seems to have had no choice whatsoever concerning her marriage to Arthur, was in the end unable to be true to him. Such a pattern also points to the fact that the men who arranged to marry these young women without taking their feelings into account, also suffered because of it. Mark suffered ridicule and the temporary loss of his royal power because of the adultery of Isode and Tristram. And Arthur lost both his kingdom and his life, in part because of the adultery of Guinevere and Lancelot.

Finally, it must be observed that this striking narrative pattern correlating freedom of choice and marital fidelity is not confined to the stories of Guinevere, Lyonesse, and Isode. Malory also extends it to include the stories of Nyneve, Chief Damsel of the Lady of the Lake, and Morgan le Fay, Arthur's half sister. In Malory's version, Nyneve freely chooses to marry Sir Pelleas, the man she loves, and continues to be his faithful wife until his death (1150.21-22:xx.II). On the other hand, Morgan le Fay, who was forced by her step-father, King Uther, to marry Uriens of Gore (10.5-12:1.2),

becomes an exceptionally faithless wife and at one point even attempts to kill her husband. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion pointed to by such a persistent and pervasive pattern: if men want women to be loving and faithful wives, then they must allow them to choose their husbands.

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NOTES

¹ In *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* I have argued that Malory's representation of knighthood is not only his central concern, but also the chief means by which he endows his book with a unifying thematic structure. In a very recent article, Geraldine Heng has explored what she calls the "feminine subtext" in Malory's work, by which she means the few references remaining from earlier tradition to that "enchanted world" of witches and feys where women's power is manifested. She is principally concerned with the figures of Morgan and Nyneve.

² Excerpts from case records show, however, that a determined husband could make it almost impossible for a wife to free herself, even if she could enlist the support of her own family or friends (O'Faolain 133-35).

³ Another synthesis, between erotic love and classical notions of friendship, produced a somewhat similar outcome, which the early fourteenth-century author of "La Difinission de Amurs" calls *leal* (loyal) or *verroie* (true) love. He makes no mention of chastity or marriage, however, and he never uses the adjective *bone* (good).

⁴ The notion is so radical, in fact, that some critics have interpreted *The Franklin's Tale* as ironical. These tend to be critics of a Robertsonian or, what Douglas Wurtele has recently called, a "legalistic" bent. Moreover, as Wurtele's article makes clear, they focus their ire, not upon the paradox as such, but rather upon its narrative consequences, i.e., Arveragus's insistence that Dorigen keep her word to Aurelius.

⁵ That Margery had some knowledge of canon law on marriage is suggested by her reported reply to the Bishop of Norwich after he had questioned her regarding the words she used in betrothing herself to Calle: ". . . yf thos worddys mad yt not suhere, sche seyde boldly þat sche wold make [yt] suerhere ore þan sche went thens; fore sche thowthe in here conschens sche was bownd wat so euere þe worddys wern" (*Paston Letters*, No. 203). For a clear exposition of the evolution of canon law regarding clandestine marriage, see Thundy.

⁶ P.J.C. Field argues for a lost source that is English rather than French.

⁷ The English meaning of the adjective *valyaunt* ("brave", "courageous") seems to have been determined by restricted usage. In English it almost always describes a man's worth; in fact, a check of the *New Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that in English *valyaunt* was never applied to a woman. On the other hand, *valyaunt* was commonly applied to women in French and specifically to Guinevere in the *Prose Lancelot*, where Lancelot praises her as "*si vaillante que oncques plus honneste dame ne vy*" (Godefroy). Malory would have been familiar with this French usage, and in time the *Middle English Dictionary* may reveal that he is not the only English author to use the adjective with its original French meaning of "worthy" when describing a woman.

⁸ In his commentary on this passage, Vinaver notes that in Malory's French source, the *Merlin*, King Lodegraunce summons the knights of the Round Table to explain why he has decided to send them to Arthur. However, there is no evidence that he extends even this courtesy to his daughter.

⁹ For a discussion of this conventional type of romance, see Mathew.

¹⁰ For an extensive discussion of clandestine marriage in late mediaeval romance, as well as canon law, see Kelly, Part III.

¹¹ I was pleased to discover that the dramatization of the *Morte Darthur* staged at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, during August, 1990, made this inference explicit. In a pantomime of the boat journey and delivery of the bride to Mark, the lovers use body language to express alternating waves of desire and restraint until the boat arrives and Tristram hands Isode over to Mark, who awaits her in the royal marriage bed.

¹² For a review of the evidence of adultery in the French prose *Tristan* which Malory omits, see B. Kennedy, *Knighthood* 168–69.

¹³ P.J.C. Field notes the allusion to Chaucer in his edition of the last two tales of the *Morte Darthur* (255, note to lines 1464–69). Felicity Riddy thinks it unlikely that Malory was influenced by Chaucer and suggests a source in *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son*, instead (16).

¹⁴ That is why it is appropriate to Malory's version of events after the death of Arthur, that Lancelot should tell Guinevere of his hopes to take her back to France with him, as his queen (1253.19–22:XXI.9). Indeed, only in Malory's version of their love story is Lancelot consistently represented as Guinevere's ideal husband because of their long and true love (B. Kennedy "Malory's Lancelot").

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