From A Rhetoric of Ravishment to A Rhetoric of Rape:

Sir Thomas Malory's Linguistic Shift in the Bedtricks of *Le Morte Darthur*

Lindsay Pereira

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (English) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2024

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Lindsay Pereira

Entitled: From a Rhetoric of Ravishment to a Rhetoric of Rape:
Sir Thomas Malory's Linguistic Shift in Le Morte Darthur

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English Literature)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Nicola Nixon

_____ Examiner
Dr. Stephen Yeager

_____ Examiner

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)
Dr. Manish Sharma

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____
Dr. Nathan Brown Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dr. Pascale Sicotte Dean of Arts and Sciences

ABSTRACT

From A Rhetoric of Ravishment to A Rhetoric of Rape:

Sir Thomas Malory's Linguistic Shift in the Bedtricks of *Le Morte Darthur*

Lindsay Pereira

This thesis explores the linguistic and narrative transformation of bedtrick scenes in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* compared to their depictions in the Old French Vulgate. It investigates how Malory modifies the original sources' romanticized portrayals of rape and deceit, shifting toward a rhetoric that aligns with his contemporary concerns, particularly regarding legitimacy and moral order. By analyzing three key bedtrick scenes – Uther and Igraine, Arthur and Morgause, and Lancelot and Elaine – this study reveals how Malory downplays the enigma and emotional justifications present in the Vulgate, opting instead for a sparser, more chronicle-like tone. This approach, as observed by scholars such as Corinne Saunders and Kathryn Gravdal, reflects a deliberate effort to sterilize and rationalize sexual violence, distancing it from the romantic glamorization typical of courtly romance. The analysis underscores that while the Vulgate blurs the boundaries between love and coercion, Malory reconfigures these narratives to serve his cultural and moral agenda, ultimately obscuring the reality of deceit, violence, and rape. The thesis concludes that despite their stylistic differences, both *Le Morte Darthur* and the Old French Vulgate participate in a broader literary tradition that seeks to rationalize and contain the disruptive potential of sexual transgression within the frameworks of their respective societies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Manish Sharma for his invaluable guidance, patience, and unwavering support throughout my academic journey. Dr. Sharma, your belief in my potential, especially during moments of doubt, has been a source of immense strength. You have shown me that my voice can contribute meaningfully to scholarship, for which I am profoundly thankful.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Dr. Stephen Yeager, whose insightful guidance and advice have been instrumental in refining my arguments. Your approachable demeanor and sense of humor made graduate school less stressful and genuinely enjoyable.

I am equally grateful to Dr. Stephen Powell for his constant support and feedback on my projects. Your ability to help me untangle the chaos in my mind, coupled with your encouraging pep talks, has always left me more confident in my ideas.

A special note of thanks goes to my fellow "baby medievalists," Ella and Ghislaine. Your constant encouragement and camaraderie have been a lifeline throughout graduate school. Together, we have navigated the ups and downs of academic life and survived the chaos of looming deadlines, all while adventuring along the way.

To my husband, Stefano, thank you for being my rock. Your support has been the foundation that allowed me to return to university, complete my degree, and pursue this master's program. To my children, Isabella, Eva, and Annalisa, your belief in my work gave me the drive to reach for the stars. Lastly, to my sister, Regina, and brother-in-law, Lorne, thank you for your unspoken support. I am so grateful to have you by my side.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From A Rhetoric of Ravishment to A Rhetoric of Rape:

Sir Thomas Malory's Linguistic Shift in the Bedtricks of *Le Morte Darthur*

In Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, there is a critical shift in tonality compared to one of his primary sources, the Old French Lancelot-Grail cycle, also known as the Vulgate cycle. In important episodes, where the Vulgate author uses the tropes of *fin'amour*, Malory uses a far bleaker tone. This is most evident in episodes that concern themselves with sexual violence.

The beginning of the *Morte* presents an illustrative episode, structured by an interrelation of deceit, rape, and violence. With Merlin's magic, Uther Pendragon takes on the appearance of the Duke of Tintagel to bed his wife, Igraine. Over few sparse lines of text that imply the span of several hours, Uther goes from meeting Igraine to sex. The Vulgate version of the same episode depicts, by contrast, a lovesick Uther infatuated with Ygraine. The Vulgate portrays in great detail his months-long journey to win her affections, culminating in Uther using magic to disguise himself as the duke to sleep with Ygraine. It is Malory's response to this and other related scenes that will be the focus of this essay.

Deception, rape, and violence in the *Morte* are issues addressed extensively in scholarship on Malory. But, while many researchers have looked at these elements individually, none have examined their interrelatedness. Elizabeth Edwards (1996) and Catherine LaFarge (1992) claim Malory neglects the feminine portrayal of his original Old French sources and thus represses femininity, touching on sexual violence to prove their arguments. While I agree he does not represent females as in the Vulgate, I do see this is a very intentional, strategic tactic to reduce sympathy for women. Rather than repressed, I will show that females lack the psychological complexity they were originally given in the Vulgate, lessening their value and thus making them easier to deceive or violate. Amy S. Kaufman (2010), Felicity Riddy (2006), Helen Cooper (2004), and Catherine Batt (2016) see Malory's narrative choices as a reflection of

a society that marginalizes women and reinforces misogynistic views. Women are temptresses or passive figures, objects of exchange or causes of male conflict. This is most obvious in scenes of deception and sexual violence, where male honour is prioritized over female autonomy and consent. While this may cement Malory's work as sexist or misogynistic to some, other scholars like Dorsey Armstrong (2003), D. Thomas Hanks (2023), and Yekaterina Zimmerman (2007) argue for a positive representation of women instead. Rather than demonstrating a contempt for women, they see the language of the *Morte* as empowering women and exemplifying feminine roles. Here, I hesitate to label the *Morte* as either a feminist or misogynistic work, as I feel this binary demands a limited view of a complex text. I do see the *Morte* as a space that repeatedly employs sex as a tool to control the outcome of situations, but it is a tool that is used on both men and women.

By presenting some of the scholarship on sexual violence in the *Morte,* my purpose is to underscore the evident lack of scholarship on "bedtricks" in Arthuriana. This narrative element tends to coordinate deception, rape, and violence – a central thematic nexus in the *Morte*. Although the scholars I have cited do provide noteworthy readings, I have yet to find any academics that have considered the complexity of bedtricks throughout the *Morte*, highlighting a gap in scholarship that I aim to fill.

The term bedtrick has been used by a variety of scholars in different literary contexts. When a person is unknowingly deceived into sex with someone other than their legitimate partner through misrecognition, this is known as a bedtrick.[1] The perpetrator deliberately plans the act, with a specific outcome in mind, benefitting from exploiting the victim. The term bedtrick exists at the intersection of deception, rape, and violence. It is, therefore, useful to use

[1] On her definition and explanation of bedtrick, see Doniger *pg. xiii.*

this specific term in the context of the *Morte*. Most scholarship on bedtricks focuses on Shakespeare, but Wendy Doniger has applied the term to everything from the Hebrew Bible to modern movies. She is the only scholar who has applied this term to medieval literature, and more specifically Arthuriana. However, she does so very briefly and does not explore the full implications of this concept for our understanding of Arthurian literature.[2] By abstracting the term from its original context in Shakespearean scholarship, I demonstrate that scholars have focused on key aspects of the bedtrick, yet they lack the leverage that this specific term gives to my paper by coordinating an important array of terms. The term bedtrick thus offers critical leverage by encapsulating the intricate interplay of deception, rape, and violence in a single concept, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of scenes of sexual violence. The term reveals patterns of power dynamics and consent that might otherwise be overlooked, and it deepens our understanding of how these elements function together to shape the narrative in *Le Morte Darthur*.

The word "rape" under the modern definition of non-consensual sex is not specific enough for my purposes. For this reason, I will use the word bedtrick for the specific scenes I am analyzing in this paper. Above, I outline the complex relationship between non-consensual sex and illegal, socially unacceptable sex, demonstrating the different ways they intersect with the medieval and modern definitions of rape. Rape, violence, and deception are thus intersecting but not perfectly synonymous terms. The term bedtrick allows us to bridge the gap between the medieval context and modern perspective to speak about a specific instance of this intersection

[2] On her references to Arthurian literature, see Doniger *pgs. 83, 189, 205, 277-78, 333, 452, 480-481.*

between rape, violence, and deception. There are these three separate aspects that are not synonymous, but that intertwine into a single act which is the bedtrick.

I will thus argue that there is a deliberate shift from the rhetoric of ravishment in the original French source to a rhetoric of rape in pivotal bedtrick scenes in Malory's *Morte*. The interplay between word choice, tone, figurative language, and sentence structure – elements of writing style – work together to establish the mood and meaning of the texts. In the Vulgate, the style is romantic and sentimental. It is written like a love story, yet its sentimentality veils obsession, trickery, and rape. These romanticised scenes soften the perpetrator's actions to transfer blame onto the victim. Kathryn Gravdal documents an "unstated and invisible meaning of the word 'romantic'" in Old French romance that "blurs the distinction between seduction and aggression" (Gravdal 14). This blurred distinction, which she calls "romance ravishment," codes female submission and male domination as aesthetically pleasing and emotionally satisfying.

While the rhetoric of ravishment in the Vulgate engages with connotations of love and passion, the rhetoric of rape in Malory engages with power dynamics. Accordingly, I will investigate bedtricks in the *Morte* and argue that Malory's removal of sentimentality unveils the underlying power dynamics and violence. The resulting lack of emotion downplays the severity of the violence. Whether you are couching rape in the language of love, or paring it down in the rhetoric of rape, revealing the bare power dynamics at play, either way, you are justifying the violence. Therefore, the Vulgate and Malory both justify rape in different ways. My essay will examine three key bedtricks from both texts, between Uther and Igraine, Lancelot and Elaine of Corbenic, and Arthur and Morgause. I will compare Malory's version to his French sources in order to argue that his modifications propose a pattern that reshapes the reader's perception of events. By introducing the term bedtrick into Arthurian studies, my paper adds a crucial

analytical tool to the field that uncovers the nuanced ways Malory manipulates narrative to align with his broader thematic objectives.

In the *Morte*, the treatment is far more laconic, downplaying the seriousness of these scenes that involve rape. The change of Malory's writing style alters the impact of the scene, where many key details are removed to lessen the severity of rape, thereby signalling to his audience that this is normal. I believe this normalization works strategically to detract from the severity of the crime, diminishing the victim's trauma and implicitly justifying the perpetrator's actions – this I call a rhetoric of rape.

Malory's writing shift consequently serves to reveal otherwise occluded power dynamics. Though Malory maintains the plot of these three illicit affairs in *Le Morte Darthur*, his adaptations take on an altered meaning, reinforcing the need for a strong paternal connection as it stresses the value of legitimacy. On the other hand, the Old French Vulgate, the source text, focuses on love, a love that is often obsessive, blurring the space between consent and nonconsent. Within this blurred space, rape is softened, romanticised, and even presented as reasonable. However, this Old French world glamorizes physical impulses and emotional desires in a manner too dangerous for Malory's reality. It distorts true legitimate succession, consequently opening the path to treason. While the Vulgate romanticizes rape, Malory's *Morte* normalizes it by stripping away romantic elements and reducing actions or speech that would otherwise justify or mitigate the severity of the act. Both texts, in different ways, contribute to the legitimization of rape**.**

Uther Pendragon and Lady Igraine

The basic elements of the bedtrick scene between Uther and Igraine remain consistent in both the original Old French Vulgate and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. In both versions, Uther

desires the duke's wife, Ygraine/Igraine, depends on Merlin to devise a plan to help him bed her, disguises himself as the duke with Merlin's magic, and has sex with an unknowing Igraine as his army murders her husband. These bedtrick scenes also lead to conceiving Arthur. Although these key moments in the interaction between Uther and Igraine do remain, there is a significant contrast in the writing style of the Vulgate and the *Morte*. The Old French tale portrays a romanticized version of events that contrasts starkly with the plain wording in Malory's writing. In their own manner, and for different purposes, each version masks the reality of sexual violence in these bedtrick scenes.

The most remarkable feature of the Vulgate is its sentimental nature of writing in what I call a rhetoric of rapture. It paints a vivid picture of a lovesick Uther, who goes to great lengths, repeatedly, to gain Ygraine's attention, all over a period of several months. What we get as readers is a love story – or rather, what is an elaborate leadup to a carefully constructed and disguised bedtrick. In fact, it is equally essential to analyze this leadup since it is an integral part of the bedtrick itself. The deceptive nature of the bedtrick begins here, in this leadup, with wording that evidences a rhetoric of rapture.

Uther meets Ygraine for the first time during a celebration to "honor and love him[self]" (Lacy, VI, 199), establishing him as a self-absorbed, entitled monarch. Instantly, he falls for the duke's wife, "love[s] her deeply," and struggles to hide these emotions: "[the king] did not show [his love], except that he more willingly looked at [Ygraine] than […] other women" (199). His desire for her quickly supersedes the need for decorum, and he becomes desperate for her attention. Over the next few days, he showers her with gifts, but does so in a secretive way: "the king, for love of [Ygraine], but so that no one would take notice, sent jewels to all the ladies at the feast" (199). In order to get closer to her, Uther also befriends the duke: "the king had the

duke and Ygraine sit with him to eat [then] gave so many gifts and looked at her in such a way that Ygraine knew […] he loved her" (199). Uther's deception, disguised as secrecy, is emotional, romantic. His actions, meant to portray his love for Ygraine, are completely inappropriate given her marital status. Yet these actions are also veiled by sentimentalized wording, where deep love conceals obsession, secretive gifts conceal a resolve to possess, and an invitation to dine conceals an illicit desire for her body.

In another example, Uther's tireless pursuit of Ygraine further depicts his infatuation. The Vulgate's writing style describes a man who is emotional, in love, and desperate for attention in return. When Uther's frantic attempts to gain Ygraine's attention fall short, his actions become increasingly irrational. Rather than appearing obsessive or manipulative, Uther's irrationality comes across as eager, his love as devotion. When he can no longer contain his "distress and agony," he seeks advice on "how [to] be with [Ygraine]" (199). Uther follows the suggestion of close friends and "call[s] together a great court at Carduel [and tells his men] they must not leave for two full weeks, [and] to bring their wives. So [the king can] have a long time to spend with Ygraine, and [he] can take delight in [their] love" (199). Uther also depends on Sir Ulfin for advice and to maintain secrecy: "I beg you [Ulfin], help me in all the ways you can. Please take from my room everything you will and give it to all the men and women about [Ygraine]. Strive to do whatever pleases her, and speak to Ygraine in ways you know will be useful to me" (200). As this quote demonstrates, Uther's desire grows more desperate. Yet it is softened by the language of the Vulgate that paints him in "distress," "agony," and as "so overwhelmed," doing all he can to gain the "love of Ygraine" (199). The turmoil he goes through is emotionally charged and in turn embellished, cloaking the deceptive tactics that lead to a bedtrick.

In contrast to the Vulgate's sentimental style is Malory's straightforward manner of writing in the *Morte* – this is what I call a rhetoric of rape. It removes key details and simplifies problematic actions to lessen their severity, thereby altering the impact of scenes. Oversimplifying issues cuts their value, signaling them as ordinary, everyday events. For example, if sexual assault or sexual violence happens often – so often it becomes a regular occurrence – then its constant recurrence numbs our reception to it, eventually making it mundane. Over time, rape then becomes something to expect and accept in life. But while this downplaying of severity may look like an attempt to uncover sexual violence, it is instead another means to mask rape.

In the *Morte*, there is considerably less preamble to the bedtrick between Uther and Igraine. Instead of seeing a duke under a king's power, Malory portrays King Uther and the Duke of Tintagel as equally powerful men. Even though they have been at war for "a long time," Uther invites the "mighty duke" and his wife over for a visit (Malory 5). Within the first four lines of the opening scene, we see Uther's true motive behind the invite was to meet the duke's wife: "she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise; and her name was called Igraine" (5). Malory eliminates the sentimental qualities of the Vulgate version, stripping down the beginning of the tale to plain, simple sexual attraction. There is no appearance of a drawn-out romance. Instead, in its simplest form, Uther wants to meet Igraine, the wife of his enemy, because he heard about her beauty and intelligence.

Malory's simplified style of writing sets the tone of the *Morte*, so by describing things in a plain way, the things that are being described becomes plain. If it is plain, then it must be unremarkable. And if it is unremarkable, then it must be unimportant. And if it is unimportant, then it must have little value. By lessening the severity of an action, Malory lessens the impact of

that action. Gillian Adler argues that any attempt to rewrite events, even those from fictional works, “has the potential to fictionalize [them] and compromise authenticity in just the same way that primary documents do” (Adler, 50-51). Consequently, she explains, re-writing a narrative would constitute re-fictionalizing it, “creating the potential for readers to diminish the importance of the traumatic event” (51). The same can be said of Malory’s reiteration of King Arthur’s life. As Adler underscores, narrative rewrites lose their original form, and in turn their original message. Even though the *Morte* is a compilation as well as an adaptation, and thus its own unique configuration of the Arthurian legend, it nonetheless strays from its original Old French source.

It is however a space that, because of Malory’s simplified writing style, and paired with its place as an adaptation, diminishes the significance of events that were once traumatic. For instance, when Malory describes Uther’s initial encounter with Igraine, he notes, “The King liked and loved this lady [and] desired to have lain by her. But she was a passing good woman, and would not assent unto the King” (Malory 5). Here, the straightforward language reduces Uther’s desire to a mere impulse, and Igraine’s resistance, though noted, is overshadowed by the simplicity of the narration. The significance of Igraine’s refusal is downplayed, presenting the King’s desire as a trivial, almost expected, expression of power rather than a moral transgression.

When Igraine voices her suspicion, saying, “I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonoured; wherefore, husband, I counsel you that we depart from hence suddenly” (Malory 5), her words hint at the gravity of the situation, yet Malory does not delve into her fear or the implications of her dishonor (5). The couple’s secretive departure, followed by Uther’s reaction – “he was wonderly wroth” – is reported with minimal commentary (5). The narrative choice reflects Malory’s tendency to present events with an air of inevitability, thereby reducing their

moral complexity. By stripping down the emotional and ethical weight of deceptive actions, the text situates them as inescapable. Other scholars have noted similar observations. Felicity Riddy (2006) believes the narrative of the *Morte* is marked by a tendency to understate and simplify events, creating an impression of inevitability and moral ambivalence.[3] Helen Cooper (2004) notes Malory's writing often reduces the emotional and ethical weight of events, showing them with a degree of detachment that hints at an unavoidable fate.[4] Similarly, Catherine Batt (2016) claims the *Morte* frequently presents events without explicit moral judgment, implying a narrative inevitability that downplays the complexity of characters ethical decisions.[5]

The bedtrick scene in the Vulgate, considering the text's long, detailed preamble leading up to it, is surprisingly short. What is most unexpected, however, is its comical nature. This is, at its core, a rape scene. Yet the wording of it is jovial throughout. Nonetheless, this is a continuation of the sentimental, romantic style that is typical of the Vulgate, but with a carefree, cheeriness to it. This comic sentimentality further serves to veil the bedtrick:

> As fast as they could, [Merlin and Ulfin] had their lord's boots taken off, and they put [Uther] to bed with Ygraine. This is how the good king called Arthur was conceived. The lady took great delight in the king, for she thought that he was surely her husband the duke, whom she loved very much, and they lay together until daylight the next morning. (Lacy 199)

---

[3] For more on moral ambivalence and moral inevitability, see Riddy, pp. 57-58, 63-69.

[4] For Malory's writing style demonstrating detachment and links to fate, see Cooper, pp. 194-196.

[5] For moral judgement and ethical decisions, see Batt, pp. 31-33, 50-52.

This comic tone, juxtaposed with the gravity of the act being depicted, diminishes the violence of the bedtrick, reframing it within the bounds of romanticized love rather than the coercion and deception at its core. By presenting the scene with an air of lightheartedness, the Vulgate obscures the ethical implications of the bedtrick, aligning the event more closely with the ideals of courtly love than with the disturbing reality of sexual assault. This narrative choice reflects a deliberate attempt to cloak the true nature of a heinous act, even when the act itself is far from virtuous.

The deliberate narrative choice to obscure the true nature of a heinous act finds further support in Catherine La Farge's (2013) analysis of the *Morte*, where she examines how humor can similarly veil morally questionable actions within Arthurian romance.[6] She notes humorous tones can diminish the gravity of certain actions, including those that are morally questionable, by framing them within a more lighthearted narrative style. In a similar vein, Helen Phillips (2011) touches on the manipulation of traditional romance tropes, observing that some authors use humor to veil serious social anxieties or moral dilemmas.[7] Although her focus is on a different aspect of Arthurian literature, the concept she highlights aligns with my argument on the comic nature of scene reframes what is essentially an act of sexual violence. In her research on the evolution of rape tropes in Arthurian literature, Anna Angeli (2010) claims that some texts romanticize, even trivialize, rape through their narrative tone.[8] La Farge, Phillips, and Angeli's

---

[6] On humour, grotesque bodies, morality in Malory's *Morte*, see La Farge pp. 181-198.

[7] On knightly status, manhood, class, domesticity in Malory's *Morte*, see Phillips pp. 39-40, 52-55.

[8] On male rape, loss of identity in Arthurian romance, see Angeli pp 30-33, 49-52.

research collectively reinforce the idea that humor and sentimentality can serve to mask the darker aspects of Arthuriana.

In contrast to the sentimental, comedic portrayal of the bedtrick in the Vulgate, Malory's depiction of the same event is devoid of romance or levity. Instead, the combined brevity and bluntness of the wording emphasizes a transactional sex act. But while it appears as nothing more than a factual statement, it skims over Igraine's rape: "after the death of the duke, King Uther lay with Igraine more than three hours after his death, and begot on her that night Arthur" (Malory 5). Here, Malory strips away any pretense of love, presenting the encounter as a cold, mechanical act of procreation rather than a union of love or even mistaken identity. This stark depiction serves to emphasize the power dynamics at play and the disregard for Igraine's autonomy, aligning the act more closely with a violation than with the romanticized love seen in the Vulgate. By doing so, Malory not only heightens the sense of moral ambiguity surrounding Arthur's conception but also reframes the bedtrick as an assertion of male dominance and a tool of political strategy rather than a simple narrative device.

The wording style of the Vulgate also situates Uther as a more important figure than Ygraine. That is to say, Uther's desire for Ygraine supersedes her disinterest in having a relationship with him, a disinterest that quickly grows into hatred. This underscores the power dynamic between them, regardless of his title as king. Let us consider the language and placement of her repeated disinterest in the following lines:

> […] Ygraine was sorely distressed […] she did not want [her gifts yet] made no sign of this […] but she dared not refuse them [and] knew in her heart that the king had given jewels to the other ladies only because of her. (199)

Ygraine understands her precarious position in court as the object of the king's secret affections. Uther's actions, again, are romanticized, depicting a secret admirer that is hopelessly in love, who showers Ygraine with jewels and gifts. The fact that he does the same for all the other women in court, in a guise to hide his desire for Ygraine, gives the impression he is deeply in love and willing to do anything to show his affections and gain hers. Everything Uther does out of what he claims is love however is clearly, as she states herself, an act of "treachery" (200). If it was an innocent act with good intentions, then there would be no need for Uther's secrecy. Instead, Ygraine is upset by his actions and fears negative repercussions. These are no acts of love but of treachery, an appearance of romance veiling deceit.

In another example that situates Uther as the figure of importance, the wording of the Vulgate elevates Uther's love for Ygraine through repetition to justify his actions. He reiterates his love over and over, something that takes up several pages. All this love serves to downplay the reasoning behind it. But no matter how much Uther claims to love Ygraine, no amount of it can justify away his selfish actions. The sentimental, romantic language of the Vulgate, nonetheless, serves Uther, working to his advantage. When Uther holds court, "all for love of Ygraine," his emotions take precedence over hers since she "had so overwhelmed him that he did not now what to do" (200). That is to say, according to this quote, Uther's feelings for Ygraine are all her fault. Everything he does is not just for her but because of her, implying a wrongdoing on her part. The blame of his love is placed on her. By this logic, his actions are all her fault. This, right here, is the logic and language of abuse. Through this language of abuse, a perpetrator can justify away any act of violence or deception. Blame is instead pinned on the victim, which is in this case Ygraine.

When the Duke of Tintagel and his wife finally leave court after their initial invitation, Uther rides with them to see them off. Uther's true intention however is to declare his love to Ygraine. In this scene, we see again in the language of the Vulgate that he is the figure of importance. Secretly, Uther whispers to Ygraine, that "she [is] taking his heart away with her [and that] his heart belonged wholly to [her], and he pined for her" (200). We witness his language of blame once more, situating her as the reason for his emotions. She is described in a negative light: she takes his heart, she owns his heart, while he yearns for her. The wording creates the illusion that Uther's love and attention is all Ygraine's fault, prioritizing him and his emotions over her. We see this prioritization of Uther again in the following line: "all year the king *bore the misery* of his love for Ygraine [and when] he could *hide it no longer*, he *[revealed] his distress* and the *agony he felt because of [her]*" (emphasis added, 200). This quote is clear, direct, and persuasive, exemplifying his status in the text, not as king but as someone suffering from unrequited love. The text makes him out to be the victim in this line, while Ygraine is the perpetrator. However, I believe it is the Vulgate veiling deceit. Note my emphasis on these word pairings: bore misery, hide no longer, revealed distress, agony felt. While these word pairings signal pain, they also sentimentalize Uther's suffering. At the end of this quote is the reason for Uther's anguish: his love for Ygraine. The Vulgate language plays up, or sensationalizes, Uther's feelings to downplay, or reduce the significance, of Ygraine's emotions.

In examining the bedtrick between Uther and Igraine, the contrasts between the Old French Vulgate and Malory's *Morte* are extensive. The Vulgate's language of *fin'amour*, with its rhetoric of rapture, serves to sentimentalize Uther's pursuit of Ygraine, casting him as a tragic lover whose actions, though deceptive and coercive, are veiled in the guise of courtly love. This narrative technique shifts the blame onto Ygraine, positioning her as the cause of Uther's turmoil

and justifying his actions through an abusive logic that prioritizes his desires over her autonomy. In contrast, Malory's plain, straightforward rhetoric of rape strips the encounter of any romantic pretense, presenting it as a blunt assertion of power and male dominance. By downplaying the emotional and ethical complexity of the bedtrick, Malory recasts it as an unremarkable event, thereby minimizing its moral implications. This shift in narrative style not only alters the reader's perception of the event but also reflects a broader commentary on the role of power, desire, and deception in both texts.

Lancelot du Lac and Elaine of Corbenic

Sir Lancelot du Lac experiences a bedtrick, not just once but twice. In both instances, he is deceived into sex with Elaine of Corbenic, the daughter of King Pellas, the Grail King. For the purpose of my paper, I will only address the first bedtrick, which occurs at Castle Case.

In contrast, Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* presents the bedtrick in a more straightforward and less embellished manner. The language is simpler, reflecting Malory's preference for a plain, direct style of storytelling. Dame Brusen, who plays the role of the deceiver, is less of a mystical figure and more of a pragmatic character who facilitates the plot. The narrative in Malory's version shifts away from the religious and prophetic undertones found in the Vulgate, focusing instead on the immediate consequences of the deception for Lancelot's honor and his relationship with Guinevere. Lancelot's reaction in Malory's text is still intense, but it is more controlled and resolved quickly, with the emphasis placed on his sense of betrayal and dishonor rather than on a prolonged emotional crisis. This contrast in narrative style and character portrayal reflects the distinct approaches of the two texts, with the Vulgate leaning into the romantic and divine aspects of the Arthurian legend, while Malory's text prioritizes the chivalric and moral implications of the events.

In the Old French Vulgate, the prelude to Lancelot's first bedtrick begins upon his arrival in Corbenic. This lead-in includes heroic actions, such as freeing a maiden from a basin of burning water and defeating a "fiendish dragon" (Lacy, VIII, 163), which brings him to an engraved prediction on a tombstone and Corbenic's ruler, King Pellas. It is equally important to analyze the wording of this lead-in, as it shows an integral part of the deception surrounding the bedtrick act itself. The justification of deceiving Lancelot comes down to destiny. After Lancelot saves the maiden, he is led by the grateful townspeople to the cemetery, where the following is engraved on a tombstone:

> This tombstone will not be lifted until the Leopard, from whom is to descend the Great Lion, puts a hand to it, and he will lift it easily, and afterwards the Great Lion will be begotten in the beautiful daughter of the King of the Land Beyond. (Lacy, VIII, 163)

Not only are the townspeople convinced that this prediction is about Lancelot, but so is King Pellas. The king is incredibly happy to see Lancelot, who he believes will sire the saviour of his land. Pellas embraces him, his words situating Lancelot as long expected and heaven-sent: "Sir, for so long now we've wished to see you and have you among us! Thank God, you've come at last" […] I'm convinced that either you or someone begotten by you will deliver this land from [its] the strange adventures" (163). By combining the prediction on the tombstone, Pellas's belief that it refers to Lancelot, and the king's resulting expectation that Lancelot is fated to father the realm's saviour, we can see Pellas' need to ensure that this prediction comes true.

At this point, Lancelot's fate is out of his control. This romanticized language serves to elevate the act of deception to a divinely sanctioned mission, effectively masking the violence of the upcoming bedtrick under the guise of destiny and heroism. The emphasis on prophecy and the portrayal of Lancelot as a preordained savior not only justifies the deceit but also reframes

the bedtrick as a noble act necessary for the greater good. This deliberate use of elevated, almost sacred, language highlights how the original French source cloaks the bedtrick in an aura of inevitability and righteousness, contrasting sharply with Malory's more pragmatic, less idealized portrayal.

Brisane performs a fundamental role in the Vulgate as the mastermind behind Lancelot's bedtrick. Initially, she appears harmless, merely an unnamed, "ancient old lady" who tutors the king's daughter (164). Upon seeing Lancelot at Pellas' palace, Brisane reminds the king about the prophesy, spurring him to ensure it comes to pass, subsequently revealing herself as his confidant, co-conspirator, and sorceress. In a conversation between Pellas and Brisane, we see the romanticized language of the Vulgate through its religious wording:

> "[W]hat can be done with this knight God has sent us?" [asks Brisane], "I don't know […] except that he'll have my daughter to do with as he will," replies the king. "In the name of God […] I know for certain Lancelot won't want [Elaine] because he loves [Queen Guinevere …], we'll have to [deceive him] so subtly he won't notice," to which King Pellas replies, "Then see to it as you will […] because it must be done." […] "Don't you worry about it anymore […] for I'll see that it's accomplished." (164)

The religious wording of this passage cloaks the trickery that leads up to the bedtrick in a veneer of divine approval, masking its true nature as an act of deception and manipulation. By invoking God's will and framing the bedtrick as a necessity ordained by fate, the Vulgate narrative sanitizes the violence and rape inherent in the act. Brisane's use of religious rhetoric not only legitimizes the deceit but also reframes it as a pious duty, successfully clouding the darker elements of the bedtrick under a facade of righteousness and divine inevitability.

The matching scene in *Le Morte Darthur* plays out relatively similarly, with the same heroic feats during the lead-in to the bedtrick, though Malory's writing style is greatly simplified. As we see in the Vulgate, deceiving Lancelot is justified by providence. Sir Lancelot "peradventure" crosses the Pont de Corbin to villagers awaiting "the flower of knighthood" to deliver the dolorous lady from her magically induced torment and their town from an entombed dragon-like serpent (Malory 281-282). Instead of the entire village chaperoning Lancelot to the serpent's tomb, it is only the dolorous lady that accompanies him. And although he sees the engraved prophesy, no one else brings attention to it: "Here shall come a leopard of kings' blood, and he shall slay this serpent; and this leopard shall engender a lion in this foreign country, which lion shall pass all other knights" (282). In comparison to the Vulgate, this prophesy text is not only less poetic and dramatic but also less specific. Malory's simplification of the prophesy still maintains Lancelot as the leopard and Galahad as the lion. But, instead of directly stating that it will be "the daughter of the king of the land", it hides the 'who' and the 'how' of the "engender[ing]" by generalizing the wording of the prophesy. Lancelot's fate in the *Morte*, because of the obscure language of the prophesy, is less defined. The generalized, hazy wording does not, however, grant Lancelot more power over his destiny. Rather, it is an illusion of choice that simply does not exist. By creating this illusion, Malory moderates the treachery and deceit that leads to and is included in the bedtrick. Much of the religious jargon is eliminated as well, significantly lessening the guilt attached to sin and softening upcoming violence. Less religion means less sin, and less sin means less guilt.

The divine sanction in *Le Morte Darthur* does not necessarily eliminate guilt because human actions, even when foreordained, can still carry moral responsibility. Malory's depiction of providence, while complex, does not always absolve characters of guilt. Although God's will

might justify or explain certain events, the individuals involved can still experience internal conflict or guilt, particularly in a world where free will and divine intervention coexist. Catherine Batt, in *Malory's Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, explores the notion of providence and guilt in *Le Morte Darthur*, arguing that even when divine sanction is involved, characters like Lancelot are often portrayed as struggling with their moral choices. She notes, "Malory's knights often operate under the belief that their actions are predestined, yet they are not fully exonerated from the guilt of their deeds" (Batt 54). This suggests that Lancelot's participation in the bedtrick could still be seen as morally ambiguous, despite the divine prophecy. Additionally, Dorsey Armstrong, in *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Le Morte Darthur,* contends that Malory's work often reflects a tension between divine will and human agency, where character awareness of divine purpose does not completely absolve them of guilt or moral responsibility. Armstrong states, "The intersection of providence and free will in Malory's narrative creates a moral landscape where divine foreordination does not erase the ethical implications of human actions" (Armstrong 112). By invoking these scholarly perspectives, I argue that Malory's use of divine prophecy creates a complex moral situation where characters like Lancelot are not entirely free from guilt, even when their actions are part of a divine plan. The mastermind behind Lancelot's bedtrick in the *Morte* is Dame Brusen, a craftier yet more practical version of the Vulgate's Brisane. She is no old crone but "one of the greatest enchanters […] in the world" (Malory 283). The plain writing style of the *Morte* paints her as direct and impatient, rushing King Pellas to do what is necessary to get Lancelot in bed with his daughter, Elaine. Rather than a confidant to the king that proposes a solution, this sorceress takes control and demands action. Dame Brusen knows about Lancelot and Queen

Guenivere, and has already come up with a plan to use this knowledge to lure the knight into a trap:

> Lancelot loveth no lady in the world but all only Queen Guenivere; and therefore work ye by my counsel, and I shall make him to lie with your daughter, and he shall not wit but that he lieth by Queen Guenivere. (Malory 283)

The shift from the Vulgate's Brisane to the *Morte's* Dame Brusen reflects a transition from idealized coercion to a more pragmatic, calculated deceit. Unlike Brisane's subtle orchestration shrouded in religious language, Dame Brusen's approach is blunt and devoid of moral pretense, emphasizing the bedtrick's inherent violence and deception. Her language is straightforward and utilitarian, stripping away the mystical veneer present in the Vulgate. By focusing on the practicalities of deception rather than cloaking it in divine justification, Malory exposes the manipulation and coercion at the heart of the bedtrick, thereby underscoring the darker, more cynical portrayal of such acts in his narrative. By focusing on the practicalities of deception rather than cloaking it in divine justification, Malory exposes the manipulation and coercion at the heart of the bedtrick, thereby highlighting the stark reality of such acts rather than their romanticized interpretations. As Mark Lambert observes, Malory's characters often engage in deceit without the moral or religious rationalizations seen in earlier versions, which serves to "bring the starkness of moral choices to the forefront" (Lambert 132). This contrasts sharply with the idealized versions of similar events in the Vulgate.

In the Vulgate's bedtrick scene, Brisane uses Lancelot's love for Queen Guenivere to her advantage, baiting him into riding to Castle Case on the false premise of joining his lover. The tone of this scene is malicious, much of which comes through in Brisane's thoughts and dialogue, portraying the sorceress as a powerful puppet-master. In her scheme, Lancelot drinks

the potion-laced wine Brisane concocts, leaving him "more animated and talkative […] completely transformed [and willing to] do everything [she] want[s], and so what [they are] all seeking will come about" (Lacy 164). Once Lancelot is drugged and nearly senseless, the sorceress leads him to the grail Maiden's bed. While the text makes it a point to state that "their desires stemmed from different motives," the wording that is used places more importance on the Grail Maiden's actions by judging those of Lancelot's. So while Elaine wants to have "the fruit that would restore the entire land," Lancelot wants a night with "his lady the queen" (164). This is yet another instance where bedtrickery is explained away with religion and divine provenance.

In the Vulgate's narrative, while Lancelot is indeed disparaged for seeking a night with another man's wife, this does not fully exonerate the manipulation and deceit employed against him. The comparison of Lancelot to Adam and Galahad to Christ complicates the reading, as it invokes the concept of *felix culpa* (fortunate fall), where a sin leads to a greater good. However, Eugene Vinaver contends that Malory often presents these divine parallels with a degree of skepticism, questioning the extent to which divine will can justify human actions. Vinaver argues that "while divine providence is acknowledged, it does not always absolve characters of their sins, reflecting a more nuanced moral landscape" (Vinaver 145). This perspective allows for an interpretation where Lancelot's guilt is recognized, but the bedtrick itself remains a morally dubious act, regardless of its divine outcome.

The sentimentalized language of the Vulgate uses this divine prominence to justify a "coupling" deemed "valu[able] by the Lord" (Lacy 164). The "join[ing] together" of "the best and most handsome knight who ever lived" and "the most beautiful and highest-born maiden" (164) made sense to God himself, regardless of the sexual violation. Together, they created Galahad, whose "goodness and tenderness" would save the wastelands, and through this action

"wrong was made right" (165). Not only is it a means to excuse its necessity, but it also insinuates the bedtrick as a merciful means of redemption for Lancelot's adultery. The Vulgate's lyric-like narrative forms a dense padding around the rape of Lancelot, beautifying its heinousness.

The Vulgate's narrative indeed beautifies the bedtrick through its sentimentalized language, but this does not diminish the psychological toll on Lancelot, who goes mad after realizing the deception. Elizabeth Archibald notes that while the Vulgate attempts to justify the bedtrick through divine providence, the narrative still acknowledges the profound impact on Lancelot, suggesting that the act's heinousness is not entirely obscured. Archibald states, "The madness of Lancelot following the bedtrick is a testament to the profound violation he experiences, undermining any attempts to present the act as merely a divine necessity" (Archibald 78). This complexity highlights the tension between divine justification and the human experience of trauma, complicating the narrative's attempt to beautify the event.

In the *Morte*, the bedtrick scene between Lancelot and Elaine is both less elaborate and religiously charged. Dame Brusen, acting under the command of King Pelles, orchestrates the deception with a focus on immediate practicalities rather than any divine or prophetic justification. The scene unfolds at Castle Case, where Lancelot, upon seeing Queen Guinevere's ring—an item cunningly obtained by Dame Brusen—hastens to the castle under the false belief that he will reunite with his beloved. The setting is meticulously prepared to deceive him: "five and twenty knights" stand guard, creating the illusion of a royal reception befitting the queen herself (Malory, 284). When Dame Brusen hands Lancelot a goblet of wine laced with her powerful potion, it renders him "so besotted and mad" with desire. Unable to discern reality from

illusion, when the sorceress leads him to Elaine, Lancelot believes she is Guinevere instead (Malory, 284).

The plain, functional language used by Malory reflects the broader narrative style we see throughout the *Morte*. What we get is a direct, unembellished portrayal of events. For instance, when Lancelot drinks the potion, the focus is on its physical, immediate effects: "And wit you well that Sir Lancelot was glad, and so was that lady Elaine that she had got Sir Lancelot in her arms; for well she knew that that same night should be begotten Sir Galahad upon her, that should prove the best knight of the world" (Malory, 284). The emphasis here is on the pragmatic outcome of the bedtrick—the conception of Galahad—rather than any divine sanctioning of the act. Elaine's happiness at having deceived Lancelot is presented without moral commentary, reinforcing the scene's focus on the mechanics of deception rather than the ethics behind it. There is very little emphasis on the mystical or religious elements that pervade the Old French text. While the Vulgate dwelled on the divine implications of Galahad's conception, Malory simply notes it as a factual outcome of the deception. In the first bedtrick, Elaine is portrayed as a passive participant, manipulated by Brisane and King Pelles. We see her take on a different role, one more complex, in the second bedtrick. As Carolyn Larrington points out, Elaine transitions from a mere vessel of prophecy to an active agent driven by personal desire.[9] In the second bedtrick, Elaine consciously seeks Brisane's help to deceive Lancelot, driven by her love for him. It is a shift, from passivity to agency, that reflects the variability in Elaine's characterization, moving from a puppet to a figure exercising her own will, albeit within the confines of manipulation and deceit.

[9] On Elaine's desire and agency, see Larrington, pg. 134.

In the Vulgate, Galahad's conception is portrayed as divinely sanctioned, integral to the Grail Quest, symbolizing the culmination of a divine plan. However, in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the divine elements surrounding Galahad's conception are notably downplayed. P. J. C. Field suggests that Malory often "earths" the ethereal aspects of the Arthurian legend, focusing on the physical and pragmatic consequences of events rather than their spiritual significance.[10] This shift in emphasis from the mystical to the material reflects Malory's broader narrative strategy, where religious themes are selectively highlighted, often to serve the immediate needs of the plot rather than a consistent theological framework. Lancelot's emotional breakdown following the bedtrick is depicted in the Vulgate with the same heightened drama and sentimental language that characterizes much of the text. This reaction serves as a powerful conclusion to the bedtrick episode, illustrating the profound impact of the deception on the knight.

Upon realizing the truth the next morning, Lancelot is "more grieved than words can express" (Lacy 165), a phrase that captures both the intensity of his despair and the Vulgate's tendency to use language that amplifies emotional states. The moment he awakens and realizes what happened, he springs from the bed in a frantic state, instinctively reaching for his sword and armor, readying for battle. Lancelot's subsequent actions are driven by a mix of rage, humiliation, and a deep sense of betrayal. Grief transforms into fury at the sight of Elaine, and he feels "as though he would go out of his head" (165). This vivid depiction underscores the extent the betrayal has unhinged him, pushing him to the brink of madness. The text portrays rage that is as all-consuming, with Lancelot "shaking with anger and wrath" (165). His intention to kill Elaine is framed not merely as an act of personal vengeance but to "avenge himself" and to "save

[10] On spirituality and pragmatism in the *Morte*, see Fields pg. 134.

other men from suffering her trickery" (165). This dual motivation reflects the chivalric code that governs Lancelot's actions—his sense of duty to protect others from harm, even as he grapples with his own pain and shame.

There is of course a tension between Lancelot's chivalric duties and his personal emotions, evident not only in bedtrick scenes but also in the entirety of Arthurian lore. The chivalric code is equally elaborate as it is multifaceted and is often a site that reveals the strain between knightly ideals and personal emotions. Lancelot's response to the bedtrick involving Elaine illustrates this conflict. As Beverly Kennedy (2001) notes, Lancelot's actions are frequently driven by a reaction to deeper sentiments that sometimes overshadow his chivalric duties – we see this in particular when he feels betrayed[11]. In his moment of rage with Elaine, though it is not sanctioned by the chivalric code, underscores Lancelot's human limitations. Even the noblest of knights has internal struggles. In this instance with Elaine, after realizing their deception, we see Lancelot struggling to overcome emotional betrayal and maintain honor.

However, Lancelot does not carry out his violent intentions. The tension of this moment is seen in the emotional language of the passage, describing him as "overwhelmed [and] defeated" (Lacy 165). Lancelot was tricked, drugged, manipulated, raped, and forced to father a child. Yet, despite these things, and despite his fury, he is still unable to kill her. The language here is particularly telling – Lancelot is "defeated," not just in the physical sense but emotionally. He is unable to reconcile his desire for vengeance with his innate sense of compassion and honor. His request for Elaine's forgiveness for having drawn his sword, even though she was the one who wronged him, further emphasizes this inner turmoil and the Vulgate's emphasis on the noble yet tragic aspects of Lancelot's character. Lancelot's departure

[11] On Lancelot and chivalric duties, emotions, see Kennedy pp. 117-118.

from Castle Case is marked by disorientation and despair. He is "downcast […] not knowing what he was doing" (165), wandering aimlessly as he struggles with the events that transpired. This portrayal of Lancelot, lost in his thoughts and "disturbed by what happened to him" (165), exemplifies the emotional wording typical of the Vulgate. The sentimental, almost lyrical language of this scene highlights the tragic nature of Lancelot's experience, painting him as a figure overwhelmed by forces beyond his control – both external, in the form of the bedtrick, and internal, in his own emotional response.

Lancelot's reaction to the bedtrick in the Vulgate moves from intense grief to violent rage to sorrowful resignation. The romantic and sentimental language of the text amplifies these emotions, portraying Lancelot as a tragic hero caught in a web of deceit and personal turmoil. His ultimate inability to exact revenge on Elaine, coupled with his profound sense of loss and confusion, underscores the Vulgate's emphasis on the emotional and psychological consequences of the bedtrick, making this episode a poignant exploration of the complexities of chivalric honor, betrayal, and the human condition. While Elaine is a passive participant in the first bedtrick, manipulated by Brisane and King Pelles, she is an active participant in the second bedtrick. As I previously noted, Larrington observes a transition in Elaine, from a mere vessel of prophecy to an active agent driven by personal desire (Larrington 148). Her love for Lancelot drives her to seek out Brisane to ask for help to deceive him yet again. This shift from passivity to activity reflects the mutability of her character, moving from a puppet-like figure to a woman with agency and free will.

Other scholars have similar observations to Larrington. Radulescu notes that Elaine's actions in the second bedtrick reveal her as a character who, while initially constrained by the

expectations of her father and the prophecy, ultimately exerts her influence over the narrative.[12] Kennedy argues that Elaine's manipulation of Lancelot in the second bedtrick represents a calculated effort to secure her place within the Arthurian narrative, emphasizing that even within a framework of deception, Elaine's agency is evident.[13] The perspectives that Larrington, Radulescu, and Kennedy collectively offer reinforces the idea that Elaine's role evolves from that of a puppet to a more complex figure who, despite being influenced by external forces, exercises significant personal agency within the bedtrick scenes in the *Morte*, Lancelot's reaction to the bedtrick is portrayed with a mix of fury, confusion, and ultimately reluctant acceptance, mirroring the text's more straightforward and pragmatic style compared to the Vulgate. Upon realizing that he has been deceived, Lancelot's immediate response is one of violent anger. He grabs his sword and vows to kill the "false traitress" (Malory 285) Elaine for her role in the deceit, declaring that she must pay for the shame she has brought upon him. The language here is direct and unembellished, emphasizing the rawness of Lancelot's emotions without the sentimental flourishes found in the Vulgate. His initial reaction is a stark portrayal of the intense betrayal he feels, encapsulated in his intention to kill Elaine as retribution.

Yet, Malory's Lancelot is quick to reconsider his decision when confronted with Elaine's explanation. As she kneels before him, naked and vulnerable, Elaine pleads for mercy, invoking both her noble lineage and the prophecy that she carries the future greatest knight in her womb: "I have in my womb begotten of thee that shall be the most noblest knight of the world" (285). The simplicity of her plea, combined with the revelation of her pregnancy, prompts Lancelot to shift from anger to a grudging acceptance of the situation. The text's language reflects this shift,

---

[12] On Elaine's actions and influence in the prophesy, see Radulescu p. 113.

[13] On Elaine's agency and Lancelot's manipulation, see Kennedy p. 203.

moving from the harshness of Lancelot's initial vow to the more measured tone of his response to Elaine's words. Lancelot, now aware of the prophecy and Elaine's status as King Pelles's daughter, absolves her of her part in the deception and instead directs his wrath towards Dame Brusen, whom he vows will "lose her head for her witchcrafts" (285). This shift in blame from Elaine to Brusen highlights the importance of lineage and prophecy in the world of the *Morte*, as Lancelot is ultimately unable to bring himself to harm a woman carrying his child, particularly one prophesied to be the greatest knight of all.

Malory's treatment of this scene is notable for its brevity and its focus on the consequences rather than the emotional turmoil that characterizes the Vulgate's account. After deciding to spare Elaine, Lancelot immediately departs for Castle Corbin, leaving the scene of the bedtrick behind with little reflection on the emotional or psychological impact it has had on him. The text then quickly shifts to the announcement of the birth of Galahad, emphasizing the fulfillment of the prophecy over the personal trauma that Lancelot has just experienced. This narrative choice reflects Malory's more pragmatic approach to storytelling, where the emphasis is placed on the broader implications of events – such as the birth of Galahad – rather than on the inner emotional lives of the characters.

Lancelot's final words in the scene, spoken as he realizes the full extent of the deception, further illustrate the directness of Malory's style: "Alas, that I have loved so long, for now I am shamed!" (285). This declaration is both a lament for the loss of his honor and a recognition of the enduring consequences of his actions. The starkness of this statement contrasts with the more elaborate expressions of grief and anger found in the Vulgate, underscoring the straightforward, often harsh reality of the world Malory depicts. Lancelot's shame is tied not only to the act of

betrayal itself but also to the realization that his long-held love for Guinevere has been tainted by this night's events.

Lancelot's reaction to the bedtrick in the *Morte* is characterized by a rapid progression from rage to reluctant acceptance, framed within Malory's clear, pragmatic narrative style. The language used in this scene is direct and unadorned, reflecting the stark reality of Lancelot's situation and the focus on the broader narrative consequences, such as the birth of Galahad, rather than the intricate emotional landscape explored in the Vulgate. This approach not only highlights the different narrative priorities of Malory but also underscores the complex interplay of honor, lineage, and prophecy that defines the world of the *Morte*.

The contrasting depictions in the Vulgate and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* offer a striking comparison that underscores the different narrative priorities and stylistic choices of these two seminal Arthurian texts. In the Vulgate, the bedtrick is presented as a divinely sanctioned event, steeped in a romanticized and sentimental narrative style that emphasizes the mystical and prophetic dimensions of the Arthurian legend. The language is rich and elaborate, with Brisane portrayed as a powerful sorceress whose actions are integral to the fulfillment of a divine prophecy. Lancelot's subsequent emotional breakdown is depicted in a highly dramatic manner, with the narrative focusing on his internal turmoil and the tragic consequences of the deception. The Vulgate's portrayal of the bedtrick serves to highlight the conflict between personal desire and divine destiny, ultimately framing the event as a necessary, albeit tragic, part of the larger mythic structure.

Malory, on the other hand, presents the bedtrick in a much more straightforward and pragmatic manner, reflecting a shift in narrative focus from the mystical to the chivalric. The language is simpler and more direct, with less emphasis on the supernatural and more on the

human and moral consequences of the deception. Dame Brusen, while still a key figure in the bedtrick, is more a facilitator of events than a mystical being, and the focus is on the immediate impact of the deception on Lancelot's honor and his relationship with Guinevere. Lancelot's reaction, while still intense, is resolved quickly, with the narrative moving swiftly from the moment of realization to the aftermath of the event. This shift in focus from the divine to the human reflects Malory's broader thematic concerns with chivalry, honor, and the moral responsibilities of knights.

The key difference between the two texts lies in their treatment of the bedtrick as either a divinely justified act or a personal betrayal with significant moral implications. The Vulgate's emphasis on prophecy and divine intervention serves to elevate the bedtrick to a necessary part of the Arthurian mythos, while Malory's more grounded approach highlights the personal and chivalric consequences of such an act. These differences not only reflect the distinct narrative and thematic concerns of the two texts but also offer insights into the ways in which the Arthurian legend has been adapted and reinterpreted over time, with each version reflecting the values and priorities of its respective era.

Arthur and Morgause

Of particular interest is the third bedtrick, between Arthur and Morgause, as it undergoes a drastic alteration from the Old French Vulgate that portrays a clear instance of a bedtrick with rape to Malory's version that removes the sexual assault entirely. Malory twists this scene, turning Morgause into the perpetrator of the sex act and Arthur into the victim – an alteration that begs for a justification. As we see in the other bedtricks of the *Morte* in this paper, Malory changes details, removes the love language and, as a result, alters the impact of the rape scenes.

In addition, this bedtrick scene includes two distinguishing features: the length of the text and the subject of incest. The *Morte* depicts a scene that is substantially shorter than in the Vulgate, posing somewhat of a challenge for a comparative analysis. This notable difference in length, however, is itself a site for analysis, as it can serve as an effective narratological tool to clarify or conceal information. The bedtrick between Arthur and Morgause also incorporates a taboo element: incest. Saunders reminds us that the theme of incest, and its echo throughout foundational texts, "recalls the strange fact that the whole of the Arthurian world, its inception and its end, has been constructed on illicit sex, one manifestation of which is rape" (Saunders 262). Incest works on different levels, adding an extra layer of sin to an already sinful act of rape. So, while I do agree with Saunders, I feel it essential to distinguish between what degree of incest is involved in the bedtrick. In Arthurian tales, would a reader believe it more sinful for an aunt and nephew to have sexual relations, or for a brother and sister?

In exploring the sinfulness of incest within Arthurian literature, it is crucial to recognize how medieval morality classified different forms of incest. While all incestuous relations were considered sinful, medieval law and theology sometimes differentiated between degrees of kinship. For example, scholars have discussed how medieval audiences might have perceived incestuous relationships differently depending on the specific family ties involved. Richard Kaeuper, in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, addresses the sinfulness of incestuous relations in the broader context of chivalric codes. Kaeuper notes that "incest, particularly between siblings, was viewed with extreme horror and was believed to bring about divine retribution," which suggests that the relationship between a brother and sister might be perceived as more sinful compared to that between an aunt and nephew (Kaeuper 312). Ruth Mazo Karras in *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* stresses "the closer the

kinship tie, the greater the sin," implying a brother-sister relationship would likely be seen as more grievous than that of an aunt-nephew pairing (Karras 158). At the root of this distinction is the idea that siblings share a more immediate blood relationship. The moral and theological prohibitions against such unions are thus intensified. In *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte Darthur*, Dorsey Armstrong examines the *Morte* its reflection of contemporary attitudes toward incest and sin. "Malory's portrayal of incest," Armstrong argues, "particularly in the case of Arthur and Morgause, is intentionally ambiguous, allowing for a complex reading of sin that hinges on both the act of rape and the degree of kinship" (Armstrong 187). This suggests that while incest is undoubtedly sinful, the degree of sinfulness may vary depending on the specific familial relationship and its narrative context.

Malory's treatment of incest in the *Morte* reflects his manipulation of narrative structure and moral implications and in turn his writing style. If we consider that the gravity of sin can vary depending on the degree of kinship, then we can also see it as a tactical writing tool that he employed. As scholars like Saunders, Kaeuper, Karras, and Armstrong suggest, the distinction between incestuous relationships – whether aunt and nephew or brother and sister – can complicate a reader's understanding of sin. The wording of the *Morte* both conceals and reveals sinful acts like incest within its moral landscape. The nuanced depiction of incest adds further complexity to what is a narrative of sin and morality.

In the Vulgate's *Story of Merlin*, the tale begins with a focus on King Lot as a protector and savior, to then situate his wife in relation to this powerful status. He arrives in Orkney with three thousand of his men, to city dwellers who welcome their protection from raiding Saxons. After calling in more reinforcements to defend the city and countryside, Lot is much honoured

and famed for safeguarding the city. Without prior context, the narrator delivers a striking revelation in terms of lineage, completely altering the tone of the text with its gossipy nature:

> It is also true that [King Lot's] wife was one of King Arthur's half-sisters, his mother's daughter. This lady gave birth to Gawainet, Agravain, Guerrehet, and Gaheriet, who were all King Lot's sons. Furthermore, she also bore Mordred, who was the offspring whom King Arthur fathered. And *I will tell you, for the history will be more worthwhile if I make you understand how Mordred was sired by him, for many people would find King Arthur less worthy because of it if they did not know the truth*.
>
> (emphasis added, Lacy V, 237)

In the above quote, the reader learns key details about the past, present, and future. We are told that Lady Lot is the daughter of the Duke of Tintagel and his wife Igraine, which makes her half-sister to Arthur (who will, according to the quote, eventually be king). We are also told that she gives birth to Mordred, who was sired by Arthur – making this incest without clearly defining it with the word 'incest'. The last line of the quote stands out for its conspiratorial language, where the narrator underscores the fault in King Arthur's action, pointedly calling him unworthy of what we assume is an eventual superior status. There is no blame placed on Lady Lot whatsoever, a detail that is essential to keep in mind when comparing this scene to the one in Malory's version.

What precedes the bedtrick is a description of Arthur as "a very handsome lad [that] was very clever" (237) that marks an uptick in the Vulgate's striking use of love language, in a move to increase the romance aspect to justify an act of sexual deception. Love language often acts, as we have seen before in the bedtricks involving Uther and Igraine and Lancelot and Elaine, as a buffer to decrease the severity of a disagreeable act. The beautiful, flowery wording serves to

distract from approaching acts of disgrace. In this instance, the wording underscores Arthur's physical attractiveness and keen intelligence. However, the word "clever" serves as a double-entendre well here, as it also denotes craftiness, which is appropriate considering his secret attraction to Lady Lot and planned bedtrick. The wording used to describe Arthur's attraction gives a strong sense of infatuation: "He […] noticed everything about the lady […] that she was beautiful and plump; he strongly desired her in his heart and loved her for it" (237). The language is charming, romantic, and emotional. The use of the word "love" and "heart" situate a scene that is emotional, appears loving, written in a poetic style typical of Old French romance. The wording is gentle, sweet, and soft, reminiscent of innocent infatuations and first loves, but with an underlying push to portray legitimacy of these sentiments. And when we are told "the lady did not heed this, for she was very faithful to her husband" (237), we are left with a sense of loss for Arthur, the young squire who sleeps in the dark hallway corner, away from all people of import. The gentle romanticism of the language softens Arthur's position here, veiling the impending threat of incest.

The bedtrick scene adopts the same tone, romanticising Arthur's rape of King Lot's wife. In the early hours of the morning, King Lot left with the barons of the realm to confer secretly at Black Cross. But though he quietly warned his household to prepare for it, King Lot failed to inform his wife of his impending departure, leaving her asleep and alone in their bed. Arthur, noticing King Lot's departure with his entourage, took immediate advantage:

> Arthur […] got up and went to the lady's bed and lay down with her. And after he had got in bed with her, he turned his back to her, for he did not dare do anything else […] the lady awoke and, still half asleep, turned toward him, for she truly thought that he was her husband, and she put her arms around him. When Arthur saw that she had embraced him,

> *he understood that she had not noticed who he was, so he put his arms around her and lay with her fully, and the lady gave him much pleasure, and she did it willingly, for she thought that he was her husband*. And this is how Mordred was conceived. And *when Arthur had done to the lady what gave him such great delight*, he did not have to wait a very long time before she went back to sleep. *He went back to his own bed very quietly, so that no one realized what he had done.* (emphasis added, Lacy V, 238)

The next morning, when Lady Lot asks why Arthur looks pensive, he replies "in a low voice that he could never deserve the good things she had done for him" (238). But "refus[es]" to explain further "unless she swore to him that she would not tell anyone or try to find a way to cast blame on him or do anything harmful to him" (238). Confident she has no cause for worry, the lady swore no harm would come to him. Once he reveals "how he had lain with her" the night prior, Lady Lot "*was deeply ashamed and blushed, but no one knew what their secret was*" (emphasis added 238). The closing line to the bedtrick scene in the Vulgate minimizes the impact of this news with a sense of resolution and finality: "So that is how Arthur lay with his sister, and it never happened again, but the lady knew that she was with child by him" (238). It even infers the tale has a happy ending, signalling to readers that all is fine, no harm was done, and we should in fact be happy for Lady Lot. In doing so, the wording of Vulgate codes the bedtrick as something positive, with a rape that was beneficial.

In contrast to the Vulgate, Malory offers a stripped-down, reworked rendition of the bedtrick scene between Arthur and Morgause. Its alteration is so considerable, one cannot help but question the rationale behind such a change to this bedtrick scene. Most intriguing is Malory's decision to retain the incestuous parentage of Mordred from the Vulgate. Other textual sources, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Stanzaic Morte*

Arthur, and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, instead, establish the element of incest through a nephew-aunt relation. In these texts, Mordred, Arthur's nephew, seizes the throne of Britain and claims Arthur's wife, Guinevere (Monmouth 196). Albeit still incestuous, this nephew-aunt relation is less dramatic and thus less impactful. The closer blood-relation brother-sister sex act would thus appear more sinful to the reader.

What Malory does not do, however, is maintain the roles given to Arthur and Lot's wife by the Vulgate, where rapist and victim are clearly denoted. The blame of their incestuous romp is placed squarely on the shoulders of Morgause, while Arthur is painted as innocent – a far cry from the bedtrick in the Old French version. With this 'increase' in incest in the *Morte* comes a corresponding decrease in accountability for Arthur. In the *Morte*, Morgause is sent to Caerleon by her husband King Lot of Orkney to spy on King Arthur and his court. She arrives, "richly beseen […] for she was a passing fair lady" (Malory 21), with an entourage of knights, ladies, and her four sons: Gawain, Gaheris, Agravain, and Gareth. Arthur is instantly attracted to her, "cast[ing] great love unto her, and desired to lie by her" (21). In the next line, the narrator relates the truth about their familial relation, but does so in a hurried, offhanded manner: "And so they were agreed, and he begot upon her Sir Mordred, and she was sister on the mother's side, Igraine, unto Arthur" (21). The wording, moreover, while understandable, is confusing. Or rather, appears to be carefully chosen to downplay the severity of what has happened. It goes from Arthur and Morgause agreeing to sex in wording that denotes a straightforward transaction, to conceiving Mordred together, to Morgause being his sister. As it is, all this news is shocking. The further we move through that sentence, technically, the more sinful it gets. Yet the ending is what is truly confusing, and the extra commas certainly do nothing to add clarity.

The bedtrick scene between Arthur and Morgause has been the focus of significant scholarship on incest and its moral implications. Malory's version of this incestuous relationship complicates moral boundaries. Armstrong suggests that Malory's decision to retain the incestuous parentage of Mordred demonstrates an allocation of blame in the narrative[14]. The scene in the *Morte*, she argues, reflects broader cultural anxieties about kingship, legitimacy, and the dangers of unchecked male desire. With this in mind, I suggest that Mallory's writing style serves to diminish Arthur's accountability and as such attempts to preserve the king's moral integrity in the eyes of a contemporary audience. Archibald comments on the transgressive nature of the sex act between Arthur in Morgause in the *Morte.*[15] Malory's narrative choice, she suggests, emphasizes the inevitability of Mordred's role as a harbinger of doom, a product of both sin and royal blood. Andrea Hopkins considers Malory's portrayal of incest a reflection of the *Morte*'s broader moral ambiguity.

Yet it also serves as a narrative device to explore themes of fate and inevitability. Hopkins observes that by softening the language around Arthur's role in the bedtrick, Malory aligns the act with the tragic inevitability that permeates the text, reinforcing the idea that Mordred's conception was destined to bring about the downfall of Arthur's kingdom.[16] The existing scholarship on this bedtrick scene underscores Malory's a complex treatment of incest that is pinned against the moral gravity of the act. Malory's narrative style, while perhaps not purposefully employed, mitigates Arthur's culpability, ultimately reflecting broader thematic concerns the text. The narrator states that Morgause is Arthur's sister, on his mother's side. A

---

[14] On incest, incestuous parentage, and blame, see Armstrong, pp. 76, 78.

[15] On incest, medieval society, transgressive nature of incest, see Archibald, p. 135.

[16] On destiny, Mordred's conception, see Hopkins, p. 67.

couple of lines later this is reiterated, but with the added detail that "*[he] knew not* King Lot's wife was his sister" (emphasis added, 21). In a scant few lines, not only has Malory changed the original bedtrick with rape scene into one of mutual attraction and consensual sex, but he has also designated Arthur an innocent victim and Morgause an interloper and sexual perpetrator. There is a noticeable lack of knowledge on Morgause's part in terms of their familial connection. Since this information is not specified, perhaps intentionally omitted, then we are left to wonder about her intentions, painting her in a negative light. She was already a spy but was she one with perverse intensions? We are left with countless questions. More importantly, we are led to sympathize with Arthur and place blame on Morgause. In the Vulgate, Arthur's actions are morally reprehensible, emphasizing his culpability in not only the bedtrick rape but also the incest. By transforming the scene into a mutual sexual joining, Malory mitigates Arthur's guilt, making the act less of a deliberate deception and more of a tragic mistake. It is a pointed shift that preserves Arthur's heroic stature in the *Morte*, aligning with Malory's broader portrayal of Arthur as a noble, if flawed, king.

The discrepancy in the length of the two tales serves as a narratological tool for Malory, effectively concealing abuse in various forms. In the *Morte*, there is no lead-up to or follow-up from the bedtrick. The scene itself spans only four lines, offering minimal yet confusing detail. In addition, the complete alteration of the bedtrick, which casts Morgause as the perpetrator and Arthur as the victim, significantly distorts the narrative. Given that the evidence suggests Malory relied on the Vulgate's version of the tale, why does he alter it so drastically? Why retain the incestuous relationship, as in the Vulgate, thereby maximizing the taboo, yet remove the rape and bedtrick elements for the *Morte's* audience? In his pared-down, simplified rewrite of the scene, Malory eliminates many details that might evoke empathy for Morgause, thereby

transferring it to Arthur. This is underscored by the narrative repetition of Arthur's ignorance of his blood relation to Morgause. Part of this elimination, moreover, includes the omission of the Vulgate narrator's comment that the truth about Arthur would tarnish his reputation. In contrast, Malory's narrator emphasizes – twice – that Arthur is not at fault. This introduces a specific bias into the reader's mind, mirroring the same aim of the Vulgate's narrator. However, there is a distinction between the Vulgate's narrator, who seeks to reveal what he claims is the truth about how Arthur sired Mordred with his sister—not just for the reader but also for historical record—and a truth that labels Arthur an unworthy king (Lacy, 237). In the *Morte*, the narrator gives a direct statement, asserting that Arthur did not know Morgause was his sister, and reiterates this point. Ultimately, the difference lies in the writing styles of both texts: the Vulgate's rhetoric of ravishment versus the *Morte's* rhetoric of rape.

Incest haunts the Vulgate, according to Griffin, in the repeated refusal of the narrative to state Arthur's sin. The sentimental, dreamy quality of its writing style veils the incestuous sex act between Arthur and King Lot's wife, treating it instead as "the subject of concealment and revelation [that is] marked by a conspicuous absence" (Griffin 500-502). Although this voiceless yet palpable concealment is a feature in other texts on Arthur, Griffin claims it is most apparent in the Old French sources. I argue, however, that the 'spectre of incest' is not only apparent in the *Morte* but is augmented through its changes to the bedtrick and simplified writing style, which serves to direct as much blame as possible to Morgause. By giving us fewer words and less detail, Malory hands us more chaos and more doubt. As readers of his incest bedtrick scene, we get no clear explanation or attempt at justification, and consequently, no resolution. Instead, readers are left to connect scattered pieces of information found throughout the text and form their own understanding of Arthur's sin. It is a method that works well to hide information and

mask truth, creating an "unspoken allegation written between the lines of literature and hanging in the air of oral tradition [that hint[s] at an unknowable past and cr[ies] out for an explanation some time in the future" (Griffin 499). Malory's four-line, confusingly worded, barely detailed setting is most ideal to obscure Arthur's culpability. It also serves to amplify Morgause's role as seductress while shifting blame onto her. By shrouding their bedtrick scene in ambiguity, Malory's narrative reinforces Morgause as the catalyst for the sin, intensifying her guilt in the eyes of readers.

The altered chronology of the Vulgate tale acts as a tool to create a dreamy sense of timelessness to blur factual events. The text jumps back in time to situate the present and explain the future. We move to Uther's death and a young Arthur who is not yet king, to the present moment of the bedtrick, to the future birth of Mordred. There is a sense of logic somewhat, as this scene does act like a flashback to better situate King Lot's wife's identity. Along with the blurred chronology, we also experience the blurred boundaries between Arthur and Lot's wife. So not only is time out of control, or chaotic, so too is Arthur's sexual desire for Lot's wife. Note here that Lady Lot is never named Morgause in the Vulgate – it is a name that Malory gives her – and in fact remains nameless throughout the text. Instead, she is referred to by her familial relation to others, identified only by those around her: "King Lot's wife," [the] lady [who] gave birth to Gawainet, Agravain, Guerrehet, and Gaheriet," "King Arthur's half-[sister]," "[Arthur's] mother's daughter" (237), positioning her as belonging to someone, or even as property. Her namelessness is yet another instance of romanticized language, giving her an air of mystery. In this place of timelessness, she is a nameless woman, turning her into an otherworldly creature. Together, these elements create a sense that she does not belong there and, as such, is responsible for negative consequences that befall her.

Conclusion

The analysis of bedtrick scenes in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* and the Old French Vulgate exposes a complex interplay between rhetoric, narrative style, and the thematic portrayal of rape and deceit. Malory, while preserving the general narrative of these illicit encounters, deliberately shifts the focus from the romanticized ravishment present in the Vulgate to a more subdued, chronicle-like rhetoric that aligns with his contemporary concerns over legitimacy and moral order. As Corinne Saunders observes, Malory's reduction of the supernatural and his adoption of a sparser tone serve to diminish the enigma and marvellous elements that characterize his French sources, resulting in a narrative that is more direct and less forgiving of the transgressions depicted (Saunders 236).

Conversely, the Old French Vulgate, steeped in the tradition of courtly romance, blurs the lines between love and coercion, casting rape in a light that is dangerously romanticized. Kathryn Gravdal's analysis of medieval romance underscores this tendency, noting how the genre codes male domination and female submission as emotionally satisfying and aesthetically pleasing, thereby masking the physical violence and suffering inherent in these acts (Gravdal 15). The Vulgate's treatment of rape as a romantic and even reasonable act contrasts sharply with Malory's more restrained approach, which seeks to sterilize these scenes, stripping them of the emotional justification that the Vulgate affords.

Both texts, nevertheless, despite their differing approaches, ultimately serve to obscure the reality of deceit, violence, and rape inherent in bedtricks. By either romanticizing or downplaying these elements, they justify heinous acts to their respective audiences, reflecting the broader societal values and concerns of their times. Malory's focus on legitimacy and the need for a strong paternal connection, contrasted with the Vulgate's dangerous glamorization of

physical impulses, underscores the significant but divergent ways in which these narratives engage with the themes of sexual violence and moral order. Through this comparative analysis, it becomes clear that while the Vulgate and *Le Morte Darthur* may diverge in style and rhetoric, they both participate in a literary tradition that seeks to rationalize and contain the disruptive potential of sexual transgression within the boundaries of their respective cultural frameworks.

Bibliography

"Stanzaic Morte Arthur." *TEAMS Middle English Texts Series*, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/benson-and-foster-king-arthurs-death-stanzaic-morte-arthur-part-iii.

Ackerman, Felicia. "'Always to Do Ladies, Damosels, and Gentlewomen Succour': Women and the Chivalric Code in Malory's *Morte Darthur*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1–12. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/1475-4975.261050.

---. "Flourish Your Heart in This World: Emotion, Reason, and Action in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1998, pp. 182-226. *Wiley Online Library*, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.1998.tb00337.x.

Adler, Gillian. "'Writing History, Writing Trauma.'" *Medieval Feminist Forum*, vol. 56, no. 2, 25 Mar. 2021, pp. 48–72, https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2215.

Archibald, Elizabeth. *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte Darthur*. University Press of Florida, 2003.

Batt, Catherine. *Malory's Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*. Palgrave, 2016.

Battles, Paul, and Dominique Battles. "From Thebes to Camelot: Incest, Civil War, and Kin-Slaying in the Fall of Arthur's Kingdom." *Arthuriana,* Scriptorium Press, 22 June 2017, muse.jhu.edu/article/663292.

Black, Joseph, et al., editors. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Medieval Period.* Broadview Press, 2015.

Brewer, Derek, and Mark Lambert. “Malory: Style and vision in ‘Le Morte Darthur.’” *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 73, no. 4, Oct. 1998, p. 874, https://doi.org/10.2307/3727603.

Cherewatuk, Karen. *Marriage, Adultery and Inheritance in Malory’s Morte D’Arthur*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006.

---. “Born-Again Virgins and Holy Bastards: Bors and Elyne and Lancelot and Galahad.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, pp. 52-64. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869635.

---. “Malory’s Lancelot and the Language of Sin and Confession.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2006, pp. 68-72. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27870761.

---. “The Saint’s Life of Sir Launcelot: Hagiography and the Conclusion of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1995, pp. 62-78. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869095.

Cooper, Helen. “The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones.” *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 183-202.

---. “Malory and the Early Prose Romances.” *A Companion to Romance*, edited by Corinne J. Saunders, Oxford Publishing, 2004, pp. 104–120, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999172.ch7.

---. “Counter-Romance: Civil Strife and Father-Killing in the Prose Romances.” *Arthurian Literature XX*, edited by James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy, D.S. Brewer, 2004, pp. 99-117.

Davidson, Roberta. “Prison and Knightly Identity in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2004, pp. 54-63. *Project Muse*, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2004.0066.

---. “Reading like a Woman in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 21-33. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27870730.

Dunn, Caroline. “The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England.” *Speculum*, vol. 86, no. 1, 2011, pp. 79-116. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41105501.

Edwards, Elizabeth. “The Place of Women in the *Morte Dathur*.” In *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 37-54.

Field, P.J.C. *Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory’s Prose Style*. Barrie & Jenkins, 1971.

---. *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. D.S. Brewer, 1993.

Fisher, John H. “Tristan and Courtly Adultery.” *Comparative Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1957, pp. 50-64. doi:10.2307/1768881.

Fritscher, John J. *Sex and Magic in King Arthur’s Camelot: A Textual Investigation of Religion and the Supranatural in Malory’s Morte D’Arthur*. Loyola University, 1967, [Doctoral dissertation].

Gravdal, Kathryn. *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

Griffin, Miranda. *Transforming Tales: Rewriting the Middle Ages in Gothic Romance.* Oxford University Press, 2020.

Hanks, D. Thomas. “Guenevere’s Raptus-Sanctus Triumphs in Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte Darthur.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 33, no. 4, Dec. 2023, pp. 3–31, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2023.a914636.

Hardyment, Christina. *Malory: The Knight Who Became King Arthur’s Chronicler.* HarperCollins, 2005.

Haught, Leah. “Fleeing the Future, Forgetting the Past: Becoming Malory’s Lancelot.” *Parergon*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2013, pp. 159-177. *Project Muse*, https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.2013.0037.

Heikel, Julie Anne. *Constructing Chivalry: The Symbolism of King Mark in Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde*. McGill University, 2007, [Master’s thesis].

Hildebrand, Kristina. “‘I Love Nat to Be Constreyned to Love’: Launcelot and Coerced Sex.” *Arthurian Literature XXXVII: Malory at 550: Old and New*, edited by Megan G. Leitch and Kevin S. Whetter, Boydell & Brewer, 2022, pp. 175–192.

Hodges, Kenneth. *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory’s Le Morte Darthur*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Hopkins, Andrea. *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 67.

Horzum, Şafak. “Hegemonic Hospitality in Relation to Diasporic Male Identities in Hanif Kureishi’s *My Ear at His Heart*.” In *Representations of Diasporic Identities in Britain*, edited by A. Deniz Bozer, Hacettepe UP, 2017, pp. 41-68.

Kaeuper, Richard W. *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Karr, Phyllis Ann. *The Arthurian Companion: The Legendary World of Camelot and the Round Table.* Chaosium, 1997.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Kaufman, Amy S. "Guenevere Burning." *Arthuriana 20.1* (2010): pgs. 76-94. Print.

Kelly, Henry Ansgar. "Clandestine Marriage and Chaucer's *Troilus*." *Viator*, vol. 4, 1973, pp. 435-457. doi:10.1484/J.VIATOR.

Kennedy, Beverly. "Adultery in Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur.'" *Arthuriana*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1997, pp. 63–91. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869288. Accessed 29 Aug. 2024.

---. "The Idea of Providence in Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur.'" *Arthuriana*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, pp. 5–19. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869631. Accessed 29 Aug. 2024.

---. *Arthurian Studies XI: Knighthood in the Morte*. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1992.

---. *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*. Boydell & Brewer, 1992.

---. *Malory's Lancelot and the Grail: A Study in the Process of Sanctioned Heroism*. Boydell & Brewer, 1992, p. 203.

Kittredge, George Lyman. *Who Was Sir Thomas Malory?* Ginn & Co., 1976.

Lacy, Norris J. *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate In Translation*. D.S. Brewer, 2010.

La Farge, Catherine. "Launcelot in Compromising Positions: Fabliau in Malory's 'Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake'." *Arthurian Literature XXVIII: Blood, Sex, Malory: Essays on the 'Morte Darthur.'* Ed. David Clark and Kate McClune. Boydell & Brewer, 2011, pp. 181–198.

---. "The Hand of the Huntress: Repetition and Malory's *Morte Darthur*." In *New Feminist Discourse*, edited by Isabel Armstrong, Routledge, 2012, pp. 263-280.

Lambert, Mark. *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur*. Yale University Press, 2003.

Larrington, Carolyne. *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition*, 2006, https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755694976.

Leitch, Megan G. *Romancing Treason: The Literature of the Wars of Roses*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lumiansky, R. M. "Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, 1947-1987: Author, Title, Text." *Speculum*, vol. 62, no. 4, 1987, pp. 878-897. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2851785.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur - the Winchester Manuscript*. Edited by Helen Cooper, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Matthews, William. *The Ill-Famed Knight: A Skeptical Inquiry into the Identity of Sir Thomas Malory*. University of California Press, 1966.

Moore, Helen. "The Malory Debate: Essays on the texts of Le Morte Darthur." *Notes and Queries*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1 June 2003, pp. 232–233, https://doi.org/10.1093/nq/500232a.

Norris, Ralph. *Malory's Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur*. D.S. Brewer, 2008.

Phillips, Helen. "Bewmaynes: The Threat from the Kitchen." *Arthurian Literature XXVIII: Blood, Sex, Malory: Essays on the "Morte Darthur."* Ed. David Clark and Kate McClune. Boydell & Brewer, 2011. 39–56. Print. Arthurian Literature.

Raabe, Pamela. "Chrétien's Lancelot and the Sublimity of Adultery." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 259-269. *Project Muse*, https://muse-jhuedu.zeus.tarleton.edu/article/513012.

Radulescu, Raluca. *The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*. D.S. Brewer, 2003, p. 113.

Riddy, Felicity. "Contextualizing Le Morte Darthur: Empire and Civil War." *A Companion to Malory,* edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards, D.S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 55-73.

Saunders, Corinne J. *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*. D.S. Brewer, 2001.

Summers, Joanna. *Late Medieval Prison Writings and The Politics of Autobiography*. Clarendon Press, 2004.

Vinaver, Eugene. *The Rise of Romance: Themes and Interpretations in Le Morte Darthur*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Weir, Alison. *The Wars of the Roses*. Random House, 1996.

Zimmerman, Yekaterina. "Female Discourses: Powerful and Powerless Speech in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*." UF Digital Collections, 2006, pp. 50-55, ufdc.ufl.edu/UFE0012949/00001.