



國立中山大學外國語文研究所

碩士論文

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
NATIONAL SUN YET-SEN UNIVERSITY

馬婁里騎士的罪與悔：藍撒洛與高隱

Sin and Repentance of Malory's Knights: Lancelot and Gawain

研究生：王淳菱 撰

By Chunling Wang

指導教授：蘇其康 教授

Advisor: Professor Francis K. H. So

中華民國 九十七年七月

July, 2008

Acknowledgements

First of all, I am most grateful to Prof. Francis So for his instructions and guidance during the composition of this thesis. Were it not for him, this thesis could not have been completed. Besides, his kindness and patience extend from school to my personal life. It is his constant support and help that sees me through all the hardships for the past three years. Prof. So shows me a life of wisdom, dignity and generosity through our conversations, his leadership and work. He is a man for my emulation.

I am also very thankful to Ruby Kuo and Linda Wu, two lovely ladies in their Ph.D programs, who never hesitate to give me assurances and advice when I am in need. They are also more than willing to teach me everything about life and work and ease my anxiety with their warm regards and friendship. Moreover, many thanks go to Prof. Tee Kim Tong, who has enriched my school days in SYSU with his sense of humor and inspired me with his life philosophy. My acquaintance with Lilian, Leo, Beatrice, Yofen, Johnny, Futing, Kate and Lily, are indispensable to the completion of this thesis as well. They have been most understanding and light up every moment in graduate school.

My family shares a great part of my gratitude, too. They have been very supportive by being a good listener and encourage me to go on when I am in depression. I lean on their love and care to finish this thesis. Last but not least, I am appreciative of Michael Decena's genuine concern, which always renders relief and strength to those difficult days in composing this thesis. Though away in a foreign country, he demonstrates his encouragements and good wishes by emails and phone calls and treats with great forbearance my short temper from stress. His company has been the backbone of my life throughout these years.

Thank you all.

Title: Sin and Repentance in Malory's Knights: Lancelot and Gawain

Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Sun Yet-sen University

Date: July 2008

By: Chunling Wang

Advisor: Professor Francis K. H. So

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyze the notions of sin and repentance of Lancelot and Gawain in Malory's *Morte Darthur* so as to unveil what Malory's ideal knight is to be like. While the traditional view takes Lancelot as a perfect knight and Gawain a reckless one because of their different dispositions, I approach these two characters from their breach of the chivalric code and their sequential penitence. Chapter I and Chapter II will study respectively how Lancelot and Gawain sin in the world of chivalry because of their wrongdoings. Although these two knights have both sinned, yet, in Malory's hands, these two knights are portrayed in divergent degrees with obviously contrastive narrative context and their repentance takes a different hue as well. Chapter III examines the repentance of Lancelot and Gawain and takes note that although both knights repent for their sins, forgiveness is granted to the former exclusively whereas the latter is denied such a treatment. Chapter IV concludes that such difference or prejudice is indicative of Malory's evaluation of Lancelot and Gawain in accordance with how the two knights handle their misdeeds and this implies the author's conception of what a perfect knight should be. Of particular interest is that Chapters I through IV trace the traditional theological view by looking at St. Thomas Aquinas' concept of sin and repentance. Aquinas' doctrinal view allows us to analyze Lancelot and Gawain's sin and repentance within a chivalric as well as theological domain and provides us a better base with which to understand these two concepts. This research strives to bring about a different perspective in evaluating Malory's knights.

論文名稱：馬婁里騎士的罪與悔-藍撒洛和高隱

頁數：九十八頁

校所組別：國立中山大學外國語文學研究所

畢業名稱及提要別：九十六學年第二學期碩士學位論文提要

研究生：王淳菱

指導教授：蘇其康 教授

論文摘要

本論文嘗試探討湯姆斯·馬婁里的《亞瑟王之死》裡所呈現藍撒洛和高隱兩位騎士的罪與悔。傳統觀點大多以這兩位騎士的性情和品德切入分析，結論普遍認為藍撒洛是一完美騎士，而高隱是衝動魯莽的。本文以這兩位騎士的罪過和懺悔來觀察他們的差異，並借用湯姆斯·阿奎納斯對罪與悔的觀念作一詮釋。第一章探討藍撒洛不應被視為完美，而是一位有缺陷騎士；他在《亞瑟王之死》中不斷的得到同伴的讚美卻最終無法一窺聖杯，這表示馬婁里認同藍撒洛的好卻也深知他的罪。第二章處理高隱爵士的罪，雖然他失去手足的悲痛令人同情，但因他的衝動性情和驕傲自大使得亞瑟宮廷最終因他尋求報復藍撒洛而瓦解，本章節提出馬婁里一方面不贊同高隱的報復心裡，更重要的是另一方面譴責高隱不願把握贖罪的機會，屢次視懺悔在他追求聖杯之旅中微不足道。前兩個章節可看出馬婁里呈視兩位騎士的手法上有明顯的不同，而第三章舉證在這兩位騎士以不同態度面對自身過錯後，馬婁里最後原諒了藍撒洛，卻沒有原諒高隱，這可從馬婁里描寫他們的懺悔裡看出端倪。本文探討的結論是馬婁里的理想騎士並非是完美無缺，而是他知道自身的過錯及不足，有一顆謙卑的心和面對錯誤的意願，也希望能夠補償，這才是馬婁里的理想騎士。過去研究推斷馬婁里應是在監獄服刑時完成《亞瑟王之死》，因此不難想像作者本身對於罪與悔即有獨特的見解。本文以罪與悔的觀念檢視這二位騎士在騎士精神裡有著不同的地位和影響，為馬婁里的騎士精神注入另一解釋層面。

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter I | 19 |
| Sin of Lancelot | |
| Chapter II | 41 |
| Sin of Gawain | |
| Chapter III | 69 |
| Repentance of Lancelot and Gawain | |
| Conclusion | 86 |
| Works Cited | 90 |

Sin and Repentance in Malory's Knights: Lancelot and Gawain

Introduction

Since its publication in 1485, Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (henceforth called *Morte*) has remained an entertaining and intriguing work that appeals to readers throughout the ages. The many episodes of *Morte*, Arthur's leadership, adventures of the Round Table and the somber love stories among the knights and ladies have become perennial topics of discussion. Of these topics, Lancelot and Gawain are two major characters of interests and debate for many critics. These two knights have been evaluated against their performance in battlefield and comparison is made between them by moral standards in the course of the quest for the Holy Grail. It is generally considered that Lancelot is a knight of valour and humbleness whereas Gawain is portrayed as one of foolhardiness and pride. However, far from addressing these two knights in respect to their fighting skills and distinct personalities, this thesis will focus on investigating the behavioral pattern of these two knights from the point of sin and repentance. By juxtaposing Lancelot and Gawain in the frame of this coupled notion, this study hopes to discover what Malory's idea of a perfect knight is to be like. I shall demonstrate the different types of sin and repentance these two knights have respectively committed and incurred in *Morte*. The goal is to find out how a sin committed due to human frailty is resolved by the sinner's practice of repentance and to unravel Malory's attitude towards the topic through his portrayal of the two above-mentioned knights. A brief review of literature on the concept of sin and repentance is in order in the following.

Sin

Before any in-depth investigation on the concept of sin is to be processed, sin in

early times, according to *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, was viewed solely as “contumacy” or “rebellion” (533) and its root was attributed to the evil spirits which tempt man to sin. In this sense, sin in its early understanding was taken to be associated with magical influence rather than man himself. However, if one digs into the multitude of data on theology, one discovers that the fundamental concept of sin centers on original sin, which results from our great parents, who have been seduced by the serpent to eat the apple against God’s commandment. After eating the apple, our great parents lost their innocence and in place of that they acquired the ability to discern the good from the evil and the knowledge of which is forbidden by God. As a consequence, descendants of Adam and Eve are believed to carry an inborn sin at birth and this becomes the original sin which affects men’s disposition to evil. It is based on such thinking that sin is thereafter broadly defined as doing something contrary to God’s will. Furthermore, sinful acts render men go wandering and become alienated from God and additionally our great parents by their fault are excluded from the earthly Paradise and thus lost their immortality. As the concept of rebelling against God progresses, the idea of sin varies according to various theological explications and St. Augustine of Hippo (345-430 A.D.) is one of the most influential. The interpretation of St. Augustine’s teaching made by Alister E. McGrath can be drawn upon to display the idea of sin. McGrath says, “For Augustine, the simple fact that we are sinners means that we are in the position of being seriously ill and unable to diagnose our own illness adequately, let alone cure it” (*Christian Theology* 428-29). The comment suggests that sin is regarded by St. Augustine to rob us of the ability to judge the right from the wrong and it blinds us to know who we are and that we are unable to resolve it ourselves.

Though the idea of sin has not changed much from St. Augustine’s time, we would like to account some research on it by focusing on its essentials during the

Middle Ages as noted in the dictionary. Four notions of *sinne*, the medieval form of sin, are given out in *Middle English Dictionary (MED)* as follows:

1. opposition to God's will, moral obliquity; moral evil, understood as offensive to God; a state of sin, sinfulness
2. an individual act contrary to divine moral law
3. a basic vice, root of sin; one of the seven deadly sins
4. an injury, a harm; crime; also a proclivity to vice, baseness

The first reference views sin as an offence against God's will, an evil doing and a condition of being sinful and it centers upon the idea of doing something in collision of God's will whereas man's free will is excluded from its consideration. Opposition against God is perceived as going astray from norms of morality and thus is considered as the equivalent of offence against God. In this definition, it makes explicit the importance of God's role when referring to sin. The second definition includes personal experience that is antagonistic to divine moral law. Both these two notes on *sinne* are riveted on doing something against God's will or reflect an act contrary to divine law. Such a concept is as much religious as it is legal. The third and fourth entries allude to the disposition to sins. Further elaboration on sin includes Andrea Hopkins's book, *The Sinful Knights*, which has a chapter on a comprehensive survey of the history of penance explicating how sin was perceived at an early stage.¹ Hopkin explains that sin itself, to many of the early Church Fathers (A.D. 100-600), was not just what offended God, but also what transgressed the law

¹ Hopkins's *The Sinful Knights* is a study on four medieval romances, which include *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Ysumbras*, *Sir Gowther* and *Roberd of Cisyle*. The study attempts to first review the theology of Penance and compares it with the penitential pattern hidden in the abovementioned four heroes in the four romances. Her research on the history of Penance gives us the source of knowledge on the subject of sin and repentance for this thesis.

which God and His Church had forbidden. Sin was thus considered a state of absolute wrongness, and besides ignorance did not excuse the sinner from guilt (46).

Till now, the idea of sin retains its legacy from the Medieval times. According to *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, sin discloses generally three aspects of meaning. First, it refers to an act that transgresses the divine law and “an offence against God” (*OED* “sin (syn), sb.1.”). Second, it can mean “a state of transgression against God or His commands” (*OED* 2.a.). Third, it denotes a sense of “pity,” “shame” and “a fear of doing wrong” (*OED* 3.a. & b.). Therefore, sin in the modern sense is regarded as an act against God’s will. Consequently, the dictionary meanings of sin in the modern and medieval senses are similar: sin means doing something against God’s will or it is an act that is contrary to divine law.

Repentance

Nonetheless, although sin is deemed completely condemnable and that man himself is incapable of resolving it, one is able to have sins remitted through the practice of repentance. McGrath claims that, “It is through the grace of God alone that our illness is diagnosed (sin), and a cure made available (grace)” (429). Sin is treated as a disease that affects one’s vision—in spiritual not physical terms—and the grace of God is the cure. Furthermore, McGrath also asserts that,

God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven and restored. (McGrath 430)

The assertion conveys that men make mistakes and thus sin. But through the grace of God, men can renew his relationship with God and return to a state of His enlightenment. The way to achieve God’s grace is to do repentance, i.e., to recognize our sinfulness and wish to redress it, which will lead us to salvation or

absolution. In McGrath's explication of salvation, Everything leading up to salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God, given out of love for sinners. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is enabled to deal with fallen humanity in this remarkable and generous manner, giving us that which we do not deserve (salvation) and withholding from us that which we do deserve (condemnation). (431)

Accordingly, a sinner though condemnable can yet be saved and remitted once again by doing repentance so that he can return to God. St. Augustine makes an analogy between medical treatment and repentance in *On Christian Teaching*, noting "The way to health is through medical care; God's care has taken it upon itself to heal and restore sinners by the same methods" (14).

In the early days, to do repentance involves first of all contrition on the part of the sinner, i.e., the sinner feels truly contrite for his wrongful acts, and afterward undergoes the phase of confession by going to a priest in order to have his sin absolved. After the sins are absolved, the sinner still has to do remedy, or atonement, as a condition for the forgiveness of his sins. Around the first to the third century, there were two forms of confession, one public and the other private. For public confession, it was "made before the assembled congregation" and for those who have committed graver offenses, "this discipline was accompanied by a period of exclusion from the fellowship" (McNeill 4). Later on, the practice of public confession was replaced by a private one, "involving confession to and absolution by a priestly confessor and entailing acts of penance that were often mainly or wholly private" (McNeill 6). Penance, in the words of McNeill, had a sacramental as well as a disciplinary aspect and is expounded as follows,

It [penance] was thought of not merely as a discipline for the restoration

of sinners to the privileges of membership in the Church but as a means of supernatural grace annulling the consequences of sin and recovering the favor of God. (15)

It can be inferred from the passage that penance can bring sinners back to the Church and God. However, this process of restoring relationship with God cannot be accomplished by the sinners alone. It was generally believed in medieval times that bishops and priests were endowed with the “Power of the Keys” that enabled them to remit sins and carried on to grant forgiveness to sinners.² Additionally, priests and bishops alone do not have the right to authorize forgiveness. Andrea Hopkins’s survey finds that the operations of bishops and priests were invalid “if it is not in accordance with divine will” (52). This implies that if the bishops and priests pardon a sinner without sound judgment and do not abide by God’s command, such performance of pardoning is groundless and therefore is invalid. Furthermore, in the observation of Hopkins, it was Hugh of Saint Victoire (A.D. 1096-1141) who further developed the definition of sin and its penalties in an attempt to formulate a complete theory of the sacrament.³ Saint Victoire points out two kinds of penance: external

² It is recorded in St. Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching* that our road to God is blocked by our sins, “as it were by thorny hedgerows” (15). Therefore, Jesus Christ’s crucifixion is to forgive our sins with mercy and bring us back to God. In this sense, Church serves as a delegate of Christ on earth to mete out forgiveness and absolution in accord with the sinner’s faith in the grace of God and power of Church. As it is written, “He accordingly gave keys to his church so that whatever it loosed on earth should also be loosed in heaven and whatever it bound on earth should also be bound in heaven” (Matt. 16:19, qtd. in Augustine 15). Nonetheless, Augustine further states, “A person who does not believe that his sins can be forgiven is made worse by despair, feeling that nothing better awaits him than to be wicked, since he has no faith in the results of being converted” (16)

³ Hugh of Saint Victoire was both a philosopher and theologian. His chief work contributes to a general thesis on dogmatic theology, which gives him his high place in medieval philosophy. Hugh’s sacramental teaching is of great importance in that he begins the final stage in the formulation of the definition of a sacrament, synthesizing the scattered teaching of St. Augustine.

penance by affliction of the flesh that remits the fact of the wrong deed, and interior penance by contrition of the heart which remits the evil intention (Hopkins 52). However, contrition alone, according to Victoire, is insufficient to gain pardon and the complete remission of sins. The sinner is bound both by his sin and by the ensuing penalty. Hopkins suggests that what Victoire means is that remission is given out by God when the penitent shows contrition whereas the punishment the sinner has incurred is pardoned by sacramental absolution which is administered by the priest (52-53). In this respect, Hopkin's suggestion highlights the importance of a priest's role in the practice of repentance. Hopkins also draws upon the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, which he believes to be the apogee of the development of sin and repentance (56). Hopkins makes sense of Aquinas' teaching that "penitence is a dispenser of grace, of which the direct source is the absolution of the priest. The sacrament is therefore essential to salvation; without it no sin can be pardoned" (56). Hopkins further writes, "St. Thomas confirms that attrition can be transformed to contrition by the operation of the sacrament. He [Aquinas] considers contrition, which disposes the sinner to penitence, confession and satisfaction (which achieves the work of grace), to be the matter of the sacrament, while the form of it is absolution" (56). In brief, contrition, confession and satisfaction are three fundamental phases in the course of gaining absolution. Aquinas teaches that sins can only be pardoned through these three linked phases marking the importance of penitence in pardoning a sin. Essentially the Church's position has not changed since the time of Aquinas. Today, it is still accepted that absolution conferred by a priest within the context of sacrament and performance of the penance is the only way in which sins can be remitted (Hopkins 56). The Catholic Church today continues the practice as a sacrament.

Other than achieving absolution for the sinner himself, doing repentance indicates

a renewal between men and God as well. According to *Encyclopedia of Ethics and Religion*, “In its broadest sense repentance describes the act of the soul in breaking away from its past as a preliminary step to the work of ethical reform” (731). In this sense, unlike sin which is defined as turning away from God, the idea of repentance is taken as an act of going back to the moral track designated by God for men. It is further expounded in the *Encyclopedia* that

In repenting the sinner tears down the barriers, which is never a mere remission of penalty but always and essentially the restoration to the normal and filial relation of man to God, follows naturally and spontaneously on repentance. (734)

This notion of repentance allows one to get a deeper understanding of what repentance is. As it is stated above, it is more than a “remission of penalty” but also serves as a way of renewing “the normal and filial relation of man to God.” Therefore, repentance should be seen not only as a practice of cleansing one’s sin but also as a means of returning to God.

Literature Review

There are an abundance of researches that concerns evaluations of individual characters from diverse angles. For example, *Morte* has been analyzed with a feminist approach which makes attempts to reverse traditional views of women’s roles, contending that women are not mere passive objects for men’s rescue by emphasizing their importance in knighthood. For the past decade, there are three leading critics who approach *Morte* with a feminist view that can be singled out. Lisa Robeson, by surveying the word “worship” in the *Morte*, observes that “worship” is not exclusively applied to men only but that women should also be given credits for helping the knights accomplish their obligation in *Morte* by different means.

Robeson believes that women “support chivalry by making it possible for their knights to fight, and not just in the courtly sense of inspiring them to greater deeds on the field or romance role of providing a convenient object for rescue” (110).⁴ Robeson makes her striking point by saying that “. . . men’s honour depends on women’s and vice versa” (113) because without the functioning of women’s role by which the knights can perform chivalric codes, the Arthurian society will fail to operate. Besides, Geraldine Heng’s argument focuses on women’s influence on men, saying that “knightly obedience to and cooperation with the feminine supply effective means for actualizations of feminine will, . . . the exploits of ladies through the medium of knights” (102). Moreover, Fiona Tolhurst’s stance is found to concur with Heng’s statement in her essay making remarks as follow, “. . . Arthur’s identity as a man and king likewise depends upon the actions of females” (140).

There is some amount of research that dives into the findings of Malory’s idea of chivalry. Richard Barber and Larry Benson, for example, examine through the frame of the historical background in an effort to discover the message Malory’s work is sending out. Barber believes that chivalry before the time of Malory was in its decline and has lost much of its religiosity. In Malory’s time, his *Morte* was viewed as more secular than other works of Arthurian literature. It means that characters in the work are depicted with worldliness instead of religious high-mindedness. Barber thus argues that when Malory talks about chivalry, “he is invoking a newly-revived but flourishing ideal, not an echo of past tradition” (31). He also thinks that Malory’s

⁴ Robeson proposes the example of Lancelot’s praise of Guinevere’s function in helping him achieve worship: “ye [King Arthur] ar the man that gaff me the high Order of Knyghthode, and that day my lady, youre quene, dede me *worship*” (1058.22-24; emphasis mine). Another example is Isode, who urges both Lancelot and Trystram to attend the tournament when Isode declines to go along and Sir Trystram also refuses to attend.

attitude to chivalry is “essentially human in scale and scope” (34) and further notes that Malory looks for neither the transcendental love between Tristram and Isode nor Galahad’s ecstasy before the Holy Grail. Instead, Malory’s story is “about chivalry in the real world, where human weakness tragically

undermines the greatest and most ambitious of its achievements. But it is equally human endeavour and human emotion, the quest for a better way in this world through justice, valour and courtesy that is Malory’s vision of chivalry” (Barber 35).

Such a view is similar to Benson’s notion that: “Malory’s response to his characters is more direct and emotional. Never much of a systematic thinker, he [Malory] repeatedly appeals to our hearts rather than to our heads” (*The Ending of Le Morte Darthur* 21). Benson confirms the assertion that Malory’s idea of chivalry is more secular than his sources. By looking at Sir Ector’s final tribute to the deceased Lancelot, Benson remarks that Malory is not concerned with the hero’s holiness and spirituality but that the mourning speech reminds the readers of Lancelot as a “perfect worldly knight” (246).⁵

Other important issues that will be addressed in the following are related to our two principal knights of discussion, i.e., Lancelot and Gawain. A brief literature review enables one to have better understanding of these two knights when it comes to the discussion of them. The name Lancelot signifies prominence in feats of arms, prowess on the battlefield, an exemplar of the code of chivalry and his unswerving commitment in serving Queen Guinevere. It is just like what Brewer has noted,

⁵ Malory works from various pieces of a puzzle of sources to complete *Morte*. The French prose *La Mort Le Roi Artu* and the English Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* are considered to be his two principal sources. For a thorough understanding of Malory’s sources, see Field’s *Malory: Texts and Sources*, Cambridge, 1998.

The moral structure of Lancelot's honour or 'worthiness' is based on his supreme courage and fighting ability, and equally on his relationships with women, which often evoke sententious commentary" ("Malory's 'Proving' of Sir Lancelot" 130)

The passage indicates that although Lancelot is highly commended for carrying out knighthood to the full content, it is well acknowledged that his love affair with Guinevere leads him to a heated debate over his status in the *Morte*. It forms an hindrance to his gaining a complete vision of the Holy Grail that is granted to Galahad, Percival and Bors. In fact, critics over the centuries have endeavoured to uncover Malory's judgment and evaluation over Lancelot's imperfection, which comes from his adulterly, in relation to Malory's conception of chivalry. Some believe it is due to Malory's shift of interests from his sources and others observe that Malory intends to show the gap between humanity and an ideal that eventually cause the tragedy in the end. The following should demonstrate some of these differing opinions for the past two decades.

Sandra Ness, by examining the abbreviation and meaning of Malory's French source the *Queste* in the *Tale of the Sankgreal*, tries to discern Malory's different conception of an ideal knight from that of the *Queste* in terms of morality, brotherhood and the portrayal of Lancelot. Her argument is that the alterations Malory makes shows that Malory's concern is more worldly than spiritual because Malory intentionally lessens the doctrinal allegory in the *Queste* and because "he is mainly concerned with good knightly conduct" (132). In the *Queste*, Ness asserts that a knight's worthiness is evaluated by his ability to perceive the meaning of the adventure as well as his "spiritual condition" (127) whereas Malory's standards of correct behaviour are concerned with "the chivalric code of conduct" (127). What Ness means is that in the *Queste* a knight's value depends more on his spirituality and

his capacity to comprehend the religious elements in the Grail quest but Malory views it differently; he judges a knight by his performance of worldly chivalric code. Therefore, Ness makes an interpretation of Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere based on such reasoning. She argues that Malory does not treat Lancelot's adultery sinful because Lancelot's love for Guinevere corresponds to Malory's ideal secular chivalry (145), i.e., Malory sees love for a lady part of chivalry. Hence, Malory shifts Lancelot's sin from adultery in his source to another type of sin—which is ingratitude to God—because Lancelot's affection for Guinevere should be seen as a knight performing his courtly duties to the lady rather than a sin. A passage of Lancelot's confession should illustrate the knight's mistaken view of his power source,

And never dud I batayle all only for Goddis sake, but for to wynne
 worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought I
 thanked never God of hit. (*Works* II, 897.19-22)

Thus, Malory's Lancelot is not treated as sinful because of his love for Guinevere but rather his lack of appreciation of God for his eminence in worldly worship. Such shift is to make his ideal knight to be judged "in accordance with his own conception of worthiness in the quest" (145) and the connotation of condemnation of the adultery that appears in the *Queste* is reduced in the work of Malory. Ness's contention is concurred by Raluca L. Radulescu who makes a similar observation in claiming that the "doctrinal aspect of religion" present in the French source is replaced by a "practical understanding of religious experience," embodied through Lancelot's performance (285). Radulescu suggests that unlike Malory's sources that emphasize on doctrines, Malory modifies such notion by shifting to personal religious understanding of God. Due to such transformation of ideology, Radulescu states that Malory changes his focus from Lancelot's adultery to his instability in keeping with

the religious content of the chivalric order. That is, as Radulescu remarks,

Lancelot's fundamental fault and sin is not his disloyalty to his lord through his committing adultery with Guinevere, but his wrong way of undertaking battles for the sake of love, and his never thanking God for his success. (291)

Thus, Radulescu contends that in *Morte* Lancelot's fault is social rather than moral or spiritual. Moreover, Radulescu incorporates the tales "The Healing of Sir Urry" to further expound upon his argument. Radulescu suggests that in the "Sankgreal Tale," the readers witness a miserable Lancelot whose failure to recognize his source of power also causes him to fail in the Holy Grail Quest, whereas in "The Healing" Lancelot is graced with the power to heal from whom he least expects it. Both tales, according to Radulescu, reflect Malory's intention of subordinating religion to chivalry and cherishing Lancelot as the best earthly knight (295).

By comparing the alterations Malory makes in *Morte*, the views of both Ness and Radulescu make it explicit that Lancelot's sin lies in his negligence in identifying the true sources of his power and thus is excluded from experiencing the vision of the Grail. Malory removes much of the impression of adultery because the writer's interest shifts from the knight's love affair as stressed in his French source to the knight's religious understanding of chivalry. Yet, the other school of criticism takes Lancelot and Guinevere as an adulterous couple and links their adultery directly to the fall of the Round Table. Guerin, for instance, sees Malory's *Morte* as a tragedy and attributes the fall of the society to the "sins and errors of the characters as individuals over a lengthy period of time" (269). Though Guerin does not specify what "sin" causes the fall of the Round Table, he implies that the downfall of Arthur's court is due to the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere by citing Vinaver's opinion of Lancelot's grief and mourning over his lady and King Arthur rather than God

(271-272).⁶ For Guerin, the tragedy of the Round Table exists in “the discrepancy humanity and aspired ideals expected of a knight creates what shatters the Arthurian court between its idealistic aspirations to fulfill a great potential, and the realistic understanding that reliance upon human beings must necessarily and ultimately defeat its purpose” (271). Guerin points out that the gap between humanity and a society of ideal chivalric code. Both these two critics are looking at Lancelot’s sin as a sign of Lancelot’s flawed humanity that fails to accomplish an ideal, while Ness and Radulescu are taking it as a failure to acknowledge the true source of his power.

Aside from the dispute of Lancelot’s love for Guinevere, other discussion of Lancelot centers upon the entry into monastic life at the last tale of *Morte*. Some critics argue whether such entry to monastic life to do repentance is motivated by his regret of sinning against God or by his earthly love for Guinevere. Such query in fact reflects the critics’ view on Lancelot and Guinevere’s doing repentance to be a narrative technique of Malory’s evaluation of the illicit love affair. Some scholars believe that such turning of Lancelot and Guinevere to God should be regarded as an evidence of palliating their sin. For instance, D.S. Brewer, one of the foremost scholars on Malorian studies, argues that “Though *The Morte Darthur* tells the story of such significant tragedy, it does not stop there” (31) since the conversion of the lovers accomplishes “The shift of the plane of narration at the end . . . expresses that mysterious sense of destiny, of the total relativity of earthly life” (33). Guerin also

⁶ Of Lancelot, Vinaver’s notes are as follow, “It is not as a Christian but as a lover that he mourns the queen; he repents, not of the sins he has committed against God, but of the grief he has caused his lady and King Arthur. . . .” (qtd. in Guerin 271-272)

points out that conversion overcomes the final tragedy, saying “Malory shows . . . the way out of this tragic state: the path to salvation can be trod by individuals alone, and its summit can be reached only after death” (273).

Unlike Lancelot, the characterization of Gawain in the *Morte* creates an impression of a knight of foolhardiness and rashness. However, Malory places these two knights of such different dispositions as equally sinful. Consequently, it is necessary for us to examine Lancelot and Gawain in an attempt to learn Malory’s view on sin and repentance in the portrayal of these two knights. For the sake of convenience in surveying the multitude of studies on Gawain, I would like to focus on the criticism of the past three decades. The importance of Gawain’s role in traditional Arthurian legend is much reduced in the *Morte*. It is noted by Brewer, “Malory translated *Morte Arthure*. He made a number of changes in it. For example, he suppressed much of the heroic Gawain, and in turn exalted Lancelot, inventing new episodes to his glory” (*The Morte Darthur* 7). Malory, instead of demonstrating Gawain as Arthur’s principal knight, presents him in an unfavorable light mostly because of his rashness in personal pursuit of worship in the Sankgreal Tale and his outrageous revenge for Lancelot’s unfortunate killing of his brother, sir Gareth. Gawain’s recklessness in initiating the Holy Grail quest, impulsive killing of seven knights and his impetuosity is presented as a stark contrast to Lancelot. According to Brewer, after the death of Sir Gareth,

He is then shown as angry and vengeful, inspired not only by love of Gareth but by the spirit of ancient family feud. At his death he repents. He is a simple, stubborn man, an outstanding fighter, formidable in his depth of feeling, passionately proud and fierce in his personal and family honour. (*The Morte Darthur* 23)

The passage shed lights on Gawain’s susceptibility of violent emotion that ultimately

leads him to unchecked revengefulness. In the typology of knighthood, Beverley Kennedy places Gawain under the category of the “heroic knight”.⁷ In the survey that compares the adventures of Gawain, Tor and Pellinor in terms of their respective reaction to their opponents on the battlefield, Gawain is termed a “heroic knight” because except for his demonstration of fighting ability in battlefield, there is no sign of other virtues that qualifies him to be a perfect knight, e.g., showing mercy towards opponents in fights, service towards ladies and respect for God (60-69). Besides, in Charles Moorman’s discussion of the presentation of Gawain in the *Morte*, he finds that through comparing with Malory’s French source, Gawain is changed by Malory into a malicious and immoral character and Moorman asserts that Malory “at every opportunity degrades the character of Gawain” (“Malory’s Treatment of the Sankgreall” 507). However, Martin B. Shichtman believes that Malory shows more sympathy for Gawain in comparison with his French sources, arguing that “Although Malory does not allow the knight to repent his having initiated the quest (Gawain expresses his regrets in the *Queste*), he does not depict him as a depraved, unredeemable individual either” (167) because Malory deletes “excessive criticism” (168) found in Malory’s source and reduces the tone of condemnation in *Morte*. Thus, according to Shichtman, rather than being reproached for being a murderer and his disregard for the Church and God in the *Queste*, “To be sure, Gawain receives condemnation in Malory, but he is primarily accused of secular chivalric crimes” (168). From the above criticism, though with some variations, it can generally be

⁷ There are three types of knight in Kennedy’s typology of knighthood: the Heroic (Gawain), the Worshipful (Tristram and Arthur), and the True (Lancelot, Gareth and the Grail knights). Such categorizing is evaluated according to their accomplishment in respects of feudal, courtly and religious virtues. Kennedy believes that these three types of knight form a pattern that operates in the *Morte* and produces a thematic unity in the work.

inferred that Gawain is oftentimes evaluated in a negative way because of his rashness and hot-headedness in the adventures and his exacting vengeance from Lancelot for the killing of Gareth.

The above survey of sin and repentance intends to give some background explication to this thesis project in the hope that readers may find it easier to look at *Morte* with such framework of Western thinking. Our chosen primary text is Eugene Vinaver's three-volume *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, based on the Winchester Manuscript.⁸ The survey on Lancelot and Gawain will acquaint us with some major issues concerning the two knights, leading the readers to better understand what they are like. Specifically, this thesis will examine Lancelot and Gawain in terms of their sin and repentance in reference to the chivalric moral system of Malory.

⁸ There are two principal editions of *Morte* that profoundly affects our reading and textual analysis: one is William Caxton's edition, published in 1485, and the other is Wynkyn de Worde's reprinted edition of Caxton's. The dispute lies in that Caxton's edition had been held as the base text of Malory's *Morte* and was assumed to be of utmost authority. Yet, in 1943, the discovery of a manuscript at Winchester College by W. F. Oakeshott, put the authority of Caxton's edition in question for the Winchester Manuscript was then regarded to be the nearest to Malory's original. From then on, the relationship between the Winchester Manuscript and Caxton's edition has roused tremendous interests. The Winchester Manuscript has been considered closer to the original than Caxton's edition while the latter is often taken as contaminated and corrupted because many alterations are found to be from Caxton's hands instead of Malory's. Caxton is assumed by many critics to have made alterations for readers, negligent of author's initial intention and to revise the original work where there seems to him in need of improvements. Nevertheless, Caxton's edition, after years of debate, remains to be considered as the better version of *Morte*. For example, Terence McCarthy's believes that the Winchester Manuscript should best represent Malory's original writing by a series of investigation and comes to the conclusion, "Whenever the sources can offer no help in choosing between two variant readings, the WMS must be preferred. Although the scribe may have misunderstood or misread Malory's original words and hence corrupted it in his copy, we have no reason to believe that he ever consciously altered anything at all, whereas Caxton's version throughout reveals traces of an editor at work" (144). Consequently, Vinaver's text based on Winchester Manuscript is a paramount choice for this thesis.

Therefore, Chapter I and Chapter II will separately study how Lancelot and Gawain sin in the world of chivalry because of their misdeeds against the chivalric code. Chapter III will examine the repentance of Lancelot and Gawain. Although these two knights have both sinned, yet, as Ackerman notes, “All the seven deadly sins figure in Malory’s *Morte*, but they vary in their prevalence and salience” (47). Therefore this thesis aims for the subtleties of these two knights’ misdeeds and penitence and this investigation hopes to present a fresh perspective in looking at Malory’s knights.

Chapter I

Sin of Lancelot

It is understood that Malory presents Lancelot as his ideal knight and deliberately subordinates other knights to Lancelot by repeatedly calling him “the best of any *synfull* man of the world” (*Works* II, 863, emphasis mine) in the text. Malory’s comment discloses the author’s acknowledgement of Lancelot’s simultaneous sinfulness and greatness. Evidence of such recognition can be found in *Morte* where in the Sankgreal Tale the readers are constantly reminded of Lancelot’s sin and prominence through the knight’s own confession and remarks of the hermits. This chapter aims to address Lancelot’s sin to unfold how Malory sees his ideal knight in terms of his wrongdoings. During this research, I shall employ St. Thomas Aquinas’ concept on sin so as to examine Lancelot’s sinfulness both within the bound of Malory’s chivalric world and in the domain of medieval theology. In contrast to the long-established approaches by which critics examine Lancelot in light of his superiority over his fellow knights, this investigation attempts to analyze Lancelot from the perspective of his wrongdoings and to argue against the traditional view that Lancelot is Malory’s choice of knight because of his perfection. By stressing Lancelot’s misdeeds, my argument intends to add a new aspect to what consists in Malory’s ideal knight.

St. Thomas Aquinas on Sin

St. Thomas Aquinas (c.a.1225-74), being a renowned theologian and philosopher, gives an extended analysis of sin in the *Summa Theologiae*, part I-II, questions 71-89. His idea of sin is concerned more than an act that either transgresses God’s will or committing a crime mentioned in the introduction. His discussion of sin encompasses individual will and the idea of sin is analyzed by

Aquinas in many other respects. This notion of sin gets complicated by his taking into account the distinction of sin, the comparison with one another, the subject of sin, and lastly, cause and effects of sin.

Before proceeding to the discussion of sin, Aquinas first defines the nature of sin. In his word,

Two things concur in the nature of sin, viz. the voluntary act, and its inordinateness, which consists in departing from God's law. Of these two, one is referred essentially to the sinner, who intends such and such an act in such and such matter; while the other, viz. the inordinateness of the act, is referred accidentally to the intention of the sinner.

(*ST. Part I, Q.72, Art. 1*)

Aquinas is here dividing the sinner from the inordinateness of the sinful act. Such division is critical in that it reminds us of taking into account both the sinner and the intention of his. Thus, when one sins, these two parts should be taken into consideration before any judgment is to be made. What Aquinas means is that this distinction has its impact on how we weigh the gravity of sin. He further notes,

sin is made more grievous, because a man sins more grievously if his will is induced to sin by the intention of a more evil end.—Other causes incline the will to sin, against the nature and order of the will, whose natural inclination is to be moved freely of itself in accord with the judgment of reason. Wherefore those causes which weaken the judgment of reason (e.g. ignorance), or which weaken the free movement of the will (e.g. weakness, violence, fear, or the like), diminish the gravity of sin, even as they diminish its voluntariness. (*ST. Part I-II, Q.73, Art. 6*)

Aquinas' argument reminds us that the concept of sin involves not just an act against God; rather, man's will figures equally in the process. Literally, the passage

maintains that the gravity of sin can be aggravated or mitigated according to a person's will to sin and the sentiments that affect the will—that is to say that the sinner's motivation, e.g. out of greed or self-defence, should be taken into account for assessment. It also suggests that Aquinas is making a plea for mercy and sympathy for the sinner's sake because the sinner's concern is taken into consideration instead of solely the sinful act itself.

Aquinas separates the corpus of sin into two categories: one is mortal sin and the other venial sin. In essence, mortal sins refer to sins committed when the sinner has full knowledge of its graveness. This deliberate act means a rejection of God and cuts the sinner off from receiving God's grace. If the mortal sin is left unresolved, it produces eternal punishment in Hell. Aquinas characterizes it as consisting "in turning away from our last end which is God" and the aversion of it is due to our "deliberating reason," the function of which is to direct us towards God (*ST. Part I-II, Q.77, Art. 8*). This statement suggests two things. First, Aquinas believes that in sin one has strayed away from God and has also damaged the harmony between man and God. Second, the statement indicates that Aquinas finds a person wicked when overlooking his reason and thus sins, the act of which signifies how a man's will counts in the course of committing a sin. Aquinas gives an example of a person whose passion takes him to a sinful act and he believes that being led by passion is to deliberately disregard reason and therefore many adulteries and murders that are committed through passion should be viewed as mortal sins.

In contrast to mortal sins, the other type is venial sin and it can be called so in three ways:

First, through its cause, i.e. through having cause to be forgiven, which cause lessens the sin; thus a sin that is committed through weakness or ignorance is said to be venial. Secondly, through its issue; thus every

sin, through repentance, becomes venial, e.g. receives pardon. Thirdly, by its genus, e.g. an idle word. (*ST. Part I-II, Q.77, Art. 8*)

Venial sin generally means sin that is less condemnable than mortal sin for the three causes abovementioned. Such act of sinning does not cut off the sinner from God's grace because the sinner has not rejected God. However, venial sins do injure the relationship between the sinner and God. What is worthy of notice in the quotation is the second point where it notes that every sin can become venial, that is, can receive pardon through repentance. This statement displays the importance of repentance because the practice of it has the power to remit sinfulness and to grant forgiveness to the sinner. Consequently, the latter part of this chapter is to look into Lancelot's sin by employing Aquinas' assumption in an attempt to learn how Lancelot has sinned mortally and yet because of his disposition to recognize his sinfulness he is able to turn his mortal sin venial and once again secure his status as Malory's ideal knight.

Sin of Lancelot

Lancelot, considered as being the greatest knight among the Round Table, is well-known for his performance in feats of arms, celebrated for his humility despite his superiority and observing the code of chivalry as demonstrated in his deeds of honour and worship. Nonetheless, unlike Galahad, Perceval and Bors, Lancelot is not given the privilege to have a complete vision of the Holy Grail chiefly because of his sin that debars him from gaining the vision in the Sankgreal Tale. As a matter of fact, the Sankgreal Tale is an account of some knights's failure to the attaining to the Holy Grail due to their imperfection, e.g. Lancelot, Gawain, Gareth, Ector and so on. The point is that although Galahad, Perceval and Bors are awarded with a vision of the Holy Grail, they do not, at the end of the tale, return to Camelot to give an account of the Grail quest except Lancelot, who is merely granted a partial view. Galahad

dies after his eye-witnessing the vision as he “so suddeynly departed hys soule to Jesu Cryste, and a rete multitude of angels bare hit up to hevyn” (*Works* II, 1035.14-16). As for Percival, he “yelded hym to an ermytayge out of the cite, and toke religious clothing” (*Works* II, 1035.27-28) and after two years “passed oute of the worlde” (*Works* II, 1036.2-3). Bors returns to Camelot and “tolde hym of the hyghe adventures of the Sankgreal such as had befalle hym and his three felowes, which were sir Launcelot, Percival and sir Galahad and hymselff, than sir Launcelot tolde the adventures of the Sankgreal that he had sene” (*Works* II, 1036.16-20). Such arrangement of these three knights is alleged by Raluca L. Radulescu to be an implication of Malory’s subordinating the position of the perfect knights to that of Lancelot by placing Lancelot to record the adventure of the quest at the court (290). Radulescu’s contention raises the question of how to take Lancelot’s sinfulness when at the end he remains as the only knight having the opportunity to give an account of the Grail Quest. Thus we need to first see what sins Lancelot has committed and how his sinfulness is a violation against his chivalric obligation and finally discuss why he stays on to be the best sinfull man.

Among the comments on Lancelot’s sin, I find it hard to approve McCarthy and Larry Benson’s assertions of Lancelot’s innocence in his adultery act with Guinevere. McCarthy notes that when the Lancelot-Guinevere affair is exposed to the public, Lancelot’s endeavour to defend the Queen’s name has “increased the glory of the realm as a whole,” and furthermore, it “is not merely to avoid a scandal but to hold the realm together” (90). Larry Benson’s argument, too, is in favour of McCarthy’s evaluation concerning the affair. He believes that although Lancelot’s illicit love for Guinevere is “sinful and blameworthy”, he thinks that “Lancelot’s love of Guinevere is a positive virtue, a necessary part of the perfect chivalry that is rewarded in ‘The Healing of Sir Urry’” (231). Although both McCarthy and Benson view the adultery

as morally condemnable, yet they consider this love affair an additional credit to Lancelot's virtue. Nevertheless, their observation is flimsy as Benson and McCarthy's standpoint favors Lancelot by appealing to the knight's personal chivalric accomplishment of affection for his lady and his intention to save the Arthurian court but ignoring the fact that adultery itself is a sin indeed. The critics' partiality for Lancelot is too weak to justify the liason. It seems that Benson has been so possessed by Lancelot's other overwhelming knightly performances in the work and thus grossly takes the adultery as part of his virtues. Furthermore, McCarthy's comment is flawed in that it considers Lancelot's self-defense of denying the love affair as a disinterested attempt to secure the Arthurian court. Instead, I propose that Lancelot is absolutely wrong in developing his affair with Guinevere and subsequently the sin of adultery gives rise to other sins.

On the contrary, Lancelot's sin can be itemized into three parts according to other critics' various kinds of surveys: adultery, instability and pride. I find this type of criticism acceptable because these three categories of sin are pointed out in Lancelot's own confession specifically in the tales of Sankgreal and the death of Arthur as Lancelot himself claims, "My *synne* and my *wyckednes* hath brought me unto grete dishonour!" (*Works* II, 897.1-2, emphasis mine). It will therefore be unwise to dismiss these sins. These three parts of sin will be addressed sequentially in the following.

Beverly Kennedy sees the downfall and the interaction between Lancelot and Guinevere in a different light. Kennedy holds the idea that "Malory does not see anything 'good' in Lancelot's adultery; however, he can forgive Lancelot's failures because they [Lancelot's failures] were not premeditated, and that they [the failures] were deeply repented, and that they [failures] were very few" (95).¹ Kennedy differs from Benson and McCarthy, who prefer to treat the adultery as reinforcing Lancelot's

greatness by emphasizing it as his implementation of courtly love. In other words, the observation Kennedy makes is to regard the affair as an unfaithful sin and it is through his repentance that Lancelot regains and abides by the code of ideal chivalry. This attitude makes better sense than Benson and McCarthy's in that the adultery act is addressed apart from Lancelot's other knightly virtues that otherwise blind critics' judgment. Furthermore, such view recognizes Lancelot's sinful acts and at the same time takes into account the knight's will to sin. Thus, Kennedy states, "Malory prefers a hero who is less perfect, but more credible" (94). Kennedy's proclamation is in agreement with Moorman's argument. Moorman puts forward the idea that in the Sankgreal Tale where Lancelot fails to see the Holy Grail, Malory "actually uses this comparison between chivalric success and religious failure to condemn the perfect secular hero" (503). Moorman continues to affirm that Malory wants the comparison to serve a higher purpose when he remarks that,

Malory can keep the contrast of appearance (the ideal Round Table) and reality (Launcelot and Guinevere) uppermost in the reader's mind. In other words, Malory does not in the least ignore Launcelot's sin; he deepens it by having the hermits hold up before Launcelot a picture of his potential greatness, a greatness which, were it not for sin, might have saved the Round Table civilization. ("Malory's Treatment" 503)

In addition to the sin of adultery, Lancelot is trapped in the dilemma of either

¹ Kennedy also asserts that there are two kinds of factors that cause the downfall of the Round Table, one rationalist and pragmatic; the other religious and providential. He assumes that Arthur has failed three political lessons to which Gawain and the Arthurian Court have fallen preys as well. Furthermore, Kennedy argues that Lancelot exceeds Arthur and Gawain on the religious level for his constant and consistent providentialist belief that *unhappynesse* is caused by sin and *happynesse* by virtue and faith in the grace of God.

following his head or heart, i.e., if he shall adhere to chivalric code by cutting off his affection for Guinevere or otherwise. In that case, critics describe that Lancelot has sinned through his instability as he wavers between different moral systems and they constitute the cause of his instability directly to Lancelot's inordinate affection for Guinevere. So far, readers may be reminded that Malory draws an analogy between Lancelot and Tristram on the topic of adultery. But Tristram, with his love strengthened by the love portion intended for king Mark and Isode, decides to serve his king with loyalty and thus gives up developing his relationship with Isode. It is not until king Mark's jealousy turns him to commit treason against Tristram that Tristram decides to forfeit his loyalty to king Mark and advance the love affair. Tristram's adultery therefore receives less controversy than that of Lancelot because king Mark's malice and Tristram's initial choice to be loyal to king Mark by dropping his affection for Isode, more or less justifies the Tristram's subsequent act in developing the liason. On the other hand, Lancelot does not have a vicious king who treats him with injustice and Lancelot at the beginning is not resolved to serve anyone as Tristram is. Consequently, Lancelot commits both adultery and the sin of instability. P. E. Tucker and Moorman are two principal critics who draw our attention to Lancelot's instability however with different contentions. Tucker contends that instability is Lancelot's chief sin judging from a hermit's explanation to Gawain about his failure to meet adventures,

“For I dare sey, as sunfull as ever sir Launcelot hath byn , sith that he wente into the qeste of the Sankgreal he slew never man nother nought shall, tylle that he come to Camelot agayne; for he hath takyn [upon] hym to forsake synne. And ne were that he ys nat stable, but by hys thoughte he ys lykly to turne agayne, he sholde be nexte to enchev[e] hit sauff sir Galahad, hys sonne; but God knowith hys thought and hys unstableness.

And yet shall he dye right an holy man, and no doute he hath no fellow of
 none earthly synfull man lyvyng.” (Works II, 948.20-29)

Tucker takes the passage as “an evidence of the more general trait of instability in his character that causes his failure” (394) because Lancelot cannot put off from his mind “prevy thoughtis” (Works II, 1046.9) of Guinevere and “ys lyckly to turne agayne.” A striking point made by Tucker is that Lancelot is wavering between two types of chivalry—the “good” (that consists the chivalric code) and the “bad” (because of his devotion service to Guinevere).² Another contention of Tucker is that Malory “was already uneasy over the connexion of love and chivalry when he came to the quest” and that because “he found Launcelot condemned as the knight-lover, but being certain that knighthood was a noble ideal, he began to distinguish between good chivalry and bad” (394).³ I think there are two things to add from this comment about Lancelot’s instability. Firstly, if Lancelot learns how to tell good chivalry from bad, it implies that the knight has become conscious of his sinfulness and gradually acknowledges his wrongdoing. Secondly, what it discloses is that once a knight owns such notion of good and bad, he begins to form an idea of distinction, the result of which is pride, the sin of which will be discussed later. Holding the same idea of Lancelot’s instability, Moorman looks at the issue from another angle. His view is included here because it supports the statement that Lancelot’s attachment to Guinevere is not justified on account of his knightly obligations to his lady. Instead, he suggests that Lancelot’s struggle between personal passion and knightly

² According to Tucker, “This notion of ‘bad chivalry’ is further substantiated by suggestions of pride in Lancelot” (394). The sin of pride will be discussed in the next paragraph.

³ Such argument is refuted by Moorman on the ground of that Malory does not condemn love as a part of the knightly code, but rather takes the adultery as an integral part of the system of courtly love as he found it reflected in his French source.

obligations leads him to commit the sin of instability. I agree with Moorman because I believe Lancelot's sense of duty is not strong enough to withstand his personal desire and thus creates a dilemma for himself. Moorman argues that Lancelot's wavering lies not in the two types of chivalry that Tucker proposes, but in "his own avowed conception of chivalry as a secular ideal (and this would include his love for Guinevere) and a religious ideal which itself transcends chivalry" (501-2, nt.10). Hence, one can come to an inference that Lancelot's sin of instability is accounted for as one of his sins and this instability signifies his vacillation between two moral systems. Finally, Davies' notion can be employed to illustrate Lancelot's instability,

Launcelot was unsuccessful as a knight of the Grail, and his defeat was due to his instability in a state of grace (for while she was alive and accessible, Gwennyver could not be kept out of his mind). (364)

So, Lancelot's inordinate love for Guinevere outruns his rationality to abide by knighthood and such inclination affects his constancy of observing the moral code. Furthermore, such indulgence in the vehemence of one's sentiments misleads Lancelot into an illusion of seeing Guinevere as his power source and this brings about sin of pride. Tucker's contention is of avail in demonstrating Lancelot's sin of pride because he goes back to textual reference as a proof for his argument. In the Sankgreal Tale, after Lancelot recognizes his illicit love that prevents him from having a vision of the Holy Grail, he goes to a hermit to make a confession,

And than he tolde there the good man all hys lyff, and how he had loved a quene unmesurably and oute of mesure longe. And all my grete dedis of armys that I have done for the moste party was for the quenys sake, and for hir sake wolde I do batayle were hit right other wronge. And never dud I batayle all only [for] for Goddis sake, but for to wyne

worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought I
thanked never God of hit. (*Works II*, 897.15-22)

Tucker interprets the confession in two ways. In one way, Tucker points out that Malory is suggesting that “Lancelot’s love for Guinevere mars the perfection of his knighthood” (392). In another way, the quotation implies that he fights not only for Guinevere, “but for to wynne worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved.” It is a sign held by Tucker as “the earliest hint of the fault of pride in him” (393). Tucker further comments that Malory “magnifies Lancelot’s sense of his own prowess until it becomes a fault in his knighthood” (393). His contention implies that Lancelot’s obsessive passion for Guinevere traps himself in false understanding that he can demonstrate his virtues by vying for the queen’s affection through physical victory in the battlefield. Consequently, gratitude and humbleness for prowess escape Lancelot, which results in his sin of pride. Davies responds to Tucker’s statement by pinpointing Lancelot’s final grief for Arthur and Guinevere in this episode,

’For whan I [Lancelot] remember of hir beaulte and of hir noblesse, that was bothe with hyr kyng and with hyr, so whan I sawe his corps and hir corps so lye togyders, truly myn herte wold not serve to susteyne my careful body. Also whan I remember me how *by my defaute and my orgule and my pryde* that they were bothe layed full owe, that were pereles that ever was lyvyng of Cristen people, wyt you wel,’ sayd syr Launcelot, ‘this remembred, of their kyndenes and my unkyndenes, sanke so to myn herte that I myght not susteyne myself.’

(*Works III*, 1256.29-38, emphasis mine)

On the basis of the above narrative situation, Davies makes a response to the above remark as follows:

This is at last an expression of humility, and a recognition of his own

responsibility. It is an expression of his freedom from all blame of others. Presumably his exact meaning is that both Arthur and Gwenyver in their several ways as his superiors, his lord and lady, were generous to him, and so were true to their noble nature, while all that he, their subject, did in return was to act unnaturally and by his noble liaison with the queen to bring enmity between them, and between them and their people.

There, presumably, were his pride and fault. (363-4)

In fine, Lancelot's sin can be analyzed in terms of adultery, instability and pride. Moreover, these three sins produce influence on each other as Lancelot's adultery is the cause of his wavering between two moral systems; the notions of adultery and instability are accentuated respectively by his excessive and undue love for Guinevere and pride in his fighting abilities on the battlefield. The above investigation shows that Lancelot is far from being perfect in chivalry, the analysis of which modifies the popular concept of Malory's ideal knight as being flawless. However, Malory is presenting a knight sinful enough as to be like anyone of us.

Lancelot's Sin Viewed in the Chivalric and Theologic Domains

This part examines Lancelot's sin in light of chivalry and theology to provide readers with an idea of Lancelot's culpability. To set Lancelot's sins against the context of chivalry, Ramon Lull's treatise *The Book of the Ordre of Chyuvlry* serves as a fundamental guide.⁴ Lull carefully divides his book into several sections from the

⁴ Recognized as "the most compendious medieval treatise on the obligations of knighthood" ("Preface", Alfred Byles), *The Book of the Ordre of Chyuvlry* was written around fourteenth century and was three times translated from French into English, among them William Caxton's version (1484) being the most widely circulated and best-known. Apart from the military and political role a knight had to play in those days, Lull's major concern centered upon the religious elements in chivalry and

origin of chivalry, through the making of a knight beginning from his status as a squire to the decline of chivalry. In the book, Lull lists a knight's virtues and the seven deadly sins in terms of Christian perception of a knight's duty,

Euery knight ought to knowe the seuen virtues / whiche be begynnyng
And rote of al good custommes / and ben the way and path of the
celestial glory perdurable / of whiche seuen virtues the thre ben
theologale or duyne / And the other four ben cardinal. (Lull 90)

Both Lull's presuming a knight's knowledge of the seven virtues and the categorization of virtues into theological and cardinal ones show his expectation of knighthood to be able to bear ecclesiastical values. The three theological virtues incorporate *fayth*, *hope* and *charyte* and the four cardinal virtues include *justyce*, *prudence*, *strenge* and *attemperance*. Lull also admonishes a knight to stand against the seven deadly sins,⁵ which encompass *Gloutonnye*, *lecherye*, *Auaryce*, *Pryde*, *slouthe*, *Enuye* and *yre*. Lull thinks that *gloutonnye* renders the body feeble and therefore makes it susceptible to "*slouthe* and *lachenys* of body which greueth the soule / Thenne all the vices ben contrary to chyualry" (97). Lancelot's undue

addressed much of the moral and Christian values a knight was considered to demonstrate. Kennedy also holds the idea that the publication of *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* one year before the printing of *Morte Darthur* "would seem to confirm the continuing popularity and authority of Lull's treatise." (13)

⁵ For more details on the history of the seven deadly sins, please refer to Newhauser's *The seven deadly sins: from communities to individuals*, Leiden: Brill, 2007. The book explores the seven deadly sins from "a diversity of approaches to the topic of sin in medieval and early modern Europe" (Rosenfeld, rev. of *The seven deadly sins: from communities to individuals*, *The Medieval Review* 08.6.12, 11 June 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tmr/>>). Newhauser argues that the concept of seven deadly sins in fact evolves with time and is not confined to "inflexible notions of medieval 'dogma'" (Rosenfeld's review). Various essays are contained in Newhauser's book and seeks to comprehend the seven deadly sins in the cultural contexts.

affection for the queen is lechery and thus such affair is a breach of the code of chivalry. Hence, Lancelot has not merely committed one of the seven deadly sins, he has also broken the codes required of a knight. Lull keeps condemning *lecherye* by asserting that “lecherye warreth Chastyte / ben / yongthe / beaulte / moche drynke / & moche mete / queynt vestures and galaunt Falshede / Treason Iniurye / and despysyng of God / and of his glorye/” (98). This passage indicates that the committing of *lecherye* is treated by Lull as a violation of the chivalric code as well as “despysyng of God / and of his glorye/.” Accordingly, when Lancelot is confirmed to have transgressed his courtly obligations, he has already sinned by Lull’s standard of chivalry as well as ecclesiastically since such act is at once a breach from and a violation of God’s will. Meanwhile, Lancelot’s sinful act destroys his glory and his status as a perfect knight and thus Lancelot is deprived of the right to view the Grail. Evidence of such sinfulness in the above statement can be found in the Sankgreal Tale, in which Lancelot falls asleep in a chapel and finds himself unable to get up during the healing process of a sick knight by means of the appearance of the Holy Grail. During the visioning, Lancelot did not see the Grail. Accordingly, the sick knight says, “But I have mervayle of thys slepyng knight that he had no power to awake whan thys holy vessel was brought hydir” (*Works* II, 895.7-10). The squire accompanying the sick knight answers, “I dare well sey, seyde the squyre, ‘that he dwellith in som dedly synne whereof he was never confessed’” (*Works* II, 895.10-11).

From the perspective of chivalry, Lancelot is condemnable for his sinful acts. Henceafter, we would like to examine Lancelot’s sin in the context of Aquinas’ theology and to look at it with a religious hue. There are two kinds of sin in Aquinas’ idea as mentioned previously: one mortal and the other venial. Lancelot’s sin conforms to Aquinas’ definition of mortal sin in the sense that his sin is “turning away from our last end which is God” (*ST*, Part I-II., Q.77, Art.8). We have seen

that Lancelot's sins are lechery, pride and instability and they are acts "despysing of God" as glossed by Lull. Accordingly, Lancelot is turning away from God and his sins are mortal ones in that he is aware of his undue relationship with Guinevere and yet he fails to cut off the relationship. Lancelot's awareness of his sins can be found in a scene where in a chapel, the knight is warned by a voice to withdraw at the appearance of the Holy Grail because of his sins: "go thou from hens, and withdraw the from thys holy places!" (*Works II*, 895.26-27). Upon hearing this, Lancelot is "passing hevvy and wyst nat what to do" (*Works II*, 895.29-30). Though in distress, Lancelot comes to realize immediately that it is his sinfulness that causes him to be unable to see the Grail. He mournfully remarks,

"My *synne* and my *wyckednes* hath brought me unto grete dishonour!
For whan I sought worldly adventures for worldely desires I ever
encheved them and had the bettir in every place, and never was I
discomfite in no quarrel, were hit right were hit wronge. And now I
take uppon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges, now I se and
undirstonde that *myne olde synne* hyndryth me and shamyth me, that I
had no power to stirre nother speke whan the holy bloode appered before
me."
(*Works II*, 896.1-9, emphasis mine)

Lancelot's frank confrontation with his sin, calling it "wyckednes" shows that he is fully conscious of his sinful act and the negativity that it entails. In retrospect, Lancelot's incapacity to view the Holy Grail reminds him of his "olde synne," which points to his relationship with the queen. Yet, even though Lancelot shows clear awareness of his sinfulness, he renews the liaison right after the Holy Grail quest as the account goes, ". . . , sir Launcelot began to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and forgate the promise and the perfeccion that he made in the quest . . ." (*Works II*, 1045.10-12). Lancelot's deliberate ignorance of his promise can be taken as failing

to have “deliberating reason” to come to rescue, which makes his adultery a mortal sin. Thus, from the theological stance, Lancelot has committed a mortal sin. Lancelot is sinful by Lull’s standard of chivalry and in Aquinas’ theological thinking. This recognition alerts the readers to reform the conventional notion of Lancelot’s faultlessness. The significance is that Malory is by no means introducing a perfect Lancelot for emulation but that the knight is sinful and flawed. In addition, Malory invites his readers to see more behind the knight’s misdeeds. For instance, Kennedy’s statement looks at Lancelot’s act on a different level. He says, “Lancelot’s relationship to Guinevere is the source of his only imperfections as the epitome of True knighthood, but it is also what humanizes him as a hero” (94). Kennedy’s assumption is that Lancelot is of course worshipped for his invincibility and gallantry but what truly makes him heroic is his faults because such imperfection makes him recognize his own sinfulness and it enables him to learn to be humble and unassuming. Consequently, Lancelot’s imperfection is more of a challenge to be resolved than of a stain in his reputation. Being aware of his sinfulness, Lancelot here begins to reflect upon himself and starts to seek repentance, which will be dealt with in Chapter IV. However, the following will first examine the way Malory writes about Lancelot’s sins, which implies both his idea of an ideal knight and his sympathy for the knight.

Malory’s Ideal Knight and Sympathy

The above discussion shows how Lancelot’s sins go against the chivalry codes and are violations of a knight’s ecclesiastic obligations. Although it is undeniable that Lancelot is sinful and breaks the chivalric code, the situation the knight is involved in actually deserves sympathy. Previously, I mention that ignorance cannot excuse the sinner from culpability according to the thinking of the first century.

However through changes of time, the idea has been modified and according to Aquinas, a sinner is no sinner until he has the intention to sin, the concern of which determines the sinner's culpability. Therefore, this part invites us to sympathize with Lancelot by analyzing his intention in sinning and his struggling to follow chivalric code in serving his king and queen. Furthermore, Malory's narrative techniques will also be looked at to see his skills in tackling Lancelot's sins.

First, Lancelot's intention is never to cause harm to anyone, as Kennedy notes, "imperfect though he is, for at the same time as he tries with varying degrees of success to be true to both God and Guinevere, he never fails to serve Arthur by doing justice and pacifying the realm" (95). Kennedy defends Lancelot by pleading his loyalty to both the King and the realm as one of the knight's concerns in addition to the love affair. I find Kennedy's claim makes better sense than that of Mark Lambert which suggests that Lancelot and Guinevere should take the blame for the breakdown of the Round Table, "but it does not occur to either of them that the adultery in itself was an injury to the king" (61). In other words, Lambert does not think that Lancelot intends to make Arthur "wronged" (196). I believe Lambert makes such comment to defend Lancelot but his ignorance does not serve as an excuse especially when Lancelot is fully aware of his sinful act. Lambert's perception appears naïve and gives an impression of the knight's insensibility to Arthurian court's safety. Instead, Kennedy's assertion that Lancelot struggles to remain faithful to both sides, Arthur and Guinevere, is a sound idea that shows an insight to Lancelot's bitter psychology caused by the entanglement between his personal infatuation and knightly obligation. It is Lancelot's agony in serving his king and queen, not disregarding either part's concern that readers are moved to sympathize with the knight and are anxious to forgive him. We can support the idea of sympathy for Lancelot by appealing to Aquinas' idea that a sin is made more grievous if the will to sin is

induced by the intention of a more evil end. In Lancelot's case, he is fully aware of his sins but is neither driven to sin by an intention to rouse disruption nor motivated by other evil ends. What it shows is that on the one hand the graveness of Lancelot's sin is lessened; on the other hand, it also shows that Malory demonstrates his sympathy by placing Lancelot in such tough situation that one finds it cruel to judge Lancelot and appears insensible not to do so.

Secondly, Malory desires to reduce Lancelot's culpability by means of omitting Lancelot and Guinevere's love scenes in *Morte*. The Lancelot-Guinevere relationship in the *Morte* first appears in Merlin's prophecy to dissuade King Arthur from further pursuit to establish marital link and the occasion reads, "M[e]rlyon warned the kyng covertly that Gwennyver was nat holsom for hym to take to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne" (*Works I*, 97.29-31). Even with Merlin's prophecy, no measures are taken for precaution in the *Morte*. After Merlin's prophecy, Malory employs an elusive tactics to bring up the liason and the readers' awareness of it is assumed to be dispensed with detailed narrative. For example, in the Sankgreal Tale, this relationship emerges only in Lancelot's reflection of his sinfulness that fails him in the quest ("myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me") without making specific references to the affair. The omission of direct reference to the relationship requires the readers to conjecture about it from Lancelot's confession. In addition, Lancelot's resuming the love affair with Guinevere is described with much reservation as well. When after the Holy Grail quest, Malory says "But ever his thoughtis prevyly were on the quene, and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde" (*Works II*, 1045.16-18). Even when Sir Aggravayne and Mordred disclose the affair to King Arthur, the scene is presented with more emphasis on the two knights' revengefulness than reproach on Lancelot. The disclosure remark as made by Aggravayne reads,

‘My lorde,’ seyde sir Aggravayne, ‘I shall telle you, for I may kepe hit no lenger. Here ys I and my brother sir Mordred brake unto my brother sir Gawayne, sir Gaherys and to sir Gareth—for thy sys all that sir Launcelot holdith youre quene, and hath done longe; and we be your syster sunnes, we may suffir hit no lenger. And all we wote that ye shulde be above sir Launcelot, and ye ar the kynge that made hym knight, and therefore we woll preve hit that he is a traytoure to yore person. (*Works* III, 1163.3-11)

The description only mentions slightly Lancelot’s love affair, putting it as “sir Launcelot holdith youre quene.” Others emphasize Aggravayne and Mordred’s malice in directing king Arthur into a sense of betrayal by misguiding him into believing Lancelot’s ungratefulness. Such recounting gives the readers misgivings of imminent mishap that arises from Aggravayne and Mordred’s threatening notice and additionally distracts the readers from Lancelot’s sin.

Aside from Malory’s narrative technique that eschews tones of condemnation, if one looks further into the oath of Pentecost, one discovers that Lancelot, sinful as he is, violates none of the oath in accordance with Malory’s concept of chivalry. The oath of Pentecost which the knights of the Round Table are required to abide contains service to the temporal lord and the ladies,

the kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes and gaff them rychesse and londys; and charged them never to do outrage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that lordship of kynge Arthure for evermore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damsels, and jantilwomen and sydowes [socour] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a wronefull quarrel for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Round, both olde and

yonge, and every yere so were the[y] sworne at the hyghe fest of
Pentecoste. (*Works I*, 120.15-27)

The phrase “never to do outrage nothir mourthir and always to fle treson” exhorts the knights to avoid murder out of outrage and that treachery should never be in their mind. Moreover, to “gyff mercy” means to show kindness to enemies or offenders to the extent of sparing their lives. Guarding ladies and coming to their rescue are also obligations for the knights to perform and to “take no batayles in a wronefull quarre” means avoiding to fight for injustice. Lancelot, during the course of his life, has not violated the stipulations of the abovementioned Pentecost oath. In other words, Malory makes Lancelot remain faithful to Arthur even when the war is waged against him at the siege of Benwick as Lancelot claims, “for to ryde oute of thys castell and to do batayle I am full lothe” (*Works III*, 1191.4-5). Lancelot eventually meets Gawain on the battlefield neither out of rage nor of grudges towards Arthur, but for his repugnance in being falsely accused of treason by Gawain. In another incident when Lancelot tries to settle a strife between Sir Pedyvere and his lady, Pedyvere kills the lady in Lancelot’s presence. Lancelot feels ashamed for being unable to protect the lady and decides to do battle with Pedyvere. In answering Lancelot’s indignity and demand for a solo combat, Pedyvere asks for Lancelot’s mercy, “I woll never aryse tylle ye graunte me mercy” (*Works I*, 285.22-23). In the end, Pedyvere is granted mercy and is made to bear the lady upon him without rest until he goes to Guinevere. These incidents reflect Lancelot’s concern for the codes of chivalry and later his sinful love affair with the queen does not seem to contradict his status of an ideal knight as conceived by Malory.

What results in Malory’s sympathy for Lancelot is the knight’s capability to recognize his misdeeds and wrongdoings. For instance, Lancelot confesses that he always fights “for hir [Guinevere] sake” and that “never dud I batayle all only for

Goddis sake, but for to wyne worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved , and litill or nought I thanked never God of hit.” (*Works* II, 897.17-22). This confession not only reveals Lancelot’s sin in failing to acknowledge God but also highlights his ability to recognize the misdeeds and inadequacy in himself. This inclination to take blame is the reason why Malory characterizes Lancelot as being the best of the sinful knights. This assumption will be further discussed in the next chapter.

To sum up at this point, Lancelot’s sin is unlike Benson and McCarthy’s observation which holds that the love affair should be taken as an additional credit for Lancelot’s knightly values. More precisely, Lancelot’s adulterous love, in the context of Lull’s treatise on chivalry and St. Thomas’s theology, is an act “despysyng of God / and of his glorye/” as well as a mortal sin entailing by his turning away from God because of his excessive and undue love for the queen. Additionally, there is also his sin of pride and instability. Lancelot’s realization of his “olde synne” manifests Malory’s acknowledgement of this sinful act. Denying Lancelot the vision of the Holy Grail is a demonstration of Malory’s recognition of Lancelot’s immoral love and depicting Lancelot’s flaws as well. However, the way Malory presents Lancelot’s sin is full of compassion and consideration judging from his reducing the number of the adulterous love scenes and posing Lancelot’s conduct in conformity with the Pentecost oath in spite of his sinfulness. Besides, Malory’s sympathy probably comes from Lancelot’s capability of recognizing his inadequacy and misdemeanour. This may be considered a first step toward contrition as admission of his own weakness. Hence, we come to the conclusion that Malory’s ideal knight is one possessing physical strength and the ability to see his own insufficiency, with which the ideal knight learns to be humble and shows modesty in supplication to God’s grace for his sins.

Compared to Lancelot’s frank confrontation with his sins, Gawain is

characterized as a stark contrast to Lancelot's humility and inclination to acknowledge mistakes. Thus, the next chapter will call attention to the case of Gawain with an intention to explore the very different ways Lancelot and Gawain are described with respect to their sins and the attitudes with which they face their wrongful acts. The reason of my choosing Gawain here is that in comparison to other major knights (e.g., Perceval, Bors and Galahad, etc.) in the Holy Grail quest, Gawain is deprived of gaining a vision of the Holy Grail because of his sinfulness but together with Lancelot he returns to the Arthurian court alive and survives till the end of the romance. As a result, Gawain stands as a counterpart to Lancelot in respect of his sins and repentance. The result discovered should help us understand Malory's perspective on sin and repentance.

Chapter II

Sin of Gawain

One of the significant adaptations Malory undertakes in the *Morte* is that Lancelot replaces Gawain as the key protagonist in the Arthurian Literature. Gawain in many versions of the Arthurian Literature is the chief knight of Arthur's court but Malory's *Morte* does not conform to that tradition. This shift of subjects indicates Malory's mind of a different perspective as D.S. Brewer thinks that such remodeling of Malory's sources is an example of Malory's independent view of the characters. Brewer further elaborates on Malory's alteration by saying that "Malory accepts Lancelot's predominance, but presents a Gawain of some complexity in the last two main sections" (23). It is believed that the downfall of Camelot is, apart from Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery, due to Gawain's outrage at Lancelot's unfortunate killing of Sir Gareth that leads to his final deadly revenge. On his deathbed, Gawain repents that his pride causes the breakdown when Arthur's kingdom is threatened by the imminent war waged by the treacherous Mordred.

However, although Lancelot and Gawain are to be blamed for bringing down the Round Table court, it seems that Malory, while sympathetic to Lancelot and showing lenience in addressing his sin, displays Gawain in an unfavorable light and much condemnation is imposed on him. Therefore this chapter hopes to delineate Gawain's sin by looking at its causes and the way Malory presents the issue and compare it to that of Lancelot. In addition, Gawain's sin should also be examined in the context of St. Thomas Aquinas' theology to unearth the difference from that of Lancelot. This chapter therefore aims to point out that although Gawain sins through his pride like Lancelot's adultery, pride and instability, Gawain is portrayed as a maliciously sinful knight and his wrongdoing is treated relentlessly from Malory's perspective. This is because Gawain persistently declines to admit his mistakes and

shows no signs of humility in front of God. Besides, the causes of Gawain's sin are of a more grievous nature than Lancelot's because Gawain sins out of personal resentment and he has an intention to wound Lancelot whereas Lancelot means no harm in his sinning. This characterization contrast between Lancelot and Gawain confirms once again Malory's sympathy for Lancelot's willingness to take blame and his repugnance for Gawain's refusal to recognize his misdeeds.

Gawain's pride comes chiefly from two roots: one is from his revengefulness against Lancelot in the final tale of *Morte* because he is convinced that defeating Lancelot is the way to get even; and the other is from his seeking personal glory in the Sangkreal Tale. On the first count, because Gawain is so intent upon his personal vengeance and further demands Arthur's renouncing of Lancelot's alliance, he ignores the safety of the Arthurian court and thus his revengefulness works as the direct cause for the downfall of the kingdom and consequently renders his act a sin of pride. As Gawain himself makes clear his sin by saying, "And thorow me and <my> pryde ye have all thys shame and disease, for had that noble knight, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys un happy warre had never ben begunne" (*Works* III, 1230.19-21). Nonetheless, the recognition has come too late because the Arthurian society is already on the verge of a breakdown. Indeed, it is not until Gawain is notified of Lancelot's killing of Gareth that Gawain loses grip of himself and gives way to hostility towards Lancelot. The final Tale of *Morte* opens with Sir Agravain and Mordred's malevolent disclosure to King Arthur the illicit love between Lancelot and Guinevere. Gawain for the time being, still attempts to vindicate Lancelot even after he is informed of his brother Sir Agravain's death, "'For I dare sey,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'my lady, your quene, ys to you both good and trew. And as for sir Launcelot, I dare say he woll make hit good uppon ony knight lyvyng that woll put uppon hym vylany or shame, and in lyke wyse he woll make good for my

lady the queene” (*Works* III, 1175.14-18). When reminded by Arthur of Lancelot’s killing of his brothers and sons, Gawain replies,

‘My lorde,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘of all thys I have a knowlwche, whych of her dethis sore repentis me. But insomuch as I gaff hem warnynge and tolde my brother and my sonnes they wolde nat do be my counccyle, I woll nat meddyll me thereof, nor revenge me nothyng of their dethys; for I tolde them there was no boote to styve with sir Launcelot. Howbehit I am sory of the deth of my brother and of my two sunnes, but they ar the causars of their owne dethe; for oftyntymes I warned my brother sir Aggravayne, and I tolde hym of the perellis [the which ben now fallen].’ (*Works* III, 1176.1-10)

The passage illustrates that Gawain continues to defend Lancelot and is able to analyze the death of his sibling and sons with sound judgment. Yet, this does not last long when Gawain is notified of the death of Sir Gaherys and Gareth, who are sent by Arthur to oversee the execution of Guinevere after Gawain refuses to do so. Gawain’s disposition shifts thereafter and his brotherhood with Lancelot is destroyed because of this killing. Suffering from loss of his beloved, Gawain is determined to fight Lancelot, “hit ys my quarrel to fight with the because of the dethe of my brother, sir Gareth” (*Works* III, 1191.13-14). Later on, when Lancelot is explaining to Gawain that his killing of Gareth is caused by his failure to recognize him and asks for his forgiveness, Gawain answers with rancour and bitterness,

I have right well harde thy langayge and thy grete proffers. But wyt thou well, lat the kynge do as hit pleasith hym, I woll never forgyff the my brothers dethe, and in especiall the deth of my brothir sir Gareth. And if myne uncle, kynge Arthur, wyll accorde with the, he shall lose my servys, for wyte thou well, . . . , thou arte bothe false to the kynge and to

me. (*Works III*, 1200.13-20)

With regard to Gawain's violent reaction towards this unfortunate killing, critics have been very sympathetic with Gawain, taking pity on his excessive rage and fatal vengeance for the loss of his kin. For example, Professor Eugene Vinaver remarks that Gawain's violent sentiments towards Lancelot is not from "vindictiveness, as in the French romance, but genuine grief that turns Lancelot's truest friend, Gawain, into a mortal enemy" (1621). Another critic, David Benson, asserts that, "The Gawain who approves of Lancelot's rescue and the Gawain who vows eternal revenge are not two inimical beings, but the same man following a single virtue" (271). His attitude is that Gawain is "honour bound" (271) to revenge in spite of Lancelot's unsuccessful recognition. Benson argues that Gawain takes revenge out of a sense of duty of chivalry that requires him to rescue his fellow knights in need. Therefore, he declares that, "Gawain is by no means frenzied with emotion and grief or atavistically defending his kin," but that Gawain is simply doing what accords to the Arthurian code in securing his honour by taking revenge for the untimely death of his fellow knights (271). In fact, David Benson believes that every knight in *Morte* is bound to the code of honor, i.e., every knight is obliged to do what chivalry required of them regardless of their personal account. David Benson makes such observation by drawing on the speech Gawain delivers upon hearing the death of Gareth. The speech is as follows,

'A, Jesu, save me my two brethirn!' seyde sir Gawayne, 'For full well wylt I,' sayde sir Gawayne, 'that sir Launcelot wolde rescow her, other ellis he wolde dye in that fylde; and to say the trouth he were nat of worship but if he had rescowed the quene, insomuch as she shulde have brete for his sake. And as in that,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'he hath done but knyghtly, and as I wolde have done myselff and I had stoned in lyke case.

But where ar my brethirn?’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘I mervayle that I se <nor>
[here] nat of them.’ (Works III, 1184.17-25)

In the above speech, Gawain actually approves Lancelot’s rescuing Guinevere on the ground to perform his knightly obligations and believes he would do the same in Lancelot’s position. Gawain’s adoption of revenge is under such circumstance in which knights are to carry out the dictates of chivalry even with reluctance. I do agree these two critics’ sympathy for Gawain and believe that perhaps Gawain’s dictates of honour or grief should drive him into that reluctant vengeance. It somehow seems to me that his vehement emotions override his prudence and reason at the expense of the safety of Camelot and that the critics’ view is grossly overlooking Gawain’s vagaries that lead him into extremities in the end. Gawain is carried away by his anguish regardless of Lancelot’s explanation and ultimately he becomes the contributor both to his own death and the breakdown of Arthur’s court.

However, I do sympathize with Gawain though in a reduced degree. I find Gray Babara Bartholomew’s view acceptable in that he sympathizes with Gawain but also recognizes his drawbacks in causing the final tragedy. He thinks that Gawain has two seemingly unreconciled characters though not split character, the best and the worst. Bartholomew is convinced that it is only out of humanity that Gawain is kind at times and wicked at others and contends that the characterization of Gawain by Malory is composed of “obvious inconsistencies of virtue and evil” (262). For instance, when Pellinor, the murderer of Gawain’s father, is honored by Merlin, Gawain bitterly speaks about killing the murderer.¹ Bartholomew says that,

¹ Gawain’s exact expression is, “And thereat had sir Gawayne *grete envy* and tolde Gaherys hys brother. ‘Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, which grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir kyng Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym’” (Works III, 102.10-14)

“Concern for a slain father is noble, but ‘grete envy,’ no matter how human an emotion, is a mortal sin” (265). Bartholomew comes to the conclusion that in Gawain, readers see a “bold juxtaposition of Cardinal Virtue and Deadly Sin” and this is to “present Gawain as typical of the best and the worst in the Round Table fellowship” (267). This signifies that Gawain is justified in resorting to vengeance for the loss of his loved ones on the basis of humanity but excessive emotions of his cannot be simply accounted for on the ground of humanity. Instead, Gawain should be held responsible for himself. I think Bartholomew expounds clearly that although Gawain is a victim of the tragic killing of his siblings, Gawain’s ill humour and impetuosity explain why later he seeks revenge on Lancelot which ultimately brings down the entire Arthur’s court. From another perspective, the incident of Gawain tricking Sir Pelleas enables us to see more about vengeance. Gawain has learned of Pelleas’ unrequited love for a lady and promises to bring Pelleas the lady to ease his pining by deception of Pelleas’ being murdered by Gawain. However, it turns out that “there was made a bedde, and there Sir Gawayne and Ettarde wente to bedde togedyrs” (*Works I*, 169.32-33). After Gawain has set out to look for Ettarde, Pelleas also goes on a journey in search of Gawain but finds himself betrayed by the sight of the couple lying together in bed. And then, “he toke his horse and might nat abyde no lenger for pure sorow” (*Works I*, 170.18-19). However, after he has left and rides half a mile, “he turned agayne and thought for to sle hem bothe” (*Works I*, 170.19-20). Nevertheless in the end, Pelleas decides to walk away quietly and leaves his sword with them as a token of his discovery. At this point, even though Pelleas is not so noble as to exclude the idea of vengeance, I do not feel repulsed by the thought because it is Gawain who has wronged Pelleas in the first place. The thing is that Pelleas fights back the impulse of murder by means of his sense of honor and duty as the account goes,

And whan he saw hem lye so bothe slepyng faste, tha<n> unnethe he might holde hym on horseback for sorow, and seyde thus to himself: “Though this knight be never so false, I woll never sle hym slepyng—for I woll never dystroy the hyghe order of knyghthode,” and therewith he departed agayne. (*Works* I, 170.20-25)

Pelleas’ reaction, from his first move to take leave, then to the idea of killing and finally coming to composure by observing his chivalric code, forms a stark contrast to Gawain’s. Pelleas’ case shows that one is able to overcome his emotions and act in accordance with reason even under the circumstances of being wronged with injustice. Besides, Gawain is neither betrayed nor duped like Pelleas but that he is grieved at Gareth’s death. Some might protest my assertion that I am being unfair in comparing their responses because their misfortunes are of different types. I must say that I consider the mishaps a great blow to them respectively but I argue that if Pelleas, stricken by betrayal from his friend and lover, can resist the urge to slay on account of knighthood, Gawain, attacked by strong feelings, could have chosen to do the same too, yet he chooses to kill.

Although vengeance for clansmen is to a certain degree understandable and deserves sympathy, one can choose to act in a non-violent way. For instance, during Tristram’s visit at the Anwysse’s court, the queen discovers that, by identifying a dent in Tristram’s sword, he is the killer of her brother, Marhault. This piece of intelligence is disclosed to king Angwysse and Tristram is interrogated for confirmation of the killing. After the homicide is verified and the king’s inquiries are satisfied, the king, though enraged at his clansman’s death, seeks no revenge. Instead, the king says, “I [the king] may nat sey but ye dud as a knyght sholde do and as hit was youre parte to do for your quarrel, and to encrewe you worship as a knyght sholde do. Howebehit I may nat mayntayne you in this contrey with my

worship but that I sholde displese many of my barownes and my wyff and my kynne” (Works I, 391.17-22). The king’s response implies that he acts according to discretion and the explanation offered by Tristram is taken into sound consideration. It also shows that vengeance for vengeance is not the only way to adopt on personal account of sorrow and rage. It depends on one’s will and wisdom on how to act.

Additionally, if one goes back for textual analysis, after the siege of Benwick, Gawain is wounded fatally by Lancelot’s strike and on his deathbed Gawain begins to recall and reflect on his emotional outrage,

‘A, my uncle,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘now I woll that ye wyte that my deth-dayes be come! And all I may wyte myne owne hastynes and my *wy[l]fulnesse*, for thorow my *wylfulnes* I was causer of myne owne dethe; for I was thy day hurte and smitten uppon myne old wounde that sir Launclot gaff me, and I fele myself that I muste nedis be dede by the owre of noone. *And thorow me and <my> pryde ye have all thys shame and disese*, for had that noble knight, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne; for he thorow hys noble knyghthod and hys noble bloode, hylde all youre cankyrde enemyes in subjeccison and dangere.

(Works III, 1230.18-29, emphasis mine)

In this confessional speech, Gawain admits clearly that he sins through pride. As elaborated in Lull’s treatise and manifested in the Church’s dogma, *pryde* like Lancelot’s sin *lachenies*, belongs to the seven deadly sin. This is a proof that Gawain considers himself sinful and attempts no escape to excuse himself from the final tragedy of Camelot. His own confession supports my argument of the knight’s culpability and corresponds to the comparison with Pelleas and Tristram.

So, the first cause of Gawain’s pride is revenge, the second cause manifested in

the Sankgreal Tale is Gawain's search for distinction from his fellow-knights; and for such desire of personal achievement Gawain fails in the quest. For instance, after Gawain sets out on the Holy Grail quest, his eagerness in the quest starts to wane gradually when he finds that he does not encounter as many adventures as Sir Galahad and Lancelot do. On the way of his search, Gawain comes to an abbey where one of his fellow knights, Melyas, lies sick in bed. As Melyas recounts the marvelous adventures Galahad has encountered, Gawain complains about his lack of similar adventures. One of the monks in the abbey tells Gawain that it is because of his wickedness and sinfulness that his chances to encounter adventures are deprived.

'Sertes,' side sir Gawayne, I am nat happy that I toke nat the way that he wente. For and I may nete with hym I woll nat departe from hym lightly, for all mervaylous adventures sir Galahad enchevith.'

'Sir' seyde one of the munkes, 'he woll nat of youre felyship.'

'Why so?' seyde sir Gawayne.

'Sir,' seyde he, 'for ye be wicked and synfull, and he ys full blyssed.'

(*Works II*, 890.21-29)

Later, when Gawain comes to a hermitage and enquires a priest of the monk's comment, the priest replies,

'He myght well sye hit,' seyde the eremite, 'for whan ye were made first knight ye sholde have takyn you to knightly dedys and virtuous lyvyng. And ye have done the contrary, for ye have lyved myschevously many wyntirs. . . . (*Works II*, 891.30-33)

The remarks of the monk and the hermit suggest that Malory intentionally directs readers' attention to accentuate Gawain's culpability. This narrative technique is starkly contrasting to that of Lancelot because Malory obviously attempts to eschew emphasizing the latter's sinfulness. Malory has great concern for Lancelot and looks

up to him in many aspects. For instance, in the tale of Sir Urry's healing, Lancelot is the only knight capable of performing such task after other knights have failed in it. Before commencing the healing demanded by king Arthur, Lancelot claims that he is aware that he has to oblige the king but also asserts, "But and I myght or durste, wyte you well I wolde nat take uppon me to towche that wounded knyght in that entent that I shulde psse all other knyghtes" (*Works* III, 1151.26-30) Malory takes care not to give Lancelot's intervention an impression of his sense of superiority but that he comes to rescue out of concern for his fellow. That Malory treats Gawain's sin in a different way is because Gawain dismisses with contempt those counsels to repent. This can be found in another incident of Gawain and Ector's encounter,

So on a day hit befelle that Gawayne mette with sir Ector de Maris, and aythir made grete joy of other. And so they tolde everyche other, and complained them gretely, that they coude fynde none adventure.

'Truly,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I am ny wery of thys queste and lothe I am to follow further in straunge contreyes.' (*Works* II, 941.6-11)

Gawain presumes that he deserves encountering adventures because of his greatness and such presumption implies that he is ignorant of the true significance of the Holy Grail quest, which should be understood in one's spiritual experience of God instead of physical display of valour in the battlefield. Moreover, Gawain's complaint of his lack of adventure also suggests his presupposition of a sense of superiority, which he believes will grant him the right to a vision of the Holy Grail. Little did he realize that viewing the Holy Grail depends on his purity rather than his feudalistic social status. Gawain's weariness of the adventure is interpreted by Ackerman as a sin of "spiritual sloth," meaning "a bored indifference towards religious and spiritual matters" (47). To make it plain, "spiritual sloth" is equal to "spiritual apathy," which means the inability to experience joy in the divine good (48). Ackerman

contends that Gawain is severely deficient in partaking the joy in the divine good because Gawain declines to do penance. When asked by a hermit, he replies “for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne” (*Works* II, 892.19-20). Ackerman sees Gawain’s reply as “a refusal evincing the sin of pride as well as that of spiritual sloth” (48). Gawain is more intended in seeking adventures which may be taken as a forum of entertainment than improving himself to partake in the divine good.

After Gawain refuses to do repentance, both he and Ector fall asleep in a chapel and in their slumber, they have a dream, in which there are “a rake of bullis, an hundrith and fyftty, that were proude and black, save three of hem was all whyght, and one had a blacke spotte” (*Works* II, 942.4-6). The dream sets its background in a meadow. After they wake up and sit up to converse about the dream they have had, they hear a voice but the source of which is unknown:

And anone com downe a voice which seyde ‘knyghtes full of evyll faith
and of poore beleve, thes two thynges have fayled you, and therefore ye
may nat com to the aventures of the Sankgreall!’ (*Works* II, 943.13-16)

Although being accused as knights of evil faith and poor belief and are left in bewilderment, the two knights ignore the voice and leave the chapel to look for a hermit to interpret their dream. According to the hermit’s explanation, a hundred and fifty bulls stand for the members of the Round Table and the fair meadow represent the Round Table itself which “oughte to be undirstonde humilite and paciens” (*Works* II, 946.7). The hermit further explains that,

At the rack ete an hondred and fyftty bullys, but they ete nat in the
medowe, for if they had, their hartes sholde have bene sette in humilite
and paciens; and *the bullis were proude and backe sauff only three.*

‘And by the bullys ys undirstonde the felyshyp of the Rounde Table

which for their synne and their wyckednesse bene blackenes ys as much to sey withoute good virtues or workes. And the three bulles which were whyght sauff only one had bene spotted? The too whyght betokenythe sir Galahad and sir Percivale, for they be maydyns and clene withoute spotte, and the thirde, that had a spotte, signifieth sir Bors de Gaynes, which trespassed but ony in hys virginite. But sithyn he kepyth hymselff so wel in chastite that all ys forgyffyn hym and hys myssededys. And why tho three were tyed by the neckes, they be three knyghtes in virginite and chastite, and there ys no pryde smitten in them.

‘And the blacke bullis which seyde, “go we hens”, they were tho which at Pentecoste at the hyghe feste toke uppon hem [to go] in the queste of the Sankgreall *withoute confession*: they myght nat entir in the medow of humilite and paciens. And therefore they turned into waste contreyes: that signifieth dethe, for there shall dye many off them. For everych of them shall sle other for *synne*. (Works II, 946.13-35, empasis mine)

The hermit’s advice makes explicit what it takes to be a knight of the Round Table: humility and patience. Only three bulls possess such qualifications and they are Galahad, Percivale and Bors whereas other knights are deprived of the vision of the Grail because of their “synne” and “wyckednesse.” What is of particular interest in the passage is that this comment implies Malory’s emphasis on a person’s inclination to confess even though he has done something wrong. For example, Bors has a “spotte” because of his breach of virginity. This refers to an incident where Bors is tempted by a lady’s invitation to lie with her. Luckily, Bor’s refusal to oblige the lady secures his reputation and hence he is “forgyffyn.” In implication, Malory values a knight by virtue of his ability to face and avoid misdeeds, rather than by his flawlessness. Seemingly, Malory gives more credit and weight to a knight who

struggles to become sanctified or in the process of ennobling, rather than a knight who is already perfect. And this is why the hermit concludes that those other knights “without confession” are denied the chance to enter the realm of “humilite and paciens” and as a result they fail in the Grail quest. The dream interpretation also suggests that Gawain’s failure to have adventures and obtain the vision of the Holy Grail is caused by lack of the two virtues mentioned and the ensuing pride. Furthermore, Gawain is blind to his own defects and thus is unwilling to acknowledge them, and this recognition generates Malory’s condemnation in his narrative technique.

Gawain’s Sin in Light of Chivalry and Theology

Gawain’s sin and its two causes are portrayed largely in the final tale and the Sankgreal Tale. This section proposes to make an in-depth analysis in light of Lull’s treatise and St. Thomas Aquinas’ doctrines. I take it that Gawain in these two perspectives is a foul knight deserving no right to see the Grail and that he is more sinful than Lancelot for the cause of his pride. Although there is no novelty in this part it corresponds fairly well to the thesis’ argument. First, Gawain in both tales is a sinful knight because of his overconfidence in himself that eventually leads him to the sin of pride and such mistaken idea deprives a knight of the two virtues necessary in comprehending the true meaning of the Grail, which is humility and patience. For instance, Lull admonishes knights to stay away from the seven deadly sins and pride is one of them. Lull says,

Pryde is a vyce of Inequality / or to be inegal to other and not lyke / for
a proud man wyllee haue no pere / ne egall to hym / but loueth better to
be alone not lyke any other / and therefore humylyte and strengthe ben
two vertues / that loue egalte / And in that they be ageynst pryde yf thou

prowde knyght wylt vaynquysshe thy pryde / Assemble within thy
 courage humylyte and strengthe / For humylyte without strengthe is
 nothyng / ne it maye not holde ageynst pryde / And pryde maye not be
 vaynuysshed / but by that / whan thou shalt be armed and mounted vpon
 thy grete hors / thou shalt be paranenter proud / But yf strengthe of
 Humylyte make the to remembre the reson / thentencion wherfor thou
 arte knyght thou shalt never be proud / And yf thou be proud / thou shalt
 neuer have strenthe in thy courage / by whiche thou mayst cast out proud
 thoughte. (Lull 104-105)

Lull clearly points out in the beginning that pride is a vice of inequality. Inequality is that a person considers himself better than others. He suggests that pride gives one a false impression of personal distinction and this causes one to set himself apart from other people by courting no company. Therefore pride is a vice of inequality because a proud man considers himself equal to none. And it is through humility and strength that a knight can cast out the proud thought. In Gawain's case, Gawain is proud so that he does not possess either humility or strength to resist "proud thoughte" and hence Gawain is not qualified to see the Grail. The explanation signifies that Gawain's transgression of the medieval chivalric code disqualifies him to see the Grail.

Comparatively speaking, in the context of Aquinas' theology, Gawain's pride is a mortal sin because Gawain fails to let his reason to come to rescue when he is so intent upon revenge. The deliberate ignorance of it makes the knight turn away from God. On the one hand, Gawain has failed in the Grail quest for the pursuit of personal glory. As for revengefulness on the other hand, Gawain has gone too far. Aquinas in an article talks about vengeance in terms of its lawfulness. He maintains that the avengers's intention must be taken in to consideration to determine its

lawfulness. Here, lawfulness is used in the sense of justification of one's act. In Aquinas' wording,

. . . , in the matter of vengeance, we must consider the mind of the avenger. For if his intention is directed chiefly to the evil of the person on whom he takes vengeance, and rests there, then his vengeance is altogether unlawful: because to take pleasure in another's evil belongs to hatred, which is contrary to the charity whereby we are bound to love all men. (*ST. Part II, Q.108, Art.1*)

Based on this reasoning, vengeance is unlawful when it is carried out in a vindictive mind and when the avenger intends solely to impose evil on a person who has done wrong to him. This means vengeance is not absolutely sinful. Whether or not it is taken as sinful and something wrong depends on the situation and the context of the act. I find that Aquinas' thought is in concurrence with the book of *Romans* of the New Testament, which goes, "Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good" (12:21). The *Romans* urges to take no vengeance on your enemy and "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink" (12:20). Nonetheless, there are cases in which vengeance can be termed lawful when,

the avenger's intention be directed chiefly to some good, to be obtained by means of the punishment of the person who has sinned (for instance that the sinner may amend, or at least that he may be restrained and others be not disturbed, that justice may be upheld, and God honored), then vengeance may be lawful, . . . (*ST. Part II, Q.108, Art.1*)

What Aquinas suggests is that if vengeance is employed for the purpose of achieving some good from the sinner, vengeance is lawful on this condition. With the explication on vengeance, we can discern from Gawain's case that he inflicts vengeance upon Lancelot because of the latter's killing his siblings by mistakes.

Gawain's intention is set completely on getting even with the latter by violence instead of inspiring Lancelot to some good, and that motivation makes his vengeance unlawful and consequently unjustifiable. In other words, Gawain has been overcome by evil thought and hatred rather than "overcome evil by good." Thus, Gawain's sin of pride that arises from this unlawful vengeance renders him all the more sinful.

A similar situation can be found in Sir Bors and his brother, Sir Lyonell. Lyonell is furious about Bors' choosing to rescue a lady before coming to his rescue and vows to take revenge by slaying his brother. Bors' entreaty for forgiveness is in vain, "Fayre swete brother, have mercy upon me and sle me nat, and have in remembraunce the grete love which oughte to be between us two" (*Works II*, 970.10-12). During the duel, Lyonell kills a hermit and a fellow knight who tries to settle the scores. Lyonell's random killing suggests that he might be as impetuous as Gawain. Lyonell's remark in response to his fellow knight's exhortation to refrain from fratricide also indicates the extent of his rage close to that of Gawain. He says bitterly, "Yee, sley hym woll I, whoso seyth the contrary! For he hath done so mucche ayenst me that he hath well deserved hit" (*Works II*, 971.25-26). Bors is thus forced to fight with his brother but suddenly they both hear a voice coming out of nowhere that says, "Fle, sir Bors, and towche hym nat, other ellis thou shalt sle hym!" (*Works II*, 974 1-2). Although knowing he has the advantage to win the duel, Bors pleads earnestly for his brother's mercy and finally Lyonell relents. Bors says, "For Goddis love, fayre swete brother, forgyff me my trespass!" and Lyonell responds, "God forgyff you, and I do gladly." What can be seen from this case is that even though Lyonell is wronged by his own brother and that he has a short temper as that of Gawain, Lyonell knows to refrain himself from excessive rage and finally spares his brother for the sake of God and brotherly affection. In addition, that Lyonell

shows mercy for his brother after God is realization of the idea “overcome good by evil.” Comparatively, Gawain gives way to his vehement emotions and does not hesitate to kill and refuses to relent at Lancelot’s pleading for mercy even after hearing Lancelot’s explanation. Hatred has taken over Gawain’s heart so that his vengeful desire to kill becomes malicious and evil. There is no fraternal love between him and Lancelot; neither is there fellowship of the Round Table knights.

Malory’s Commendation and Condemnation

Notwithstanding Gawain’s sinfulness, a number of scholars and critics have endeavoured to expound on Malory’s attitude towards Gawain. They have been troubled by whether Malory has debased or sympathized with the knight by digging into Malory’s sources and comparing them with his own work. Most researches conclude, however, that Malory condemns Gawain’s sins. For instance, Moorman asserts that Malory “at every opportunity . . . degrades the character of Gawain” (“The Tale of the Sankgreal” 201) In another respect, Martin B. Shichtman holds an opposite opinion. Shichtman, by means of examining Malory’s omission of a vigorous attack on Gawain’s in his French source, notes that this deletion demonstrates Malory’s commiseration for the knight.² He remarks, “Malory has

² For lack of resource and language barrier, I present the French attack in translation from Shichtman’s note in the article, “In justice, sir, were you called a bad and faithless servant. You were not admitted to the order of chivalry to soldier in the devil’s cause thenceforward, but in order to serve our Maker, defend Holy Church and render at last to God that reassurance which He entrusted to your safekeeping, namely your soul. To this end were you made a knight, and you, Gawain, have abused your knighthood. For you have been henchman to the enemy, forsaking your Maker and living the worst and most dissolute life that ever a knight lived. Now you can clearly see that he who called you a bad and faithless servant knew you well” (*La Queste del Saint Graal*, trans. P.M. Matarasso, New York, 1969. For the French version, please refer to *La Queste del Saint Grail*, ed. Albert Pauphilet, Paris, 1923.

more sympathy for Gawain than did the authors of his French source. Although Malory does not allow the knight to repent his having initiated the quest (Gawain expresses his regrets in the *Queste*), he does not depict him as a depraved, unredeemable individual either” (167). Both sides of the comments earn their own credit for regarding the issue from differing positions. My argument does not intend to defend either of them though my contention here tends to be in agreement with the latter. I propose that by reviewing the way Gawain’s sin is presented and by making a comparison to that of Lancelot, the findings show that Malory does condemn Gawain and puts aside sympathy for the sinful knight. This study also makes an assumption that Gawain is blamed for his sin and also his disinclination to repent. On the other hand, Lancelot, though sinful, is commended for his inclination to recognize his misdeeds and to redress them.

Gawain’s sin is depicted in the way of a man driven by desire to glorify himself and unlike Lancelot, he is labelled by the hermit as being “wycked and synfull, and he [Lancelot] ys full blyssed” (*Works* II, 890) and alleged to “have lyved myschevously many wyntirs” (*Works* II, 891). This unreserved criticism, which forms as a contrast to the commendation Lancelot is described with, verifies Malory’s condemnation of Gawain. The hermit’s answer in explaining the reason why he failed in his quest for the Holy Grail helps further our argument here,

‘Sertes,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘full sothly have ye seyde, that I se hit opynly. Now I pray you telle me why we mette nat with so many adventures as we were wonte to do?’

‘I shall telle you gladly,’ seyde the good man. ‘The adventure of the Sankgreal which be in shewynge now, [ye and many other have undertaken the quest of hit and fynde hit not,] for hit aperith nat to no sinners wherefore mervayle ye nat thou[gh] ye fayle thereof and many

other, for ye bene an untrew knyght and a grete murtherar, and to good men signifieth other thynges than murthir. For I dare sey, as sunfull as ever sir Launcelot hath byn, sith that he wente into the qeste of the Sankgreal he slew never man nother nought shall, tylle that he come to Camelot agayne; *for he hath takyn [upon] hym to forsake synne.* And ne were that he ys nat stable, but by hys thoughte he ys lykly to turne agayne, he sholde be nexte to enchev[e] hit sauff sir Galahad, hys sonne; but God knowith hys thought and hys unstableness. And yet shall he dye right an holy man, and no doute he hath no fellow of none earthly synfull man lyvyng. (*Works II*, 948.11-29)

This passage bears two implications. First, it is because Lancelot and Gawain both have sinned, they fail to see the Holy Grail. However, Lancelot is being valued for his inclination “to forsake synne.” For Lancelot, his adultery is deliberately mitigated by Malory’s intentional omission of the love scenes in the text and hence Lancelot’s sin of pride and instability are apparently reduced. This is because Malory on purpose wants to stress and commend Lancelot’s willingness to take the blame than the actual content of the sin. This sends out an important Malorian message that his ideal knight does not necessarily have to be flawless but that his value depends on his ability to recognize his deficiency and his intention to redress it in face of God’s grace.

Secondly, the hermits points out one more issue that is worthy of note accusing Gawain of being “a grete murtherar.” When Gawain goes to the hermit to enquire about his lack in encountering adventures, the hermit comments that although Lancelot is sinful, he slays no man but Gawain commits sin as well as murders men and this is why Gawain is penalized to have encounter no adventures. In fact, on the subject of murder, Malory has displayed his evaluation of both Lancelot and Gawain

by different means. Gawain's wish to murder Lancelot is motivated by his sad loss of Gareth in the last tale and earlier on Gawain has also murdered King Pellinor for the death of his father, King Lott. As the account goes, "But kynge Pellynore bare the wyte of the dethe of kynge Lott, wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the tenthe yere aftir he was made knyght, and slew kynge Pellynor hys owne hondis" (*Works* I, 77.18-22). The killing of King Pellinore in blood revenge foreshadows Gawain's later vow of vengeance against Lancelot for the death of his brothers. Ackerman argues that such revenge is "not very reputable and that Gawain is reprehensible in accomplishing it" (160). In addition, Ackerman assumes that,

He [Gawain] is a man whose best intentions are undermined by a host of human frailties. In the context of Malory's work, Gawain's family loyalties seem understandable, though, at times, plainly excessive and misguided. (160)

What Ackerman means by "family loyalties" is Gawain's affection for his family yet Gawain exerts his family affection too far by adopting revengeful murder as his means to express family affection. More than vindicating the death of his father, Gawain extends his revenge to King Pellinor's son, Lamorak. In the opinion of Ackerman, Lamorak's execution is enacted in a "debased," "not dignified" and even "contemptible" (161) manner because during the fight Lamorak has been outnumbered by four knights, including Gawain. That means, Gawain is not conducting a fair play. He wants to win by hook or by crook and that makes him disgraceful. Sir Palomydes recalls this battling scene of Lamorak with Gawain and three other knights in the following episode:

sir Lamorak was slayne he ded the moste dedis of armys that ever I saw knyght do in my lyeff, and whan he was gyvyn the gre be my lorde kynge Arthure, sir Gawayne and his three bretherne, sir Agravayne, sir Gaherys

and sir Mordred, sette uppon sir Lamorak in a privy place, and there they slew his horse. And so they faught with hym on foote more than three owrys bothe byfore hym and behynde hym, and so sir Mordrede gaff hym his dethis wounde behynde hym at his bake. (*Works II*, 699.17-26)

This episode gives the impression of Gawain's ruthlessness and unchecked rage in seeking revenge and so Gawain has done Lamorak injustice in teaming up with other three knights to fight against the lone Lamorak. Medieval chivalry demands that when knights fight, they have to be on equal footing, including battling on a one to one basis without helping hands and ambush. Gawain and his group first kill Lamorak's horse, putting him to his disadvantage and then attacking him from all sides, signifying torture and foul play. Palomides, a Saracen knight, does not approve the unfair fight and so makes the unusual remark as above.

Another dishonorable killing can be found in the Grail quest when Gawain and his other fellow knights, Gareth and Uwayne, slay seven knights at the Castle of Maidens. Gawain discovers later that the seven knights are representative of seven deadly sins. It is written in the text, "And therewith the seven knyghtes sette uppon hem three knyghtes. And by fortune sir Gawayne slew one [of] the brethren, and ech one of hys felowys overthrew another, and so slew al the remenaunte" (*Works II*, 891.1013). On their way during the quest, they encounter a hermit who explains to them the apparition of the seven knights at the Castle,

"the Castell of Maydyns betokenyth the good soulys that were in preson before the Incarnacion of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. And the seven knyghtes betokenyth the seven dedly synnes that regned that tyme in the worlde" (*Works II*, 892.7-11)

Although the seven deadly sins deserve eradication, Gawain and his fellow knights have done the killing in ignorance of the seven knights' identity. That is to say, the

incident indicates that Gawain acts on impulse instead of doing it with reason and judgment. Contrastively, Galahad also encounters the seven knights earlier than Gawain and he fights with them but he does not kill them when he can. As a result, Gawain's slaying of the seven knights is very much condemned by the hermit who compares his murder with Galahad's avoidance of such killing and makes the following comment,

sir Galahad ys a mayde and synned never, and that ys the cause he shall enchyve where he goth that ye nor none suche shall never sttayne, nother none in youre felyship, for ye have used the moste untewyst lyff that ever I herd knyght lyve. For sertes, had ye nat bene so wycked as ye ar, never had the seven brethren be slayne by you and youre two felowys: for sir Galahad himself alone bete hem all seven the day toforne, but hys lyvyn ys such that he shall sle no man lightly. (*Works II*, 891.33-892.6)

These two incidents of dishonorable killing imply that Gawain not only has the intention to sin but that his foul play and impulsive killing marks his culpability in chivalry. Even in the eyes of ordinary man, his behavior is condemnable. There is certainly a dark side in his chivalric career. Thus, Malory in fact takes no pity on Gawain in the story but condemns him for his sinfulness.

Contrary to the case of Gawain, Malory presents Lancelot's fighting without delineating similar kinds of blood violence, revenge and impulsiveness and does not particularly portray his killing as a sinful act. Instead, Lancelot's battling is shown to be a demonstration of his morality and ethics, with which a true knight is supposed to possess. For example, in the Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake, Lancelot encounters an adventure in which his fellow knight, Sir Kay, is outnumbered by three opponents and decides to help Sir Kay because he believes that "hit were shame for me to se three knyghtes on one, and yf [he] be there slayne I am partener of his deth"

(*Works I*, 273.13-14). Lancelot successfully subdues the attackers to come to the rescue of Sir Kay but he asks the attackers to submit themselves to Sir Kay not himself. The account goes,

'Sir knyght, we yelde us unto you as a man of myght makeles.'

'As to that, I woll nat take youre yeldyng unto me, but so that ye woll yelde you unto thys knyght; and on that convenaunte I woll save youre lyvys, and ellys nat.'

'Fayre knyght, that were us loth, for as for that knyght, we chaced hym hydir, and had overcome hym, had nat ye bene. Therefore to yelde us unto hym hit were no reson.'

'Well, as to that, avyse you well, for ye be yolden hit shall be unto sir Kay.'

'Now, fayre knyght,' they seyde, 'in saving of oure lyvys, we woll do as thou commaundys us.'

'Than shall ye,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'on Whystsonday nexte commynge go unto the courte of kynge Arthure, and there shall ye yelde you unto quene Gwenyvere and putte you all three in hir grace and mercy, and say that sir Kay sente you thydir to be her presoners.'

(*Works I*, 273.29-274.11)

Ultimately, Lancelot does not only give mercy to those three knights but demands them to yield to Sir Kay when in reality it is Lancelot who defeats them. Lancelot's declining to take credit for the victory draws our attention to his sense of ethics and humility. He keeps in mind the provenance of the fight and does not scheme to take advantage of it. He is aware that the victory over the fight belongs to Sir Kay because this is his fight and he puts up no air of condescendence in giving Sir Kay the credit. His initial plunging into Sir Kay's succour is due to his genuine concern for

an imperiled fellow knight whereas Gawain carries out his killing because of his evil attention and outrage. Showing mercy to his opponents is the least concern in Gawain's mind in this incident. Being merciful is also a part that Gawain lacks and for this Malory condemns Gawain more than he does with Lancelot.

In addition, contrary to Lancelot, Malory also deliberately describes Gawain as a knight breaking away from the Pentecostal oath.³ In Kennedy's survey, Gawain is believed to have "violated nearly every one of Arthur's injunctions" (66). For example, when traveling with his brother Gaheris and being infuriated by the killing of his hounds, Gawain refuses to give mercy to his opponent after he has beaten him to the ground. Even though Sir Blamoure of the Maryse offers to "make amendys" for what he has done, Gawain determines that he must die "for sleyng of my howndis" (*Works* I, 106.15-16). As he prepares to strike off his head, Sir Blamoure's "sovereign lady" (*Works* I, 105.28) rushes in to throw herself over his body and so "by myssefortune" Gawain strikes off her head instead (*Works* I, 106.20-21). Gawain's younger brother is just as quick to blame his brother as he was to praise:

"Alas," seyde Gaherys, "that ys fowle and shamefully done, for that shame shall never frome you. Also ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knight withoute mercy ys withoute worship."

(*Works* I, 106.22-25)

Kennedy views the above as Gawain's violation of the Pentecostal oath. First,

³ King Arthuer specifically asks his Round Table Knights to follow the Pentecostal oath that reads "never to do outrage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that lordship of kynge Arthure for evermore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damsels, and jantilwomen and sydowes [socour] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a wronefull quarrel for no love ne for no worldis goodis." (*Works* I, 120.15-25)

Gawain's denial of giving mercy to Sir Blamoure is outrageousness and is a disregard of the admonition, "never to do outrage nothir mourthir" and the fight is a "wronfull quarrell" because it is based on a revenge for the death of his hunting dogs. A trivial matter has unnecessarily been blown up, making the deadly fight ludicrous and unjust. The killing of Sir Blamoure's lady, though an accident, also renders his courtly service to the ladies a total failure. In light of the above context, Gawain has been portrayed to have sinned more grievously through his merciless killing which at the same time violating the Pentecostal code.

Though Lancelot and Gawain sin in different manners, we note that they share the sin of pride. However, their sin of pride has a different level of implication too. Lambert's comparison between the sins of Gawain and Lancelot warrants further discussion and strengthens the argument of this thesis. We recall that Lambert specifies Gawain's pride in the final tale of the *Morte* comes from his revengefulness and holds Gawain's share of responsibility for the downfall of the Round Table. Moreover, Lambert directs our attention to a mourning speech made by Lancelot that addresses his pride after Lancelot and Guinevere retreat to monastic life. Lancelot, upon hearing Guinevere's death, goes to see Guinevere with all dispatch but is too late and what he sees is merely Guinevere's corpse wrapped in cloth.

"Truly," sayd syr Launcelot, "I trust I do not dysplese God, for He knoweth myn entent: for my sorow was not, nor is not, for ony rejoysyng of synne, but my sorow may never have ende. For whan I remember of hir beaulte and of hir noblesse, that was bothe with hyr kyng and with hyr, so whan I sawe his corps and hir corps so lye togyders, truly myn herte wold not serve to susteyne my careful body. Also whan I remember me how by my *defaute* and myn *orgule* and my *pryde* that they were bothe layde full owe, that were pereles that ever was lyvyng of Cristen people,

wyt you wel, “ sad syr Launcelot, “this remembred, of their kyndenesand
 myn unkyndenes, sanke so to myn herte that I myght not susteyne
 myself.” (*Works* III, 1256.26-38, emphasis mine)

Lambert’s observation makes it clear that while Gawain’s pride is easy to identify that of Lancelot is difficult to define. Lambert believes that although Lancelot is held responsible for the tragedy of Camelot, he keeps holding back to fight with both Arthur and Gawain and when finally brought to war it is against his will. Hence, “our sense of the culpability of Lancelot’s pride hardly exists at this point,” and that rather than “Lancelot’s self-accusation, even more than Gawain’s or Guinevere’s, it is the nobility of the act of blame-taking the reader responds to rather than the content of the analysis” (218). In other words, Lambert asserts that Lancelot’s willingness to take blame and to recognize his wrongful acts distinguish him from the same culpable deeds of other knights. For example, Balin kills king Arthur’s visitor, the Lady of the Lake, to avenge his mother’s death in the king’s presence. Taking the killing as extremely shameful and feeling utterly offended, king Arthur is furious and asks Balin to repent it.⁴ Balin’s act is also blamed by his own squire who comments, “ye are grete to blame for to displese kyng Arthure” (*Works* I, 66.30-31). However, in face of Arthur’s great displeasure and the squire’s accusation, Balin still refuses to admit the mistake and after he leaves the court, he devises to kill the tyrant king Royns in order to win back Arthur’s affection.⁵ This comparison shows that Balin

⁴ Out of anger, king Arthur says, “‘For what cause soever ye had,’ seyde Arthure, ‘ye sholde have forborne in my presence. Therefore thynke nat the contrary: ye shall repente hit, for such another despite had I nevir in my courte. Therefore withdraw you oute of my courte in all the haste that ye may.’” (*Works* I, 66.15-19).

⁵ Balin is convinced that he can have Arthur’s respect again if he can “mete with kyng Royns and destroy hym, other ellis to dye therefore. And iff hit may happe me to wynne hym, than woll kyng Arthure be my good frende” (*Works* I, 66.33-35).

has no will to recognize his wrongdoing even when the act is viewed evil and he is advised to repent it. Balin even naively thinks that the way to undo his mistakes is through another killing, if the idea of amending is what motivates him. Therefore, the comparison of Lambert gives us good reason to conclude that though Malory has these two knights take the blame for the breakdown of the Arthurian court, Malory is making Lancelot more excusable and his sinfulness is much erased from the author's narrative technique because of his disposition to acknowledge his sinfulness. Humbleness qualifies him to be pardonable.

Looking at the above discussion of the rhetorical situation of Lancelot and Gawain one sees that these two knights have committed similar type of mortal sins but Malory does not try to tarnish his ideal knight Lancelot to be as sinful as Gawain. What is noteworthy is that Malory does not alter Lancelot's status as "the best of ony synfull man of the world." Lancelot's virtues and his status as a knight of most worship and renown are constantly stressed by Malory much as his sinfulness. Comparatively, Gawain is oftentimes condemned and described in a villainous manner. What makes the difference between these two knights is, according to Ness,

Lancelot has achieved the highest adventure of the Grail available to him because he has gone as far as possible to overcome the effect of sin on his spiritual condition. . . ; and the implicit comparisons between Lancelot and the elect knights, and also between Lancelot and the irredeemable knights Gawain and Hector, throw his position into relief.

(88)

Therefore no matter it is in Malory's narrative technique or Aquinas' explication of sin, Lancelot's sin has been handled with less condemnation and more sympathy while that of Gawain finds less compassion from both sides. Accordingly, the following chapter will explore more on the issue regarding how these two knights

recognize their sins and set out to do repentance. Moreover, even in terms of repentance, the consequences of Lancelot and Gawain are different consequences resulting from how they approach the practice.

Chapter III

Repentance of Lancelot and Gawain

This chapter aims to verify the argument by examining the repentance pattern of these two knights. It is found that Malory readily grants Lancelot forgiveness and denies Gawain an equal opportunity by having the two knights go through different repenting processes. The results derived from their different repentance patterns are caused by their attitudes with which they handle their sins respectively. Because men will sin, many of us are anxious to seek forgiveness for fear of God's judgment and punishment after death. In consequence, doing repentance is a way to cleanse our sins and be granted absolution. As recorded in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology* that a Catholic Christian has to go through three phases to complete the Sacrament of Penance, which include contrition, confession and satisfaction (795). This chapter will focus on the Catholic penitential practice, rather than the Reformed Church repentance, and approaches Lancelot and Gawain in light of it. Though these three stages of doing repentance have been discussed, I shall elaborate on the second stage of confession since this is also the part that will be stressed in my research. According to Hui-hua Wang's survey on Catholic confession, there are three parts in the conduct of it: (1) the priests' interrogation of the penitents on their background and the detection of the correctness of their religious understanding; (2) the penitents' confession of sin; (3) the imposition of penance and absolution (47).¹ The confessional rite begins with the priest's inquires into a penitent's background and this understanding helps the priest to conduct the confession by building up mutual trust between him and the penitent. In

¹ For more information, please refer to Thomas Tentle, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

addition, “priests are advised to give encouragement” (Wang 48) by giving the penitents to understand that “they are confessing to representatives of Christs” (Wang 48) and assuring the penitents of forgiveness if they truly repent. The penitents then goes on to confess and the

confessions have to fulfill the requirements of being honest, complete, succinct and frank, being made with sorrow or contrition and with the intention to amend, and expressing correct understanding of sins.

(Wang 49).

The priests are the judge of the penitents’ heart in doing the repentance. It seems that the priests have the upper hand of the process but they are also bound by the seal of confession, i.e., they are not to reveal any sins confessed. In addition, the priests are “warned to conceal any disapproval [they] might feel at [the penitents’] sins partly for fear that the [penitents] will not give a complete confession for the possibility of being shamed and harassed” (Tentle, *Sin* 94, qtd. in Wang 50). After the sinners’ confession and the priests’ evaluation of its validity, the penitents receive absolution by the priests’ pronouncement and imposition of penance. Finally, the penitents will give alms and ask the priest to pray for them and take leave (Wang 50). This conduct of confession was and still is considered a good Christian practice and is encouraged. It is only by means of contrition and confession that subsequently the sinner is able to achieve satisfaction (795). Such a tripartite procedure forms the backbone and vital sequence in the Christian understanding of repentance. Repentance, therefore, is not a wish, a whimsical desire, or something to pay lip service to. Instead, the sinner has to earnestly go through these trials before he is cleansed.

St. Thomas Aquinas on Repentance

A full and comprehensive view of the notion of repentance is discussed in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, part III, questions 84-90 and in the Supplement, questions 1-28. The major issues of the subject include the effects of penance, the return of virtues by penance, the parts of penance and the minister who has the power of keys. First of all, Aquinas confirms the power of the effect of penance in responding to an objection that not all sins can be taken away by penance. However, Aquinas considers penance to be able to remove all sins based on the two following reasons,

First, because this is contrary to Divine mercy, of which it is written that God is gracious and merciful, patient, and rich in mercy and ready to repent of the evil . . . Secondly, because this would be derogatory to the power of Christ's Passion, through which Penance produces its effect, as do the other sacraments since it is written. Therefore we must say simply that, in this life, every sin can be blotted out by true Penance.

(*ST. Part III, Art. 86*)

One might find it hard to agree that whoever sins can be pardoned if he repents because in that case one might have no scruple to sin. But the concept is that both divine mercy and God's grace are regarded as supreme and nothing can exceed them, including the evil. Hence Aquinas is convinced that every sin can be remitted and forgiven through repentance and remission; forgiveness is a demonstration of God's mercy and grace that excludes no one even if he is sinful. If there were unforgivable sins, it would mean that the power of evil was greater than the grace of God. Therefore, sins can be forgiven if it goes through the necessary cleansing process.

After his explication on the effects of repentance, Aquinas continues to discuss the recovery of virtue by penance. In this part, he suggests that man at once rises

again to equal virtue and is restored to his former dignity after his penance. Aquinas thinks that man by sinning loses twofold dignity, one in respect of God, and the other in respect of the Church. Yet Aquinas believes that the penitent recovers “something greater sometimes” through doing repentance and he quotes Gregory the Great to support his claim,

Those who acknowledge themselves to have strayed away from God, make up for their past losses, by subsequent gains: so that there is more joy in heaven on their account, even as in battle, the commanding officer thinks more of the soldier who, after running away, returns and bravely attacks the foe, than of one who has never turned his back, but has done nothing brave.²

From the quoting and the passage itself, it can be inferred that both Aquinas and Gregory the Great are praising those who, after recognizing their misdeeds, are willing to confront them and by practicing repentance, redress the misdeeds and work on satisfaction, they will resume to receive God’s grace. Furthermore, Aquinas’ quotation of the passage reflects how he views the penitents. Instead of treating them as unforgivably sinful, Aquinas sees them as those who are capable of demonstrating greater virtues by repentance even after they sin. Unlike the Chinese thinking that teaches one to seek perfection, Western thinking has a tradition in viewing human with faults, the concept of which can be traced back to the Greek mythology where gods make mistakes just like humans. Hence, it is not shameful to

² Pope St. Gregory the Great (540-640), *Hom. De centum Ovibus, 34 in Ev.*, qtd. in *ST. Part III.*, Q.89, Art. 3. Gregory the Great is one of the most notable figures in ecclesiastical history. He has exercised in many respects a momentous influence on the doctrine, the organization, and the discipline of the Catholic Church. To him we look for an explanation of the religious situation of the Middle Ages.

have made mistakes, but disgraceful not to repent them. Similar ideas of valuing repentance can be found in Gregory the Great's theological thinking. Gregory Halfond, in reviewing Kevin Hester's book on Gregory, notes that Gregory the Great believes men's fall incurs pain from either external or internal and the understanding of the pain is quite different between the elect and the unrepentant sinners.³ Halfond quotes Hester's interpretation that "pain and suffering are for the elect a means of grace" (*Eschatology and Pain in Gregory* 75, qtd. in Halfond's review) but for the unrepentant sinner "pain serves a castigatory purpose, . . . , they are unable (and unwilling) to appreciate the justice in God's actions."⁴ This idea suggests that when one comes across misfortunes in life, he should look beyond it as a test that will guide him to God's grace. Else, those ungrateful for such trial are therefore denied salvation.

As for how penance should be practiced, Aquinas also maintains that the sinner has to go through the three stages: contrition, confession and satisfaction. Aquinas notes,

Accordingly the first requisite on the part of the penitent is the will to atone, and this is done by contrition; the second is that he submit to the judgment of the priest standing in God's place, and this is done in confession; and the third is that he atones according to the decision of God's minister, and this is done in satisfaction: and so contrition, confession, and satisfaction are assigned as parts of Penance.

³ Kevin Hester's book is *Eschatology and Pain in St. Gregory the Great*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster Press, 2007. Its new publication unables me to require a copy in Taiwan during my composition of this thesis and thus Halfond's online review of this book becomes the reference.

⁴ Halfond Gregory, rev. of *Eschatology and Pain in Gregory*, by Kevin Hester, *The Medieval Review* 08.5.13, 26 May 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tmr/>>.

(*ST. Part 3, Q. 90, Art. 3*)

Aquinas also claims that there is a difference between atonement in vindictive justice and penance. Whereas the atonement rests in the hands of the judge's decision in according to the will of the sinner, and the judgment of God" (*ST. Part III, Q.90, Art.3*). His thought denotes that it depends on the sinner's sincerity in repentance to effect pardon and the power lies in the hands of God. Accordingly, the sinner does not repent for the sole purpose of forgiveness but that pardon is meted out in accordance with the sinner's heart-felt feelings for the practice. Aquinas makes it clear that what matters first in the practice of penance is the sinner's will to repent and yet this does not mean that as long as a person does penance for his sins, the sinner is forgiven. Still, the dispensation of justice and forgiveness relies on God's judgment of the degree to which the sinner truly repents. Apart from forgiving the sinner himself, Aquinas further explains that penance is more than the remission of sin, "but also and still more the reconciliation of friendship, which is accomplished by the offender making atonement according to the will of the person offended" (*ST. Part III, Q.90, Art.3*). Hence, it can be seen that atonement is part and parcel of the repentance process which means mere desire or verbal expression to repent will not suffice for a person's sins to be forgiven.

Repentance of Lancelot and Gawain

In *Morte* after King Arthur's death Guinevere leads a religious life. Lancelot therefore follows her to adopt the same kind of life. Lancelot and Guinevere's final entry into a monastic life in the last tale is considered to be a sign of their way of doing penance and Lancelot's death shrouded in the odor of saintliness is taken as

Malory's intention to reinforce Lancelot's greatness.⁵ Larry Benson asserts that the moving tribute made by Sir Ector to the dead Lancelot is "a powerful reassertion of the virtues that Lancelot exemplified throughout his earthly life, and because Lancelot achieved his saintly end by remaining a true knight, Ector's threnody is by no means incongruent with Lancelot's holy death" (246).⁶ Another critic, F. Whitehead, talks about Lancelot's penance in Malory's French sources, the *Mort Artu* and argues that Malory follows closely with his French author concerning Lancelot's repentance. Whitehead comments on Lancelot's entry into the monastery for penance in *Mort Artu* as follows,

The emphasis in this last chapter is not on the sins for which Lancelot is now doing penance, but on the exemplary piety of his new life and his attachment to spiritual exercises. To earthly fame there is now added heavenly felicity. (106)

It can be seen that Lancelot and Guinevere's entry into monastic life is highly recommended by Whitehead and the two critics' ideas on it are to the effect that such act of Lancelot cleanses his sinfulness, which I will demonstrate later. But readers

⁵ Lancelot is found dead in the morning by a Bishop and some other fellow knights and the scene puts it as "So whan syr Bors and his felowes came to his bedde they founde hym starke ded; and he laye as he had smyled, and the swetest savour aboute hym that ever they felte" (*Work III*, 1258.15-17). The smile on Lancelot's face and the fragrance around him give an air of Lancelot's peaceful and saintly death.

⁶ Sir Ector's threnody is as follows, "'A, Launcelot!' he seyde, 'thou were hede of al Crysten knyghtes! And now I dare say,' sayde syr Ector, 'thou sir Launcelot, there thou lyste, that thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes hande. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bae shelde! And thou were the trues frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest lover, of a sinful man, that ever loved woman, and thou were the kindest man that ever strake with swerde. And thou were the godelyest persone that ever cam emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the meekest man and the jentyllest that ever ete in halle emonge ladyes, and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foo that ever put spere in the reeste.'" (*Works III*, 1259.9-21)

must be reminded that monastic life alone does not cleanse a penitent's sins. A sinner is required to go through practices of penitence before a forgiveness is granted. Additionally, with respect to Hector's mourning speech over Lancelot's death, Larry Benson and Whitehead come to the same conclusion of seeing it as Malory's confirmation Lancelot's greatness as Whitehead says,

Hector's great eulogy of Lancelot in Malory, although marked by a passionate intensity of emotion completely foreign to the *Mort Artu*, is nevertheless in complete accord with the French author's attitude.

(106)

Benson and Whitehead concur with Ector's remarks that Malory actually endorses the penance undertaken by Lancelot. Nevertheless, though Ector's mournful speech over Lancelot's death does seem to confirm Lancelot has recovered his former virtues and is held to be an evidence for Malory's extolling, one needs more proofs to see if Malory has granted Lancelot forgiveness other than these closing remarks. Thus, this chapter will consider the penitential Lancelot in the Sankgreal Tale where the knight makes his confession to a hermit, the part of which verifies the second stage of Lancelot's repentance. As for Gawain, his manner of doing repentance should be examined by considering his deathbed speech when he finally realizes his sin and attempts to confess about it.

In the Sankgreal, when Lancelot is denied the vision of the Holy Grail, at the time the appearance of which heals an ill knight, he begins to recognize his sin as the cause of his failure in the quest and commences a process of repentance thereafter. First, he feels contrite for his sin as he himself points out: "My synne and my wyckednes" and that "myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me" (*Works II*, 896). For the present, he is regretting dolefully his wrongdoings and conscious of his failure in the Grail quest as we have discussed in Chapter I. This phase, however,

only arrives at an internal reformation. Aside from recognizing his own faults, the penitent has to seek a priest to do confession in order to complete his repentance. An ordained priest of the Church has the privilege to determine the degree of the penitent's culpability through the confession made by the penitent and he holds the license to grant satisfaction. Without the role of the priest, forgiveness may not be obtained. It is also mentioned by Hopkins that confession must be made

completely accurate in details of circumstances, performed promptly,
accompanied by weeping, often repeated and undertaken freely out of
love and devotion to God. (Hopkins 62)

Lancelot's confession responds well to such conception in that after lamenting his sin, "he cam to an hyghe hulle and founde an ermytage and an ermyte therein which was goyng unto masse" (*Works II*, 896.15-16). The account implies that he promptly goes to the "ermyte" and Lancelot cries for the hermit's mercy as the account goes on, "And than sir Launcelot kneled downe and cryed on Oure Lorde mercy for hys sycked workys. So whan masse was done sir Launcelot called hym, and prayed hym for seyne charite for to hyre hys lyff" (*Works II*, 896.17-20). The hermit continues to say, "hyde none olde synne from me," (*Works II*, 897.10) and Lancelot commences with his confession.

During Lancelot's confession, the hermit is constantly urging Lancelot to acknowledge God's grace in him, remarking "in all the worlde men shall nat fynde one knight to whom Oure Lorde hath yevyn so much of grace as He hath lente the" (*Works II*, 898.8-10). The function of this reminding is to give Lancelot assurance to ease his pain in confessing his sin and to make the knight feel that God is always with him. Another possibility of this reminding is to alert Lancelot that he has been ungrateful to God's exceptional kindness. That is probably why later on Lancelot is reminded of his disregard of God's endowing him with prominence and power and his

sin of adultery is described by the hermit as “a fygge-tre which was right fayre and well garnsshed of levys, but fruyte had hit none” and that “He found in the no fruyte, nother good thought nother good wylle, and defouled with lechory” (*Works II*, 898.29-35). However disconcerted one may feel towards these accusations, the hermit’s statements are accepted by Lancelot with a heart fully repentant in his saying, “and frome hensforewarde I caste me, by the grace of God, never to be so wycked as I have bene” (*Works II*, 899.1-2). Consequently, in the end,

Than thys good man [the hermit] joined sir Launcelot suche penaunce as he myght do and to swe knyghthode, *and so assoyled hym*, and prayed hym to abyde with hym all that day. (*Works II*, 899.4-6, emphasis mine)

According to Aquinas, the utterance “I absolve thee” (*ST*, Part III, Q.84, Art.3)⁷ from the priest is a ritualistic indication of finalizing the repentance since this demonstrates that satisfaction will be given out to the penitent. Hence, judging from this account, it stands to follow that Malory has depicted Lancelot with his satisfying the requirements of the confession and portrays him to have completed the repentance process. Nevertheless, the completion of repentance does more than forgiving the sinner only. In the idea of Aquinas’ theology, such achievement of satisfaction suggests one’s restoration of his previous virtues and honour and re-directs his footsteps plodding forward God. In that sense, Lancelot is not only cleansed of his sins, his status as a perfect knight, well known for goodness and integrity, is regained

⁷ Aquinas owns that a penitent’s deeds is the matter of the sacrament of penance and that what a priest does is the form of the sacrament. He further notes that because the perfection of a thing is ascribed to its form, the part taken by the priest should be valued to complete repentance. It is also written that “. . . the sacrament of Penance, consists not in the consecration of a matter, nor in the use of a hallowed matter, but rather in the removal of a certain matter, viz. sin . . . This removal is expressed by the priest saying: *I absolve thee . . .*” (*ST*, Part III, Q.84, Art.3)

and preserved.

An issue I would like to address is the role of the “ermyte” that plays during the stage of confession. The identity of the “ermyte” Lancelot confesses to is hard to determine because the mention of it by Malory is quite abruptly and leaves little evidence for reference. He is neither the Bishop of Canterbury who Lancelot goes to for consolation after he returns Guinevere to King Arthur nor any former hermit we can identify with. Thus, we are left with the single option to assume that he is simply a “ermyte.” So, it is specified explicitly that only the priests are privileged to grant satisfaction; yet it is a “ermyte” who exerts the office in the *Morte* for Lancelot. In the modern sense, a hermit is a person who lives alone especially for religious reasons but he is not conferred upon the religious power from the Church to give forgiveness. There is no entry for reference in the *MED* for “ermyte.” These inquiries give rise to the problem of whether Malory allows Lancelot a genuine satisfaction. Malory, in a multitude of biographical surveys, is believed to be an educated knight. Furthermore, Hopkins notes that although most people in the fourteenth century were not familiar with the penitential theology, “they were schooled in the basic doctrines of their religion, and particularly those concerning sin and penance” (58). Malory, therefore, must have had knowledge of the practice of repentance and could not have been ignorant of the function of a priest. In consequence, the task will be to prove that the “ermyte” as chosen by Malory functions the same as a priest in the common practice of repentance.

The medieval form of the word “priest” is “pryste” or “preste,” which does appear in Malory’s work. In the Sankgreal Tale, after Percival leaves his aunt to go looking for Galahad, Percival comes near “a monastery he founde a *preste* redy at the awter” (*Works* I, 907.25-26). From the account on Percival and Lancelot, there does exist different religious names for hermit and priest in the *Morte*. These two

religious titles give rise to inquiries as to whether those who assume such different names perform different functions respectively or the same. In an episode that records Sir Bor fighting Sir Lyonell, there is a clear illustration that “pryste” and “ermyte” signify the same. Sir Bor is made to combat with his brother Sir Lyonell because Bor chooses to succour a lady before coming to Lyonell’s rescue and Lyonell vows to revenge for his embarrassment. At the moment during their fight, Bor is on the verge of receiving a fatal strike from Lyonell, “Therewith cam the *ermyte* rennyng unto hym, which was a good man and of grete ayge” (*Works* II, 970.22-24, emphasis mine). Here, the “ermyte” stands between the two knights, admonishing Lyonell not to commit such fratricide, “have mercy uppon me and uppon thy brother, for if thou sle hym thou shalt be dede of that synne” (*Works* II, 970.27-29). Sir Lyonell makes the following reply to the sudden dissuasion from the hermit, “So God me helpe, *sir pryste*, but if ye fle from hym I shall sle you, and he shall never the sunner be quytte” (*Works* II, 970.31-32, emphasis mine). This alteration of address from “ermyte” to “sir pryste” suggests that in Malory’s work, the two religious titles refer to the same office or function. Based on this reasoning, if we go back to the text where Lancelot makes his confession to and is absolved by a “ermyte,” it corresponds perfectly to the traditional practice of confession in which the penitent is required to make confession to a priest. As a result, the satisfaction Lancelot obtains from the “ermyte” has its authority and in a theological context, it is a genuine satisfaction like that from a priest. Thus, Malory grants Lancelot satisfaction and in the tale of “Healing of Sir Urry”, Malory does again prove Lancelot’s peerless virtue and greatness by making him the single knight capable of healing.

On the contrary, Gawain’s practice of repentance is presented in a very different way. He does not begin his repentance until towards the end of the last tale. It is on his deathbed that he reflects upon his past misdeeds and sin,

‘A, my uncle,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘now I woll that ye wyte that my deth-dayes be come! And all I may wyte myne owne hastynes and my wy[l]fulnesse, for thorow my wylfulnes I was causer of myne owne dethe; for I was thy day hurte and smitten uppon myne old wounde that sir Launclot gaff me, and I fele myself that I muste nedis be dede by the owre of noone. And thorow me and <my> pryde ye have all thys shame and disese, for had that noble knight, sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never ben begunne; for he thorow hys noble knyghthod and hys noble bloode, hylde all youre cankyrde enemyes in subjeccison and dangere. (*Works* III, 1230.18-29)

The mournful speech gives the impression of a Gawain desperate for doing repentance and his regret for having been fallen out with Lancelot. Yet, this confession is made to King Arthur rather than to a priest. In this sense, the confession in the ecclesiastical sense is not valid without the presence of a priest. In fact, before his deathbed confession, Gawain’s reluctance to repent in the Sankgreal Tale foreshadows Malory’s denying him with a satisfaction. In the Sankgreal Tale when the novelty of the quests has worn out, Gawain meets his other fellow-knights, Sir Gareth and Sir Uwayne. Together they complain about their want in adventures. On the way the three knights come to the Castle of Maidens and slay seven knights there. Gawain then meets a hermit and seeks counseling from him regarding “how a monke of an abbay ‘called me wicked knyght’” (*Works* II, 891.28-29). The hermit replies that it is owing to Gawain’s failure in knightly deeds and virtuous living that he bears such a nasty name: “And ye have done the contrary, for ye have lyved myschevously many wyntirs” (*Works* II, 891.32-33). The hermit further points out the seven knights Gawain has slain “betokenyth the seven dedly synnes that regned that tyme in the worlde” (*Works* II, 892.9-11). Contrastively, Galahad, who has also

been to the Castle before Gawain, does not kill the seven knights and, as mentioned by the hermit, “delyver al the maydyns oute of the woofull castell” (*Works II*, 892.14).

Because of his murderous act, Gawain is demanded by the hermit to do repentance,

’Now, sir Gawayne,’ seyde the good man, ‘thou muste do penaunce for thy synne.’

‘Sir, what penaunce shall I do?’

‘Such as I woll gyff the,’ seyde the good man.

‘Nay,’ seyde sir Gawayne, ‘I may do no penaunce, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo and payne.’

(*Works II*, 892. 14-20)

Gawain’s mention of “suffir” and “payne” in the passage reminds me of Gregory Great’s idea of pain. In Halfond’s words, “For the elect, pain serves a redemptive function, as it leads to fear, humility, and introspection, which in turn can lead to virtue.”⁸ I do not attempt to argue that because Gawain is not the elect, therefore pain does not serve as a way for redemption for him but that the knight abuses and misunderstands his encountering. Although Gawain does not specify what suffering and pain he experiences, I gather he refers to the hardships he has confronted in the Grail quest, including fatigue from fighting and monotony from experiencing none of the adventures. On the one hand, Gawain is obviously using his toil in the quest as an excuse to avoid repentance. Even with the hermit’s earnest exhortation, Gawain refuses to do repentance and alleges the toils to be his excuse when in fact he has met little of them. Gawain’s declination of repenting here implies his denial of having sinned during his quest and therefore repentance is no concern of his; it might as well

⁸ Halfond Gregory, rev. of *Eschatology and Pain in Gregory*, by Kevin Hester, *The Medieval Review* 08.5.13, 26 May 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tmr/>>.

be a sign of his pride to refuse showing any signs of contrition for his misdeeds before a hermit. On the other hand, Gawain grossly mistakes the hardships in the Grail quest as nothing more than travail. In consequence of his misconstruction and misuses of God's trial, his pain sustained during the Grail quest does not seem to him a means for redemption and leads him to no fear, humility and introspection. As a whole, Malory is presenting a Gawain whose lack of self-reflection impedes him from doing repentance. Another episode that accentuates the argument of Gawain's proclivity to dismiss repentance is when Gawain is demanded to do penance by a hermit who interprets his dream of a hundred and fifty bulls. It is written that when the dream is interpreted and Gawain is urged to do penance, the hermit says,

'Hit ys onge tyme passed sith that ye were made knyght and never synnes servyd thou thy Maker, and now thou arte so olde a tre that in the ys neythir leeff, nor grasse, nor fruyte. Wherefore bethynke the that thou yelde to Our orde the bare rynde, sith the fende hatth the levis and the fruyte.'

'Sir,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'and I had leyser I wolde speke with thou, but my fellow sir Ector ys gone and abithe me yonder bynethe the hylle.'

'Well,' seyde the good man, 'thou were better to be counceyled.'

(*Works* II, 949.4-14)

The expression "manifests clearly that Gawain refuses to take word to do penance and he excuses himself by saying Ector is awaiting him. Such an excuse enables him to run away from the demand to do penance. His hastening to leave shows his disregard for the sacrament and thus can be taken as disrespect for God.

Previously in the Sankgreal Tale, Gawain gives away the chance to do repentance. In the last tale of *Morte*, Gawain becomes a dispirited figure yearning for confession of his sin of "hastynes," "wyfulnessse" and "pryde" but is denied of

access to absolution by a priest. Grieving for his wickedness and regretting his pride that altogether contributes to the downfall of the Round Table, Gawain is eventually deprived of forgiveness as Malory does not grant him the benefit of an authority such as a priest. It is recorded in the text that Gawain dies after composing a letter for Lancelot to demand Lancelot's rescue for Camelot and urges a visit at his tomb.

And than he wepte and kynge Arthur both, and sowned. And whan they were awaked bothe, the kynge made sir Gawayne to resceyve hys sacrament, and than sir Gawayne prayed the kynge for to sende for sir Launcelot and to cherysshe hym aboven all other knyghtes.

And so at the owre of noone sir Gawayne yelded up the goste. And than the kynge lat entere hym in a chapel within Dover castell. And there yet all men may se the skulle of hym, and the same wounde is sene that sir Launcelot gaff in batayle. (*Works* III, 1232.11-20)

The expression “the kynge made sir Gawayne to resceyve hys sacrament” is not entirely clean. It may mean Arthur arranges Gawain to receive his sacrament, and it may also mean that Arthur asks Gawain to consider receiving his sacrament. Yet no trace or sign of a priest appears in this crucial moment. There are more chances than not that Gawain does not receive official forgiveness sanctioned by the Church as there is no priest proclaiming, “I absolve thee,” which is required in the process of a proper repentance. Of course, Gawain shows contrition for his wrongful acts here but the confession is done without the presiding of a priest and thus no absolution and satisfaction will be able to be issued out. This occasion relating to Gawain's failure in doing repentance shed lights on Malory's disapproval in granting Gawain forgiveness. So, Malory once again displays his sympathy for Lancelot by allowing him to complete the process of repentance. Finally, Ness's comment makes similar observation and supports my contention of this thesis. Ness writes,

Nonetheless, he [Lancelot] proves himself more worthy than Gawain by his readiness to accept a penance . . . and holy instruction; yet because of his years of sinful living, the way for him will be hard. (85)

What Ness emphasizes is, as herself declares, a heart of earnestness for repentance and for confrontation of misdeeds that renders Lancelot an admirable and respectable knight. Thus, because of Lancelot's readiness to do repentance God is also more than willing to forgive him.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

The Western concept of sin derives its source from the original sin which is caused by Adam and Eve's fall after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. On this basis, men are considered to be born with an original sin, i.e., a disposition to evil. The consequence that ensues is alienation from God, fracture in the relationship between God and men. However, the practice of repentance serves as the best means to restore the relation of a sinner with God. By doing repentance, the sinner comes to recognize God's love and it is out of the supreme grace of God that all sorts of sins are remitted and sinners are pardoned.

Lancelot's sin surveyed in Chapter I is portrayed in three aspects: adultery, instability and pride. The main argument lies in that Lancelot's knightly accomplishment should not obscure his sinfulness and asserts that the knight sins for his misdeeds. His adultery with Guinevere against the commandment of the Church forms acts that violate the chivalric code according to Lull's treatise and it results in Lancelot's instability between two value systems and his pride. The two value systems which Lancelot wavers between include his desire for the queen and the chivalric code he has vowed to adhere to, which forbids such inappropriate attachment. His pride lies in his failure to recognize the true source of his prominence and power, which he falsely contributes to Guinevere and fights to vie for her affection. In the secular sense, Lancelot sins because he has transgressed the chivalric codes he is to abide by and thus his sin becomes an impediment to a vision of the Holy Grail. In view of the divine laws, Lancelot's adultery is a deed turning himself away from God and rendering him to be indifferent to God's will. In Aquinas' theological system, Lancelot is considered to have sinned mortally because he has committed sins with full knowledge of its graveness. Though Lancelot sins

both in the secular and theological senses, Malory invites readers to sympathize with the knight because of his endeavours to serve both his king and queen. Readers are moved by his predicament and willingness to take the blame of his defects and misdeeds. In addition, Malory shows sympathy for Lancelot through his narrative technique with which the author removes a heavy tone of condemnation and reinforces Lancelot's status as the best sinful knight by finally granting Lancelot forgiveness because of his sincere repentance. Malory's sympathy suggests that Lancelot's being ideal depends not on his flawlessness but on his inclination to confront his sins and his disposition to take counsel to repent.

To compare, Gawain's sin is addressed with more condemnation by Malory. Gawain's sin is his pride which includes his conceit in personal superiority and his superciliousness that causes him to encounter no adventures in the Sankgreal Tale and upholding the excessive confidence in his own fighting skill to avenge Lancelot. However, critics have been very sympathetic with Gawain for his loss of siblings and argue that his grief is the reason why the knight has gone to extremity. I do not attempt to argue against the above critics but would like to make an assumption that Gawain should be blamed for his sin as well as his disinclination to face his wrongdoings. Gawain should be blamed because he sins for a more evil purpose in that his pride comes from his personal pursuit of honour and revengefulness for his siblings who have been killed in accident by Lancelot. Gawain's disdainfulness in regard to his sins and his disinclination to repent with contempt results in Malory's detestation and condemnation.

Each repentance pattern conveys how Malory assesses his knights and the manner with which the two knights treat hermit's advice to do repentance. For Lancelot's part, he commences his penance by receiving the exhortation from a hermit in the Sankgral Tale and Lancelot responds to it with humility and starts to reflect

upon his sins genuinely. Lancelot's acceptance of repentance procures himself an official absolution by the hermit. On the one hand, Malory recognizes Lancelot's humble attitude with which Lancelot does his repentance by characterizing him the sole knight recounting adventures of the Grail quest when returning to Camelot. On the other hand, Gawain is posed by Malory in stark contrast to Lancelot. Even after Gawain is continuously reminded of his misdeeds and unceasingly given the opportunity to repent, Gawain alleges labourious undertaking of the adventures and using Sir Ector's awaiting him as an excuse mentioned in Chapter III to decline repentance. Gawain's reluctance to do penance discloses his propensity for ignoring his sins and his proclivity to take no notice of the benefit of such a sacrament. Gawain's disinclination for penance proves great imprudence and he suffers its consequences when on the deathbed he can only make confession to King Arthur instead of a hermit, and that type of confession does not count as an official repentance. It is because of Gawain's previous contempt to do repentance that he has deprived himself of a chance to gain forgiveness.

Malory's biographical studies might also be drawn to support the assumption of the basic argument of this thesis. Through many researches, Malory is believed to have been a knight-prisoner and have conducted the *Morte* in prison.¹ His sentence in jail might have given him an unusual perspective on the subject of sin and repentance and therefore presents an ideal knight not of perfection but of sinfulness seeking redress. Thus seen, this thesis has shown that Malory's ideal knight consists in not only his physical strength and fighting skills but also a heart of humility to

¹ For Malory's biographical study, please refer to Gweneth Whitteridge, "The Identity of Sir Thomas Malory, Knight Prisoner" *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 24, No. 95 (Aug., 1973), pp. 257-265

confront his own misdeeds. Besides, the greatness of a knight is not determined upon his being faultless but is established on his inclination to acknowledge his defects. It is only through understanding one's inadequacy and recognizing God's grace as a means for satisfaction that leads Malory to make Lancelot one of the ideal knights. Though Malory showers his favor on Lancelot, he has also made Lancelot an ideal knight who has weaknesses and who is superior to other human knights, while bearing defects and insufficiency.

Works Cited

- Ackerman, Felicia Nimue. "‘I May Do No Penance’: Spiritual Sloth in Malory’s *Morte*." *Arthuriana* 16.1(2006):47-53.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 vols. Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981.
- Augustine, St. *On Christian Teaching*. Trans. R.P.H. Green. New York:Oxford UP, 1999.
- Bartholomew, Barbara Gray. "The Thematic Function of Malory’s Gawain" *College English* 24.4(1963):262-267.
- Barber, Richard. "Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*" *A Companion to Malory*. Ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, eds. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000. 19-35
- Benson, C. David. "Gawain’s Defence of Lancelot in Malory’s ‘Death of Arthur’" *The Modern Language Review* 78.2(1983):267-272.
- . "The Ending of the *Morte Darthur*" *A Companion to Malory*. Ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, eds. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000. 221-236.
- Benson, Larry D. *Malory’s Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977.
- Brewer, D.S, ed. "Malory’s ‘Proving’ of Sir Lancelot." *The Changing Face of Arthurian Literature: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in memory of Cedric E. Pickford*. Ed. Alison Adams et al. Woodbridge: Boydell P, 1986. 123-36.
- . *The Morte Darthur: Parts Seven and Eight*. London: Edward Arnold, 1968.
- Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*. Ed. Peter Byrne and Leslie Houldon. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Davies, R.T. "Malory’s Launcelot and the Noble Way of the World" *The Review of English Studies*. 6.24(1955):356-364.

- Field, P.J.C. *Malory: Texts and Sources*. Cambridge: Edmondsbury P, 1998.
- Guerin, Wilfred L. “‘The Tale of the Death of Arthur’: Catastrophe and Resolution.”
Malory’s Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur. Ed. R.M.
 Lumiansky. New York: Arno P, 1979.
- Halfond, Gregory, rev. of *Eschatology and Pain in Gregory*, by Kevin Hester, *The Medieval Review* 08.5.13, 26 May 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tmr/>>.
- Hastings, James, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. New York: Scribner, 1924-1927.
- Hester, Kevin. *Eschatology and Pain in St. Gregory the Great*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster P, 2007.
- Heng, Geraldine. “Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory” *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Ed. Lacy J. Norris. New York: Garland, 1996.
- Hopkins, Andrea. *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990. 32-69.
- Kennedy, Beverly. *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992.
- Kurath, Hans, ed. *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1954.
- Lambert, Mark. *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur*. London: Yale UP, 1975.
- Luminasky, R. M. “Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*: 1947-1987: Author, Title and Text.” *Speculum*. 62.4 (1987): 878-897.
- Lull, Ramon. *The Book of the ordre of Chyualry*. London: Oxford UP, 1926.
- Matthews, William. “A Question of Texts” *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. Boonie Wheeler et al. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2000. 65-107.

- McCarthy, Terence. *Reading the Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1988.
- . "Caxton and the text of Malory's Book 2." *Modern Philology*. 11.2 (1973): 144-152
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: an introduction*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.
- McNeill, John and Helena M. Gamer, trans. *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales*. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.
- Moorman, Charles. "'The Tale of the Sankgreal': Human Frailty" *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Arno P, 1979.
- . "Malory's Treatment of the Sankgreall" *PMLA*. 71.3(1956):496-509.
- Ness, Sandra Ihle. *Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance*. London: U of Wisconsin P, 1983. 127-160
- Newhauser, Richard, ed. *The seven deadly sins: from communities to individuals*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Noguchi, Shunichi. "The Winchester Malory" *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. Boonie Wheeler et al. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2000. 117-126
- Norris, Ralph. "Lucius's Exhortation in Winchester and the Caxton" *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. New York: D.S.Brwer, 2004. 253-259
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Ed. R. W. Burchfield. 2nd rev. ed. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989.
- Radulescu, L. Raluca. "'now I take upon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges': Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood" *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*. Ed. Bonnie Wheeler. New York: D.S.Brewer, 2004. 285-295

- Robeson, Lisa. "Women's Worship: Female Versions of Chivalric Honour"
Reviewing Le Morte Darthur: Texts and Context. Characters and Themes. Ed.
 K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.
 107-118.
- Rosenfeld, Jessica, rev. of *The seven deadly sins: from communities to individuals*,
The Medieval Review 08.6.12, 11 June 2008 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tmr/>>.
- Shichtman, Martin B. "Malory's Gawain Reconsidered" *Essays in English Literature*
 11.2(1984):159-176.
- Tentler, Thomas. *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*. Princeton:
 Princeton UP, 1977.
- "The New Testament." Romans 12. *The New American Bible*. 1991, 1986, 1970.
 Online. Internet. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. 24
 May 2008. <<http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.htm>>.
- Tolhurst, Fiona. "Why Every Knight Needs His Lady: Re-viewing Questions of
 Genre and 'Cohesion' in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" *Reviewing Le Morte
 Darthur: Texts and Context. Characters and Themes*. Ed. K.S. Whetter and
 Raluca L. Radulescu. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005. 133-148.
- Tucker, P.E. "The Place of the 'Quest of the Holy Grail' in the *Morte Darthur*" *The
 Modern Language Review*. 48.4(1953):391-397.
- Vinaver, Eugene, ed. *Malory*. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971.
- Wang, Hui-hua. "Penitential Politics and Poetics: Catholic Auricular Confession and
 Reformed Church Repentance as Techniques of Government in Shakespeare."
 Diss. NTU, Taipei, 2006.
- Whitehead, F. "Lancelot's Penance" *Essays on Malory*. Ed. J. A. W. Bennet. Oxford:
 Clarendon P, 1965. 104-113.