“No gretter peril”: Over-mighty Subjects and Fifteenth-Century Politics in
Malory’s *Morte Darthur*

Dissertation

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Abstract

Traditionally read as a deeply nostalgic text – one that looks back to Arthur’s Camelot as a Golden Age of English history and chivalry – Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* is, instead, a very contemporarily relevant text. Completed in 1469/70, at the mathematical center of the divisive Wars of the Roses (c. 1455-1485), Malory’s *Morte* considers problematic contemporary political issues that threaten the peace and stability of the realm. Chief among these are issues involving over-mighty subjects, identified by Sir John Fortescue in *The Governance of England* (c. 1471/75) as the greatest threat to fifteenth-century kings. Since K. B. McFarlane’s 1964 declaration that “only an undermighty ruler had anything to fear from overmighty subjects,” however, the over-mighty have been under-studied. It is important, though, when examining a text to consider the prevalent beliefs of its time; even if McFarlane’s statement is true, neither Fortescue nor Malory would have agreed with it.

Malory’s *Morte* does not create perfect analogues to fifteenth-century persons or events (i.e., Lancelot is not the Kingmaker, the final battle near Salisbury is not Towton), but it does create many parallels to fifteenth-century political issues. This study argues that Malory’s selections from, alterations of, and additions to his source material intentionally recall contemporary political problems – particularly those involving over-mighty subjects – that threaten the stability of the realm. The use and misuse of royal patronage, for example, often resulted in the favoritism of some nobles and the ostracism
of others – the former engendered envy, the latter risked rebellion. Local struggles over property and influence, if not properly addressed, could ignite blood feuds and shape political factions at court. Such problems caused the downfall of Arthur’s Camelot – and they threatened fifteenth-century England as well. In many ways, Malory’s *Morte* serves as warning of things to come, should such issues be allowed to fester.
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Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. iv
Vita ............................................................................................................................................................ vi

Introduction: Over-Mighty Subjects in Fifteenth-Century England and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* ................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: Background and Interpretations .......................................................................................... 27
  1. “Thys poure knyght”: Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel .......................................................... 29
  2. “In thos dayes” Versus “Nowadayes”: Nostalgic and Contemporarily Relevant Readings of the *Morte Darthur* .......................................................................................................................... 45

Chapter 2: Favoritism and Ostracism .................................................................................................... 84
  1. “Whos lyvelode and mighte was nerehande equivalente to the kinges owne”: Lancelot as Over-mighty Subject ................................................................................................................................. 85
  2. “Cherissh thy champyons and chief men of armes”: King/Noble Relations and the Role of Royal Patronage ........................................................................................................................................ 112
  3. “Noble prynce… Susteyne right, trouthe þou magnefy… Til noper part þy fauour applye”: Royal Favoritism and the Cases of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and Sir Lancelot du Lake .................................................................................................................. 126
  4. “And that ys to me grete hevynes… that I was fleamed oute of thys londe”: Royal Ostracism and the Cases of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Sir Lancelot du Lake .................................................................................................................................. 151

Chapter 3: Private Feuds .......................................................................................................................... 170
  1. “And for thys cause we felle at debate”: Preconditions for Feuds in Fifteenth-Century England .............................................................................................................................................. 175
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“For the peopul wil go with hym that beste may sustene and rewarde hem”: The Struggles for Property and Influence in Fifteenth-Century England</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Thy father slew myne, and so wil I do the and all thy kyn”: The Blood Feud</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

OVER-MIGHTY SUBJECTS IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND
AND SIR THOMAS MALORY’S MORTE DARTHUR

In 1964, K. B. McFarlane declared that “only an undermighty ruler had anything to fear from overmighty subjects; and if he were undermighty his personal lack of fitness was the cause, not the weakness of his office and its resources.”¹ Subsequent scholarship widely accepted this assertion, and the over-mighty became understudied. Even when the special status of magnates was accepted, however, scholars tended to focus on the weakness of Henry VI as much as on the power of men like Richard, duke of York. J. R. Lander, for example, recognizes York’s singular status in October 1460, when, by claiming the crown (and receiving acknowledgment as Henry’s heir), “York had acted against the wishes of well-nigh all.”² Yet Lander also stresses Henry VI’s personal weakness:

In an age when government was a cooperative enterprise between the monarch and the propertied classes, only a king of sound political

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judgment, seen to hold a fair balance between the conflicting interests of rival magnates, cold hope to control the great and, through the great, the country. Henry VI… developed or degenerated into a man who could hardly have been worse equipped to meet the unceasing stresses of such a task. ³

Although Lander provides a fairly balanced view of the power dynamics of fifteenth-century England, such was McFarlane’s influence that Colin Richmond dubbed the era “McFarlane’s century.”⁴ Although this is a rather dubious claim, the de-emphasis of over-mighty subjects in the following decades lends it some credence; indeed, fifteenth-century historiography demonstrates the extent of the scholarly reversal. From the time of the Wars of the Roses to the mid-twentieth century, over-mighty subjects had been a primary interest of historians – McFarlane’s statement seemed to change that.

If McFarlane doubted the power and influence wielded by over-mighty subjects, many in fifteenth-century England did not. In fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, Sir John Fortescue first used the term over-mighty subject in The Governance of England, written circa 1471/75. The way in which Fortescue debuts the term, in the heading of his ninth chapter, demonstrates its seriousness: “The periles that mowe falle to a kyng by ovur mighti subgiettes.”⁵ He ends the chapter with an even graver statement: “For certaynly ther may no gretter perile growe to a prince thanne tahave a subjiet

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³ Lander, Government and Community, 178.
equipolente to hym selfe.”

Fortescue directly connects such equivalency with wealth, and specifies that kings should have larger disposable incomes than the greatest lords in the land. The reason for this is simple: “Whanne a subjiet hathe had also grete lyveloode as his prince, he hathe anoon aspired to thastate of his prince, which by suche a man may sone begote.”

The reason that wealth can be so potent a weapon against the king is that “the peopul wil go with hym that beste may sustene and rewarde hem.” Over-mighty subjects, with their ability to attract large numbers of followers, threatened the peace and stability of the realm. Fortescue provides examples of rebellious magnates from history, including the English earls of Leicester and Gloucester during Henry III’s reign, and the Scottish earl of Douglas; he also notes that every realm from France, Spain, Denmark, and even biblical lands (as related in the books of Kings) can supply examples of the rebellions of over-mighty subjects.

According to Fortescue, the people of his time were keenly aware of the dangers these magnates posed: “We have also late in our reaume knowen somme of the kinges subjiettes given hym bataill, by occasion that their lyvelode and offices weren the gretteste of the londe, and elles they wolde nat han done soo.” In fact, the only over-mighty subject who is mentioned positively by Fortescue is Henry VI’s great-grandfather, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster.

Gaunt, who was perhaps the greatest of the late medieval over-mighty subjects, faced suspicions regarding his own royal ambitions – the 1381 rebels in Kent forced passing pilgrims to swear an oath that

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they would “accept no king who was called ‘John’”\(^\text{12}\) – but seems to receive Fortescue’s approval because he turned his royal ambitions to the shores of Spain. Pursuing foreign thrones, it seems, earned praise; creating domestic division by seeking to control or unseat England’s king did not. Writing about the same time, as Fortescue, George Ashby (while not using the term \textit{over-mighty subject}), echoes the concerns regarding over-wealthy subjects in his advice to the Lancastrian heir, Edward, Prince of Wales:

\begin{quote}
Oon thing kepe in youre noble memorie,
Do magnifie & enriche youre dscent (\textit{sic}),
And thaugh al other ye do modifie,
I holde it a prouision prudent,
Lete not theime be to you equiuolent,
Neither in myghti pouer ne Richesse,
In eschewyng hapley youre oune distresse.\(^\text{13}\)
\end{quote}

Despite his later recommendations to make knights, squires, gentlemen, and even the commons wealthy, Ashby adds, “But to youre richesse make neuer man liche, / If ye wol stande in peas and be set by.”\(^\text{14}\) Again, kings or would-be kings are advised not to allow a subject to become their “equivalent,” either in wealth or in power.

Fortescue and Ashby are not the only late fifteenth-century writers to emphasize the role of over-mighty subjects as sources for political problems. In fact, the author of the 1486 continuation of the \textit{Crowland Chronicle} sees the removal of over-mighty

\(^{12}\text{Thomas Walsingham, }\textit{The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham (1376-1422)},\text{ trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 121. See also Christopher Fletcher, }\textit{Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99}\text{ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77-78, 84.}\)

\(^{13}\text{George Ashby, }\textit{Active Policy of a Prince},\text{ in }\textit{George Ashby’s Poems},\text{ ed. Mary Bateson (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), ll. 625-31.}\)

\(^{14}\text{Ashby, }\textit{Active Policy},\text{ ll. 641-42.}\)
subjects as the smoothest avenue for a king to rule without restraint. The chronicler notes that after the deaths of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (killed at the Battle of Barnet on 14 April 1471) and George, duke of Clarence (executed on 18 February 1478), Edward IV “was persuaded that he could rule as he pleased throughout the whole kingdom now that all those idols had been destroyed to whom the eyes of the common folk, ever eager for change, used to turn in times gone by” – this assertion comes despite the fact that the writer also suggests that after Clarence’s execution many people “deserted” Edward.\textsuperscript{15} In addition to the assessments of Fortescue, Ashby, and the Crowland chronicler, other contemporary sources reveal an awareness of the over-mighty. Many such sources, for example, display the common belief that Warwick was the real power behind Edward IV’s throne in the early 1460s. After Edward’s coronation, the papal legate Francesco Coppini famously reported, “Warwick… has made a new king of the son of the Duke of York,”\textsuperscript{16} and Antonio de la Torre, the English envoy to the papal court and the duke of Milan, likened Warwick to “another Caesar in these parts…”\textsuperscript{17} Writing to the duke of Milan, Giovanni Pietro Cagnola of Lodi proclaimed, “Thus they say that every day favours the Earl of Warwick, who seems to me to be everything in this kingdom…”\textsuperscript{18} In

\textsuperscript{15} The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459-1486, eds. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox (London: Sutton Publishing, 1986), 147. For the Latin, see the facing page, 146: “Ab hoc actu multi Regem Edwardum persuasum relinquebant quod ad libitum dominari posset super totum regnum exterminates nunc idolis universis in quorum facies popularium, oculi novarum semper rerum cupiditi, transactis temporibus respicere consueverunt.” For a discussion of over-mighty subjects as “idols of the multitude,” see Michael Hicks, “Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses,” History 85 (2000): 386-403. To avoid confusion with Hicks’s book Bastard Feudalism, this article will hereafter be referred to as “Idols of the Multitude.”


\textsuperscript{17} Calendar of State Papers, 46.

\textsuperscript{18} Calendar of State Papers, 100.
the early 1460s, when such letters refer to Edward as king, his name is usually immediately followed by Warwick’s.

Though sources such as Fortescue, Ashby and the Crowland chronicler place much weight on over-mighty subjects, historian Michael Hicks cautions that, in the fifteenth century at least, this was a “minority view.”¹⁹ There is some truth to this assertion. It is worth remembering that Fortescue’s Governance of England contains the first recorded use of the term. Even if he did not coin the phrase himself, it cannot have been used very frequently before 1470 – despite the fact that “over-mighty subjects” had existed for some time. Fortescue even mentions Simon de Monfort, earl of Leicester as an example. Leicester took Henry III prisoner in 1264, after the Battle of Lewes, much like Warwick took Edward IV prisoner in 1469. But until Fortescue over-mighty subjects had not been given a particular designation. In fact, according to the Middle English Dictionary, even the generic “magnate” seems to first appear as an English word in John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes (in 1439).

In many ways, later historians emphasized the threat presented by over-mighty subjects much more than the fifteenth-century sources. Sixteenth-century historians, from the humanists Polydore Vergil and Sir Thomas More to Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed, tended to focus on the individual ambitions of powerful individuals and the factionalism that developed from the disputes created by their rivaling ambitions. Subsequent generations maintained the general narrative created by these early Tudor historians, and Victorian historians were particularly taken with the concept.²⁰ Charles Plummer, in particular, condemned “the overgrown power and insubordination of the

¹⁹ Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 387.
²⁰ Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 387.
nobles” in his introduction to Fortescue’s *Governance of England*. In many ways, the emphasis placed on magnates fit well into the “Great Man” theory of history popular at the time and discussed by Thomas Carlyle in 1840:

> For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world’s history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.

Of all the over-mighty subjects, it is perhaps Warwick who best exemplifies the “great man” – he has long captured the popular imagination, more so than John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, William de le Pole, duke of Suffolk, or Richard Plantagenet, duke of York. Fifty years after his death, John Major dubbed Warwick *regum creator* for his role in helping Edward IV claim the throne (in 1461), and in helping Henry VI reclaim it almost

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23 John Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae, tam Angliae quam Scotiae* (Edinburgh: Robertus Fribarnius, 1740), 330. Major is inaccurate in that he indicates that Warwick, Henry VI, and Edward of Lancaster all met with Edward IV in the same battle: “Edwardus ergo iterato, magno cum milite, anno 1471. Angliam petit; cui Anglorum multi in auxilium occurrerunt. Contra quos Henricus sextus, Walliæ princeps ejus filius, & Warvicus comes obviam eunt: inter quos atrox commissum est prælium, in quo Edwardus superior evasit; Walliæ princeps occubuit; Henricus sextus captivus abductus est; & Warvicus Regum creator interit.” In reality, Warwick was killed at the Battle of Barnet on 14 April 1471, Edward of Lancaster was killed three weeks later at the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May, and Henry VI, who had been recaptured when Edward entered London on 11 April, was put to death on approximately 21 May.
a decade later (in 1470). In 1609, Samuel Daniel translated *regum creator* as “King-maker”:

But greatest in renowne doth *Warwicke* sit;
That braue King-maker *Warwicke*; so farre growne,
In grace with Fortune, that he gouerns it,
And Monarchs makes; and, made, againe puts downe.\(^{24}\)

Though Warwick was not without his enemies, he was charismatic and quite popular;\(^{25}\) it should not surprise that the force of his personality kept him at the fore of fifteenth-century historical studies for the first four-and-a-half centuries after his death. Indeed, Warwick was the subject of multiple biographies and historical novels, even through the mid-twentieth century.\(^{26}\) But eventually, interest in men of Warwick’s ilk waned.

The Great Man theory of history, while it remained influential well into the twentieth century, soon had its critics. One of the more prominent was Herbert Spencer, whose work *The Study of Sociology* (1873) provides a quotable refutation of the Great Man theory:

If it be a fact that the great man may modify his nation in its structure and actions, it is also a fact that there must have been those antecedent modifications constituting national progress before he could be evolved.

Before he can re-make his society, his society must make him. So that all

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\(^{26}\) See, for example, Charles Oman, *Warwick, the Kingmaker* (London: Macmillan, 1891); Paul Murray Kendall, *Warwick, the Kingmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957); Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Last of the Barons* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1843).
those changes of which he is the proximate initiator have their chief causes in the generations he descended from.\textsuperscript{27}

Recent history had seen the concurrent development of theories of evolution through natural selection by Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace in 1858, offering a prime example of the fact that change rarely relies on any one person. Indeed, Herbert himself actually coined the term “survival of the fittest” – now so often associated with Darwinism – and had anonymously published an article on the theory of organic evolution in 1852. Just as Darwin was not an isolated genius but a man of his times, so, too, were the Leicesters and Warwicks of medieval England.

By the mid-twentieth century, scholars began to pursue avenues of investigation other than the kings and magnates of the realm. Topics such as constitutional development and the gentry came to the fore. Perhaps the catalyst of this scholarly change of direction was McFarlane’s 1964 declaration; his comment on under-mighty rulers seemed to end the emphasis placed on over-mighty subjects. After Kendall’s 1957 biography of Warwick, for example, four decades passed before another major biography of the Kingmaker was published.\textsuperscript{28} But over-mighty subjects were not simply de-emphasized – Colin Richmond would further strip the magnates of their prestige by reallocating their power to the gentry: “The power of the 60-100 noblemen, including the dozen or so great magnates among them, depended on the cooperation of the gentry to exercise it on their behalf.”\textsuperscript{29} While I do not wish to resuscitate the Great Man theory, I would contend that over-mighty subjects warrant more scholarly attention. Using

\textsuperscript{27} Herbert Spencer, \textit{The Study of Sociology}, 9\textsuperscript{th} ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1880), 34-35.
\textsuperscript{28} See Michael Hicks, \textit{Warwick the Kingmaker} (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).
\textsuperscript{29} Richmond, “After McFarlane,” 59.
Richmond’s logic, one could argue that the king’s power must be based on that of his magnates and nobles – those on whose cooperation he relied to exercise authority on his behalf. Power is complex, but in general people of higher status have more options for accomplishing their goals; it would be easier for a duke to replace a retainer for a specific task than for a retainer to obtain an equivalent position with an equivalent lord. The resources, and therefore the options, available to the greatest magnates made them particularly powerful and dangerous – and thus worthy of extra attention today. Yet, such was McFarlane’s influence that while kings, the nobility in general, and the gentry have all received their due in modern fifteenth-century scholarship, those so-called over-mighty subjects remained largely avoided until recent years. From the social evolutionary perspective of Spencer, perhaps McFarlane’s role in the de-emphasizing of over-mighty subjects has been overemphasized – scholarship would have turned its attentions to institutions even without his comment – but he did give the shift away its strongest voice. But now, McFarlane’s under-appreciation of the over-mighty is, rightly, being called into question.

Although Hicks states that Fortescue’s emphasis on over-mighty subjects was atypical of the time, he also questions the widespread acceptance of McFarlane’s conclusions. He reminds us that McFarlane, before his death, reputedly had a forthcoming work that would have overturned some of his own previous conclusions;

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Hicks suggests that if McFarlane questioned his own early work so should we.\textsuperscript{31} This view warrants consideration. Indeed, although McFarlane was partially right to blame the troubles of Richard II, Henry VI, and even to an extent those of Edward IV, on their own personal failings, it is inaccurate to dismiss the influence of over-mighty subjects. Every king in the fifteenth century faced rebellions and plots of varying degrees. A few examples include: the rebellions of Owen Glendower and Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland in the reign of Henry IV; the discovered assassination plot involving Richard, earl of Cambridge, Henry Scrope, Lord Scrope and Sir Thomas Grey of Hutton in the reign of Henry V; the Jack Cade uprising and the Yorkist rebellions in the reign of Henry VI; the Lancastrian uprisings and Warwick’s rebellion in the reign of Edward IV; Richard, duke of Gloucester’s usurpation in the short reign of Edward V; Henry Stafford, duke of Buckingham’s rebellion and Henry Tudor’s invasion in the reign of Richard III; and the John de la Pole, earl of Lincoln and Perkin Warbeck plots in the reign of Henry VII. Not all of these insurrections involved over-mighty subjects, but the most successful ones did. Starting with the deposition of Richard II in 1399, a surprising number of English kings died violently at the hands of the over-mighty: Richard II, Henry VI, Edward V, and Richard III. Edward IV died of illness, but he was deposed briefly from October 1470 to April 1471. Only Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VII reigned uninterrupted from coronation to natural death (though they each faced unsuccessful attempts to unseat them). And while these kings survived, it is doubtful that either Henry IV or Henry VII felt truly secure on their thrones.\textsuperscript{32} One might even question where

\textsuperscript{31} See Hicks, \textit{Richard III and His Rivals}, 1-3.

\textsuperscript{32} In his biography of Henry VII, S. B. Chrimes suggests that Henry was wary of Yorkist claimants until 1506; he died in 1509. See \textit{Henry VII} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 94.
Henry V might have stood had not Agincourt won the hearts of the English so soon after the foiled assassination plot against him. It is true that the “under-mighty” kings had more to fear, but the possibility of deposition existed for each fifteenth-century king. As mentioned above, recent publications indicate a renewed interest in over-mighty subjects, but thus far literary critics have not addressed the topic in depth. One exception is Raluca Radulescu’s brief discussion of the figures of Gawain, Lancelot and Mordred as “over-powerful subjects” in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. This dissertation will utilize Radulescu’s discussion as a foundation for a deeper analysis of this topic in Malory’s *Morte*. Particularly, I will examine the ways in which Malory’s version of the Arthurian legend reflects contemporary political concerns relevant to over-mighty subjects – and how integral these men (and the relationships they had with the king and with each other) were to the peace and stability of the realm. First, however, a working definition of “over-mighty subject” should be established.

Hicks attempts to define the term “over-mighty subject” is his article, “Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses” (2000). He delineates several criteria for over-mighty status, though he notes that not all such magnates necessarily met all of them. Hicks’s criteria include both personal traits and material advantages: royal blood; great inheritances and governmental appointments (i.e., wealth); exclusion from court; ambition; ability (to command, persuade, etc.); inflexibility (e.g., refusal to compromise); the willingness to oppose the crown and disturb the realm. This dissertation will use the criteria Hicks proposes as a

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starting point for a definition of “over-mighty subject,” but will make several amendments, as some of his qualifications are unnecessarily restrictive. For example, Hicks stresses, “Opposition to the crown, a willingness to disturb the realm and a track record for doing so are all essential qualifications.” As such, he excludes figures that could be considered “over-mighty” (particularly using Fortescue’s primary qualification, great wealth) but never attempted to oppose the crown. These criteria, however, necessarily require hindsight – as mentioned above, John of Gaunt was one of England’s over-mightiest subjects, yet despite the suspicions of contemporaries (and some tensions with Richard II) he never openly rebelled against the crown. But no one doubts he could have caused serious problems for the king if he had. A magnate’s inaction could also have negative consequences for the king in power, as it did for Henry VI in 1471 and Richard III in 1485, when Northumberland’s non-interference allowed Edward IV to reclaim his throne and Henry VII to gain his. Plus, while Hicks considers the years 1450-1500 – which is certainly the heyday of the over-mighty subject – this study will reference examples from the entire fifteenth century. After all, in many ways an over-mighty subject caused the troubles of the fifteenth century: Henry Bolingbroke usurped the throne in 1399, bypassing the expected route of succession and opening the door for others to question the legitimacy of his dynasty. Another key difference is that Hicks states that over-mighty subjects were excluded from court. In the cases that stand out, this is true. There were, however, men like William de la Pole who actually attained over-mighty status through the favoritism of the king. Hicks specifically excludes Suffolk

34 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 388.
35 For the argument that Henry Bolingbroke may have been the rightful heir, if not the expected heir, see Ian Mortimer, “Richard II and the Succession to the Crown,” History: The Journal of the Historical Association 91.303 (2006): 320-36.
from over-mighty status, stating that he “carried little weight apart from the court.”

Suffolk, however, was widely considered the most powerful man in the kingdom during the 1440s, and purportedly engineered the downfall and murder of Henry VI’s royal uncle, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester:

> And the x day of February nexte after began þe parlemente atte Seynt Edmundes Bury in Southfolke, the wheche wasse ordeyned only forto sle the noble Duke of Gloucestre, Humfrey, the kyngys vnCLE, whos dethe, William de la Poole, Duke off Southefolke, and Ser Iames Fynes, Lorde Say, and oþer of their assente hadde longe tyme ymagyned & conspired.

Though this particular chronicle was likely composed in the early years of Edward IV’s reign as Yorkist propaganda, the idea is found in historical and literary texts of 1450 (when Suffolk was killed). In the “Articles of the Captain of Kent,” for example, Suffolk is numbered among the “fals traytors the whiche contrived and imagened the detthe of the highe and mightefull excellent prince, the duc of Glowcester…” The short poem “Arrest of the Duke of Suffolk” uses animal imagery to veil the accusation (slightly):

> “Þis fox at bury slowe oure grete gandere.”

Considering the extent of the influence Suffolk had with Henry VI, I include him among the fifteenth century’s over-mighty subjects.

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36 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 388.
One of the qualifications Hicks stresses most is the importance of the blood royal: “Overmighty subjects were born not made. All were princes of the blood royal…” To a large extent this was true; many of the greatest magnates were closely related to the king and were in the line of succession, so this criterion almost goes without saying. But it is important to note that this qualification is not absolute. It would be more accurate to distinguish such magnates by their current rank, power, wealth, and influence rather than by their longstanding birthrights. As we shall see in Chapter Two, one of the over-mightiest subjects of this period – Richard Neville, earl of Warwick – had so little royal blood that he was never a real threat to occupy the throne. Thus, his constant attempts to control the throne. Meanwhile, critics of Henry VI counted Suffolk among the “meane personnes of lower nature,” whom the king gathered about him. Plus, as mentioned above, Fortescue stresses wealth as the key attribute of over-mighty status. As he says, The grete lordis of the lande by reason of newe discentes falling unto hem and by reason also of mariages, purchases and other titles shulne oftyn tymes growe to be gretter thane thei be now, and peradventure some of hem to be of lyvelode and power like a kyng.

Thus, over-mighty status could be gained through an accumulation of titles and properties through inheritances, marriage, or royal grants – it was thus attainable for individuals outside the small group of royal princes (i.e., close kinsmen to the king). In fact, Warwick and Suffolk both had merchants in their direct ancestry, and fortunate marriages

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40 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 403.
42 Fortescue, Governance of England, 204.
increased both men’s wealth: Warwick’s to Anne Beauchamp, the heiress of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, and Suffolk to Alice Chaucer, widow of Thomas Montacute, earl of Salisbury (and granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer). Plus, despite their relatively low rank, Edward IV’s Woodville in-laws encountered no problems in securing favorable marriages once Elizabeth became queen.\(^{43}\) Quick rises were uncommon, but over-mighty subjects could be – and were – made as well as born.

It is also inaccurate to view over-mighty subjects strictly through a negative lens. Over-mighty subjects could, in fact, be good for the realm. In his discussion of over-mighty subjects, Fortescue says that some lords will grow to be greater than they presently are – and that this is not necessarily a bad thing: “And peradventure some of hem [will grow] to be of lyvelode and power like a kyng. Whiche shalbe righte good for the londe while they aspire to noon higher degree or estate…”\(^{44}\) In Malory’s Morte, during Mordred’s usurpation attempt, Gawain recognizes (on his deathbed) that a loyal over-mighty subject can stabilize the peace and unity of the realm, just as others may attempt to destabilize it: “For had that noble knyght, sir Launcelot, ben with you [i.e., Arthur]… thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne.”\(^{45}\) One mid-fifteenth century poem compares the great Lancastrian lords to various, integral parts to the allegorized “Ship of State”: Somerset is the stern, Northumberland is the sail, and so on.\(^{46}\) Magnates who faithfully served the king and the realm were valuable assets. Of course, it is the

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\(^{44}\) Fortescue, Governance of England, 237. Emphasis added.


negative examples that stand out most, and as discussed above fifteenth-century magnates more often proved to be sources of discord and division than of peace and stability. It is not surprising, then, that Malory’s *Morte* would express concern for the stability and unity of the realm, and that the focus of these concerns would center on over-mighty subjects. Written in the aftermath of civil disturbances like those experienced in 1455, 1459-60, and 1468-69 (at the time Malory was completing his work), each at the hand of men like York and Warwick, division was one of the disturbing “topics of the day” – more so than usual, although the reigns of John, Henry III, and Richard II provide comparable precedents.

Peace and unity were common and laudable goals throughout the Middle Ages, but it was widely recognized that both tend to elude humanity. In the early fifth century, for example, Saint Augustine of Hippo observed that “the earthly city is generally divided against itself by litigation, by wars, by battles, by the pursuit of victories that bring death with them or at best are doomed to death.”47 This largely pessimistic view is still found almost a thousand years later in writings such as John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, which identifies division – that within man himself and that within society – as the root of earthly problems. Whether discussing the state, the Church or the people, Gower notes, “The world stant evere upon debat…”48 Often such social discord is connected

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48 John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 1, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). The quote is from the *Prologue*, line 567 (page 83). In the *Prologue*, Gower also looks back on a Golden Age of civilization, when health, wealth and virtue reigned; then, “The citees knewen no debat” (line 106).
particularly with the sins of Pride and Avarice, with mankind's desire for more power and more wealth, and with the discontent of one's station in life. In a fourteenth-century sermon, John Bromyard says, "The squire is not satisfied unless he lives like a knight; the knight wants to be a baron; the baron, an earl; the earl, a king…" Thomas Brunton, Bishop of Rochester, adds, "Scarcely is there any man to-day content with his status. Inferiors are always eager to be equal with—or perchance to outshine—their betters, by any means they can." George Ashby's fifteenth-century translation of the *Dicta & Opiniones Diversorum Philosophorum* demonstrates the ongoing concerns regarding proper social divisions:

A seruaunt shold nat be euen equal
To his lorde, but in thre thinges trewely,
That is, in feithe, wytte, & pacience al,
Not in estate nor clothinges richely,
Ner in other delites excessely;
But iche man knowe hym self and his degre,
Non excedyng for possibilite.

Multiple renewals of sumptuary laws (though not always enforced) would also seem to indicate a concern with even the *appearance* of social mobility. In his *Active Policy of a Prince*, Ashby emphasizes the divinely ordained nature of social divisions: "Goddys lawe

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50 Quoted in Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit*, 314.
is man to knowe his estate…” In practice, however, society was not very much concerned about a knight becoming a baron – one might recall the rise of the de la Pole, Paston and Woodville families. The real problem was when a magnate wished to be king. Unfortunately, according to Sir John Fortescue, such ambitions were the natural result of the power and wealth possessed by over-mighty subjects: “Whanne a subgiet hathe had also grete lyveloode as his prince, he hathe anoon aspired to thastate of his prince…” On the one hand, Fortescue does not seem to think that such aspirations are inherently bad, although he also quotes an ominous sounding adage: “For mannys corage is so noble that naturelly he aspirith to highe thinges and to be exalted and therefore he enforsith hym selfe to be alwey gretter for which the philosophur seith: OMNIA [AMAMUS] SED PRINCIPARI MAIUS” (i.e., “We love all things but most of all we love to rule”). This conception of man’s corage resembles the common medieval conception – found perhaps most memorably in the opening Canto of Dante’s Paradiso – that the soul, when “freed from hindrance,” naturally rises, seeking to return to God. On the other hand, perhaps due to man’s fallen state, in fifteenth-century England the noble corage so applauded by Fortescue most often succumbed to Pride and Avarice, thus proving more destructive than beneficial to society. The desire to rule, mentioned by Fortescue, often proved divisive and dangerous. Malory recognizes this and, like

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53 Ashby, *Active Policy*, ln. 239.
54 See Chapter One for more information on these families.
56 Fortescue, *Governance of England*, 236. I have corrected the scribal error noted by the editors of this edition and replaced a maius for amamus.
Fortescue, seems to emphasize in his writing the capabilities of over-mighty subjects to destabilize the realm.

As discussed above, Malory’s contemporaries also recognized the dangers posed by over-mighty subjects. Henry Bolingbroke’s 1399 usurpation drew attention to these dangers, and created an imminent threat from other dissatisfied magnates. As popular historian Robin Neillands puts it, the usurpation “put forward a novel idea: that the king was simply *primus inter pares* – first among equals.”58 This statement perhaps oversimplifies things – at least six of the seven fifteenth-century kings had some arguably legitimate claim to the throne. The two kings with the least claim were also the last two: Richard III and Henry VII. Even Henry – whose claim was highly questionable, at best – had inherited the bastard Beaufort line’s claim through his mother, Margaret Beaufort. Only Richard III, who survived only two short years after usurping the throne from his nephew, definitely seemed to hold that *primus inter pares* perspective – even if he truly believed Edward IV’s sons were bastards, his brother George’s son, Edward, would have been next in line (though even in this case, it was argued that young Edward was ineligible for the crown due to the fact that his father had been attainted).59 But there is other evidence of this competitive perspective: the mighty Warwick displayed it on multiple occasions, such as when he tried to place Edward IV’s younger brother, George, on the throne in 1470. Thus, if not entirely accurate, Neillands’s quote does succinctly encapsulate the spirit of competition for the throne in this time period. Indeed, from 1399-1485, the crown changed hands violently six times (in nine changes); an over-mighty subject and/or an alliance of peers led each of the violent exchanges. Interestingly

enough, this spirit of competition and civil strife frames Malory’s version of the Arthurian legend.

In most versions of the Arthurian legend – including Geoffrey of Monmouth’s original version and the *Vulgate Cycle* (the collection of prose romances that served as one of Malory’s biggest sources) – the narrative describes the Saxon invasion of Britain. Arthur’s fame, indeed, stems from his ability to defeat the Saxons and force them to retreat from Britain’s shores or to submit to his rule. But Malory’s *Morte* begins not with the Saxon invasion, but with internal strife: “Hit befel in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englond and so regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornwall that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme…” The barons of the land achieve a brief accord between the king and the duke, but Uther’s lust for the duke’s wife renews the conflict almost immediately. A couple years later, after the infant Arthur had been delivered to Sir Ector by Merlin, Uther’s “enemyes usurpped upon hym and dyd a grete bataylle upon his men and sleue many of his peple.” Again, Malory shifts the focus from the invading force found in his source, to a domestic uprising that puts Uther against “a grete hoost of the North.” Although suggestions that Malory had Henry VI in mind when he has Uther carried upon a litter to the battle at St. Albans are tempting, and have

60 Malory, 7.
61 Malory, 11.
been made – especially given that Uther fell so ill that for “thre dayes and thre nyghtes he was specheles”63 – Griffith notes that the three most distinctive details of the battle (i.e., “St. Albans, the Northern host, and the litter-born king”)64 are found in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s text and subsequent chronicles. It would be inaccurate, however, to describe Uther’s enemies in Geoffrey’s Historia Regum Britanniae as “Northern” – this implies an insular opponent, but Uther’s enemies are Saxons who had invaded Albany first and worked their way down. Malory’s use of the “North,” however, seems far more specific and insular. Later, when he calculates the number of kings who held their land from Arthur, he says, “For in Walys were two kynges, and in the Northe were many kynges, and in Cornuayle and in the Weste were two kynges…”65 This sequence clearly links the North with other regions of Britain; Malory then proceeds to move off the island and mentions kings of Ireland, France, Brittany, and all the lordships of Rome as well. Likewise, Malory informs us that at St. Albans “kyng Uthers men overcome the northeryn bataylle”66 – and later, when Arthur is fighting against the Eleven Kings, his ally Bors says, “Now shall we se… how thes northirne Bretons can bere theire armys!”67 In fact, the traditional Saxon opponents for both Uther and Arthur (referred to by Malory as Saracens) do not make a direct appearance in the Morte; instead, they are relegated to a couple “off-stage” references when they invade the Eleven Kings’ lands and allow Arthur to turn his attention to aiding King Leodegrance, Guinevere’s father, who was

63 Malory, 11. Twice Henry VI entered a catatonic state in which he did not respond to any attempts at communication; Henry VI was carried to St. Albans before the battle on 22 May 1455, causing some critics to see Uther as a Henry VI figure. The part about Uther being speechless for three days is, however, found in the Vulgate Merlin. See Lancelot-Grail, vol. 1, 211.
65 Malory, 371. Emphasis added.
66 Malory, 11. Emphasis added.
67 Malory, 32. Emphasis added.
under attack by King Rions. Of course, if could be argued that Malory does not specify a domestic opponent, either. Although Malory uses the word *usuurped*, which today tends to have a domestic connotation – e.g., Richard III *usuurped* Edward V’s throne, but William the Bastard *conquered* Harold Godwinson’s – the same was not necessarily true in his day. In fact, a mid-fifteenth century translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, found in MS Harley 2261, states that “the Danes usurpede the realme of Estenglonde, and also of Estesex…” But the regional groupings discussed above strongly suggest that the sources of unrest are domestic rather than foreign.

Another way that Malory alters his sources to emphasize civil unrest is found in his handling of the events after Uther’s death. In Malory’s version, Uther reigns but two years after Arthur’s birth before falling ill. Uther’s death then precipitates political chaos that lasts for over a decade: “Thenne stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty of men maade hym stronge, and many wende to have ben kyng.” Both details are in stark contrast to the Vulgate *Merlin*, in which Uther enjoys a long reign, one lasting sixteen years after the St. Albans battle. More importantly, in the Vulgate version after Uther is buried, “All the barons gathered and took counsel as to how the kingdom would be ruled, but they could never come to terms. Then they said by

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69 Malory, 12. The assertion that the instability lasted over a decade is based on Arthur’s age at the time of his coronation. Although Malory does not specify it, Arthur is of a comparable age to Kay, whose mother nursed Arthur; Kay had only recently been made a knight, and Arthur was deemed old enough to be knighted once the people and barons agreed to let him be crowned. These details mean it is likely that Arthur was between 15-20 years old. See Malory, 13-16. In Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur is fifteen when he is crowned, and in the Vulgate *Merlin* he is sixteen. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, transl. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 212; *Lancelot-Grail*, vol. 1, 212.
common agreement that they would seek Merlin’s advice…”\textsuperscript{70} Certainly, the barons later have a hard time accepting Arthur as king, but they are not aware of his heritage – their objection is to having “one of such low birth”\textsuperscript{71} as their king. Malory’s barons want to be king; the ones in his sources want a legitimate king.

Just as Malory’s text begins with several episodes of civil unrest, so it ends with several others. Lancelot’s affair with the queen leads to the kingdom being split in two – when Lancelot is banished, almost half the Knights of the Round Table go with him. Gawain’s insistence on pursuing him decimates Arthur’s forces, and ultimately robs the realm of its two most powerful defenders: Lancelot (who is banished) and Gawain (who ultimately dies from the wounds received at Lancelot’s hands). In their absence, Arthur’s bastard son, Mordred, usurps the throne. In a very real sense, civil unrest – a division in the realm – leads to the fall of Camelot. This dissertation will examine how Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte Darthur explores several key issues regarding fifteenth-century over-mighty subjects, particularly the favoritism/ostracism of certain over-mighty subjects, and the growing number of private feuds among them. It will consider how these issues are reflected in the text, how certain characters are presented as over-mighty subjects, and how Malory’s gentry background may have affected his presentation of these issues.

Chapter One considers the fifteenth-century contexts of the Morte, as well as traditional readings of the text. As with many literary studies, it begins with a consideration of the author – accepting, for now, the identification of Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel as the author of the Morte. P. J. C. Field’s biography of Malory seems

\textsuperscript{70} Lancelot-Grail, vol. 1, 211.
\textsuperscript{71} Lancelot-Grail, vol. 1, 215. Malory’s barons echo this concern, too, but this does not alter the effects of Malory’s other changes. See, for example, Malory, 15.
to resolve some previous controversies regarding the text and its author, particularly regarding his criminal career and the chivalric content of the work. In addition to examining Malory’s life and elements of his world, this chapter will discuss the traditional, nostalgic readings of the *Morte* and argue for more contemporarily and politically relevant readings. Instead of an aged author looking back on – and mourning the loss of – a golden age of chivalry, Field’s middle-aged Malory shapes the Arthurian legend to mirror issues and concerns of his own age.

Chapter Two examines the related issues of favoritism and ostracism with regard to over-mighty subjects. Due to the political system of the time – and the reliance on royal patronage – magnates often vied for the king’s favor. Greedy favorites could cause much harm to the realm, and opposition to them created friction and civil discord. Historically speaking, I will consider the case of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, once considered the most powerful man in the kingdom – until, that is, his forced exile and summary execution in 1450. If the abuses of a royal favorite could lead to civil unrest, as jealous opposition against the favorite grew, so too could the ostracism of a powerful individual lead to trouble. One such historic example is Richard Neville, earl of Warwick; he gained temporary control of two kings, helped depose two kings, and tried to set up a third king as his puppet. Sources indicate that the growing estrangement between Edward IV and Warwick were among the primary reasons for his rebellions against the Yorkist regime he helped establish – and when he helped depose Henry VI, he was politically allied with the ostracized Richard, duke of York. These problematic issues of favoritism and ostracism are dealt with in Malory’s *Morte*, most clearly in one figure: Sir Lancelot du Lake. Favored by both King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, Lancelot
inspires the jealousy and ire of other knights – specifically that of Sir Aggravaine and Sir Mordred, Arthur’s kinsmen (fifteenth-century complaints often stated that the king needed to take more counsel from those of the royal blood). Eventually, the favored knight becomes ostracized and exiled, taking with him his vast retinue of followers – this, too, creates a problem, however, as Arthur is deprived of his strongest supporters when Mordred rebels.

Chapter Three examines the issue of private feuds among magnates. Many historians, dating back to the fifteenth century itself, have traced the origins of the Wars of the Roses to private feuds among the upper nobility. In particular, the Percy-Neville feud in northern England is given much credit for dividing the kingdom into the rival factions that later backed the houses of Lancaster and York. Literary scholars have noted the prevalent place Malory gives feuds in the Morte, particularly the feuds between the houses of Pellinore and Lot, and between the houses of Lot and Ban. Just as fifteenth-century England was torn apart by feuding nobles and competing dynasties, Arthur’s kingdom collapses due, in no small part, to similar feuds. If ostracism cost Arthur the support of Lancelot during Mordred’s rebellion, the feud between Gawain and Lancelot cost Arthur the support of Gawain (who died from wounds received in his fights with Lancelot); the kingdom was left vulnerable after the loss of its two strongest defenders.
CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND INTERPRETATIONS

Almost twenty years ago, Peter Field – following in the footsteps of scholars like Oskar Sommer and George Lyman Kittredge – satisfactorily identified the author of the *Morte Darthur* as the Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel.\(^1\) At various times, scholars have proposed as many as eight other candidates, the most promising alternatives being the Thomas Malorys of Papworth St Agnes and of Hutton.\(^2\) Even with Field’s convincing study on Malory, given the profusion of candidates one might, following the thinking of Michel Foucault, question the necessity of identifying the specific author of the *Morte*:

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for interpretive purposes, “What difference does it make who is speaking?”³ Others had, of course, anticipated the basic premise behind Foucault’s question.⁴ In the twentieth century, structuralists denied the author expressive intentions, while New Critics maintained that extrinsic analysis – such as that which employs the author’s biographical information – needlessly obfuscates the art of the literary text. Similarly, Matthew Arnold had stated in the late nineteenth century that if criticism itself was to hold a certain disinterestedness (i.e., a freedom from political or practical agendas) it should not consider the contemporary political milieu of a work.⁵ From any of these perspectives, Malory’s specific identity does not really matter. The majority of literary scholarship today examines such contextual information, but scholars still occasionally ponder the need for it. In his consideration of the fifteenth-century Fairfax Sequence, Derek Pearsall surmises, “It would perhaps be an advance in understanding if scholarship could free itself from the irritable (though natural) preoccupation with authorship, the idea that a poem somehow lacks identity if it cannot be attached to a named author.”⁶ Applying this idea to the romance genre, and glancing at all the Thomas Malorys in fifteenth-century records, one might again be tempted to wonder whether it matters who wrote the Morte.

Yet other critical schools of thought regard historical and biographical information as important and value the author’s intended purpose in selecting which

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details to include in the text. Unfortunately, settling on Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel as the author of the *Morte* does not provide scholars with an enormous amount of extra information, as significant chunks of his life remain a mystery to us. But each extra detail has the potential to enhance our understanding of the most widely discussed text from fifteenth-century England. This chapter, therefore, will consist of two parts. The first section considers the traditional narrative of Malory’s life and how elements of Field’s version might influence readings of the *Morte*. The second section will examine the traditional “nostalgic” reading of the *Morte*, and ways in which the text should be considered contemporarily relevant.

1. “Thys poure knyght”: Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel

The traditional narrative of the life of Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel places his birth c. 1400. William Dugdale records that this Thomas Malory served Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick at a siege of Calais during the reign of Henry V, bringing with him “one lance and two archers.” Kittredge’s study assigns this siege to 1415, making it improbable that Malory was born any later than 1400; it would stand to reason that he had been born several years earlier. This record – the so-called Beauchamp Roll – combined with Malory’s connection to Warwickshire prompted the

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7 For the view that the author’s intention is unknowable (and irrelevant to literary analysis), see W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54.3 (1946): 468-88.
8 William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London: Thomas Warren, 1656), 56. Because Richard Neville, earl of Warwick will be discussed at more length later, I will refer to the Beauchamp earl as “Beauchamp” rather than by his title, Warwick, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.
traditional narrative that he spent many years in the service of Beauchamp, one of the fifteenth century’s most famous flowers of chivalry. This narrative has influenced considerations of the *Morte Darthur* in two particular ways. First, the presumed dissonance between the text’s contents and the author’s age has made some scholars question the Newbold Revel Malory’s authorship. Second, the presumed service under the chivalrous Beauchamp has made some scholars read the text as a nostalgic lament for a dying chivalric past, and question whether the author could really have been the man accused of so many criminal actions. Field’s reevaluation of the documentary evidence, however, concludes that the Newbold Revel Malory was likely not born until c. 1415.10 This conclusion affects both the presumed age/content dissonance and the traditional reading of the *Morte* as a nostalgic text.

First, Field’s conclusion solves the long-held reservation regarding Malory’s age at the writing of the *Morte*. The traditional biography puts Malory at seventy years of age or older when he completed the text in “the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the Fourth”11 (i.e., 4 March 1469 to 3 March 1470). Scholars have often seen a dissonance between the “boyish” contents of the text and the presumed interests of an elderly author. One reason for this is that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the *Morte* was associated with childhood. Andrew Lynch, in his study on the tendency to abridge and moralize the *Morte* during this time, discusses the frequent association of Malory’s

10 Field, *Life and Times*, 64. Field suggests that Dugdale misidentifies the Thomas Malory on the Beauchamp retinue roll as the one from Newbold Revel, but that the dates for another Thomas Malory in Dugdale’s book, on page 1122 of volume II of the 1730 edition of *Antiquities*, better fits the 1415 date of the roll. See *Life and Times*, 56.

fight scenes with “the taste of youth, especially boyhood.”12 This comes, in part, through equating the tournaments and jousts that permeate the Morte with the sports that so frequently occupy childhood – in fact, it has been argued that “Victorians selected the qualities which they admired in chivalry and remodelled games in the light of them…”13

The childhood/Morte connection was not limited to Great Britain: the first American edition of Malory was Sidney Lanier’s The Boy’s King Arthur printed in 1880. It is not surprising, therefore, that many scholars and writers of the time first encountered, and enjoyed, the Morte in their childhood: Robert Southey, Alfred Lord Tennyson, T. S. Eliot, and John Steinbeck, to name a few.14 Steinbeck, in fact, was so fond of the Morte that he wished to make the text more accessible to modern readers. His modernization, The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights, welcomed readers of all ages but was addressed first to young boys: “I wanted to set [the stories of King Arthur and his knights] down in plain present-day speech for my own young sons, and for other sons not so young…”15 Given the prevalence of this association, some scholars contend that an aged Malory would not have the high level of enthusiasm for youthful “sports” (i.e., tournaments and jousting) that is displayed in the text. While it is debatable that Malory’s age would affect his leisure and literary interests, other scholars have also objected to the Newbold Revel Malory by considering the physical limitations an elderly, imprisoned man must have faced. William Matthews estimates that the composition of the Morte

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likely took between one and two years, and there is reason to doubt that an aged Malory would be physically capable of composing such a lengthy text. Using the traditional narrative, Matthews therefore dismisses the Newbold Revel Malory as the author, saying, “But seventy-five is no age at all to be writing *Le Morte Darthur* in prison… [recalling] the long, persistent labor that it represents, one needs hardly to be skeptical to doubt that the work was written by an ancient of seventy-five.” If Malory *was* seventy-five in 1469, Matthews’s argument would seem both logical and solid.

Field’s new birth date for Malory, however, resolves both the presumed age/content dissonance and the question regarding his physical capability to write the text. A birth year of c. 1415 would put Malory in his mid-fifties, rather than in his seventies, at the time he completed the *Morte*. At that age, Malory could easily still possess the physical capabilities required to write such a lengthy text, and just as easily might still retain a high level of interest in martial activities. Malory’s contemporary Sir John Astley is known to have had a lifelong interest (and participation) in such activities. While still a squire, Astley fought Pierre de Massy in Paris in 1438; he was knighted after defeating Philip Boyle in combat at Smithfield in 1442; he arbitrated single combats in both 1446 and 1453; he also coached Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers before his match against Antoine de la Roche, the Bastard of Burgundy in 1467. Assuming Astley was approximately twenty years old in 1438 (old enough to accept a challenge, but still a squire), he must have been close to fifty (or older) in 1467. It should be noted that the

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17 Matthews, *The Ill-Framed Knight*, 73.
first record of Malory as a knight is dated 8 October 1441, only about three months before Astley was knighted. It is not unlikely that the men were roughly the same age; Malory is an esquire in the Chetwynd Chartulary, from May 1439, and Malory and Astley were knighted within a couple years of each other. In all likelihood, the two men knew each other: both men were at the siege of Alnwick in 1462, and had connections to the Appleby family. Astley’s involvement in the Woodville/Burgundy joust of 1467 – when he was likely about fifty years old – therefore attests to the likelihood that Malory still had a keen interest in such activities at the time he wrote the Morte, c. 1468-70. For those who doubt a man in his seventies would write the Morte, a Malory in his fifties is certainly a fine candidate.

If the new birth year suggested by Field solves the problem regarding the dissonance between Malory’s age and the Morte’s contents, however, it opens another problem with one particularly beloved Malorian tradition: his supposed close connection to Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick. Scholars like Eugene Vinaver have made much of this connection, noting that Beauchamp’s own life resembles that of an Arthurian knight. Recounting events narrated in the Rous Roll, Vinaver compares Beauchamp’s challenges to three French knights on successive days to the defeats of the Black, Green and Red Knights by Malory’s Gareth. In fact, Vinaver proposes that Gareth’s nickname, Beaumains, is inspired by the earl’s surname, Beauchamp. It is, perhaps, interesting that

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19 Field, Life and Times, 84.
20 Field, Life and Times, 83. Malory serves as a witness on the “Chetwynd Chartulary.”
21 Barber, “Court Culture,” 151.
22 Field, Life and Times, 143. Field suggests Malory was imprisoned in 1468, and started writing the Morte at that time. Though the expected time requirements for the writing of the Morte (discussed above) would require Malory to write continuously, this does not necessarily preclude Vinaver’s suggestion of the unordered composition of the tales. See Vinaver, “Introduction,” Works, li-1vii.
The Tale of Sir Gareth is one of the few parts of the Morte for which there is no known (direct) source; this allows for the hypothesis (unlikely as it is) that Malory was paying a small tribute to the earl through this tale. Certainly Beauchamp was renowned in his day as a flower of chivalry – the Beauchamp Pageant reports,

And the Emperor [Sigismond] said to the kyng that no prince cristyn, for wisdom nortur and manhode, hadde suche a nother knyght as he hadde of therle of Warrewyk, addyng thereto that if al curtesye were lost yet myght hit be founde ageyn in hym. And so ever after, by the Emperors auctorite, was called the ‘fadre of curteisy’.24

But, if Field’s date is correct, then Malory was certainly not at the 1415 siege of Calais with Beauchamp. In fact, Malory’s first appearance in extant records, his witnessing of the aforementioned Chetwynd Chartulary (23 May 1439), occurs almost a month after Beauchamp’s death on 30 April. Given that Malory was not knighted for another year or so, it seems unlikely that he served for any great length of time, if at all, in Beauchamp’s retinue; he is, however, associated with the earl’s son, Henry Beauchamp, duke of Warwick.25 Therefore, even if he did not formally serve the famous earl, the two men still may have had some connection. There is also evidence that Malory’s cousin Sir Philip Chetwynd served Richard Beauchamp for a time in 1427 (though Chetwynd had a stronger overall connection to Humphrey Stafford, earl of Stafford).26 Additionally, Christine Carpenter connects Malory with the affinity of the Ferrers of Chartley – an affinity associated with Beauchamp from at least 1418, when Edmund Ferrers served in

24 The Beauchamp Pageant, ed. Alexandra Sinclair (Donington: The Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2003), 120. The facsimile is on the facing page, 121.
25 Field, Life and Times, 88. The custodians of the late duke’s estate paid Malory an annuity in 1446.
26 Field, Life and Times, 66.
France under the earl. Thus, even if Malory was not an official member of Beauchamp’s affinity, it is not unlikely that he encountered the local earl on more than one occasion. If so, he may also have met Beauchamp’s young son-in-law, Richard Neville (later the Kingmaker, with whom Malory has also been associated), who in 1436, at age seven, married the earl’s daughter and went to live in his household. It is also possible that Malory met the young Henry VI, for whom Beauchamp served as guardian from June 1428 to May 1436.

In addition to dismissing the traditional image of Malory serving the chivalrous Beauchamp, Field also dismisses the somewhat romantic idea of the Warwickshire-dwelling Malory faithfully serving a procession of the earls of Warwick: Richard Beauchamp, Henry Beauchamp, Richard Neville. Instead, he believes that he more likely “followed several different lords in turn.” Though this idea might call to mind the shifting allegiances of the Wars of the Roses and open Malory to charges of being a mere mercenary, that does not seem to be the case. Among those lords he has been connected with were: Henry Beauchamp, duke of Warwick (d. 1445); his rival, Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham (k. 1460); John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk (d. 1461); Richard, duke of York (k. 1460); and Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (k. 1471). Among these magnates, Buckingham stands out as a rival to Henry Beauchamp (and the connection between him and Malory is slight at best). The other lords, however, were interconnected: Neville married Henry Beauchamp’s sister, and Neville and Norfolk were two of York’s

27 Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 314-15. On the possible connection between Malory and the Ferrers, it is interesting to note that in early 1450, Malory and members of the Ferrers affinity were involved in two separate attacks on the Duke of Buckingham. See Field, *Life and Times*, 96.

28 Field, *Life and Times*, 103.

strongest allies. For the most part – excluding the brief connection with Buckingham (whom, at any rate, Malory later supposedly attacked) – Malory seems to have run in a large, connected circle. Though shifting allegiances were common during the latter part of the fifteenth century, Malory’s own movements appear relatively stable until the late 1460s when he seems to have flipped from York to Lancaster – yet his association with the Kingmaker explains this easily enough. Instead of indicating mercenary tendencies, Malory’s movements from one potential “good lord” to another might indicate his political usefulness and political ambitions.

Before moving on to Malory’s personal political ambitions, however, it is worth considering the social class of which he was a part: the gentry. As there is some debate about the “gentry” in fifteenth-century England, it is important to figure out just what this term implied. Initially, the word gentil simply meant noble, and thus a gentleman was a nobleman. According to T. B. Pugh, these terms were synonymous until the late fourteenth-century establishment of the hereditary right of the parliamentary peers. By about 1400, the gentry were distinguished from the nobility – but as Michael Hicks points out, both were still members of the aristocracy. Raluca Radulescu notes that the

30 See Field, Life and Times, 96.
31 P. J. C. Field states that much of the Morte is concerned with finding a “good lord.” See Field, “Four Functions of Malory’s Minor Characters,” Medium Aevum 37 (1968): 37-45. For the historical dangers of being lordless, a situation Malory might have found himself in, see Colin F. Richmond, “The Murder of Thomas Dennis,” Common Knowledge 2 (1993): 85-98.
distinction between the two was first made overtly in the Statute of Additions in 1413.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, by the fifteenth century, the gentry were a step below the nobility: the nobility formed secular members of the parliamentary House of Lords, and the gentry were eligible for election to the House of Commons. While the gentry did serve their noble lords, they in turn were lords of lesser men; though many of them did work, they were not manual laborers but lawyers, bureaucrats, and the like.\textsuperscript{35} As such, they possessed skills, wealth and an amount of influence at both the local and national levels. In fact, there have been attempts to locate the true political power of fifteenth-century England in the gentry rather than in the nobility; Colin Richmond argues, “If power has to be located in one place then it should be here with these gentlemen.”\textsuperscript{36} This may be an exaggeration, but the magnates of the realm most certainly depended on the gentry to get things done. For their part, many members of the gentry seemed to have noble aspirations; these aspirations are apparent in their desires to imitate the habits and interests of their social superiors.\textsuperscript{37} In fact, many families did succeed in marrying into or being raised into the nobility. For example, the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, the son of a prosperous vintner, held numerous government and court appointments (e.g., Member of Parliament, Justice of the Peace, Controller of the port of London, Clerk of the King’s Works) – his granddaughter, Alice, eventually married William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk, and her grandson, John de la Pole, earl of Lincoln, was the presumed heir to Richard III after the death of Richard’s

\textsuperscript{34} Raluca Radulescu, \textit{The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur} (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 7-8.
\textsuperscript{35} Hicks, \textit{Bastard Feudalism}, 7.
\textsuperscript{36} See, for example, Colin Richmond, “After McFarlane,” \textit{History} 68 (1983), 59.
\textsuperscript{37} For the social aspirations of members of the middle class and gentry, see work on courtesy manuals and “great books,” e.g.: Felicity Riddy, \textit{Sir Thomas Malory}, Medieval and Renaissance Authors, Vol. 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), especially 60-83; Karen Cherewatuk, “‘Gentyl’ Audiences and ‘Grete Bookes’: Chivalric Manuals and the \textit{Morte Darthur},” \textit{Arthurian Literature} 15 (1997); as well as selections from \textit{The Paston Letters}.
son in 1484. The rise of the Paston family is well documented, and they, too, married into the peerage: William Paston II married Lady Anne Beaufort, the daughter of the deceased Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset, c. 1469, and John II was engaged to a cousin of Queen Elizabeth Woodville for approximately eight years. Both the Beauforts and the Woodvilles had similar rises before providing avenues for the Pastons’ entry into the nobility. The Beaufort family were the legitimized descendants of John of Gaunt via his mistress and later wife, Katherine Swynford—who was herself the daughter of a mere knight (and Chaucer’s sister-in-law). Queen Elizabeth Woodville’s father, Richard, was from a Northamptonshire gentry family. Richard Woodville had only been raised to the peerage in 1448, some twelve years after his scandalous marriage to Jacquetta of Luxembourg, the daughter of a French count and widow to Henry VI’s uncle, John, duke of Bedford. With such social success stories as these to look up to, it is easy to imagine Malory possessing social and political ambitions. As Cherewatuk argues, “Malory thus was committed to a chivalric system, which although conservative, allowed certain members of the gentry to rise on the social scale.” Since the opportunity existed for social advancement, the question is whether Malory wished to pursue it.

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38 See Martin M. Crow and Virginia E. Leland, “Introduction: Chaucer’s Life,” *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987): xv-xxvi. It should also be noted that Chaucer’s wife, Philippa, seems to have been the sister of Katherine Swynford, the mistress and later wife of John of Gaunt. See Crow and Leland, xviii. All quotations from Chaucer’s works will be taken from this edition unless otherwise noted.


40 Richard and Jacquetta were fined £1,000 for their unsanctioned marriage. David Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 2002), 2.

41 Cherewatuk, “Gentyl Audiences,” 207.
According to Field, Malory’s knighthood “suggests political ambition,” and there are reasons to accept this assertion. According to the 1436 tax records, the Malorys’ income appears to have been approximately £60 per year. This is somewhat above the average esquire income in Warwickshire, as Carpenter’s work on the gentry suggests that Warwickshire esquires averaged about £50 per year. The average income for Warwickshire knights, however, was about £155 per year. Additionally, Field notes that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, £40 – rather than the generally accepted £20 – was the minimal expected income for an English knight. It is also worth noting that by the early fifteenth century, knighthood was in something of a decline. It was not uncommon for men eligible for knighthood to pay fines in order to forego the honor – John Paston I did this very thing. Consequently, it seems curious that Malory would choose to be a “poor knight” rather than a well-off esquire, particularly since rank brought with it expectations of maintaining certain appearances. There is ample evidence that these expectations were taken seriously. In January 1471, John de la Pole, duke of Suffolk delayed responding to a summons to London because he was unable to appear “at his time to his worship… ffor I dare sey he hath here at his day awayting uppon his

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42 Field, Life and Times, 84.
43 Field, Life and Times, 65. Field notes that the recently widowed Philippa Malory’s lands were calculated at £60 in the 1436 tax record. The fact that Philippa, not Thomas, acted as executrix of John Malory’s will also indicates that Thomas was likely still a minor in 1436. This supports the new birth date of c. 1415. See Field, Life and Times, 64.
44 Carpenter, Locality and Polity, 58.
45 Field, Life and Times, 90. Field also notes that the annual income of Sir Thomas Malory’s widow (presumably Elizabeth Walsh of Wanlip) was listed at just over £21. Field does not discount, however, the possibility that Malory may have had additional income to supplement his meager base.
47 See Carpenter, Locality and Polity, 52.
lordship not a dozen persons." Clothing, naturally, played a large – and expensive – role in maintaining appropriate appearances, and sumptuary laws (though not always strictly enforced) limited certain colors or items of clothing to members of the aristocracy or nobility. As part of his effort to maintain expected appearances, Richard Beauchamp spent over twenty-five percent of his 1420-21 income on clothing. Failing to meet expectations could have dire consequences; Henry VI’s 1471 procession through London – intended to win support – failed in no small part because of his unkingly appearance: “The [progresse] was more lyker a play then the shewyng of a prynce to wynne mennys hertys, ffor by this mean he lost many & wan noon or Rygth ffew, and evyr he was shewid In a long blew goune of velvet as thowth he hadd no moo to chaunge w...”

Closer to Malory’s own social standing, the Pastons again provide a comparable example. The Paston letters are filled with information regarding clothing: requests for items to be sent, information about the status of orders or purchases, and reports of fashion. On 7 April 1469, John III expresses concern about the suitability of his headwear in a letter to his brother, John II:

And if so be þat ye send eny man hom hastely, I pray yow send me an hat and a bonet by þe same man, and let hym bryng the hat vp-on hys hed for mysfaconyng of it. I haue ned to bothe, for I may not ryd nor goo owt at

49 For an examination of the importance of aristocratic appearances, see Susan Crane, The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity during the Hundred Years War (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
It may well be that John II did not respond quickly enough, as a letter dated to May 1469 complains that John III has not received “syche ger as I sent yow mony for” and explains, “need compellyd me, for in thys contré is no syche stuffe as I sent to yow for.” The concern over appearances is portrayed in literature as well. The knights in Thomas Chestre’s late fourteenth-century Sir Launfal express dismay at their poor appearance. When Sir Huwe and Sir Jon leave Sir Launfal to return to court, they complain: “Syr, our robes beth torent, / And your tresour ys all yspent, / And we goth ewyll ydyght.” Once they arrive at court, they lie about why their clothes are so tattered. Before they left, Sir Launfal also begged his companions, “Tellyth no man of my poverté, / For the love of God Almyght!” Meanwhile, the Morte’s pathetic passage that introduces Balin as a “poore knyght” makes one wonder if it was written with particular sympathy on the part of the author:

Than hit be felle so that tyme there was a poore knyght with kynge Arthure that had bene presonere with hym half a yere and more… And so he went pryvaly into the courte and saw thys adventure whereoff hit reysed his herte, and wolde assayde as othir knyghtes ded. But for he was poore and poorly arayde, he put hymselff nat far in prees. But in hys herte he was fully assured to do as well, if hys grace happed hym, as ony knyght

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52 Paston Letters, I.540-41. Emphasis added. John III was in Caister at the time, John II in London. This would indicate that the request was more fashion-oriented than need-oriented.
53 Paston Letters, I.542. It is not certain that the second letter refers to the items in the first, but the dating and the fact that both are addressed to John II suggest this interpretation.
55 Chestre, Sir Launfal, ll. 143-44.
that there was... Thys damsell than behelde thys poure knyght and saw he was a lyckly man; but for hys poure araymente she thought he sholde nat be of no worship withoute vylony or trechory.\textsuperscript{56}

Field observes that Balin’s sense of embarrassment, due to his poor appearance compared to the other knights at court, is an element that Malory adds to his source, the Vulgate \textit{Merlin}.\textsuperscript{57} Perhaps Malory felt a similar unease as a “poor knight,” particularly if Barber is correct in speculating that Malory attended the court of Edward IV with the hopes of gaining royal favor.\textsuperscript{58} If he did seek royal favor in this way, Malory likely viewed the combination of knighthood and a presence at court as an investment which he hoped would lead to a rise in his social status not unlike what the Chaucers and Pastons experienced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Pastons, in fact, provide an example of investing in the future in this very manner. In 1461, John I procured for his son John II, who had not yet been knighted, a place at Edward IV’s court with the intent of making advantageous connections.\textsuperscript{59} In the Pastons’ case, the investment paid off, as they gained some favor from men like Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, and William Hastings, Lord Hastings.

Malory certainly had reason to be hopeful for his prospects. With examples like the Chaucers and Pastons, and his own family connections, Malory probably did not expect to remain a “poor knight.” His father, John Malory, had been a successful esquire

\textsuperscript{56} Malory, 62-63. Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 90 notes “the embarrassment felt at being visibly poorer than the company one is in” is an element Malory adds to the source, the Vulgate \textit{Merlin}.
\textsuperscript{57} Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 90.
\textsuperscript{58} Barber, “Court Culture,” 134-35.
\textsuperscript{59} See Bennett, \textit{The Pastons and Their England}, 13; Larry D. Benson, \textit{Malory’s Morte Darthur} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 200; \textit{The Paston Letters}, I.128, 199-200. Even though court life proved quite expensive, and Sir John appeared ineffective at making friends, Clement Paston could not bring himself to recommend the young man’s removal from court, lest “men wold thinke þat he were put owte of seruice” (quote from 200).
who served in a variety of public offices, including: five-time Member of Parliament for Warwickshire, Sheriff of Warwickshire and of Leicestershire, commissioner of array, Justice of the Peace for Warwickshire, and escheator of Warwickshire and Leicestershire. Malory started his career along a similar trajectory: he served as M.P. in 1445-46 (Warwickshire) and was assigned to a commission along with Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham; he also likely served as M.P. in 1449 (Bedwin in Wiltshire) and 1450-51 (Wareham, Dorset). Additionally, he likely joined his cousin Sir Philip Chetwynd’s military expedition into Gascony as a junior officer. Chetwynd, in fact was something of a rising star, who achieved such titles and offices as Viscount Tartas (1440), mayor of Bayonne (1441), and lieutenant-governor of Calais (1444). Yet neither his father John nor his cousin Sir Philip was Malory’s most prominent kinsman: his uncle, Sir Robert Malory, the Prior of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem in England (1432-1439/40), has been called “one of the great magnates in the kingdom.” The potential for Malory’s social advancement was real. Two events of the early 1440s, however, somewhat dimmed Malory’s political prospects: the deaths of Sir Robert in 1440 and Sir Philip in 1444. Field suggests that Malory’s life of crime – the first criminal accusation against him is recorded in October 1443 – may have started in part due to the “expectations dashed by the death of his powerful kinsman,” Sir Robert. In an argument that is perhaps not unrelated, Raluca Radulescu suggests that Malory’s life of crime may have started in part due to the death of his powerful kinsman, Sir Robert.

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60 Field, *Life and Times*, 44-47. It should be noted that many of Malory’s ancestors were knights, though John apparently did not pursue this avenue.
62 Field, *Life and Times*, 86.
63 Field, *Life and Times*, 68.
64 Field, *Life and Times*, 87.
65 Field, *Life and Times*, 80.
have stemmed from his attempts to defend the estates of his family and dependants.\textsuperscript{66} Both these possibilities suggest that Malory’s many legal troubles may have had political origins – and ties between the details surrounding his imprisonments and his political enemies support this notion.

While any or all of Malory’s alleged crimes may have been genuine, many of the ones from the early 1450s can be associated with Buckingham’s rivalries with two different earls of Warwick, Henry Beauchamp and Richard Neville, and the later Lancaster/York conflict. Carpenter notes that in 1451 Malory was not indicted in Warwickshire, where he should have been – and where, perhaps, the Neville earl of Warwick would have made it difficult to obtain a guilty verdict against him.\textsuperscript{67} Malory then faced a series of deferred trials until, ultimately, the government ceased attempting to organize one and simply left him in prison. Judging by the number of accusers and the variety of charges on record, Field also suggests that there is reason to believe that “someone looked for people with grievances against Malory and organized them into court…”\textsuperscript{68} Malory’s association with the duke of York’s allies certainly allows for such speculation, and his attack on Buckingham in January 1450 – at a time when staunch Lancastrians like William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk were being attacked openly – adds some substance. Looking forward to the late 1460s, and to Malory’s potential involvement in the Cornelius Plot against Edward IV in 1468,\textsuperscript{69} there is even more reason to believe that Malory was deemed a potential threat. Perhaps frustrated by his thwarted

\textsuperscript{66} Radulescu, \textit{Gentry Context}, 14.
\textsuperscript{67} Carpenter, \textit{Locality and Polity}, 452-53.
\textsuperscript{68} Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 106.
ambitions, Malory supported rivals who offered the promise of better days. On the whole, however, whether Malory’s imprisonments stemmed from subversive politics or simple criminal activities, he apparently made consistently poor choices that prevented him from attaining positions of lasting prominence or wealth. Despite his associations with some of the most powerful men in the kingdom, he typically ended up offending those in power: he spent much of the 1450s imprisoned by the Lancastrian regime, and the late 1460s imprisoned by the Yorkist one. His final imprisonment in the late 1460s, however, provided Malory the opportunity to write the work that ultimately secured his place in history: the *Morte Darthur*.

2. “In thos dayes” Versus “Nowadayes”: Nostalgic and Contemporarily Relevant Readings of the *Morte Darthur*

In his 1912 study *Chivalry in English Literature*, W. H. Schofield surmises, “Turning from Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century to Sir Thomas Malory in the fifteenth, we take a step backward instead of forward…” Schofield is not referring to Malory’s artistic ability, nor even to his style (though he does describe this as “so natural and simple, so lacking in rhetorical ornament”); he also is not, as so many other scholars have done, comparing the “dullness” of a fifteenth-century writer to the brilliance of Chaucer. Instead, when Schofield writes that “the *Morte d'Arthur* might

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71 Schofield, *Chivalry*, 77.
almost as well have been written seventy years before Chaucer’s birth as seventy years
after his death,” Schofield argues, that Chaucer approached much more pragmatically and realistically. Other scholars echo this backward-looking interpretation, seeing Malory as a nostalgic writer caught up in the idea of a lost golden age of chivalry. In fact, E. K. Chambers believes that not only was Malory a nostalgic writer, but his contemporaries also read him as such: “It was, perhaps, his nostalgia for a decayed chivalry which led William Caxton to make his greatest gift to English letters, the so-called Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas Malory.” Although it is now common to read Malory’s Morte in its fifteenth-century social and political contexts, some scholars continue to associate the text – or, indeed, the Arthurian legend itself – with nostalgia. Elizabeth Edwards states, “The completeness of closure in the Arthurian cycle means that regret and backwards-looking inhere in the material – but Malory’s version in particular seems steeped in nostalgia, laden with an impossible desire for the past.” Because one of this present study’s fundamental suppositions is that Malory’s text is not as nostalgic as many scholars assert, it is worth considering both nostalgia itself and how the Morte’s first editor likely viewed the work.

At first glance, a nostalgic reading of the Morte has much to recommend it, based not only on the current definition of nostalgia but also on what we know about the condition. First, studies indicate that nostalgia – that general, bittersweet longing for

73 Schofield, Chivalry, 75.
75 Elizabeth Edwards, The Genesis of Narrative in Malory’s Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 179. Also see Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, King Arthur and the Myth of History (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Finke and Shichtman examine the Arthurian legend and historical narratives in the context of looking to the past to reframe the present and justify political agendas.
better days – is universal; it occurs cross-culturally, spanning social and age groups.\textsuperscript{76} That people in medieval England experienced nostalgia is apparent in the yearning \textit{ubi sunts} found in Old English poems like “The Wanderer” and in later poetry like Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Former Age,” which longs for a more idyllic time. There are passages in the \textit{Morte} that seem particularly nostalgic, such as the oft-quoted discussion of love; as Malory later succinctly reminds us, “Love was nat as love ys nowadayes.”\textsuperscript{77} Second, although nostalgia was once tied to personal recollections of one’s own past, it is now recognized that it can be both personal and collective\textsuperscript{78} and that “displaced nostalgia”\textsuperscript{79} allows people to experience it for times and places of which they have no firsthand knowledge. Thus, while critics may once have scoffed at using \textit{nostalgia} (originally a medical condition) to describe a narrative based in the distant, pseudo-historical past, that is no longer the case. Indeed, David Lowenthal observes: “Formerly confined in time and place, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past.”\textsuperscript{80} Because the conditions existed in which Malory may have experienced nostalgia – both private and collective – during the writing of the \textit{Morte}, it would perhaps be natural to conclude that the sentiment would be reflected in the text. If he did indeed experience what we now call \textit{nostalgia}, such readings of the \textit{Morte} should be considered seriously.

\textsuperscript{76} Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt, and Clay Routledge, “Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future,” \textit{Current Directions in Psychological Science} 17, no. 5 (2008): 304. Nostalgia, coined by Johaness Hofer in 1688, was originally a medical condition associated with the physical “homesickness” of Swiss mercenaries; by the twentieth century it was considered a psychiatric condition associated with a desire to return to one’s own past. Now, it is often associated with the past in general (see Lowenthal, note 82).
\textsuperscript{77} Malory, 1165. See pp. 1119-20 for the longer discussion of love.
\textsuperscript{79} Tom Vanderbilt uses this term in “The Nostalgia Gap,” \textit{The Baffler} 5 (November 1993): 152-57.
\textsuperscript{80} David Lowenthal, \textit{The Past Is a Foreign Country} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6. It should be noted that the longing described today as \textit{nostalgia} existed in previous eras, though the term itself dates to the seventeenth century and has changed in meaning. Thus, while it would have been impossible for Malory to describe his sentiment as \textit{nostalgic}, the sentiment itself existed. This discussion is based on Malory feeling what we today define as \textit{nostalgia}. 

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Malory certainly appears to be a prime candidate for experiencing nostalgia on a personal level, as nostalgia has often been associated with both depression and loneliness. Considering the significant amounts of time that Malory spent in prison – often with little or no hope of a forthcoming trial or pardon – it is perhaps natural to assume he felt lonely and depressed. No record exists that attests to this assumption, but historical and literary evidence suggest we should consider the possibility. For example, Field notes that Malory’s multiple escape attempts and his appeal to readers to pray “that God sende me good delyveraunce” indicate he was not content to remain in prison.

More pertinently, Field notes the pathos with which Malory writes about Sir Trystram’s imprisonment:

So sir Trystram endured there grete Payne, for syknes had undirtake hym, and that ys the grettist Payne a presoner may have… and than hath he cause to wayle and wepe. Ryght so ded sir Trystram whan syknes had undirtake hym, for than he toke such sorow that he had allmoste slayne hymselff.

Even if Malory himself was not ill in prison, there is reason to believe he was on occasion depressed by his situation. As mentioned above, his trials were constantly delayed, and he had no recourse for securing his release (which might explain his repeated escape

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82 Although Malory’s imprisonment was at times more lax than what we normally think of as imprisonment – e.g., while in Fleet Prison Malory would likely have been free to leave the prison during the day (for a fee; see Field, *Life and Times*, 120-21), and he had access to an impressive Arthurian library during his imprisonment in the late 1460s – the frustrations at deferred trials and rejections of/exemptions from pardons must have frustrated him (see Field, *Life and Times*, 118 and 128).
83 Malory, 1260.
84 Malory, 540. See Field, *Life and Times*, 120-21. Schofield, *Chivalry*, 86 also makes this connection, and suggests that Malory may have been sick at the time he wrote this passage and later died of that illness; Aurner, “Sir Thomas Malory—Historian?” 391, believes this passage reflects Malory’s own experience.
attempts and skipping out on bail).\textsuperscript{85} In general, late medieval depictions of prison terms paint a depressing picture. In the \textit{Knight’s Tale}, Chaucer takes it for granted that his audience would view a prison term – particularly one with no hope of release – as depressing: “What nedeth wordes mo? / And in a tour, in angwissh and in wo, / This Palamon and his felawe Arcite / For everemoore; ther may no gold hem quite.”\textsuperscript{86} Likewise, Malory’s contemporary George Ashby laments his own imprisonment:

\begin{quote}
George Ashby ys my name, that ys greued

By enprysonment a hole yere an d more,

Knowyng no meane there to be releued,

Whyche greveth myne hert heuyly and sore…\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Ashby wrote this lament in the relatively lax conditions of Fleet Prison, also expressing little hope for release. Of course, as Boethian tropes, such expressions should not be accepted too readily as proof of a writer’s psychological state at the time of writing. But whereas Ashby laments his fall from a position of favor – like other authors who utilize Boethian tropes in their prison writings (e.g., Thomas Usk) – Malory’s \textit{explicits} merely request prayers for deliverance:

\begin{quote}
For this was drawyn by a knyght presoner, sir Thomas Malleoré, that God sende hym good recover. Amen…
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{85} The statutes of Richard III’s 1484 parliament, regarding bail for suspected felons, prevented imprisonment prior to trial and protected property from forfeiture until conviction. These reforms suggest that Malory’s experiences with legal delays were not unique – and that such situations were considered unjust.

\textsuperscript{86} Chaucer, \textit{The Knight’s Tale}, ll. 1029-32. This quote occurs before the cousins first see Emelye and begin to suffer from lovesickness.

And I pray you all that redyth this tale to pray for hym that this wrote, that
God sende hym good delyveraunce sone and hastely. Amen…
I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of
Arthur and his knyghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge, praye for me
whyle I am on lyve that God sende me good delyveraunce. And whan I am
deed, I praye you all praye for my soule. 88

Rather than a Boethian trope, Malory’s *explicit* appear to be heartfelt, if generalized,
appeals. Non-literary sources reveal similar (if typically more specific) appeals for help.
One man named Piers wrote to Sir Richard Rokesby from prison in 1461, asking
Rokesby to help him get some money owed him by a Richard Kowuen (presumably to
pay his fine and gain release):

> For in goode feyth, I hadde neuer more neede for to haue helpe of my
goode as I haue at this tyme, for God wot, it stonde right straunce with me.

> For the false chayler that kepeth me entretethe me worse thanne it were a
dogge, for I am feterid worse thanne euer I whas, and manacled on the
handes be the daye and nyght, for he is a-feerde of me for brekyng
awaye. 89

Piers’s letter suggests that prison conditions could be quite dismal, and indicates the
desire for a quick release (“I hadde neuer more need for to haue helpe…”). Without the
presence of further Boethian tropes, Malory’s *explicit* seem more in line with the types
of comments made in non-literary sources. Returning to the *Morte* itself, the experiences
of imprisoned characters also contain a feeling of verisimilitude. In addition to the

88 Malory, 180, 363, 1260.
89 *Paston Letters*, III.175.
Trystram passage quoted above, Lancelot’s imprisonment by the Four Queens reflects his solitude and depression: “So they departed and leffte hym there alone that made grete sorow.” Many scholars believe that Lancelot was Malory’s favorite character – and the one with which he most identified. The depression and loneliness Malory likely felt while in prison would seem to favor scholars who support a nostalgic reading of the text – it certainly is not difficult to imagine Malory’s mind taking a nostalgic turn to a supposed Golden Age of English history, a time when justice reigned. The answer to one question might help determine whether Malory’s text is nostalgic: how did his contemporaries read it, including the first editor and printer, William Caxton? If Chambers was right to suggest that Caxton printed the *Morte* out of a sense of his own nostalgia – a mere fifteen years after it was completed – then perhaps that is the tone Malory intended.

Critics have often commented upon Caxton’s antiquarian interests, and such preferences are frequently associated with nostalgia. Indeed, many of the works he printed were tried and true “classics”: Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, John Lydgate’s *The Lyf of Our Lady*, the *Brut* chronicle; translations of Boethius (by Chaucer), Ranulf Higden’s *Polycronicon* (by John Trevisa), Vincent de Beauvais’ *The Myrrour of the World*, Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*, Aesop’s *Fables*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In many cases, extant manuscripts provide evidence of these texts’ popularity in the Middle Ages. At first glance a recent work like

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90 Malory, 258.
92 See, for example, Finke and Shichtman, 159; for a discussion of Caxton’s uncertain place in literary history (a printer of medieval texts using Renaissance technology), see Jenny Adams, “‘Longene to the Playe’: Caxton, Chess, and the Boundaries of Political Order,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2004): 151-66.
Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* – completed in 1469-70 – may not seem to fit Caxton’s printing habits. But as Caxton’s preface points out, the *Morte* should be considered a translation not unlike some of Caxton’s own: Malory took the story “oute of certeyn booke of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe.” Malory’s many references to *the Frensshe booke* serve as reminders to this fact (though sometimes misleadingly).

In printing the Morte, Caxton merely printed a translation of yet another “classic” story (though one never completely told in English).

Caxton’s choice to print the *Morte*, then, is in line with his typically antiquarian interests. Evidence that nostalgia for a bygone day influenced his choice to print it can, perhaps, be found in his preface to the text:

> And I, according to my copye, have doon sette it in enprynte to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyl and virtuous dedes that somme knyghtes used *in tho dayes*, by whiche they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke; humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce, and to folowe the same…

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94 Malory often refers to “the Frensshe booke” even when he is departing from his source or when his immediate source is an English one; Beverly Kennedy argues that Malory habitually invokes the French “whenever he is being particularly innovative.” See Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 2.

Caxton’s use of the phrase *in tho dayes* and the implied comparison between a time when honor mattered (then) to a time when it does not (now) supports the view that Caxton – and presumably his contemporaries – considered the *Morte* a nostalgic text that looked back upon better days and a more chivalrous time. This is an understandable interpretation of the text, given the social and political problems of the fifteenth century. Contemporary sources – and later sixteenth-century sources even more so – often lament the general breakdown of law and justice; a strong king like Arthur (in the early books of the *Morte*) must have been an appealing alternative to the weak Henry VI or the hedonistic Edward IV.\(^96\) Of course, Arthur’s weakness in the later books complicates the issue, and might remind readers of contemporary kings.

Another reason some view the text as nostalgic is that Caxton suggests it has a reformist objective. The *Morte* has been read as a chivalric or courtesy manual, as critics point to Caxton’s urging of his readers to imitate “the good and honest actes” presented in the book. While a courtesy or chivalric manual would not necessarily be considered nostalgic, a reformist objective inspired by, and patterned after, the past opens the *Morte* up to this interpretation: nostalgia, after all, “requires active reconstruction of the past.”\(^97\)

If the *Morte* serves as a type of chivalric exemplum, it must first reconstruct the past that is to be emulated. Interestingly, Jennifer Goodman suggests that Caxton printed the *Morte* as part of a chivalric series aimed at reforming English knighthood. This proposed series, printed between 1481 and 1485, focuses on the three Christian members of the

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\(^97\) Janelle L. Wilson, “‘Remember When…’ A Consideration of the Concept of Nostalgia,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56.3 (Fall 1999): 299.
Nine Worthies, and includes a popular chivalric manual: *Godfrey of Boloyne* (1481), *The Book of the Orde of Chyualry* (1484), *Morte Darthur* (1485), and *Charles the Great* (1485). The arguments that Caxton viewed the *Morte* as a nostalgic text and printed a chivalric series to reform English knighthood are perhaps strengthened when Caxton’s epilogue to his translation of Ramón Lull’s *The Book of the Orde of Chyualry* is considered:

> Here endeth the book of thordre of chyualry… whiche book is not requysyte to every comyn man to haue / but to noble gentylmen that by their vertu entende to come & entre in to the noble ordre of chyualry / the whiche *in these late dayes* hath ben vsed according to this booke here to fore wretin but forgeten / and thexersytees of chyualry / not vsed / honoured ne excercysed / as hit hath ben *in auncyent tyme* / at whiche tyme the noble actes of the knyghtes of Englond that vsed chyualry were renomed thurgh the vnyuersal world…

Again, Caxton’s references to the past as a better time (from which one can learn) suggest a particular type of nostalgia. This epilogue further connects the printing of Lull’s *Book* with the *Morte* by serving, perhaps, as an advertisement of sorts for Caxton’s upcoming Arthurian publication, and highlighting its worth as an exemplum of chivalry:

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98 J. R. Goodman, “Malory and Caxton’s Chivalric Series, 1481-85,” *Studies in Malory* ed. James Spisak (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985): 257-74. As will be seen, however, Goodman sees a practical purpose for chivalric activities in Malory’s day, making the *Morte* somewhat less nostalgic than Chambers asserts. For more on viewing these four texts as part of a series, see William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 193-235.

O ye knyghtes of Englond where is the custome and vsage of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho dayes / what do ye now / but go to the baynes & playe att dyse And some not wel aduysed vse not honest and good rule ageyn alle ordre of knyghthode / leue this / leue it and rede the noble volumes of saynt graal of lancelot / of galaad / of Trystram / of perse forest / of percyual / of gawayn / & many mo / Ther shalle ye see manhode / curtosye & genteeleſs...

Caxton’s use of the phrase in tho dayes indicates that chivalry is no longer what it once was. In addition to Caxton’s own publications, there are numerous other historical and literary texts that indicate the general feeling that chivalry had been in decline for some time – on the continent as well as in England. Since the mid-fourteenth century men such as John Bromyard, Eustace Deschamps, Alain Chartier, and Jean de Venette had criticized the laziness, greed, lawlessness, impiety, and other vices of knights. Other writers had reform in mind, including Geoffroi de Charny and the late thirteenth-century Ramón Lull. In the late fifteenth century, Caxton and other sources echo many of these criticisms. One prominent example is William Worcester in The Boke of Noblesse, and his so-called “lamentation of chivalry.” Worcester encourages the training of young

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100 Caxton, “Epilogue,” 122. Emphasis added. Caxton then suggests reading some noble acts since the Conquest, such as those in the days of kings Richard the Lionheart, Edward I, Edward III, and Henry V.
101 See Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry, rev. ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 371-83. As Barber discusses, however, various criticisms of chivalry can be found dating to the beginnings of knighthood.
103 For discussions of contemporary criticisms of knights and the nobility (and, indeed, every sector of society), see G. R. Owst, Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966); V. J. Scarragood, Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972), particularly 298-349.
noblemen in the arts of war, noting: “And this was the custom of your noble auncestries…”

Worcester adds, however:

But now of late daies, the grettir pite is, many one that ben descendid of noble bloode and borne to armes… set hem silfe to singuler practik, straunge faculties from that fet as to lerne the practique of law or custom of lande, or of civile matier, and so wastyn gretlie theire tyme in suche nedelese besinesse…

Worcester began work on *The Boke of Noblesse* in the 1450s, but presented an updated version to Edward IV in 1475 (shortly before the king left for war in France). Given Worcester’s writings (about which more will be said below), it would seem that Caxton was not the only one aiming to reform knighthood. It is, however, a bit ironic that Worcester and Caxton look back upon the same days about which Bromyard, Deschamps, and Chartier had complained – chivalry, it would appear, is in the eye of the beholder.

Whether or not the *Morte* serves as a chivalric (or courtesy) manual or comprises part of a chivalric series aimed at reforming English knighthood, it has been associated inextricably with the concept of chivalry since Caxton’s printing. As seen above, the preface states that Caxton printed the work so “that noble men may see and lerne the

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107 Indeed, literary critics have argued that the *Morte* demonstrates, and wrestles with, the fact that there were competing, or at least various, forms of knighthood or codes of chivalry. See, for example, Kennedy, *Knighthood*; Kenneth Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory’s Le Morte Darthur* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
noble actes of *chyvalrye.*” Later scholars have only strengthened the connection between the text and chivalry. The *Morte* is, in the words of Richard Barber, “first and foremost, a chivalric romance.” Karen Cherewatuk assumes, “Even a casual reading of the *Morte Darthur* reveals that Malory is not a detached critic of but rather a loyal adherent to chivalry.” With the text so informed with and by chivalry – so much so that Caxton assigns the text a didactic purpose – it is, perhaps, curious that Tomomi Kato’s concordance lists only fifteen occurrences of the word (in four forms: *chevalry, chevilry, chyvalry,* and *shevalry*) in the voluminous *Morte.* But, to continue Cherewatuk’s line of thought, even a casual consideration of the text’s contents – the tournaments, the loves of Tristan/Isolde and Lancelot/Guinevere, the emphases on knighthood, noble deeds, noble knights, and worship – reveals that critics are certainly correct to connect the *Morte* and chivalry so closely. The question worth consideration is whether or not this emphasis on chivalry makes the *Morte* as nostalgic as Chambers suggests.

Many modern historians and literary critics generally support the nostalgic interpretation of Malory’s *Morte* because they, like Caxton perhaps, see chivalry as in decline by the late fifteenth century. This view is perhaps best represented in Johan Huizinga’s *The Waning of the Middle Ages.* Huizinga argues that chivalry had ceased to

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108 Caxton, “Preface,” cxlvii. Emphasis added. It should be noted that Caxton refers the *Morte* as “thys book” several times in his preface, and considers it a single work. Vinaver, however, argues that Malory wrote eight separate romances. See Vinaver’s “Introduction” in *Works,* particularly xli-lvi. Modern scholars have defended both views; I favor the arguments that see it as a single work (with some structural discrepancies).


111 See Tomomi Kato, ed., *A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974). The related word *shyvalere* is also used nine times.
be a social reality by the fourteenth century. By the fifteenth century, reality had exposed the lie, the illusion, of chivalry, and confined it to the aristocratic “domains of literature and of conversation.” Regarding the outward shows of chivalry – the tournaments, passages of arms, vows – Huizinga says that in the late Middle Ages, “We only see the dead form of the thing: the cultural significance of the custom has disappeared…” It is not entirely clear, however, that “chivalry” was ever a true social reality; while Huizinga discusses how reality gave the lie to the illusion, John Addington Symonds states, “Chivalry was the golden dream of possibilities which hovered above the eyes of mediaeval men and women, ennobling their aspirations, but finding its truest expression less in actual existence than in legend and literature.” In a sense Symonds is right; chivalry can be described as “a Platonic ideal of knightly life.” This all fits a nostalgic reading of the Morte, because with nostalgia “the longing may be for a past that did not necessarily exist.” But scholars have noted a difference between the illusory/ideal chivalry found in romances and the actual practice of it. In order to understand the Morte better, it is worth briefly considering the concept and development of chivalry in the Middle Ages.

113 Huizinga, Waning, 101.
114 Huizinga, Waning, 89.
117 Wilson, “Remembering When,” 303.
118 See, for example, the introduction in Maurice Keen, Chivalry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Nigel Saul, Chivalry in Medieval England (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
The traditional view of chivalry is that it rose to prominence during the twelfth century and lasted, to one degree or another, through the fifteenth. Its roots lie in the combination of a variety of influences. The first factor is the development of the horsed warrior, enabled by the introduction of the stirrup in the eighth century. Because equipment became more and more expensive, the horsed warrior became associated with the nobility. Barber locates the “formative period for knighthood” in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when western European kingdoms faced constant wars. By comparison, the twelfth century was relatively peaceful – thus, the rise of the tournament, that entertainment-based replacement for martial activity. Also popular in twelfth-century France were the heroic *chansons de geste* and the courtly love literature of the troubadours. Barber argues that it is in the combination of these elements – and the infusion of a religious one as well – that the roots of chivalry can be found. Keen echoes this, and describes chivalry as a complex combination of “three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious.”

Though Huizinga’s image of a decaying chivalry fits perfectly with a nostalgic reading of the *Morte*, it is important to note that numerous scholars have challenged his view, arguing instead that the fifteenth century witnessed a rebirth and flowering of chivalry. As Beverly Kennedy asserts, “We now know that Huizinga was wrong.” On the whole, Larry D. Benson dismisses the idea of a “golden age,” but adds, “Yet if there

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119 Barber gives a brief summary of these pertinent factors in “Chivalry and the Morte Darthur,” which serves as a basis for the following discussion.
120 Barber, “Chivalry and the Morte Darthur,” 20.
121 Keen, *Chivalry*, 17.
was a golden age of chivalry, a time when men at least tried to be chivalric knights, it was from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.”\textsuperscript{123} Huizinga was not unaware of an apparent revival of chivalry in the late Middle Ages, but he connected it with a kind of amusement and literary self-fashioning of the nobility. Chivalry certainly comprised part of the nobility’s self-fashioning, but even as late as the mid-fifteenth century it would seem to surpass mere frivolity. Indeed, Nigel Saul argues that the dispute between York and Somerset – integral to the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses – developed from “a point of chivalry.”\textsuperscript{124} When Somerset, who had been placed in charge of Normandy in December 1447, surrendered Rouen to the French in October 1449 with virtually no resistance (a treasonable offense), York was still nominally the captain of the city. Technically, though York was in Ireland (as its lord lieutenant) at the time, the quick surrender of the city dishonored him.\textsuperscript{125} In this light, chivalry should not be seen as a decaying institution or a largely imaginary concept at the time; it still had the power to influence matters of national importance.

In fact, Goodman argues that fifteenth-century chivalry served practical purposes. One compelling example she discusses involves the aforementioned joust between Anthony Woodville and the Bastard of Burgundy in 1467. First, the joust served as a diplomatic enterprise between England and Burgundy – and, indeed, Edward IV’s sister Margaret of York married Charles, duke of Burgundy the following year (at which time another tournament was held as part of the wedding festivities). Second, the joust provided an opportunity to display the honor of the Woodville house: “One major object

\textsuperscript{123} Benson, Malory’s Morte Darthur, 141.
\textsuperscript{124} Saul, Chivalry, 332.
of this famous performance would have been to display the Wydville coat of arms beside that of the ducal house of Burgundy.”\textsuperscript{126} The traditional historical narrative explains that Edward IV had been much criticized for marrying Elizabeth Woodville, due to the relatively low birth of her father:\textsuperscript{127}

After this, king Edward, prompted by the ardour of youth, and relying entirely on his own choice, without consulting the nobles of the kingdom, privately married the widow of a certain knight, Elizabeth by name; who, though she had only a knight for a father, had a duchess for her mother; and shortly after he had her solemnly crowned queen. This the nobility and chief men of the kingdom took amiss, seeing that he had with such immoderate haste promoted a person sprung from a comparatively humble lineage, to share the throne with him.\textsuperscript{128}

Albico Malleta reported the marriage to the Duke of Milan and concluded: “This has greatly offended the people of England.”\textsuperscript{129} According to William Paston, Edward IV himself (while still the earl of March, and with his Neville kinsmen, the earls of Salisbury and Warwick) had berated his future father-in-law at Calais in January 1460, calling him the son of a knave and squire who was made a lord only by his marriage to John, duke of Bedford’s widow.\textsuperscript{130} As the chronicler quoted above notes, however, Elizabeth Woodville’s mother, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, had a somewhat higher pedigree – not

\textsuperscript{126} See Goodman, “Caxton’s Chivalric Series,” 263.
\textsuperscript{127} Pugh, “The Magnates, Knights and Gentry,” 87-88, argues that the nobility was more accepting of new families than traditionally thought. He notes the recent acceptances of the de la Poles, Hollands, Beauforts and Bouchiers into the nobility as ample precedents.
\textsuperscript{129} Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan, vol. I, ed. Allen B. Hinds (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1912), 114.
\textsuperscript{130} The Paston Letters, 162.
only was she John, duke of Bedford’s widow, she also belonged to a noble house in Burgundy that could trace its ancestry back to Charlemagne. The tournaments in 1467 and 1468 between England and Burgundy provided the perfect stage for promoting the queen’s maternal lineage. In fact, Barber connects the revival of English tournaments in the 1460s with a renewed interest in chivalry and courtly culture; he suggests that Edward IV patterned his own court after the chivalric Edward III’s court and the courts of contemporary Burgundy and Italy. Other scholars argue that Edward IV made a concentrated effort to revive the institution of knighthood: there were 193 knights in the kingdom in 1459, but by 1465 Edward had raised the number to 237. Again, there seems to be a functional aspect to this revival, as many scholars believe that Edward created the new knights in order to generate support for his reign.

But perhaps more than a renewal, or rebirth, of chivalry, the late fifteenth-century saw a redefinition of chivalry. Two members of Sir John Fastolf’s household, William Worcester and Stephen Scrope, wrote works focused on a practical, “patriotic” form of chivalry – one in which knighthood was an institution for public service. In the 1460s, John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester translated Buonaccorso da Montemagno’s *Contraversia de Nobilitate* under the title *Declamacion of Noblesse*. In this work, the nature of nobility is debated in a Roman senate; one character, Guyus Flamineus, argues that nobility should not be based on lineage so much as on inner qualities and a dedication to public

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131 See Barber, “Court Culture,” particularly 138-46.
133 See, for example, Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, 9-10.
135 See Saul, *Chivalry*, 327-38. Worcester, of course, wrote *The Boke of Noblesse*, while Scrope translated *The Dicte and Sayings of the Philosophers* and Christine de Pizan’s *Epistle of Othea*. Fastolf himself wrote memoranda to Henry VI’s council on how to best handle the war in France.
service. There are traces of this mentality in Malory’s *Morte*, indicating his participation in this redefinition of chivalry. Early in Arthur’s reign, a damsel arrives at court with a test of true nobility: she is girded with a sword that may only be removed from its sheath by “a passyng gode man… withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson” and “a clene knyght withoute vylony and of jantill strene of fadir syde and of moder syde.”

When all the other knights fail, the poorly arrayed Balyn asks to be allowed an attempt to withdraw the sword. Eyeing his poor clothing, the damsel initially refuses, until Balyn says:

‘A, fayre damesell… worthynes and good tacchis and also good dedis is nat only in araymente, but manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person; and many a worshipfull knyght ys nat knowyn unto all peple. And therefore worship and hardynesse ys nat in araymente.’

Although Balyn is a knight, he is “a poore knyght,” and one of the seemingly few at Arthur’s court who is not a king or a king’s son. Such a mentality of inner nobility fit with the newer brand of chivalry, which located nobility *within a man* rather than in lineage. Indeed, another proponent of this type of chivalry was Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales (later Earl Rivers), who also translated *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, as Scrope had some twenty years earlier; as discussed above, the Woodvilles were a parvenu family, eager to establish their own worth (though they were not averse to highlighting the lineage of the duchess Jacquetta).

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136 Malory, 61-62.
137 Malory, 63.
138 Malory, 62.
139 For the “inflation of status” that makes almost all of Malory’s characters “either a king or a king’s son,” see Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 34 (note 42).
If, as Goodman, Saul, and the others argue, chivalry maintained (or even regained) practical uses in the fifteenth century, should Malory’s *Morte* still be considered nostalgic – or, at the least, as not relevant to his own day? Bennett’s commentary still retains some influence: “Occasionally [Malory] exclaims against the times, but for the most part he retires into a world of long ago.”  

As seen above, Edwards is but one scholar who still agrees with this assessment. Critics point to various aspects as “backward-looking,” but three interconnected elements merit particular consideration: Malory’s style, language, and genre. Stylistically, Bennett presents Malory as “a writer who holds firmly to the old ways” – a point which Peter Field expands upon when he notes that Malory’s rather simplistic, more “oral” and somewhat old-fashioned style lacks the literary complexity of late medieval and early modern written prose. But Bennett observes that “prose was also continuing to develop along simpler and more conversational lines” and that authors “were constantly attempting to put down their thoughts in a clear and unornamented fashion.” He states that other fifteenth-century writers were using prose for new ends, and acknowledges its continuing development, but neglects to consider that Malory’s *Morte* is the first English version of the complete Arthurian saga – and that it is in prose, not verse. It should also be noted that Bennett refers to the typical writings of ordinary men; Field, however, refers to literary writing. It might be a mistake, however, to assume that Malory chose an outdated

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141 Bennett, 200.
143 Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, 180.
literary style – he may have not seen himself as writing a straightforward literary work. Many scholars discuss the possibility that Malory actually saw himself as a historian,\textsuperscript{145} which is much the way that Caxton’s preface presents the work. Field even observes that Malory’s supposedly old-fashioned, more oral language resembles contemporary chronicles (Caxton updates some of the language in his edition, but that is not surprising considering the Winchester manuscript’s more northern-based language).\textsuperscript{146} Malory’s “simplistic” style and language, then, would seem to participate in the contemporary form of prose writing that Bennett discusses.

There is also the question of genre: was Malory truly writing a chivalric romance? As mentioned above, he may have viewed himself as a historian rather than a writer of romance – but that alone may not be enough to categorize the work. Indeed, Malory himself may not have had a specific “genre” in mind. Elements of romance clearly inform the work, but modern scholarship demonstrates that romances influenced chronicles and chronicles frequently included romance material.\textsuperscript{147} Those who argue that the \textit{Morte} was a chivalric manual, or functioned as a mirror for princes, are able to turn to Gervase of Canterbury for support: Gervase states that historians are to “instruct

truthfully” (veraciter edocere). Chris Given-Wilson notes the didactic purpose of history in the Middle Ages, and it has been suggested that the *Morte* was among the works that Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers planned to use in the education of Edward, Prince of Wales. Since many parts of the Arthurian legend were considered historical, Malory may well have been writing from that perspective – according to Given-Wilson, even fantastic/miraculous elements (such as the Holy Grail) may have actually provided credibility to a chronicle. Terrence McCarthy examines Malory’s “historical mode,” and favors regarding Malory as a historian but also considers the possibility that Malory was altering the romance genre: “It could be argued that the *Morte Darthur* constitutes a movement away from romance, or that it presents that genre in a new light.” Ralph Norris suggests that Malory’s method of composition (i.e., his combination of a large number of major and minor sources) “makes him, as far as is

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149 Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 2-3.

150 This obviously could not have been Malory’s intent when writing the *Morte*, as the future Edward V was not born until 2 November 1470, well after the completion of the text. Malory probably would not have known that Queen Elizabeth was expecting before completing his work. Woodville could have still intended to use a copy, however, as many believe he supplied Caxton the Winchester Manuscript. See, for example, George D. Painter, *William Caxton: A Quincentenary Biography of England’s First Printer* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), 146-47. It might be instructive to determine how Malory’s contemporaries viewed the text.

151 See, for example, Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 136-37. Of course, historians since Geoffrey of Monmouth’s own day have questioned the historicity of Arthur and his deeds; Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 4, mentions the works of Alfred of Beverley, Ailred of Rievaulx, Gerald of Wales and William of Newburgh as examples of early doubts.


known, unique among romance writers of any language.”\textsuperscript{154} Although traditional literary history saw the romance in decline in the late fifteenth century, or “living on its past,”\textsuperscript{155} more recent scholarship has noted a vibrant life for the genre at the time. Felicity Riddy, for example, argues, “The period between 1476 and 1535… which spans the publication of the first three editions of the \textit{Morte Darthur}—was one in which romance flourished with vigorous new growth and did not merely feed on its own past.”\textsuperscript{156} Norris does add that “the \textit{creative period} of Arthurian romance was mostly past” (granting another point to those of the nostalgic school),\textsuperscript{157} but Helen Cooper also points out that in writing a prose romance Malory was helping to forge new ground. English romances were written in verse until the \textit{Prose Merlin}, and Cooper asserts that “the equation of the genre with verse was decisively broken only by Sir Thomas Malory…”\textsuperscript{158} All things considered, perhaps Malory should be viewed as somewhat more \textit{progressive} than he has been in the past; previous suppositions regarding his style, language and genre can all be viewed in this light, as can his subject. Returning for a moment to the \textit{Morte}’s chivalric activities, Barber states that “had [Malory] been writing in the late 1450s, his interest in tournaments could have only been antiquarian curiosity…. By contrast, in the 1460s, there was a major revival of the sport in England, and evidence of royal and courtly enthusiasm for it.”\textsuperscript{159} Considering Victorian medievalism, it is possible that the nostalgic readings of the \textit{Morte} stem more from the nostalgia of the nineteenth century – nostalgia

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{154} Norris, \textit{Malory’s Library}, 167.
\textsuperscript{156} Riddy, \textit{Malory}, 10. For a brief overview of the genre, see Helen Cooper, \textit{The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22-40.
\textsuperscript{157} Norris, \textit{Malory’s Library}, 3. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{158} Cooper, \textit{English Romance}, 33.
\textsuperscript{159} Barber, “Court Culture,” 146.
\end{footnotesize}
for both the medieval past and for childhood (recall the connections made between the
text and childhood) – than it does from the contents of Malory’s work.

In order, therefore, to determine whether or not Malory’s *Morte* can accurately be
described as nostalgic (in the sense that it longs for a past Golden Age), it is time to turn
to those contents. Chambers gives one of the more convincing arguments for reading
Malory’s text as a story of a long lost world, despite Malory’s occasional authorial aside:

> But of the England of the fifteenth century, exhausted by generations of
> foreign enterprise and dynastic quarrels, of England as we find it depicted
> in the *Paston Letters*, of the complete breakdown of law and order, of the
> abuses of maintenance and livery and private warfare, of the corruption of
> officials, of the excessive taxation, of the ruin of countrysides by the
> enclosure of agricultural land for pasture—of all this we find no
> consciousness whatever in Malory’s pages. A revival of the spirit of
> chivalry might have done something to help matters, but a strong hand in
> the central government would have done more.

Malory does not, however, except in this outburst [i.e., “Lo ye, all
Englysshemen…”], come before us as a political thinker, but as a story-
teller, intent on the development of a very dramatic theme.\(^{160}\)

As we shall see, not all of the assertions here are correct (e.g., private warfare, such as the
feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore, *is* present in Malory), but on the whole
Chambers recognizes that many contemporary issues are conspicuously absent from the
*Morte*. Because such topics are absent, many scholars choose to focus on the passages

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\(^{160}\) Chambers, *English Literature*, 197.
where Malory compares *nowadayes* to *in thos dayes* or *in kynge Arthurs dayes*.

Occasionally, Malory uses such phrases to provide the reader with some historical perspective: “*For in thos dayes* hit was nat the gyse as *ys nowadays*…”\(^{161}\) These instances often give the impression that Malory idealizes the past, particularly when it is compared to his present:

> But *nowadayes* men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres. That love may nat endure by reson, for where they bethe sone accorded and hasty, heete sone keelyth. And ryght so faryth the love nowadayes, sone hote sone colde. Thys *ys no stabylyté*. *But the olde love was nat so*. For men and women coude love togydirs seven yer ys, and no lycoures lustis was betwyxte them, and than was love trouthe and faythefulnes. And so in lyke wyse was used such love *in kynge Arthurs dayes*.\(^{162}\)

Malory later assures the reader that “*love was nat as love ys nowadayes.*”\(^{163}\) In light of these and other such passages, it seems natural to read the *Morte* as nostalgic – but upon further study, it may not be right to do so.

Despite a couple of prominent examples, there are surprisingly few passages where Malory compares *nowadayes* to *in thos dayes*. Kato lists only seven occurrences of the word *nowadayes* – the first of which occurs in “The Poisoned Apple” episode (five-sixths of the way through the text) and refers not to fifteenth-century England but to

\(^{161}\) Malory, 1076. Emphases added.
\(^{162}\) Malory, 1119-20. Emphases added.
\(^{163}\) Malory, 1165. In some ways, however, Malory also seems insincere in his description of past love. If it was as idealistic as he makes it sound, why must he be so coy regarding the details of Lancelot’s relationship with Guinevere?
Lancelot’s changing behavior toward Queen Guinevere. She complains that “nowadayes” he has more to do with “ladyes, madyns, and jantilwomen… than ever ye were wont to have beforehende.”¹⁶⁴ Five of the seven occurrences pertain to love; four are found in the oft-quoted “Summer” passage, and the fifth refers back to that passage. The seventh occurrence pertains to hermits. Arguably, such comparisons do not a nostalgic text make. Malory does, of course, use *in thos dayes* more often, and a related phrase that should be considered as well: *for suche was the custom*. If Malory seldom uses *nowadayes*, he uses *custom* substantially more often: seventy-eight times, according to Kato. It is worth noting, however, that many of the occurrences of both *in thos dayes* and *custom* compare Arthur’s day less frequently to Malory’s day than to Arthur’s own time or previous history. There are, of course, a handful of examples when Malory *does* compare the fifteenth century (rather unfavorably) to Arthur’s day. For example, the statement about hermits referred to above compares the contemporary world with the Arthurian one: “*For in tho dayes hit was not the gyse as ys nowadayes; for there were none ermytis in tho dayes but that they had bene men of worship and of prouesse, and tho ermytes hylde grete householdis and refreysshed people that were in distresse.*”¹⁶⁵ He also alerts the reader to some differences in the treason laws: “*For the custom was such at that tyme that

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¹⁶⁴ Malory, 1046.
all maner of shamefull deth was called treson.”¹⁶⁶ In another comparative passage, Malory addresses the burial preparations for Lancelot: “And ever his vysage was layed open and naked, that al folks myght beholde hym; for suche was the custom in tho dayes that al men of worship shold so lye wyth open vysage tyl that they were buryed.”¹⁶⁷ One passage that stands out as a clear negative comparison between Malory’s day and Arthur’s occurs in “The Poisoned Apple” episode. This passage calls to mind the contemporary complaints regarding the perversion of justice and the abuses of livery and maintenance: “For such custom was used in tho dayes: for favoure, love, nother affinité there sholde be none other but ryghtuous jugemente, as well uppon a kynge as uppon a knyght, and as well uppon a quene as uppon another poure lady.”¹⁶⁸ Extant documents and letters reveal that fifteenth-century English justice often favored the powerful. The complaints of the commons during the Cade Rebellion of 1450 and the Yorkist complaints of 1459-60 are echoed by the Lincolnshire rebels in 1469:

Also the seid sedicious persones by the mayntenaunces in the contrees where they dwelle or where they bere reule wol nat suffer the kinges lawes tobe executed upon whome they owe favour, and also move our said

¹⁶⁸ Malory, 1055. Emphasis added. Ironically, this passage refers to Guinevere’s trial for the murder of Sir Patryse – a crime for which she is completely innocent. The justice system that receives this praise almost cost the queen her life.
soveraigne lorde to the same. By the whiche the lawes be not duly
mynistred ne put in execucion bi the which grete murdres, robries, rapes,
oppresions and extorcions aswele by theyme as by their mayntenaunces
of their servauntes byne dayle doone and remayne unpunisshed to the
grete hurte and grugge of all this lande.169

Malory’s snide comment on fifteenth-century English justice, however, is one of the
relatively few direct negative comparisons in the Morte. Other examples that provide a
commentary on Malory’s day do not idealize Arthur’s day. In fact, a few of the oft-
quoted comparisons function to compare – rather than contrast – Arthur’s day with
Malory’s: “Lo thus was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we
of thys lond have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us
Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme.”170 Here, Malory condemns
an enduring national trait. The relatively few direct comparisons in the Morte, like the
one regarding justice, between Malory’s day and Arthur’s actually highlight the
similarities Malory must have assumed existed between the two eras – after all, if there is
an important difference, Malory conscientiously points it out. That he does this so
infrequently demonstrates that he assumed his readers would be familiar with the world
and the customs he presents.

Far more plentiful, however, are references to specific customs of specific places
in Arthur’s own day. These customs often appear as strange to outsiders in the story as

169 "The articles and causes for the assembling of Robin of Redesdale and the commons of Yorkshire, 1469," in John Vale’s Book, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne F. Sutton, Livia
Visser-Fuchs, John L. Watts (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), 214. For the perspective that
lawlessness and violence during the fifteenth century was not excessive, see J. R. Lander, The Wars of the
170 Malory, 1229. Emphases added.
they do to readers. One such strange custom is encountered when the knights of a particular castle threaten a maiden traveling with Balin. At first, Balin moves to protect her:

And they all seyde nay, they wolde nat fyght with hym, for they dud nothynge but the olde custom of thys castell, and tolde hym that hir lady was syke and had leyne many yeres, and she myght nat be hole but yf she had bloode in a sylver dysshe full, of a clene mayde and a kynges doghter.

‘And therefore the custom of thys castell ys that there shall no damesell passe thys way but she shall blede of hir blood a sylver dysshefull.’

Balan dislikes the custom, but allows the maiden to bleed – as long as she is not killed.

Later, during the Grail Quest, Sir Percival and Sir Galahad encounter this same castle and its custom. They, too, dislike what they hear: “‘Blame have he,’ seyde Galahad, ‘that brought up such customs!’” Their companion, Sir Percival’s sister, however, freely offers her blood; it heals the woman, but Sir Percival’s sister dies as a result of the bleeding.

Knights-errant, and their often-unlucky female companions, frequently encounter strange customs in isolated castles. Sir Trystram and La Beale Isolde, for example, are taken captive at another castle with its own peculiar custom:

But anone as sir Trystrames was within the castell they were takyn presoners, for the custom of that castell was suche that who that rode by that castell and brought ony lady wyth hym he muste nedys fyght with the lorde that hyght Brewnour… So this custom was used many wyntyrs,

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171 Malory, 81-82. Emphasis added.
172 Malory, 1000.
wherefore hit was called the Castell Plewre, that is to sey ‘the wepynge castell’.\textsuperscript{173}

That this custom must have seemed as strange to Trystram as to Malory’s readers is evident: at various points, Trystram describes the custom as “foule,” “shamfull,” “horryble,” “wicked,” and “evyll.”\textsuperscript{174} Such examples demonstrate that Malory’s frequent use of the word \textit{custom} are rarely used as comparisons between his day and Arthur’s; he is not waxing nostalgic for a better time. The strange customs of the “foreign” castles serve less to separate them from fifteenth-century English castles than they do to separate them from Camelot and other castles of the Arthurian world. The other way Malory uses the word \textit{custom} serves to separate his own world from Arthur’s even less.

Frequently, Malory uses \textit{custom} to mean simply \textit{habit}. The knight who turns out to be King Pellinore has the \textit{custom} of letting no knight pass without jousting.\textsuperscript{175} King Arthur, we learn, “had a \textit{custom} that at the feste of Pentecoste in especiall afore ot her festys in the yere, he wolde nat go that day to mete unto that he had herde other sawe of a grete mervayle.”\textsuperscript{176} Trystram’s \textit{custom}, when he is not at arms, is to hunt in the forest.\textsuperscript{177} We also learn of Lancelot’s \textit{custom} of sleep talking,\textsuperscript{178} of Gawain’s \textit{custom} of eating fruit at meals,\textsuperscript{179} and of Queen Guinevere’s to ride always with a large escort.\textsuperscript{180} In fact, there are at least as many explanations of the \textit{customs} of individuals in the \textit{Morte} as there are

\textsuperscript{173} Malory, 412-13. Emphases added.
\textsuperscript{174} Malory, 413-15.
\textsuperscript{175} Malory, 49. Sir Dinadan later informs Sir Epynogrys that “hit is the custom of knyghtes arraunte one to juste with other.” See 690. For the popularity of the \textit{pas d’armes} in fifteenth-century Burgundy (the favored ally of Edward IV), see Barber, “Chivalry and the Morte Darthur,” 29-31.
\textsuperscript{176} Malory, 293. Emphasis added. This habit of Arthur’s is mention again on page 855.
\textsuperscript{177} Malory, 422.
\textsuperscript{178} Malory, 805.
\textsuperscript{179} Malory, 1048.
\textsuperscript{180} Malory, 1121.
comparisons between the real and imagined societies. For Sir Dinadan, Malory uses *custom* to mean something more akin to *preference*: "For sir Dynadan had suche a custom that he loved all good knyghtes that were valyaunte, and he hated all tho that were destroyers of good knyghtes."\(^{181}\) As with the *customs* of some castles, the word can also mean simply *rule*, as in a tournament.\(^{182}\) On the whole, Malory differentiates between the customs of various places in the Arthurian world more than he does between fifteenth-century England and the Arthurian world; the supposedly nostalgic comparisons in the text are few and far between. But even pointing out the differences between local customs could help make Malory’s Arthurian world more recognizable to his readers – as a man with some travel experience himself, Malory knew firsthand that different places had different customs (or even different laws or dialects); adding in such “local colour” would accord with Malory’s tendency to make his geography more realistic.\(^{183}\) Indeed, within fifteenth-century England alone were such distinct regions as Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, and the North, as well as the continental city of Calais.

On the whole, the content of the *Morte* arguably does not support the traditional nostalgic interpretation. It should be noted that while earlier scholarship often approached the *Morte* from an *either/or* perspective – it either looks nostalgically back to a better time, or it addresses contemporary issues – more recent scholarship has recognized that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, an essentially nostalgic text may make an implicit statement regarding its own age, or may even explicitly confront or

\(^{181}\) Malory, 614.
\(^{182}\) See Malory, 736.
\(^{183}\) One early proponent of Malory’s realistic geography was George R. Stewart (from whom I borrowed the term “local colour”); see “English Geography in Malory’s ‘Morte D’Arthur,’” *Modern Language Review* 30 (1935): 204-09. Also relevant is Hodges’s argument that the *Morte* explores variations in local codes of chivalry, and that this accounts for many of the apparent disunities in the text. See *Forging Chivalric Communities*. 

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criticize elements of contemporary society. The texts in Caxton’s “chivalric series,” after all, seem to dwell upon *thos dayes* in the hopes of reforming fifteenth-century knighthood. Similarly, a text that predominantly addresses *nowadayes* can, on occasion, refer back to a time when things were different, perhaps even better. The *Morte* is of this second variety. As seen above, the text does not support the predominantly nostalgic interpretations – but it does, on occasion, refer back to a time when things were handled differently. Two such instances found in the *Morte* are the references to hermits (who used to be men of worship, and who could be counted on to help those in distress) and to justice (which used to apply to kings as well as knights, to queens as well as to poor ladies).\

184 There was much to criticize in Malory’s day regarding the Church (the Reformation would occur less than fifty years later), and the perception was that lords would often circumvent justice for themselves or their retainers.\

185 It is not surprising, then, that an earlier, better time might be mentioned. But more frequently now, modern studies examine the commonalities rather than the differences between Malory’s day and that of his Arthur. Even Field, who states in *Romance and Chronicle* that Malory’s “story looked to the past rather than to the future,” is forced to consider seriously the possibilities of contemporary allusions in the text. He ultimately decides that most potential allusions are likely due more to chance rather than design, but also allows that Malory might have made such allusions from a generally sympathetic point of view – but

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184 See Malory, 1076, 1055.\
185 As Crane points out, livery and maintenance were “widely understood to encourage lawlessness…” See Crane, *Performance of Self*, 40. Hicks, however, argues that the connection between livery and lawlessness is overstated. See *Bastard Feudalism*, 116-24.\
not from a partisan perspective with any political agenda.\textsuperscript{187}\ Not everyone agrees with Field, however; many see the \textit{Morte} as a very contemporarily relevant text by virtue of overt political leanings or deliberate contemporary allusions. A brief overview of some of the most influential, interesting and relevant studies will help contextualize this present study.

Considering that Malory wrote at the mathematical midpoint of the Wars of the Roses, with its competing dynasties of Lancaster and York, it is no surprise that scholars often focus on his political leanings.\textsuperscript{188}\ For decades, the widely accepted view was that Malory supported the Lancastrian dynasty. Schofield remarks that Malory fought for the Lancastrians, calling particular attention to the fact that he had been specifically excluded from a 1468 royal pardon issued by the Yorkist Edward IV.\textsuperscript{189}\ He also makes an early connection between the traitorous Mordred and Edward IV, by comparing the geographical origins of their primary supporters.\textsuperscript{190}\ Nellie Slayton Aurner accepts these Lancastrian associations, listing how Malory would have served, in turn, each of the Lancastrian monarchs: helping to establish and secure Henry IV on the throne; serving Henry V on the continent; witnessing the crowning of Henry VI and the burning of Jeanne d’Arc.\textsuperscript{191}\ She goes so far as to argue that Malory presents the Arthurian saga as

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{188}\textsuperscript{ As noted above, Malory completed the \textit{Morte} c. 1470; the Wars of the Roses are most often dated 1455-1485 (though 1453-1487 is also used); that places the \textit{Morte} at approximately 15 (or 17) years from both the start date and the end date. For useful summaries of the ongoing debates regarding Malory’s politics, see Richard R. Griffith, “The Political Bias of Malory’s ‘Morte Darthur,’” \textit{Viator} 5 (1974): 365-86; Edward Donald Kennedy, “Malory’s \textit{Morte Darthur}: A Politically Neutral Adaptation of the Arthurian Story,” \textit{Arthurian Literature} 20 (2003): 145-69.}
\textsuperscript{189}\textsuperscript{ Schofield, \textit{Chivalry}, 81. Schofield does not explain, however, the pardons Malory received from Yorkist governments in 1455 and 1462.}
\textsuperscript{190}\textsuperscript{ Schofield, \textit{Chivalry}, 92.}
\textsuperscript{191}\textsuperscript{ Nellie Slayton Aurner, “Sir Thomas Malory—Historian?” \textit{PMLA} 48:2 (June 1933), 362. See above for new interpretations of the Beauchamp retinue roll of c. 1415, which Field believes refers to a different}
something of a Lancastrian allegory: the young Arthur, with his questionable claim to the throne, is equated with Henry IV; the Arthur who conquers Rome represents Henry V; and the ineffective, post-Grail Quest Arthur parallels the impotent Henry VI. This reading of the *Morte* has not received much support, though it is often unfairly read “as a kind of fifteenth-century *roman à clef*” (a too-specific term that Aurner herself rejects). If the overall reading is unconvincing, however, it is representative of the traditional readings of Malory’s Lancastrianism. George R. Stewart agrees with these and other scholars (e.g., Edward Hicks and George Lyman Kittredge), analyzing passages “in which Malory lets his loyalty to the House of Lancaster display itself in his writing.” These passages include Malory’s description of the ill Uther’s battle at St. Albans (the site of a 1455 battle in which an ill Henry VI “led” an army), as well as a consideration of Schofield’s point about the power bases of Mordred’s supporters (similar to the areas from which the Yorkists gained support). Subsequent scholars, like Matthews and Elizabeth Pochoda, essentially accepted Malory’s purported Lancastrianism. More recently, Robert L. Kelly argues that Malory’s presentation of English/French relations supports a “pro-French, anti-war” position that “could have been readily identifiable as a Lancastrian critique of Edward IV’s plans to reopen the Hundred Years’ War.” It should be noted, however, that a pro-French perspective need not be equated with the Lancastrians – Richard

Thomas Malory: if correct, the author of the *Morte* would not have been alive at the time of Henry IV’s usurpation, and would have been too young to serve under Henry V.


Stewart, “English Geography”: 207.

See below for a brief discussion of the critiques of Stewart’s points.

Neville, earl of Warwick preferred a French alliance to the Burgundian one favored by Edward IV.\footnote{196}

It was not until 1974 that Malory’s presumed Lancastrian leanings came under serious scrutiny. Richard R. Griffith points out some obvious problems to the evidence presented by earlier scholars.\footnote{197} Regarding the apparent parallels between Uther’s St. Albans battle and the 1455 one involving Henry VI, Griffith shows that most of the pertinent details are in Malory’s sources. He also seriously critiques the possible connections between Arthur’s Roman campaign and the continental victories of Henry V.\footnote{198} Griffith also adequately dismisses the suggested connection between Mordred’s and the Yorkists’ strongholds – and the general association of the southeast with traitors – by demonstrating that the area was “a kaleidoscope of shifting allegiances”;\footnote{199} more likely Malory selected these areas because of their Saxon connections (who are, in most versions, Mordred’s allies). Ultimately, Griffith concludes that Malory was not Lancastrian: he was, if anything, a Yorkist supporter. This interpretation recently received a more forceful endorsement. Historian Jonathan Hughes argues:

> The identification of Edward with Arthur as recognized by genealogists and chroniclers was given most powerful expression by the one writer of

\footnote{196 Admittedly, the timing of the *Morte* perhaps supports Kelly’s pro-Lancastrian reading; if Malory was arrested in the Cornelius Plot (see above) sometime after 14 June 1468, and started writing the *Morte* soon thereafter, there would be little point in writing to support Warwick’s pro-French stance: Edward IV had agreed to the marriage of his sister, Margaret of York, and Charles, duke of Burgundy in February 1468, and the wedding was held on 3 July 1468. The author of the *Crowland Chronicle Continuations* (misidentifying the year as 1467) suggests that this marriage – rather than Edward IV’s to Elizabeth Woodville – “was the real cause of the dissension” between Edward and Warwick. See *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459-1486*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox (London: Sutton Publishing, 1986), 115.}
\footnote{197 Griffith, “The Political Bias.”}
\footnote{198 Indeed, Arthur’s Roman campaign and its associated imperialism could even be read as an encouragement of Edward IV’s proposed French campaign; though the one announced in 1468 – about the time Malory started the *Morte* – never materialized, Edward did eventually invade France in 1475.}
\footnote{199 Griffith, “Political Bias,” 371.}
unquestionable genius in the fifteenth century, Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell in Warwickshire.\textsuperscript{200}

In many ways, the youthful, active, successful-in-battle Edward IV does seem more comparable to Malory’s portrayal of Arthur than the sickly and weak-willed Henry VI. As other evidence of an Edward/Arthur connection, Hughes also points out Edward IV’s love of tournaments and pageantry; his Welsh heritage; suggestions of a crusade; and relevant imagery from prophecies regarding Edward IV. Whether or not Hughes’ argument is accepted in full, he does make some intriguing connections that warrant consideration.

There is, however, a third perspective regarding Malory’s political associations: he may have been non-partisan. He served both Lancastrian and Yorkist governments, and was imprisoned by both as well; he was not likely a political intransigent. Field and Edward Donald Kennedy view him as a non-political writer. As mentioned above, Field finds little evidence of contemporary design in Malory’s apparent allusions, scattered as they are so haphazardly throughout the text: “Their very distribution, therefore, helps to confirm that they were produced by chance similarities triggering memory rather than by any conscious allegorical scheme.”\textsuperscript{201} Elsewhere Field is a little more charitable to the possibility that Malory wrote with his own times in mind, but still concludes “that most of the apparent contemporary allusions are sympathetic: Malory as an author is a notably


uncensorious person.” This sympathetic and uncensorious Malory fits well with Kennedy’s non-partisan reading of the Morte:

I believe, however, that there is virtually nothing in Malory’s book that could be described as either specifically anti-Yorkist or pro-Yorkist, that the book is about as politically neutral as possible… and [Malory] was not commenting on contemporary policies.

Kennedy does admit, however, that Malory may have been writing to please Edward IV, who had an interest in Arthurian material. In essence, Malory had no political agenda beyond pleasing the king: much like a chef preparing a meal for an honored guest.

The balanced views of Malory offered by Field and Kennedy have much to commend them, but they are not unassailable positions. It should be said that Field’s belief that Malory is generally a sympathetic person and Kennedy’s belief that Malory’s text is politically neutral form the foundation of the argument this present study will make. The point at which this study diverges from theirs, however, concerns Malory’s intent and design. Neither Field nor Kennedy believes that Malory makes deliberate references to contemporary politics, but that is exactly what Malory does. Sir Thomas Malory, as Vinaver observes, did not write as a mere translator – he altered his sources in such ways as to craft his own version of the Arthurian narrative. His changes were not simply for the sake of literary or narrative design, as Field argues. Instead, they were made with an eye toward making the type of contemporary allusions Field and Kennedy

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202 Field, *Life and Times*, 124. In “Fifteenth-Century History,” Field allows that Malory seems somewhat more sympathetic to the Lancastrians than to the Yorkists, but that his “chivalrous generosity of spirit… could encompass both.” See page 71.
203 E. Kennedy, “Malory’s Morte Darthur,” 147.
205 Field, “Fifteenth-Century History,” 49.
dismiss – not, perhaps, direct allusions to specific people or events, but allusions to contemporary issues and concerns. This is not to argue that Malory’s political preferences inhere the text; instead, he wrote with a keen eye on the political and social issues that concerned the realm (and perhaps in particular, the gentry). Schofield was perhaps the first to suggest that Malory “planned to arouse definite contemporaneous interest by the subtle enforcing of similitude between past and present happenings,” but he was not the last. Despite the arguments that attempt to isolate the Morte from Malory’s own day, studies by Hyonjin Kim, Raluca Radulescu, Kenneth Hodges, and others demonstrate just how relevant the text is to its time. Kim’s study, for example, takes as its jumping off point a quote by Benson:

> It is therefore as vain to look in the pages of Malory for the Pastons’ England as it is to search the Pastons’ letters for Malory’s world—and it is, of course, a mistake to think that either gives us a full report of fifteenth-century life. Malory... writes not for the whole range of fifteenth-century society but for a small audience—gentlemen like himself, who shared his love of hunting, jousting, and literature.

Kim and Radulescu adequately identify fifteenth-century gentry concerns in the Morte, Cherewatuk shows similar conceptions of knighthood in both Malory and fifteenth-century “grete bookes,” and Hodges explores Malorian chivalry in the context of fifteenth-century regional codes. The final two chapters of this dissertation will depart from such studies and examine how Malory explores contemporary issues and concerns

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206 Schofield, Chivalry, 89.
207 Benson, Malory’s Morte Darthur, 200. For Kim’s stated purpose, see The Knight without the Sword, 17 (Benson is quoted on 15).
with over-mighty subjects, not from a partisan perspective but from a deep concern for
the stability of the realm.
CHAPTER TWO

FAVORITISM AND OSTRACISM

As described in the Introduction, this chapter will explore how Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* handles the issues of royal favoritism and royal ostracism – two important causes of division in fifteenth-century England. The favoritism showed to William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk by Henry VI, for example, created factions at court and incited the commons to rebel. Eventually Suffolk’s enemies impeached him, forced Henry to exile him, and finally murdered him in defiance of the safe passage granted to him by the king. Similarly, Edward IV’s ostracism of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, positioned his mightiest subject against the queen’s Woodville relatives in a struggle for influence. Once it was clear Warwick had lost his position of prominence, he attempted to control Edward by force. Having failed that, he worked to replace Edward as king, and eventually restored the deposed Henry VI to the throne. Because these issues and the events that transpired are closely tied to the relationships between kings and their most powerful subjects, I will examine briefly how the king and his magnates interacted: whether they were naturally competitive or naturally cooperative with each other. I will also discuss the societal role of – and need for – royal patronage: its function and proper use. I will then turn to the issues in the chapter’s title and consider, in turn, historical
cases of royal favoritism (Suffolk) and royal ostracism (Warwick) in the fifteenth century. For each case, I will then analyze ways that Malory handles these issues in his text, particularly through the character of Sir Lancelot du Lake. The events in the *Morte* do not parallel contemporary events directly, but they do offer insights into the potential dangers surrounding these issues – and they explore ways in which such dangers can be avoided. It should also be noted that I am not arguing that Malory creates direct parallels to any specific historical figures, but rather that he infuses his text with aspects of many of the political problems causing division in his own day. In this sense, the *Morte* is perhaps a warning text: as Camelot fell, so might England fall. But first, although the Introduction contextualizes the *Morte* in the fifteenth-century’s concern regarding over-mighty subjects, I would like to expand upon that argument by establishing the character of Lancelot as a very *fifteenth-century* over-mighty subject.

1. “Whos lyvelode and mighte was nerehande equivalente to the kinges owne”:¹

Lancelot as Over-mighty Subject

In *The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur*, Raluca Radulescu states that the characters of “Gawain, Lancelot and Mordred, each in turn, are presented as potentially over-powerful subjects.”² Her brief comparisons are, for the most part, role-oriented: Gawain as the overly influential counselor, Lancelot as the charismatic, divisive

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figure, Mordred as the usurper. These are useful paradigms for approaching the concept of over-mighty subjects in the *Morte*, but Malory’s magnates resemble fifteenth-century over-mighty subjects in many other ways as well. In fact, Malory’s Lancelot or Gawain correspond remarkably well to the criteria for over-mighty subjects delineated by historian Michael Hicks in his article “Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses.”3 Hicks, of course, does not discuss literary characters like those found in the *Morte*, but his criteria help demonstrate just how accurately Malory’s portrayal of Arthur’s greatest magnates lines up with the historical realities with which he and his readers were familiar.4 Lancelot will provide the case study here for two reasons: first, he is (save, perhaps, Gawain) the most powerful and influential knight at King Arthur’s court; second, more than any other character, he demonstrates Malory’s exploration of the problems of favoritism and ostracism. As such, Lancelot will serve as the backbone of this chapter.

According to Hicks, the first prerequisite for a subject achieving “over-mighty” status was pedigree: “Overmighty subjects were born not made. All were princes of the blood royal…”5 In some ways this qualification is overly restrictive, and should be expanded to include magnates of the highest rank who, although they were not strictly “princes of the royal blood,” were mighty of power, wealth and influence. Hicks himself seems to apply this restriction rather loosely by including Thomas, Lord Stanley and Sir William Stanley on the list of over-mighty subjects; the Stanleys were most closely

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3 See Michael Hicks, “Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses,” *History* 85 (2000): 386-403. To prevent confusion with Hicks’s book *Bastard Feudalism*, this article will be abbreviated henceforth to “Idols of the Multitude.”

4 As noted in the Introduction, I amend Hicks’s criteria somewhat. In general, however, the qualifications he identifies create a helpful paradigm, which I use to demonstrate how easily the characters would have been identifiable to fifteenth-century readers as “over-mighty subjects.”

5 Michael Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 403.
related to the throne via marriage into the bastard Beaufort line. Even Richard Neville, earl of Warwick – perhaps the most recognizable over-mighty subject from the fifteenth century, and certainly discussed by Hicks – was forced to play the role of Kingmaker rather than king, due to the weakness of his royal blood. Warwick’s closest royal ties also came through the Beaufort line, via his paternal grandmother Joan Beaufort. Otherwise, his connection to the throne was through marriage: his paternal aunt, Cecily, was the mother of Edward IV. Warwick was certainly of noble birth, but was never remotely considered a candidate for the English throne – thus his repeated attempts to create puppet kings in whose names he could govern: Edward IV (1461, 1469), George duke of Clarence (1470), and the restored Henry VI (1470). We should also consider the thoughts of the man who, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, coined the term “over-mighty subject,” Sir John Fortescue. Fortescue does not limit over-mighty status by blood, but allows for the possibility of noblemen growing into it: “The grete lordis of the lande by reason of newe discentes falling unto hem and by reason also of mariages, purchases and other titles shulne oftyn tymes growe to be gretter thane thei be now, and peradventure some of hem to be of lyvelode and power like a kyng.” Of course, one might question why, for the purposes of this study, I would need to amend Hicks’s pedigree criterion: as the son of King Ban of Benwic, Lancelot possesses a distinguished

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6 The Beaufort line, descended from John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford (his third wife) was legitimized in 1397; Henry IV reaffirmed this in 1407, but specifically excluded them from inheriting the crown. See “Beaufort Family” in John A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 25.

7 Fortescue, *Governance of England*, 237. Fortescue does not really discuss pedigree at all, but (as discussed below) emphasizes wealth as the primary criterion for over-mighty status.
royal pedigree. Additionally, his grandfather married the king of Ireland’s daughter and he is descended from Joseph of Arimathea, the man who brought the Holy Grail to England. On the surface, it would seem that Lancelot easily satisfies Hicks’s pedigree criterion. There are, however, some factors regarding Lancelot’s lineage that might necessitate a loosening of this pedigree criterion – factors that might put him more on the level of a Thomas Stanley or a Richard Neville.

The first factor that must be considered is Lancelot’s position in Arthur’s kingdom. Typically, Lancelot is considered to be a foreign prince in Arthur’s service, a dispossessed Frenchman whose lands are held by their conqueror, King Claudas. Derek Pearsall, for example, uses the Morte to argue against a sense of nationhood in fifteenth-century England: “A work in which the hero and principal character is a Frenchman, constantly wronged and misunderstood by the native British, does not seem designed to set the national pulse racing.”

There is also the fact that neither Hicks nor Fortescue considers foreigners as potential over-mighty subjects. This view of Lancelot, then, would place him in a rather ambiguous category: he clearly functions as an over-mighty subject, but his continental lands and maternal Irish heritage place him outside the British hierarchy. Kenneth Hodges, however, recently posed an important question: did Malory (or even his readers) consider Lancelot a Frenchman – or an Englishman? Hodges leans toward the latter, making two pertinent observations. First, he notes that “the positioning

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9 Malory, 929-30.
of Launcelot in Gascony is [Malory’s] innovation…“11 It might be tempting to attribute this positioning to Malory’s tendency to name previously unidentified locations and his penchant for realistic detail.12 To leave it at that, however, fails to recognize adequately the possibility of a purposeful decision by Malory. The second observation Hodges makes is that during Malory’s formative years, Gascony was under English control – indeed, it was under England’s governance for three centuries, from 1152 to 1453. In fact, Richard II is also known as Richard of Bordeux, as he was born there (in the abbey of St. André). Though England lost Gascony almost twenty years prior to the completion of the Morte, there is good reason that Malory would have identified the region with England’s past. In fact, in the early 1440s – about the time Malory may have accompanied his cousin, Sir Philip Chetwynd, on a military expedition to Gascony13 – official documents clearly differentiate between France and Gascony. P. A. Johnson, discussing the documents that outlined Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset’s duties in France, observes: “The command in France was to be kept distinct from that in Gascony… All arrangements in France, excluding Gascony, were to pass under the seal of France, those for Gascony under the seal of England.”14 It is worth recalling that many scholars believe Malory saw himself as something of a historian (and Caxton’s preface presents the work as a chronicle of sorts). As such, it would seem natural – if somewhat anachronistic for the Arthurian period – for him to place Gascony within the English

11 Kenneth Hodges, “Why Malory’s Launcelot Is Not French: Region, Nation, and Political Identity,” PMLA 125.3 (2010), 556. Hodges denies Lancelot’s Frenchness, but does not fully commit to making him English: “Guienne is not French, and neither is Launcelot, but they are never quite wholly English.” See page 569.
12 For Malory’s tendency to affix names to locations, see George R. Stewart, “English Geography in Malory’s ‘Morte D’Arthur,’” Modern Language Review 30 (1935): 204-09.
realm. Malory’s Lancelot may be from the fringes of the realm, an outsider to some extent, but he appears to be an Englishman rather than a Frenchman.

Additionally, Hodges astutely observes that at the end of the quest for the Holy Grail, Lancelot’s kinsmen – his son Galahad and cousin Bors (also from the continent) – are grouped with Perceval as England’s Grail representatives. These three men meet nine other Grail knights (three each from Ireland, Denmark, and Gaul), and Hodges argues: “Malory’s decision to make Launcelot’s kinsmen part of the English rather than the French contingent speaks to his sense of the Englishness of Gascony.”15 This argument is somewhat complicated by Malory’s identification of Gaul (the kingdom of King Bors, Sir Bors’s father) with France, and the later connection between Lancelot and France.16 Malory’s conception of geography and political divisions is at best unclear, but it is important to remember that Malory’s Arthur could ostensibly be considered the overlord of all these territories: early in his reign, he defeated the kings of Ireland, Denmark, and Gaul (the invading Claudas, not King Bors) in battle.17 Therefore, the three representative knights from Gaul, as well as those from Ireland and Denmark, need not be from independent kingdoms: they might represent Arthur’s larger, international empire. In fact, one of the knights from Gaul is Claudine, King Claudas’s son, and thus a likely liegeman of Arthur’s. When Galahad departs from the Grail Castle, he asks the three knights from

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16 See Malory, 20: “…and that othyr hyght kyng Bors of Gaule, that is Fraunce”; and 1204: “…sir Launcelott and hys neveawis was lorde[s] of all Fraunce…”
17 The kings of Ireland and Denmark were among the Five Kings that invaded England shortly after Arthur married Guinevere; see Malory, 126-28. Malory does not relate the story of Arthur defeating King Claudas of Gaul, but Arthur is sworn to help kings Ban and Bors defeat Claudas, 20, and Malory alludes to this victory on at least two occasions: 194, 802. Of course, the nature of this victory is unclear, as Merlin also predicts that Lancelot shall “revenge you [i.e., Lancelot’s parents] on kyng Claudas,” 126.
Gaul to give his regards to his father Lancelot, should they visit Arthur’s court. This simple request, which seems to expect that the knights might have occasion to visit the English court, could indicate that it is possible (and perhaps even likely) that all twelve knights, including Lancelot’s kinsmen and those from Gaul, are indeed Arthur’s subjects.

One potential argument against categorizing Lancelot as “English” is the fact that when he leaves England for Benwic, he considers himself banished from the realm:

“There truly me repentis that ever I cam in thys realme, that I shulde be thus shamefully banysshed, undeserved and causeles!” But this declaration need not sever Benwic from Arthur’s sovereignty. After all, Yorkist propaganda routinely portrayed Richard, duke of York’s appointment as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland as a form of exile. One political poem of the day, for example, states: “Rychard of yorke, that lord ryal, / He was exilyd for ȝeres thre…” Even the Jack Cade rebels of 1450 voiced this by saying, “The highe and mighti prince the duc of Yorke, late exiled from our seid soveraigne lordes presence…” Political exile, then, could include banishment from court – not unlike Guinevere’s earlier banishment of Lancelot from court just prior to “The Poisoned Apple” episode: “And ryght here I dyscharge the thys court, that thou never com within hit, and I forfende the

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18 Malory, 1031.
19 Malory, 1201.
20 “God Amend Wicked Counsel (1464),” in Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 197 (ll. 21-22). Some scholars believe that the sense of exile was a “backdated” expression of Yorkist propaganda c. 1460, and that the appointment may even have been an honor due to York’s familial history with Ireland. See John Sadler, The Red and the White: The Wars of the Roses, 1453-1487 (Harlow, UK: Longman Publishing, 2010), 30. For differing views of York’s influence at court in the 1440s, see R. A. Griffiths, The Reign of King Henry VI (Stroud: Sutton, 1981), 673 ff., who believed York’s influence had been waning for some time; John Watts, Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 237, for the view that York was on good terms with the crown until his return from Ireland.
my felyship, and uppon payne of thy hede that thou se me nevermore!”22 Another counterargument would be Arthur’s relationship with the brother kings, Ban and Bors, who are decidedly not Arthur’s liegemen. When Merlin suggests Arthur seek their help in defeating the rebellious lords in his own realm, he speaks as though Arthur might not even know who they are: “Ther ar two bretheren beyond the see, and they be kinges both…”23 Arguably, however, Lancelot and his cousin Bors could be considered liegemen to Arthur, as Malory twice refers to the fact that Arthur defeats Claudas in battle. The text gives the impression that this victory brought Claudas’s lands under Arthur’s authority, as in the aftermath of the war with Rome Arthur grants Lancelot and Bors possession of their ancestral lands: “Than [Arthur] commaunded sir Launcelot and sir Bors to take kepe unto their fadyrs landys that kynge Ban and kynge Bors welded and her fadyrs…”24 Furthermore, Arthur adds additional lands: “Also the mighty kynge Claudas [i.e., his lands] I gyff you for to parte betwyxte you evyn… so that ye and they to the Rounde Table make your repeyre.”25 The condition at the end of this new grant – that Lancelot and Bors must attend the Round Table – clearly indicates a lord/vassal relationship, and the two knights seem to accept this: “Sir Launcelot and sir Bors de Gaynys thanked the kynge fayre and sayde their hertes and servyse sholde ever be his owne.”26 This language echoes that of Sir Priamus, who thanks the king for the grant of the dukedom of Lorraine and a thousand pounds annually: “As longe as I lyve my servys

22 Malory, 1047.
23 Malory, 20.
24 Malory, 245.
26 Malory, 245.
is youre owne.” As with the grants to Lancelot and Bors, Arthur qualifies the ones to Priamus by saying, “So thou leve not my felyship, this gyffte ys thyne owne.” Priamus does indeed stay loyal to Arthur throughout his life, as he is slain by Lancelot’s allies during the rescue of Queen Guinevere near the end of the Morte. There are two final reasons to consider Lancelot as Arthur’s subject. First, as Beverly Kennedy points out, Arthur is the Holy Roman Emperor and thus overlord of France. Second, although Malory does not specify this, in his source, the Vulgate Merlin, Ban and Bors actually swear oaths of fealty to Arthur. We cannot know if Malory left the oaths out purposefully or incidentally, so this point is flimsy evidence at best – but the fact that Arthur seems to have some authority to distribute the lands of Ban and Bors to Lancelot and the younger Bors does suggest that either an oath of fealty occurred or that the lands were among those Arthur conquered on the continent.

If Lancelot is accepted not as a foreign prince but rather as another English subject, we must change the way we view him. As Hodges says, “There is a vast difference between a knight who serves a foreign lord voluntarily, out of love, and a subject who legally owes obedience, particularly when a rift grows between knight and lord.” This reclassification of Lancelot also provides another reason to revise Hicks’s criterion of royal blood – after all, Lancelot (an Arthurian over-mighty subject if ever there was one) has no ties to Arthur’s lineage. It is true that Lancelot is a king, but in the

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27 Malory, 245.
28 Malory, 245.
29 See Malory, 1177.
political reality of the Morte he is more like a sub-king. This is particularly true when one considers the “inflation of status” that makes almost all of Malory’s characters “either a king or a king’s son.” Lancelot’s pedigree does not stand out that much from the crowd, though it does seem sufficiently impressive for the other characters. This inflation of status, however, also highlights Lancelot’s distance from England’s throne: he simply is not one of the “princes of the blood royal” in England. Regarding the English throne he is at best a noble of high blood from the fringes of Arthur’s empire: his paternal lands are on the continent, and even his maternal ancestry hails from Ireland. Ireland, of course, is also under Arthur’s control – not only is King Angwysshe of Ireland among the defeated Eleven Kings, but he is among those at Arthur’s court who attempts to heal Sir Urré near the end of the text. As a nobleman from the fringes, Lancelot is not unlike Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, whose traditional Neville lands were in the remote North, near the Scottish border. Like Warwick, Lancelot never seems to be a candidate for the English crown. In a strict adherence to Hicks’s criterion, then, Lancelot’s pedigree might seem to eliminate him from the status of over-mighty subject – but one would be hard pressed not to recognize him as such (indeed, both Radulescu and Hodges do so). Hicks’s criterion, then, should allow for a more general, highly noble lineage rather than a strictly royal one. After all, much like Warwick or the Stanleys, over-mighty subjects were not always pretenders to the crown, but threats to destabilize the realm. In this light, Lancelot – whether seen as a foreign prince or an English nobleman – easily qualifies as an over-

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34 Lancelot’s overall virtue might separate him from the crowd more than his pedigree. Though he is not perfect, he is virtuous enough to be among the few who catch a glimpse of the Holy Grail, and he receives “divine sanction” in the healing of Sir Urré. His love for Guinevere aside, about which Malory is rather close-mouthed, his inner qualities perhaps elevate him. Compare this with the new definition of chivalry, discussed in Chapter One.
35 Malory, 1147.
mighty subject; it is probable that Malory’s original readers would have interpreted him as such.

Hicks also discusses wealth and position (i.e., position at court, on the royal council, appointed offices, etc.) as criteria for over-mighty status, and with good reason: Fortescue’s primary concern regarding such magnates involves their personal wealth. Fortescue suggests that wealthy lords can more easily rebel, because “the peopul wil go with hym that beste may sustene and rewarde hem.”

As discussed above, another reason wealth is a particular concern is because it – unlike pedigree – can be obtained, via multiple inheritances, beneficial marriages, new titles, and such. Given Fortescue’s emphasis on wealth, and Malory’s own tendency to add realistic and contemporary details, it might seem surprising that the Morte does not better catalogue the wealth of Arthur’s most prominent knights. When Malory discusses generic treasure, wealth, goods or riches, he typically refers to those belonging to – and distributed by – Arthur himself (although adventuring knights do encounter castles or other structures that contain such things). It is interesting, however, that when Malory uses specific terms like pounds or pence, it is most frequently in connection with Lancelot. According to Tomomi Kato’s Concordance, Malory uses the word “money” only once, and it is in reference to Lancelot. Similarly, the only time he uses “pence” and the only two times he uses “mass-peny” all refer to Lancelot – as do three of the eight times he uses “pound” or

36 Fortescue, Governance of England, 236.
37 Eugene Vinaver suggests that among Malory’s realistic additions to the story are financial concerns: Guinevere gives Sirs Bors, Lionel and Ector “tresoure inowe for there expence” in the search for Lancelot, and “on several occasions Malory makes King Arthur’s knights acquire substantial sources of revenue ‘through might of arms’.” See Malory, 808 and xxviii of Vinaver’s “Introduction.” As we shall see below, however, such details are relatively few.
38 For the following examples, see the entries in Tomomi Kato, A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974).
“pounds.” In all, six of the eleven uses of the contemporary monetary words “pound” and “pence/penny” refer directly to Lancelot – and all but two others refer to the searching for Lancelot or to his own retinue’s personal wealth (likely attained through Lancelot, as it is after he has distributed his continental estates to his followers).39

With few references to specific monetary amounts it is difficult to judge Lancelot’s personal wealth, but the references given make him look wealthy indeed when compared to the amounts mentioned in relation to other characters. Gawain, for example, once mentions that he grew up in the wardrobe of King Arthur, who gave him “an hondred pounde and horse and harneyse rych.”40 Later, Gareth tells Dame Lyonesse to bid Arthur to call a tournament and offer a jewel-encrusted gold crown “to the valew of a thousand pounde” as prize should a married man win; in lieu of this prize, a bachelor knight would win Lyonesse’s hand in marriage and all her land. In reference to the royal coffers, Bors tells Lancelot that “hyt hath coste my lady the quene twenty thousand pounde the sekynge of you.”42 In comparison, Lancelot’s wealth seems nearly equivalent to the wealth of Arthur and Guinevere. Lancelot offers Elaine of Astolat a thousand pounds annually to abandon her love for him and to marry some other knight.43 She refuses, choosing death over a life without Lancelot, who then pays her mass-penny after

39 After examining the occurrences listed in Kato’s Concordance, it does not appear that Malory uses words like angel, cross, groat, mark, noble, shield, or ship as forms of money. The glossary at the end of the Works does not gloss these words in such a way, either. This does not preclude, of course, the possibility of puns or double meanings in some occurrences.
40 Malory, 232.
41 Malory, 341.
42 Malory, 831.
43 Malory, 1089. To clear himself of blame in her death, Lancelot later tells Arthur and Guinevere of this offer. See page 1097. Kim, The Knight without the Sword, 52, notes: In fifteenth-century England, a yearly income of a thousand pounds would instantly qualify one for parliamentary peerage.” It truly was a generous offer.
her body arrives at Westminster. The final specific references to Lancelot’s wealth are found when he returns to England after Arthur’s death. While mourning at Sir Gawain’s tomb, Lancelot charitably (and personally) hands out twelve pence to “every man and woman… com whoso wolde”; he also feeds all who arrive from the town and surrounding countryside. This type of activity is very reminiscent of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, who was well known for his generosity and feeding people wherever he went. Lancelot next gives the clergy a hundred pounds for the requiem mass; his seven companion kings give forty pounds apiece, and all the other knights give a pound each. Lancelot’s overall wealth is also clearly visible in the distributions he makes to his followers when he retreats to his continental lands, but perhaps the most memorable example is seen in his attempt to appease Gawain after the accidental slayings of Gareth and Gaheris: Lancelot offers to walk from Sandwich to Carlisle and found/provide for religious houses (to pray for the souls of the slain brothers) every ten miles. Measured “as the crow flies” in modern miles, the distance between those cities is about three hundred miles; a ground-based route would likely be between three hundred fifty and four hundred miles. Given that a mile was typically shorter in Malory’s day than it is today, Lancelot’s offer includes the foundation of well over thirty religious houses. Although Gawain refuses this penance and other reparations, even he admits they are

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44 Malory, 1096-97. In her letter, Elaine also asks Lancelot to bury her, and Malory notes that “she was entered rychely.”
45 Malory, 1250.
47 Malory, 1251.
48 Malory, 1199-1200.
49 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the original Roman mile measured approximately 1618 yards, but the actual distance varied in different places and times; in 1592, England standardized the measurement to 1760 yards. See “Mile, n.1.”
“grete proffirs.” Anyone able to fulfill this promise would surely rank among the wealthiest men in England – either Arthur’s England or Edward IV’s. It should, perhaps, also be noted that all the specific references to Lancelot’s wealth are in the final two books of Malory’s Works – the very books in which Lancelot’s power is manifested as a realistic threat to Arthur’s own.

In addition to pedigree, wealth, and position, Hicks states that to be truly over-mighty a nobleman needed to be able to summon a large army for personal use. Traditionally, such armies were raised through a magnate’s tenants, but by the fifteenth century lords also had access to manpower through their own affinities – and, of course, through their alliances with other nobles and their affinities. These affinities consisted of a noble’s non-tenant (or non-landed) retainers, and composed an important part of the bastard feudal system prevalent in the late Middle Ages. The ability to retain extra followers allowed wealthy nobles to expand their power and influence: land-poor nobles with few tenants could bolster their manpower, and land-rich nobles could extend their influence into areas where they owned few or no estates. (Alliances with other nobles and their affinities, obviously, allowed magnates to become particularly powerful.) Lancelot’s ability to raise substantial forces is one of the clearest ways he can be considered an over-mighty subject, and this can be seen early in his career. When the Roman Emperor Lucius commands Arthur to pay tribute, Lancelot is still a relative newcomer to court

50 Malory, 1200.
51 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 389-91.
whose ancestral lands remain in the hands of King Claudas. Upon Arthur’s refusal to pay the tribute, Lancelot says,

Though my londis marche nyghe thyne enemyes, yet shall I make myne avow aftir my power that of good men of armys aftir my bloode thus many I shall brynge with me: twenty thousand helmys in haubirkes attyred that shall never fayle you whyle oure lyves lastyth.

The use of *helmys* here clearly is a metonymy for *men*, and Vinaver glosses the word in just that way. These promised twenty thousand men rank behind the thirty thousand promised by the king of Brittanay and the “myghty deuke that was lorde of Weste Walys,” and the thirty thousand combined forces promised by Sir Ewayne and his son Ider. It is, however, equal to the amount promised by King Angwysshaunce of Scotland, and double that offered by Sir Bawdyn of Bretayne, Arthur’s constable. Considering Lancelot’s youth at the time – he was, perhaps, about twenty-five years old – this is a formidable force. Over time, Lancelot accumulates a larger following. His kinsmen, such as Bors, Lionel, and Ector, constitute the core of his affinity, but over the course of his exploits Lancelot wins the allegiance of such knights as Lavayne, Urré, Palomides and Saphir, Clegis, Neroveus and Plenorius, and Dinas. Near the end of Malory’s final tale, “foure score knyghtes” join Lancelot to rescue Guinevere from the fire, despite the

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52 The explicit to the *Tale of King Arthur* states, “And this booke endyth whereas Sir Launcelot and Sir Trystrams com to courte,” and the Emperor’s demand comes at the very beginning of the next tale. See Malory, 180-90.
53 Malory, 189-90.
54 Malory, 189.
55 When Merlin sees “yonge Launcelot,” he tells Elayne (Launcelot’s mother) that “this same chylde yonge Launcelot shall within this twenty yere revenge you on kyng Claudas…” See Malory, 125-26. This vengeance has not yet been accomplished, limiting Lancelot’s age at the time of the Roman war.
56 See Malory, 1170 for a more complete list of Lancelot’s affinity.
57 Malory, 1170.
potential treason inherent in interfering with the king’s justice. Later, “an hondred knyghtes” follow Lancelot into exile in France. Perhaps not all of these knights were Knights of the Round Table, but a large number of them were – certainly, among the four score knights who help rescue Guinevere from the fire, all twenty-six named are Knights of the Round Table. They are each listed at the healing of Urré, where Arthur specifically requires “all the kynges, dukes and earles and all noble knyghtes of the Rounde Table” to participate. There, Malory numbers that fellowship at about one hundred fifty knights, so in all likelihood somewhere between a third and a half (but perhaps as few as a fifth or as much as two-thirds) of the Knights of the Round Table choose to side with Lancelot over King Arthur. Whether Lancelot holds the allegiance of a fifth, third, half, or two-thirds of the greatest knights in the realm, it would be accurate to call Lancelot “mygthy of men” (the phrase Malory uses to describe the lords vying to be king after Uther’s death).

A final criterion for over-mighty status described by Hicks is the use of propaganda, particularly by those also labeled “idols of the multitude.” Characteristically, such idols “had been excluded from their rightful say in political issues or at least claimed to have been so excluded.” Consequently, they became masters at criticizing the government (frequently targeting wicked counselors and

58 Malory, 1204.
59 This number includes Lancelot, Bors, and twenty-four other knights named. See Malory, 1170.
60 Malory, 1146.
61 During the healing of Sir Urré episode, Malory notes that “at that tyme there were but an hondred an ten of the Rounde Table, for forty knyghtes were that tyme away.” See Malory, 1146-47. The explicit to The Deth of Arthur, however, states that “whan they were holé togyders there was ever an hondred and forty” Knights of the Round Table. See Malory, 1260.
62 Malory, 12.
63 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 400-402.
64 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 400.
injustice) and appealing to the populace via speeches, letters, manifestos, and the use of
ceremony and display. In fifteenth-century England, propaganda proved useful to such
over-mighty subjects as Richard, duke of York (whose reform-minded platform helped
gain recognition for his claim to the crown) and Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (whose
popularity and reform-minded platform helped him overthrow two kings). In Malory’s
Morte, the label “idol of the multitude” befits Lancelot more than any other knight: he is
the most famous, desired, envied and powerful knight in the kingdom. Interestingly, as
Hyonjin Kim notes, Lancelot also utilizes what we might call “propaganda” (or, more
accurately, rhetoric) more than any other character in the text. Kim analyzes the “self-
justifying speech” Lancelot gives when he returns Queen Guinevere to Arthur and notes
the subtle ways in which it diverts the focus from the issues at hand (i.e., Lancelot’s
adultery with the queen). On the point in which Lancelot and Guinevere are most guilty
– that of adultery – Lancelot turns to a flawed justice system to prove their innocence: he
offers to fight “ony knyght, of what degré that ever he be off, except your person [i.e.,
King Arthur]…” Kim points out that Lancelot well knows that none can best him in
single combat, and Malory’s text has shown this system of divine judgment to be
ineffective on multiple occasions. For example, when Sir Amant appeals King Mark of
treason (for the slaying of Sir Berluse), King Arthur has the two men fight. Mark defeats
Amant, though Malory notes that “yet was sir Amaunte in the ryghtuous quarell” – a

65 For a discussion of Lancelot as a rhetorician, see Hyonjin Kim, Knight without the Sword, 95-98. Kim
does not use the term “propaganda,” but I feel comfortable expanding Hicks’s propaganda criterion to
include Lancelot’s rhetoric. After all, both propaganda and rhetoric have the aim of influencing the
audience, and propaganda might be considered the misuse of rhetoric. See Gareth S. Jowett and Victoria
66 Kim, Knight without the Sword, 96; the speech itself is in Malory, 1197-2000.
67 Malory, 1197.
point the dying Amant iterates: “Here am I slayne in a ryghteous quarell…”\textsuperscript{68} Amaunte’s
death incites the two maidens sent to court by Le Beale Isolde to cry out, in the hearing of
the whole court, “A, swete Jesu that knowyste all hydde thynges! Why sufferyst Thou so
false a traytoure to venqueyshe and sle a trewe knyght that faught in a ryghteous
quarell!”\textsuperscript{69} Arthur himself speaks of the fallibility of the system when Sir Aggravain
accuses Lancelot and the queen of adultery, by insisting that Lancelot “be takyn with the
dede”; otherwise the accused knight would “fyght with hym that bryngith up the noyse,
and I know no knyght that ys able to macch hym.”\textsuperscript{70} Lancelot himself admits his ability
to beat the system during the quest for the Holy Grail:

\begin{quote}
My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For
whan I sought worldly adventures for worldely desyres I ever encheved
them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I discomfite in no
quarell, were hit ryght were hit wronge.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Yet, when defending himself against the accusation of treason, Lancelot publicly
subscribes to the divine justice found in trial by combat: “For they that tolde you tho talys
were lyars, and so hit felle uppon them: for by lyklyhode, had nat the myght of God bene
with me, I myght never have endured with fourtene knyghtes…”\textsuperscript{72} As Kim observes,
defeating a dozen or so knights is hardly a noteworthy accomplishment for Lancelot,
considering his many more formidable feats.\textsuperscript{73} There seems to be, then, something
disingenuous in Lancelot’s offer to fight any knight (save Gawain or Arthur himself): he

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotemark\footnote{68}{Malory, 592-93.}
\footnotemark\footnote{69}{Malory, 593.}
\footnotemark\footnote{70}{Malory, 1163.}
\footnotemark\footnote{71}{Malory, 896.}
\footnotemark\footnote{72}{Malory, 1197.}
\footnotemark\footnote{73}{Kim, \textit{The Knight without the Sword}, 96.}
\end{footnotes}
knows that either no one will accuse him, out of fear of facing him in single combat, or that he will be “proven” innocent by winning the combat. As Kim observes, however, Lancelot follows this challenge up with recounting a variety of true deeds he has performed on both Arthur’s and Gawain’s behalves. Lancelot poignantly argues that both men owe him much better treatment than such “false” and scandalous accusations, as he has served both of them well in the past. Lancelot even fully accepts the responsibility for the deaths of Sirs Gaheris and Gareth – crimes for which Arthur has already partially acquitted him, having told Gawain, “Sir Launcelot slew them in the thyk prees and knew them nat.”

Even from modern political and public relations standpoints – and perfectly in line with fifteenth-century standards – Lancelot’s speech is quite effective in sidestepping the real issues by offering instead (disingenuous) “proof” of his innocence, and painting himself in the best light possible.

Another way in which the Morte’s Lancelot utilizes the rhetoric one might expect from a fifteenth-century over-mighty subject is seen in his defense of Guinevere when Sir Meleagant accuses her of sleeping with one of her knights. The blood on Guinevere’s bed sheets clearly indicates that a wounded knight has been in her bed, and Meleagant accuses one of the ten wounded Queen’s Knights, who had been sleeping just outside her chamber. Meleagant, apparently believing in both the justness of his accusation and the prevalent judicial system, warns Lancelot, “I wote well ye ar renowned the beste knyght of the worlde, yet shulde ye be avysed to do batayle in a wronge quarell, for God woll have a stroke in every batayle.” Perhaps Lancelot – recently returned from the Grail

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74 Malory, 1185.
75 Malory, 1133. Meleagant’s faith in the justice system is questionable. On the one hand, he seems to believe in it, as he initially avoids fighting with Lancelot: he is, after all, in the wrong when it comes to
Quest, where he faced his imperfections – has some doubts about his own prowess in the face of divine justice, because his cleverly worded reply is, technically, true:

“As for that,” seyde sir Launcelot, “God ys to be dBrad! But as to that I say nay playnly, that thys nyght there lay none of thes ten knyghtes wounded with my lady, quene Gwenyver, and that woll I prove with myne hondys that ye say untrewly in that.”  

Here, Lancelot does not deny that the queen has been unfaithful; instead, he denies that Meleagant’s *accusation* (involving one of the ten wounded knights) is true. Indeed, Lancelot knows this accusation is false, as he was the one spending the night in the queen’s bed. In many ways, Lancelot’s defense of Guinevere follows the tradition of the *equivocal oath*, an oath that is misleadingly true. One memorable example is Yseut’s oath of fidelity to King Mark in Beroul’s *Roman de Tristan*. Although guilty of adultery with Tristan, Yseult swears:

‘So help me God and St Hilary, and by these relics, this holy place, the relics that are not here and all the relics there are in the world, I swear that no man ever came between my thighs except the leper who carried me on his back across the ford and my husband, King Mark. Those two I exclude from my oath; I exclude no one else in the world.’

76 Malory, 1133.  
78 Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan*, trans. Alan S. Fedrick (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 141-42. The original reads: “Si m’aït Dex et saint Ylaire, / Ces reliques, cest saintuaire, / Totes celes qui ci ne sont / Et tuit icil de par le mont, / Q’entre mes cuises n’entra home, / Fors le ladre qui fist soi some, / Qui me porta outre les guez, / Et li rois Marc mes esposez; / Ces dues ost de mon soirement. / Ge n’en ost plus de tote
Of course, the leper who had helped her across the ford was Tristan in disguise, so Yseult’s oath, like Lancelot’s, is technically true. Lancelot’s carefully worded defense, however, also reflects the self-serving *politique* language of the late fifteenth century, as examined by Paul Strohm.⁷⁹ Indeed, his verbal evasiveness anticipates another well-known (and historical) verbal evasion by less than three years. When the exiled Edward IV returned to England in March 1471 – landing at Ravenspur, as Henry of Bolingbroke had in June 1399 just prior to his usurpation of Richard II – he also used a cleverly phrased truth to mask his intentions of reclaiming the throne. As reported in the pro-Yorkist *Historie of the Arrivall of King Edward IV*, Edward instructed his men that they should say:

> Shuld noyse, and say openly, where so evar they came, that his entent and purpos was only to claime to be Duke of Yorke, and to have and enjoy th’enheritaunce that he was borne unto, by the right of the full noble prince his fathar, and none othar.⁸⁰

Other sources, like the pro-Lancastrian *Warkworth’s Chronicle*, present a far less equivocal version of this claim:

> And also he came for to clayme the Duchery of Yorke, the whic he was his inheritaunce of ryght… and he seyde to the mayre and aldermenne and to alle the comons of the cite, in likewyse as he was afore… that [he] nevere wulde clayme no title, ne take uppone honde to be Kynge of Englonde, nor wulde have do afore that tyme… And after this he was sufferd to passe...” See *The Romance of Tristan by Beroul*, ed. Stewart Gregory (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), ll. 4201-10.


the cite… and anone aftere he made his proclamacyone, and called hym selfe Kynge of Englonde and of Fraunce.\(^8\)

As reported in the *Historie of the Arrivall*, Edward’s words are – like Lancelot’s – technically true. After all, in October 1460 parliament had decided that the House of York had the rightful claim to England’s throne: Edward did, indeed, simply claim his rightful inheritance, though he coyly mentioned only the duchy of York and neglected to mention the crown.\(^2\) Warkworth’s less favorable version of events paints Edward as a straight up liar and oath-breaker. Both Edward’s and Lancelot’s phraseologies fit well within the fifteenth-century mold of *politique* behavior discussed by Strohm. In Strohm’s words, self-serving *politique* behavior at that time would eagerly “employ lies, deceptions, and even falsely sworn oaths as possible elements of good political practice.”\(^3\) Malory’s Lancelot – described by Kim as “far more eloquent and verbose than his French namesake”\(^4\) – seems to employ deceptive (or even false) rhetoric in similar ways, and with as much ease, as the fifteenth-century over-mighty subjects described by Hicks.

If Lancelot readily fits the over-mighty criteria delineated by Hicks, he also resembles such historical magnates in other ways as well. Lancelot’s generosity in feeding the populace has already been mentioned, and even compared to the Neville earl of Warwick’s generosity. Interestingly enough, other comparisons between Lancelot and

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\(^2\) Strohm acknowledges this “unspoken corollary” regarding Edward IV’s right to the crown, but still categorizes Edward as a perjurer along the lines of Henry of Bolingbroke; I question whether that label is technically correct, at least as the event is described in the official narrative given in the Yorkist-sponsored *Historie of the Arrivall*. See Strohm, *Politique*, 31.

\(^3\) Strohm, *Politique*, 5.

\(^4\) Kim, *The Knight without the Sword*, 95.
Warwick can be made easily. But first, a quick note of clarification is needed: this is not to argue, as some scholars have, that Lancelot (or any other character in the *Morte*) personifies a specific historical person. Stephen Knight, for example, notes some “strong parallels” between Lancelot and Warwick, and essentially equates Lancelot as a “specific idealisation”85 of the chivalric Warwick. While this is an intriguing suggestion, there is not enough evidence to convince most critics that Malory had Warwick in mind when characterizing his Lancelot – but there are enough parallels between the two to characterize Lancelot as an over-mighty subject in the same mold as Warwick. For one thing, Lancelot’s chivalric reputation closely resembles Warwick’s own, particularly as seen in Yorkist propaganda c. 1460.86 Throughout the *Morte*, Lancelot is called such things as “the beste knyght in the worlde,” “the worshypfullyest knyght of the worlde,” “the myghtyest man that ys… living,” “the floure of knyghthode,” “the moste nobelyst knyght of the worlde,” and the “moste famous knyght of the worlde.”87 Meanwhile, the author of *Bale’s Chronicle* refers to Warwick as “the moost corageous and manliest knight lyvyng” and “as famous a knight as was lyving.”88 Pro-Yorkist poetry highlights Warwick martial prowess, describing him as the “boldest vnder baner in batell,”89 “of knyghthode / Lodesterre,”90 and “sheelde of oure defence.”91 However, lest we make too much of similar words and phrases (such as lodestar/flower of knighthood), it is wise to

87 See Malory, respectively, 267, 284, 791, 828, 1047, 1232.
remember that other prominent figures were given similarly flattering chivalric titles. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Beauchamp earl of Warwick had been called the “fadre of curteisy.”\(^{92}\) King Henry V is called the “ffloure off the Cristyn chiualrye”\(^{93}\) in a London chronicle (Julius B II), and such things as “floure of hye prowesse” and “myrrour of manhede” in poems like John Lydgate’s “Ballade to King Henry VI upon His Coronation.”\(^{94}\) Rather than using Malory’s descriptions of Lancelot to link him to one figure, it more fruitful to use them to link him to the wider discussion of the kingdom’s elite in fifteenth-century England. A second parallel that helps establish Lancelot as over-mighty is his unchallenged preeminence in Arthur’s kingdom. Even though his son Galahad temporarily unseats him during the Grail quest, the healing of Sir Urré reestablishes Lancelot as “the beste knyght in the worlde.”\(^{95}\) Similarly, Warwick’s status as the preeminent magnate in the newly-crowned Edward IV’s kingdom seemed unchallenged – indeed, as discussed in Chapter One, Warwick was proclaimed “another Caesar” and seemed to Giovanni Pietro Cagnola of Lodi “to be everything in this kingdom…”\(^{96}\) But, again, these apparent parallels do more to establish that Lancelot is on the level of such men – and allow us to view him in the same light as them – rather than to connect him with any single lord.

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\(^{92}\) The Beauchamp Pageant, ed. Alexandra Sinclair (Donington: The Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2003), 120. The facsimile is on the facing page, 121.


\(^{95}\) Malory, 1145.

Finally, another reason to consider Lancelot as a fifteenth-century magnate is that he acts the part of a “good lord” throughout the *Morte*. He acts as a defender of the people and of the realm, and as a patron to those who are loyal to him. In most cases, Lancelot appears to uphold justice (his defense of Guinevere, perhaps, excepted). It would not be farfetched to say that Lancelot defends everyone: fresh off aiding King Bagdemagus in a tournament, Lancelot defeats Sir Tarquin and Sir Peris de Forrest Savage in back-to-back encounters. As the damsel who leads Lancelot to Sir Peris notes, “For lyke as Terquyn wacched to dystresse good knyghtes, so dud this knyght [Sir Peris] attende to destroy and dystresse ladyes, damesels and jantyllwomen…” Man or woman, king or knight, lady or damsel, Lancelot defends all who are in need of justice. To his credit – and in stark contrast to his fifteenth-century historical counterparts – Lancelot rarely takes compensation for his efforts, preferring to restore lost property and treasures to their rightful heirs. Often such was not the reality in Malory’s world, and here Malory may be offering Lancelot as a mirror for magnates. In the months just prior to the completion of the *Morte*, Margaret Paston knew full well how costly a nobleman’s help might be. The Mowbrays (dukes of Norfolk) and Pastons had disputed over the claim to Caister Castle since the death of its previous owner, Sir John Fastolf, in 1459. In August and September 1469, with Edward IV the veritable prisoner of the earl of Warwick, John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk took the law into his own hands and besieged the Pastons at Caister Castle. In a letter to her son John Paston II, dated 12 September 1469, Margaret demonstrates the expense one might expect to incur when turning to the nobility for help:

97 Kim’s *The Knight without the Sword* gives a good discussion of “good lordship” in Malory’s *Morte*. See particularly Chapter Three, “The Politics of Loyalty and Friendship,” 55-99.
98 Malory, 270.
And if ye thynk, as I can suppose, that the Duke of Norffolk wull not aggregé to this be-cause he graunted this a-forn and thei in the place wuld not accept it, than I wuld the seid massangere shuld wyth the seid letteres bryng fro the seid lord of Clarence, or ell my lord Archebussshop, to my lord of Oxenford othere letteres to rescuse them forth-wyth, thoughe the seid Erle of Oxenford shuld haue the place during his lyffe for his labour.99

Margaret Paston believed that the cost of protecting her family’s lasting claim to Caister Castle would be high: in order to secure John de Vere’s protection, they might need to turn over possession of the property to the earl for the duration of his life. The youthful earl was just twenty-six years old at the time. This may well be an extreme example of the expected cost of noble protection, but the fact that Margaret anticipated – and accepted – it as the probable cost is perhaps as indicative of its normalcy as it is of her desperation for help. Margaret’s expectations, however, may have been shattered had Lancelot roamed the roads of fifteenth-century England. Perhaps the knight’s generosity, highlighted by Malory on multiple occasions, reveals a gentry desire for just (and affordable) legal protection from acquisitive lords. Malory’s Lancelot often goes unrewarded for his labors of liberation. When he frees Tintagel from two terrorizing giants, Lancelot tells the inhabitants, “And what tresoure that there is in this castel I yeff hit you for a rewarde for your grevaunces. And the lorde that is owner of this castel, I

wolde he ressayved hit as is his ryght.”

Lancelot’s actions probably inspired sighs of “What if?” from his readers. And Lancelot was equally as generous on a personal level. Not long after his generosity to the people of Tintagel, Lancelot rescues Sir Kay from three attackers. Instead of sending them to court in his own name, he instructs the defeated knights to present themselves to Queen Guinevere as Sir Kay’s prisoners.

Later, he gives gold and clothes to the newly arrived (and in disguise) Gareth, earning Gareth’s unfailing loyalty; it might not be inappropriate to equate this to the giving of livery. The fact that Gawain also gives Gareth gold and clothes demonstrates the complicated reality of fifteenth-century bastard feudalism, in which individuals might belong to multiple lords’ affinities. It is surely with Lancelot’s help that his followers like Sirs Lavayne and Urré attain the Round Table. Lancelot also enfranchises followers such as the knight known as La Cote Male Tayle, to whom he grants the Castle Pendragon (after defeating its lord, Bryan de Lese Iles, who would not submit to Arthur). Of course, once he leaves England and takes full possession of his homeland, Lancelot creates kings of his cousins Lyonell and Bors, and his half-brother Ector de Marys; amongst his other kinsmen and faithful followers he creates eight dukes and thirteen earls, and others whom Malory decides to omit for brevity’s sake. In many ways,

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100 Malory, 272. Lancelot does occasionally accept rewards for his labor: he keeps possession of Joyous Garde, for example. Malory does not tell this particular story, but in the Vulgate Lancelot the hero frees the castle from a tyrannical lord – a prophecy is then revealed that identifies Lancelot as its liberator and new lord. See Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, vol. II, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Samuel N. Rosenberg (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 75-80. In other situations, like that involving Castle Pendragon, mentioned below, it seems as if Lancelot takes or grants possession of castles that had been ruled by a bad, but legitimate lord. If there is a displaced and legitimate lord, he returns possession to him or her.

101 Malory, 274.

102 Malory, 295-96.

103 Malory, 476.

104 Malory, 1204-05. Kim notes this in The Knight without the Sword, 95.
Lancelot is the ideal fifteenth-century magnate: defender of the realm, provider of justice, and a generous and good lord.

2. “Cherissh thy champyons and chief men of armes”;¹⁰⁵ King/Noble Relations and the Role of Royal Patronage

In late medieval England, few relationships were as important as those involving the king and the nobility. Of particular importance during the fifteenth century were the relationships between the king and his most powerful subjects. After all, of the nine times the crown changed hands between 1399 and 1485, six involved violent overthrows led by an over-mighty subject and/or an alliance of peers. It is not surprising, then, that sixteenth-century historians emphasized the personal ambitions of magnates as the primary causes of the previous century’s turbulence. Richard Grafton’s chronicle, printed in 1569, provides numerous examples of personal disputes between the king and a powerful magnate that caused political division. The following passage, quoted at length, discusses the dissolving relationship between Edward IV and the earl of Warwick (Warwick favored an alliance with France, and was negotiating for Edward to marry King Louis’s sister-in-law, Bona of Savoy; Edward, however, married Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of a Lancastrian knight):

But when the Earl of Warwike had perfite knowledge by the letters of his trusty friends, that king Edward had gotten him a newe wife, and that all that he had done with king Lewys in his ambassade for the conioyning of

this newe affinitie, was both frustrate and vaine, he was earnestly moued and sore chafed with the chaunce, and thought it necessarie that king Edwarde should be deposed from his crowne and royall dignitie, as an inconstaunt Prince, not worthy of suche a kingly office. All men for the most part agree, that this mariage was the onely cause, why the Erle of Warwike bare grudge, and made warre on king Edward. Other affirme that there were other causes, which added to this, made the fyre to flame, which before was but a little smoke. For after that king Edwarde had obteyned his kingdome (as it was then thought) by the only helpe and meane of the Erle of Warwike, he beganne to suspect, yea, and to doubt him, fearing least he being in such authority and estimation of the people, as he well might worke him pleasure or displeasure, when he therevnto were minded, wherefore he thought it conuenient a little, & a little to pluck away and minishe the power and authoritie, which he and his predecessors had geuē to the Erle, to the entent that he then might doe at his pleasure, both at home and in outwarde parties, without feare or dread, without check or taunt, whatsoever to his awne mind seemed most conuenient…. Of this the Erle of Warwike was nothing ignoraunt, which although he looked for better thankes and greater benefites at king Edwards handes : yet he thought it best to dissimule the matter tyll such a tyme were come, as he might finde the king without strength, and then to imbrayd him with the pleasure that he had done for him.  

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This passage gives no deep political analysis of Edward IV’s questionable marriage. There is no discussion, for example, of the missed opportunity of building a foreign alliance – although Warwick favored France, a marriage to a royal princess from Spain or another nation could have proven equally beneficial. This excerpt also does not discuss the saturation of the domestic marriage market due to the new queen’s numerous Woodville relatives. Warwick had two daughters, Isabel and Anne, who were approaching marriageable age in 1464, but Edward’s new wife had seven sisters (as well as five brothers and two sons from her previous marriage) who now needed spouses suitable for royal in-laws. The marriages of three Woodville women to the sons of two earls and a duke severely limited the marriage options for the Neville sisters, particularly since Edward later refused to allow Isabel to marry his brother George (Warwick took the two to Calais in 1469 and allowed them to marry anyway).

Another topic not discussed in the quotation above is the populace’s widespread discontent over the mismatched marriage. Not only did the king marry a lower-level gentry widow, but her husband had died fighting for the Lancastrians. Each of these issues were discussed by contemporaries, but Grafton chose to emphasize Warwick’s displeasure at his own foiled plans; Edward’s growing suspicions about the earl’s influence; and the king’s decision to diminish that influence so that he might rule more at his whim. Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, which does briefly discuss the proposed marriage between Edward IV and Bona of Savoy, agrees that Warwick’s wounded pride – due to his marriage negotiations being so casually dismissed and the apparent diminishing of his influence – stirred his heart against his cousin, the king. But Holinshed also offers an even more personal reason for the political break:
Other affirme other causes [for Warwick’s hatred against Edward]; and one speciallie, for that king Edward did attempt a thing once in the earles house, which was much against the earles honestie (whether he would have defloured his daughter or his néece, the certeintie was not for both their honours reuealed)…

Holished elects not to judge which slight – the rumored seduction attempt or the blundered marriage negotiations – was the primary cause, but he concludes: “Truth it is, that the priuie intentions of their harts brake into so many small pieces, that England, France, and Flanders, could neuer ioine them againe, during their naturall liues.”

Holinshed’s conclusion may be too simplistic, but it does offers one explanation for the rift that caused Warwick, not unlike Lancelot, to go from royal favorite to ostracized antagonist (in both cases, Jonathan Hughes notes, the falls were partly due to the influence of a beautiful queen). To some extent, this preoccupation with the personal motives (and even personalities) of society’s elite during this time seems justified. English history was affected greatly by such personal/political decisions as Edward IV’s, whether for lust or love, to marry Lady Elizabeth Grey (née Woodville), and Richard, duke of Gloucester’s later decision to usurp his nephew’s throne. Even modern scholars continue to suggest that “the civil strife of the Wars of the Roses entailed fighting for local and personal advantages for both nobility and gentry, rather

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than an ideological war of ideas between two opposing factions…” Battlefield behavior would also appear to support this reading of the period’s violence. Once the commanders of one side were killed in battle, the commons typically ceased to fight: i.e., they fought out of duty or loyalty to their lords, not for a “cause.” Perhaps the troubles during the subsequent Tudor and Stuart eras, tinged as they were with religious and political ideologies, seemed to confirm for later historians the personal nature of the fifteenth century’s problems.

Commentaries such as Grafton’s quoted above – and there were many of them – depicting kings struggling with the nobility shaped the narrative of English history for centuries. Thus, as mentioned in the Introduction, nineteenth-century Victorian scholars like Charles Plummer criticized “the overgrown power and insubordination of the nobles.” According to Plummer, the “evil” system he dubbed bastard feudalism allowed the great lords to increase their power and influence and to pervert the law to their own ends. Inevitably, the personal ambitions of various lords came into conflict with those of other lords, and, not infrequently, with the desires of the crown. Though Plummer traced the origins of the supposedly problematic bastard feudal system to the reign of Edward III, scholars such as William Stubbs traced the tension between kings and nobles back even farther – at least to the establishment of feudalism in England by

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110 Radulescu, Gentry Context, 6.
111 For a convenient review of the historiography of the Wars of the Roses, see Keith Dockray, William Shakespeare, the Wars of the Roses, and the Historians (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), particularly 125-94.
113 See Plumber, “Introduction,” 15-16. Briefly, “bastard feudalism” has been defined as “the set of relationships with their social inferiors that provided the English aristocracy with the manpower they required.” In essence, the nobility enhanced its feudal, land-based manpower with monetarily-compensated retainers. See Hicks, Bastard Feudalism, 1.
William the Conqueror in 1066. After the Conquest, Stubbs argues that “the Norman baronage [was] incessantly in arms in order to extend their own power, taking advantage of every quarrel, and ranging themselves with the king or against him on no principle save the desire of strengthening their own position…” The divisive nature of society and the frequent calls for, and celebrations of, unity have already been discussed in the Introduction, but it would perhaps be a mistake to overestimate the amount of conflict between kings and nobles in the fifteenth century. Just as the traditional description of fifteenth-century England as a lawless and violent age has been challenged, many historians now dismiss the notion that kings and nobles constantly vied with each other for power.

Current scholarship argues that although there were certainly brief periods of upheaval – such as the usurpations and overthrows in 1399, 1461, and 1470-71 – medieval kings and nobles had fairly harmonious relationships, and that the nobility’s “natural disposition” was to cooperate with the king. To an extent this rings true, even near the onset of the presumed turbulence of the Wars of the Roses. In 1452 when the somewhat-popular, reform-minded Richard, duke of York attempted a coup d’état of Henry VI’s immensely unpopular government, he found support from only two peers: Thomas Courtenay, the “self-interested Earl of Devon,” and Lord Cobham. Eight years later, after a decade-long political struggle between York and the king – including armed

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116 Charles Ross, *The Wars of the Roses: A Concise History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 28-29. Devon supported York primarily due to the latter’s opposition to the court party; Devon himself was in open antagonism with two court favorites, James Butler earl of Wiltshire and Ormond and William Bonville, Lord Bonville.
conflicts like the one at St. Albans on 22 May 1455, in which York was joined by several peers, including his Neville in-laws, the earls of Salisbury and Warwick – York’s allies were reportedly shocked when he announced his claim to the throne on 16 October 1460.\textsuperscript{117} There is some debate about this particular version of York’s claim, taken largely from the account left by Jehan de Waurin, who may have wanted to present a favorable view of Warwick.\textsuperscript{118} Both R. A. Griffiths and P. A. Johnson, for example, believe that York’s most powerful ally, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, knew about (or even suggested) York’s plan to claim the throne. Griffiths suggests that the plan was concocted in Ireland in March 1460 (six months before the claim was made),\textsuperscript{119} while Johnson allows that Warwick may have made the suggestion as late as September.\textsuperscript{120} Regardless, however, of whether or not York’s closest allies knew of his plan to claim the throne, the general reaction of the peers was underwhelming. According to one chronicler, when York claimed the throne “all the lordes were sore dismaide…”\textsuperscript{121} If Warwick – well recognized for his deft use of propaganda – had indeed been sent to London to prepare the way for York’s claim, he proved ineffective. It was only after three weeks of deliberation that a compromise was reached: Henry VI would remain on the throne, but York would again be named Protector, and after the death of Henry the crown would then


\textsuperscript{118} See Jehan de Waurin, \textit{Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Breaigne, a Present Nomme Engleterre}, vol. 5, ed. Sir William Hardy and Edward L. C. P. Hardy (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891), 308-18.

\textsuperscript{119} Griffiths, \textit{Henry VI}, 855-57.


\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Chronicles of London}, 171.
pass to York and his heirs.\textsuperscript{122} Despite the fact that it recognized the strict legality of York’s claim, parliament remained reticent to depose a reigning monarch (and the third of his line, at that). The grasping, contentious society imagined by earlier scholars should have jumped at the chance to dismiss an impotent king while garnering the favor of an emergent dynasty – or, perhaps, to promote their own royal ambitions during the ensuing confusion, as some believe Henry Stafford, duke of Buckingham planned to do in the aftermath of his (failed) 1483 rebellion.\textsuperscript{123} Instead, York was forced to rely primarily on his allies-by-marriage, the law, and the halfhearted support of the lords. However, the “natural disposition” of the nobility to cooperate with the crown had its limits, as Anthony Tuck also reminds us:

\begin{quote}
The nobility’s reluctance to remove an anointed king to whom they had sworn allegiance was not absolute; once deposition had been employed for the first time in 1327 it became the ultimate means by which an aristocratic faction could make its will prevail against a recalcitrant king.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

As with Edward II and Richard II, both Henry VI and his Yorkist successors discovered that powerful and disgruntled magnates could assert their own power and agendas, even against the king.

\textsuperscript{122} Pollard surmises that York, Warwick and March may have planned the claim with the specific intent of having York recognized as Henry VI’s heir, not expecting Henry VI to be set aside. See \textit{Warwick the Kingmaker}, 43-46. It is interesting to note, however, that York was a decade older than Henry: would he have expected to outlive the king?
\textsuperscript{123} See, for example, Paul Murray Kendall, \textit{Richard the Third} (New York: Norton, 1955), 318-22. As evidence for Buckingham’s royal ambitions, Kendall and others cite (among other things) Buckingham’s successful request in 1474 to bear the arms of his great-great-grandfather Thomas of Woodstock, Edward III’s youngest son. See Bodleian MS. Ashmole 857, fos. 50-51, 18 February 1474. He was also descended from John of Gaunt through the bastard Beaufort line. Early authors who acknowledge rumors regarding Buckingham’s ambitions include John Rous, Polydore Vergil, and Edward Hall.
\textsuperscript{124} Tuck, \textit{Crown and Nobility}, xvi.
The most successful medieval English kings, then, carefully monitored their relationships with the nobility, particularly with their most powerful subjects. Perhaps equally important, kings had to monitor the relationships between the lords themselves, and endeavor to achieve a certain balance. These tasks, necessary to maintain amicable relations among the elite and keep society functioning smoothly, were partially accomplished through royal patronage.\textsuperscript{125} Patronage – in the form of land, offices, commands, grants, wardships, and such – brought both income and prestige to the nobles, and allowed them then to become patrons to others.\textsuperscript{126} As one might imagine, the nobles competed for such political advantages rather vigorously. Thus, as John Watts puts it, a wise king should utilize patronage “prescriptively… so as to encourage harmony” in the realm:

This was perhaps the most important role for royal ‘patronage’ in the later medieval polity: not as a means of reward, still less a means of purchasing loyalty, but rather as a device for modifying the natural pattern of lordship to suit the vagaries of the common interest.\textsuperscript{127}

Charles Ross directly connects the king’s “management of his great men” to patronage by simply stating, “It was the king’s business to make intelligent use of his royal patronage.”\textsuperscript{128} The implication here is that a king who did not use patronage wisely could find himself with some discontented magnates on his hands. Conversely, Christine de Pizan asserts that a “good prince who loves the universal good” will be liberal and

\textsuperscript{126} Hicks, “Oversmighty Subjects,” 394.
\textsuperscript{127} Watts, \textit{Henry VI}, 98. As Ross discusses, however, using patronage “to win the loyalty and service of a large and powerful royal affinity,” as Henry IV and Henry V did, was still important. See Ross, \textit{Wars of the Roses}, 20.
\textsuperscript{128} Ross, \textit{The Wars of the Roses}, 19.
thereby “will attract the hearts of his own subjects to himself as well as those of strangers.”

The early pages of Malory’s *Morte* portray King Arthur doing just this by making (or attempting to make) wise use of patronage and gift giving.

Immediately upon Arthur’s coronation, he appoints his foster brother Sir Kay and his closest allies – Sir Baudwin, Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias – to the highest offices in the kingdom: seneschal, constable, chamberlain, warden of the North, respectively. Over the next few years, as he conquers the North, Scotland, and Wales, Arthur also extends gifts (initially rejected) to the barons who have opposed his reign. At first, then, Arthur rewards his closest family and friends – an accepted and expected policy, it would seem, as Lancelot does the same when divvying up his continental lands to his followers.

Additionally, George Ashby advises, “One thing kepe in youre noble memorie, / Do magnifie & enriche youre dscent (sic)…” Then, in an attempt to widen his support base, Arthur reaches out to others in the realm. At Merlin’s advice, however, Arthur soon alters his tactic. When the brother kings Ban and Bors help Arthur defeat the eleven rebel kings, Merlin suggests that Arthur first reward his new allies, as “that shall cause straungers to be of bettir wyll to do you servyse at nede. Also ye be able to rewarde youre owne knyghtes at what tyme somever hit lykith you.” This time, instead of rewarding his own men first Arthur initially rewards the outsiders who have come to his aid, knowing that potential future allies will remember his actions and be more eager to send

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130 Malory, 16-17.
132 Malory, 37. Merlin’s advice appears to be Malory’s addition to the text; in the Vulgate *Merlin*, Merlin leaves immediately after the battle is over to visit the hermit, Blaise. The three kings – Arthur, Ban, and Bors – then together distribute treasure to their men. See *Lancelot-Grail*, 233.
him aid if needed; it is almost as if Arthur is following Christine de Pizan’s advice: be liberal to attract the hearts of friends and strangers.\textsuperscript{133}

Although the legendary King Arthur seems to excel in distributing patronage wisely, at least early in his reign,\textsuperscript{134} not all of his historical counterparts were so judicious – least of all Henry VI, the sitting king for most of Malory’s life. Perhaps encouraged by advice literature to be liberal, Henry VI simply went too far. Lydgate, for one, advised the young king, “Be liberal… / Be bounteuouse and kingly honourable…”\textsuperscript{135} Regardless of why Henry became so generous, two problems emerged from his lavish giving. First, he impoverished and indebted the crown – a rather difficult task, considering that Henry IV’s usurpation in 1399 had brought the vast Lancaster estates into the royal reserves. Between the ongoing war in France and Henry’s own “excessive generosity,” however, the crown’s debt doubled from approximately £164,000 in 1433 to £372,000 by 1450.\textsuperscript{136} To make matters worse, Henry’s personal annual income stood at a woefully insufficient £33,000, down from the approximately £120,000 enjoyed by Richard II fifty years earlier.\textsuperscript{137} The crown’s abject poverty caught the attention of many contemporaries, and chroniclers and poets alike frequently remarked on it and attributed it as one of the primary factors of the period’s political unrest. One continuation of the Brut chronicle, for example, describing events of c. 1460, reads:

\textsuperscript{133} Similar advice about liberality, of course, can be found in such diverse texts as \textit{Beowulf}, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s \textit{History of the Kings of Britain}, and the fifteenth-century Middle English \textit{Prose Merlin}.
\textsuperscript{134} Radulescu points out that Arthur is less successful in distributing patronage and controlling his subjects in the second half of his reign. See \textit{Gentry Context}, 145.
\textsuperscript{135} “Ballade to King Henry VI upon His Coronation,” ll.123, 1139.
\textsuperscript{136} Ross, \textit{Wars of the Roses}, 26. In Henry VI’s defense, it should be noted that the wartime debts of Edward I and Edward III reached £200,000 and £300,000, respectively. See G. L. Harriss, \textit{Henry V: The Practice of Kingship} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 167.
\textsuperscript{137} For Henry VI’s income, see Ross, \textit{Wars of the Roses}, 26; for Richard II’s, see Anthony Steel, “English Government Finance, 1377-1413,” \textit{English Historical Review} 51.201 (Jan. 1936): 29-51.
In this same tyme, þe reame of Englonde was oute of all good
gouernaunce, as it had be meny dayes before, for the kyng was simple and
lad by couetous counseyll, and owed more then he was worthe. His dettes
enceased dayly, but payment was there none; all þe possessyons and
lordeshyppes þat perteyned to the croune the kyng had yeue awey…

A decade earlier, one of the first complaints registered by the Jack Cade rebels in 1450
reads: “Item, the king is stered to leve oonly on his commones and other menne tahave
the revenues of the crownne the whiche hathe caused povertie of his excellence…”

About that same time, one poet lamented: “So pore a kyng was neuer seen, / Nor richere
lordes all by-dene; / þe commvnes may no more.” It is worth remembering that
Fortescue equates over-mighty subjects with over-wealthy ones; in the eyes of the
populous, certain greedy lords were becoming rich off the increasingly-poor king’s own
revenue sources.

Despite the concern contemporaries (and some later scholars) expressed over the
king’s poverty, and the supposed connection between it and the day’s political problems,
many modern scholars suggest that the lords were often in no better shape. England
suffered a recession at the time, and some scholars believe that the nobility’s financial
insolvency led directly to the troubles of the mid-to-late fifteenth century. Following in

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139 “Complaints of the Commons of Kent and causes of their assembly at Blackheath, 1450,” in The Politics
of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale’s Book, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne
140 “Advice to the Court, II (1450),” in Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. Rossell Hope
141 Royal critics also voiced similar complaints during the reigns of Edward II, Richard II, and (later)
Edward IV. See “The articles and causes for the assembling of Robin of Redesdale and the commons of
Yorkshire, 1469,” in John Vale’s Book, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne F. Sutton,
the wake of M. M. Postan’s studies of the nobility’s financial records, T. B. Pugh and Charles Ross conclude,

Without patronage from the Crown, in the form of grants of land, offices and pensions, some barons were no longer able to pay their way… The Wars of the Roses were fought, it would seem, not because over-wealthy great magnates could afford to hire armies of retainers to fight their battles, but rather because they could no longer afford to pay them.\textsuperscript{142}

The economic conditions of the mid-fifteenth century – influenced by repeated visitations of epidemic disease and by fluctuations in foreign trade due to war, continental recession, and other causes – likely intensified the normal competition for royal patronage.\textsuperscript{143} This competition for patronage leads directly into the second problem resulting from Henry’s generosity: his poor decisions in distributing it.

If a wise king distributed patronage strategically – as Malory’s Arthur did early in his reign – in order to maintain the peace, then Henry VI failed on multiple fronts. Indeed, one could argue that Henry’s irresponsible use of patronage was one of the primary causes of the Wars of the Roses. For one thing, there is evidence that Henry was somewhat careless in his generosity. Perhaps the most appalling example involved two disputing families, the Bonvilles and Courtenays. In 1437, Henry granted William, Lord Bonville the position of royal steward for the king’s lands in Cornwall; four years later, he thoughtlessly granted virtually the same position (described this time as the steward of


the duchy of Cornwall) to Bonville’s rival, Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon. The awkward situation exacerbated the growing rivalry between the two families, which both had their power bases in the West Country. In fact, several armed skirmishes occurred as both men maneuvered to keep their respective appointments; Malory’s cousin Sir Philip Chetwynd, an ally of Bonville’s, was among those attacked. In the end, the royal council cancelled both grants and sent the dispute to arbitration (though no record remains of the final decision). This unfortunate – and avoidable – situation, as well as the king’s general poverty, may have been among the things that prompted George Ashby to advise Henry’s son to consider carefully any grants:

Amonges other I wolde you aduertise
To be wele aduised in your grauntyng
Any fee or office in any wise
That it securly stande withoute resumyng.
Suche variance hathe be grete rebukyng
To many folk, that haue be preferred,
And aftur of their livelode differred.145

The next stanza continues on this topic, and editor Mary Bateson’s marginal notation on it even reads, “Resumption of grants dangerous.” The Courtenay/Bonville situation provides evidence that this was true, and highlights Henry’s inability to utilize patronage wisely or prescriptively.

Henry VI also fell into two related traps: the favoritism of some nobles and the ostracism of others. After ending his minority in 1437, Henry proved particularly prone

145 Ashby, Active Policy, ll. 723-29.
to selecting favorites. The first was William de la Pole, eventually raised to the rank of duke of Suffolk, and later Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset. The next section will focus on Suffolk, as he was probably the most disruptive royal favorite of the fifteenth century. On the opposite side, if one believes the Yorkist version of events, Richard, duke of York faced virtual exile from court, despite (or perhaps because of) his close kinship with the king. York would provide an excellent example of the dangers of royal ostracism, but the fourth section of this present chapter will turn instead to Richard Neville, earl of Warwick. Like Lancelot, Warwick fell from favor and became increasingly ostracized by Edward. Also, switching from Henry VI’s reign to Edward IV’s will provide a wider perspective on how problematic king/noble relations were in fifteenth-century England. This will help readjust McFarlane’s focus on under-mighty kings, as it better shows the struggles all rulers of the period had with over-mighty subjects. Conveniently, Malory’s *Morte* explores the issues of favoritism and ostracism through a single character: Sir Lancelot du Lake. Thus, he will provide points of comparison and contrast to the historical personages examined below.

3. “Noble prynce… Susteyne right, trouthe þou magnefye… Til noper part by fauour applye”: Royal Favoritism and the Cases of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and Sir Lancelot du Lake

Perhaps the most recognized royal favorite of the fifteenth century is Richard Neville, earl of Warwick – the infamous Kingmaker. He would certainly be an apt case

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146 “Ballade to King Henry VI upon His Coronation,” ll. 41-42, 45.
for this section: like Lancelot, Warwick fell from favor into exile. But Warwick’s status as favorite was never really the problem with him; neither the nobility nor the populace as a whole ever moved against him. The problem with Warwick was his determination to hold the position of prominence under – and influence over – the king. It was his response when he lost his favored position that disrupted the kingdom. Thus, Warwick will be the subject of the next section, on royal ostracism. As mentioned above, Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset was another problematic favorite – and his rumored relationship with Queen Margaret would make for an interesting parallel with Lancelot’s relationship with Queen Guinevere. However, this section will most frequently turn to William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk. Much like Lancelot, Suffolk held a virtual monopoly on royal favoritism, became the object of court jealousies and slander, and eventually found himself banished from the realm. I am not the first to note such similarities between these two figures. Nellie Slayton Aurner, for example, suggests: “The trial of Suffolk, his defence, his banishment, and the slander concerning the favor shown him by the Queen offer many analogies to the situation of Lancelot.” In both cases, the kings and queens involved failed to maintain (at the least) a general, non-biased façade, engendering court jealousies that destroyed the unity of the realm. This section discusses the ways in which Malory explores such issues involving royal favoritism, contextualizing the issues in the Morte with those involving Suffolk in the 1440s.

William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk, was initially a younger son, but inherited his father’s estates when his older brother died at Agincourt in 1415. Before long, he began his own military career, and apparently impressed Henry V enough to be named admiral

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of Normandy in 1419 and Knight of the Garter in 1421. Even under the regency of John, duke of Bedford, Suffolk accumulated various offices and positions in France. Among them, he holds the dubious honor of acting as commander of the siege of Orléans, the site of Joan of Arc’s successful military debut in May 1429. Captured later that year by the French, he reportedly paid a hefty £20,000 ransom for his release. Shortly thereafter, Suffolk contracted marriage to Alice Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer’s granddaughter and a kinswoman of the Beaufort line. Alice’s father Thomas, the king’s butler, helped Suffolk attain valuable posts in the estates of Henry V’s widow, Queen Catherine. By the time of his death in 1434, Chaucer had helped establish Suffolk as a major player in the Thames valley – a convenient power base for one associated with the royal government. Additionally, Suffolk was appointed to the king’s council in 1431, and given custody of the long-time captive Charles of Orléans in 1432. He was then appointed steward in 1433, and by the time a young Henry VI began asserting his royal authority in July 1436, Suffolk was among the king’s favorites – as indicated by the appointments and promotions given to him and members of his affinity in 1436-7. Suffolk also became associated with the peace faction at court – perhaps in part due to his friendship with Charles of Orléans, but also because Cardinal Henry Beaufort, his wife’s kinsman, led the faction. He served on the commission that examined Eleanor Cobham’s treason case in 1441, which helped neutralize, politically speaking, her husband, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester. In 1444, Suffolk was chosen to negotiate Henry VI’s marriage to Margaret of

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148 Alice Chaucer’s first marriage had been to Sir John Phelip, so Suffolk was actually her third (and final) marriage. See Rowena E. Archer, “Chaucer, Alice, duchess of Suffolk (c. 1404-1475),” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online edition (January 2008). Alice’s mother, Philippa, was the sister of Katherine Swynford, the mistress and later wife of John of Gaunt; their offspring, once legitimized, became the Beaufort line.

149 See Griffiths, Henry VI, 232-34. At this point, it is possible that Cardinal Henry Beaufort was the primary favorite, and Suffolk benefited from his close ties to Beaufort.
Anjou, and even stood in as the king’s proxy during the ceremony in France. After his return to England – and probably as a reward for his service – he was created marquis. Suffolk was appointed chamberlain in 1447, but he held many other titles and offices as well; he was also granted a series of lucrative wardships throughout the 1440s. In 1448, he was created duke. Despite being relatively land poor, Suffolk’s power and influence grew through Henry VI’s lavish gifts. In fact, modern scholars have recognized Suffolk as “the most powerful man in England” by the late 1440s, due to the influence he held over the king.  

Contemporaries likewise noted both his power and influence, although not always in a positive manner. Indeed, Suffolk was widely regarded as instrumental in the death (or murder?) of the king’s uncle, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, in 1447. Sometimes this accusation was thinly veiled, such as in the memorable line from the poem now called “The Arrest of the Duke of Suffolk”: “Ƿis fox at bury slowe oure grete gandere…”

Other times, it was stated bluntly, as in this chronicle entry:

And the x day of February nexte after began þe parlemente atte Seynt Edmundes Bury in Southfolke, the wheche wasse ordeyned only forto sle the noble Duke of Gloucestre, Humfrey, the kyngys vncle, whos dethe, William de la Poole, Duke off Southefolke, and Ser Iames Fynes, Lorde Say, and oþer of their assente hadde longe tyme ymagyned & conspired.

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152 An English Chronicle, 65.
The contemporary view of Suffolk’s influence is also evident in the Burgundian chronicler Georges Chastellain’s reference to him as a “second king.” Some of Suffolk’s own countrymen feared that he eyed the crown for himself, or for his son. One poet warned, “But yif the commyns of Englond / Helpe þe kyng in his fond, / Suffolk woll bere þe crown!” According to the official parliament record of his trial in 1450, Henry VI was informed that Suffolk intended to have France invade England; Suffolk then planned to marry his son, John, to Margaret Beaufort, “to thentent to make John sonne of the same duke, kyng of this youre seid reame, and to depose you of youre high regalie therof…” Even ten years after his summary execution, Suffolk was compared to Vortigern – the ancient Britain who set up Constans as a puppet king, murdered him, and later invited the Saxons into the land. In addition to this unlikely charge of foreign conspiracy, Suffolk was accused of a wide range of misdeeds, including treason (for surrendering Maine and Anjou to France), and interfering with justice on the behalf of members of his affinity. Eventually, and likely in part to protect the hated duke, Henry VI banished him from the realm for five years. Just before departing, he apparently wrote a moving letter to his son – of which the final, rhyming line, “Wreten of myn hand, þe day

154 “Advice to the Court, II (1450),” ll. 40-42.  
of my departing fro this land,”\textsuperscript{157} has been used to support the Suffolk’s authorship of (at least some of) the English poems of the Fairfax Sequence.\textsuperscript{158} While sailing for the continent, however, a ship named \textit{The Nicholas of the Tower} intercepted Suffolk’s ship; the next day, Suffolk was beheaded on the shore near Dover. Suffolk’s virtual monopoly on royal patronage resulted in abuses of power; court jealousies; rumor and scandal; and, ultimately, political division as those excluded from royal favor moved against the hated favorite. An exacerbating factor was the king’s blindness to the situation. To some extent, Malory explores all of these issues in his version of the Arthurian legend.

As discussed above, kings were expected to give prominence to certain individuals; both Arthur and Lancelot, for instance, provide for their family members and closest allies first, and Ashby advises Prince Edward to “magnifie & enriche”\textsuperscript{159} his descendants. When taken to the extreme, however, bestowing favor upon an individual or small group of people created problems. The discussion above highlights Suffolk’s power and influence, but only hints at the level of favoritism bestowed upon him by Henry VI; according to both contemporary accounts and modern scholarship, Suffolk held a virtual monopoly on royal patronage by the late 1440s.\textsuperscript{160} Criticisms of Henry’s government, such as those quoted in Section Two, often target Suffolk. Indeed, in lieu of attacking the king himself, critics often targeted such “covetous councilors.” Regarding Suffolk’s monopoly on patronage, the record of his 1450 trial in the Rolls of Parliament overlooks Henry’s own culpability by focusing on Suffolk’s supposed covetousness: “Item, the seid

\textsuperscript{159} Ashby, \textit{Active Policy}, l. 626.
\textsuperscript{160} See, for example, Griffiths, \textit{Henry VI}, 284-90, 301-10; Storey, \textit{The End of the House of Lancaster}, 40-60.
duke of Suff’, evere havyng insaciable covetise, and siguler wille to enriche hym
self...”  
Suffolk is accused not only of diverting rewards to his own pockets, but also to
the pockets of his friends and allies. In both cases, the charges directly link these grants to
the king’s own poverty:

First, the seid duke, the .xvi. yere of youre reigne, then beyng next and
pryvyest of your counseill, and steward of your honorable houshold, then
and many yeres seth, for covetise of grete lucre of good singulerly to hym
self, stured and moeved your highnes, the seid .xvi. yere, ye thenne beyng
in prosperitie and havyng grete possessions, to yeve and graunte moche
partie of your seid possessions, to dyvers persones in youre seid reame of
Englund, by the which ye be gretely empoverisshed...  

Suffolk is charged with directing the king’s funds into the hands of, among others, his
own niece and her husband; Sir Piers de Brecy, former counselor to Henry’s “grete
adversarie,” King Charles of France; and the “Frenssh quene.” Perhaps most damning
of all, in the eyes of the Commons at least, Suffolk reputedly diverted almost £60,000 of
tax revenue – from the fifteenths, tenths, and other granted revenues – and had it
“myschevously yeven and distribute to hym self, his frendes and welewillers...” Such
funds should have gone to the defense of the realm, rather than to Suffolk and his coterie.

What perhaps made this venomous view of Suffolk worse was the ongoing recession.
After all, an early component of Richard, duke of York’s complaints against Henry VI’s
government was his own financial difficulties due to non-payments for his service in

France. There is some debate over just how real York’s financial struggles were (and whether they resulted from his own mismanagement, or from the nonpayment of funds owed him), but at one point the crown did recognize a debt of almost £40,000 owed to the duke – and in the late 1440s, York did mortgage or sell several of his own properties. He also cancelled a sum of 10,000 marks due him in 1444 – a year before Suffolk would require over £5,000 for bringing Henry’s new bride, Margaret of Anjou, to England – and another amount just shy of £13,000 in 1446. Considering that the Commons in parliament and the Jack Cade rebels both addressed Suffolk’s greed so thoroughly in 1450, and that the Cade rebels particularly spoke well of York, it is not unlikely that York noticed and resented the generous grants given to Suffolk and his allies (one of which, the keeper of the privy seal, Adam Moleyns, had been the one accusing York of mismanaging the funds that were paid him for his service in Normandy).

Malory’s readers, therefore, would have been well aware of the problems caused by royal favoritism – particularly when a favorite monopolized royal patronage. Not only were they well aware of recent cases like the Woodvilles or Suffolk, but they well knew the problematic history of such royal favorites as Michael de la Pole, earl of Suffolk in the reign of Richard II; Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall, Hugh Despenser, earl of Winchester, and his son, Hugh the Younger, in the reign of Edward II; and perhaps less typical favorites, such as Alice Perrers, Edward III’s mistress. Kenneth Hodges argues that such a monopoly of royal patronage is exactly what is happening in Lancelot’s relationship with Queen Guinevere. Immediately after the Quest for the Holy Grail –

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165 See, for example, Johnson, Richard Duke of York, 51-64.
during which Lancelot repented of his love for the queen\textsuperscript{167} – Malory reports that “sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste… and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde, and had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of it…”\textsuperscript{168} Most critics read this as an indication of a renewal of the adulterous affair between the two characters. Beverly Kennedy, however, suggests: “The Middle English idiom, ‘to hauen a draught,’ means simply ‘to take a walk’ (MED 3a). It follows therefore that to have a ‘prevy draught’ means simply to take a ‘private stroll’ with someone, tête à tête.”\textsuperscript{169} To further support this draughts/walks reading, Kennedy draws attention to the woodcut used at the start of Book XVIII in Wynkyn de Worde’s 1529 edition. This woodcut shows Lancelot and the Queen talking one-on-one; to the left are two courtiers also in conversation, one of them positioned so that he would have an easy view of Lancelot and Guinevere. Kennedy offers this scene as evidence that Malory’s early readers would have taken the prevy draughtis as private walks rather than sexual innuendo.\textsuperscript{170} Kennedy also points out the hermit to whom Lancelot confesses his sins requires the knight to promise that “ye shall no more com in that quenys felyship as much as ye may forbere.”\textsuperscript{171} Lancelot so promises, and Kennedy argues that this is the promise

\textsuperscript{167} Malory, 896-99.
\textsuperscript{168} Malory, 1045.
\textsuperscript{169} Beverly Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur,” Arthuriana 7.4 (1997), 76. Kennedy does not deny altogether a sexual component to the relationship, as she admits to a genuine sexual encounter during “The Knight of the Cart” episode. Unlike most critics, though, she does see this encounter as an exception rather than part of an ongoing affair. See page 78-79. The definition “to take a walk” for draught is not, however, uncontested; the MED lists it as questionable. Less contested is the standard, sexual innuendo use of the term.
\textsuperscript{170} Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory,” 77.
\textsuperscript{171} Malory, 897.
Lancelot “forgate”; the *prevy draughtis* indicate Lancelot and Guinevere’s indiscretion and impropriety in spending so much time together rather than outright adultery.

Hodges builds on Kennedy’s observations, without denying a sexual component to the relationship, by interpreting the *prevy draughtis* as both a show of public favoritism and an indication that Lancelot was monopolizing the queen’s time – and thus preventing others from meeting with the queen, either to bring suits to her or to build relationships with her. Hodges recognizes the danger of treasonous adultery, but more interestingly he contextualizes his reading with the threats posed by past royal favorites who had gained undue influence in matters of state: Roger Mortimer with Queen Isabella, Alice Perrers with Edward III, and so on. To support this interpretation further, Hodges quotes a relevant passage from Christine de Pizan’s *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. According to Christine, a queen or princess should, on summer afternoons, “go off to amuse herself in a garden until supper-time, walking up and down for her health. She will wish that if any persons need to see her for any reason they be allowed to enter and she will hear them.” Lancelot, then, might very well be preventing others at court from getting valuable “face time” with the queen. There is another passage in the *Morte* that could serve to strengthen Hodges’s reading of these *prevy draughtis*, particularly in light of the Christine de Pizan garden passage quoted above. When the brother kings, Ban and Bors, arrive in England to help Arthur in his fight against those rebelling against him, Arthur holds a feast and a tournament. On the tournament’s first day, the melee involving

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172 Hodges acknowledges a sexual component to the affair: “[Guinevere’s] sexual sin is real, but it is not her only characteristic, nor, perhaps, even her overwhelming characteristic.” See “Guinevere’s Politics,” 79.


seven hundred knights begins to get rather heated. Arthur and his two allies decide to halt the action and send the knights to their lodgings. They then attend evensong and eat supper. At this time, Malory writes: “And aftir souper the three kynges wente into a gardyne and gave the pryce unto sir Kay and unto sir Lucas the Butler and unto sir Gryfflet.”\footnote{Malory, 24.} Here, we have an example of King Arthur utilizing a garden setting to bestow a gift or honor: the prize for best performance at the day’s tournament. Malory does not specify what type of prize is given, beyond simple recognition, but elsewhere in the \textit{Morte} a diamond serves as the typical prize.\footnote{E.g., Malory, 1098, 1153. Based on contemporary accounts, however, Malory’s readers may have expected prizes like a rod of gold or a ruby. See Richard Barber, “Malory’s \textit{Le Morte Darthur} and Court Culture under Edward IV,” \textit{Arthurian Literature} 12 (1993), 150.} The combination of the garden (just after supper, though Christine’s description involves a garden walk \textit{before} supper) and the bestowal of a prize/honor in this passage suggests that Hodges’s political reading of Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship could be correct. If Lancelot, then, occupies too much of the queen’s time, others may not have had opportunities to appeal to her or build political relationships with her; conversely, the queen did not have the opportunity to broaden her own affinity.

It is in this political light of affinities that Hodges reads “The Poisoned Apple” episode. In the sentence about the \textit{prevy draughtis}, Malory also notes that “many in the courte spake of it, and in especiall sir Aggravayne, sir Gawaynes brothir, for he was ever opynne-mowthed.”\footnote{Malory, 1045.} The very next sentence (which begins a new paragraph) states: “So hit befelle that sir Launcelot had many resortis of ladyes and damesels which dayly resorted unto hym, that besoughte hym to be their champion. In all such maters of ryght
sir Launcelot applied hym dayly… and ever as much as he myght he withdrew hym fro
the company of quene Gwennyvere for to eschew the slander and noyse.” These details
would seem to strengthen Hodges’s argument, because it gives the impression that once
Lancelot withdraws from the queen’s company he is able to see daily visitors and
champion their causes – one might expect that the queen, too, had more time to hear
appeals. Of course, Guinevere at first does not see things in this way: she grows angry at
Lancelot for spending so much time with other women. He attempts to explain the
political ramifications of their relationship, and how it is leaving her vulnerable:

Also, madame, wyte you well that there be many men spekith of oure
love in thys courte and have you and me gretely in awayte, as thes sir
Aggravayne and sir Mordred… And than, if that ye falle in ony distresse
thorowoute wyllfull foly, than ys there none other remedy other helpe but
by me and my bloode.179

At first, Guinevere responds emotionally, and does not accept these political reasons for
his behavior; she accuses him of being “a false, recrayed knyght and a common
lechourere” who “lovyste and holdiste othir ladyes…”180 She even banishes him from
court. Outwardly, Guinevere maintains an unconcerned air, but Malory notes: “Wyte ye
well, inwardely, as the booke seyth, she toke grete thought…”181 In the next paragraph,
she decides to throw a private dinner party for twenty-four knights. The typical reading of
this feast is that Guinevere is trying to show Lancelot and his kin that she does not miss
him; the political reading suggests that she took Lancelot’s warning to heart and is trying

178 Malory, 1045.
179 Malory 1046.
180 Malory, 1047.
181 Malory, 1048.
to mend fences by expanding her affinity beyond the house of Ban. These two readings are not incompatible, as the text says that “all was for to shew outwarde that she had as grete joy in all other knyghtes of the Rounde Table as she had in sir Launcelot.” But the political reading does add an extra depth to the episode and to Guinevere’s actions. Plus, as we shall see in Chapter Three, another passage from Christine de Pizan supports the political reading of the dinner party, particularly as a potential attempt to heal the ongoing feuds that threaten to divide Arthur’s realm. Unfortunately, the dinner party serves to highlight the very danger of political isolation about which Lancelot warned the queen – when she is accused of poisoning Sir Patryse, who dies by eating a poisoned apple at the dinner party, no one stands up to defend her. Eventually, Sir Bors – very reluctantly and against his own desire – agrees to fight on the queen’s behalf, but only if “a bettir knyghht” (i.e., Lancelot) does not arrive in time to do so. Bors’s loyalty in this situation belongs more to Lancelot and King Arthur, on whose behalves he is somewhat willing to defend the queen’s honor. Guinevere’s banishment of Lancelot had weakened her relationship with his kin and affinity, and her attempt to repair her relationships with others at court outside his circle ends in tragedy; it also solidifies her dependence on Lancelot. Ultimately, however, Hodges argues that Guinevere’s continued efforts pay some dividends: in “The Knight of the Cart” episode, in which she is technically guilty of the charge of adultery (whereas in “The Poisoned Apple” episode she was completely innocent), all twelve members of the Queen’s Knights are willing to fight for her.

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182 Malory, 1048.
183 Malory, 1053.
185 Hodges points out that most of these knights are associated with King Arthur’s affinity elsewhere in the text, and that half of them were among the attendees at the feast where Sir Patryse was poisoned – that they
While the argument could be made that the knights are only willing to fight for the queen in this case because their honor is in question, their corporate defense of the queen indicates faith in her. Speaking “all at onys” they say: “Sir Mellyagaunte, thou falsely belyest my lady, the quene, and that we woll make good uppon the, any of us. Now chose whych thou lytest of us, whan we ar hole of the woundes thou gavyst us.”\textsuperscript{186} While each knight could be confident in his own innocence, none could know for certain that each of his fellows was also innocent – yet their defense attacks Mellyagaunt’s accusation of the quene.

One of the results of Suffolk’s increasing power was his inordinate influence over the workings of government and the administration of justice. Sir John Fastolf, for example, complained in a letter to some associates, “I was oftyn tymes dammaged by the Duc of Suffolk officers in Lodylond, both by greete and vndewe amerciementes [i.e., fines], as by distreynynges [i.e., seizure] of my catell as othyr wyse…”\textsuperscript{187} The Jack Cade rebels had complained about \textit{amerciamentes} earlier that same year.\textsuperscript{188} We have seen above how Suffolk was accused of enriching himself and his friends by diverting taxes and other government funds, but there were even darker crimes laid upon him by contemporaries. He was largely suspected, for example, to be behind William Tailboys’s assassination attempt on Ralph Cromwell, Lord Cromwell – a former Lord Treasurer – on

\textsuperscript{186} Malory, 1132. Emphases added.
\textsuperscript{188} “Complaints of the commons of Kent and causes of their assembly at Blackheath, 1450,” in \textit{The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale’s Book}, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne F. Sutton, Livia Visser-Fuchs, John L. Watts (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), 204. This complaint was written after Suffolk’s death, but he is still named in many of the rebels’ writings.
28 November 1449. Tailboys, a career criminal with a record perhaps more colorful than Malory’s, often escaped punishment, or received an early pardon, largely due to Suffolk’s interference on his behalf. Despite all of this, according to John Paston I, writing in April 1448, Suffolk bore no criticism: “þer xal no man ben so hardy to don noþer seyn aȝens my lord of Sowthfolk nere non þat longyth to hym; and all þat han don and seyd aȝens hym, þey xul sore repent þem.”

It is, perhaps, not inappropriate to compare Suffolk’s perversions of justice (often in pursuing his own self-interests) to Lancelot’s ability to skew the divine justice system at Arthur’s court. Just as Suffolk had the ear of the king and could stack juries in his favor, Lancelot’s fighting prowess – whether or not he was fighting on the right side – tilted the balance in his. Lancelot confesses as much on the Grail Quest, admitting, “Never was I discomfite in no quarell, were hit ryght were hit wronge.” In many ways, Lancelot is a more fearsome form of over-mighty subject, because although Suffolk’s power depended in large part on his relationship with the king, Lancelot’s comes from his independent ability to best all foes. As noted above, Arthur recognizes this fact; even if Lancelot really is guilty of treason (by having an affair with the queen), Arthur knows Lancelot must “be takyn with the dede… [because] I know no knyght that ys able to macch hym.” Many times in the text, Lancelot does fight for justice – but when the situation is of a personal nature, he fights simply for his own self-interests (even if he does find ways to self-justify them). In fact, when trapped by Aggravain and Mordred in the queen’s chambers, Lancelot

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189 See Griffiths, Henry VI, 580-81, 678. The attempt to pardon Tailboys in the Cromwell affair seems to have led to Cromwell helping to impeach Suffolk the following year.
191 Malory, 896.
192 Malory, 1163.
acknowledges to Guinevere: “I never fayled you in ryght nor in wronge…”

Lancelot’s physical might is, in many ways, like a fifteenth-century over-mighty subject’s ability to interfere with the judicial system.

Another way that favoritism can harm the kingdom is when it damages reputations through rumor and slander. In his trial, Suffolk specifically wanted to address “the grete infamie and defamation that is seid uppon hym, by many of the people of this lande,” and lamented “the odious and horrible langage that renneth thorough [the] lande, almoost in every commons mouth…” Elsewhere, as we have seen, Suffolk was accused of the murder of Humphrey, duke of Gloucester; even ten years after his own execution, Suffolk was still being condemned for this act, so lasting was the rumor.

There is some question regarding Suffolk’s culpability in all the charges laid on him by his political opponents. C. L. Kingsford, for instance, suggests that Suffolk does not deserve the blame cast on him by his political opponents for the loss of Maine. Though many modern scholars are critical of Suffolk, there is evidence that he did not wish to undertake the marriage negotiation between Henry and Margaret of Anjou: he tried to recuse himself, and even obtained an indemnity for his actions during the negotiation process. In May 1447, the Council acquitted him of any wrongdoing in the matter of Maine. During his trial in 1450, Suffolk’s defense suggested that there were others

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193 Malory, 1166.
195 “Articles of the commons of Kent,” in John Vale’s Book, 211. Many scholars believe, however, that Gloucester’s death – though at an inconvenient time for his enemies – was likely from natural causes. See, for example, Christine Carpenter, The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c. 1437-1509 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102.
who had at least as much guilt in the matter, as he is recorded suggesting that “so grete thinges coude not be doon nor brought aboute by hym self alone, onlesse that other persones had doon her parte and be pryvy therto aswell as he…”\(198\) John Watts observes that Suffolk’s trial drew to a quick close after that not-so-cryptic insinuation.\(199\) Despite this, Suffolk bore most the blame for the loss of Maine, and the charge rose again during his trial.

Rumor and slander both play parts in Malory’s Morte, and these things divide Arthur’s court as much as Henry VI’s. Early in Lancelot’s career, shortly after he defeats Sirs Tarquin and Peris, the damsel leading him suggests that he take a wife. It seems one reason she suggests this is that there are some troubling rumors starting to spread: “But hit is noysed that ye love quene Gwenyvere, and that she hath ordeyned by enchauntemente that ye shall never love none other but hir…”\(200\) At the time Malory is writing, the suggestion of enchantment – or witchcraft – was not to be taken lightly. Less than three decades earlier, in 1441, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester’s wife, Eleanor Cobham, had been found guilty of sorcery and imprisoned for life. Among her supposed acts of sorcery were making the duke fall in love with her; attempting to give him an heir; and seeking the date of Henry VI’s death (a treasonous act).\(201\) Similarly, within a year or two prior to Malory’s completion of the Morte, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, duchess of


\(200\) Malory, 270.

Bedford (and thus, Eleanor Cobham’s ex-sister-in-law) – by then remarried to Richard Woodville, earl Rivers – also faced accusations of sorcery; she supposedly used witchcraft to make Edward IV fall in love with her daughter, Elizabeth Woodville. Though her official trial was in January 1470, it is likely that rumors to this effect predated the Warwick-backed accusations, perhaps going back to the revelation of the ill-fitting marriage in 1464. Certainly, the suspicions were strong and deep enough for Richard, duke of Gloucester to renew them against Queen Elizabeth herself in 1483. Likewise, the rumors about Lancelot and Guinevere do not disappear. As noted above, near the end of the Morte Lancelot defends his interactions with other ladies as a precautionary measure, telling the queen, “Also, madame, wyte you well that there be many men spekith of oure love in thys courte and have you and me gretely in awayte…” Here there is no mention of sorcery, but the implication of adultery is clear. This type of scandal would have been familiar to Malory’s readers as well. As early as 1459, Henry’s queen, Margaret, faced such slanderous rumors: “The quene [Margaret] was defamed and desclaundered, that he that was called Prince [i.e., Edward of Lancaster], was nat hir sone, but a bastard gotten in avoutry…” By 1461 there were further rumors that reflected poorly on Queen Margaret. In two separate letters, Prospero di Camulio reported to the Duke of Milan that Margaret was supposedly planning to poison Henry, place her son on the throne, and marry the duke of Somerset – and that Henry himself marveled at the Prince’s birth, reputedly remarking that the boy “must be

202 Malory, 1046.
203 An English Chronicle, 79. Though the text says the prince is “nat hir sone,” the implication is that he is not her son with Henry VI; a few sentences later, it clearly identifies the Prince as “hyre sone.” See page 80.
the son of the Holy Spirit…” Given Henry VI’s monkish ways, this particular rumor held a certain potency: how would a chaste king produce a child? And if he had not, how had the queen become pregnant? Though most of this Yorkist propaganda dates from about 1460 – when the tensions were about to explode – there are a few early indications of questions regarding the Prince’s birth. Bale’s Chronicle says the “peple spake strangely” about it. There are other reports, however, that reflect a different account. Edmund Clere reported to John Paston I in January 1455 that, when presented with his son, the recently-recovered Henry (who had been in a fit of madness for the previous sixteen months or so) “hild vp his handes and thankid God þe rof.” Indeed, even if Henry did indeed say the “Holy Spirit” comment, there is an alternative explanation for it: in the spring of 1453, the queen had visited the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, a common destination for women praying for fertility. Henry may have been thankful for divine intervention rather than wondering at divine conception. Rumors regarding the birth of Edward of Lancaster and other royal figures will be considered later, but in general it is interesting to note the similarities in rumors over the course of the fifteenth century (and earlier/later periods). Eleanor Cobham and Jacquetta of Luxembourg supposedly used witchcraft to capture the hearts of powerful men and elevate their

204 Calendar of State Papers, vol. I, 58. Although one interpretation of this story allows for the suggestion that the child was not Henry’s (i.e., perhaps the monkish king had not been having sex with his wife, but naively believed that the Holy Spirit – and not another man – conceived the child), another interpretation could read Henry’s comment as an expression of his pious belief in the efficacy of prayer to the saints: in the spring of 1453, Margaret had made a visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, a frequent destination of women praying for fertility. See Helen E. Maurer, Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 43. Coincidentally, Queen Elizabeth Woodville made a similar journey to Walsingham in 1469, the year before she gave birth to her own first son. See J. L. Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship, 1443-1503 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

205 Six Town Chronicles, 141.


207 Maurer, Margaret of Anjou, 43.
families; various political enemies of Edward II, Richard II, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, Henry VI, and, later, the Princes in the Tower were accused of murder via hot spits in the fundament, starvation, and/or smothering with feather beds; Edward of Lancaster, Edward IV and Edward V were but three kings or heirs labeled bastards by their enemies. Rumor and slander, it seems, were often used as political weapons by those jealous of, or threatened by, someone else – and it is in this way that Hodges reads Aggravain’s attack on Lancelot and Guinevere.  

Perhaps the most dangerous thing about royal favoritism, however, is the jealousies it can provoke in others. These feelings are not limited to people who feel ostracized by the king; others who receive reasonable rewards might still feel slighted by the greater rewards heaped upon a favorite. Of course, physical rewards – lands, grants, offices, and such – are not the only objects of jealousy. Hodges again makes two interesting, and interrelated, points that merit expansion: that the early phases of the Wars of the Roses were often over royal advisors (and not possession of the crown itself) and that the accusation of adultery might have been a political strategy. It is worth recalling one comment Malory makes: “Wherefore quene Gwenyvere had [Lancelot] in grete favoure aboven all other knyghtis…” As with Henry VI’s favoring of Suffolk, there is little doubt that Guinevere’s overt favoritism of Lancelot incites the jealousies of others.

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208 To suggest further the political aspect of these rumors and charges of witchcraft, it is interesting to note that the witchcraft cases of Eleanor Cobham in 1441, Jacquetta of Luxembourg in 1470, and Elizabeth Woodville in 1483 all included woman from mismatched marriages: Cobham and Woodville were of considerably lower social standings than their husbands, and Jacquetta’s was of a considerable higher social standing than hers. This is not to say that there were no truth to the rumors – Cobham did own a medical/astrological book – but her political ambition and her husband’s influence have been cited as reasons behind the charge. See Griffiths, “The Trial of Eleanor Cobham,” 384-85. It is also widely believed that the charge against Joan of Navarre in 1419 was fabricated so that Henry V could utilize his mother’s dowager income in his war with France.

209 Hodges, “Guinevere’s Politics,” 64.

210 Malory, 253.
at court. Not too long before the Grail quest begins, Sir Dinadan tells Sir Gareth, “For sir Gawayne and his bretherne, excepte you, sir Gareth... prevayly they hate my lorde sir Launcelot and all his kyn, and grete pryvay dispyte they have at hym.”

A mere ten pages earlier in the text, Aggravain and Gaheris had killed three knights for saying that Lancelot was a better knight than Gawain; indeed, they reportedly kill Dinadan as well during the Grail quest (though he apparently makes a posthumous appearance at the healing of Sir Urré). At the beginning of Malory’s last book, he informs the readers that this hatred has expanded to include the queen: “For thys sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot...” This secret hatred seems odd considering an earlier suggestion of friendship between Lancelot and Gawain. When Merlin predicts that Lancelot will slay Gawain with Balin’s sword, he actually says, “And Launcelot with thys swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that shall be sir Gawayne.” Further evidence of this friendship can be seen in Gawain’s initial refusal to help his brothers trap Lancelot; in his initial defense of Lancelot’s actions in saving Guinevere from the stake; and in the letter he writes upon his deathbed to Lancelot, asking him to return to England to fight again for Arthur, “for all the love that ever was betwyxte us...” It is possible that the hatred Gawain supposedly held for Lancelot was more of a projection of the hatred Gawain’s brothers felt for the main rival at court – Gawain’s rival for political influence, which limited the favors he could provide for his own affinity. As Hodges points out, in the aftermath of the

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211 Malory, 700.  
212 Malory, 690-91, 615, 1148.  
213 Malory, 1161.  
214 Malory, 91.  
215 Malory, 1231. As discussed in Chapter Three, however, there is reason to believe that Gawain may feel some animosity toward Lancelot, but that he attempts to conceal it.
accusation, Gawain – and no longer Lancelot – becomes Arthur’s primary advisor.²¹⁶

Even if Gawain was satisfied with the status quo, his men were not, and did something about it. If Lancelot had been monopolizing the queen’s time and patronage, he is no longer able to do so from his ostracized position. Much like Suffolk in 1450, Lancelot finds that royal favoritism can lead to a bitter fall from grace, instigated by those who feel left out. Unfortunately for the kingdom at large, such falls typically come at the cost of the realm’s peace and stability.

Another way that favoritism can be dangerous is when it blinds the king, and thus negatively affects his ability to govern the realm in a satisfactory manner. In 1450, when widespread discontent led to Suffolk’s trial and murder, and the Jack Cade rebellion, the overt criticism was directed toward men like Suffolk – Henry VI was generally only indirectly criticized. As one poet put it, “pe kyng knowith not all.”²¹⁷ There were, however, indications that the king should know what was going on in the kingdom. The same poem features two ominous warnings. The first could be simply “advice,” but when read another way it could be seen as warning the king that he must be more responsible (or else?): “Be ware, kynge henre, how þou doos; / Let no lenger þy traitours go loos…”²¹⁸ More ominous, however, is the Latin verse (a common one) that seems attached at the end of the poem: “O rex, si rex es, rege te, vel eris sine re rex; / Nomen habes sine re, nisi te recte regas.”²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Hodges, “Guinevere’s Politics,” 64. Hodges says that Gawain’s affinity temporarily benefits from the adultery accusation, but it would appear almost a Pyrrhic victory since so many members are killed.
²¹⁷ “Advice to the Court, II (1450),” l. 15.
²¹⁸ “Advice to the Court, II (1450),” ll. 43-44.
²¹⁹ “Advice to the Court, II (1450),” ll. 61-62. I would like to thank Dr. Ryan Judkins for his translation of this passage; his suggestions and amendments to my original translation maintain, as he noted, the Latin’s alliteration and its linguistic rex/regere overlap. My translation was far less poetic.
rightly. In Malory’s *Morte*, there are suggestions that indicate Arthur knows what is going on between his wife and his leading knight but that his emotions cause him to filter information selectively. First, he was told even before his marriage to Guinevere that she would love someone else – and that someone was even identified for the king: “But Merlyon warned the kyng covertly that Gwenyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne…”

Second, Morgan le Fay had convinced Tristram to bear a suggestive shield in the tournament Arthur held at Harde Roche. This shield, portraying a knight standing on the heads of a king and a queen, was interpreted for Arthur by one of Morgan’s maidens: “Sir kynge, wyte you well thys shylde was ordained for you, to warn you of youre shame and dishonoure that longith to you and youre quene.”

Third, a letter written by King Mark (whose own wife, Isolde, was involved in an affair with his leading knight, Sir Trystram) chastised Arthur to mind his own business, and suggested that Arthur had his own problems to worry about; Arthur’s first thought was about his wife and Lancelot:

> And to begyn, the kyngis [i. e., Mark’s] lettirs spake wondirly shorte unto kynge Arthur, and bade hym entermete with hymself and wyth hys wyff, and of his knyghtes, for he was able to rule his wyff and his knyghtes.

> Whan kynge Arthure undirstode the lettir, he mused of many thynges, and thought of his systyrs wordys, quene Morgan le Fay, that she had seyde betwyxte quene Gwenyver and sir Launcelot, and in this thought he

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220 Malory, 97. For the suggestion that the word *covertly* might indicate that Merlin’s warning to Arthur about Lancelot is vague (as it is in the French), see Vinaver’s commentary, 1323-24.

221 Malory, 557. This shield was Morgan le Fay’s second attempt to expose the Lancelot/Guinevere affair; she tries to send a magical cup, from which no unfaithful lady could drink without spilling, to Arthur’s court, but Lamerok redirects it to Mark’s court. See 429-30.
studied a grete whyle. Than he bethought hym agayne how his owne sistir was his enemy, and that she hated the quene and sir Launcelot to the deth, and so he put that all oute of his thought.\footnote{Malory, 617.}

Because of his love for Guinevere and his admiration for Lancelot, Arthur rationalizes away the warnings. Still, he had his own deeply ingrained suspicions – even when Aggravain “reveals” the affair, Malory notes:

> For, as the Freynshe booke seyth, the kyng was full lothe that such a noyse shulde be uppon sir Launcelot and his quene; for the kyng had a demyng of hit, but he wold nat here thereoff, for sir Launcelot had done so much for hym and for the quene so many tymes that wyte you well the kynge loved hym passyngly well.\footnote{Malory, 1163.}

The implication is that Arthur would have dealt with the issue beforehand had not his personal feelings interfered. On the one hand, Arthur might be commended on not believing unproven allegations – and, indeed, he later tells Aggravain that he will not lightly believe the accusation against Lancelot unless “that he were takyn with the dede” (i.e., caught in the act).\footnote{Malory, 1163.} This follows Ashby’s advice that a king should not easily believe every thing he hears: “Light credence hath done muche harm & damage / In this world…”\footnote{Ashby, Active Policy, ll. 765-66. Also see ll. 758-71.} On the other hand, upon deeper inspection, Ashby’s advice also reveals how poorly Arthur has handled the situation. First, although kings should not believe all tales, he recommends, “Whan any man telleth you any tale, / Serche it priuely to haue trewe
Second, Ashby also advises against procrastination: “Delay no thyng to be doon bi reason, / Ne deferre it without cause resonable…” Third, if anything treasonous comes to light, Ashby says the king should “proceed sharply”: “And if thoffence touche the subuercion / Of the Realme, puttyng it in disturbance, / Procede sharply to deue execucion…” Arthur does none of these things – rather than inquire into the matter early in his reign, he opts to ignore the potential problem until forced to face it. At that time, it literally tears the kingdom apart. While writing to Edward of Lancaster, Henry VI’s son, Ashby condemns such inaction by the prince’s own father. The Yorkists had long attacked Henry’s covetous counselors, and Ashby states that the king’s inaction was responsible for the realm’s current troubles:

The high estate of oure king god preserue,
And if deuoided had folke couetous
From his persoune, his people had not sterue
With suche grete batellis dispiteous,
Whiche to here & telle is ful piteous. 229

Ashby is likely speaking of the dukes of Suffolk and Somerset, the primary targets of the Yorkist attacks on Henry’s government, and it would seem that they have little in common with Lancelot. This, however, is not necessarily the case, as there are some parallels to consider. Both men, for instance, have been linked adulterously with Queen Margaret; both were once considered the most powerful and/or influential men in the kingdom (though unlike Lancelot both were much dependent on the king); and both

228 Ashby, *Active Policy*, ll. 793-95.
229 Ashby, *Active Policy*, ll. 190-94.
incurred the jealousies of less-favored prominent men. Though Malory’s text seems to lay the blame for the fall of Camelot on different characters at various times – e.g., Aggravain, Gawain, Lancelot and Guinevere\textsuperscript{230} – Arthur is not blameless. His unwillingness to face the latent problems in the realm allowed them to fester and explode. Similarly, Henry VI – and later Edward IV – dealt ineffectively with problems. Henry VI’s inclination to adopt favorites created problems throughout the 1440s and 1450s. What conciliatory efforts he did make, such as exiling Suffolk in 1450 and the Love Day of 1458, were too little, too late. Suffolk was intercepted while on his way to the continent and beheaded; the peace celebrated by the Love Day lasted less than eighteen months before open war broke out. In neither case did Henry adequately deal with the underlying issues. As Malory’s text reveals, neither did Arthur.

4. “And that ys to me grete hevynes… that I was fleamed oute of thys londe”\textsuperscript{231}; Royal Ostracism and the Cases of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Sir Lancelot du Lake

As much as favoritism was a problem during the fifteenth century, so too was its opposite, ostracism. One might, in fact, argue that ostracism was the primary cause of the civil unrest in the period. Both Yorkist propaganda and sixteenth-century chronicles (as well as the Shakespearian plays based on those chronicles) trace the origins of the wars to the deposition of Richard II in 1399. In the late 1390s, Richard renewed his long-dormant interest in seeking revenge on the Lords Appellant and those associated with the

\textsuperscript{230} See Malory, 1154 (Aggravain), 1230 (Gawain), 1252 (Lancelot and Guinevere).
\textsuperscript{231} Malory, 1202-03.
Merciless Parliament a decade earlier (which, among other things, had attacked Richard’s favorites). In the uncertainty regarding Richard’s ultimate intentions and targets, the former Appellants Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk and Henry Bolingbroke, earl of Derby ended up accusing each other of treason in 1398. In response, Richard banished Mowbray for life and Bolingbroke for ten years. In February 1399, however, Bolingbroke’s father, the powerful John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, died; Richard seized Gaunt’s lands, effectively disinheriting Bolingbroke, and reportedly extended his exile for life. Bolingbroke’s response was to return to England while Richard was in Ireland, claim his inheritance, and – whether preplanned or not – take the throne. The concept of exile, then, played a large part in the deposition of Richard II. As one chronicle describes it: “And then were redde and declared mony notable and grete defautez þat Kynge Richard hadde don agaynes his othe and the lawes of þe reame, and how he hadde exiled and slayn his lordeþ… wherfor he wasse deposed.” The ostracism of Henry Bolingbroke – first by exiling him, then by discarding his hereditary rights – led not only to Richard’s deposition, but also to Henry IV’s legally tenuous claim to the throne. Henry’s usurpation gave later ostracized nobles a “legal” platform on which to plot against the king, dividing the realm on multiple occasions.

232 C. D. Fletcher points out that Richard never formally disinherited Bolingbroke, and that the only source we have to indicate that his exile had been extended for life is the anti-Ricardian St. Albans chronicler. See “Narrative and Political Strategies at the Deposition of Richard II,” Journal of Medieval History 30 (2004), 337-38.
234 Perhaps because Richard II had been only ten years old when he inherited the crown in 1377, few were interested in crowning the presumed heir after Richard’s deposition: the eight year old Edmund Mortimer, earl of March, descended of Edward III’s second son, Lionel of Clarence. Henry Bolingbroke was descended from Edward’s third son, John of Gaunt. Thus, Henry’s coronation bypassed the most likely line of succession. For the possibility, however, that Henry had a genuine claim to be Richard’s rightful heir, see Ian Mortimer, “Richard II and the Succession to the Crown,” History: The Journal of the Historical Association 91.303 (2006): 320-36. Mortimer suggests that Richard had long planned revenge on Henry, for his role in the Appellants in 1387.
It would be easy to discuss Richard, duke of York in the context of royal ostracism, as his own frustrations at being left out of Henry VI’s inner circle resulted in open rebellion and a rift in the kingdom. It would perhaps be more appropriate, however, to consider the case of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick; like Lancelot, Warwick was at one point the most powerful man in the realm, until he fell from the king’s favor.

Warwick was born into the powerful, northern-based Neville family, but his true wealth came from his beneficial marriage to Anne Beauchamp, the daughter and heir of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick. The earl died in 1439, and his son, Henry, duke of Warwick, died in 1446; Henry’s sole heir was a young daughter, Anne, who died in 1449. At that point, Henry’s sister, Anne, inherited the earldom – and her husband, Richard Neville, unexpectedly found himself an earl in right of his wife. But fifteenth century inheritances were often complicated (recall the Pastons’ fight for Caister Castle), and the new earl soon found himself at odds with Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset, who had also married into the Beauchamp family. This inheritance dispute was one reason that Warwick slowly began to align politically with Somerset’s enemy, the duke of York – who was married to Warwick’s aunt, Cecily Neville. By 1455, York and Warwick were steadfast allies, and at the first Battle of St. Albans three of their biggest rivals were among the few slain: Somerset; Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland; and Thomas Clifford, Lord Clifford (Northumberland’s ally). As we shall see in Chapter Three, this battle helped solidify some of the major feuds in the Wars of the Roses. York appointed Warwick Captain of Calais later that year, during his second protectorate – and Warwick turned that into a major Yorkist stronghold for the duration of the wars. As discussed

above, Warwick may have helped plan York’s claim to the throne in 1460; Warwick basically invaded England from Calais in June 1460, and even captured Henry VI after the Battle of Northampton on 10 July. This certainly eased York’s progress to London, where he claimed the crown; the peerage did not support this claim, but Warwick played a large role in formulating the Act of Accord that named York as Henry’s heir. Warwick further proved his importance to the Yorkist cause by helping York’s son, Edward, after York’s death at Wakefield on 30 December 1460. Warwick’s role in helping Edward win the throne in March 1461 solidified him as a pillar of the youthful Yorkist king’s new government (Edward was but eighteen when crowned king of England; his cousin Warwick was a more mature thirty-two). For the next several years, domestic and foreign accounts label Warwick as the real power behind the throne (see the quotes by Antonio de la Torre and Giovanni Pietro Cagnola of Lodi referenced above).

As we have also seen, however, Warwick’s position of power and influence did not last; it may not be appropriate, though, to label Edward’s marriage to Elizabeth Woodville as the singular cause of Warwick’s fall, as Grafton did in his chronicle. The rift likely occurred due to a variety of factors, such as: differences in foreign policy; Edward’s reputation for seeking pleasure over the irritants of duty; friction with other favorites like William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, and the queen’s Woodville relatives; the possibility, noted by Holinshed, that Edward had sought to seduce one of Warwick’s daughters; Edward’s refusal to let his brother George, duke of Clarence, marry Warwick’s daughter, Isabel; and Edward’s desire to separate himself from Warwick, to be seen as his own man. Regardless of the factors involved, Edward’s slow withdrawal

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236 Warwick’s own father, Richard Neville, earl of Salisbury, was executed in the aftermath of this battle.
from Warwick’s control did seem to infuriate the earl. In 1469, Warwick allied with Clarence – and allowed him to marry Isabel despite Edward’s opposition – and attempted to take control of the government. The two magnates were behind the Robin of Redesdale rebellion, and soon invaded England from Warwick’s base in Calais. After the Battle of Edgecote on 26 July 1469, Warwick executed Pembroke, as well as Edward’s father-in-law Richard Woodville, earl Rivers, and brother-in-law, Sir John Woodville. With much of the royal forces defeated, Warwick took Edward into custody. A parliament was called, and there were rumors that Warwick and Clarence sought to “deprive [Edward] from the crown,” though Sforza di Bettinis reported this to the duke of Milan from his position in France. Unfortunately for Warwick, the kingdom practically erupted with riots and rebellions. One of Warwick’s cousins, Sir Humphrey Neville, rebelled in the north in Henry VI’s name. Warwick could not raise the troops he needed without Edward’s authority, and was forced to free the king. Warwick and Edward made peace, but it proved to be short-lived – in 1470, Warwick and Clarence again rebelled, and this time their intention to dethrone Edward was clear. Initially, they were rebuffed: the Lincolnshire rebellion they incited was smashed at the Battle of Losecoat Field, so named because Warwick’s and Clarence’s men shed their liveried coats while running away. Warwick and Clarence fled to France, where Warwick was soon reconciled with Queen Margaret of Anjou and committed himself to restoring Henry VI to the throne. He even married his younger daughter, Anne, to Henry’s son, Edward of Lancaster. In September

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237 Calendar of State Papers, 132. This was reported by Sforza de Bettini; his information was not always very accurate, as the following year, when Edward was forced to flee England, de Bettini reported that “King Edward himself is dead.” See page 135. However, the deposition rumor in 1469 also is supported by a manifesto issued from Calais and rumors asserting Edward was a bastard. See Pollard, Warwick the Kingmaker, 66.
1470, Warwick and Clarence returned to England and garnered enough support in Henry’s name that now Edward had to flee the country, to Burgundy. Warwick went about securing England, but Queen Margaret delayed her coming. In March 1471, Edward returned, defeated first Warwick (at the Battle of Barnet, with Clarence’s help), and then the queen’s forces (at the Battle of Tewkesbury), which had arrived too late to help Warwick. Warwick, who “louyd dyuysion,” was dead; upon Edward’s return to London, Henry VI was quietly murdered in the Tower of London, thus ending the Wars of the Roses for the next twelve years.

Malory’s version of the Arthurian legend does not resemble fifteenth-century history in that the exiled Lancelot never plots to overthrow King Arthur – that, indeed, would have been quite a departure from the source material. Instead, Malory seems to alter his approach from examining the historical problems with over-mighty subjects to illustrating how they can be a part of solutions. The Morte portrays men of various ranks reacting in positive ways to royal ostracism, both early and late in the text. Whereas many of the issues discussed in this study are in the form of negative exempla – warnings of what could be in England’s future if things did not change – Malory seems to offer some positive examples of how ostracized nobles should behave. Early in the initial tale, The Tale of King Arthur, we are introduced to the character of Balin, who is described as a poor knight and a prisoner. Balin had killed one of Arthur’s cousins, and he is clearly not in favor with the king. Even after the barons secure Balin’s freedom, he seems to go out of his way to remain out of the limelight. Malory describes how he moves “pryvaly

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into the courte239 when the Damsel from the Lady of the Lake arrives, girt with a magic sword and asking worthy knights to attempt to relieve her of it (for, she says, it “doth me grete sorow and comberaunce”).240 Just as the damsel starts to leave the court, all the other knights having failed to draw the sword from the scabbard, Balin steps forward and asks to attempt it. After some hesitation (due to Balin’s poor raiment), she allows him to try; he succeeds, much to the wonder of the court. By accomplishing this marvelous task, Balin temporarily gains Arthur’s attention – but he quickly loses favor again when he slays the Lady of the Lake (who had apparently caused the death of Balin’s mother) in front of the king. Arthur takes this affront seriously indeed, warning Balin, “I shall never forgyff you that trespasse… Ye shall repent hit, for such anothir despite had I nevir in my courte. Therefore withdraw you oute of my courte in all the haste that ye may.”241 Balin responds to this exile not by plotting his revenge against the king who banishes him, but by thinking of a way to regain royal favor: “I woll hyghe me in all the haste that I may to mete with kyng Royns [i.e., Arthur’s enemy] and destroy hym, othir ellis to dye therefore. And iff hit may happe me to wynne hym, than woll kynge Arthure be my good frende.”242 Balin, with the help of his brother Balan, not only defeats King Rions in combat, but also plays a pivotal role in the battle against King Lot (so much so that Sir Lamerok seems to believe that Balin, rather than his own father King Pellinore, killed King Lot during the battle).243 These deeds not only help Balin to regain Arthur’s favor,

239 Malory, 63.
240 Malory, 61.
241 Malory, 66.
242 Malory, 66.
243 Malory, 612. Malory’s text seem clear that Pellinore kills Lot: “[K]ynge Pellinor smote [Lot] a grete stroke thorow the helme and hede unto the browis.” There is, perhaps, some room for doubt, as Malory also notes, after the Orkney hosts flees, “But kynge Pellinore bare the wyte of the deethe of kinge Lott…” (emphasis added). It is possible that Pellinore greatly wounded Lot, and someone else finished him off.
but they serve the realm as well. Balin’s response to royal ostracism is to serve, not to fight – and that would seem to be how Malory thinks ostracized nobles should behave.

But in many ways, Balin is a lesser knight – mighty of prowess, certainly, but poor and of meager status. Perhaps men of the gentry, like Malory himself, would see Balin as a mirror of sorts, but it is doubtful the kingdom’s elite would see themselves in such a humble knight. But Malory provides the elite, too, with examples of how to behave. First, recall the statement above that the barons secure Balin’s freedom. This is not the first time in the text that the barons serve as peacemakers between a king and one of his subjects. As discussed in the Introduction, Malory chose to begin his text not with the story of Merlin, nor with the story of Vortigern and the Saxons; instead, he begins his tale with a civil war between King Uther and a duke of Cornwall (also identified as the Duke of Tintagel). In the Morte’s first paragraph, Uther summons the Duke, and the second paragraph immediately informs us that “by the means of grete lordes they [i.e., Uther and the Duke] were accorded bothe…” Even after this peace falls apart – due to Uther’s lust for Igrayne, the Duke’s wife – and the Duke is killed in battle, the barons (not knowing of the king’s love for Igrayne) again play a role in bringing peace: “Thenne alle the barons by one assent prayd the kynge of accord betwixe the lady Igrayne and hym.” Granted, after Uther’s death the barons’ greed for power overtakes their desire for peace – after all, “many wende to have ben kyng” – but while there is an accepted

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244 Radulescu suggests that Balin does indeed serve as an inspiration for gentry with noble aspirations. He is, after all, a knight whose nobility is found in his heart rather than in his status or clothes. She also points to a marginal note in the Winchester manuscript that suggests Malory’s early readers may have interpreted this section of the Morte in this way: “Vertue and manhode ys hyed wythin the bodye.” See Gentry Context, 88-90.
245 Malory, 7.
246 Malory, 9.
247 Malory, 12.
king on the throne, the barons work to maintain harmony in the realm. It is also worth noting, however, that in Arthur’s reign, the barons do not attempt to convince Arthur to make peace with Rome (which demands tribute from England). In this case, when the threat originates from outside the kingdom, the barons are prepared to defend the realm vigorously. Recall from the Introduction that magnates served as pillars of the realm. In Malory’s *Morte*, magnates led by a king typically behave well; it is when left without leadership – or when the legitimacy of that leader is in question – that their ambition gets out of hand. Malory’s positive examples of baronial behavior, though, extend to magnates who find themselves ostracized by the king: Lancelot, once the royal favorite, loses his position of primacy at court in the aftermath of the queen’s adultery trial. His behavior is in stark contrast to that of many fifteenth-century magnates in similar positions.

As seen above, when Warwick found himself on the outs with Edward IV, he turned to violence and rebellion – much as Richard, duke of York and Henry Bolingbroke had before him. In Malory’s text, it would be understandable if Lancelot rebelled in such a way. On one occasion, Queen Guinevere exiles him from court; on another, King Arthur banishes him. Of course, in Malory’s sources Lancelot never rebels – his only act of “aggressive” confrontation with Arthur is when he saves Guinevere from the flames after she is accused of treason. Even this act appears to be no grave offense, as Malory later notes: “Full fayne [Arthur] wolde have bene acorded with sir Launcelot…” Yet we might wonder why Malory did not have Lancelot actively rebel against Arthur; that surely would have made Lancelot more reminiscent of contemporary figures like

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248 Malory, 1194.
Warwick. Elsewhere Malory proved willing to alter his source material to suit his own purposes and vision (e.g., moving the war with Rome to the beginning, rather than keeping it at the end, of Arthur’s reign), and rebellious over-mighty subjects were relevant at the time (and Malory already had a rebellious subject in his sources: Mordred). Plus, if we accept the hypothesis that Malory was concerned about the fate of England, it is perfectly understandable that he kept close to his sources regarding the nature of Lancelot’s interactions with Arthur near the end of the text. Malory saw that Lancelot offered a mirror for ostracized magnates, one more likely to catch their attention than the lowly Balin. It is interesting that Lancelot tries his best to avoid conflict with Arthur. When besieged at Joyous Garde, Lancelot voices his reluctance to fight his king: “‘God defende me,’ seyde sir Launcelot, ‘that ever I shulde encounter wyth the moste noble kynge that made me knyght.’”

Lancelot endures fifteen weeks of siege at Joyous Garde and six months at Benwick, avoiding battle as long as he can. It is only when his own followers, concerned for Lancelot’s honor as well as their own, tell him he must fight or lose their service that Lancelot leaves the walls of Joyous Garde to make war on Arthur’s forces. Even then, he tries to convince Arthur and Gawain to stay out of the battle (though both refuse to do so). Lancelot’s behavior is markedly different from the historical magnates of this period, many of whom rationalized that war against the king was not treasonous if it were in response to aggressions by the king. Discussing the narratives of Henry IV’s 1399 usurpation, C. D. Fletcher states, “These accounts seek to have it assumed that, because Henry had been disinherited, he was perfectly justified in

249 Malory, 1187.
250 See Malory, 1190-91.
using force against the king if he was denied redress.” Similarly, the Yorkists frequently postured themselves as innocent defendants. For example, Richard, duke of York supposedly said before the Battle of St. Albans in 1455:

Seris the king our soveraigne lorde will nat be reformed at oure beseching ne praier… but oonly is in full purpos to destroye us all. And therupon a grete othe hathe made that ther is noon other weye but that he with all his poweire will pursue us and yif we be taken to geve us ashamedfull detthe, lesing oure livelood and goodis and also our heires shamed for evur. Therefore sires now sethe it will noon otherwise be but that we shall utterly dye, bettir it is to us to dye in the felde, than cowardly tobe put unto an utter rebuke and shamefull detthe…

York goes on to pray that through God’s grace, “We mow be made stronge to withstonde the grete, abhominable and horrible malice of theim that perpose to destroye us…” In Malory’s text, however, it is more honorable to retreat than to face one’s king in open battle – at least until left with no other choice.

There are, of course, some scholars who believe that Lancelot is wrongly accused, and that there is no physical evidence of an ongoing affair between him and the queen. The extent to which one subscribes to these arguments will make a difference in how one

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251 Fletcher, “Narrative and Political Strategies,” 328.
254 See, for example, Kennedy, “Adultery in Malory.” As noted above, Kenedy does acknowledge one sexual encounter between Lancelot and Guinevere. See 78-79. For the argument that Malory leaves open the question of whether or not Lancelot and Guinevere committed adultery (and the “unknowbability of the past”), see Robert S. Sturges, “Epistemology of the Bedchamber: Textuality, Knowledge, and the Representation of Adultery in Malory and the Prose Lancelot,” Arthuriana 7.4 (1997): 47-62.
views Lancelot: a treasonous subject or an oppressed one. Lancelot certainly paints himself as an oppressed subject rather than a rebellious one. When Arthur and Gawain arrive at the gates of Joyous Garde, Lancelot ends his initial speech by bidding Arthur, “Take your quene unto youre good grace, for she ys both tru and good.” Later, when the Bishop of Rochester brokers a partial truce between the parties, Lancelot delivers the queen with the statement, “Sir, hit was never in my thought… to withholde the quene frome my lorde Arthur, but I kepe her for thys cause: insomuche as she shulde have be brente for my sake, mesemed hit was my parte to save her lyff and put her from daungere tyll bettir recover might com.” His posturing as an oppressed subject makes his refusal to fight all the more impressive. It is doubtful, of course, that Lancelot was without fault – he does willingly sleep with Elaine, Galahad’s mother, twice when he is tricked into believing she is Guinevere. The queen even forgives him of the first time after he explained how he thought he was with her. But strictly speaking, Lancelot and Guinevere were not caught in the act by Aggravain and Mordred’s ambush. He was, arguably, wrongfully convicted if not wrongfully accused. It is in this sense of technical innocence that Malory’s Lancelot provides a positive example of an ostracized over-mighty subject. As just discussed, Lancelot seeks to avoid open conflict for as long as possible, and even offers generous reparations to Gawain. He does warn, however, that there is a limit to his restraint: “For I woll allwayes fle that noble kynge that made me

255 Malory, 1188.
256 Malory, 1195.
257 See Malory, 794-95 for Galahad’s conception; 802, where “the quene hylde sir Launcelot exkused” for sleeping with Elaine while believing it was Guinevere herself; and 804-05 for Lancelot’s second romantic encounter with Elaine.
knyght; and when I may no farther, I must nedis deffende me."²⁵⁸ Ideally, then, an over-mighty subject should avoid open battle with the king through any means necessary: offering generous reparations, retreating to his own lands, refusing to do battle until a siege threatens the lives of the defenders. This is not, typically, what historical over-mighty subjects did in the fifteenth century. More often than not, aggrieved peers took the fight to the king. Consider but a few examples of peers raising armies against the king: Henry Bolingbroke in 1399; Henry “Hotspur” Percy in 1403; Richard, duke of York in 1452, 1455, 1459, 1460; the Kingmaker in 1469 and 1470. Such larger conflicts do not include numerous Mortimer plots, such as those in 1405, 1415, and 1424, or the possible peer-backed revolts of the commons, such as those in 1450, 1469, and 1470. Conversely, Malory’s text endorses actively seeking to regain the king’s favor through deeds of great service, or taking defensive positions while attempting to negotiate. Such actions help unify, rather than divide, the realm.

Just as Malory seems to explore the difficulties kings faced in making tough decisions – such as Arthur’s reluctance to burn Guinevere, but acknowledging that he must uphold the law – so, too, does he explore the concerns ostracized nobles must have had regarding their place not only in the kingdom but in history. There is ample evidence that the mighty were cognizant of their places in history, and that they were encouraged to be so. The concern for reputation can be seen in Old English battle poems like “The Battle of Maldon,” where the heroic are commemorated and the cowardly are publicly denounced,²⁵⁹ and chivalric chronicles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which

²⁵⁸ Malory, 1214.
likewise name both valorous knights and, occasionally for political purposes, cowards.\textsuperscript{260}

Perhaps more interestingly, powerful families often kept their own genealogical texts in the forms of pedigrees, chronicles, and such, which typically served as family propaganda.\textsuperscript{261} Mirrors for princes often directed kings and kings-to-be to history, sometimes even placing an importance on chronicles equal to that on Scripture when it came to learning how to govern.\textsuperscript{262} Ashby, for example, tells Prince Edward to read chronicles filled with stories of his ancestors: “Beholde eke youre noble progenitours, / How victorious thei were in corage, / How Iuste, how sad & eke wise… / Whos werkes be cronicled to their fame.”\textsuperscript{263} At the same time, such texts warn their readers that their deeds shall likewise be chronicled for future generations:

\begin{quote}
Suche as ye be, so shall ye be taken,
Youre dedys & werkes shal prove al thing,
Wele or evyl thei shalbe awaken,
In chronicles youre Rule rehersyng,
Either in preisyng either in blamyng.\textsuperscript{264}
\end{quote}

In Malory’s \textit{Morte}, Lancelot recognizes that deeds will be remembered, and worries about how his own reputation will be affected by his fall from favor:

\begin{quote}
Than, my fayre felowys… I muste departe oute of thys moste noble realme. And now I shall departe, hit grevyth me sore, for I shall departe with no worship; for a fleymed man departith never oute of a realme with
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{260} See Given-Wilson, \textit{Chronicles}, particularly 99-111.
\textsuperscript{261} For one study of a medieval family’s genealogical texts, see Matthew Holford, “Family, Lineage and Society: Medieval Pedigrees of the Percy Family,” \textit{Nottingham Medieval Studies} LII (2008): 165-90.
\textsuperscript{262} Ashby, \textit{Active Policy}, ll. 204-10.
\textsuperscript{263} Ashby, \textit{Active Policy}, ll. 148-50, 153.
\textsuperscript{264} Ashby, \textit{Active Policy}, ll. 232-36.
no worship. And that ys to me grete hevynes, for ever I feare aftir my
dayes that men shall cronycle uppon me that I was fleamed oute of thys
londe.²⁶⁵

This lament would seem to have a particular resonance with Malory’s English readers.
According to Adam Usk, Richard II lamented (in very Malorian-style sentiments), “My
God, this is a strange and fickle land, which has exiled, slain, destroyed and ruined so
many kings, so many rulers, so many great men, and which never ceases to be riven and
worn down by dissensions and strife and internecine hatreds.”²⁶⁶ England, it seems, had a
reputation for destroying its great men – and itself, with civil strife. Shortly after
Malory’s death, his contemporary Richard Neville, earl of Warwick would be castigated
in The Historie of the Arrivall of King Edward IV: “Here after folowethe the mannar how
the moaste noble and right victorious prince Edwarde… reconqueryd the sayde realme,
upon and agaynst th’Erle of Warwicke, his traytor and rebel…”²⁶⁷ Certainly Lancelot
expects similar treatment at the hands of Arthur’s chroniclers (who, as we know, are
active in the realm; they are shown at their work several times in the Morte),²⁶⁸ as his
enemies had already made a point of loudly announcing, repeatedly, his shameful
presence in Guinevere’s chamber: “Traytour knyght, com oute of the quenys chambir!”²⁶⁹
Lancelot begs his attackers to cease their “shamefull cry and noyse,”²⁷⁰ offering to appear

²⁶⁵ Malory, 1202-03.
Clarendon Press, 1997), 65. The Latin, on p. 64, reads: “O Deus, hec est mirabilis terra et inconstans, quia
tot reges, tot presules, totque magnates exulauit, interficit, destrucit, et depredauit, semper discensionibus
et discordiis mutuisque inuidiis continue infecta et laborans.”
²⁶⁷ Historie of the Arrivall, 147.
²⁶⁸ See, for example, Malory, 188 (when Rome’s emissaries arrive at court), 1036 (at the end of the quest
for the Holy Grail).
²⁶⁹ Malory, 1166.
²⁷⁰ Malory, 1166.
before the king to face the charges if they will only keep quiet. He knows that once driven from the land he can expect no better treatment in chronicles – and that his reputation will be permanently damaged.

If Malory gives gentry knights and noble magnates positive examples of how to respond to royal ostracism – in the characters of Balin and Lancelot – then he also gives kings a lesson in not ostracizing or exiling his greatest subjects. After all, a final problem associated with royal ostracism is the potential loss one of the realm’s greatest defenders. Gawain recognizes this truth whilst lying upon his deathbed. Knowing that Arthur will face the rebellious Mordred in battle, he laments: “For had that noble knyght, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne; for he, thorow hys noble knyghthode and hys noble blood, hylde all youre cankyrde enemyes in subjeccion and daungere.”

Instead, with Lancelot driven from the realm, and Arthur and Gawain both on the continent to do battle against him, Mordred seizes the throne with little opposition. As mentioned above, late medieval England had seen exiled peers “invade” the realm and back domestic uprisings. Discontented Lancastrian lords were always a threat to Edward IV’s rule; in Wales, for example, Harlech Castle remained a Lancastrian stronghold from Edward’s accession on 4 March 1461 until 14 August 1468. During the 1468 troubles between Edward and Warwick – about the time of the Cornelius Plot, with which Malory and Warwick have potential connections – the French king Louis XI supported the landing of a Lancastrian force, led by Jasper Tudor, at Harlech Castle. Considering that there were rumors of a brewing

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271 Malory, 1230.
272 Field, Life and Times, 139-43. Field surmises Malory (and possibly Warwick) may have been connected to the Cornelius Plot based on his associations with some of the other men implicated, such as John, Lord Wenlock.
reconciliation between Warwick and Queen Margaret as early as 1467, it is possible that this French-sponsored expedition was made possible by Warwick’s increasing marginalization. Though Edward dealt with both Tudor’s forces and the Cornelius Plot very quickly, both were signs of growing discontent with his reign. Two years later, the ostracized Warwick and George, duke of Clarence would invade England and force Edward himself into exile. With one of his most powerful lords dead (Warwick had executed Edward’s father-in-law, Richard Woodville, Earl Rivers, in 1469) and another with unreliable loyalty – John Neville, Marquis of Montagu, Warwick’s brother, initially seemed to oppose Warwick’s invasion force, but joined it shortly after it landed – the king found he had little enough support to withstand the combined might of Warwick and Clarence. The circumstances in which Edward’s throne was coming under attack around the time Malory was completing his Morte do not parallel those in which Arthur finds his own throne usurped, but much like Edward’s England Arthur’s had been depleted of its most stalwart defenders. But even if this developing situation had not yet caught Malory’s attention, he may have been thinking of another, very relevant, era of English history. Returning to the events of 1399 detailed at the beginning of this section, it is worth noting that Richard II’s throne was taken from him while he was absent, in Ireland. By ostracizing not only Henry Bolingbroke, but also Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk, and numerous other peers (with his callous seizing of Henry’s inheritance), Richard had few defenders to help him retain his throne. According to one recent biographer,

\[273\] See Pollard, Warwick, 61-63.
Richard’s actions against his enemies – and perceived enemies – helped set the stage for his own deposition.\textsuperscript{274}

Sir Thomas Malory witnessed first hand the divisions caused by the favoritism and ostracism of magnates during the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV. If he served as M.P. in the sessions from 1449-1451, as Field suggests,\textsuperscript{275} then he participated in the impeachment of William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk. Considering the Commons’ attitude toward Suffolk, it would be surprising if Malory did not feel a certain amount of distaste for the duke himself. He also would have witnessed Thomas Young’s request in 1451 that Richard, duke of York be named Henry VI’s heir – a request that promptly ended the parliament and landed Young in the Tower of London.\textsuperscript{276} Field has linked Malory to the duke of York at that time,\textsuperscript{277} so Malory might well have felt the chilliness with which York’s name was met in that parliament. As an adherent of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick in the 1460s, he certainly would have seen the ups and downs of royal favor – accompanying both Edward IV and Warwick to besiege the Lancastrian-held castles at Alnwick, Bamburgh, and Dunstanborough,\textsuperscript{278} but later, after magnate and king had fallen out with each other, perhaps plotting with Warwick against Edward.\textsuperscript{279} The upshot of this possible plotting was another prison term, which this time included being singled out of Edward’s general pardons of 1468 and after. Many critics, however, see Malory as a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item[275] Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 94-104.
\item[277] Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 98.
\item[278] Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 129.
\item[279] Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 139-43.
\end{thebibliography}
rather non-partisan, nonjudgmental writer. Field, for example, says that Malory’s tale is
told “with hints of compassion for human weakness” and a “generosity of spirit” that
could encompass both Lancastrian and Yorkist adherents. Edward Donald Kennedy
similarly suggests that Malory’s Camelot, for the most part, falls through “the errors of
people who are basically good…” There are many reasons to support this sentiment.
First, as noted above, Malory’s text does not lay blame on any one character, but notes
that several share responsibility. Second, the Morte demonstrates how kings, queens, and
magnates can disrupt the realm – or preserve its unity. Both Henry VI and Edward IV
favored certain nobles, and ostracized others; often the favorites abused their influence,
while the ostracized responded with violence. At different times, Malory’s Morte
provides both negative exempla as warnings of the division that can occur from the
interactions of kings and magnates, and positive ones that provide mirrors for unifying
behavior.

280 P. J. C. Field, “Fifteenth-Century History in Malory’s Morte Darthur,” Malory: Texts and Sources,
Arthurian Studies 40 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), 69, 71. Field does say that if Malory is critical of
any specific person, it is Richard, duke of York. See Field, “Fifteenth-Century History,” 71; Life and
Times, 173.

281 Edward Donald Kennedy, “Malory’s Morte Darthur: A Politically Neutral Adaptation of the Arthurian
CHAPTER THREE

PRIVATE FEUDS

Charles Moorman argues that there are three main plot lines in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*: “the Lancelot-Guinevere affair, the quest of the Holy Grail, and the feud between the houses of King Lot and King Pellinore…”¹ Moorman points out that even though each plot is represented in Malory’s sources—as, indeed, are many of the episodes and details provided within each plot—it is important to keep in mind just how much of his source material Malory rejected. The *Morte* is, after all, a greatly reduced version of the Arthurian legend, assembled from (or influenced by) as many as thirty-five diverse sources.² As Moorman suggests, “By the very act of choosing to keep an incident or a speech, Malory is giving it an importance and an emphasis in his own work far beyond that which it claimed in the source.”³ This point combines well with R. M. Lumiansky’s recognition of Malory’s authorial prerogative in handling source material:

> In such an examination we must observe what Malory borrowed *verbatim* from the source, what he altered, what he omitted, and what he added. The

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fundamental assumption is that in each of these aspects of his work
Malory was consciously aware of his handling of the source. He controlled
the source; it did not control him, for he could have handled it in an
infinite number of ways had he so desired.  

Malory demonstrates his authorial prerogative on multiple occasions, perhaps most
noticeably when he moves the war with Rome to the start of Arthur’s career so that later
he can utilize the Lancelot/Guinevere affair as the instigation of the fall of Camelot. In
doing this, Malory does indeed highlight the affair as one of the major “plots” of Arthur’s
reign. Similarly, Malory’s handling of the feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore
allows it toloom larger in the Morte than in the earlier versions of the legend – and his
own additions to this plot line serve to highlight the feud even further. Given the political
contexts of Malory’s day, it is unlikely that this emphasis is accidental.

Although Moorman does not directly link the feuds in the Morte with the
historical feuds of fifteenth-century England, Nellie Slayton Aurner does just this – and
she particularly links Malory’s feuds with the ongoing dynastic conflict between
Lancaster and York. She suggests, “Malory’s choice of material makes the destruction of
the Round Table due to feuds whose seeds were planted during the establishment of
Arthur’s claim, just as the downfall of the Lancastrian line came about.” In Aurner’s
mind, Charles Oman’s description of the Wars of the Roses as “a great faction fight for
power between the two family alliances of over-great baronial houses led by York and

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Somerset readily mirrors the Camelot-crippling conflict between the houses of Lot and Ban at the end of the *Morte*. Considering the “over-mighty subjects” context of this present study, this interpretation combined with Moorman’s observations has some appeal – it would, indeed, be tempting to accept Aurner’s conclusion: “A faithful son of fifteenth-century England, [Malory] made his book the classic expression of his age.”

While Aurner’s reading of the *Morte* as a Lancastrian allegory fails to convince, some of her general points – such as the one regarding feuds – merit consideration. It is worth considering, for example, R. L. Storey’s assertion that the Wars of the Roses were “the outcome of an escalation of private feuds.”

Even Aurner’s critic Peter Field admits that there is a noticeable similarity between the realities of Malory’s day and his fiction: “Malory presents the rivalries between the houses of Lot, Pellinore, and Ban in a way that recalls the feuding affinities of great lords in the later middle ages.” Unlike Aurner, however, Field does not see a close connection between the literary and historical feuds; he cautions that the similarities are not strong enough to require the reader to make any such connections. Yet Field’s argument – like Aurner’s – is not wholly convincing.

It is Field’s opinion that Malory’s changes – while perhaps influenced by some of his own, personal experiences – are for literary purposes, and are not intended to produce direct parallels with his time. Many of Field’s arguments against the historical and fictional parallelism are linked to the ongoing argument regarding Malory’s political

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allegiances: the attempts to label the author as either a Lancastrian or a Yorkist supporter. Like Edward Donald Kennedy, Field sees the Morte as a rather non-partisan text.\(^\text{10}\) He sees the Morte’s “even-handed sympathies”\(^\text{11}\) as an indication that even Malory’s most apparent historical allusions are more coincidental (and literary) than purposeful. But Field also suggests Malory is “as temperamentally more inclined to admire than to condemn,” and that the Morte contains “a chivalrous generosity of spirit that could encompass both [the Lancastrians and the Yorkists].”\(^\text{12}\) From this interpretation, it is not too large a leap to suggest that Malory’s non-partisan, non-critical text expresses an overall concern for the kingdom: it warns against the dangers of division. In this light, Field’s admission that “even if no extended part of the Morte Darthur allegorizes Malory’s time, he may still have had particular events and persons in mind”\(^\text{13}\) gains new potency. Even if the contemporary allusions discussed by Field are not intended to be partisan, as critics like Aurner, W. H. Schoefield, or Richard R. Griffith have argued, they can still serve to create an atmosphere of familiarity – one which would allow the reader to associate the problems of Arthur’s kingdom with those of his or her own day.\(^\text{14}\) Indeed, an atmosphere of familiarity may have been all Malory wished to present. As Kennedy points out: “Given the uncertainty of the political situation, any intelligent person would have realized that this would have been no time to make enemies, no time to be writing


\(^{11}\) Field, “Fifteenth-Century History,” 70.


\(^{13}\) Field, “Fifteenth-Century History,” 50.

\(^{14}\) For the political readings referred to, see W. H. Schoefield, *Chivalry in English Literature: Chaucer, Malory, Spenser and Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1912); Richard R. Griffith, “The Political Bias of Malory’s ‘Morte Darthur,’” *Viator* 5 (1974): 365-86. As discussed in the Introduction, Schoefield was an early proponent of Malory as a Lancastrian, Stewart of Malory as a Yorkist.
political propaganda that would alienate either side.”

But if Malory was trying to create an atmosphere of familiarity, the allusions cannot be said to be strictly coincidental or literary, as Field asserts; they may not be overt enough to parallel contemporary events or figures directly, but they do parallel them enough to recall the anxieties of the day. Considered in this way, the feuds between the houses of Lot and Pellinore and Lot and Ban, as well as numerous smaller conflicts in the text, become recognizable problems facing fifteenth-century England. As with his handling of the issues of royal favoritism and ostracism, Malory’s representation of feuds serves as a warning that division can lead to the fall of even the greatest kingdoms – a too-familiar prospect to his contemporary readers. John Lydgate’s *The Serpent of Division* provides but one example of late medieval English applications of Matthew 12:25:

> Criste hymselfe recordith in scripture
> That euery londe and euery region
> Whiche is devided may no while endure,
> But turne in haste to desolacion.

Or, as John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* puts it, “Division, the Gospell seith, / On hous upon another leith, / Til that the regne al overthrowe.” This popular image of a kingdom’s fall through division was particularly apropos at the time during which Malory wrote the *Morte*, as indicated by the numerous feuds and dynastic conflict of the day. This chapter first examines the conditions that made feuds so prevalent and dangerous in

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fifteenth-century England, and then turns to two common and interrelated causes of feuds: the struggles for property and influence. Finally, it considers why the blood feud—a rare occurrence, despite popular conceptions of the period—was so prominent in the contemporary mind.

1. “And for thys cause we felle at debate”\(^{19}\): Preconditions for Feuds in Fifteenth-Century England

Historians generally agree that English private feuds increased in both number and scale during the fifteenth century.\(^{20}\) Certainly, rivalries and feuds were nothing new to England: Richard II’s court was rife with faction, for example, and the so-called Despenser War of 1321 was not completely unlike the later Percy-Neville feud. Nor does fifteenth-century England stand out among its neighbors, as contemporary France, Castile, and Aragon also endured factional disorder.\(^{21}\) Yet the concept of the feud is indelibly linked with the Wars of the Roses in particular. In part, this is due to the depictions of the period by later Tudor chronicles and the history plays of William Shakespeare, which all stress the themes of division and unity. In *Richard III*,

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Shakespeare’s King Henry VII, immediately after winning the crown at the Battle of Bosworth Field, describes the internal division and violence of the previous decades:

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\begin{align*}
\text{England hath long been mad, and scarred herself;} \\
\text{The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood;} \\
\text{The father rashly slaughtered his own son;} \\
\text{The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire…}^{22}
\end{align*}
\]

Such dramatizations depict the fifteenth century as a time of violent civil war. Modern scholars tend to downplay such violence by demonstrating just how short the actual military campaigns were, and that the nobility’s extinction rate was no higher than at other times. But there is evidence that Malory’s contemporaries viewed the day’s political situation in much the same way that their Tudor descendants would: a kingdom torn apart by factionalism.\(^{23}\) For example, John Whethamstede, abbot of St. Albans, attributes the first phase of the Wars of the Roses to the rivalry between Richard, duke of York and Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset.\(^{24}\) More poignantly, the contemporary *Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, formerly attributed to William Worcester, describes the Neville-Percy feud as “the beginning of the greatest sorrows in England.”\(^{25}\) Even some modern scholars note that during this period multiple feuds “attained the proportions of


private wars.”²⁶ Such feuds were not isolated events constrained to a single troublesome region. Examples can be found throughout the kingdom: the Neville-Percy feud in the north; the Courtenay-Bonville rivalry in the West Country; the Stafford-Harcourt conflict in Oxfordshire; the Mowbray-Paston dispute in the east. Interestingly enough, just as modern scholarship indicates that the king and the nobility typically maintained harmonious relationships (rather than antagonistic ones), so too does it indicate that most magnates tended to avoid friction when possible.²⁷ In this light, the increase in feuds during the fifteenth century deserves particular consideration and analysis.

As Michael Hicks notes, certain sources of conflict were always present; land disputes and “overlapping jurisdictions and spheres of influence”²⁸ are two examples. Both issues, discussed below, are prominent in fifteenth-century feuds – but since they are also present in earlier (and later) feuds, such as the fourteenth-century Despenser War mentioned above, they can hardly be held responsible for the increase in the number and scale of feuds in the fifteenth century. We should, then, look elsewhere for the underlying causes for the escalation of private feuds. In a recent study on the Wars of the Roses, Hicks applies the concepts of preconditions, precipitants, and triggers – which Lawrence Stone used to analyze the outbreak of the English Civil War in the seventeenth-century – to the troubles of the fifteenth century.²⁹ This useful approach recognizes the complex nature of historical study, particularly when attempting to ascertain the “causes” of such conflicts as the Wars of the Roses or the English Civil War. It can also be adapted,

²⁶ Storey, End of the House of Lancaster, 8.
²⁸ Hicks, Bastard Feudalism, 178-79.
however, to examine broader historical trends. This present study does not have the space to consider the precipitants or the triggers for each major feud of the fifteenth century, but I do wish to consider briefly the preconditions that allowed private feuds to escalate when they did. As with anything this complex, there were multiple factors involved, but three are worth consideration here: the financial crisis of the day, the expansion of bastard feudalism, and the weakness of the crown.

The financial crisis of the mid-fifteenth century was two-pronged, involving both unavoidable and avoidable factors. Among the unavoidable factors was the ongoing economic recession. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the recession increased the nobility’s reliance on royal patronage, which, in turn, increased competition among the elite and created fertile conditions for feuds. There was little anyone could have done to prevent the recession. The Black Death of 1348-50 had substantially reduced the working population – by as much as 50% or more, according to some estimates – and frequent re-visitations of the plague prevented a full recovery. The reduction in the workforce produced such problems as high wages combined with low rents, both of which negatively impacted the nobility. Variations in crop yields, influenced by the uncontrollable weather, frequently created either shortages or excesses of food – the former could further reduce the workforce, while the latter could drive prices even lower.

In her study of Warwickshire, Christine Carpenter notes that in addition to the high wages, low rents, and generally low grain prices, “even the hitherto quite buoyant market

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30 For a brief discussion of the effects of the population decline in England, see Watts, The Making of Polities, 218-25.
for the products of animal husbandry slumped.” Carpenter notes that, for the Warwickshire elite, “income and rent levels reached their nadir in the middle of the century…” Not all regions of the kingdom were hit equally hard, nor hit at the same time, but most areas were affected at some point, to some degree. But the domestic situation was not the only concern for the English – the recession on the continent negatively impacted English trade through war-related embargos and decreasing demand and sales in foreign markets. R. H. Britnell notes that although cloth exports had reached a zenith in the early 1440s, they had fallen almost fifty percent by 1460 as the continental recession worsened. Scholars have pointed out that not all the nobility suffered from the recession: other factors, like political favor, inheritance, and beneficial marriages, allowed some families to enrich themselves during this period. But such rare examples of success stories do not cancel the effects of the generally poor economic conditions on the majority of the population – and it is worth considering whether these exceptions proved a source of envy for the less fortunate. Indeed, studies by M. M. Postan, T. B. Pugh and Charles Ross are among those who suggest that many of the English nobility were in financial distress in the mid-fifteenth century.

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34 Britnell, “The Economic Context,” 44. Britnell points out that a small portion of the foreign trade problems were actually England’s own fault: acts of English piracy led to problems with the Hanseatic League that required some diplomacy to solve. See p. 45.
If the nobility felt a financial crunch, the crown did as well – Henry VI’s wartime debt reached £370,000 by 1450. A certain portion of this amount can be blamed on the mismanagement of funds – or, more accurately, perhaps, on Henry’s excessive generosity – but not all of it. Recall that Edward III’s wartime debt reached a similarly staggering £300,000. For all his faults, Henry VI was not completely to blame for the crown’s debt; the war with France, inherited from Henry V, would have strained the kingdom’s resources regardless of who wore the crown. Even Henry V, admired by contemporaries and modern scholars alike, often dealt with financial difficulties through excessive taxation and loans. Both sources had limitations that would eventually be reached; J. L. Kirby, for example, notes that by 1417, “The supply of money for loans on a large scale was already drying up.” In fact, after 1417, the largest single loan to come from London sources – Henry V’s second-leading source of loans, after Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester – was £2,000, given on 13 May 1421. The evidence leads Kirby to conclude that while Henry V remained a popular king, the populace was growing less enthusiastic about funding the king’s war. Had Henry V lived another ten years, he likely would have accumulated a debt comparable to (or greater than) that of his son; it is estimated he had already borrowed £140,000 by the time of his death in 1422. This borrowed amount, accumulated in less than ten years, was on top of the excessive taxes and fines Henry imposed on his people. For comparison, Henry VI had, technically, been on the throne for twenty-eight years by 1450, three times longer than his father’s reign. If Henry

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41 Kirby, “Henry V and the City of London,” 231.
V had continued borrowing money at the same rate (though there is no way of knowing if he would have), his own debt may very well have exceeded £400,000. Henry V, that shooting star of English kings who shined brightly for a brief period, may have solidified his long-term reputation by dying young – before the cost of his martial reputation came due in full. After all, although war was avoidable, the costs associated with it were not; Henry VI had inherited his father’s war, which had been continued in his name during his infancy and minority. For Henry VI, much of his wartime debt was unavoidable.

The avoidable causes of the financial crisis, however, rest primarily on Henry VI’s shoulders. As discussed in Chapter Two, his excessive generosity resulted in a substantial decrease in crown revenue. Whereas Richard II’s revenue reached approximately £120,000 late in his reign, Henry VI’s income stood at £33,000 by mid-century.\(^{43}\) This was despite the fact that Henry IV had added the substantial Lancastrian estates to the royal holdings in 1399. The poverty of the crown affected the kingdom as a whole, which was then burdened with extra taxation. Indeed, a common complaint during the latter part of the fifteenth century was that the king was not living by his own means, but off the people. In 1460, for example, the commons of Kent wrote: “Item, they sey how that the king shulde lyve uppon his commones so that all theire bodies and goodis bene his. The contrarie ys trewe for thanne nede hym nevur to sett parliamente taske ene goodes of hem.”\(^{44}\) Had Henry VI utilized his patronage responsibly, he could have

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\(^{43}\) For Henry VI’s income, see Ross, *Wars of the Roses*, 26; for Richard II’s, see Anthony Steel, “English Government Finance, 1377-1413,” *English Historical Review* 51, no. 201 (Jan. 1936): 29-51. It should be noted that Henry VI was not solely responsible for losing almost £90,000 of annual royal revenue; as seen below, Henry V’s 1421 income stood at approximately £55,000.

\(^{44}\) See “Articles of the commons of Kent at the coming of the Yorkist lords from Calais, 1460,” in *The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale’s Book*, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne F. Sutton, Livia Visser-Fuchs, John L. Watts (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), 210. For other such complaints, see *John Vale’s Book*, 204 (against Henry VI in 1450) and 213 (against Edward IV in...
alleviated the financial troubles of both the crown and many of his subjects; his tendency
to favor small groups, however – like Suffolk’s coterie – did little to moderate the effects
of the recession, and actually amplified the animosities between rival lords. Regardless,
even though a better king than Henry VI could have steered the kingdom more
successfully during the financial crisis, any king would have faced the same unavoidable
conditions that created an atmosphere conducive to private feuds.

In addition to the intensification of rivalries created by the financial crisis, the
expansion of bastard feudalism also contributed to the increase in feuds. Scholars have
long associated bastard feudalism with violence, a recognized problem in fifteenth-
century England. Technically, the older feudal system banned private wars (though as
mentioned above, they did occur). Bastard feudalism, however, enabled it: “Bastard
feudal armies of liveried retainers supplied lords with the manpower to indulge in violent
crime, private war, rebellion, and civil war.” In their efforts to increase their influence
in a particular region, or even to expand their influence into new geographical regions in
which they had no estates, lords would acquire the service of retainers in return for
payments of money and promises of support and protection. These retainers would
typically wear the lord’s livery as an outward sign of the relationship. By the reign of
Richard II, livery was “widely understood to encourage lawlessness” and was seen “as a

1469); in the same book, Sir John Fortescue discusses “The harmys that comen of a kinges pouvertie” in

45 See, for example, Charles Plummer, “Introduction,” in Sir John Fortescue’s _The Governance of England_,
ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), particularly 14-32; for the perspective that
lawlessness and violence during the fifteenth century was not excessive, see J. R. Lander, _The Wars of the

license to pursue personal agendas.”

Sometimes these agendas were relatively minor, such as Reynald Rowse’s claim against William Burgeys for five shilling and four pence of supposedly unpaid rent. Burgeys apparently had documentation to support his refusal to pay, but, as reported in a letter of uncertain date and author, Justice William Paston advised Burgeys to pay anyway:

…and þan he [i.e., Burgeys] rod vp to Lundun and wente to Pastun þe justyse and preyd hym of consel and tolde hym al þe mater, and he bad hym not plete wyth hym be non wey, ‘for ȝif þu do,’ he seyd, ‘þu xalte hafe þe worse, be þi cawse neuer so trewe, for he is feid wyth myn lord of Sowthfolke and mech he is of hese consel, and also þu canste no man of lawe in Northfolke ne in Sowthfolke to be wyth þe aȝens hym, and for sothe nomore myth I qwan I had a ple aȝens hym; and þerfore myn consel is þat þu make an end qwat so euer þu pay, for he xal elles on-do þe and brynge þe to nowte.”

The perversions of justice allowed by livery and maintenance, however, far surpassed such minor cases. In the 1459 parliament, legal troubles like those faced by Burgeys were brought to the king’s attention alongside more violent types of wrongdoing, which were perpetrated with practical immunity by those wearing the livery of powerful lords. The Commons complained

…universally thorough oute every parties of this youre realme, of robberyes, ravisshments, extorcions, oppressions, riottes, unlawfull

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Complaints about the abuses of livery date to the reigns of Edward I and Edward II, but the frequent and repeated attempts to deal with the issues in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicate that the problems were increasing rather than being curbed. In fact, J. G. Bellamy lists seven parliaments between 1377 and 1429 in which livery and maintenance were addressed – and parliament continued to revisit the issues deep into the Yorkist period. Indeed, the importance of livery (or the lack of it) in the lawlessness of the fifteenth century can be seen in such cases as the careers of Sir Thomas Tuddenham and Sir Thomas Malory, and the murders of Nicholas Radford and Sir Thomas Dennis.

The third precondition for private feuds in the fifteenth century directly relates to the lawlessness associated with bastard feudalism – but it is, in scholarship at least, perhaps the most tenuous: the weakness of the crown. For decades, most scholars have

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accepted K. B. McFarlane’s 1964 declaration that “only an undermighty ruler had anything to fear from overmighty subjects; and if he were undermighty his personal lack of fitness was the cause, not the weakness of his office and its resources.”

Subsequent scholarship typically has attributed the troubles in the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV (particularly in the first half of his reign), Edward V, and Richard III to each king’s personal failings (or extreme youth, in the case of Edward V). On the surface, there are many reasons to accept McFarlane’s conclusion, particularly regarding Henry VI’s personal inadequacy – even Henry’s contemporaries seemed to have had their doubts regarding his abilities to serve as king. The Burgundian chronicler Jehan de Waurin, for example, attributed many of England’s troubles to “the simple-mindedness of the king, who was neither intelligent enough nor experienced enough to manage a kingdom such as England…”

English sources also suggest Henry’s incompetence. The incomplete chronicle referred to as Hearne’s Fragment, written by a servant of Edward IV, states that in March 1461 “a council was called, whereat King Harry, for his imbecility and insufficiency was by the whole House deposed…” There are also scattered references in the records of the King’s Bench: a yeoman called the king a lunatic in 1442; Thomas Carver, gentleman, implied the king (in his early 20s) was still a child in 1444; a London draper also stated that the king had a childlike countenance, and lacked wit, in 1447; a


husbandman called Henry a fool in 1449; another yeoman called the king a fool, in the
public market, in 1450. As both R. L. Storey and R. A. Griffiths note, such criticisms
could stem more from discontent with the government than from accurate assessments of
the king – but they do reflect some of the contemporary rumors circulating even prior to
the outbreak of the dynastic conflict and its ensuing politically-biased commentaries. Combine these contemporary references with Henry VI’s known period of mental
incapacity (from c. August 1453 to December 1454) and the fact that his maternal
grandfather, King Charles VI of France, suffered from madness, and it is easy to see how
Henry VI could be considered an “under-mighty” king. In further support of McFarlane’s
point about under-mighty kings, it should also be noted that some of the greatest
moments of lawlessness during the fifteenth century came when the ruling king was
incapacitated. In 1453, for instance, the Percy/Neville feud broke into open warfare
within weeks of Henry VI’s mental collapse. Similarly, in 1469, John Mowbray, duke of
Norfolk besieged the Pastons at Caister Castle while Edward IV was held captive by the
earl of Warwick. It is impossible to know whether or not these armed conflicts would
have occurred without Henry VI’s incapacity or Edward IV’s captivity, but their timing
lends some credence to the under-mighty king theory.

It is still worthwhile, however, to re-evaluate McFarlane’s assertion – particularly
the second part, regarding the office. In fact, one might wonder if there is an implicit
contradiction in maintaining that the office of king was itself in a position of strength, but

57 See Storey, *End of the House of Lancaster*, 35; R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1981), 240-42. Griffiths also notes a few couched criticisms of Henry VI in chronicles written before 1461, such as in those by John Hardyng, John Capgrave, and John Whethamstede, abbot of St. Albans; these, though, tend to focus on matters of policy rather than personal inadequacy.
that an under-mighty king was in danger of losing his crown through his own personal weaknesses: an inherently strong office should withstand assault regardless of who wields its authority. The topic to reconsider, then, is whether the crown itself was weak during the fifteenth century. Michael Hicks suggests that it was, and that the crown’s poverty was one of the primary reasons for its weakness. This suggestion fits well with Sir John Fortescue’s focus on the crown’s wealth in *The Governance of England*, which specifically addresses financial matters in approximately half of its twenty chapters. Chapter Five of the *Governance*, for example, is entitled “The harmys that comen of a kinges pouvertie.” One of Fortescue’s primary concerns is that an over-mighty subject might have more disposable income than the king. Most modern scholars dismiss this concern: “The incomes of even the richest of English magnates, York, Warwick or Buckingham, were only a fraction of those of any king.” For example, at its height Richard, duke of York’s revenue might have reached £5,800 per year (compared to Henry VI’s £33,000). But Fortescue’s concern is not a magnate’s total income, per se, but his disposable income relative to the king’s:

> Than nedith it that the kynges lyveloode, above suche revenues as shulne be assigned for his ordinari charges, biene gretter thanne the lyvelood of the grettest lorde in Englonde. And peraventur whanne lyvelood sufficiente for the kinges ordinarie charges is lymyted and assigned therto, it shal appere that divers lordis of Englande have also moche lyveloode of

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58 Hicks, *Wars of the Roses*, 20.
59 Michael Hicks, “Bastard Feudalism, Overmighty Subjects and Idols of the Multitude during the Wars of the Roses,” *History* 85 (2000), 390. To avoid confusion with Hicks’s book *Bastard Feudalism*, this article is hereafter referred to as “Idols of the Multitude.”
60 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 392.
in their owne as than shal remaigne in the kinges handis for his
extraordinarie charges, whiche were inconveniente and wolde be to the
king right dredfull.\textsuperscript{61}

As Fortescue notes elsewhere, both the king and magnates had certain “ordinary”
charges, though the king’s were rather more substantial. The king, in particular, also
faced unpredictable “extraordinary” charges, which could be quite large.\textsuperscript{62} Therefore,
despite the king’s enormous revenue, his effective income could be much less. In fact,
even Henry V – McFarlane’s quintessential strong king, who did much to address the
financial distresses of the kingdom – faced a tight situation in 1421. The crown’s revenue
for that year was £55,743, of which a little more than £52,235 were immediately spoken
for – the remaining £3,507 needed to cover a slew of other expenses, including the
budgets for the chamber, household, privy wardrobe, artillery, care for the king’s
prisoners, and messengers, as well as unpaid bills dating from Henry IV’s reign.\textsuperscript{63}

Despite the fact that the royal revenue dwarfed that of the wealthiest magnates – and
despite the tough economic times in general – Henry V did not seem to be in a much
healthier financial position than many of the realm’s magnates. Even in Henry V’s reign,
Fortescue’s concerns regarding, essentially, the crown’s disposable income seem to have
had some merit. Given Henry’s reliance on heavy taxes, fines, and loans, the situation of
1421 may not have been unique. Considering that the wealthiest magnates had annual
incomes many times the size of most of the nobility, it is not surprising that


contemporaries perceived the wealth of such men to be nearly “equivalent” (a word used by both Fortescue and George Ashby) to the king’s.  

The lack of funds experienced by the Lancastrian kings – practically unavoidable without conceding the war in France – also threatened to limit the crown’s power in another way. Since the 1340s, kings in need of money were forced to turn to parliament to approve taxes; parliament, in turn, often sought to barter its approval for royal concessions. As Matthew Giancarlo observes, “As kings needed money, so the power of parliament grew...” Given the costs of war, it is probably no coincidence that the greatest growth in parliament’s power occurred during the mid-to-late fourteenth century, when England became embroiled in the Hundred Years’ War. In fact, the statute securing parliament the right to approve taxes dates to the mid-1340s, less than a decade after Edward III claimed the French crown. Yet A. L. Brown identifies the late 1370s as the point at which parliamentary influence began to grow most rapidly. Thus, parliament developed most not in the aftermath of the great victories at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356), but instead shortly after the English continental fortunes had started to abate – first with the Treaty of Brétigny-Calais, in which Edward III renounced his claim to the French throne in 1360, and more recently with the losses of such territories as Rouergue, Agenais, Perigord, and Ponthieu in the resumption of hostilities in 1369. As the emotions of the early victories faded, and realities such as taxes set in, support for the war

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64 Hicks, “Idols of the Multitude,” 392. For the use of the word “equivalent,” see Fortescue, Governance, 237; George Ashby, Active Policy of a Prince in George Ashby’s Poems, ed. Mary Bateson (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), I. 629.  
waned. In fact, at the time of Richard II’s accession the major concern of the English commoners was the defense of the insular realm rather than the conquest or retention of continental lands. The heavy Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1380 turned out to be key precipitants for the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381; indeed, the collection of the 1380 tax can be considered the primary trigger for the uprising. As the crown’s need for money increased, so did its reliance on parliament – and the chances of revolt.

In addition to the war with France, a second event of the late fourteenth century affected parliament’s relationship with the crown: the deposition of Richard II. According to Ronald Butt, the deposition had notable effects:

> With [Richard’s] overthrow it was settled that henceforth the monarchy would in practice be in some degree limited… The crown had been seriously weakened by the loss of the legitimacy which was the norm of the time and its weakness was a new stimulant for strife. Whereas the replacement of Edward II by Edward III had merely hastened the natural succession, the installation of Henry IV had set aside the legitimate line and made the crown a prize for competition.

Similarly, Chris Given-Wilson attributes the “outpouring of polemic” surrounding the 1399 deposition, in part, to the “potential impact of Henry’s usurpation on the future stability of the realm.” As it turned out, the usurpation did, in fact, destabilize the realm.

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Despite the Lancastrian dynasty’s early attempts to legitimize itself—through means as diverse as the use of propaganda, prophecy, ceremony, and literature—72 the Lancastrians’ tainted legitimacy affected every English king from Henry IV through Henry VII and beyond. Each king faced dynastic-related rebellions, and over a century later Henry VIII saw fit to eradicate the remaining descendents of the house of York (his own relatives, as he was Edward IV’s grandson) in a flurry of executions from 1538 to 1541. Not only did the Lancastrian usurpation seemingly break the legitimate line of succession, but as Butt observes it also opened the realm up to the possibility of replacing an unpopular king with another, more acceptable candidate. 73

Crown advocates might point out that despite the advances in parliament made during the late fourteenth century, scholarship has frequently considered the fifteenth century a step backwards for the institution. In the early twentieth century, for example, William Stubbs stated: “If the only object of Constitutional History were the investigation of the origin and powers of Parliament, the study of the subject might be suspended at the deposition of Richard II, to be resumed under the Tudors.” 74 Even Butt, who argues that the deposition limited the monarchy, notes that Henry V easily managed the Commons—indeed, he was “applauded” while utilizing many of the same tactics for which Richard II

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73 For the possibility, however, that Henry had a genuine claim to be Richard’s rightful heir, see Ian Mortimer, “Richard II and the Succession to the Crown,” History: The Journal of the Historical Association 91.303 (2006): 320-36; Michael Bennett, “Edward III’s Entail and the Succession to the Crown, 1376-1471,” The English Historical Review 113:452 (June 1998): 580-609. Contemporary sources, however, indicate that many people maintained the rights of the Mortimer line; inheritance issues were complicated in the late medieval period, as evidenced in sources like the Paston Letters.

had been criticized.\textsuperscript{75} Since the anticipated give-and-take between the two institutions (i.e., concessions for taxes) would indicate an inverse power relationship – as one grows stronger, the other grows weaker – it seems logical that the crown gained in power as parliament stagnated. Indeed, other scholars point out that parliament was still very much the king’s assembly: “It was he who summoned, prorogued and dissolved parliaments, and determined their agenda…”\textsuperscript{76} As A. R. Myers discusses, even as weak a king as Henry VI thwarted parliament’s attempt to impeach his favorite, William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk in 1450; Edward IV found no resistance when he accused his brother, George, duke of Clarence of the capital offense of treason; parliament virtually always attainted the enemies of the current king, and overturned similar decisions made by previous parliaments under a rival dynasty.\textsuperscript{77} Many fifteenth century kings also summoned parliament with far less frequency than their predecessors, particularly after they had been established on the throne for some time: “Edward IV summoned only one parliament, lasting five weeks, in the last five years of his reign, and Henry VII held only one, lasting nine weeks, during the last twelve years of his.”\textsuperscript{78} Henry VI summoned it less after ending his minority in 1437, and Richard III held only one parliament in his two years as king.\textsuperscript{79} Yet it would be premature to dismiss parliament’s influence or development during this time. Indeed, Henry VI seemed reluctant to summon parliament in the 1440s and 50s because he was likely to face criticism for domestic lawlessness.

\textsuperscript{75} Butt, History of Parliament, 494.
\textsuperscript{77} Myers, “Parliament, 1422-1509,” 142-43.
\textsuperscript{78} Myers, “Parliament, 1422-1509,” 143.
\textsuperscript{79} Butt, History of Parliament, 527, 623.
without receiving the funds required for the war in France.\textsuperscript{80} Plus, although parliament met less frequently, it tended to meet for longer:

In the fourteenth century one session was normal, but after 1400 two-thirds of the parliaments lasted for two or more sessions. Their length was also increasing, from three weeks before 1360 to five weeks under Richard II, to nine weeks under Henry IV, and twelve weeks under Henry VI…\textsuperscript{81}

That fifteenth-century kings seemed less willing to summon parliament, and held them for longer periods of time, might suggest that they were cognizant of parliament’s growing influence, and perhaps encountered more resistance in getting matters handled to their satisfaction. It is worth considering whether kings actually held parliaments longer once they had managed to stack the assembly with amenable men – Edward IV, particularly in his early reign, tended to prorogue parliaments repeatedly rather than dissolve them.\textsuperscript{82} The parliament that opened on 29 April 1463, for example, technically lasted until 28 March 1465. Edward repeated this unorthodox style by holding lengthy parliaments from 3 June 1467 until 7 June 1468, and from 6 October 1472 until 14 March 1475. Edward’s wariness of parliament became increasingly obvious, despite the fact that he is considered a “strong” king in the second half of his reign. As Rosemary Horrox observes, “Edward was perceptibly less willing to summon parliament towards the end of his reign… After his return from the French expedition in 1475, when criticism came to a

\textsuperscript{80} Butt, History of Parliament, 528.
\textsuperscript{82} Although the 1478 parliament lasted only three weeks (it was summoned primarily for the purpose of condemning George, duke of Clarence for treason), it demonstrates the king’s ability to stack the house when motivated. Charles Ross notes, “Of the 37 English shires represented in parliament, no fewer than 23 drew one or both of their members from the staff of the king’s household. See Edward IV (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 343.
head, he called parliament only when essential.” 83 It is also worth noting that Edward was the first king who truly attempted to make himself financially independent, allowing him to avoid asking parliament for taxes. 84 But for all of parliament’s apparent weakness in the fifteenth century, statutes attained a higher status – to the point that they “would be upheld even if they conflicted with royal prerogative…” 85 Additionally, the composition of the Commons came to be dominated by the gentry during this period, bringing their concerns more in line with the aristocracy; this may have brought parliament’s interests more in line with the king’s, but it also increased the potential for trouble should the two institutions collide. 86

If historians argue that parliament virtually disappeared from English history in the fifteenth century, literary scholars have noted a similar, post-Agincourt course: “For the most part, parliament drops out of literature as both a topical element and a structuring form.” 87 Malory’s Morte certainly represents this trend: Tomomi Kato’s Concordance lists only three uses of the word parlement (or parlemente) in the entire work. 88 Plus, as Giancarlo points out, even when parliament does appear in the Morte, it tends to recall an older, baronial assembly rather than the contemporary institution. 89

Even so, there are some ways in which Malory’s parliaments resemble fifteenth-century ones. For one thing, all three parliaments are called at or near the beginning of a king’s reign: Arthur calls one before embarking on his Roman campaign; Lancelot calls one

84 Butt, History of Parliament, 567.
87 Giancarlo, Parliament and Literature, 21.
89 Giancarlo, Parliament and Literature, 255.
when establishing himself in France; Mordred calls one for his own coronation (after forging letters announcing Arthur’s death). The lack of parliaments later in Arthur’s reign faintly mirrors the fifteenth-century tendency for kings to call parliament less and less frequently over time. It would be easy to conclude that parliament is essentially a non-entity in the Morte – just as it arguably was in the fifteenth century. Additionally, given parliament’s practical absence in the text, it would also be easy to conclude that the Morte presents the image of a strong crown – which also would be reflective, in McFarlane’s opinion, of the political reality of the day. Yet such conclusions might be overhasty; as discussed above, an inverse power relationship between crown and parliament is not a foregone conclusion. In fact, in a 1939 study of French taxation, Joseph Strayer concluded the opposite: “England developed parliamentary government because her early kings were strong. France developed absolutism because her early kings were weak.” The fact that each reign in the Morte begins with a parliament suggests that its fictional parliaments – much like their post-1399 historical counterparts – lend legitimacy to a new king’s reign. This legitimacy is apparent from the beginning of the text, in the aftermath of Uther’s death when “many wende to have ben kyng.” Although Malory does not use the word parlement here, Merlin advises the Archbishop of Canterbury to summon to London “all the lordes of the reame and alle the gentilmen of armes…” Unlike the baronial assemblies later in the text, this one involves “alle the

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90 See, respectively, Malory, 194, 1204, 1227.
91 Joseph R. Strayer, “Consent to Taxation under Philip the Fair,” in Studies in Early French Taxation (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 94. Charles T. Wood discusses other potential factors, such as the relative sizes of the two kingdoms, responses to external threats, extent of royal lands, the lack of contiguous noble estates, etc. See Joan of Arc and Richard III: Sex, Saints, and Government in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
92 Malory, 12.
93 Malory, 12.
estates…”94 There is also in the *Morte* something of Strayer’s conclusion: for when Arthur calls a parliament, he is at his strongest – yet, arguably, later in the text, when he does not call parliaments before weighty decisions (such as whether to declare war on Lancelot), he more closely represents McFarlane’s “undermighty ruler.” Indeed, Malory’s portrayal of Arthur calls to mind several fifteenth-century issues. First, Arthur seems unable to control his over-mighty subjects as, among other things: Lancelot cuckold him, Gawain bullies him into war, and Mordred usurps his crown. Second, Raluca Radulescu calls Arthur’s judgment into question by comparing Aggravain and Mordred to the false and covetous counselors – those “myscheves peple” and “fals lordes” – blamed for Henry VI’s downfall.95 She suggests: “Arthur also appears unable to distinguish between good and bad advice, between good and bad individuals, and consequently loses leadership over, and control of, his Round Table knights.”96 Elsewhere, she states that “listening to the wrong advisors is ultimately the king’s fault, since it points to his bad choice of counsellors in the first place.”97 In many ways, Arthur appears as ineffective at the end of his reign as Henry VI had been for most of his – or as

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94 Malory, 12.
97 Raluca Radulescu, “*John Vale’s Book* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*: A Political Agenda,” *Arthuriana* 9.4 (1999), 74. Radulescu also, however, acknowledges that Arthur’s blame for the fall of Camelot is limited once Aggravain and Mordred reveal the Lancelot/Guinevere affair; after the affair is made public, she admits, there is little Arthur could have done to maintain the court’s unity. Arthur’s early counselor, Merlin, is a difficult figure to understand; in many ways, he plays the role of Kingmaker for Arthur, yet Sir Ulphuns blames him for the rebellions Arthur faces early on (because Merlin had arranged for Arthur’s parentage to be concealed). See Malory, 46. Merlin’s character is ambiguous, at best, and perhaps too influential (and not forthcoming enough) not to be viewed with suspicion.
Edward IV seemed in the years leading up to Malory’s composition of the *Morte* (particularly after his Woodville marriage had started to drive a wedge between him and Warwick). In the cases of both Henry and Edward, the king’s choice of counselors was among the chief complaints lodged by disgruntled subjects.

In the *Morte’s* closing books, Arthur is reactive or, at best, guided by others. Once Gawain’s beloved brothers Gaheris and Gareth are slain, Arthur seemingly tries to prevent the court from completely breaking apart by assuring Gawain that, by all reports, Lancelot slew them “in the thyk prees and knew them nat.”\(^98\) He also suggests they seek non-violent means of settling the score: “And therefore lat us shape a remedy for to revenge their dethys.”\(^99\) Lancelot’s later offer of reparations in the form of dozens of religious houses indicates that *he* is willing to go to great lengths to find a “remedy,” but Gawain is not appeased by Arthur’s suggestion.\(^100\) Instead, he appeals to Arthur on both familial and political grounds:

> My kynge, my lorde, and myne uncle… 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.\(^101\)

\(^98\) Malory, 1185. It should be noted that Arthur’s manner of breaking the news to Gawain allows an alternative interpretation: perhaps Arthur is goading Gawain into action. He does, after all, initially simply state that Lancelot slew Gaheris and Gaheris; Arthur adds the caveat that “hit ys sayde” that he slew them “in the thyk prees and knew them nat” only after the shock of the first statement. My thanks go to Karen Winstead, who pointed out this alternative interpretation to me.

\(^99\) Malory, 1185. As in the previous footnote, Arthur’s proffer of “revenge” could be interpreted as a violent remedy. Arthur’s earlier laments over Aggravain’s “evyll wyll” and the impending war, however, allow the more pacifying Arthur presented here. See 1183-84. Also, Arthur’s use of “remedy” suggests a legal redress of a wrong, and has the connotation of healing and “evading a difficulty.” See *Middle English Dictionary* (available online at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/), “remedie” definitions 2 and 1a.

\(^100\) For the reparations Lancelot offered, see Malory, 1199-1200.

\(^101\) Malory, 1186.
Despite the relatively weak portrait of Arthur at the end of the *Morte* painted by some scholars, there are a couple reasons to resist labeling Arthur “undermighty.” Returning again to Fortescue’s *Governance of England*, we learn that Malory’s contemporary identifies and describes two types of kingdoms, *dominium regale* and *dominium politicum et regale*:

The firste king may rewle his peopull by suche lawes as he maketh hym selfe and therefore he may sette upon theim tailes and imposicions suche as he woll him selfe withoute their assente. The secunde king may not rewle his peopull by other lawes thanne suche as they will assenten unto, and therefore he may sette upon theim noon imposicions withoute their owne assente.102

England, Fortescue informs us, is the second type of realm – the better, stronger type, according to him. The assent of the people, required for things like taxation, was typically given through parliament, and, as a whole, late medieval Englishmen were proud of their parliamentary system. This is evidenced by their growing habit of predating its origin: parliament as we know it began in the thirteenth century, but by the mid-fourteenth century the chronicler Robert Mannyng reported that Belinus (c. 400 B.C.) held parliaments.103 But this system also restrained the king in other, legal ways – recall Fletcher’s comment (quoted in Chapter Two) about how Bolingbroke was, arguably at least, justified in responding to Richard II’s tyranny with force because the king had

103 Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 180. For brief recaps of the emergence of parliament, see Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 174-85; Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 34-46, also includes an interesting discussion on Arthurian literature and parliamentary history. For a more detailed look at parliament’s development, see Butt, *A History of Parliament.*
overstepped his rights. At the end of the *Morte*, where Arthur is perceived as under-mighty, it is worth remembering that Gawain is, technically, in the right. Lancelot *did* slay Gawain’s brothers (and sons, in the attack on the queen’s chamber), and did so as a byproduct of his own treasonous relationship with the queen. As king, Arthur is forced to side with his kinsman, who has the law on his side. Indeed, on his coronation day, Arthur had “sworne unto his lordes and the comyns for to be a true kyng, to stand with true justyce fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf.”\(^{104}\) However loath Arthur might be to follow a particular course of action, as king he takes his responsibility to abide by and uphold the law seriously. This dedicated adherence to the law was proved earlier in the text, in the aftermath of “The Poisoned Apple” affair. When Sir Mador appeals the queen of treason for the death of his cousin, Sir Patryse, Arthur reluctantly but dutifully removes himself from the situation: “Fayre lordys… me repentith of thys trouble, but the case ys so I may nat have ado in thys mater, for I muste be a ryghtfull juge. And that repentith me that I may nat do batayle for my wyff, for as I deme, thys dede com never by her.”\(^{105}\)

Even in his anger when Lancelot is found in Guinevere’s chamber, Arthur remains firm in his duty: “She shall have the law.”\(^{106}\) The law states, as Malory makes clear, that in this case the queen must die: “And the law was such in tho dayes that whatsomever they were, of what astate or degré, if they were founden gylty of treson there shuld be none other remedy but deth, and othir the menour other the takynge wyth the dede shulde be

\(^{104}\) Malory, 16. Hodges notes that Arthur, technically, fights on the wrong side of justice when he champions Sir Damas in Damas’s feud with his brother Sir Outlake. Arthur does this in order to get out of Damas’s prison. See Kenneth Hodges, “Guinevere’s Politics in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 104.1 (Jan. 2005), 73-74. It is interesting to note, however, that during this incident is found the highest concentration of times when Malory refers to Arthur not as *King* Arthur, but *Sir* Arthur: approximately a dozen times. It is possible Malory uses “Sir” instead of “King” here to show that Arthur is not acting as a king should. See Malory, 141-46.

\(^{105}\) Malory, 1050.

\(^{106}\) Malory, 1175.
causer of their hasty jougement.”¹⁰⁷ Robert L. Kelly justifiably questions the strict legality of Guinevere’s *hasty jougement*, demonstrating that a fifteenth-century reader likely would have found the sentence “a miscarriage of justice.”¹⁰⁸ Yet in the context of the text, Arthur had instructed Aggravain to make sure that Lancelot was “takyn with the dede”¹⁰⁹ – and one of his first questions to Mordred is, “Toke ye hym in the quenys chambir?”¹¹⁰ Mordred replies, “Yee, so God me helpe… there we founde hym unarmed…”¹¹¹ Certainly, Gawain’s subsequent advice to the king – that Arthur should slow down and explore alternate explanations – is prudent, but not strictly necessary according to the law of the land. Ashby’s advice to the Lancastrian Prince Edward might highlight Arthur’s difficult position: on one hand, Ashby advises, “Light credence hath done mucho harms & damage,” while on the other he recommends, “Procede sharply to deue execucion”¹¹² in cases of treason. Not only did Arthur have an (unreliable, as it happens) eyewitness, but as discussed above (in Chapter Two) he had also already recognized Lancelot’s ability to pervert the justice system; thus, when Gawain suggests letting Lancelot defend the queen’s honor, the king knows the outcome will not resolve the issue at hand. Arthur’s strict adherence to the law, on multiple occasions, demonstrates that the crown in the *Morte* is limited much like the English crown, as described by Fortescue. In this sense, it might not be that Arthur is under-mighty, but that the law he swore to uphold limits him.

¹⁰⁷ Malory, 1174.
¹⁰⁹ Malory, 1163.
¹¹⁰ Malory, 1174.
¹¹¹ Malory, 1174. Mordred’s answer is perhaps misleading, as they did not catch Lancelot in the act of adultery; as Gawain tries to explain to Arthur, there could have been multiple reasons that Lancelot was visiting the queen at that hour. See 1174-75.
Since Henry V is considered the quintessential late medieval king – McFarlane certainly implies that he was a mighty king by stating that “Henry VI’s head was too small for his father’s crown”\textsuperscript{113} – it might prove enlightening to examine several aspects of his reign, to see if the crown could rightly be considered strong in the early fifteenth century. Henry VI and Edward IV (in his first reign) are considered weak, or under-mighty, kings because they faced plots and were overthrown; conversely, Henry V won the support of his people and passed his crown onto his son. In a sense, however, this simply uses hindsight to label individual kings as strong or weak based on their accomplishments or lack thereof; a king’s strength or weakness, however, may not have been as readily apparent to contemporaries. In the first eighteen months of his reign, for example, Henry V faced at least two threats to his crown: the Sir John Oldcastle rebellion and the Southampton Plot, led by Richard, earl of Cambridge. In retrospect, many scholars discount the seriousness of these threats, both of which were reported to the king by insiders. The existence of the plots, however, indicates that in the pre-Agincourt stage of Henry’s reign, malcontents were willing to plot against him just as they had plotted against his father and Richard II. The great victory at Agincourt changed that, winning the hearts of the English as much as the victories at Crécy and Poitiers had over six decades earlier. Yet, as discussed above, by the 1420s it seems as though the people’s patience was reaching its limits with the frequent taxes, fines and loans. Fourteenth-century events suggest that great military victories have expiration dates for maintaining public support, and Agincourt’s appeared to be approaching. Henry’s successes in France had also slowed considerably, removing the constant morale boosts of his earlier

\textsuperscript{113} McFarlane, “The Wars of the Roses,” 239.
campaigns. In fact, despite some continued victories, the final two years of Henry’s campaigns in France saw multiple difficulties, including: the defeat, and death, of Henry’s brother and then-heir to the throne, Thomas of Clarence, at Baugé on 22 March 1421; parliament’s initial resistance to the Treaty of Troyes in May 1421 (the English wanted to ensure that the realm was not to be merged with France under one crown); the duke of Brittany’s renunciation of his treaty with Henry in May 1421, and announcement of support for the dauphin; the unexpectedly long siege of Meux (from October 1421 to March 1422); the lack of the expected aid from the duke of Burgundy. To all of these were added the increasing financial crunch Henry faced; parliament had voiced its own concerns about monetary matters in 1419, particularly regarding how the granted money should be spent. If history is able to anticipate later events – and contemporaries believed it could, enough so that it offers kings lessons for present and future situations – events of the fourteenth century suggest that even the “strong” Henry V would have soon encountered a parliament intent on obtaining royal concessions in exchange for granted funds. The crown seemed as vulnerable as the man who wore it. On the one hand, this statement seems to correspond with McFarlane’s statement regarding under-mighty kings. But, more so, it would seem to indicate that the office of the crown was not inherently strong – and that the crown, due to its weakness, needed a strong hand in order to appear strong (and not that it would only appear weak on a weak king’s head).

114 See Allmand, Henry V, 158-68.
116 See, for example, Richard Firth Green, Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 135-67. As Green demonstrates, numerous fifteenth-century texts purported the practical, instructional value of history (e.g., Philippe de Commynes’s Memoirs; George Ashby’s Active Policy of a Prince; Stephen Scrope’s Boke of Noblesse; translations of Secretum Secretorum). Henry V was specifically instructed by Thomas Hoccleve’s Regiment of Princes, and Green adds that Thomas Walsingham “clearly felt that Henry V’s conquest of Normandy would be rendered easier by a knowledge of the history of the region…” See p. 139.
Finally, it is worth noting that much of Henry’s reputation lies in the fact that after Agincourt he ruled securely – as did his infant son, Henry VI (or, more accurately, the council ruled securely in his stead). The fact that the young Henry VI sat easy on his throne would seem to support McFarlane’s belief in the strength of the crown, but there is another important factor to consider: the crown’s lack of a motivated, over-mighty opponent from Agincourt until Henry VI’s majority. To demonstrate the inherent weakness of the crown, would not Edward IV qualify as a “strong” monarch in the second half of his reign? Yet prior to that, he was both captured (in 1469) and temporarily deposed (during the Readeption of Henry VI in 1470-71) by his over-mightiest subject, Warwick. The security of his second reign resulted in the absence of a motivated, over-mighty foe: both Warwick and Henry VI were dead, and Clarence was executed in February 1478. Arguably, the security of Henry V’s throne derived as much from a similar lack of motivated opponents as it did from his own forceful personality.

The so-called Southampton Plot of 1415, a rather ambitious plan, is worth analysis. There is some debate about the importance of the Southampton Plot – E. F. Jacob and G. L. Harriss are among the scholars who have considered it a major threat, but T. B. Pugh downplays the plot’s seriousness. Even Pugh, however, recognizes that Edmund Mortimer, earl of March – the man whom the plotters reputedly wished to place on the throne in Henry’s stead – was both one of the wealthiest magnates of the time and completely uninterested in politics. Mortimer, in fact, is the one who reported the plot.

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to Henry. Pugh’s assertion about the Lancastrian dynasty’s stability from the early years of Henry IV’s reign through Henry VI’s minority actually rests on the fact that the “potential trouble-makers among the English baronage had been removed.”\textsuperscript{119} Had Mortimer been a more ambitious and capable man, a man more like the Kingmaker than like Henry VI, there is no certainty that Henry V would have reigned so securely, even after the glory of Agincourt. Henry V does deserve credit for his personal approach to governance: his re-interment of Richard II, restoration of inheritances to families like the Percies, and other attempts to heal (and prevent) division proved effective. But McFarlane’s assertion that the troubles of the fifteenth century stemmed more from the personal failings of the kings in power does not adequately account for the success of Henry VI’s minority – if ever there was a weak king, it was an infant. After all, in late medieval England, Ecclesiastes 10:16 was an oft-quoted passage, and one John Capgrave reports was said at the time of Henry VI’s coronation: “Væ tibi, terra, cujus rex puer est…” (“Woe to you, O land, whose king is a child”).\textsuperscript{120} Rather than viewing the crown as strong enough to survive a minority, it should be noted that from c. 1416 to c. 1450 there simply were not any over-mighty subjects (with any realistic claim to the throne) who felt compelled to challenge for the crown. The young king’s three powerful kinsmen – John, duke of Bedford, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, and Cardinal Henry Beaufort – provided adequate checks-and-balances on each other, and buffers from outside threats.

The \textit{preconditions} for private feuds discussed above all factor into what is perhaps the most famous feud of the day: the Percy-Neville feud in northern England. Ralph A.

\textsuperscript{119} Pugh, “Southampton Plot,” 85.
Griffiths suggests that “the economic recession contributed to the potential for violence,” particularly in large cities like York where the Percies recruited heavily. R. L. Storey maintains that the north, in particular, suffered from the lawlessness so complained about during the period:

Naturally it was in those parts of the country most distant from the centre of government that lawlessness was at its worst, a danger not only to local society but a potential threat to the crown itself, for these were the conditions in which interested magnates were best able to recruit large followings of militant retainers.122

The border regions, and their overlords, posed unique problems for the crown. It was recognized that they needed to remain powerful in their own rights – both the Nevilles and the Percies, for instance, needed to be able to repel Scottish attacks – and for this reason alone, they were often exempted from attempts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to control and restrict retaining (which, as we have seen, Plummer associates with the problematic and “evil” bastard feudal system).123 But as their power grew, so did their abilities to disrupt the peace of the kingdom – not just on the local level, but on the national level as well. Even worse, as Storey points out, the crown was weakest in these very regions, which were distant from London, and once the government destabilized with the onset of Henry VI’s mental incapacity, open hostilities erupted within a month.

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122 Storey, End of the House of Lancaster, 84. See Hicks, Bastard Feudalism, 156-67 for an alternate view, which sees magnates as less dominant in the provinces than generally is assumed. In fact, looking at the nobility as a whole, Hicks states, “Bastard feudal anarchy, it thus appears, reflects the weakness rather than the strength of the nobility.” See page 33.
123 See, for example, Michael Hicks, “1468 Statute of Livery,” 15-28.
The following sections discuss some of the key feuds in the *Morte* in the context of the ongoing historical feuds of Malory’s day, such as the Percy-Neville feud.

2. “For the peopul wil go with hym that beste may sustene and rewarde hem”. The Struggles for Property and Influence in Fifteenth-Century England

Although Moorman believes the feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore is one of the three primary plotlines in Malory’s *Morte* – and is thus highlighted by Malory – it is not the only major feud in the text. Indeed, it could be argued that by moving the Roman campaign to the beginning of Arthur’s reign, Malory emphasizes the Lot-Ban feud every bit as much as the Lot-Pellinore one. After all, by featuring prominently in the Lancelot-Guinevere affair plotline (a second of the three primary plots identified by Moorman), the Lot-Ban feud plays a significant role in precipitating the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom. As discussed below, the Lot-Pellinore feud is closely associated with the blood feud: the sons of King Lot seek revenge on King Pellinore for slaying their father. The Lot-Ban feud degenerates into a blood feud once Lancelot has killed Gaheris and Gareth, but the tension had existed – and been building – for some time. Malory is not overt in specifying the causes of the tension, but by examining elements of the feud and identifying similar issues handled elsewhere in the text, it is possible to conjecture about the causes. In keeping with his tendency to reflect contemporary political problems

125 Although, as Moorman notes, the Lot-Pellinore feud helps shape the Lot-Ban feud, and thus the downfall of Camelot: “The consequences of the murder of Lamerak are immediately obvious in the relations of the knights, who quickly begin to align themselves either behind Mordred… or behind Lancelot…” See “Lot and Pellinore,” 88.
in his Arthurian world, Malory informs the *Morte* with elements of the interrelated contemporary struggles over property and influence. In many cases, property disputes directly or indirectly involved the struggle for local or regional influence – and regional influence affected one’s national influence. Therefore, this section will examine the struggle for property in the *Morte* first, and then move on to the struggle for national influence.

Malory’s *Morte* is not traditionally associated with property disputes, or other matters of property in general. Indeed, Larry D. Benson suggests that the *Morte* has little to do with the mundane concerns of fifteenth-century life: “It is therefore as vain to look in the pages of Malory for the Pastons’ England as it is to search the Pastons’ letters for Malory’s world…”\(^{126}\) While Benson does consider the *Morte*’s presentation of chivalry to be relevant to its time, he ultimately sees Malory’s concerns to be limited to those of an enthusiast of jousting, hunting, and courtly love. On the surface, this reading might appear to be true, but it is not entirely accurate. Eugene Vinaver, for example, observes that Malory’s realistic additions to his source material include several comments regarding “mundane” financial matters.\(^{127}\) Many of these references are quite general in nature; Vinaver mentions, for example, Trystram’s lament to Queen Isolde (when he believes she has been unfaithful to him, with Kehydan) that “many londis and grete

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\(^{127}\) Eugene Vinaver, “Introduction,” in *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, rev. P. J. C. Field, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), xxviii. The word “mundane” refers back to the Benson quote, and is not in Vinaver’s comments on this topic. Of course, as discussed in the Introduction, these monetary references tend to be general in nature; Malory does not minutely catalogue the properties (or their values) of his characters, except when characters like Arthur or Lancelot are distributing lands to their followers. Benson suggests that these references, which are not very different from those found in other romances of the time, show Malory’s “practical” side. See Benson, *Malory’s Morte Darthur*, 197-98.
rychesse have I forsakyn for youre love!"  

Such statements by (or about) the characters in the *Morte* are not particularly notable, and they would perhaps fit into any number of romances. Nor does Malory minutely catalogue the properties (or their values) of each character, save when one of them (e.g., Arthur or Lancelot) is distributing lands to his followers. But there are other ways in which Malory presents wealth and property concerns that seem particularly relevant in the context of his own period; one of these involves his own social class, the gentry.

In *The Knight without the Sword*, Hyonjin Kim takes Benson’s comment as his jumping off point and attempts to refute it by finding in the *Morte* “the anxieties and aspirations of the real fifteenth-century aristocracy – especially the squirearchical landowners such as the author himself…” In his study, Kim outlines two “paradigms of love” in Malory: courtly love and married love. These, he suggests, are often divided into “propertied love” and “unpropertied love.” It is an interesting argument, that basically states that the mightiest of Malory’s characters – e.g., Lancelot, Gawain, Trystram, Bors – who are elder sons with landed estates are, for the most part, uninvolved in normal marital relationships in the text. This contrasts sharply with many of the younger sons, such as Aggravaine and Gareth, and knights of more meager means such as

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128 Malory, 493.
131 Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 25-51.
132 Trystram does marry Isolde le Blaunche Maynes, but it is a chaste marriage. See Malory, 494. Malory does not specify that Gawain marries, though he does have two sons who participate in the attack on Lancelot in the queen’s chambers. See Malory, 1175.
Lavayne; these knights, Kim observes, most frequently marry into large estates. The argument is supported by the fact that Malory changes the background of one prominent knight, Palomides, to fit into this paradigm. In Malory’s source, the prose *Tristan*, Palomides hails from a family of no real wealth. In fact, in the “prequel” to the *Tristan*, called *Palamedes*, his father is a landless hostage in Rome who happens to attract notice by saving the emperor’s life. As Kim points out, however, Malory’s character introduces himself as the “sunne and ayre unto kyng Aclabor…” As a propertied heir now, Palomides is free to participate in Malory’s courtly love plotline involving Trystram and La Beale Isolde. Meanwhile, Gawain’s younger brothers find wealthy heiresses for wives. Gareth and Gaheris marry the sisters Lyonesse (“a lady off grete worshyp and of grete londys”) and Lynette, while Aggravain marries their niece (who is also “a fayre lady wyth grete and myghty londys”). Kim connects Malory’s apparent interest in the younger sons’ acquiring landed estates with the conflicting estate concerns of the fifteenth-century gentry: to provide for younger sons while keeping the estate intact. In general, of course, the nobility had the means to provide for younger sons; the gentry, however, often could not afford to divide an estate up for the benefit of all the children. Younger sons and daughters, therefore, often inherited meager annual annuities or lump sums. In order to provide better for their younger children – and to enrich their families and extend their influence – many members of the fifteenth-century gentry (and nobility)

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133 It should be noted that this is not always the case. Perceval, for instance, is one of the virgin knights capable of achieving the Grail Quest. Lavayne is given lands by king Arthur upon his marriage, but there is no indication that his wife, Sir Urry’s sister Fileloli, is wealthy in her own right.
134 Malory, 769. See Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 36-37, for his discussion of Palomides; footnote 47 contains the information regarding *Palamedes*.
135 Malory, 296.
136 Malory, 363.
137 Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 38 ff.
aggressively pursued the accumulation of property, both through marital and legal means as well as, on occasion, by force.

To support Kim’s “propertied” reading of the *Morte* further, it is useful to recall an incident mentioned in Chapter Two: the 1469 siege of the Pastons at Caister Castle by John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk, in his attempt to seize the property for himself. Although this siege was rather exceptional, it was not unique for the time – and there are several such incidents in the *Morte*. For a text not interested in such mundane issues as property, wandering knights encounter a surprising number of property disputes. In one such example, during the Grail Quest, Bors stumbles upon a property dispute that surely would have resonated with the nobility and gentry of Malory’s day. The incident is taken from the source, the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*, but minor changes broaden its applicability. The *Queste* repeatedly calls the disputing women sisters, and also repeatedly invokes the concept of “inheritance.” Yet Malory chooses to downplay the familial nature of the conflict significantly – arguably, he may have intended to erase it entirely, as for all practical purposes he turns the inheritance dispute into a more general property dispute, the kind which proliferated in the fifteenth century. Malory’s one indication that the women are sisters comes when a squire, speaking to the lady Bors defends, refers to the other woman as “youre syster.” But otherwise, he does not connect the women by any familial references. Instead, Bors’s lady describes her attacker as “a jantillwoman a grete dele elder than I” and “thys other lady…” When the two ladies meet just prior to the duel, Malory simply notes, “And as sone as thses two ladys

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139 Malory, 957. Malory also refers to the concept of inheritance only once, when Bors’s lady asks why she should be “disherited.” See page 957. Regardless, familial relationship need not be implied by disinheritance.

140 Malory, 957.
mette togydir…”\(^1\) (the Queste, meanwhile, specifies that “the two sisters caught sight of each other”).\(^2\) Even when Bors’s lady directly addresses her attacker, she does not attempt to use any family relationship in her plea: “Madam, ye have done grete wronge to beryve me my landis that kyng Anyaws gaff me, and full lothe I am there sholde be ony batayle.”\(^3\) It is strange that the lady should not invoke a sisterly relationship, should Malory have intended there to be one; elsewhere, the Morte specifically censures family disputes, and this would have been the perfect opportunity to do so again. In fact, in the Winchester manuscript one of the harsher condemnations of familial discord occurs a mere seven leaves after this very incident.

Shortly after leaving the maiden whom he defends in the property dispute, Bors comes upon two people in need of aid: a lady about to be raped by a knight, and his brother Lionel, who has been captured and is being beaten by two knights. Bors chooses to save the lady; when the brothers next meet, Lionel challenges Bors to a duel to the death. A hermit attempts to intervene, stressing the evil nature of the proposed fight: “A, jantyll knyght! have mercy uppon me and uppon thy brothir, for if thou sle hym thou shalt be dede of that synne…”\(^4\) So angry is Lionel that he slays the hermit, as well as Sir Collgrevaunce, who also attempts to intervene. After repeatedly trying to make apologies for his actions – and witnessing two other men die for him – Bors says, “And well wote ye that I am nat aferde of you gretely, but I drede the wratthe of God; and thys ys an unkyndely werre. Therefore God shew His myracle uppon us bothe, and God have

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\(^1\) Malory, 959.
\(^3\) Malory, 959.
\(^4\) Malory, 970.
mercy uppon me, thoughe I defende my lyff ayenst my brothir.”145 A loud voice (either the voice of God or of an angel), accompanied by a marvelous cloud of fire, prevents the brotherly duel, and orders Bors to flee the scene. The fact that Malory stresses the evils of kin slaying so soon after the incident of the sisters – in which he does not remark on the evils of intrafamilial warfare – suggests that he intended to erase the familial relationship in the incident and broaden its applicability. His single use of the word syster, in stark contrast to the source material, appears to be no more than a slip. It would not be the first, or only, slip for Malory. Indeed, in a work of this size, authorial mistakes are practically inevitable – such as the posthumous appearances of Collgrevaunce and other knights.146 Malory certainly could have retained the Queste’s emphasis on the sisterly relationship without losing contemporary relevance – recall the cadet branches of the Neville and Courtenay families, whose relationships with their primary branches were not always amicable. Instead, while in the source the lady whom Bors defends complains that her sister has disinherited her, in Malory she claims that the elder woman has bereaved her of her lands. By re-contextualizing the incident, Malory broadens its application; indeed, the elder woman’s loss of her lands (for her evil customs) looks much like attainder, an all-too-familiar occurrence during the Wars of the Roses.

In fifteenth-century England, property disputes such as the one described above – if not resolved in the courts – could devolve into violence. Property ownership, after all, greatly impacted political influence in a particular region; it bestowed wealth and status,

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145 Malory. 973.
146 Collgrevaunce’s double deaths are the one mentioned here and the one during the attack on Lancelot in the queen’s chamber. Other knights who return to life include Bagdemagus, Uwayne le Avoutres, and Dinadan. All are killed by Gawain or his brothers in the Grail Quest (see, respectively, Malory, 1020, 945, and 615); Uwayne and Dinadan, however, are present later at the healing of Sir Urré, and Bagdemagus is listed as one of Lancelot’s counselors in Benwick. See, respectively, 1148 and 1211.
and typically, over time, brought the loyalty of the area’s inhabitants.\textsuperscript{147} This regional influence often provided an amount of national influence as well, particularly when the region was affluent, of strategic importance, or a significant source of manpower. This devolution into violence occurs in the Norfolk-Paston dispute over Caister Castle, but more notably in the Percy-Neville situation in the North of England. Despite multiple intermarriages between the families, Percy-Neville relations were characterized by rivalry and resentment. Both families had long been influential in the North, and were given earldoms only twenty years apart: the Percies in 1377, the Nevilles in 1397. The Percies, however, lost most of their estates after rebelling against Henry IV in 1403 (and, despite peacemaking efforts by the king, plotting further before fleeing to Scotland in 1404). This nadir of Percy power – which only started to improve in 1416, when the Percy earldom was restored – allowed the Nevilles to gain much ground on their rivals. These gains were somewhat stunted by the death of Ralph Neville, earl of Westmoreland in 1425, because the inheritance was split between the firstborn son, Ralph, of his first wife and his second wife, Joan Beaufort (and her son, Richard).\textsuperscript{148} The longstanding rivalry finally broke into open hostilities on 24 August 1453. On that day, a force led by Thomas Percy, Lord Egremont and his brother, Richard Percy, attacked a Neville party (including its patriarch Richard Neville, earl of Salisbury), which was returning from the wedding of Sir Thomas Neville to Maud Stanhope. Although the Percies’ reputed goal was the assassination of Salisbury and the other Neville family members present, the primary

\textsuperscript{147} For a regional populace’s loyalty to a single family over generations see, for example, Hicks, \textit{Bastard Feudalism}, 93-104.

\textsuperscript{148} This created a cadet branch of the Neville family, whose interests did not always coincide with those of the primary branch. The Courtenay family provides another example of a cadet branch that often opposed the primary branch: Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon, for example, besieged Sir Philip Courtenay at Powderham in 1455. Such examples of cadet branches might account for Malory’s portrayal of Gareth, who tends to avoid his older brothers in the \textit{Morte}.
motivation for the attack can be traced to the rights to two manors: Wressle and Burwell. The motivation for the attack can be traced to the rights to two manors: Wressle and Burwell. Both manors had once been Percy lands, but were among the properties not yet returned to the rebellious family. In 1438, Henry VI granted Ralph Cromwell, Lord Cromwell a two-thirds lifetime interest in the estates; in 1439, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland initiated an attempt to reclaim them. The estates had not been returned by 1453, and Maud Stanhope was Cromwell’s niece and the co-heiress to his estates. Her marriage to Sir Thomas Neville, then, would give the Neville family a possible claim to the two former Percy manors. If the primary precondition of the so-called “Battle of Heworth” in 1453 was the longstanding Percy-Neville rivalry, the primary trigger (the Neville-Stanhope marriage) involved property rights. Despite claims by the contemporary Whitby Abbey annalist, who reported that “many men of both partes were beten, slayne, and hurt,” scholars find no corroborating evidence for any casualties – but with as many as five thousand men in the Percy force, the incident is not to be written off as a minor event. Indeed, some people, like the author of the *Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, mentioned above, have even considered this “battle” to be the beginning of the Wars of the Roses. Even if this particular claim is dismissed, however, the Percy-Neville feud played a key role in the formation of the political alignments during the wars; its importance, therefore, to later events should not be underestimated.

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149 There were reports of earlier troubles between the two families, though not on the same scale; plus, those incidents, too, may have been initiated by the marriage announcement. See Griffiths, “Local Rivalries,” for more information on the outbreak of the Percy-Neville feud.  
150 *Cartularum Abbathiae de Whiteby, Ordinis S. Benedicti*, ed. J. C. Atkinson (Durham: St. Andrews & Co., 1881), 694-95. The context perhaps allows for the interpretation that the “many” refers to casualties of the larger Percy-Neville conflict, and not just the Battle of Heworth (which is not mentioned specifically). The annalist speaks of “a greate discorde”; he also incorrectly identifies the year as 1452, if he is indeed speaking strictly about Heworth.  
At first glance, the Lot-Ban “feud” does not appear to resemble the historical Percy-Neville feud. The Percy-Neville feud was between two northern families; it was a regional rivalry that spilled into national politics. If anything, the Lot-Ban rivalry (for it does not appear to be a true feud until after Lancelot kills Gareth and Gaheris) resembles the North/South divide present throughout much of medieval English history. As the sons of King Lot of Lothian and Orkney, Gawain and his brothers represent the North; as the son of King Ban of Benwick, whose estates lie on the continent, Lancelot arguably represents the South (or, at least, the southern reaches of the kingdom). Such a reading should not be ignored. Indeed, so potent were the differences between the regions that the downfall of Richard III in 1485 – only fifteen years after the completion of the Morte (and within weeks of Caxton’s printing the work) – has been attributed, in part, to his strategic error of distributing seized southern estates to his northern supporters. The author of the continuation of the Crowland Chronicle (dated c. April 1486) describes the resentment stirred up by this controversial policy:

[King Richard III] distributed all these [southern estates and inheritances] amongst his northerners whom he had planted in every part of his dominions, to the shame of all the southern people who murmured ceaselessly and longed more each day for the return of their old lords in place of the tyranny of the present ones.

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The same chronicler puts a similar geographic spin on the political situation of 1460, stating that the northerners found the Act of Accord (which named York as Henry VI’s heir, disinheriting the Lancastrian Prince of Wales) “detestable and accursed” and therefore rose up against York; the author adds, “The northerners then invaded the South…” Meanwhile in the South, “When he [i.e., Edward, earl of March] heard of his father’s death and how eagerly the people of the South wanted him to become king, Earl Edward having collected his forces comes to London.” Even though this text was written approximately twenty-five years after these events, the geographic conflict has the ring of truth – in 1470, for example, the author of the Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire (written within months of the events it describes) also hints at a North/South political divide. Warwick reputedly planned to allow Edward to come northwards unopposed so that his forces and those of the duke of Clarence could get between the king and the South, allowing “the power of the northe” to encircle him, “to the likly uttur and finalle distruccon of his rialle person…” There is certainly evidence that at about the time that Malory was completing the Morte, the North and South of England had divided loyalties.

The potential of a North/South binary in the Morte is enhanced by Malory’s rejection of the native English tradition regarding the characterization of Gawain in favor of a more complex and nuanced portrayal of his character.
of the French tradition. Unlike the French sources, which portray Gawain variously as a scoundrel, rapist, or even something of a clown, insular romances and chronicles frequently portray him in a highly favorable light – as a model of chivalry and courtesy. Lady Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* provides one of the most famous such descriptions of Gawain:

> For I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen ȝe are,  
> þat alle þe worlde worchipez; quereso ȝe ride,  
> Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praysed  
> With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle þat lyf bere.\(^{159}\)

Of course, this quote is well-known today, but there is scant evidence that the works of the Pearl-Poet, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, were widely disseminated – as John Bowers observes, there is little indication that the poet’s works impacted later literature.\(^{160}\) But far more popular works of the time also testify to Gawain’s positive reputation, not the least of which is Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Squire’s Tale*. As the “strange knyght” of the tale approaches the king, Cambyuskan, the Squire says that he does so

> With so heigh reverence and obeisaunce,  
> As wel in speche as in contenaunce,  
> That Gawayn, with his olde curteisye,


Though he were comen ayeyn out of Fairye,

Ne koude hym at amende with a word.\textsuperscript{161}

Interestingly enough, it is possible that Malory himself participated in the insular tradition: Peter Field conjectures that in addition to the \textit{Morte}, Malory wrote the short verse romance \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}.\textsuperscript{162} In this poem, the courteous Gawain unhesitatingly marries a Loathly Lady for Arthur’s sake. His gallantry even extends into the privacy of the bedroom, for when she asks him to “kysse me att the leste” he replies, “I wolde do more / Then for to kysse, and God before!”\textsuperscript{163} Plus, as discussed below, insular literature granted Gawain the preeminent position at Arthur’s court.

Regardless of whether or not Malory wrote \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, it is certain that he was aware of the positive reputation Gawain enjoyed in English literature: one of his major sources, the \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure}, employs

\textsuperscript{161} Geoffrey Chaucer, \textit{The Squire’s Tale}, in \textit{The Riverside Chaucer}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), ll. 93-97. As Benson notes, Cambyuskan is Genghis Khan. Readers should be aware of Chaucer’s penchant for irony, and the possibility that the Squire is making a humorous mistake in listing Gawain as a good judge of courtesy. But as a youthful narrator with true enthusiasm (if not talent) for his chosen topic – and with other sources like \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} for comparison – it seems likely that the Squire and his (and Chaucer’s) audience accepted Gawain’s positive reputation. Thomas Hahn uses this quote and the one above from \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight} to illustrate Gawain’s insular reputation. See Hahn, “Introduction,” in \textit{Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales}, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 1-2.


\textsuperscript{163} \textit{The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle}, in \textit{Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales}, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll. 635, 638-39. One could argue that Gawain’s willingness to do more is a comedic reflection of his common reputation as a lover, but Gawain’s subsequent decision to let his wife choose whether to be fair in the day (publicly, for all to see and praise) or at night (privately, for Gawain’s pleasure) indicates his gallantry. Another interpretation is that \textit{The Wedding} mocks the characters and “reduces Gawain in a slyly ironic variation of his role as royal champion.” See Rebecca A. Davis, “More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in ‘The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell,’” \textit{The Chaucer Review} 35.4 (2001), 436.
it.\textsuperscript{164} That he knew this positive tradition, yet opted to follow (for the most part) the negative French tradition, invites analysis: \textit{why} did Malory forego the traditional English portrayal of Gawain? Some scholars attribute Gawain’s rather uneven characterization in the \textit{Morte} to an effort by Malory to merge the positive and negative traditions.\textsuperscript{165} Another common theory is that Gawain had to be diminished so that Lancelot, Malory’s favored knight, could be elevated. Mary E. Dichmann, for example, observes that Malory attributes some of Gawain’s accomplishments in the \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure} to other knights (and often to members of Lancelot’s clan), or at least includes others in deeds that Gawain performs alone in the sources.\textsuperscript{166} Meanwhile, McCarthy suggests that Malory adapted the \textit{Alliterative Morte Darthur’s} final description of Gawain for his own final description of Lancelot.\textsuperscript{167}

But Malory’s decision looks even more interesting when we consider that many of the \textit{Morte}’s original readers – both those of the manuscript and the published volume – may not have been as familiar with the French sources as is typically assumed. Terence McCarthy observes:

\begin{quote}
It is even difficult to know how much of the Arthurian story was known in Malory’s day. According to Caxton, far more texts were available in other languages, and Robert Mannyng had said much the same thing a hundred
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{164} For a discussion of Gawain’s positive portrayal in the \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure}, see Christopher Dean, “Sir Gawain in the Alliterative Morte Arthure,” \textit{Papers on Language and Literature} 22.2 (Spring 1986): 115-25.

\textsuperscript{165} See, for example, Robert Henry Wilson, \textit{Characterization in Malory: A Comparison with His Sources} (Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1934), 69-82; like Wilson, Terence McCarthy does not believe that Malory succeeds in creating a consistent, convincing character out of the two traditions. See \textit{An Introduction to Malory} (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 119-21.


and fifty years earlier. Allusions in non-Arthurian texts in the Middle Ages represent Arthur and his knights in the most stereotyped terms: Arthur is famous for the splendour of his court and Lancelot as a figure of gallantry, but little detailed knowledge is revealed. Indeed, certain major figures and episodes of the legend – Lancelot, Perceval, the Grail Quest, and Tristram – owe their existence in English almost entirely to Malory’s book…

The allusion to Gawain in The Squire’s Tale, quoted above, demonstrates the kind of vague, stereotyped allusion McCarthy mentions: there, Gawain is known simply for his courtesy. Although Felicity Riddy finds ample evidence of gentry access to and/or interest in the French texts (she cites Henry Lovelich, a London merchant; Dame Matilda Bowers, a Yorkshire gentlewoman; Master Thomas Hebbeden, Durham-area cleric; and, of course, Malory himself, a Warwickshire knight), she also raises a point relevant to McCarthy’s: “The activities of Lovelich and Malory as translators are particularly significant, since their versions show that there was a taste for French Arthurian romances among people who may not have been able to read them in the original language.” Eugene Vinaver even considered the possibility that Malory himself was unfamiliar with the French sources before he started writing. In the introduction to his edition of the Winchester manuscript, Vinaver argues that Malory was introduced initially to the Arthurian legend through the Alliterative Morte Arthure, and that he initially wrote The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius based on that poem (although the tale appears second in the Morte). Vinaver then speculates that the writing

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168 McCarthy, “Malory and His Sources,” 79.
of this tale “induced [Malory] to ‘seek other books of Arthur,’”\textsuperscript{170} including the French sources, to tell of the beginning of Arthur’s reign: “But he soon found to his dismay that the treatment of the chronicle material was singularly unlike what he had seen in the \textit{Morte Arthure}.”\textsuperscript{171} This sequence is, of course, highly speculative, but it is worth noting that the Winchester manuscript’s first modern editor seriously considered the possibility that Malory might not have known the French sources before encountering them during the writing of his own Arthurian cycle.\textsuperscript{172} It is possible, then, that the \textit{Morte’s} presentation of Gawain might have come as a surprise to at least some of Malory’s early readers. Altering a longstanding tradition – and the associated expectations – would have required strong reasons for doing so.

Malory’s portrayal of Gawain could be tied to the aforementioned North/South divide. Gawain had long been associated with the North – even in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s \textit{Historia Regum Britanniae} (the first complete version of the Arthurian story), Gawain’s father, Loth, rules Lodonesia (i.e., Lothian, located in southern Scotland/northern Northumbria); Arthur eventually makes Loth the king of Norway (historically, home of the “Northmen”). Additionally, many of the later romances that feature Gawain are set in the North, and they appear to have originated in that region as well.\textsuperscript{173} It is interesting that Malory’s portrayal of Gawain accords with contemporary stereotypes of northerners: stubborn, potentially rebellious, lawless, somewhat wild and

\textsuperscript{170} Vinaver, “Introduction,” lv.
\textsuperscript{171} Vinaver, “Introduction,” lxiv.
\textsuperscript{172} Dichmann points out that Vinaver’s \textit{Commentary} does not support the assumption that Malory did not know the French sources before he began writing; otherwise, Malory would have had little reason to enhance Lancelot’s role in \textit{The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius}. See “Characterization,” 881-82.
\textsuperscript{173} For the northern roots of insular Gawain romances, see Hahn, “Introduction,” 30-31.
uncouth, warlike and violent.\textsuperscript{174} Malory’s Gawain, after all, freely admits to his own “wyffulnes” (i.e., stubbornness) on his deathbed.\textsuperscript{175} He is also, perhaps, one of the chief reasons Arthur establishes guidelines for his knights. While on the quest of the white hart, Gawain refuses to give mercy to a defeated knight, and accidentally decapitates the knight’s lady when she attempts to intervene. When Gawain returns to court and relates the tale, Arthur and Guinevere are both “gretely displeased.”\textsuperscript{176} In fact, the queen arranges an inquest of ladies, which orders Gawain to fight always for women, be courteous, and never to refuse mercy; for his part, the king fashions an oath for all knights to take – and includes provisions for giving mercy to those who ask and for protecting women.\textsuperscript{177} Despite such reproaches early in his career, Gawain is later involved in such distasteful activities as the revenge killings of Pellinore and Lamerok, to the extent that his own brother, Gareth, distances himself from him (and the other Orkney brothers, who also fit the “Northern” stereotype described above) and accuses him of being a murderer of good knights.\textsuperscript{178} Although Malory’s representation of Gawain might have surprised his English readers, it actually conforms to typical “Northern” behavior – not only in the eyes of Malory’s readers, but also in the eyes of his characters. It has been


\textsuperscript{175} Malory, 1230.

\textsuperscript{176} Malory, 108.

\textsuperscript{177} See Malory, 108-09, 120. There are two brief episodes involving Tor and Pellinore inserted between Gawain’s arrival at court and the establishment of the Round Table oath; however, these episodes run parallel to the Gawain episode, as each quest originated at the wedding of Arthur and Guinevere. Tor is praised for his adventure, while Pellinore receives some criticism for failing to save a lady (though doing so would have interfered with his quest to rescue another lady who had been kidnapped). Gawain is the only one censured in any way. See pages 109-120 for the quests of Tor and Pellinore.

\textsuperscript{178} See Malory, 699.
noted that Northerners frequently play the role of Arthur’s (and, even earlier, Uther’s) enemies. In fact, during Pellinore’s quest for the lady kidnapped from Arthur’s court (at the wedding of Arthur and Guinevere), Pellinore overhears a Northern knight speak of a plot to kill Arthur:

‘I have brought a remedy with me that ys the grettist poysen that ever ye herde speke of. And to Camelot woll I with it, for we have a frende ryght nyghe the kynge, well cheryshed, that shall poysen kynge Arthur, for so hath he promysed oure chyfftaynes, and receyved grete gyffitis for to do hit.’

Though nothing comes of this apparent assassination attempt, the passage speaks volumes regarding the “North” in Malory’s Arthurian world.

Southern perceptions of Northerners fluctuated over the centuries, but recent events had solidified the stereotypical, negative qualities in the minds of Southerners and intensified the perceived differences between the two groups. In the aftermath of the first Battle of St. Albans (1455), the victorious Yorkist army (which was largely from the North) plundered the city – much to the shock and dismay of men like John Whethamstede, the abbot of the monastery at St. Albans. Whethamstede’s Registrum chronicles the plundering in detail, and expresses fear that the monastery would suffer a similar fate (it was, however, spared). Then, in 1461, as Queen Margaret’s victorious, northern-based army marched toward London after the second Battle of St. Albans, the Yorkists incited fear by warning Londoners that the army would plunder the city. The

179 See Jewell, North-South Divide, 190.
180 Malory, 118.
author of the continuation of the *Croyland Chronicle* would later say that the northern army “swept onwards like a whirlwind from the north, and in the impulse of their fury attempted to overrun the whole of England.”

Clement Paston was in London at the time and provides a contemporary voice for London’s concerns in a letter to his brother, John I, dated 23 January 1461: “fore þe pepill in þe northe robbe and styll and ben apoyntyd to pill all þys cwntré, and gyffë a-way meny goodys and lyfflodys in all þe sowthe cwntré…”

Queen Margaret felt compelled to address and specifically deny such rumors in a letter to the citizens of London, assuring them that “ye nor noon of you shalbe robbed, dispoiled nor wronged by any personne that at that tyme we or our sayde sone shalbe accompanyed with or any other sent in our or his name…” The city remained unconvinced, however, and denied entry to the queen, forcing her and her army to leave the area; shortly thereafter, the Yorkist Edward entered the city and claimed the throne. The *Morte Darthur*’s northern house of Lot – envious, vengeful, violent – resembles the contemporary perception of Northerners. Lancelot, however, probably reminded Southerners of themselves: noble (with the courtesy of the English Gawain), well-spoken, “civilized” (save, of course, when he goes mad, runs into the wilderness, and becomes unrecognizable; one might say, when he goes “Northern” for a while).

Although there is much to recommend a strictly North/South reading of the feud between the houses of Lot and Ban, this reading is not without complications. For one thing, Malory identifies Lancelot’s Joyous Garde as either the northern castle at Alnwick

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or the one at Bamburgh. But this very complication – Lancelot as a northern landowner – opens up another possible lens through which to view this feud: the struggle for property and influence, on both the regional and national levels. It also enhances the verisimilitude for fifteenth-century readers, as magnate estates were rarely concentrated in one area, but were typically scattered across the kingdom. Richard, duke of York, for example, held lands in areas as widespread as Yorkshire, East Anglia, the Welsh Marches, and Ireland. It is interesting to note that the first solid evidence Malory provides for any animosity between the houses of Lot and Ban can be read in the context of the struggles for property and influence. There are suggestions of forthcoming troubles early in the text, such as Merlin’s prophecy at the end of the Balin episode. Merlin takes Balin’s sword and prophesies: “And Launcelot with thys swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that shall be sir Gawayne.” Yet this prophecy need not indicate friction between the two men, as Balin and his brother Balan had just slain each other unwittingly – after Balin had received a similar warning: “Ye shall sle with that swerde the beste frende that ye have and the man that ye moste love in the world, and that swerde shall be youre destruccion.” Despite the prophecy of Gawain’s death, the text gives no solid evidence that the house of Lot resents the house of Ban until after Lancelot has won Joyous Garde. At one point, an indeterminable amount of time after Lancelot becomes a northern landowner but only the fourth time Joyous Garde is mentioned in the Morte, Trystram arrives at the castle amidst some turmoil. The townspeople inform him that Aggravain and Gaheris have killed “a knyght of this castell… for none other cause

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185 See Malory, 1257.
186 Malory, 91.
187 Malory, 64. It is difficult to imagine that Gawain did not hear of and remember this prophecy, as it was spoken in the midst of others, but it – like many of Merlin’s prophecies – seems to be forgotten over time.
but that oure knyght seyde that sir Launcelot was bettir knyght than sir Gawayne.”

This shameful act bewilders Trystram, who sees nothing wrong with a knight speaking well of his lord – and in Lancelot’s own base of operations at that. But to a reader in fifteenth-century England, this murder of a retainer of a rival magnate in a contested area would look uncomfortably familiar. Much of the Percy-Neville dispute – which involved violence, or the threat of violence, on retainers of the opposing affinity – revolved around property and local influence. Peter Booth, in fact, examines that feud in terms of the spread of Neville influence into Percy territory and the resentment it caused.

Lancelot’s obtaining Joyous Garde certainly parallels a similar encroachment into the territory long associated with the house of Lot, and it is reasonable to suspect that fifteenth-century readers would have picked up on the tension. This encroachment would become more obvious if Gawain’s home territory could be identified more precisely than just Lothian and Orkney (and often larger areas of Scotland). There are suggestions that perhaps his territory stretches from these lands north of Joyous Garde to well south of it.

In *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, for example, Gawain appears to grant both Carlisle and Lowther (just south of Penrith) to Sir Galleron of Galloway; both are well south of Alnwick and Bamburgh. It has been demonstrated before that Malory frequently used such texts to provide names for characters and locations in the *Morte* – including Galleron. One possible Gawain stronghold in the *Morte* may be the castle of Lonezep,

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188 Malory, 690.
190 See *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll. 679, 681. The text uses the forms Carlele and Lother, but Hahn lists Carlisle and Lother as likely locations.
191 See, for example, Norris, *Malory’s Library*, 111-12; Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 85-87.
which lies “faste by Joyus Garde.”\textsuperscript{192} Besides its general proximity to known Gawain territories, there are two other reasons for associating it with Gawain. First, it is notable that in the tournament there Arthur grants the first joust to Sir Edward of Orkney and his brother Sir Sadok (both Gawain’s cousins) “for they were of Orkney.”\textsuperscript{193} A second reason to suspect that Lonezep is in Gawain’s territory is that when Trystram leaves Joyous Garde for the final time, he shortly meets Palomides; these two immediately meet Galleron. Kim lists Galleron as a member of Gawain’s affinity, and as mentioned above he was associated with Gawain and the North via his role in \textit{The Awntyrs of Arthur} (and other northern-based Gawain romances, such as \textit{Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlise}).\textsuperscript{194} In the \textit{Morte}, Galleron is present when Palomides converts; this version differs from the source, and Galleron seems to be one of those realistic additions Malory enjoys. After all, even in Malory’s world of knights-errant peppering the countryside, it would be no surprise to meet a Gawain retainer in Gawain territory. Again, recalling Lonezep’s proximity to Joyous Garde (and Joyous Garde’s proximity to Lothian) and the prominence given to the \textit{knyghtes of Orkeney} at the tournament there, Lancelot’s base of operations appears to be an intrusion into territory previously dominated by the house of Lot. A brewing territory dispute also adds extra motivation to the murder committed by Aggravain and Gaheris at Joyous Garde – the type of motivation Malory grants Sir Pynel, who attempts to poison Gawain for the murder of his cousin Lamerok (see below).

\textsuperscript{192} Malory, 682.
\textsuperscript{193} Malory, 733. Additionally, Gawain’s cousin Uwayne – along with Arthur’s butler, Lucan – opens the second day of the jousting. On both days, “knyghtes of Orkeney” comprise the second wave of jousters. On the third day, Kay le Straunge jousts first; Kim associates him with Arthur’s own affinity, but in the fifteenth-century \textit{Prose Merlin} this Kay is associated with the group of young men who gather around Gawain. See Kim, \textit{Knight without the Sword}, 92. On the third day, Arthur and Lancelot lead the second wave.
\textsuperscript{194} Kim, \textit{Knight without the Sword}, 86-87.
Lancelot’s presence at Joyous Garde – so near Gawain’s home territory – may have put the Lot-Ban feud in the context of regionally-based feuds like the Percy-Neville one in the North or the Courtenay-Bonville one in the West Country, but another important aspect of the feud makes it even more relevant to the fifteenth-century political situation: it features a royal kinsman versus a royal favorite. Gawain and his brothers, as nephews of King Arthur, expect a certain prominence to be afforded them, and to an extent it is. Arthur’s (and Guinevere’s) preference for Lancelot, however, creates tension at court. This awkward dynamic reflects mid-fifteenth century political situations, and the regular complaints about the king’s preference for favorites over princes of the blood. During the Jack Cade rebellion in 1450, for example, the commons of Kent complained about Henry VI’s recent preference for William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk: “Item, that the lordis of his roiall blood bene put from his dayle presence and other meane personnes of lower nature exalted and made cheefe of pryve counsaill.”\(^{195}\) The rebels would later demand that the king avoide all the false progenye and affinite of the duc of Suffolke… And to take aboute his noble personne the trewe lordis of his roiall blood of this his reaume, that is to say the highe and mighti prince the duc of Yorke, late exiled from our seid soveraigne lorde’s presence by the mocion and

\(^{195}\) “Complaints of the commons of Kent and causes of their assembly at Blackheath, 1450,” in The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale’s Book, ed. Margaret Lucille Kekewich, Colin Richmond, Anne F. Sutton, Livia Visser-Fuchs, John L. Watts (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), 204. Although the complaint mentions Suffolk by name, it is worth noting that Suffolk had been summarily executed several weeks earlier. One reason the commons issued this complaint was the rumor that Kent would face royal repercussions for Suffolk’s execution.
tering of the traytours and fals disposed the duc of Suffolke and his affinite…

Similarly, during the Robin of Redesdale rebellion in 1469 the Yorkshire commons drew direct parallels between Edward IV’s government and the previously failed governments of Edward II, Richard II, and Henry VI (all deposed kings): “Firste, where the seid kinges estranged the grete lordes of their blood from theire secrete counseile and nat advised by theme, takyng aboute theime other not of their blood and inclyned oonly to theire counseill, rewle and advise.” The rebels also list current offenders, such as Edward’s new father-in-law, Richard Woodville, Lord Rivers. To one degree or another, royal kinsmen have been linked to both of these complaints: York with the Kent uprising, Warwick with the Yorkshire one. As discussed in Chapter Two, Richard, duke of York (a prince of the royal blood) felt ostracized from Henry VI’s counsel in the 1450s; in the following decade, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick (Edward IV’s first cousin) likewise felt displaced by the queen’s parvenu Woodville relatives. With these contemporary situations in mind, the Lot-Ban rivalry in the Morte takes on new relevancy.

Influence at court was behind such kinsmen-favorite political rivalries, and Malory gives hints in the *Morte* that influence drives the rivalry between the houses of Lot and Ban. As discussed in Chapter Two, Kenneth Hodges reads Lancelot’s relationship with the queen politically, and this type of reading easily extends to other aspects of the court. Near the end of the text, for example, Malory reminds the reader of Aggravain’s (and Mordred’s) motivation in plotting to trap Lancelot: “For thys sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had ever a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot; and dayly and nyghtly they ever wacched uppon sir Launcelot.”

The source of their *prevy hate* is not adequately explained at this point in the text – certainly not with the same transparency that Pynel’s desire for revenge against Gawain is – and simple envy would seem to be reason enough. After all, Lancelot frequently bests members of the Orkney clan in both tournaments and random encounters. He unhorses Mordred on behalf of King Bagdamagus, for example, and Gawain while disguised as Sir Kay; he defeats all of the Lot brothers (twice) at the Great Tournament held at Westminster.

Lancelot even wins the honors on the third day of the tournament at Lonezep – which, as discussed above, likely formed part of Gawain’s territory – after Trystram and Palimodes had won the first two days by routinely defeating the *knyghtes of Orkeney*. At the tournament in which Lancelot wears the Fair Maiden of Astolat’s token, Arthur actually withholds Gawain from participating because “never had sir Gawayne the bettir and sir Launcelot were in the fydle, and many tymes was sir Gawayne rebuked so

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200 Malory, 1161. Unlike Pynel’s motivation for hating Gawain, Aggravain’s hatred for Lancelot is specified in the *Mort Aru*; his hatred of the queen, however, is not. See *The Death of Arthur*, in *Lancelot-Grail*, vol. IV, 91.

201 See, respectively, Malory, 263, 277-78, 1110-11. At the Great Tournament, Lancelot does not defeat Gareth, of course, who fights alongside Lancelot.
whan sir Launcelot was in the fylde in ony justis dysgysed."\textsuperscript{202} Lancelot’s penchant for
disguise – and jousting against Arthur’s knights – likely rankles the Orkney clan. As their
cousin Uwayne reminds Gaheris (when the latter starts to face the former in a joust at
Mark’s court in Cornwall): “Sir, ye do nat youre parte; for, sir, the firste tyme that ever ye
were made knyght of the Rounde Table ye sware that ye shuld nat have ado with none of
youre felyship wyttyngly… And thaughe ye wolde breke youre othe, I woll nat breke
myne.”\textsuperscript{203} So serious is this rebuke, that Gaheris is “ashamed” – a sentiment that Lancelot
never seems to feel, despite his many (and intentional) jousts against his fellow Knights
of the Round Table.\textsuperscript{204} Additionally, Lancelot often defeats opponents the Orkneys
cannot, such as Tarquin and Carados of the Dolorous Tower, and accomplishes feats they
cannot, such as the healing of Sir Urré. Lancelot also wins the loyalty of Gareth, the
youngest son of King Lot – surely a slap in the face in a family-oriented society. That
Malory’s text criticizes family disputes on several occasions draws particular attention to
Gareth’s preference for Lancelot over his own brothers.\textsuperscript{205} Given human nature, it would
be easy to write off Aggravain’s and Mordred’s prevy hate as mere envy, but there is
more to it than that – there is a clear political element as well.

Just as Lancelot’s relationship with Guinevere can be read politically, so, too, can the Orkney clan’s prevy hate for him. This is not simply a case of envy over another’s
success; in the \textit{Morte}, such successes (and the ensuing fame) have practical benefits; in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Malory1069} Malory, 1069.
\bibitem{Malory546} Malory, 546.
\bibitem{Malory277} This supposed vow, upon which Malory does not expound, seems to have little currency; Arthur’s
knights frequently joust against each other, even when not in disguise. In fact, when Lancelot is disguised
as Sir Kay, Sagramore initiates the series of jousts that follows. Of course, the other knights after
Sagremore believe that a strange knight has killed Kay and taken his armor, so Gawain and Uwayne do not
know that they are attacking Lancelot. As Sagremore’s sobriquet, \textit{le desyrous}, indicates, he is often
overeager, and he says he wishes to \textit{preve} (i.e., test) Kay’s might. See Malory, 277.
\bibitem{Malory913,969-74,1083-84} See, for example, Malory, 913, 969-74 (when Lionel attacks his brother Bors), and 1083-84.
\end{thebibliography}
Malory’s world, fame and success equal influence. Or, as Hyonjin Kim puts it, worship “is an important barometer of political capacity in Malory’s chivalrous society.”  

The practical aspect to worship can be seen when Trystam’s fame begins to exceed Lancelot’s; at one point, “all the noyse and brewte felle to sir Trystram, and the name ceased of sir Launcelot.”  

Malory then reports that Lancelot’s “bretherne and his kynnysmen wolde have slayne sir Trystram bycause of his fame.”  

Lancelot rebukes them harshly for this impulse, but Trystram’s growing fame has tangible benefits: “So of this noyse and fame sprange into Cornwayle and unto them of Lyones, whereof they were passynge glad and made grete joy. And than they of Lyones sente lettyrs unto sir Trystram of recommendacion, and many greate gyfftys to mayntene sir Trystrams astate.”  

The lettyrs of recommendacion referred to here suggest Trystram’s growing stature as a “good lord.” In 1454, for example, when John Paston I wrote to John de Vere, earl of Oxford, he began: “Right wurcepfull and my right especiall lord, I recomaund me to yowre gode lordshep…”  

The stock phrase “I recomaund me to you” typically indicated an inferior addressing a superior, or at least someone who was putting himself or herself into an inferior position (e.g., a lover or a petitioner might use the phrase). According to Kato’s Concordance, Malory uses various forms of recomaundele eighteen times, and each time it signifies this type of hierarchical positioning. Conversely, those in positions of authority typically began their letters, as the earl of Oxford did when writing to John Paston I in 1453, with some form of “Right trusty and right intierly welbeloued,  

206 Kim, Knight without the Sword, 76.
207 Malory, 785.
208 Malory, 785.
209 Malory, 785.
we grete you hertly wele.”\textsuperscript{211} This dynamic, too, is present in the \textit{Morte}. King Royns’
message to King Arthur, for example, demonstrates his presumption of dominance: “And
this was hys message, grerynge well kyng Arthure on thyss maner of wyse…”\textsuperscript{212}
Similarly, the Roman Emperor Lucius tells Gawain and Bors, “But saye to your lorde I
sende hym greynge…”\textsuperscript{213} Such subtle indications of relationships in the \textit{Morte} should
not be ignored: Malory was quite cognizant of his use of language. Commentators have
noted, for example, that the \textit{Morte} uses the formal \textit{you} and informal \textit{thou} pronouns to
indicate shades of respect, familiarity and insult, and that it bases its use of names (or
pseudonyms) on the knowledge of the characters present in a given scene (e.g., while
Trystram is in Ireland, the narrator calls him “Tramtryste” unless a character who knows
he is Trystram is present).\textsuperscript{214} Thus, the \textit{letyrs of recommendacion} written to Trystram
subtly indicate his growing stature as more people turn to him for favors, protection,
patronage and prestige. As Trystram’s influence grows, Lancelot’s diminishes – thus
resulting in Lancelot’s kinsmen wishing for Trystram’s death. This is the exact dynamic
going on between the Orkney clan and Lancelot: as Lancelot rises, the Orkneys decline.

As nephews of the king, Gawain and his brothers rightfully deserve places of
honor and prestige at court, yet it is Lancelot’s name on everyone’s lips; it is Lancelot to
whom people turn for favors and protection. Lancelot’s patronage is both desired and
efficacious: he is instrumental in raising men such as Lavayne, Urré, and Plenerys (and,

\textsuperscript{211} \textit{Paston Letters}, v. II, 84. A simple “we grete you well” was more common than Oxford’s phrase.
\textsuperscript{212} Malory, 54.
\textsuperscript{213} Malory, 207.
\textsuperscript{214} See, for example, Sir Thomas Malory, \textit{Le Morte Darthur}, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1998), 559-60 (note to page 472); Malory, \textit{Morte Darthur}, ed. Richard Firth Green, in \textit{English 201:
Selected Works of British Literature: Medieval to 1800}, vol. I (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University
Department of English, 2008); Dhira B. Mahoney, “Narrative Treatment of Name in Malory’s \textit{Morte
Darthur},” \textit{ELH} 47.4 (1990): 646-56.
arguably, even Gareth) to the Round Table. Regarding Gawain’s patronage, however, Kim notes that Sir Priamus is “the only knight that Malory’s Gawain has ever recruited outside the established connections of kinship and neighborhood.”\(^{215}\) This recruitment occurs early in Arthur’s reign, during the Roman campaign – which, incidentally, is when Lancelot rises to prominence. To many English readers, perhaps encountering this version of Gawain for the first time, the stark contrast between Malory’s Gawain and the insular Gawain would have been immediately noticeable; insular Arthurian literature grants *Gawain* the preeminent position at Arthur’s court. As seen above, Malory was aware of this tradition, which goes far beyond Gawain’s reputation for courtesy. In the mid-fifteenth century *Prose Merlin*, for example, Arthur names Gawain as his second-in-command, and possibly as his heir: “Gawein, feire nevewe, com hider, and that I yow enffeffe ye will take the constabilrie of myn housolde and of all the lordship of my londe after me, and fro hensforth to be lorde and comaunder of alle hem that ben in my londe, for I will it be so.”\(^{216}\) In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s popular version, Gawain’s mother is actually Arthur’s younger (and full-blooded) sister, born of both Uther and Igraine – thus Gawain would have had at least some legitimate claim to the throne, should he have survived Arthur. In *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, Arthur grants Gawain the “worship of Wales” – arguably making him the Prince of Wales and heir to the throne.\(^{217}\) Malory’s *Morte* provides multiple examples of the type of respect and status afforded to the king’s nephews, the kind they might expect as “princes of the blood.” In the incident in which Aggravain and Gaheris murder a knight at Joyous Garde, mentioned above, Trystram

\(^{215}\) Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 87.


\(^{217}\) *Awntyrs*, l. 666. Editor Thomas Hahn discusses the possible association of this grant with the title “Prince of Wales” in his note to this line. See p. 224.
refuses to kill them once they identify themselves as “brethirne unto the good knyght sir Gawayne, and… nevewys unto kynge Arthure.” Even after they attack him, Trystram defends himself without killing them. This mercy is afforded them despite the fact that Trystram has already expressed the wish that he had been present when the brothers murdered Lamerok – a thinly veiled threat if ever there was one. Despite his great fame, a regional nobleman like Trystram dares not kill the kinsmen of the king, even though doing so would have been “just.” Lamerok, too, son to one of the more prominent Welsh kings, had previously remarked that their kinship to Arthur is what prevented him from confronting the Orkney brothers. Sir Pelleas despises Gawain (who promises to help Pelleas win the love of Ettard, but sleeps with her instead), but “he spared hym for the love of the kynge.”

There are other examples, too, of the Orkney brothers receiving special treatment for their kinship with Arthur – perhaps the most notorious example is the fact that they face no repercussions for the murders of Pellinore, Lamerok, or even Arthur’s sister (their own mother), who took Lamerok as a lover. But this virtual “license to kill” is the primary benefit Arthur’s nephews receive from their royal kinship. In fact, after one joust at Camelot, in which Lamerok wins the top honor (despite arriving late, after Gawain had a strong showing to begin the tournament), Gawain makes a rather poignant remark to his brothers: “Fayre bretherne, here may ye se: whom that we hate kynge Arthure lovyth, and whom we love he hatyth.” Although this remark is made specifically about Lamerok, it clearly extends to others as well – particularly to Lancelot, the royal favorite. Shortly

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218 Malory, 691.  
219 See Malory, 664, 670.  
220 Malory, 180.  
221 Malory, 608.
after this tournament, the Orkney brothers kill Lamerok and they immediately turn their resentment to Lancelot. Malory alerts the reader to this in two ways. First, right after Percival learns of Lamerok’s death (on the verso of the same leaf in the Winchester manuscript, in fact), Trystram arrives at Joyous Garde and hears that Aggravain and Gaheris have murdered one of Lancelot’s men. Second (only two leaves later), Palomides informs Dinadan and Gareth that the other Orkney brothers have murdered Lamerok; Dinadan tells Gareth,

‘For well I wote, as they [i.e., Gareth’s brothers] myght, prevayly they hate my lorde sir Launcelot and all his kyn, and grete pryvay dispyte they have at hym. And sertaynly that is my lorde sir Launcelot well ware of, and that causyth hym the more to have the good knyghtes of his kynne about hym.’

This comment is telling in three ways: it supports the reading that Lancelot is counted among those whom King Arthur loves (and the Orkneys hate); it provides a second indication that the Orkneys have switched their target from Lamerok to Lancelot; it suggests that there are logical reasons behind the pryvay dispyte (“For well I wote, as they myght…”). The obvious reason for hating Lancelot is the influence he wields at court – influence that the nephews of King Arthur would expect to possess. In many ways, Malory’s Lancelot plays Woodville to Gawain’s Warwick, Suffolk to his York.

222 Malory, 700. Dinadan also says that Gawain and his brothers “hatyth all good knyghtes of the Rounde Table,” which would seem to offer explanation enough for the hate: Lancelot is a good knight, so they hate him. However, Dinadan has already stated his opinion that bad knights innately hate good knights, telling the knights of Cornwall “bycause ye ar nat of worship, ye hate all men of worship…” A political reading of the text offers more intricacy.
In the *Morte*, the political reality is that Lancelot’s influence dominates the court. Although most characters (and readers) recognize this early in the work, it becomes undeniable once Lancelot’s relationship with Arthur fractures: a hundred knights side with Lancelot over the king.\(^{223}\) Gawain shows his own cognizance of political reality when he rejects Aggravain’s plot to entrap Lancelot: “For, and there aryse warre and wrake betwyxte sir Launcelot and us, wyte you well, brothir, there woll many kynges and grete lordis holde with sir Launcelot.”\(^{224}\) Gawain proceeds to remind Aggravain of the many good things Lancelot has done: e.g., saving the king and queen on multiple occasions, rescuing Gawain from the Dolorous Tower, rescuing Aggravain and Mordred from Tarquin, and many other noble deeds. Critics typically read this apparent support of Lancelot as part of Gawain’s inconsistent characterization by Malory.\(^{225}\) But there is another possible explanation for Gawain’s behavior: political astuteness. The first part of his speech to Aggravain, the warning of subsequent war (quoted above), reveals the political context of Gawain’s uneasy peace with Lancelot – and makes his subsequent defense of Lancelot sound more like self-reminders of why peace is a good and logical thing. Interestingly, the man who spearheaded the murders of King Pellinore and his son Lamerok considers Lancelot too powerful to attack head-on. This fact, perhaps more than anything else, indicates just how much influence Lancelot holds. For much of the text, even after his brother Aggravain and his sons Florence and Lovell are killed in the attempt to capture Lancelot, Gawain maintains a policy of not directly opposing Lancelot (Gawain accepts these deaths as the result of his kin’s own foolhardiness, against which

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\(^{223}\) See Malory, 1204.
\(^{224}\) Malory, 1162.
\(^{225}\) See Wilson, *Characterization in Malory*, 69-82.
he had warned them). This does not mean, however, that Gawain has not tried to undermine Lancelot’s position and influence in subtle ways – ways for which there could be no retaliation. After the conclusion of the Grail Quest, “sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne… and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde…” It is clear that this relationship becomes known at court, as the text says “that many in the courte spake of hit, and in especiall sir Aggravayne, sir Gawaynes brothir, for he was ever opynne-mowthed.” Indeed, as discussed in the last chapter, Lancelot even starts to interact with other women in order “to eschew the sclawndir and noyse.” Guinevere banishes him from court, but comes to realize that he was right to think of the potential consequences of the affair. Interpreting subsequent events in the context of the Lot-Ban rivalry reveals that Gawain, like Lancelot and Guinevere, acts politically; in his case, he works to undermine Lancelot’s influence at court.

After the Poisoned Apple episode (in which Lancelot regains the favor of the queen), Arthur calls for a tournament at Camelot. Due to illness, the queen is unable to attend and remains behind; Lancelot, still recovering from defending her against Mador’s charge, also opts to stay behind. Guinevere, however, now expresses the same concerns about slander that Lancelot had earlier: “What woll youre enemyes and myne sey and deme? ‘Se how sir Launcelot holdith hym ever behynde the kynge, and so the quene doth also, for that they wolde have their plesure togydirs.’ And thus woll they sey.’ Lancelot agrees to go (incognito, of course), and thus meets Elaine of Astolat when he stays at her father’s manor. In short, Elaine falls in love with Lancelot; he agrees to wear

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226 Malory, 1045.  
227 Malory, 1045.  
228 Malory, 1045.  
229 Malory, 1065-66.
her token (as it will complete his disguise, since he has never worn a lady’s token before); he performs extremely well in the tournament, but is wounded by Bors and abruptly leaves; with Lavayne’s help, he finds succor in a hermitage. The court, of course, wants to know who the valiant knight was, and Gawain (who suspected it was Lancelot, although the token confused him) goes in search of him. It would be easy to write off Gawain’s search as mere concern about Lancelot’s wellbeing – yet Gawain does not inform Bors that he suspects the wounded knight was Lancelot. Instead, when Gawain discovers where the knight had stayed, he seems particularly interested in the potential love connection. When he first arrives, he asks, “Now, fayre maydyn… ys that good knyght youre love?” After Gawain sees the shield that Lancelot left behind, confirming the wounded knight’s identity, he asks again, “Ys that knyght that owyth thys shylde youre love?” Elaine admits, “Yee truly… my love ys he,” but laments the fact that her love is not returned: “God wolde that I were hys love!” Regardless, Gawain makes much of the fact that Lancelot had never worn a lady’s token before:

‘I have knowyn that noble knyght thys foure and twenty yere, and never or that day I nor none othir knyght, I dare make good, saw never nother herde say that ever he bare tokyn or sygne of no lady, jantillwoman, nor maydyn at no justis nother tutnamente. And therefore, fayre maydyn, ye ar much beholdyn to him to gyff him thanke.’

What does Gawain do with the information he gathers? He returns to Camelot and tells Arthur the identity of the knight, and “how he had founde sir Launcelottis shylde in the

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230 Malory, 1078.
231 Malory, 1078.
232 Malory, 1078.
233 Malory, 1079.
Telling Arthur this news first would seem to be basic protocol, but he then “opynly disclosed hit to all the courte that hit was sir Launcelot that justed beste.” This news causes two notable reactions. First, Bors and all of Lancelot’s kinsmen are greatly saddened. Politically speaking, the uncertainty of Lancelot’s future – Gawain had, after all, told Elaine that Lancelot was “more lycklyer to be dede than to be on lyve” – would have shaken his affinity, temporarily rendering it less effective.

The second, and more important, reaction comes from Queen Guinevere. After hearing Gawain’s news, the queen becomes “nygh ought of her mynde for wratthe.” Politically speaking, this easily anticipated reaction threatens Lancelot’s position at court, as it was well known that the queen had already banished him once before out of jealousy, and the logical expectation is that she will do so again. And, in fact, Gawain’s announcement probably works better than he imagined, as the queen becomes so angry that she tells Bors: “No forse… though he [i.e., Lancelot] be destroyed, for he ys a false, traytoure knyght.” Guinevere’s reaction proves not to be one that quickly loses its potency, for when Lancelot does return to court the text says that “quene Gwenyver was woode wrothe with sir Launcelot, and wolde by no means speke with hym, but estraunged herselff frome hym.” The rumored love affair between Lancelot and Elaine of Astolat may have set Arthur’s mind at ease (he had previously had some suspicions

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234 Malory, 1080. Gawain also states that the Maiden loves Lancelot “mervaylously,” but refrains from stating that Lancelot loves her as well. He simply says, “What hit meanyth I cannat sey.” Arguably, Gawain is purposefully leaving room for interpretation, despite Elaine’s own seeming admittance that Lancelot does not return her love.

235 Malory, 1080.
236 Malory, 1079.
237 Malory, 1080.
238 Malory, 1080.
239 Malory, 1092.
regarding Lancelot and Guinevere), but Lancelot’s relationship with Guinevere was integral to his prominence at court.

It may be noted that the text also says that Gawain is among those who “made grete joy of” Lancelot upon his return, but there are two other points that help contextualize Gawain’s actions politically. First, Gawain ceases to search for Lancelot upon learning his identity; he no longer seems concerned about Lancelot’s great injury or his fate. Second, when Lancelot hears that Gawain has discovered his identity, his immediate assumption is that Gawain will reveal it to the queen: “And than sir Launcelot compaste in hys mynde that sir Gawayne wolde tell quene Gwenyvere how he bare the rede slyve and for whom, that he wyst well wolde turne unto grete angur.” It seems that Gawain is every bit as eager as his surly brothers to undermine Lancelot, but that he is more adept at maintaining pretences than they are. It is not surprising that Gawain would be better at maintaining pretences; recall Gawain’s reputation for courtesy, which is one aspect of Gawain’s insular reputation that Malory alludes to in the *Morte*. In an early encounter, Marhaus unhorses Gawain; when Gawain advances on foot, Marhaus advances on horseback. Gawain instructs Marhaus to alight and fight on foot, and threatens to slay the horse if he does not. Marhaus responds: “Gramercy… of your jentylnesse! *Ye teche me curtesy*, for hit is nat commendable one knyght to be on horseback and the other on foote.” Perhaps what has been seen previously as the

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240 See, for example, Malory, 97, 557-58, and 617, and the discussion in Chapter Two.
241 Malory, 1092. Both Aggravain and Mordred are excepted by name as the only two who are not pleased to see Lancelot, besides the queen.
242 Malory, 1082.
243 Malory, 160. Emphasis added. It is possible that Marhaus is being somewhat ironic; as Kim notes, killing a knight’s horse is “one of the most heinous crimes in chivalrous society…” See *Knight without the Sword*, 78. Yet, in this case, Gawain is quite correct that it is unknighthly to fight from horseback with a man on foot, and Kim discusses horse slaying in the context of justified mercilessness and the slaying of
uneven characterization of Gawain in the *Morte* is, in reality, Gawain’s politically self-interested façade. On the surface, he works to project an amicable relationship with the most powerful magnate in the realm, and he resists openly opposing Lancelot until the deaths of Gareth and Gaheris. Behind the scenes, however, he attempts to undermine Lancelot’s position at court – a sign of the underlying struggle for influence. Of course, once Lancelot kills Gareth and Gaheris the rivalry for influence erupts into a full-scale blood feud, not unlike the previous Lot-Pellinore feud. At that point, the pretences no longer matter; what is called for is revenge.

3. “Thy father slew myne, and so wil I do the and all thy kyn”\textsuperscript{244}. The Blood Feud

According to K. B. McFarlane, blood feuds were rare in the fifteenth century\textsuperscript{245}. Despite the era’s association with such feuds, he finds scant evidence to suggest a proliferation of them during this period of English history. McFarlane even downplays the attention given to one of the period’s most famous revenge killings: the murder of Edmund, earl of Rutland, the seventeen-year-old second son of Richard, duke of York. Reportedly, John Clifford, Lord Clifford, murdered Rutland in the aftermath of the Battle of Wakefield on 30 December 1460 (after which York also was slain). The motivation for the murder was clear: five and a half years earlier, Clifford’s father, Thomas, had been killed by the Yorkist forces at the first Battle of St. Albans. Although the young Rutland unknighthly knights. This allows Marhaus’s statement to be taken at face value: Gawain is, in this case, instructing him in *curtesy*.

\textsuperscript{244} Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548), folio CLXXXIII.

\textsuperscript{245} McFarlane, “Wars of the Roses,” 243.
reportedly begged for mercy, Clifford is said to have stabbed him in the heart saying, “By Gods blode, thy father slew myne, and so wil I do the and all thy kyn…” But as McFarlane observes, this particular quote – although referred to often today to demonstrate the brutality of the Wars of the Roses – is found in no source prior to Edward Hall’s chronicle, printed in 1548. The quote is, in essence, part of the Tudor myth about the violence and disunity of the kingdom prior to Henry VII’s ascension in 1485. As with so many other conceptions of the Wars of the Roses, William Shakespeare’s pen (borrowing, of course, from Hall) perpetuated this dramatic proclamation: in 3 Henry VI, just before stabbing Rutland, Clifford says, “Thy father slew my father, therefore die.” In reality, this encounter may not have happened; several contemporary sources simply mention Rutland’s death alongside others slain in (or executed after) the battle. To minimize blood feuds further, McFarlane points out that Edward IV did not seek revenge against Clifford’s son, Henry, in the aftermath of the Readeption; rather than execute the eighteen-year old youth, Edward pardoned him. This point, however, fails to account for Edward’s pacifying policies – he pardoned many Lancastrian lords, both after first attaining the crown in 1461 and after regaining it in 1471. It also does not account for the fact that Henry Clifford later supported Henry Tudor against the Yorkist Richard III, and had his lands restored after the Battle of Bosworth; perhaps Clifford held a grudge against the house of York (though it should be noted that many former Yorkists also sided with Henry over Richard).

246 Hall, Vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies, folio CLXXXIII.
248 See, for example, An English Chronicle, 97; Crowland Chronicle Continuations, 113.
249 See Ross, Edward IV, 66-68, 183-85.
Regardless of how infrequent blood feuds actually were in Malory’s day, what matters when interpreting the *Morte Darthur* is contemporary perception. Historians can look back with a broad view of the complexities of fifteen-century England, but contemporaries had their own impressions of events and their causes. What Malory and his contemporaries perceived did not differ so much from what the Tudors would later propagate: a kingdom divided by feuds, either between political factions like York and Somerset (see Whethamstead, above), or between families like the Percies and the Nevilles (see *Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, above). It is also important to note that then, as now, the sensational would have garnered more attention than it typically deserves. Blood feuds would have stood out in the minds of fifteenth-century Englishmen – and all the more so for their rarity. Consider, for example, the persistent fear of flying today. Statistics demonstrate that it is much safer to fly than to drive an automobile, yet flying remains a common fear.\(^{250}\) This is in part due to the fact that most plane crashes make national headlines, whereas many automobile accidents fail to make even the local news. The sensational draws attention. Thus, despite the fact that blood feuds were rare in fifteenth-century England, those that did occur appear to have had a greater impact on contemporary society than perhaps hindsight analysis would deem appropriate.

The two blood feuds that feature most prominently in the *Morte* are the Lot-Ban feud that precipitates the fall of Camelot, and the Lot-Pellinore feud that pervades the text through the Poisoned Apple incident. Arguably, the former feud deserves critical attention because of its upshot, but the latter one provides some of the best evidence for

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\(^{250}\) According to the National Safety Council’s *Injury Facts, 2011 Edition*, the lifetime odds of someone dying in an air or space transport incident are 1 in 7,032; the odds of dying as the occupant of a car are 1 in 303 (for all motor vehicles accidents, the odds increase to 1 in 88). *See Injury Facts*, (Itasca, IL: National Safety Council, 2011), p. 37.
Malory’s interest in feuds as a divisive force. In multiple ways, it also more directly correlates to the major blood feuds of Malory’s day, including: the scope that such feuds could attain, the formation of political alliances, and the futility of peacemaking efforts. Each of these topics will be discussed below, but it is also worth noting that Malory’s additions to the Lot-Pellinore feud serve to unify the text in ways that have been used to combat Eugene Vinaver’s assertion that Malory composed eight individual romances rather than one work.\(^{251}\) Allowing for the *Morte*’s unity emphasizes the negative consequences of unchecked vengeance and lawlessness to a greater degree than is otherwise found in the individual tales.

Malory’s own additions to the *Morte* highlight his interest in feuds, and while Moorman discusses several of these additions, one is of particular importance: the explanation for Sir Pynel’s attempt to poison Sir Gawain in “The Poisoned Apple” episode. Malory directly links Pynel’s motive to the blood feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore by stating that “thys sir Pyonell hated sir Gawayne bycause of hys kynnesman sir Lamorakes dethe; and therefore, for pure envy and hate, sir Pyonell enpoysonde sertayn appylls for to enpoysen sir Gawayne.”\(^{252}\) Not only does this added motive bring the Lot-Pellinore feud back into the story, but the setting of this assassination attempt (a banquet hosted by Guinevere) also further emphasizes the feud. The banquet occurs after the jealous queen has banished Lancelot from court for attending to the requests of other ladies. Lancelot, of course, had tried to explain that he was only trying to divert the suspicions surrounding his relationship with the queen

\(^{251}\) See, for example, Lumiansky, “Introduction,” in *Malory’s Originality*, 1-7.
\(^{252}\) Malory, 1049.
(which, Malory says, had grown “more hotter” than before), but the jealous queen would not listen to his reasoning. Shortly after he leaves, she hosts a banquet “to shew outwarde that she had as grete joy in all other knyghtes of the Rounde Table as she had in sir Launcelot.” Critics frequently read this banquet as the reaction of a jealous woman looking to spite her lover; Hodges, however, argues that “it is an admirable and necessary attempt [for the queen] to reassert control over and bring peace to increasingly divided affinities.” This political reading is supported by Malory’s statement that, after Lancelot had left the court, Guinevere “inwardely… toke grete thought” of what he had said. It seems that she realizes he was right. On the one hand, the banquet appears to be an attempt by Guinevere to broaden the base of her own support, beyond that of Lancelot and his kin. On the other hand, it could be, as Hodges suggests, an attempt to heal divisions at court. Both are valid readings, but the latter gains support when examined in light of Christine de Pizan’s recommendations for queenly behavior: “This work is the proper duty of the wise queen and princess: to be the means of peace and concord, to work for the avoidance of war because of the trouble that can come of it.”

Meals hosted by the queen are singled out as times of peace: “No dispute will be conducted there.” She also recommends that queens honor their husband’s family, and Gawain indicates that he and his brothers were the guests of honor: “Madam, wyte you

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253 Malory, 1045.
254 Malory, 1048.
255 Hodges, Forging Chivalric Communities, 136.
256 Malory, 1048.
258 Christine de Pizan, Treasure of the City of Ladies, 61.
that thys dyner was made for me and my felowis…”

Thus, what should be a peaceful, unifying event turns into a divisive one when the Lot-Pellinore blood feud results in the death of an innocent knight, Sir Patryse. Sir Mador de la Porte immediately accuses the queen of murdering Patryse, his kinsman, and the queen finds herself isolated when no one stands up to defend her (Bors later reluctantly agrees to do so, if necessary).

Predictably, Lancelot arrives at court just in time to defend the queen against the accusation of treason, but since Malory has already established elsewhere in the text that the justice system is flawed, he also brings Nynyve, the Lady of the Lake, to court to provide a Merlin-like confirmation of the truth:

[Nynyve] tolde hit opynly that she [i.e., Guinevere] was never gylty, and there she disclosed by whom hit was done, and named hym sir Pynel, and for what cause he ded hit. There hit was opynly knowyn and disclosed, and so the quene was excused. And thys knyght sir Pynell fledde unto hys contrey, and was opynly knowyn that he enpoysynde the appyls at that feste to that entente to have destroyed sir Gawayne, bycause sir Gawayne and hys bretherine destroyed sir Lamerok de Galys which sir Pynell was cosyn unto.

Malory leaves many things in his text open to interpretation, but this incident is explained in the clearest terms possible: the details became opynly knowyn. The queen is most certainly innocent in this situation; it is instead the blood feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore that is to blame.

259 Malory, 1049. For Christine de Pizan’s advice about honoring the husband’s family, see Treasure of the City of Ladies, 65-66.
260 See the discussion in Section 1 of Chapter Two.
261 Malory, 1059.
Moorman calls Malory’s linking of these two things – the poisoning and the ongoing feud – a “brilliant stroke” that both “properly motivate[s] Pynell’s action” and “provides yet another tragic consequence of the feud and so points forward to the dissolution of the court.”262 Even more so, however, this link reemphasizes the text’s most prominent blood feud and the disunity of the court just prior to the dissolution noted by Moorman. This blood feud between two of the most prominent families in Arthurian England gains extra potency when considered in the Morte’s historical context. Indeed, the very inclusion of this incident may have held more contemporary relevance than has generally been considered. Keeping in mind Moorman’s point that even inclusion of source material highlights its importance for Malory, a contemporary chronicle hints at a similar scandal involving Queen Margaret. In a continuation of the Brut chronicle, one writer notes: “The xxxvj. yere of kyng Harry, in the moneth of January, dyed the erle of Deuynshire in the abbey of Abyndoun poysened, as men sayde, and beyng there at that tyme with quene Margarete.”263 Nothing more is said of the event, and little of it elsewhere – even modern biographers of the queen give this reference passing treatment. Helen E. Mauer, for example, only remarks on it in a footnote in her biography of Margaret, though she points out that the queen was also accused of planning to poison the king.264 One such example of this particular rumor is found in a letter dated 15 March 1461, in which Prospero di Camulio, the Milanese Ambassador in France, reported, “They say here that the Queen of England, after the king had abdicated in favour of his

262 Moorman, “Lot and Pellinore,” 89.
263 An English Chronicle, 75.
264 Helen E. Maurer, Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 201 (note 91).
son, gave the king poison.” Though such rumors existed, they apparently did not circulate widely enough or carry enough resonance to gain lasting credibility – but with such rumors less than ten years old when Malory wrote, one cannot help but consider whether they were on his mind as he wrote “The Poisoned Apple” incident. His “brilliant stroke” of associating this with the feuds of the day may also have had contemporary relevance: although Thomas Courtenay, earl of Devon had primarily sided with Henry’s government since 1455, he had been one of York’s earliest allies. He incited pro-York riots in the West Country in 1452, and sided with York against the king during the Dartford uprising of that year, after which Devon was imprisoned – only to be released the following year during York’s first Protectorate. Given the frequent switching of loyalties in the fifteenth century – and the fact that Devon himself had switched once before – it was not inconceivable that Devon (a Lancastrian adherent by 1455; he fought with Henry VI’s forces at St. Albans) may have been rumored to be switching back to York. After all, when York wrote letters to Henry VI on the night before the battle, “they were handed personally to Earl Thomas,” and Devon was apparently not targeted as Somerset, Northumberland, and Clifford were (who all were killed in the battle). Even the hint of Yorkist sympathies may have given the queen motivation for poisoning him, but it remains an unlikely, slanderous rumor. Still, the potential reading of this incident in the context of the larger feud between the queen and York should not be ignored, particularly in regard to Malory’s Poisoned Apple affair: slanderous rumors of poison.

surrounding a queen is but one of the many elements that made the Arthurian legend so relevant to late fifteenth-century England.

The Lot-Pellinore feud also reaches the wide scope of the blood feuds that developed during the Wars of the Roses, and it was the scope of these feuds that helped sensationalize the killings. To some contemporaries, it seemed there was no end to the violence. *Warkworth’s Chronicle*, for example, reports disappointment and disillusionment with the Henry VI’s reign, stating that people hoped a new king would “amende alle manere of thynges that was amysse, and brynge the reame of Englond in grete prosperite and reste.” 267 After nine years of Edward IV, however, the chronicle reports: “Nevere the lattere, whenne Kynge Edwarde iiiijth regnede, the peple looked after alle the forseide prosperytes and peece, but it came not; but one batayle aferere another, and moche troble and grett losse of goodes…” 268 This sentiment echoes the unease of Arthur’s subjects in the *Morte*, many of whom side with Mordred in the end: “For than was the comyn voyce amonge them that with kynge Arthur was never othir lyff but warre and stryff, and with sir Mordred was grete joy and blysse.” 269 Neither fifteenth-century Englishmen nor Arthur’s subjects is referring to foreign warfare, as neither kingdom had been embroiled in any major foreign wars for quite some time. 270 In both cases, it is the warre and stryff of domestic factions that most readily fit the complaints. The story of Rutland’s murder at Wakefield, for example, has all the appearance of a revenge tale – one that started years earlier at the first Battle of St. Albans on 22 May 1455. Many

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267 *Warworth’s Chronicle*, 34.
268 *Warworth’s Chronicle*, 34.
269 Malory, 1228-29.
270 Excepting, of course, some of the frequent Scottish raids – and accepting the identification of Lancelot as an English subject, and not a foreign knight who had been serving King Arthur voluntarily. For that argument, see Kenneth Hodges, “Why Malory’s Launcelot Is Not French.”

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historians consider this battle the beginning of the Wars of the Roses proper, and it was indeed the first actual military conflict between the Yorkist and Lancastrian forces—the so-called Dartford Uprising of 1452, York’s first attempt to bring military might against Henry VI, ended without violence. Of course, both the Dartford Uprising and the first Battle of St. Albans stemmed in large part from the struggle between York and Somerset for influence in Henry VI’s government, but the Percy-Neville feud also played its part. In 1452, York lacked widespread support; by 1455, however, the Neville earls of Salisbury and Warwick had joined him, thus gaining a powerful ally against their Percy nemeses. During the short battle—it lasted perhaps two hours—the only men of prominence to die were three of the Yorkists’ primary rivals: Somerset, Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, and Percy’s ally, Thomas Clifford, Lord Clifford. Over the next several years, chronicles attest to the growing animosity between the sons of the slain noblemen and the York/Neville faction. Tensions threatened to boil over in early 1458 when Henry VI’s great council (which had adjourned in November) reconvened in London at the end of January. The tense atmosphere convinced many magnates to come prepared for trouble: York brought 400 men, Salisbury 500, Warwick 600; the new duke of Somerset, Henry Beaufort, brought 800; the new earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy, his brother Thomas Percy, Lord Egremont, and their ally John Clifford, Lord Clifford, brought 1,500. Reportedly, the Lancastrian lords planned to ambush and murder the Yorkists in revenge. The chronicle in MS Gough London 10 encapsulates the precarious situation:

272 Griffiths, Reign of King Henry VI, 805.
The immediate situation was defused by Henry VI’s peacemaking efforts, and in the manner of a latter-day *wergild* the Yorkists agreed to pay fines to compensate the Beaufort, Percy and Clifford families for the deaths of their kinsmen. Yet, as discussed below, this peace attempt was ineffective. Open conflict between the factions resumed the following year, and, as seen above, the sons of the Lancastrian lords slain at St. Albans continued to seek revenge – in fact, Wakefield looks like a reverse St. Albans, as York, Rutland, Salisbury and his second son, Sir Thomas Neville were all killed, while the sons of the previously slain Somerset, Northumberland, and Clifford were all among the victors. Additionally, Wakefield saw deaths from other feuds, like the Courtenay-Bonville one: Lord Bonville’s son and grandson were also killed with the Yorkists, while the Courtenay earl of Devon fought for the victorious Lancastrians. These deaths were not the end of the killing, however: Lord Bonville himself was executed after the second Battle of St. Albans on 17 February 1461; Northumberland died during the Battle of Towton on 29 March 1461, and Devon was executed afterward; two more earls of Somerset were executed after the battles of Hexham (15 May 1464) and Tewkesbury (6 May 1471); and so on. Treason provided the overt reason for many of the post-battle

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executions, but many of the victims were the personal as well as the political enemies of the victors.

The Lot-Pellinore feud reflects the scope of contemporary blood feuds, such as the one between the Yorkist and Lancastrian lords mentioned above. Just as the deaths at St. Albans led to multiple deaths on both sides in ensuing years, so did Pellinore’s killing of Lot in battle result in years of bloodshed. Malory alerts the reader to this immediately after reporting Lot’s death: “But kyng Pellynore bare the wyte of the dethe of kynge Lott, wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the tenthe yere aftir he was made knyght, and slew kynge Pellynor hys owne hondis.” The feud is multi-faceted, as envy plays a role as well: Gawain feels snubbed when Pellinore’s son, Tor, is the first man made knight at Arthur’s wedding feast and Pellinore is shown honor. Yet revenge remains the primary motivation, as the text makes clear, with Gawain telling his brother Gaheris: “Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, whych grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir kynge Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym.” The two men agree to kill Pellinore once Gaheris is knighted. It matters not that Lot was slain in battle, and in rebellion against King Arthur at that – the score must be settled. It is unclear whether or not Gawain and his brothers would have been content to end the matter there, but Gawain assumes that the feud will continue and says that Lamerok “woll nevyr love us, because we slew his fadir, kynge Pellynor…” Lamerok never seems to plan for revenge, though he likely feels constrained because of the Orkneys’ relationship to Arthur. At one point he tells Arthur, “And if hit were nat at the reverence of youre hyghnes, I sholde be

274 Malory, 77.
275 Malory, 102.
276 Malory, 608.
revenge uppon sir Gawayne and his bretherne.” Lamerok might, however, be seeking revenge in more subtle ways; the Orkneys, at least, see Lamerok’s romantic relationship with their mother as a form of petty revenge. The affair stirs up rage, and Gaheris actually kills his own mother for the shame she puts on her family for sleeping with the son of her husband’s killer. Thus, Arthur’s own sister becomes the second victim of the Lot-Pellinore blood feud. Eventually, the Orkney brothers corner Lamerok and kill him, with Mordred reportedly dealing the deathblow from behind. But the feud does not necessarily end even with Lamerok’s death – during the Quest of the Holy Grail, Aggravain and Mordred reportedly kill Dinadan, whom they hated “oute of mesure bycause of sir Lameroke.” Finally, Sir Patryse is inadvertently killed when Sir Pynel attempts to poison Gawain “bycause of hys kynnesman sir Lamerokes deth… The Lot-Pellinore feud, then, claims at least five prominent victims (after the initial killing of Lot): Pellinore, Morgause, Lamerok, Dinadan, and Patryse. Near victims include Gawain, Sir Mador (defeated, but spared, by Lancelot), and Queen Guinevere. Its effects were more widely felt, however, as it prevented men like Lamerok from maintaining a closer relationship with Arthur’s court. Arthur’s negligence in punishing his nephews also made others more hesitant about crossing the Orkneys, such as when Trystram let Aggravain and Mordred go after the murder at Joyous Garde. The Lot-Pellinore feud also spans almost the entirety of Arthur’s reign: the current edition of The Works of Sir Thomas Malory runs over 1250 pages, with the instigating incident being reported on page 77 and

277 Malory, 664.
278 Malory, 608.
279 Malory, 699.
280 Malory, 614. Dindan is, however, among the knights who make posthumous appearances at the healing of Sir Urré. See page 1148.
281 Malory, 1049.
the Poisoned Apple episode concluding on page 1060. In its scope, including number of victims and duration, the Lot-Pellinore feud recalls some of the more sensational blood feuds of the fifteenth century.

Additionally, the Lot-Pellinore feud deserves critical attention for its resemblance to fifteenth-century feuds in the way it helps to create the political factions of Arthur’s kingdom. During the Wars of the Roses feuds like the Neville-Percy and Courtenay-Bonville ones affected the composition of political alliances; arguably, they were the primary factors in determining political alignments. As mentioned above, the Nevilles did not support York’s 1452 uprising, but by 1455 they had run afoul of York’s enemy, Somerset; therefore, they joined York and fought with him at the first Battle of St. Albans. With the Nevilles allied to the powerful York, the Percies became active allies of the queen and Somerset. In the late 1460s, however, Edward IV reinstated the Percy family to the earldom of Northumberland to counterbalance the Neville family, whose rivalry with the Woodvilles threatened the stability of the realm. Meanwhile, the Courtenays were early Yorkist supporters (Devon was one of the few lords to support York in 1452), and the Bonvilles loyal Lancastrians; due to differences with the Nevilles and the recent alienation of Lord Bonville at court, however, the Courtenays supported the house of Lancaster after the mid-1450s and Bonville subsequently switched to the Yorkist side. Likewise, the polarizing effect of blood feuds can be seen in the Morte: the political alignments of the Lot-Ban feud at the end of the text are shaped by the earlier

282 The text of the Morte starts on page 7 and ends on page 1260, but there are numerous non-content pages in between, such as title pages and Caxton’s Rubrics. Even counting the non-content pages, episodes in the Lot-Pellinore feud occur throughout 78% of the current edition. These events are spread out among many other non-related events, of course, but the intermittent incidents and references leave the impression that the feud pervades Arthur’s reign.
Lot-Pellinore feud. When Lancelot rallies his men to save the queen from being executed for treason, his numbers are greatly increased by an influx of men: “Than there felle to them, what of Northe Walys and of Cornwayle, for sir Lamorakes sake and for sir Trystrames sake, to the numbir of a foure score knyghtes.” For many of the knights of Camelot, Lancelot’s opposition to the Orkney brothers is reason enough for them to join him. It might appear at first glance that these knights have merely transferred their loyalties from Lamerok or Trystram to Lancelot due to the friendship enjoyed by the three knights. There are, however, reasons to doubt that this is the only factor in the knights’ decisions. After all, those three knights were not always so closely knit. Indeed, just as the Orkneys were envious of Lancelot’s position, so, too, were Lancelot’s men envious of Trystram’s growing fame (see above) – to the point that Lancelot’s “bretherne and his kynnysmen wolde have slayne sir Trystram bycause of his fame.” At various times in the text, all of these knights can be found in dispute with one another: Lamerok with Trystram, Lancelot with Trystram, and Lancelot with Lamerok. Plus, as Kim suggests in *The Knight without the Sword*, Arthurian knightly affinities were as webbed as fifteenth-century ones. Many knights that would be expected to side with either Lancelot or Gawain appear to take Arthur’s “side” instead, granting their allegiance to the default royal party. On the one hand, it seems surprising to see Agglovayle and Tor (Lamerok’s brothers) among the knights slain by Lancelot during the rescue of Guinevere; on the other hand, Gareth is also among those killed, and his preference for

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283 Malory, 1170.
284 Malory, 785.
285 For examples, see Malory, 429, 429, 487.
286 See Kim, *Knight without the Sword*, 89-95.
Lancelot over his brothers is not questioned.\textsuperscript{287} It is important to remember that at this point in the text, the conflict appears to be Arthur versus Lancelot, and not Gawain versus Lancelot; though Gawain’s brothers instigate the conflict, Lancelot’s affair with the queen is widely known.\textsuperscript{288} The knights who \textit{do} side with Lancelot then, likely have multifaceted motives – and there is no reason to doubt that Lamerok’s and Trystram’s animosity for Gawain’s clan is a factor. The Lot-Pellinore feud perpetuates the division of the kingdom not only while it is ongoing, but also after the Pellinore side has been effectively defeated.

Malory’s \textit{Morte} also expresses a wariness of peacemaking efforts when it comes to blood feuds. The concept of the Love Day receives particular pessimism, and is likely influenced by recent events. In order to stanch the blood feud that grew from the first Battle of St. Albans, Henry VI ordered a ceremony – the famous Love Day mentioned above – to be held in St. Paul’s cathedral on 25 March 1458. Promises were made and former enemies walked arm-in-arm: York with Queen Margaret, Salisbury with Somerset, Warwick with Henry Holland, duke of Exeter (another Percy supporter). The Love Day was trumpeted as a great success. As one poem proclaims:

\begin{quote}
In Yorke, In Somerset, as I vnderstonde,
In Warrewik also is loue & charite,
In Sarisbury eke, & in Northumbreland,
That euery man may reioise in concord & vnite.\textsuperscript{289}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{287} See, for example, Malory, 360.
\textsuperscript{288} See, for example, Malory, 1045, 1161.

257
The poem later states, “Ther was bytwyn hem lovely contynaunce, / Whiche was gret ioy to all that ther were…”\textsuperscript{290} The poem’s refrain of “concord & vnite” expresses hope for a strong and unified kingdom, something not possible when feuds create division. The forced and superficial Love Day peace did not last, however – as seen above, the killing continued. Similarly, in the \textit{Book of Sir Trystram of Lyones}, King Arthur attempts to make peace between King Mark and his nephew, Sir Trytram (who has been having an affair with Mark’s wife, La Beale Isolde). Arthur specifically asks Mark to take Trystram back to Cornwall to “lat hym se his fryndis…”\textsuperscript{291} He then has Mark swear an oath upon a book, after which “kynge Marke and sir Trystram toke ayther othir by the hondis harde knytte togydyrs.”\textsuperscript{292} Even before this ceremony, however, the \textit{Morte} alerts the reader that it will be unsuccessful: when Arthur first conceives of the idea to accord the two men, the text refers to it as “a brokyn love day.”\textsuperscript{293} After the ceremony, Trystram prepares to accompany Mark back to Cornwall, but Lancelot, Dinadan and Lamerok believe this to be a bad idea. Lancelot complains to Arthur, blaming him for Trystram’s impending departure: “Alas!... what have ye done?”\textsuperscript{294} Arthur, however, assures him, “I have done all that I can and made them at accorde.”\textsuperscript{295} Lancelot’s response indicates just how trustworthy such accords are: “Acorde?... Now fye on that accorde! For ye shall here that he shall destroy sir Trystram other put hym into preson, for he is the moste cowarde and

\textsuperscript{290} “Reconciliation of Henry VI and the Yorkists (1458),” ll. 41-42.  
\textsuperscript{291} Malory, 609.  
\textsuperscript{292} Malory, 609.  
\textsuperscript{293} Malory, 595.  
\textsuperscript{294} Malory, 609.  
\textsuperscript{295} Malory, 609.
the vylaunste kynge and knyght that is now lyvynge.” Lancelot then warns Mark not to harm Trystram, and the Cornish king coldly reminds the angry knight of the vow he has sworn in front of Arthur and the knights of the realm. Lancelot replies, “Ye sey well…but ye ar so false and full of felony that no man may believe you.”

On the one hand, the Morte’s underlying pessimism over the effectiveness of such Love Days appears to be either nothing more than the expression of the doubts for Trystram’s safety found in the source material, or perhaps a reflection of the sentiments found in various mirrors of the time, which frequently warn kings and others to beware of reconciled enemies. Malory’s contemporary, George Ashby, echoes this sentiment in his Active Policy of a Prince: “And be ye ware of the Reconsiled / That hathe deserued to be reuiled.” This wariness of old enemies can be found elsewhere, as well; a century earlier, Geoffrey Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee (a translation, for the most part, of Renaud de Louens’s Livre de Melibée et de Dame Prudence) cites such sources as Aesop, Seneca, Solomon, and Peter Alphonsus in specifically warning rulers about taking counsel from reconciled enemies: “And eek thou shalt eschue the conseillyng of thyne olde enemys that been reconsiled.” Such sentiments reveal a certain distrust of peacemaking endeavors. On the other hand, the underlying pessimism holds a particular resonance considering recent events. Not only was the failed 1458 Love Day still in active memory, but another famous attempt at such an accord was also held in 1469 – about the time that

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296 Malory, 609. In his Commentary, Vinaver notes that the tone of Malory’s version differs from that in the French source, the Roman de Tristan. There, “Lancelot expressed his fear of Mark’s cruelty,” but does not get angry with Arthur.
297 Malory, 610.
298 Ashby, Active Policy, ll. 427-28.
Malory was completing the *Morte*. At that time, Edward IV was hoping to reconcile Richard Neville, earl of Warwick to himself and the queen’s family; during his rebellion that year, Warwick had executed the queen’s father, Richard Woodville, Lord Rivers. Like Henry VI’s reconciliation efforts a decade earlier, Edward’s were doomed to failure. This temporary accord, like the 1458 Love Day, held for no more than a year. In 1470, Warwick rebelled again, this time deposing Edward IV and his Woodville in-laws. Related to this pessimism about peace accords between bitter enemies is a similar pessimism about oaths. When Malory narrates Mark’s oath to make peace with Trystram, the text notes, “But for all this kynge Marke thought falsely, as it preved aftir…” Mark’s falsely sworn oath surely called to mind the very public (and repeated) oaths of allegiance to Henry VI taken (and broken) by Richard, duke of York throughout the 1450s. If Moorman’s and Lumiansky’s arguments about the elevated importance of material Malory decided to retain or include are accepted, the distrust of accord attempts and the problem of falsely sworn oaths present in the text suggest that both were issues to which he wished to call attention.

In addition to Lancelot’s doubts (and the warnings of various mirrors for princes), Lamerok also distrusts peace efforts. When Arthur offers to make an accord between him and Gawain, Lamerok refuses and simply avoids the court. This refusal calls attention to another aspect of the *Morte*’s pessimism regarding peacemaking efforts: the impotence of royal authority, both in preventing such revenge killings and in punishing offenders effectively. After the Orkney plot to trap Lamerok ends with Morgause’s death, Lancelot

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300 Malory, 609.
301 Malory, 664, 670. Lancelot has somewhat more faith in Gawain’s integrity than in Mark’s, as he encourages Lamerok to return to court; Lamerok still refuses.
warns Arthur, “I am sure ye shall lose sir Lamerok, for sir Gawayne and his bretherne
woll sle hym by one meane other by another.”\textsuperscript{302} Arthur responds, “That shall I lette [i.e.,
hinder]…”\textsuperscript{303} Later, Arthur promises to protect Lamerok: “A, sir Lamerok, abyde wyth
me! And be my crowne, I shall never fayle the: and nat so hardy in sir Gawaynes hede,
nothir none of his bretherne, to do the wrong.”\textsuperscript{304} He adds, “Truly… I woll make you at
acorde.”\textsuperscript{305} Yet Arthur fails to obstruct the vengeance of the Orkneys, and he apparently
allows them to go unpunished for the murder (just as he failed to punish them for
Pellinore’s murder). In fact, throughout the entire feud, Arthur’s sole action against his
nephews is when he banishes Gaheris from court after the murder of Morgause – but
Gaheris participates in the tournament at Surluse, which occurs only fifteen leaves later in
the Winchester manuscript.\textsuperscript{306} Malory, and later his readers, probably could not help but
notice the similarities to the weak retribution policies of Henry VI and Edward IV, who
both sought to appease the families of victims without bringing the offenders to justice.
The Courtenay-Bonville feud provides examples of the failures both to prevent and to
punish such murderers. In October 1455, Sir Thomas Courtenay’s men murdered
Nicholas Radford, a member of Lord Bonville’s council. In a letter to John Paston I,
James Gresham says that Courtenay’s men set the gate of Radford’s house on fire, called
out to him “as though they had be sory for þe fyer,”\textsuperscript{307} promised not to harm him, robbed
his home, forced him to walk (while they rode horses) out into the night with them, then
hit him and cut his throat. Apparently, while robbing the house Courtenay’s men also

\textsuperscript{302} Malory, 613.
\textsuperscript{303} Malory, 613.
\textsuperscript{304} Malory, 663.
\textsuperscript{305} Malory, 664.
\textsuperscript{306} For Gaheris’s banishment, see Malory, 613; the tournament at Surluse starts on page 653, and Gaheris is
named among the participants on page 659.
\textsuperscript{307} Paston Letters, vol. II, 126.
dumped Radford’s invalid wife out of her bed in order to steal the sheets; at Radford’s funeral they mutilated the body and sang lewd songs. Cherry believes the brutal nature of this crime “shows that the Courtenay family felt betrayed by Radford’s connection with Bonville” – in fact, Radford had once been close enough to the Courtenays that he was young Henry Courtenay’s godfather. Although York’s government (while he served as Protector) indicted Sir Thomas Courtenay for the murder of Radford, Queen Margaret soon secured him a pardon – and even arranged for him to marry her cousin, Marie (daughter of the count of Maine). After one of the most shocking murders of a brutal period, Courtenay not only did not face punishment for his crime, but he actually improved his lot because of political expediency. Regarding royal impotency to prevent revenge killings, consider the case of Lord Bonville in 1461. Prior to the second Battle of St. Albans, the Yorkists held Henry VI in virtual captivity. As the Yorkist forces marched to battle under the command of the earl of Warwick, Lord Bonville accompanied Henry VI, who was too valuable to leave behind. When it became clear that the Yorkists would lose the battle, Bonville chose to stay with the king after Henry had assured him of his safety; the queen and Bonville’s long-time rival, the earl of Devon, however, executed him anyway after a mock trial (during which the young Prince Edward of Lancaster reportedly delivered the sentence). Of course, Henry VI was not the only king during this period that did not – or could not – effectively protect victims or punish offenders. In the late 1460s, Edward IV was not be able to punish the over-mighty Warwick for his

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311 See Storey, End of the House of Lancaster, 174-75. For reference to the prince’s participation in the trial, see Gregory’s Chronicle, in The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century, ed. James Gairdner (Westminster: Camden Society, 1876), 212.
summary executions of Lord Rivers and Sir John Woodville, the queen’s father and brother. In his inability to prevent Lamerok’s murder, and his inability or unwillingness to punish his nephews for the deed, Malory’s Arthur looks much like the kings of England in the late fifteenth century. Even if things did not reach the level of terror and carnage imagined by Tudor (or even Victorian) historians, murders like those of Rutland and Radford certainly captivated their contemporaries.

As with the issues of favoritism and ostracism, Sir Thomas Malory witnessed firsthand the divisions caused by rivalries and feuds during the reigns of both Henry VI and Edward IV. Malory also participated in the struggles for property and influence at both the regional and national levels, and in some of the resulting feuds. Christine Carpenter, for example, discusses the vicissitudes of Warwickshire politics in the 1440s, and Malory’s place in the growing contest in the northern part of the county between (among other parties) William Ferrers, Lord Ferrers and Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham.312 She also suggests: “Malory’s quarrel with Buckingham seems to have originated in a feud with the abbey of Combe… We may surmise that Malory and the abbey were in a dispute over land, a common occurrence in the lives of the fifteenth-century gentry.”313 While Malory’s motives for attacking Buckingham on 4 January 1450 are uncertain, Buckingham’s connection with the abbot of Combe would seem to support Raluca Radelescu’s suggestion that Malory “may have regarded much of his alleged career of crime in the early 1450s as defending his family or the estates of

313 Carpenter, “Sir Thomas Malory,” 37.
dependents.\textsuperscript{314} After all, many of Malory’s early crimes were directed against both the abbey and Buckingham.\textsuperscript{315} This crime spree, which seems embroiled in the struggles for property and influence in Warwickshire, resulted in an eight-year prison stint for Malory; Malory personally experienced the negative side of feuding. And as fifteenth-century private feuds and rivalries exploded onto the national stage, he may have lamented the direction the kingdom was taking: “Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was?”\textsuperscript{316}

\textsuperscript{315} See Carpenter, “Sir Thomas Malory”; Field, \textit{Life and Times}, 83-104.
\textsuperscript{316} Malory, 1229.
CONCLUSION

Modern scholarship has revised the way we view fifteenth-century England, often overturning elements influenced by the Tudor myth and perpetuated by subsequent historians. Was fifteenth-century England particularly bloody and destructive? No, the fighting was actually very limited and the majority of the common people were more or less unaffected.\(^1\) Did the nobility constantly struggle with the king and each other for power? No, in general they cooperated with both the king and avoided friction with each other.\(^2\) Was bastard feudalism an “evil” system? No, it was a neutral mechanism that had advantages as well as disadvantages.\(^3\) Were over-mighty subjects the greatest threat to the stability of the realm? No, only an under-mighty ruler needed to worry about over-mighty subjects.\(^4\)

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The more balanced views of modern scholarship certainly give us a clearer picture of the realities of fifteenth-century England than previous studies of the period, but it is also important to keep in mind that contemporaries did not have the luxury of hindsight. Thus, when analyzing works like Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, it is helpful to keep in mind how *they* perceived the realities of their day. Many elements of the Tudor myth do, in fact, have roots in pre-Tudor or, at the latest, very early Tudor writings. The *Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, formerly attributed to William Worcester and written in the second half of the fifteenth century,\(^5\) describes the period as “the greatest sorrows in England.”\(^6\) Sir John Fortescue identifies over-mighty subjects as the biggest threat to a king’s reign: “For certaynly ther may no gretter perilie growe to a prince thanne tahave a subjiet equipolente to hym selfe.”\(^7\) Even if this opinion represents a “minority view,”\(^8\) there are enough contemporary authors who express similar concerns that we should not discard the perspective when analyzing texts of the period.\(^9\)

As with many contemporary texts, Malory’s *Morte* reveals a concern for the stability of the realm – and he identifies division as one of the primary dangers. Over-

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9. As discussed in the Introduction, Fortescue, George Ashby, the author of the *Crowland Chronicle* continuations, and authors of letters like Francesco Coppini, Antonio de la Torre, and Giovanni Pietro Cagnola all consider men like Richard Neville, earl of Warwick to be exceptionally powerful (and/or dangerous).
mighty subjects provide perhaps the most dangerous source of division. Unlike previous
versions of the Arthurian legend, Malory does not begin with (or much include) the
foreign threat of Saxon invasions. Instead, internal division frames his text, which begins:
“Hit befel in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englond and so
regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornwall that helde warre ageynst hym long
tyme…” After Uther’s death, Malory reports: “Thenne stood the reame in grete
jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty of men maade hym stronge, and
many wende to have ben kyng.” Even during Arthur’s reign, there is evidence of
division reminiscent of fifteenth-century England; royal favoritism and ostracism, the
struggles for patronage, influence, and power, and blood feuds all contribute to the
downfall of the kingdom. The text ends, of course, shortly after Arthur and Mordred,
father and son, slay each other in the aftermath of Mordred’s usurpation of Arthur’s
crown.

Mordred’s usurpation itself warrants at least a chapter, if not a longer study – it is
the ultimate manifestation of the dangers of both division and over-mighty subjects. One
related topic that deserves further study, for example, is the concept of tainted legitimacy
(or, to use Paul Strohm’s term, “tainted lineage”). As discussed in Chapter Three,
Ronald Butt argues that the crown lost much of its legitimacy in Henry IV’s 1399
usurpation. Not only did the Lancastrian dynasty have to assert its legitimacy, which

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11 Malory, 12.
12 See Strohm, Politique, 182-83. Strohm points out that the early Lancastrians spread rumors that Richard
II was illegitimate; enemies proclaimed Henry IV was illegitimate; later Lancastrians, like Sir John
Fortescue even claimed that Edward IV’s Mortimer ancestor, Philippa – from whom he acquired his claim
to the throne – was illegitimate.
Richard, duke of York challenged anyway in 1460, but opponents also began to call into question the legitimacy of specific claimants. Henry VI’s son, for one, was rumored not to be his: “The quene [Margaret] was defamed and desclaundered, that he that was called Prince [i.e., Edward of Lancaster], was nat hir sone, but a bastard gotten in avoutry…” Edward IV’s first parliament (in November 1461) routinely avoids identifying Edward of Lancaster as Henry VI’s son. Instead, the former Prince of Wales is attached only to the former queen, even when mentioned in association with Henry VI: “And where also the seid Henry, late called Kyng Henry the sixt, Margarete his wyf, late called quene of Englond, and Edward her son, late called prynce of Wales…” Nor were the rumors limited to Edward of Lancaster – about the time that Malory was completing his text, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick and Edward IV’s own brother, George duke of Clarence, were spreading rumors that the king himself (sometimes called “the Rose of Rouen”) was illegitimate – born of his mother’s affair with a common archer while in Rouen. Legitimacy was also an issue for John of Gaunt’s bastard Beaufort line, which was legitimized in 1397 but barred from succession by Henry IV in 1407. Recognized as a potential claimant to the throne in the middle of the century, Henry Tudor would later exercise that claim in 1485. Mordred’s claim to the throne would seem similarly tainted and complex – not only was he a bastard, but at the time of his usurpation both King

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14 An English Chronicle 1377-1461: A New Edition, ed. William Marx (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 79. Though the text says the prince is “nat hir sone,” the implication is that he is not her son with Henry VI; a few sentences later, it clearly identifies the Prince as “hyre sone.” See page 80.
16 See Charles Ross, Richard III (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 88-90. Rumors of Edward IV’s bastardy would return in 1478 and 1483; the legitimacy of Edward’s two sons were also called into question in 1483.
Arthur and his own older brother, Gawain, were still alive. As discussed in Chapter Three, Gawain may well have been recognized as Arthur’s heir apparent in many versions of the Arthurian legend. The people accept Mordred as king, and even after Arthur proves to be alive many hold with the usurper. But Malory’s Morte does not only end with the concept of tainted lineage, it also opens with it.

Due to the fact that Merlin takes charge of Uther’s newborn son and secretly fosters him with Sir Ector, the land goes without a legitimate heir once Uther dies. Over a decade passes before Arthur becomes king, and his coronation is based on a variety of factors, including: “divine” appointment (by pulling the sword out of the stone, although this was set there by Merlin), the election of the commons (who clamor for him when the lords delay naming him as king), and, ultimately, by right of conquest (after defeating the rebellious lords). In many ways, Arthur’s complicated claim to the crown resembles that of Henry IV in 1399.18 Arthur’s right to the crown via inheritance does not become known until his coronation feast – the lords initially reject Arthur as a candidate, refusing “to be overgovernyd with a boye of no hyghe blood borne.”19 When told by Merlin that Arthur is, in fact, “kynge Uther Pendragons sone borne in wedlock, goten on Igrayne, the dukes wyf of Tyntigail,” the kings reply, “Thenne is he a bastard.”20 Malory, unlike his source, goes to great length to demonstrate that Arthur was conceived several hours after the duke’s death, and that Uther and Igrayne married in less than two weeks: “Therfor I

18 See, for example, Ian Mortimer, The Fears of Henry IV: The Life of England’s Self-made King (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 188-93.
19 Malory, 15.
20 Malory, 18. Emphasis added.
preve hym he is no bastard.” The mystery surrounding Arthur’s lineage is taken up again, however, as Arthur is faced with multiple rebellions. At one point, Sir Ulphuns criticizes Arthur’s mother, Igrayne, saying, “Thys quene Igrayne ys the causer of youre grete damage and of youre grete warre, for and she wolde have uttirde hit in the lyff of Uther of the birth of you, and how ye were begotyn, than had ye never had the mortall warrys that ye have had.” When he learns about Merlin’s role, Ulphuns turns to him and says, “Ye ar than more to blame than the queene.” On the testimony of Igrayne, Ector, and Merlin, Arthur’s legitimacy is established. Malory does not always provide us with such clear answers to questions that arise in the text. He is notoriously noncommittal regarding the sexual nature of Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship. In that situation, Robert Sturges suggests that Malory offers “only historical, which is to say uncertain, human knowledge…” If so, perhaps such “unknowability of the past,” as Sturges puts it, intentionally reflects the numerous rumors being spread about women like Queen Margaret of Anjou and Cecily Neville, mother of Edward IV: when faced with such stories of adultery and bastardy, people just cannot know the truth of the matter. It is telling, then, that Malory goes further than his sources to prove the legitimacy of England’s great king. If nothing else, the text seems to express a desire for an undeniably legitimate king.

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21 Malory, 18. The Vulgate *Merlin* simply states that Igraine’s husband, the duke of Tintagel, died the same night; it is not specified if he died before or after Uther slept with Igraine. See The Story of Merlin, in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, vol. I, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Rupert T. Pickens (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 204-05.

22 Malory, 45.

23 Malory, 46.

24 In the Vulgate *Merlin*, however, Igraine never knew that Uther was her child’s true father. See *Lancelot-Grail*, I.206, 208. In Malory, however, Uther admits to her that he fathered her child. See Malory, 10.


Interwoven with the Mordred plot are also elements of the issues discussed in this study. We have seen how Mordred (and Aggravain) held “a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwnyver, and to sir Launcelot,”\textsuperscript{27} and how it is likely that this hatred is, in part, connected to the “grete favoure”\textsuperscript{28} shown to him by the queen (and by Arthur). The usurpation is also allowed, in part, by the feud between Gawain/Arthur and Lancelot, for the text informs us that “they that loved sir Launcelot drew unto sir Mordred.”\textsuperscript{29} This is after Mordred’s letters regarding Arthur’s “death” have been proven false (though before Lancelot himself has mobilized to come to Arthur’s aid). In a real sense, the dysfunctions that were allowed to go unchecked directly lead to the usurpation. It was something Malory had witnessed firsthand in the years leading up to 1461 – and was witnessing again during the time that he was completing the \textit{Morte}. In fact, the events of 1468-1470, the years in which Malory was engaged in writing his version of the Arthurian legend,\textsuperscript{30} may have influenced the \textit{Morte}’s final book. In a sentence that appears to be Malory’s addition (there is no corresponding passage in his major sources, the Vulgate \textit{Mort Artu} and stanzaic \textit{Morte Arthur}), Lancelot expresses a contemporarily relevant lament over Mordred’s usurpation: “Alas… that ever I shulde lyve to hyre of that moste noble kynge that made me knyght thus to be oversette with hys subjette in hys owne realme!”\textsuperscript{31} The usurpation also elicits one of Malory’s more memorable commentary asides:

\begin{quote}
Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was? For he that was the moste kynge and nobelyst knyght of the worlde, and moste loved
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{27} Malory, 1161.
\item\textsuperscript{28} Malory, 253.
\item\textsuperscript{29} Malory, 1233.
\item\textsuperscript{30} See P. J. C. Field, \textit{The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory} (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 143.
\item\textsuperscript{31} Malory, 1249.
\end{footnotes}
the felyshyp of noble knyghtes, and by hym they all were upholdyn, and yet myght nat thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym. Lo thus was the olde custom and usagyes of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme.\(^{32}\)

Although the natural inclination is to attempt to identify Malory’s personal political preferences in such commentaries, both Edward Donald Kennedy and Peter Field see them as essentially non-partisan in nature.\(^{33}\) In this sense, Malory seems less a Lancastrian or a Yorkist, and perhaps more of a “royalist” — and with such a label, Malory might be counted among good company. After all, while discussing John Capgrave, F. J. Furnivall once observed that “Capgrave, being an Englishman… had an inordinate reverence for kings and ranks.”\(^{34}\) Though such generalizations are not always accurate — and, indeed, this one is proved inaccurate by the machinations of over-mighty subjects — fifteenth-century Englishmen did seem to accept the reigning king in the absence of (or sometimes despite) a “legitimate” rival. Capgrave, Fortescue, and John Hardyng are among the writers who wrote for both the Lancastrian Henry VI and the Yorkist Edward IV. And although the peers of the realm recognized Richard, duke of York’s right to the crown in October 1460, they preferred not to depose the reigning Henry VI. One explanation is that political expediency encouraged such actions (or

\(^{32}\) Malory, 1229.  
inactions) – but a desire for peace and the stability of the realm offers an alternative explanation. In this, perhaps Malory was not so unlike his contemporaries.
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283


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