De Worde's Displacement of Malory's Secularization

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William Caxton's series of books on chivalry, Godefroy of Boloyne (1480), The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry (1484), LeMorte Darthur (1485), and Charles the Great (1485), as J. R. Goodman shows, were published to evoke in knightly readers 'the need for a reformation of English knighthood and the attractions of a crusade against the Turks.'1 Set against the companion books, however, Malory's Morte seems to give a unique presentation of knighthood, and, of all four works, Malory's alone needed reprinting and kept its readership up to the present. Presumably Malory's chivalric view contributes not a little to the lasting popularity, but its reception is varied from printer to printer of early editions. How was, then, Malory's idea of knighthood deviated from the traditional one? In this essay, I shall first discuss Malorian conception of knighthood and then, limiting myself to Wynkyn de Worde, examine the editor-printer's perception of it through his editorial working. The Ordre of Chyualry regards knighthood as a combination of religion, war and gallantry, and states that the knights are chosen to fulfill these divinely-established duties: to maintain and enhance the holy faith, to defend one's lord, to keep justice and work for the common profit, and to protect the weak or the helpless.2 The conception of knighthood specified here stands as a precept by which the companion works can be measured. The Godefroy and the Charles the Great, which deal with the chivalry of crusade, accord to the strongly religious view of knighthood. But the Morte is somewhat discordant. Malory admittedly shares not a few conceptions with the hivalric manual. They are in the same tradition, for example, when noble birth is emphasised as requirements to knighthood;3 when worship and honour are most easily won among perils;4 and when loyalty is directed to one's natural lord rather than to the King or the Crown.5 But the oath which the knights of the Round Table swear annually during Pentecost reveals the breach. After giving riches and lands, King Arthur charges the knights:

> never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle
> treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon
> payne of forfiture [of their] worship and lordship of kynge
> Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels,
> and jantilwomen and wydowes [socour:] strengthe hem in hir
> ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe.
> Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongfull quarell for
> no love ne for no worldis goodis.6

E. Vinaver suggests the similarity in the didactic form of enumerating knightly obligations between the Order of Chyualry and the Morte.7 But the duties prescribed here are exclusively in terms of war and gallantry, and religious virtues are set out of consideration. Hardyng's Chronicle is also suggested by E. D. Kennedy as directly inspiring Malory's formulation of the knightly ideals.8 The knights of the Round Table in the Chronicle are expected to keep justice by arms, to defend the church, to protect the weak, and to maintain the common profit:

> ... their rule was wronges to opresse
> With their bodyes, where lawe myght not redresse,
> The fayth, ye church, maydens, & widowes clene,
> Chyldren also that were in tender age,
> The c*omon profyte euer more to sustene.9

As in the case of the Ordre of Chyualry, faith to God and service to the church are emphasized as part of knightly office, and yet Malory here again does not respond to this aspect of chivalry offered in his immediate source.10

Hardyng's Chronicle even contains a romantic, courtly definition of knighthood: a knight is not regarded as honourable ' But he wer in warre approued thrise, Nor with ladies beloued as paramoure, Whiche caused knightes armes to excercyse.'11 This element of 'courtly love' is quite foreign to the priestly tone of the Ordre of Chyualry, the author of which turned apostle from courtier with regret for his youthful follies, and who therefore avoids any reference to it throughout his work.12 It might be that, in the annual oath, Malory is also alluding in the negative to this element, as long as 'no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love' goes for it. However, there may be found in the Morte a number of episodes where, as related in the Chronicle, lady's love works as a powerful source for eliciting feats of valour.13 But Malory definitely rejects this aspect of love in the words of Lancelot: he rejects paramours 'in prencipall for drede of God, for knyghtes that bene adventures sholde nat be advoutrers nothir lecherous.'14 Lancelot initially brings a religious reason for refusing paramours, but we should hear further development of his reasoning. Lancelot, then, goes on to say:

> for than they be nat happy nother fortunate unto werrys; for other they shall be overcom with a simpler knyght than they be hemself.15

To rehearse the logic as is advanced, to take paramours is against God, and God therefore allows that such a lecherous knight, by chance, may be defeated by a less brave knight. Lancelot, however, seems to shift emphasis onto the resultant proposition and to reverse the logic: he fears God because he might be beaten by a simpler knight. Actually he is concerned with the pragmatic side of his religious reasoning. As compared with Hardyng's Chronicle, the Ordre of Chyualry and the Morte are seemingly in the same line in respect of the courtly aspect of lady's love. But the reasoning is subtly and decisively different: Ramon Lull renounces it as sinful from the outset, while Malory avoids it as a militant knight. Malory's secular inclination in his view of knighthood becomes more obvious when the knightly observances are compared with what is, in the actual dubbing ceremony, prescribed to the knights of the Bath.16 The extant description of the accolade runs:

> Lo, this is the ordre. Be ye stronge in the feith of Holy Chereche, and wydows and maydones oppressed releve as right commaundith. Yeve ye to everych his owne with all thy mynde above all thynge. Love and drede God. And avove all other erthly thinges love the Kinge thy soverayn lord, hym and his defende unto thy powere. And be fore all worldly thynges

> putte hym in worshipp and thynges that be not to be taken
> beware to begynne.17

While a modern, nationalistic idea of loyalty is presented, the religious view of knighthood is taken over and acted out in a more enforced form. In view of the common idea that the English chivalric institutions like this were regarded 'as the almost lineal descendant of Arthur's order',18 Malory's enacting of statutes for the late 15th century 'hyghe Ordre of Knyghthode' stands out for its worldliness.

Caxton, in 1490, published another manual on knighthood, The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye, which, unlike the 1484 ethical manual, was more or less a practical and utilitarian handbook of military affairs issued for a wider audience.19 What attracts attention here is that, although, or more properly, because the handbook mainly treats soldiery, the author rounds it off by extending discussion up to the problem of salvation. Christine de Pisan, deviating from Vegetius and depending upon Bonet, shows warriors two ways, direct and indirect, to heaven: first, 'the knyght or the man of armes/ that deyeth in the werre ayenst them of euyl byleue/ for thenhau[n]sing of the feyth of Ihesu Criste ... goeth strayte as a martyr vnto heuen'; secondly, 'yf a man of werre deyeth in a bataylle grownded vpon a iuste and gode quarelle/ for to help the ryght/ or that hit be for the true deffense of the lande/ or for the comonwele/ or for to kepe the fraunches and good customes of place or countrey ... he goeth right forthe in to paradyse by and by'.20 The incorporation of the spiritual problem into such a military manual evinces that the next world was one of the strong abiding concerns of the knights or men of arms, whose vocation is to kill people, as well as the fifteenth century people at large. True, the Ordre of Chyualry codifies knightly rules, presupposing salvation. But what about Malory's Morte?

Malory, who restricts the annual oath to the earthly virtues, is equally obsessed with the subject. He ends the whole story by granting Lancelot and Guinevere 'a good ende' and by referring to the remnants of the Round Table who 'dyd many bataylles upon the myscreantes or Turkes'.21 Malory, certainly, by describing Grail knights, knights-hermits and crusading knights, treats the kind of chivalry which the Fayttes calls the 'strayte' way to heaven, but he depicts with much more concern the earthly chivalry which steps up 'by and by' to God's bliss. As a lay man of arms and letters, who, as is shown by his explicits asking repeatedly for 'good delyveraunce', is strongly attached to the worldly life, Malory, in his work, takes an approving view of this world, and dwells on the reconciliation of earthly knightly virtues and celestial values.

Malory's tenacithy to this-worldliness is exemplified by his attempt to secularize the religious dispositon of the French source in the Tale of the Holy Grail. As Vinaver aptly remarks, 'Corbenic', in Malory's version, becomes 'a province of Camelot',22 and the quest of the Grail is presented as an opportunity of adventure to 'have much erthly worship'.23 Lancelot, who, in the original, is convicted, in spite of his partial observation of the grail, as an utter failure because of 'la voie de luxure [the path of lust]',24 is appraised, in Malory's tale, as a partial seer, who gives a satisfied cry: '"Now I thanke God for Hys grete mercy of that I have sene, for hit suffiseth me. For, as I suppose, no man in thys worlde have lyved bettir than I have done to enchyeve that I have done"'.25 Lancelot's earthly chivalry is not denied, in either-or way, before Galahad's celestial chivalry, but his noble and fallible conduct is interpreted in an engaging way as worthy enough to get God's eventual grace.

Interestingly there can be found phrases and expressions which seem to imply

Malory's attempt contrary to his secularization. Galahad's prayer to God, 'I wold nat lyve in thys wrecched worlde no lenger'; Galahad's farewell to Lancelot, 'bydde hym remembir of this worlde unstable'; its message by Bors, 'sir Galahad prayde you to remembir of thys unsyker worlde'; and Lancelot's cry at Arthur's death, 'Who may truste thys worlde?':26 all these are Malory's own additions and each utterance is considered to carry a contemptuous view of the world. The only case that can be traced back to the original source is Galahad's prayer to God, but its French version, 'je trespasse de ceste terriene vie en la celestiel [I should pass from the earthly life to the eternal life]',27 is neither as downright nor as depreciative as the English 'thys wrecched worlde'.

In effect, however, the interposed theme of 'contemptus mundi' stresses all the more the intensity of Malory's attachment to this world for its incongruity with his secularization. It is especially so when Lancelot, who is refused a farewell kiss by Guinevere in the convent and later informed of Arthur's death, cries out, 'Alas! Who may truste thys worlde?' On this occasion Lancelot looks as if to share the Boethian view of the world, denying his noble knighthood which has realised most admirably Arthur's code of chivalry. He puts on an 'habyte' and serves God 'day and nyght with prayers and fastynges'.28 But his motive for conversion, I would argue with F. Riddy, is purely secular, because his renunciation of the world is motivated by Guinevere's rejection of him, not by his penitence.29 Lancelot has an occasion at this stage to appreciate the Boethian world, but he still remains and lives out his earthly life in this world. In Malory's capacity, God's bliss is promised and actually given to such Lancelot.

As far as the preface to his edition of the Morte is concerned, Caxton seems to be able to appreciate Malorian continuity between earthly and celestial values. In exhorting the readers to good conduct, the publisher discloses his view of salvation:

> 'But al is wryton for our doctryne, and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but t'exersyse and folowe vertu, by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renom*me in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and transytorye lyf to come unto everlastyng blysse in heven.'30

Caxton coordinates earthly fame and renown with heavenly bliss, and he is unfolding a possibility to explain spiritual salvation in terms of secular ethics.

Wynkyn de Worde, unlike his master who, originally instigated by a royal patron, issued the book for a limited circle of people, reprinted Caxton's edition in 1498 on his initiative for a wider readership including 'comynaltee'.31 For a fresh presentation of the Morte, he changes the style of forme, employs woodcuts and even makes silent textual alterations. One such textual attempt is the famous long interpolation at Book 21:

> ..., behold, behold, see how this mighty conqueror Arthur, whom in his human life all the worlld doubted--ye also, the noble queen Guenever, that sometimes sat in her chair adorned with gold, pearls, and precious stones, now lie full low in obscure foss or pit covered with clods of earth and clay. Behold also this mighty champion Launcelot, peerless of knighthood, see now how he lieth groveling on the cold mould, now being so feeble and faint that sometimes was so terrible,

> how and in what manner ought ye to be so desirous of the mundane honour so dangerous.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Also me seemeth by the oft reading thereof ye shall greatly desire to accustom yourself in following of those gracious knightly deeds, that is to say, to dread God, and to love rightwiseness, faithfully and courageously to serve your sovereign prince. An the more that God hath given you the triumphal honour the meeker ye ought to be, ever fearing the unstableness of this deceivable world. And so I pass over, and turn again to my matter.32

When this passage is examined in its narrative context, the editor-printer's response, spontaneous or not, is too abrupt and divergent to be dismissed as a mere outlet of his deep emotion. What is shown here in an instructive tone is obviously incompatible with Malory's secular bias. Initially, whereas Caxton in the preface envisages earthly renown as a possible prerequisite to salvation and, along with Malory, takes an approving view of the worldly honour, de Worde makes a downright disparagement of 'mundane honour' and draws readers' attention to its vainness. Secondly, he acknowledges the ennobling force of knightly deeds in the Morte, but, against Malory's shift of emphasis onto the earthly knightly virtues, he inappropriately epitomises Arthurian chivalry in the light of 'dread of God' as well as 'justicekeeping' and 'loyalty to the sovereign'. And at the conclusion of his long apostrophe, he gives the readers admonitions for humility before God and for recognition of 'this deceivable world'.

De Worde sympathises more with what Malory does less. The printer's 'the more that God hath given you the triumphal honour the meeker ye ought to be' is exactly an echo of what hermits admonish Lancelot throughout the Grail tale, and this clerical view, followed by a kindred notion 'the unstableness of this deceivable world', clothes Malory's Morte forcibly with a commonplace medieval outlook of 'contemptus mundi'. All these things set against Malory's departure from the conventional idea of chivalry discussed above, we are invited to think that de Worde's didactic reading is not a spontaneous response at the tragic event but rather a well-contrived, though daring, interloping in order to conform the religious and the chivalric view in the Morte to what the editor-printer assumes should be collectively embraced in the contemporary mind.

As in the case of Caxton's cautious stance in the preface about Arthur's historicity, there can be posited social and cultural circumstances which de Worde may have felt it necessary to forstall by even overriding Malory's proper reading. Those are upsurging 'Renaissance humanism with its classical and Protestant affinities'.33 The Morte is to face the literary and religious movement which leads on one side to Ascham's outright denunciation of the romance as treating 'open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye',34 and which leads on the other to the proscription of the book in the 1539 Tract:

> Englishmen have now in hand in every Church and place, almost every man the Holy Bible and New Testament in their mother tongue instead of the old fabulous and fantastical books of the Table Round, Launcelot du Lac &, and such other whose unpure filth and vain fabulocity the light of God has

abolished utterly.35

De Worde, in recapitulating Arthurian chivalry, ignores Malory's 'alwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and gentilwomen and wydowes soccour', and adds 'to dread God' instead. This ingenious replacement reasonably may be instigated by his consciousness of the unfavourable publishing milieu.

The didactic interpolation may also be due to de Worde's own personal disposition. This passage, which is placed after the catastrophe of a tragic love, would be recognised by Chaucerian readers to be much like the palinode of Troilus and Criseyde in structual and thematic respects. De Worde, who is known to have had a marked preference for religious works,36 may well have been moved by the Boethian recantation, when he helped to impose and publish the work in 1483 as a foreman in Caxton's press, and then the religious printer, in association with Troilus and Criseyde, may have reprinted the Morte with the same kind of textual inter-polation at a corresponding place as Chaucer made to his earlier version.

There is actually circumstantial evidence to advance such an inference. De Worde published Troilus and Criseyde in 1517. Although it cost more labour in the casting off and the composing work, he commenced to make the text by using a manuscript as an exemplar. But he suddenly abandoned it at l. 547 of Book 1 and thereafter he adopted Caxton's edition instead. The manuscript used belongs to the 'Phetc' group,37 wanting the two stanzas (ll. 1807-27 of Book 5) where Troilus ascends to the eighth sphere at death and despises the 'wrecched world' in preference for the 'pleyn felicite' in heaven. Several stories can be postulated
for the composite text. A likely and tempting one will be that, while composing, the printer found the manuscript defective in the concluding stanzas, which Chaucer added later in his revision and with which de Worde personally felt much sympathy, and that he therefore searched for a better text. De Worde must have produced Chaucer's work with meticulous care, as he, in Caxton's press, had witnessed a special respect among the audience for the poet's text. Probably this literary regard may be a primary reason for changing exemplars, but his personal congeniality with Chaucer's palinode seems to be equally concerned with the textual anomaly.

Like Chaucer, de Worde interpolates his version of palinode at the final part of the whole story. But his displacing of values does not fit in with the dramatic movement of readers' emotion, nor does his homiletic instruction, therefore, rsesond to the last in their mind. Immediately de Worde's interference is followed, and its inappropriate didacticism is disclosed, by the bishop's dream of Lancelot's saintly death. The bishop's words 'I sawe the angellys heve up syr Launcelot unto heven,' and the 'swettest savour' around the body reveal to the readers that the best sinful knight is surely sanctified by God.38 And once again the readers are assured by Ector's lament that such Lancelot was an epitome of the earthly chivalry of the Round Table oath.

De Worde, as an editor-printer sensitive to the market, tried to normalise (and medievalise) Malory's idea of chivalry, but Malory's tenacity to this world and his approving view of the terrestrial chivalry, rebuffing such an religious interloping, was to keep on attracting the modern audience.

Notes

(1) R. J. Goodman, 'Malory and Caxton's Chivalric Series, 1481-1485', in J. W. Spisak ed., Studies in Malory (Western Michigan University, 1985), p. 266.

(2) The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, ed. A. T. P. Byles, E. E. T. S., o. s. 168, (Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 24-5, 29, 30, and 38, for each knightly duty.

(3)(Ordre, p. 57. 10-16; Malory's Tale of Gareth)

(4)(Ordre, p. 62 and 37)

(5)(Gareth and Gaheris for Lancelot against Arthur)

(6) The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, 3 vols., ed. E. Vinaver, third ed., rev. P. J. C. Field (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 120, ll. 17-24.

(7) Works, p. 1335. Vinaver suggests that Malory's conception of chivalry here corresponds to Caxton's in the preface to the Ordre of Chyualry. Caxton recapitulates Arthurian chivalry as 'manhode, curtosye and gentylnesse'. As for Malory's idea of knightly duties, L. Benson says, 'These are the basic virtues of knighthood, not very different from those proclaimed at the council of Clermont as a guide for the first crusaders, though now there is less emphasis on service to the church and more on the social virtues necessary to the maintenance of the 'common good'. Malory's formulation of the basic knightly code thus reflects the common understanding of his contemporaries' (Malory's Morte Darthur, Harvard Univ Press, 1976, p. 149).

(8)E. D. Kennedy, 'Malory's Use of Hardyng's Chronicle', Notes & Queries, 214 (1969), pp. 167-70.

(9) The Chronicle of Iohn Hardyng, ed. H. Ellis, (London, 1812; repr., AMS Press, 1974), p. 124.

(10) B. Kennedy also points out that the 'omission of the Round table knights' obligation to sustain the Christian faith and the church was deliberate'(Knighthood in the Morte Darthur, D. S. Brewer, 1985, p. 67).

(11) Chronicle, p. 130.

(12) 'Introduction' to the Ordre of Chyualry, p. xxxvii and A. T. P. Byles, 'Medieval Courtesy Books and the Prose Romances of Chivalry', in E. Prestage ed., Chivalry (XX, 1928; repr., AMS Press, 1974), p.189.

(13) One such example is Tristram's valorous action at the critical moment when he fears he will not be able to see La Belle Isoud again(Works, p. XX).

(14) Works, p. 270, ll. 33-5.

(15) Works, p. 270, ll. 35-7.

(16) As for the Order of the Bath, W. Segar writes: 'At the Coronation of a King or Queen there are made Knights of the Bath, with long and curious Ceremonies, whereof I am not perfectly enformed' (The Book of Honor and Armes (1590) and Honor Military and

Civil (1602), Facsimile Reproductions, Scholars' Facsimile & Reprints, 1975, p. 22).

(17) J. Gairdner ed., Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles with Historical Memoranda by John Stowe, Camden Society, n. s. 28, (Westminster, 1880), p. 113.

(18) M. Keen, Chivalry (Yale University Press, 1984), p. 191.

(19) The Ordre of Chyualry is aimed at the noble gentlemen, whereas the Fayttes is issued, as is shown in the epilogue, for 'euery estate hye & lowe that entende to the fayttes of werre'. For a general review of the chivalric manuals, see D. Bornestein, 'Military Manuals in Fifteenth-Century England', Medieval Studies, 37 (1975), 469-77.

(20) The Book of Faytes of Armes and Chyualrye, ed. A. T. P. Byles, E. E. T. S., o. s. 189, (London, 1932), p. 282, ll. 15-28.

(21) Works, p. 1260, l. 14.

(22) E. Vinaver, Malory (Oxford, 1929), p. 84.

(23) Works, p. 955, l. 9.

(24) La Queste Del Saint Graal, ed. A. Pauphilet, (Paris, 1980), p. 125, l. 34.

(25) Works, p. 1018, ll. 3-6.

(26) Works, p. 1034, l. 26; p. 1035, ll. 11-12; p. 1036, l. 28; p. 1254, l. 12.

(27)Queste, p. 278, ll. 11-12.

(28) Works, p. 1254, l. 26 and 18.

(29) F. Riddy says: 'His [Lancelot's] conversion is not born out of penitence, as Guinevere's, but is initiated by her rejection of him in the convent and is concluded by a wider insecurity' (Sir Thomas Malory, E. J. Brill, 1987, p. 157). P. E. Tucker presents a different view: 'It is not for her [Guinevere's] sake that he renounces the world; it is rather that her renunciation leaves him free at last to make his'('Chivalry in the Morte', in J. A. W. Bennett ed., Essays on Malory, Oxford, 1963, p. 99).

(30) Works, p. cxlvi.

(31) W. de Worde's 1498 edition, folio .2v, right column, ll. 36-7.

(32) De Worde's 1498 edition, folio E 3v, right column, l.34--E. 4r, left column, l. 36.

(33) M. J. Parins ed., Malory: The Critical Heritage (Routledge, 1988), p. 4.

(34) Heritage, p. 57.

(35) E. J. Sweeting, Studies in Early Tudor Criticism (Basil Blackwell, 1940), p. 40.

(36) N. F. Blake, 'Wynkyn de Worde: Early Years', Gutenberg Jahrbuch, 1971, pp. 62-9.

(37) 'The Text of the 'Troilus" to Troilus and Criseyde, ed. B. A. Windeatt, (Longman, 1984), pp. 36-54.

(38) Works, p. 1258, p. 9 and 17.