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The Treatment of Lancelot in English Literature From 1100 to 1900

Norma Koch

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THE TREATMENT OF LANCELOT
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
FROM 1100 TO 1900

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BUTLER UNIVERSITY
1936
THE TREATMENT OF LANCELOT
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
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BY
NORMA KOCH

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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PREFACE

In the treatment of the character of Lancelot in the Arthurian romance I have tried to show the different conceptions of each author studied. The first section presents the group of romances dealing with the idea of Lancelot as an individual lover. At first he was merely a knight of prowess; then he becomes the lover of the queen. This association adds to his prestige as an outstanding character. One writer treats him as an ideal lover; another, as the lover of a jealous queen; a third, as a model of perfection; while a fourth shows him as a knight of friendship. I did not use the poem, The Defense of Guinevere by William Morris, principally because in it the queen is the main character and Lancelot is only incidental.

In the second section is treated those works which present Lancelot no longer as an individual popular hero, but as one of a social order whose weakness eventually corrupts all of the group and brings that order to an inevitably tragic end. The last section deals with a conception showing Lancelot in an entirely new relationship with the queen. This last interpretation, in which Lancelot is the father of the queen's child, is not only quite original but modern in its treatment.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>PREFACE</strong></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TABLE OF CONTENTS</strong></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td><strong>LANCELOT IN LANCELOT ROMANCES</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as a Knight of Prowess in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as an Ideal Lover in Chrétien de Troyes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as Lover of the Jealous Queen in Morte Arthur (Two Early Arthurian Romances)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as an Ideal of Perfection in Tennyson's Lady of Shalott</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as a Knight, the Perfect Friend in The Prose Romance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td><strong>LANCELOT IN STORIES OF THE ROUND TABLE</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as One in a Social Order in Thomas Malory</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Round Table</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot and Guinevere</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destruction of the Round Table</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Plan of Tennyson's Idylls of the King</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Round Table</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot and Guinevere</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparison of Tennyson and Malory</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td><strong>MODERN TREATMENT</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot and Guinevere as lovers in The Marriage of Guinevere</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancelot as Father of Guinevere's Child in The Birth of Galahad</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study of the treatment of the character of Lancelot in literature, shows him to be continuously one of the most renowned and popular knights, regardless of the different interpretations which have been placed upon him, particularly by the authors considered in this thesis. In the early times, Gawain was the favorite figure in British chivalry, but later Lancelot became the most popular, especially in France. Before the twelfth century there were supposedly so many stories of Lancelot in France that Chrétien de Troyes was attracted to him and made of Lancelot a notable person in his *Erec*. Just how and where Chrétien obtained these tales of Lancelot is not certain. Lancelot is not mentioned in Wace's *Brut* nor in any of the Welsh tales of the Arthurian romance (although
certain scholars seek to ascribe Welsh origins to them).

In the thirteenth century there was a Dutch poem concerning Lancelot which, although only fragmentarily preserved, was reproduced in German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Lancelot appeared first in Chrétien's Erec. Later Chrétien ranks Lancelot in his Cligee next to Gawain and Perceval. In the story Le Chevalier de La Charrette he was Gawain's superior. Here in the central theme of this story he becomes the lover of the queen. It was Chrétien who made Lancelot a renowned literary character.

CHAPTER II
LANCELOT IN LANCELOT ROMANCES

Lancelot a Renowned and Popular Hero

The character of Lancelot in the Lancelot romances, which are continental, was that of a markedly popular and renowned hero. There is only one of these interesting romances of which the date is approximately known. The earliest version of Sir Lancelot (Lancelet), according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, was the French version of Lancelet by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, which is now lost. Ulrich translated his romance from the French. He found the French original in the poem of Lancelet which Hugh de Morville took with him from France to Austria. Morville, during the time he was a hostage to Richard Coeur de Lion, read this poem but did not take it back with him on his return to England, for the poem fell into the hands of this Swiss, Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, who translated it into the

Dutch language.

There are two reasons for believing that the poem was popular; it was carried by Morville into Austria, and it was translated by Ulrich. There is some controversy as to the time it was written. Some critics believe the date to be 1194, while others are inclined to accept 1160. However, it is certain that the Lanzelet legend had taken shape in the twelfth century and is considered the earliest known source of the romances about the hero Lancelot.

Le Morte Arthur, date unknown, offered the romance of Lancelot with an additional complication arising from the introduction of the Maid of Astolat. Le Morte Arthur is undated but is believed to have been written in the first part of the fourteenth century. A probably date was about 1340-1360. The authorship is unknown, but some critics attributed it to Huichown. Who the author was, where he lived, or when the poem was written no one knows. Its probable date of composition was assigned to about the middle of the fourteenth century. This romance has not been given a place of prominence in the world of letters because of

2. Ibid. Introduction p.x, 1.22.
3. Ibid. Introduction p.x, 1.27.
its lack of literary distinction.

The prose romance of Lancelot in *The Prose Romance of the Thirteenth Century* is believed to have been written by Walter Map, in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. This romance was found in the archives sometime after the Battle of Salisbury Plain, (during the reign of King Henry II, 1154-1189); its date is at least previous to 1189. There is also a question as to the authorship of Walter Map. Some believe him to be its author, while others believe that Walter Map was too old a man to have compiled this romance.

A French romance *Lancelot* was written by Chretien de Troyes, a Frenchman, who, according to Gaston Paris, lived between 1160 and 1172. Wistar Comfort, who translated it into English, stated that "*Lancelot* must be the keystone of any theory constructed concerning the moral evolution of Chretien*. So the story in Chretien's hands had become one of truly ethical significance.

Tennyson, much later, wrote a romantic poem, in 1833, *The Lady of Shalott*, in which he portrayed Lancelot as an image of chivalric life in perfection.

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3. Ibid.
There was no knight in Arthur's court whose name was so familiar as that of Lancelot. The Arthurian legends are chiefly of French origin. Up to the time of Chrétien de Troyes no story of Lancelot depicts that hero as the lover of Queen Guinevere. Heretofore he is simply mentioned many times as a valiant hero of combat. It is generally accepted that the earliest version of the Lancelot material was written by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven in "Das Welshe Buch von Lanzelette", which Hugo de Morville took with him to Austria. The translation of the French original, supposed to have been written in 1194, has been lost. This version does not contain any reference to the love of Lancelot for the queen, but it does contain many accounts of amorous adventures ending in marriage.

Lancelot as a Knight of Prowess

In the Ulrich von Zatzikhoven version, Lancelot was a knight of prowess. Lanzelet (Lancelot) having been trained by a fay, Niniane, who cared for him during his childhood, was sent forth by her on his adventures. He met Johfrit de Liez who taught him to ride. After three days he departed, and on his way he met Kuraus and Orphilet who took him to the castle of Galgandreiz. Galandreiz refused to give his daughter in marriage, but the maiden offered her love to these three knights, Kuraus, Orphilet, and Lancelot. The first act of Lancelot's valor was the victory over the lord
of the castle. Lancelot had accepted the maiden's love and so incurred the wrath of her father who was later killed by his opponent in self defense. Lancelot married the maiden and became the possessor of her lands.

Weary of his conjugal happiness, he silently left the castle in quest of more adventure. The second time he demonstrated his great bravery and strength was when he rode to the town of Limors, into which no one wearing armor was allowed to enter. Ignorant of this custom he violated it and was consequently imprisoned but later rescued by Ade, the niece of Linier, the lord of the castle. Ade became enamored of Lancelot. In order to leave the castle, a knight must fight with a giant, two lions, and lastly Linier himself. Having fulfilled these requirements, Lancelot married Ade and became the lord of the castle. Later Ade left Lancelot because she deemed him a coward.

Lancelot's next adventure of prowess was in the castle of death, which under the enchantment of the Lady of the Sea no man could enter unless he became a coward. Lancelot, upon entering, fell under the spell of cowardice. Here Malbuz, son of the Lady of the Sea, told Lancelot of the knight Iweret's beautiful daughter, Iblis. Iblis at about this time had a dream of meeting her lover at the well. The

1. Paton, Lucy Allen, loc.cit. p. 11.
following day after leaving the castle, Lancelot entered the most impregnable stronghold and struck a bell which summoned Iweret to combat. Lancelot was again victorious and again was given the hand of a maiden and her estates.

Again Lancelot showed much bravery upon hearing of the Queen of Pluris whose abode was a castle which was surrounded by one hundred knights, who had to be slain before any suitor would be able to enter the castle. Lancelot through his daring bravery wins this honor. The Queen of Pluris on seeing Lancelot, after being victorious, fell in love with him and placed him under strict surveillance, even depriving him of his armour. Lancelot was forced to take her as his bride, although he was married to Ilbis. Later, from the castle of Pluris, Lancelot escaped through a ruse.

Lancelot for the fourth time proved himself a man of great valor. He heard that the terrible enchanter, Valerin, had stolen the queen while the king was attending a hunting party. Valerin was lord of a grim castle, at Kardigan, which was surrounded by a wall of impenetrable snakes and monsters. He stated that the queen was promised him before she was given to Arthur and therefore he abducted the queen. Lancelot arrived to do combat with this lord, and during the terrible, long, ensuing fight Valerin became sorely wounded. When he declared that he had lost the combat, Lancelot granted him his life. The queen had to be rescued from her enchanting
sleep. After the combat it was necessary for Lancelot, Tristram, and the King to rescue the queen from her enchanting sleep. Tristram suggested that they interview Malduc, enchanter of the mystic sea, who was the only one capable of deceiving Valerin. Malduc promised the King, Lancelot and other knights to rescue the queen Quinovere (Guinevere) from her enchanting sleep. The king and queen were so overjoyed because Lancelot did so much to help rescue the queen that they sent Valerin, another knight of the rescue party, with three hundred knights to escort Iblis, Lancelot's wife, to Kardigan.

Other unimportant adventures, as the dreaded kiss and that of the return to the land of his birth, engaged Lancelot, but after his rescue of the queen he returned to Dodone, the castle of Iblis, and there Lancelot and Iblis were crowned magnificently. One daughter and three sons were born of this union. Both Lancelot and Iblis died on the same day.

In this version, of the Lanzelet, there was absolutely nothing of the love of Lancelot for Guinevere. As Lucy Paton expressed it, referring to the accounts of his loves, "the history of Lancelot is checkered with shocking inconsistencies". In this account Lancelot is married four times, but never was the lover of the queen. Throughout these

adventures Lancelot had no incentive other than that of his own prowess, for he was the ardent champion of the King; and, according to Lucy Paton, Lancelot was not stirred by love any more than any other of the knights of the court of King Arthur.

Lancelot, An Ideal Lover

In the Arthurian romances of the later part of the twelfth century written by Chrétien de Troyes, Lancelot was the most famous model of all knightly creations, for he was the courtly lover of the Queen Guinevere. The purpose of Chrétien was to portray Lancelot as the ideal lover. In the day of Chrétien, there were rigid principles of courtly love discussed with a nicety by the ladies of the court. Courtly love was an art to be practiced. The lover must needs conform to certain rules in his love making as the emotions were to be systematized. "L'amour courtois" was unlawful and furtive. In courtly love there was no thought of marriage; courtly love as adjudged by our modern nation was immoral because it could not exist between people married to each other. Courtly love sanctioned adultery, which the Church opposed. The lover was under perpetual fear of losing his lady by displeasing her or by being unworthy of her. The knight who occupied the position of the lover must assume a position of inferiority of his lady. He must accomplish every conceivable deed of prowess that was in his power.
In Chrétien de Troyes, Lancelot was the ideal lover of the queen. Nothing seemed too small or difficult to perform when the queen was involved. When Lancelot heard that Kay, a miserable fighter, had accepted the challenge of Meleagant, enemy of King Arthur, he immediately rode after Kay and Guinevere, because of his love for the queen. When Lancelot and Gawain arrived on the scene of combat, each, taking his own way, set out in pursuit of the queen. Lancelot met with a mishap, for he lost his horse and trudged along burdened with his heavy armor. As he traveled, he encountered a dwarf driving a cart, Lancelot asked him whether he had seen the queen. The dwarf told him he would see the queen on the morrow if he would ride in this cart. Knowing such procedure reflected disgrace, for only criminals rode so, Lancelot hesitated; but his love for the queen was so great, that he accepted this opportunity to go to her.

Reason, which dares thus speak to him, reaches only his lips, but not his heart; but love is enclosed within his heart, bidding him and urging him to mount at once upon the cart. So he jumps in, since love will have it so, feeling no concern about the shame, since he is prompted by love's commands. ¹

At the crossroad Lancelot encountered a damsel who told him of the trials and hardships that awaited him. His passion for the queen was so great that he determined to endure all these.

¹ Chrétien de Troyes, loc.cit. p.275.
So complete was Lancelot's adoration for the queen that even the sight of her possessions held him thrall'd. As he approached the spring, one morning, he found on a stone bordering a spring, a gilded, ivory comb which held a few tresses of the queen's hair. His passion was ever ideal for he adored the few golden hairs in the comb. He showed his love for the inanimate objects belonging to the queen as is well expressed in the following paragraph:

Never will the eye of man see anything receive such honor as when he begins to adore these tresses. A hundred thousand times he raises them to his eyes and mouth, to his forehead and face; he manifest his joy in every way, considering himself rich and happy now. He lays them in his bosom near his heart, between the shirt and the flesh. He would not exchange them for a cart load of emeralds and carbuncles, nor does he think that any sore or illness can afflict him now.\(^1\)

Not only did Lancelot show his adoration for mere objects belonging to the queen, but the sight of the queen completely entranced him. Lancelot was so enthralled at the sight of the queen that he gazed at her as she passed his window. When he no longer could see her, he attempted to throw himself to the pavement below. Only Gawain's timely appearance prevented Lancelot from doing himself this violence.

Another demonstration of Lancelot's adoration of the queen was shown during the combat with Meleagrance. As the

\(^1\) Chretien de Troyes, loc.cit.
queen saw that Lancelot was losing the fight, she spoke his name. On hearing his name spoken, Lancelot was so spurred into action that he overthrew Meleagrance and rescued the queen.

Lancelot was completely enslaved by his thoughts, which were forever on the queen. As he approached the ford, bridging the way into "the land from which no stranger returns"—that is, the Otherworld, the abode of the dead,—he did not even hear the knight forbidding him to cross so engrossed was he with the thought of the queen. He was aroused from his fancies only when he felt the water.

His thoughts are such that he totally forgets himself, and he knows not whether he is alive or dead, forgetting even his own name, not knowing whether he is armed or not, or whether he is going or whence he came. Only one creature had he in mind, and for her his thoughts are so occupied that he neither sees nor hears aught else. 2

In the end Lancelot showed his adoration for the queen when he entered her room. For, when he approached her bed, he knelt as though he were before a saint. Then as he left he bowed as if he were departing from a sacred shrine. This showed how deeply his adoration for the queen was.


Then he comes to the bed of the queen, whom he adores and before whom he kneels, holding her more dear than the relic of any saint. When he leaves the room, he bows and acts precisely as if he were before a shrine.

That same afternoon, Lancelot did not look at the maiden whom he was escorting and he respectfully refused her advances. The twelfth century, "l'amour courtois" permitted only one lover at a time and one whom the knight would not be afraid to marry. Lancelot thus could not have accepted her love since he loved the queen.

The knight has only one heart, and this one is really no longer his, but has been entrusted to some one else, so that he cannot bestow it elsewhere. Love, which holds all hearts beneath its sway, requires it to be lodged in a single place. All Hearts? No, only those which it esteems. And he whom love designs to control ought to prize himself the more. Love prized himself the more. Love prized his heart so highly that it constrained it in a special manner, and made him so proud of this distinction that I am inclined to find fault with him, if he lets alone that love forbids, and remains fixed where it desires.

According to the rules of "l'amour courtois" the queen, or the knight's lady's word, was law for him, even if obedience meant dishonor for the lover. This is clearly illustrated when the queen told Lancelot to do his worst in a combat. Therefore, Lancelot did not fight well on the

2. Ibid. p.286.
first day of a tournament since it was his lady's pleasure. On the following day again, her wishes were obeyed, for she had sent a message to Lancelot to do his best. He did so, for she so willed it. Another illustration may be found in the meeting with Meleagant whom Lancelot slew because he had received a sign from the queen to slay. It was dishonorable on Lancelot's part not to grant mercy, but it would have been more of a disgrace to be disobedient to his queen.

Throughout this romance Lancelot was treated by Chrétien de Troyes as the ideal lover of the queen, for nothing was too difficult, too embarrassing, too trivial for him to do. Lancelot was the ideal lover according to courtly love. He had only one lady, of whom he would not be ashamed, the queen. He obeyed her every wish. In all this treatment from the hands of the queen, Lancelot was a worshipful, faithful, and superb knight. So this perfect knight became the popular ideal.

Lancelot, As a Lover of a Jealous Queen

In the next romance, to be treated, Le Morte Arthur, Lancelot was the lover of a jealous queen. The Queen Gaynore (Guinevere) who loved Lancelot sent him away from court for fear of the discovery of their love.

Lancelot, what dostow here with me
The kinge is went and the courte by-dene,
I drede we shalle discovered be
Off the love is vs by-twene.1

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One reason for the queen's jealousy occurred when Lancelot went to the tournament. He met a maid, Lord Therle's daughter, who wept a great deal because Lancelot told her that another had his heart, but not because he wished it. Lancelot in order to be courteous promised to wear her sign on his arm during the tournament. This act first fired the queen's jealous passion.

Another instance in which her jealous disposition was displayed is that connected with Gawain's malicious report of Lancelot. According to Gawain's account to the queen, Lancelot had chosen for his love a beautiful maiden. Queen Guinevere became sick because of jealousy at the loss of her lover. On his return Lancelot was repulsed in his love making and left the court because of the queen's uncontrollable jealousy.

The queen's resentment had reached such a tension that after Lancelot left her, her hair was dishevelled, and she fell into a swoon. She was so envious that in order to pretend that she was glad that Lancelot had left, she gave a party. In reality it was not gladness, but envy and resentment which possessed her. During the evening, Sir Mandor's brother ate a poisoned apple which the queen had offered him. Sir Mandor challenged the deed of his brother's death. Lancelot accepted the challenge and, being victorious, freed the queen.
But just before the combat between Sir Mandor and Lancelot, and as Gawain and the King are discussing who would be a knight to prove the queen's innocence, a barge appeared bearing a maiden who had in her hand a note telling of the unrequited love for Lancelot.

For no thinge that I coude pray,
Knelynge, ne wepinge, wyth rewfulle mone,
To be my leman he sayd euyr nay,
And sayd shortly he would haue none.¹

Upon hearing this news, Gawain went to the queen and told her that he was guilty of a "trespas". This act, then, temporarily reconciled the lovers.

In this romance a new complication arises due to the love of the Maid of Ascolate for Lancelot which arouses the queen's jealousy. But, in spite of Guinevere's envious displeasure toward Lancelot, he was faithful to her even when their love was discovered. This portrayal further accentuates the faithfulness which makes Lancelot the notable and popular hero.

Lancelot, as the Ideal of Knightly Perfection

Tennyson in the *Lady of Shalott* paints in Lancelot a picture of ideal, knightly perfection. Here we have a later day conception of a knight perfect in courtesy, sensitive to beauty, and pitiful in his attitude toward the Lady of Shalott, who is the Maid of Ascolate in the Prose Romance.

Lancelot's brow, in Tennyson's poem, is clear and untroubled as the sunlight that glows upon it; his song reveals an uplifted spirit. His very apparel is resplendent, reflecting the knightly appreciation of beautiful accoutrements; all of his knightly trappings, "the gemmy bridle", "his blazon'd baldric", "mighty silver bugle", "thick-jewell'd saddle", the befeathered helmet, make of him a "meteor trailing light", across the landscape "beside remote Shalott". In meditation and pity Lancelot looks with reverence at the Lady of Shalott as she lies on her barge, for, as he says,

.....She had a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace
The Lady of Shalott.  

Tennyson's pictured knight, whose glistening image is mirrored in the Lady's crystal glass, is but an outward expression of a perfect knight as chivalrous as that red cross knight forever kneeling "to a lady in his, Lancelot's, shield". This is a small ideal picture but perfect.

Lancelot as the Perfect Friend

In the Prose Romance, a thirteenth century work of unknown authorship, Lancelot is conceived as characterizing perfect friendship. Although throughout the Arthurian romances based upon this source there continued to be different

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phases of "l'amour courtois" manifested, there is an added interest in the character of Lancelot; he becomes the friend of other characters as well as merely the lover of the queen. When Queen Guinevere heard of the fair young squire, Lancelot, she marvelled, and she was anxious to behold him. After the young squire saw the queen, "for he looked at her as long as he durst", he asked her pardon for not asking her leave. She pardoned him and told him that he could be her knight wheresoever he might be. Lancelot was so happy to have been knighted by Queen Guinevere and to hold her hand which had grasped his own, that he was enabled to go forth into the world showing great valor.

While on his adventures, he met Galehot with whom he became great friends. Lady Malehaut, friend of King Arthur and the queen, kept Lancelot as her prisoner, for she wished his love. After being a prisoner for some time, Lancelot chided Lady Malehaut for his being prevented from joustings. She promised him that he should be fully equipped the next day. On the morrow Lancelot appeared in black armor and then on his second appearance in red. Because Lancelot was victorious, Galehot summoned him, Sir Lancelot, to his tent and admired him as a brave knight and all his knights hailed Lancelot as the "flower" of knighthood. Their friendship grew; and that night when Galehot found Lancelot was asleep, he occupied the bed next to his. Before coming to his tent,
Galehot promised Lancelot whatever he wished upon condition he would come to Galehot's tent. That night Galehot was made to keep his pledge to Lancelot. His incite of the character of Galehot was proven, as a warring knight opposed to King Arthur, when Galehot went to King Arthur:

When the good knight (Lancelot) saw Galehot go to do himself such great mischief for his sake, he thought and said that never had he so good a friend and true a comrade, and he felt to great pity for him that he sighed from the depths of his heart and wept beneath his helmet, and he said between his teeth, "Fair Lord, God, Who can recompense this?"[1]

Again, Galehot demonstrated the bond of his companion-ship for Lancelot by arranging a meeting between the queen and her favored knight. Galehot knew Lancelot desired this meeting. When Lancelot came before the queen, he trembled so that he was almost unable to salute her (another touch of "l'amour courtois", showing that the knight should be inferior to his lady). During this meeting Queen Guinevere questioned him about the previous combat, in which Lancelot had fought for the King against Galehot. She questioned him as to whether he were the knight who had worn the red armor and later the black armor, but Lancelot was evasive; and for this loyalty the queen esteemed him highly. He did tell her, however, that she was the one who had made him a

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knight and given him his sword. She still questioned him concerning the maiden for whom he was displaying his valor. Eventually Lancelot had to tell that it was all for her. As the conversation was nearing a close the queen realized how ardent Lancelot's friendship was.

Galehot once more proved his loyalty when he asked Queen Guinevere to have Lancelot as her knight and that she be his loyal lady. Then Galehot made an arrangement, and Lancelot was very happy.

Even Galehot's soldiers who did not recognize Lancelot at once showed their affectionate regard for him. They admired him greatly and spoke of him with great esteem telling Galehot that Lancelot had fought with such skill that he had showed no fatigue.

\[\ldots\ldots\text{Down yonder is a knight that surpasseth all others single handed. No one can endure against him. Not even the knight of last year is worth aught in comparison to him and naught can weary him, for he hath not passed since the morning and is as strong and fresh as if he had not borne arms.}^{1}\]

Gawain, too, held Lancelot as a friend for he said: \(^2\) "He is the most worshipful man in the world". After the Saxon invasion Lancelot returned to King Arthur's court, and there Gawain and Lancelot made great joy of each other.

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2. Ibid. p.176.
After Galehot realized the warm friendship between Lancelot, the King and Gawain, he was obsessed with the fear of losing Lancelot's friendship. Galehot, seeing how often the King sought Lancelot's advice and how often the king in turn bestowed favors upon him, became even more fearful. But the queen told Galehot that through her he would lose naught; and she did promise; "I give you this knight forever save that I have him afore ye". Still the fear that Galehot would lose Lancelot as a friend troubled Galehot, for he saw the affectionate attitude of King Arthur toward Lancelot. Galehot knew that the King wished Lancelot to abide in the palace with him, but Galehot could not stay in Arthur's palace, for he would incur the ill will of his subjects by staying in a foreign court. Eternally he was possessed with this fear, and being so possessed he went to a wise old sage who could tell him about the future. When Lancelot visited Galehot, after the Saxon invasion, Galehot again spoke to Lancelot of losing his friendship. Lancelot told him:

"Wit ye well I love you above all men who ever lived. I have no welfare from you alone".

After the Saxon invasion and after remaining at the court of King Arthur for some time, Lancelot befriended

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2. Ibid. p.224.
Galehot even in death. As he was out on an adventure Lancelot sought lodging with a hermit who told him of the death of Galehot. In the chapel Lancelot read this inscription:

Here lieth Galehot, the son of the Fair Giantess, who died for the love of Lancelot.¹

True to his friendship, Lancelot took the body of Galehot to Dolorous Gard for burial. If his friendship had not been sincere, he would not have fought the keepers of the chapel for the recovery of the body. In spite of warning not to do so he persisted in its removal to Joyous Gard.

Thus far in these romances Lancelot has appeared as an individual knight. In Ulrich's work Lancelot is portrayed as a knight of prowess and because of this, he had various adventures and contracted at least four different marriages. In Ulrich's work Lancelot was never the lover of Queen Guinevere, for after rescuing her, thereby showing that he was a knight of great renown, he returned to his wife, Iblis, and lived on their estates of Dodone. Chretien de Troyes saw in Lancelot the ideal courtly lover of Guinevere, and had him worship not only her but inanimate objects which belonged to her, showing to what length this ideal love compelled him to go. The story of the English Arthurian

¹ Paton, Lucy Allen, loc. cit. p.297.
Romances, gave an account of the love of Lancelot involving a jealous queen and the unrequited love of the Maid of Astolat. This was a new complication, introducing a triangular love affair, in which the queen became very jealous of Lancelot. In Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott*, Lancelot is the picture of knightly perfection. In the Prose Romance the author depicted Lancelot as a knight of friendship. In the end, his associates in knighthood came to live with him and did not wish to depart, so strongly were they bound to Lancelot by the ties of friendship. Through the entire story Lancelot befriended and was befriended, and these friendships proved to be abiding.
CHAPTER III

LANCELOT AS A MEMBER OF THE ROUND TABLE

In Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur, Lancelot is not depicted as an individual popular hero, but as a member of the Round Table. Lancelot's defection interested the knights because he was one of their fellowship. Malory's narrating of the exploits of the knights during the time of the quest of the Holy Grail is the means by which he intended to teach truth, both moral and religious. Malory's historical romance, completed by him in the year 1469, in his interpretation of the legend, "conceived as a rebuke to the worldly character of Arthur's scheme". It is in the legends of the Grail and the legends of Lancelot and Guenevere that the dissolution of the Round Table is accounted for.

In Malory's plan, the guilty love between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere is the instrumentality bringing about the

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first step in the defeature of Arthur's schemes. Later
the rebellion, growing out of the chain of events which
followed upon the first step, taking Lancelot and his
pursuer, Arthur, out of the Kingdom and so allowing Mordred
to lead an insurrection, is the second and final step in the
demolishment of the Order of the Round Table, and the over-
throw of Arthur. This was the fatal end which Malory pre-
scribed for Arthur because of the sin of incest which he un-
knowingly had committed with his own sister.

In this great moral work, Lancelot, the guilty lover,
is undoubtedly the most familiar figure among all the popu-
lar knights of the Order of the Round Table. The Round
Table was an actual table around which, at its greatest
glory, one hundred and fifty knights assembled to tell of
their experiences and adventures and to do homage to King
Arthur.

By King Arthur's marriage to Dame Guinevere he had be-
come a possessor of the mystic Round Table which was pre-
sented to him by Leodegraunce, father of Dame Guinevere.
Leodegraunce had received the Round Table from Uther
Pendragon. Although Merlin had warned Arthur that Dame
Guinevere would be untrue to him and would have a lover,
Lancelot, King Arthur ignored the advice of the sage, and
sent the message to the monarch who was highly flattered to
hear that King Arthur, a worthy king of prowess and nobility,
wished to marry his daughter. The father decided to send Arthur a gift, the Round Table, which would please him.

Merlin made the Table Round in token of the Roundness of the world for by the Round Table is the world signified by right, for all the world Christian and heathen, repaired unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of fellowship of the Round Table they think them more blessed and more worship than if they had gotten half the world. 2

Every year at Pentecost King Arthur proclaimed a meeting of the order of the Round Table around which all knights gathered from far and near, for King Arthur's court was the center of chivalric exploits. The knights of the Round Table were bound yearly, straitly to their king by a common vow. Each knight had to swear an oath once a year which was:

Never to do outrageously nor murder, and always to flee treason; also, by no means to be cruel, but to give mercy unto him that asketh mercy, upon pain of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of King Arthur for evermore; and always to do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succour, upon pain of death. Also that no man take no battles in wrongful quarrel for no law, nor for no world's goods. 2

Lancelot and Guinevere
The influence of the two lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, came so insidiously that Arthur was unaware of it. In the first book of Malory, Lancelot was a great warrior. At


first he was a youthful, adoring knight who never gave a hint of genuine feeling (according to the rules of courtly love). Then, due to the fact that the king liked combats and tournaments and cared little for the queen, giving them and not the queen his attention, she turned more and more towards Lancelot. King Arthur loved jousting and tournaments and the associations with his knights better than any woman in the world.

And for that service he promised her that day, ever to be her knight in right or in wrong. And since Arthur loved jousting and tournaments and his noble fellowship of the Round Table better than any woman in the world, the queen turned, as time passed, more and more to Lancelot.¹

Even when King Mark of Ireland pointed out this growing love between Arthur's best loved knight and his Queen Guinevere, by secret letters sent to King Arthur telling of Lancelot and Guinevere, Arthur took little notice, attributing the report to jealousy or retaliation.

There were two instances of Lancelot's prowess at the tournament which showed how well he loved the queen. In the first tournament he wore a sleeve for the Maid of Astolat, known as Elaine le Blank. This aroused the jealousy of the queen, but Elaine was forgotten by Lancelot,

and she died for her unrequited love of Lancelot.

In the second tournament, Lancelot was forced to wear a favor of the queen's to appease her jealous wrath. Then he met another Elaine and, due to enchantments by Dame Brisen, he was made to believe that Elaine was Queen Guinevere, and Galahad was begotten upon Elaine. Guinevere banished Lancelot from court when she had knowledge of this affair. Lancelot became "arrayed out of his wits" and wandered for two years during which time he was sought by the king and knights. All this unusual behavior on the part of Lancelot and the queen became more and more evident to the observation of the various knights.

The knights of King Arthur's court, hearing about the Grail, went in search of it. This quest for the Holy Grail originated as a rebuke to the world by the character of Arthur's scheme. Lancelot prayed that he might see the San Grail. After being tossed about on the sea, Lancelot was directed to a castle, in which he could see the Grail. When entering the castle, he found a closed door past which he was forbidden to go. Lancelot disobeyed the voice, and entered. There he saw the holy vessel covered with white samite. Suddenly he lost the power to rise and lay in this chamber for twenty-four days. At the end of this time he was told that he had seen all that he could of the Holy Grail. The reason that he was denied the sight of the Grail
was his guilty love for the queen. Thereafter he renounced, for a short time, worldly love.

.....and from henceforth I cast me by the grace of God, never to be so wicked as I have been, but as to follow knighthood and to do feats of arms.\(^1\)

This showed that Lancelot wished to break away from the queen, but some time after seeing the Holy Grail, he forgot his vow, and thought of the queen.

......Lancelot's thoughts were privily on the queen and so they loved together,...... that many in the court spake of it.\(^2\)

Lancelot forgot his promise of perfection that he had made in the quest when he saw the queen on his return to court. As he heard slanderous talk about the queen, and wishing to protect her, he did not visit her as frequently as had been his custom. This neglect caused the wretched queen, who was bewildered and suspicious, to become jealous and say:

Sir Lancelot I see and feel daily that thy love beginneth to slake, for thou hast no joy to be in my presence, but even thou art out of this court and quarrels and matters thou hast nowadays for ladies and gentlewomen more than were wont to be a forehand.\(^3\)

Lancelot tried to explain his action to the queen, but failed because of her jealousy and was banished from her presence.

\(^1\) Malory, Sir Thomas, loc.cit. p.191.

\(^2\) Ibid. p.271.

\(^3\) Ibid. p.271.
Lancelot, now I well understand that thou art a false recreant knight and a common lecher, and thou lovest and holdest other ladies, and by me thou hast disdain and scorn. For wit thou well, she said, now I understand thy falsehood, and therefore shall I never love thee no more. And never be thou so hardy to come in my sight; and right here I discharge thee this court that thou never come within it.

Lancelot left the court as he was bidden, and during his absence the queen held a dinner to show her outward great joy which was really, to one of insight, but an expression of her jealousy of Lancelot. During the dinner a knight ate a poisoned apple, for which misfortune the queen was accused of treason. This accusation could be settled only by trial combat, which would show that the victor was in the right, for one must bear in mind that Malory was a moralist. Boris first accepted the challenge for the queen, but he was replaced by another, Sir Lancelot. The queen was exonerated by Lancelot's victory, although she had ordered him from the court. Lancelot was true to his queen and was always her accepted champion.

Once when Lancelot was away from court, and the king and his knights were hunting, the queen was playing in the meadow with her ladies in waiting and watched by her knights when Meleagrance descended upon the queen's party and took the queen and her knights prisoners to his castle. In

distress she sent her ring as a token to Lancelot by a small boy. Lancelot, ever faithful, hearing of this incident and wishing to reach Guinevere, asked a carter to ride in his cart since his horse had been killed by a knight of Meleagrance. Lancelot knew full well that to ride in a cart would bring disgrace. The first carter refused him, and for this Lancelot gave him such a buffet that it caused his death. The second carter, beholding this act, allowed Lancelot to ride. Meleagrance, a coward, upon beholding the determination of Lancelot, was willing to return the queen at once to him. The next morning, Meleagrance upon entering the queen's chamber, witnessed a scene for which he accused the queen of misbehavior. Lancelot, the knight of "l'amour courtois", accepted the challenge by combat to prove the queen's innocence. Meleagrance, sly and cunning, invited Lancelot to inspect the castle of Westminster, and Lancelot, little deeming that Meleagrance was up to trickery, accepted. While on this tour of inspection, Lancelot stepped into a trap and fell upon a pile of hay below the floor; consequently he did not arrive on time for the combat. The knights who were acquainted with Lancelot knew that he always kept his word, and they wondered why he had not come. With the help of his keeper, Lancelot escaped and during the combat unhorsed Meleagrance. Until Lancelot unlated his armor on his left side and removed his helmet, Meleagrance refused to
continue the fight. Then followed a hand to hand combat. Then followed a hand to hand combat. In all these complications with the two maidens and with Melesagrance the knights became more and more aware of the love of Lancelot for the queen which was the cause of the dissension among the knights.

Destruction of the Round Table

Dissension between the knights, of Mordred, and Agravaine, and Lancelot, was creeping in. Since the rescue, Sir Mordred, the vicious, and Sir Agravaine, the violent, both hated Lancelot and the queen, so they decided to set a trap to catch Lancelot in the queen's chamber.

For this Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had ever a privy hate unto the queen Dame Guenever and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot. So it mishapped, Sir Gawaine and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber; and then Sir Agravaine said thus openly, and not in no counsel, that many knights might hear it: I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the queen, and all we know it so; and it is shamefully suffered of us all, that we all should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is to be shamed.1

After much discussion over the disclosure of the behavior of the lovers Sir Agravaine proclaimed that he would be the one to make the exposition, although he felt that there would be war between Lancelot and the faction who would reveal the secret love. During the argument the king

asked these knights about the noise, and Agravaine spoke of the guilty love.

"My lord," said Agravaine, "I shall tell you that I may keep no longer." On hearing this the king demanded proof. 1

In his reply to the King, Agravaine proposed a plan to trap Lancelot while the king was away hunting. Agravaine asked the king to go hunting with the thought that Lancelot would visit the queen while the king was absent for the night. This the King did, and Lancelot was found by Sir Agravaine, Sir Mordred, and the twelve knights that evening in the Queen's room. As the knights approached her door they said: "Traitor, Sir Lancelot du Lake, now art thou taken". Lancelot, without armor slew Sir Colgrevance of Gore, for he was the first to enter the room, and with the help of Queen Guinevere, Lancelot put on Colgrevance's armor and slew the twelve knights and wounded Mordred.

...............And twelve of his fellows after, within a little while after, he laid them cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve that might stand Sir Launcelot one buffet. Also Sir Launcelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might. And then Sir Launcelot returned again unto the queen, and said: Madam, now wit you well all our true love is brought to and end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe.***And if ye see that as tomrow they will put me (Guinevere) unto the death then may ye rescue me as ye think best. 2


2. Ibid. p.345.
After Lancelot's escape he went to Sir Bors and told him what had happened. Bors did not reprimand Lancelot for his love for the queen for he gives Lancelot this advice.

"...by mine advice ye shall take the woe with the weal, and take it with patience, and thank God of it. And sithen it is fallen as it is, I counsel you keep yourself, for an ye will yourself, there is no fellowship of knights christened that shall do you wrong. Also I will counsel you my lord, Sir Launcelot, that an my lady, Queen Guenever, be in distress, insomuch as she is in pain for her sake, that ye knightly rescue her; an ye did otherwise, all the world will speak of your shame to the world's end. Insomuch as ye were taken with her, whether ye did right or wrong, it is now your part to hold with the queen, that she be not slain and put to a mischievous death, for an she so die the blame shall be yours."

Sir It was Agravaïne and Mordred who brought about the disclosure of the guilt of Lancelot. When the king found this out, he was furious because Lancelot had betrayed him and broken the sacred vows of the Round Table. The king feared that the Round Table would be destroyed for he said:

"Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken forever, for with him will many a noble knight hold, and now it is fallen so, said the king, that I may not with my worship but the queen must suffer death. And the law was such in those days that whomsoever they were of what estate or degree if they were found guilty of treason, there should be none other remedy but death."

Instead of bemoaning the loss of the queen, the king

1. Malory, Sir Thomas, loc. cit. p.349.
2. Ibid. p.353.
deplored the loss of his best knight, Sir Lancelot, for the pride and affection of King Arthur centered in his knights.

...Alas, that ever I bare crown upon my head! for now have I lost the fairest fellowship of noble knights that ever held Christian king together, and, therefore said the king, wit you well my heart was never so heavy as it is now and much I am sorrier for my good knights than the loss of my fair queen, for queens I might have enow, but such fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company.¹

Due to the discovery of this love between Lancelot and Guenevere, there were two factions of knights: one for the king, including Agravaine, Gawain, and Mordred, and one for Lancelot and his kin. As the queen was about to be burned, Sir Mordred rode hastily to the king to tell him of the affray and of Lancelot killing Gawain's brothers, Sir Gaheris and Gareth. Upon hearing all these reports the king lamented the death of his nephews and his good knights as well as the behavior of the queen.

The second step toward the destruction of the Round Table was caused by Mordred, the traitor, while Arthur is in France fighting Lancelot. Gawain, nephew of King Arthur, requested the king to lay siege to Lancelot's lands in France because of the death of his brothers. Arthur, listening to the advice and persuasion of Gawain, went to France to war against Lancelot. He grew in nobility, for he had no thought of war

¹ Malory, Sir Thomas, loc.cit. p.353.
with his king, but his cousin and kinsmen excited him to go to war.

During Arthur's sojourn in France, Mordred, the chief ruler and guardian of the queen, in the absence of the king, had letters written telling of the death of Arthur and proclaimed himself king. He was crowned at Canterbury. After this he told Guinevere that he wished to wed her.

"... and there he took Queen Guinevere, and said plainly that he would her which was his uncle's and his father's wife."

Knowing of the treacherous character of Mordred, Guinevere made a ruse to go to London to purchase raiment for her wedding, but instead, she bought all manners of foods which she stored in the tower of London where she and her men fortified themselves. Here Mordred sought to entice the queen from the tower but to no avail.

When the king had heard of Mordred's action, he returned immediately to England; but Mordred would not permit him to land. This open defiance caused war between the king and Mordred. Due to the fact that Arthur had lost many of his good knights in France and Lancelot was no longer in Arthur's army, the King could not withstand Mordred's army. Later, in the battle of Salisbury, each side was to do battle with fourteen persons. After the battle Arthur saw Mordred, and,
seizing his spear, he ran after Mordred and smote him, but
Arthur was fatally wounded.

...therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead
to the earth and noble Arthur fell in a swoon
to the earth and there he swooned oftimes.

In the end the queen realized that because of the love
between Lancelot and her, the Round Table had been destroyed
and she became penitent. To Lancelot she said:

For as well as I have loved thee mine heart
will not serve me to see thee, for through thee
and me is the flower of Kings and knights
destroyed.

It was Lancelot and Guinevere who Malory used to destroy
the Round Table and to cause discord among the knights, par­
ticularly in the case of Lancelot and Gawain. If there was
no harmony, the only result would be defeat. Lancelot failed
to keep his vow, for he took the part of the queen whether
she was right or wrong; he did not give mercy to them that
asked mercy for he slew Meleagranoe because the queen wished
it; he did not take the king as his master and his lord, but
he sought out the queen. The love of Lancelot and the queen
does lead to the dissension of the knights causing the final
rupture ending in the final destruction of the court. It was
the love of Lancelot and Guinevere that was instrumental in

2. Ibid. p.394.
in the ultimate destruction of the Round Table.

The Plan of Tennyson's Idylls of the King

The Purpose of the Round Table

Tennyson in 1859-1869, wrote The Idylls of the King in which Lancelot was again the lover of the queen and the most familiar knight of the Round Table. Each one of Tennyson's Idylls is a little allegorical picture which has a symbolical meaning. Most of these are pictures of human struggles between the higher and lower natures in man. Tennyson made Arthur a human king who had perfect ideals. The Round Table was the image of the mighty world; the image of the life of any institution that aims at purifying and cleansing the world. It was Arthur's purpose to cleanse the world. The founding of the Round Table is likened unto the "crowning of the soul". When knights gathered around their famous table, each took a vow to serve as a model for the world. Each swore:

To reverence the King, as if he were Their conscience, and their conscience as their king To break the heathen and uphold the Christ To ride abroad redressing human wrongs, To speak no slander, no nor listen to it, To honor his own word as if his God's, To lead sweet lives in purest chastity, To love one maiden only, cleave to her, And worship her by years of noble deeds, Until they won her; for indeed I knew Of no more subtle master under heaven Then is the maiden passion for a maid Not only to keep down the base in man, But to teach high thoughts, and amiable words And Courtliness, and the desire of fame,
In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, there are two forces which are at work bringing about the destruction of the Round Table: the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere, and the false conceptions of their chivalric purposes on the parts of the knights who go in quest of the Holy Grail. One step after the other involved the guilty lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, more and more deeply, and in the end they helped to bring about the destruction of the Round Table.

The first step was in the beginning when the queen saw Lancelot, who was sent by the King to escort the queen to court, she thought him to be King Arthur and fell in love with him.

Then Arthur charged his warrior who he loved
And honor'd most Sir Lancelot to ride forth
And bring the queen and watch him from the gate
And Lancelot past away among the flowers
For then was latter April and returned
Among the flowers in May, with Guinevere.

Lancelot brought the queen to King Arthur at Camelot.

Lancelot had a double allegiance, for in the vow to his king, he pledged his eternal love for him and later pledged his love to his queen. When the king had asked Lancelot to

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2. Ibid. Part I, p. 17.
joust, Lancelot had made an excuse for he thought that the queen wished him to stay. He told the king that he was not well enough to go.

Sir King mine ancient wound is hardly whole, And lets me from the saddle.1

After Lancelot had intended to stay with the queen, she reprimanded him and wished him to go for she was afraid to gossip.

Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd Will murmur, Lo the shameless ones, who take Their pastime now the trustful King is gone.2

Another complication presented itself when Lancelot lost his way going to the tournament, and instead went to the castle of Astolat. Here he met Elaine, the Lord's fair daughter. As she studied the features of Lancelot, she read the lines of his face which might have told others of the guilty love of the queen, but Elaine being Tennyson's symbol of innocence, beheld in Lancelot the best man she had ever seen. In the morning, as she bade Lancelot farewell, Lancelot saw in her only an innocent maid. She asked him to wear her favor, a red sleeve trimmed with pearls. She told him the truth when she said, "No one will recognize you if you wear it as you have never done so before."

2. Ibid. Part II, p.4.
Is it not Lancelot? When has Lancelot worn favor of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont as we that know him know
How then? Who then a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.¹

This act of wearing the favor caused jealousy on the part of the queen, for the king told her that Lancelot was no longer lonely as he wore the sleeve, evidently a gentle maid's gift. The queen, upon hearing the news, swiftly went to her room. There she gave way to a fit of jealous fury, and after that she again went about the palace looking very pale. This act on the part of the queen showed the strength of their passion.

By the king's sending Gawain in quest of Lancelot and by Gawain's visiting Elaine, Gawain was able to return to the queen and tell her about Lancelot's love for the maid of Astolat. The king had sent Gawain to find Lancelot who had not come forward to claim the diamond which he had won at the jousting. Gawain was told to deliver the diamond to the victor. When he came upon Elaine, whom he induced to tell of her love for Lancelot, Gawain gave her the diamond to deliver. When Gawain returned to court he aroused the jealousy of the queen because of his report of Lancelot and the ire of the king because of his negligence. The king

¹ Tennyson, Sir Alfred, loc.cit. Part II, p.15.
had told Gawain to deliver the diamond to the winner; this he had failed to do. Later Elaine, having sought out Lancelot, delivered the diamond to him, and also waited upon him until he was able to return to the court of King Arthur.

Lancelot, on returning to the court, became involved more deeply with the queen. After his departure from the castle of Astolat, the Lily Maid of Astolat, Elaine pined away and was finally placed upon her barge which floated down to Camelot. She was seen from the window as Lancelot looked out. The queen at his side, saw nothing, for she was too angry with her lover. Just a moment before the queen had taken all nine of the wonderful diamonds, which Lancelot had won at the previous tournaments, and had thrown them through the window into the stream. Lancelot realized that the love for his queen was not the true love. He spoke of Elaine:

Ah, simple, damsel, surely with a love Far tenderer than my queen's. Pray for my soul. ¹

While Lancelot was still in contemplation, he thought that he would have to give up his adulterous love for the queen. Yet his double nature spoke:

.........Indeed must break
These bounds that so defame me: not without She willeth it: Would I she willeth it? May ²

¹ Tennyson, Sir Alfred, loc.cit. Part II, p.44.
² Ibid. p.45.
After Mordred, the vicious, found Lancelot sitting "low on the border of her couch", then the guilty lovers were discovered. Each lover mounted his horse, rode a little way, kissed and parted. The queen took her way to Almesbury to become a nun and to repent, and Lancelot eventually became a holy man, but the influence of this love had a decided effect upon the others.

Tennyson presents each character as a symbol of mankind, and each in the society as an individual helps to disrupt it. When the people heard of the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere, the report had a decided reaction on them. When Geraint heard of this, he became fearful for he thought that his wife, a friend of the queen, might be contaminated. He therefore left court to prove that Enid was true to him, and he dealt with her austerely. Geraint compelled Enid, the true, to wear her old garments, the ones, which she had worn, when he first met her. On their sojourn Geraint commanded her never to speak to him. This severe restriction could not be met with by Enid, who fearful of her husband's safety, would warn him of the approach of the different warring knights. Even in the end, when Enid had proved herself true to her lord, Geraint still had a feeling of suspicion of her unfaithfulness.

Balin, too, was affected by the guilty love of Lancelot.
for the queen. Balin, who was honest, and sincere, stood for right; however Balin had a bad temper for which he had been exiled from court. In a rage he killed a servant. Balin saw in Lancelot the very thing that he wanted to be. Also, he asked the king's permission to wear upon his shield the image of the queen in order to inspire in himself courteous demeanor. He should not have placed explicit faith in the image of the queen because she, like each human being, had her faults. Balin should have taken the king as his ideal, for Tennyson used the king as the symbol of perfection. Later when Garlon saw the queen's emblem upon Balin's shield, he ridiculed Balin. Garlon was opposed to King Arthur's ideal, and all that stood for chivalry. Meeting Balin a second time, Garlon asked him whether he still wore the same "crown-scandalous". Later Balin rode forth on his charger, and when he was too worn to go farther, dismounted and hung his shield on a tree. As he was resting, Vivian, who was a symbol of pagan power and pagan love, appeared. She came at the opportune moment when poor Balin was struggling with his inward nature. Vivian, who stood for passion, noble or deadly, asked the knight to help her. Of course a knight could not refuse to help a maiden in distress. Vivian now proceeded to tell Balin a white lie; that she had seen Lancelot kiss the queen. Balin, who had no discrimination for right or wrong, took down his shield from the tree and
trampled upon it. At this time a knight in full armor came riding by, and seeing this insult to the queen visited violence upon Balin. Both received a fatal stroke. After the combat, when the knight's visor was lifted, Balin beheld his own brother. So evil was visited upon Balin through the favor of the guilty queen.

Another example of disruption was that of knight Tristram, who did not keep his vows. He was a bold, attractive, careless knight who won the last tournament. Tristram had violated his vow by murdering the husband of Isolt whom he loved. He transgressed his own marriage vows by deserting his wife, Isolt of the White Hands, and returned to Mark's queen. The vow "to love one maiden only and cleave to her" was broken by Tristram for he mocked the vows of chivalry. Tristram's love for the wife of his king paralleled that of Lancelot's love for Guenevere, wife of King Arthur. So Tristram fell under the influence of the irregular love of Arthur's best loved knight and Queen Guenevere.

The second step in the destruction of the Round Table was the following of the false conception of the quest for the Holy Grail. Now, while Arthur, Tennyson's symbol of the spiritualizing mind, was out in the world righting wrong, a beam appeared at Camelot, down which came the Holy Grail covered with white samite so that none of the knights might see it. After seeing the beam, all the knights vowed to take
up the quest. Arthur later thought their obsession was a great mistake, but since each had taken his vow each knight must uphold it which he did. King Arthur said to them:

Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm
Pass thro' this hall—how often, O my knights
Your places being vacant at my side,
This chance of noble deeds will come and go
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires.¹

The knights followed the wrong vision, for the Holy Grail quest was not for them, but only for Galahad, who alone had seen the Grail.

"Ah, Galahad, Galahad", said the King, "for such as thou art is the vision, nor for these."²

The adventure took the knights out of the realm of King Arthur where they should have done the work of righting the wrong at home, near Camelot. During the quest Lancelot had been told by the hermit that he could not obtain the Holy Grail because of his sin. Lancelot admitted that he loved the queen "unmeasurably", and all the deeds of arms which he did, he did for her "were it right or wrong". This showed that Lancelot did not take his vow seriously, because he did not live a life of "chastity and truth". He thought little of religion until the appearance of the Grail.

After the quest many knights did not return to court,

¹ Tennyson, Sir Alfred, loc.cit. Part II, p.55.
for some of them died and some were killed. About one-tenth of them returned.

And those that had gone out on the quest
Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,
And those that had not, stood before the king.¹

Some of the best knights of the Round Table did not return and consequently their vacancies were filled by new knights, who were inferior to the older knights.

The Idylls show, too, that any reformer must work with human material, and that in society evil crops out because people are human and have certain temperaments, somewhat lacking in integrity (as depicted in the Idylls). Truly, Lancelot and Guinevere were followers of the cult of "l'amour courtois", the practices of which had a bad effect upon the people of whom they were the center. Just so society is an organism in which weakness is communicated from one part to another corrupting the whole. It was Lancelot and Guinevere whose love was the first cause of the final dissolution of the Round Table, and the second cause was the following of the "wandering fires" in the knight's quest for the Holy Grail.

Comparison of Tennyson and Malory

In Malory and Tennyson there are minor differences as well as a major one, that of the theme. Malory has the

¹ Tennyson, Sir Alfred, loc.cit. Part II, p.88.
meeting between Lancelot and the queen incidental. King Arthur had forgotten to equip the young knight with a sword, for the ceremony of being knighted. By chance he met the queen to whom he made known his need. Quite casually she gave him a sword. Tennyson has a specific purpose in mind for he has Lancelot escort Guinevere to the court of King Arthur. She, believing Lancelot to be the king, falls in love with him. This meeting is the beginning of their troubous love affair. In Malory the prize of the tournament is immaterial, while in Tennyson's lengthy addition to the tradition it is the largest of nine diamonds from the crown of the unknown king. In Malory, Elaine of Astolat pine away, while in Tennyson she offers her love as wife and later as follower of Lancelot. Agravaine in Malory reveals to the king the secret love of Lancelot while Tennyson has Mordred tell the secret. In the end Malory has Lancelot take the queen to his castle of Joyous Gard to keep her until the wrath of the king is abated so that the queen will not be burned. In Tennyson, after the expose of their love, Tennyson has both lovers ride out from the castle, kiss, and separate. Malory devotes an entire chapter to Meleagrance's capture of the queen, which is traditional, while Tennyson omits the story altogether. The major issue in the outstanding stories of the Round Table by Malory and Tennyson is the interpretation of
their schemes. In Malory Lancelot is an individual knight of the Round Table and the lover of the queen. In Malory's scheme the author must have a knight who would cause dissension among other knights in order to show the working out of the law of retribution because of King Arthur's incest, which he had unknowingly committed. It was Lancelot, the most familiar knight, who, by loving the queen, caused this dissension among the knights, especially Mordred, Agravaine, and Gawain. This animosity led to a division between the knights. The one faction was led by Lancelot and his kinsmen, while the other was led by King Arthur, Gawain, Agravaine, and his followers. Mordred, the King's son, is left in charge of the kingdom. He causes letters to be written by others stating that the king is dead, and he has himself proclaimed king. Then he desired Queen Guinever for his wife. On hearing this report, the king in France, who is warring against Lancelot, returned to England. Arthur declares war on Mordred. The result is that both Arthur and Mordred are killed. Lancelot returns to seek the queen, but she sees the cause of all the destruction in her love for Lancelot and refuses his advances, remaining in the abbey to which she had reported in repentence.

In Tennyson's scheme, Lancelot is again the lover of the queen and the knight of the Round Table, a social order in which one knight effects the whole order; for upon the
discovery of the adulterous love of Lancelot and the queen, each member of the order of the Round Table is unfavorably influenced. Tristram, Balan, and Geraint show decided reaction. The second part of the scheme is the following of the false conception of the Holy Grail by the knights of the Round Table. In the end of the Idylls Tennyson depicts the

ruin of the soul's most noble hopes. In the life of society, then, Tennyson sees no triumph of the higher spiritual powers but rather their overthrow and an isolent resurgence of the powers of evil.


Maynadier says: "His (Hoye's) object seems to have been to ennoble their love."


CHAPTER IV

MODERN TREATMENT

Lancelot and Guinevere as Lovers

Sir Richard Hovey in 1895 gave an original (from the point of view within the scope of this study) interpretation of Sir Lancelot in modern treatment. Hovey's interest was in the guilty lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, rather than in King Arthur, for in both The Marriage of Guenevere and The Birth of Sir Galahad his account is concerned with Lancelot and the Queen; Arthur is only incidently mentioned. Trent and Peterfield state:

This was not to be merely a rehandling of ancient poetic material by an idle singer of empty day but a profound treatment of modern problems in terms of the past--the conflict of the individual and society and the right relation between them.¹

Maynadier says: "His (Hovey's) object seems to have been ²
to ennoble their love."

¹ Trent, Peterfield, Cambridge History of American Literature, New York, Putnam and Sons. 1921.
Hovey introduces several innovations into the Arthurian legend; such as, the unusual meeting of the lovers, advice given to the queen, new characters, the proposed flight, the king's unusual attitude toward rumors, and frankness of conversation. The first original idea was the meeting of Lancelot and the Lady of the Hills. Lancelot, after having wandered three days without food, became faint. As he lay on the summit of the hills, thinking of death, he saw her approach with a motley fool. From that day until after the king's coronation he saw her no more, but he recalled her by referring to her as "the Lady of the Hills". On the day of the marriage of Arthur and Guinevere, Lancelot was sent by the king on the quest of the disturbances caused by Turquine. Also, on the same day when a messenger told King Arthur that King Mark had encamped upon his territory, Arthur decided to postpone the wedding, but the Bishop opposed this delay. Arthur went on the following day. Now, as Lancelot pursued his way to conquer Turquine, he came to the same hill where he had seen the Lady of the Hills for the first time. He stopped to tell Bors about her while the other knights were sent on.

God sent a blessed angel to my aid.
There on the peak beyond the gulf I saw her,
Standing against the sky, with garments blown,
The mistress of the winds! An angel, said I?
God was more kind, he sent a woman to me.

On Lancelot's return he went with Galehot straight to the queen's garden. After he had found that Arthur had gone to attack King Mark, he found the queen alone in the garden. Then he discovered her identity with the Lady of the Hills. After this meeting Lancelot went to Galehot (Galahaut) and others and told them that he had no spirit left in him, for he had discovered that Queen Guinevere (Quenevere) and the Lady of the Hills were the same.

"...Oh, my friends, I am but the husk of what I was, and all that was savory in me is consumed."

Afterwards Lancelot turned to Galehot, and intimated that he, Lancelot, was afraid of his own undoing for he said to Galehot:

The traitor Lancelot! for hear them now,—
Cold, scornful voices of futurity
That speak so cruel—calmly of the dead!
Oh, Galahaut, for love of my good name
Pluck out your sword and kill me. 2

Then he attempted to rationalize his desire within himself thinking that he had seen the queen first, and questioned the right of the king "to steal her from him".

"...And yet I saw her first. What right had he
To steal her from me? I have served her well
Two years, laid all my laurels at her feet,

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1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.61.
2. Ibid. p.65.
Won all my victories in her sweet name, Though yet I knew it not. What right had he--?

Bors, upon knowing of Lancelot’s mental battle, advised him to do something that was superb and noble.

You will be your great self and turn this love, If it be true that will not be cast out, To something high and noble.

Never in any of the Arthurian legends is found the unusual meeting of Lancelot and Guenevere.

The advice which is given the queen is another innovation. In neither Tennyson nor Malory is the queen personally advised as to her marriage. Hovey has the queen receive advice from three different persons. One, Morgause, wife of Orkney, discusses with her the character of Lancelot and tells the queen that he has the reputation of all virtue. The mother of the queen, Camalduna, a new character added to the tradition, also gives her further advice when she earnestly urged her to be chaste.

......Be chaste as snow in heart as well as deed;

Yet you may have lovers if you will; The more the better, so you love them not. For till we yield we are lover’s tyrants, But afterwards their slaves. Remember this.3

Even Peredure, the queen’s brother, who has not been mentioned by other writers, gives advice; for it seems that

1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.66.
2. Ibid. p.85.
3. Ibid. p.40.
the queen was not in the right mood that she should have been
for her wedding day. Peredure advises her not to give herself
lightly in love.

To be caressed
When thou art old—this is a bitter thing.
But to be fondled by an unloved hand,
When all the soul is in another's arms—
That were a horror and a sacrilege.¹

Heretofore, in all the renditions of the legend, no
use has been made of Merlin as adviser to the queen. When
it is known to what extremity her love has brought her,
Merlin fears that the Round Table will utterly pass away.

And now surely I know that all my craft
Shall be undone and all the king's high dream,
And the Round Table shall pass utterly
Which, like a sacrament, showed forth the round world
In that ideal unto which it moves.²

In The Marriage of Guinevere Merlin does not give the ex­
plicit advice which he does in The Birth of Galahad.

In the former Merlin says:

The Queen, from whom I thought
The perpetuity of the state should grow,
Even she herself is the first sundering
From whence disintegrating spread to all!
Her fate has come upon her and the King's,
And I foresaw not and forwarned them not.³

Another change the Hovey made is in the addition of

1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.45.
2. Ibid. pp.139-139.
3. Ibid. pp.138-139.loc.cit. p.159.
characters. In the first romance the queen's father, Leodegrance, has been mentioned, but Hovey does not name him. In Malory and Tennyson both speak of Lancelot's mother, but Hovey gives her the name of Camalduna. He introduces Peredure as the queen's brother. In none of the preceding stories does the queen have a brother. Then, too, Hovey has created other characters such as Roman courtiers, who have never appeared in any other of the Arthurian stories.

One more digression from the Arthurian legend is in the account of the proposed flight of the queen. When news of the rumors of her behavior reaches the queen's ear, and when she knows of the king's return, she proposes to flee with Lancelot. In Malory's account Lancelot flees with the queen to Joyous Gard, his castle; in Tennyson's both enter different convents to repent of their sin; but in Hovey's tragic drama Lancelot does not flee. Lancelot will not consent, for he is still loyal to the king although he is the favorite of the queen.

Speak not of flight; I have played him false—The King, My friend. I ne'er can wipe that smirch away At least, I will not add a second shame. And blazon out the insult to the world.1

Another marked change in the Arthurian legends is in the king's attitude toward the rumor of the misbehavior of Lancelot

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1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.159.
and Guinevere. After the king has returned, he assembles court; then Morgause comes before the king to tell of the deceit practiced by Sir Lancelot. The king will not listen to her, for he thinks Morgause is weaving intrigues against Lancelot and the queen; consequently, he banishes Morgause from Camelot. Then the king commands Lancelot to be his friend.

The king's resolute attitude, in Hovey's poem, is an innovation in the legend. Never before has there been the king's direct decision, for in Malory and in Tennyson the king listens to the advice of the knights. Hovey arranges for the queen's lady in waiting to tell of the adventurous love of Lancelot for the queen, while in the legends of the Round Table he is one of the outstanding knights of that order. Morgause says:

Oh, not so fast, my royal brother! La Rouse Cannot break through his coffin to sustain His righteous accusation; but I take That burden on myself.¹

Then again Morgause says:

... I myself Have seen Sir Lancelot and the Queen together When they were unpreceived.²

With that remark Arthur silences her and will not listen to

¹ Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.176.
² Ibid. p.176.
Morgause. Morgause is in intrigue with the Roman ambassador, Publius, whose purpose is, when he comes to England, to quarrel with King Arthur. Publius says to Morgause:

Do not forget the most important thing,
That Lancelot must quarrel with the king;
For hence I see a great advantage grow
For Rome.1

In no other Arthurian stories has been found Publius making a social trip to England and remaining in King Arthur's castle.

One of the greatest innovations in Hovey's work is in the matter of the king's decision in the accusation of the queen and Lancelot. Since the king comes to this decision, that of his trust in Lancelot, The Round Table is maintained, not because a knight is incited to rise against Lancelot to defend the honor of the king. The king says of Lancelot:

I would slay 2
With mine own hands the knave that did him wrong.

Another intrusion into the traditional account in The Birth of Galahad is the availability of the desire of Lucius for Guenevere, Lancelot is badly hurt, when Lucius moves, maliciously and sinously toward Queen Guinevere. Lancelot loves the queen more than he does himself, for in one rousing effort, although he is already seriously injured, he seizes

1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.84.
2. Ibid. p.178.
the bestial Lucius and hurles him upon the stone court below the balcony. This is another addition to the Arthurian legends which has never appeared before.

The frankness of manner in facing the situation as revealed in words and actions characterizes the modern treatment which Hovey presents. These words and actions are very different in manner from that of the Victorian age, which is very reserved. In The Marriage of Guenevere Lancelot's ingenuous talk with the queen shows that she is made to realize that Lancelot does love her and has done mighty deeds of valor for her. One time, when Lancelot found the queen in her garden, he told her of his first vision of her.

Love leaped to life
Within me when I saw you in the hills.

Another instance of freedom in speech appears in the queen's recital of the royal nuptial night. The king seeing that she was timid and afraid, unsheathes his sword Excalibur.

And placed it for a sign between us twain
And all night long the sword divided us. 

Lancelot modernly human in his outward expression exclaims with joy. "Mine! Mine! All Mine!" This intense feeling on the part of Lancelot may have been inferred in his

1. Hovey, Richard, loc. cit. p. 75.
2. Ibid. p. 108.
3. Ibid. p. 108.
characterization by other writers, but it is the first time that there has been the free spoken expression. Then candidly the queen calls Lancelot her husband, and he responds by calling her his wife.

Another instance of frank expression is in the passage in which Lancelot says:

\[
\text{I have seen you as a vision of the morning in the hills, and as a queen, and as the dainty mimicry of a boy; but I would see you grand and undisguised and clothed upon with moonlight and sweet air.}
\]

The next morning Lancelot tells Guinevere that she must leave him and she says to him:

\[
\text{Must I so indeed? How can I leave you? For I live in you. You are the only concord in my life; without you I am but a jarring note and all the world mere noise.}
\]

This passage depicts the aggressiveness of the queen, which is not found in Tennyson, because Tennyson's women pine away and dare not to whisper these thoughts.

Hovey's queen is quite modern in her resourcefulness. She disguises herself as a boy in order to meet Lancelot unobserved one evening. Lancelot accepts her behavior as quite proper for a royal dignitary; he shows no surprise that a queen should so step from her own character. Then

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2. Ibid. p.110.
again there are conversations of unusual frankness between the queen and Lancelot. Their counterpart for candid discussion has never before been created in the Lancelot Guinevere tradition.

To summarize, Hovey treated Lancelot in an original way. Never before had Lancelot and Arthur's future queen met by chance. Another instance of his departure from the legend is that the queen is advised by different additional persons just before the marriage with the king. In other legends Lancelot flees with the queen, but in Hovey he is loyal to his king by remaining at court. Also there is an original turn of events in that the Round Table is not destroyed when the rumor spreads of Lancelot's love for the queen. Never before has there been found such frankness in the conversation between the two lovers. Much of the story is original in detail and exceptionally modern in treatment, showing the spirit of the age.

Lancelot as Father of Guinevere's Child

The second book of Hovey's The Birth of Galahad, which concerns Lancelot and the queen, like the first, is original and modern in effect. The queen in this story is the mother of Lancelot's child a part which she has never before taken in any writing. In the garden Morgause and the dwarf hold conversation about the expected birth of the child of Lancelot and the queen. The love of Lancelot and the queen
is consummated in the birth of Galahad.

Heretofore in all renditions of the legend no use has been made of Merlin as advisor of the queen. Shortly Merlin appeared upon the scene, and Guinevere speaks her own convictions for she says that Merlin has queer power to see into the very depths of men's souls, that he looks at one, "his thoughts startle and shrink". In the roll of advisor Merlin makes the queen realize the tragic element because of her place in the state. After the birth of Galahad, Merlin comes to Queen Guinevere and tells her that she must not acknowledge her child. Merlin tells Ylen (Elaine) daughter of Pelles, that she must pretend to be the young child's mother. When Merlin explains to Guinevere how her actions will affect the welfare of the state, she realizes that she can never call Galahad her son, feel his arms about her neck, and see him on awaking, but forever see him from afar. Then she realizes that there will be a great gulf of silence between her and her son. Merlin says:

(To Ylen) You, who are childless, must not seem to be
(To Guinevere) And you, who are not childless, must be thought so.

During the conversation Merlin, after the queen showing a somewhat haughty disposition, says to her: "I have to do

only with how your deed, Affect the state".  

Hovey heightens the effect of Lancelot's tortures by frequent references to the calm, honest eyes of the king. The relation between the king and the lovers in Hovey is not quite like that in Malory and in Tennyson, for never before has the king blamed his favorite knight in any way or at any time. This very fact increases Lancelot's sense of treacherous guilt. On the battlefield the king watches Lancelot becoming sadder each day, but Arthur thinks the mood is due to the slander which Morgause has uttered. In reality it is due to Lancelot's tormenting thoughts. After pondering his guilt, Lancelot resolves to give up Guinevere: then on further thought he concludes not to do it. He defended himself:

I will not yield her. No, by heaven, she's mine,  
And by higher title than the king's.  
I can not yield her; she's not mine to yield.  
Love is not goods or gold to be passed on  
From hand to hand; It is like life itself,  
One with the owner,—Pluck it out to give.  
Another and by that act it is destroyed.  

Within himself Lancelot knows of his wrong doing, for he thinks of his great love for the king and of his deceit betraying Arthur's trust. Lancelot knows that the king's whole heart is not with the queen, but with the kingdom; so he says:

2. Ibid. p.20.
"At least I'll serve him in this dream empire... There lies his heart."

This is the first time, in the Arthurian legends, that the queen travels from her own country to Rome, and thereby introduces an unusual turn of events. The letter which the queen sends to Lancelot falls into the hands of the Roman soldiers. Because of this letter about the birth of Galahad, son of Lancelot, they plan to have Lancelot join their forces. The queen is captured by the Romans who wait in ambush for her coming. Through this ruse they think that Lancelot will join their forces for her safety. When in the Roman camp, he is told that if he will join their forces, he will be king of Britain, and then Guinevere will be his queen.

Publius says hastily:

You shall be King in Britain,
And Guinevere your queen.2

But Lancelot is true to the king and refuses this offer.

Lancelot says:

That is our quarrel; I'll not argue it.
Treason or no treason to the state, it is Black treason to my friend and to my cause.3

When Publius, a Roman soldier, sees this plan will not

2. Ibid. p.87.
3. Ibid. p.87.
work; he makes threats on the queen's life. During that night Lancelot remains with the queen, who tells him about the birth of their son. When the night is almost gone, Lancelot kisses the queen, hands her his dagger and goes, but not as a friend of Caesar's, for he remains, in this respect, loyal to his king. That next day, Lancelot fights well and is severely wounded.

While the queen is redressing the wound, the king enters the room. He is very gracious to Lancelot, for he offered him the position of the ruler of Rome. This is the first time this act has been performed. Lancelot refuses to be ruler, and Arthur offers him any prize which Lancelot desires. Lancelot replies:

This is my prize, Arthur—
To see you here in triumph. 1

This whole body of narrative concerning the queen in Rome and much of the detail concerning the individual soldiers is original with Hovey.

It is interesting to note that Malory's work is a great composite of romantic legends which he wove into his story; Tennyson's works are little idylls; while Hovey's is a tragical drama. The tragedy is the inward intellectual tragedy of Lancelot. But, the most striking addition to the legends

1. Hovey, Richard, loc.cit. p.123.
of the Arthurian Lancelot cycle is the birth of a son, Galahad, who is the child of both Lancelot and Guinevere, and not the child of Lancelot and Elaine as has been the relationship over and over again.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the development of the character of Lancelot, there have been different interpretations varying with the treatment of different authors. In the first group of the earliest Arthurian legends, Lancelot was a popular and renowned knight. In the first story, Lancelot was only a knight of chivalry, never a lover of the queen's. He was a hero of King Arthur's court ranking below only Gawain. Lanzelet (Lancelot) written by Ulrich, does not depict Lancelot as a lover of the queen, but as a knight whose display of prowess was his only reason for the rescue of Guinevere. It was Chretien who popularized Lancelot because of the heightened interest in love. Due to "l'amour courtois" and a religious idea, he was the ideal lover of Queen Guinevere. Chretien shows him worshiping inanimate objects of the queen as well as the queen herself. The Prose Romance, sometimes attributed to Walter Map, depicted the perfect friendship of Lancelot for the queen as well as for Galehot and for King
Arthur: with all whom Lancelot met, he became a friend. In another poem, by an unknown author, the Arthurian Romance, occurs the complication of the jealousy of the queen due to the Maid of Ascolat.

The second great division of the Lancelot tradition, in the accounts by Malory and Tennyson, Lancelot is no longer a popular individual hero, but a member of the Round Table whose defect interested the two authors as one in the social order of the Round Table. Malory, a great moralist, showed how the guilty lovers helped to bring about the destruction of the Round Table. Malory has Lancelot the guilty lover of the queen in order to bring about the destruction of the Round Table. It was King Arthur and his sister who are unknowingly guilty of incest. Malory has Lancelot, chief knight of King Arthur, the lover of the queen. This love causes dissension on the part of the knights by dividing them into two factions. One faction is for the king and the other is for Lancelot. The dissension leads into war with each faction against the other. These quarrels give Mordred, the child of King Arthur, a chance to betray the king. In the end both King Arthur and Mordred are slain. The queen, seeing what her love for Lancelot has caused, goes to a convent to repent for her sins, and Lancelot retires to a monastery to become a holy man.
Tennyson, too, made Lancelot the chief knight of the Round Table, and even though chief in that order, showed Lancelot's ultimate failure was the chief defect. Lancelot and the queen's guilty love had a decided affect upon the other members of the Round Table and in the end helped cause its destruction. The second defect is that of following the wrong conception of the quest of the Holy Grail. This quest of following "wandering fires" caused the death of many knights who were replaced by inferior ones.

Hovey in *The Marriage of Guenevere* introduced several innovations into the Arthurian legends, such as the unusual meeting of the lovers, advice to the queen, new characters, proposed flight, the king's attitude toward rumors of Lancelot and the queen. Hovey presented a frankness of manner in facing the situation as revealed in words and actions of different characters. Lastly Hovey introduced a unique and momentous change in the characters of the lovers, for Galahad was no longer the son of Ylen (Elaine) daughter of King Pelles, but of Queen Guinevere. Hovey had one believe that the queen was really Lancelot's bride rather than King Arthur's. Maynadier stated that Hovey's attempt was "modernizing the nature of his characters and giving the old incidents as far as possible a new meaning for the new time".

In the Malory interpretation the literary world is
given the aome of knighthood in the character of Lancelot:

Ah, Lancelot, thou were head of all Christian
knights, and thou were never matched of earthly
knight’s hand, and thou were the courtliest knight
that ever bare shield, and thou were the truest
lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman: and
thou were the kindest man that ever strake sword:
and thou were the goodliest person ever came among
press of knights, and thou were the meekest man
and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies,
and thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe
ever put in rest.1

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