

“‘Tis But a Joke”:

The Function of Humour in Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* and its Modern English
Translations.

Michèle Posthumus Meyjes – s1137042

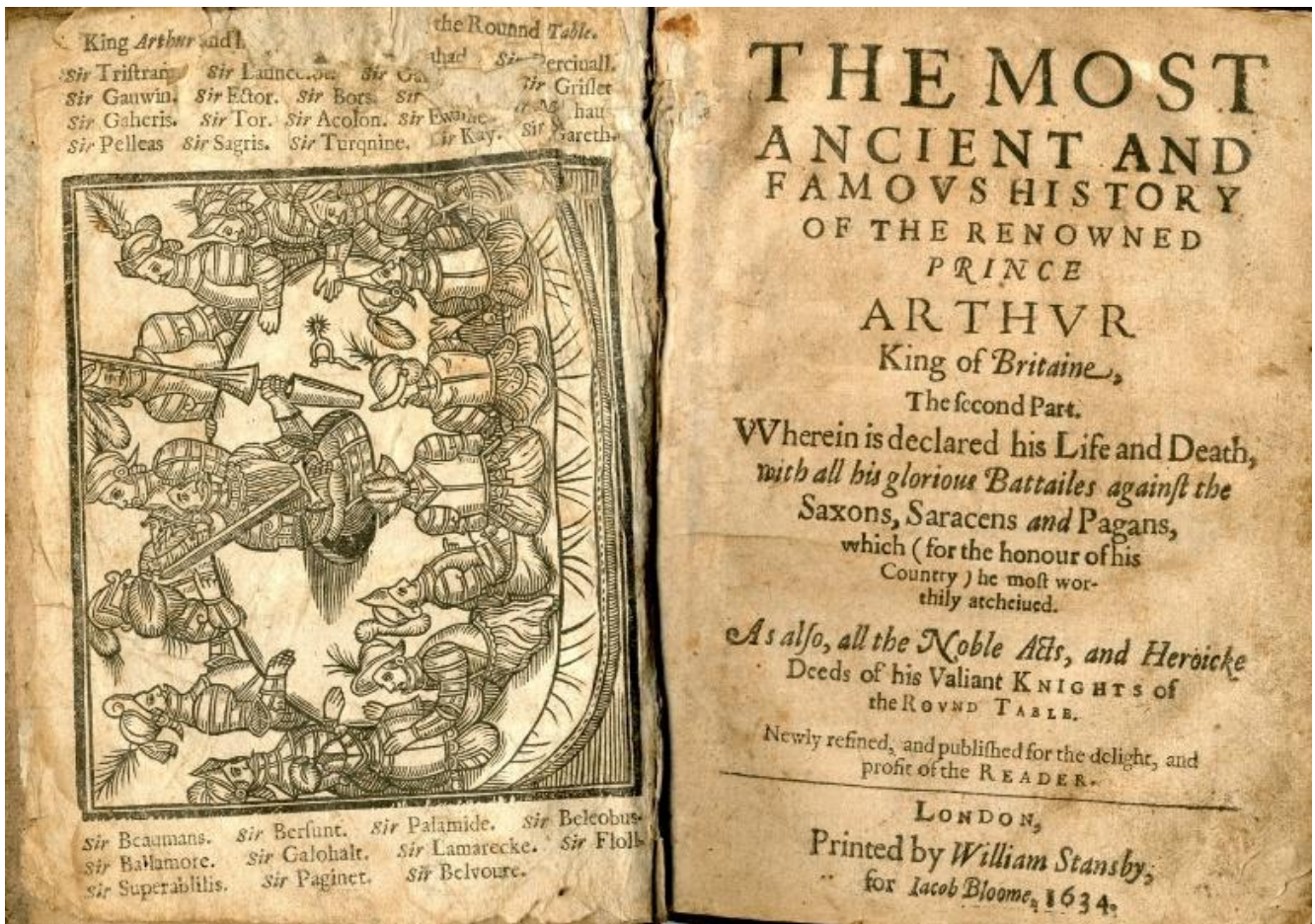
Faculty of Humanities

Research Master Literary Studies

Supervisor: Dr. M.J.A. Kasten

Second reader: Dr. M.H. Porck

22-05-2018



Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, London: printed by William Stansby for Iacob Bloome, 1634, Volume II.

Bangor University Library Rare Book Collection

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Introduction	4
Methodology	6

Chapter 1 – Malory and his *Le Morte d’Arthur*

Introduction	8
History of Arthurian Literature	8
History of Sir Thomas Malory	9
New Historicist Analysis	11

Chapter 2 – *Le Morte d’Arthur*

Introduction	19
Section 1 – Explicit Humour	19
Section 2 – Implicit Humour	29
Conclusion	41

Chapter 3 – Explicit Humour

Introduction	42
Analysis	45
Conclusion	62

Chapter 4 – Implicit Humour

Introduction	65
Analysis	65
Conclusion	81

Conclusion	83
-------------------	----

Cited Sources	86
----------------------	----

Appendix	88
-----------------	----

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, people in the Middle Ages were not mindless hooligans, unable to do anything but wave a longsword around and pour tankards of beer down their throats. There was more to life than farming, war, and the plague. In particular, the courtly romances from the late Middle Ages were filled with clever humour, sharp wit, and surprisingly raunchy lines. One such medieval work that contains humorous passages is Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Humour is a complicated phenomenon, though, open to all kinds of interpretation – both by contemporary audiences and modern ones. A sense of humour is subjective, and therefore, as Charles Harrison states in his dissertation "Difficulties of Translating Humour", "its function and meaning are difficult to define due to its vastness and sense of humour will differ from person to person" (9).

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the different kinds of humour in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and the way they have been translated into modern English. The main question I intend to answer is this: What was the particular function of the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and how are both the comedy and its function reflected in the modern translations? I believe that Malory's use of comedy in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is not merely a literary decision, but that it serves a distinct social purpose. More specifically, my claim is that Malory used comedy to reflect on the traditional values and conventions of his time. I will substantiate this claim in my thesis as well as provide an answer to my main question.

The Arthurian myth was a popular source of literary inspiration throughout the Middle Ages, and has created a legacy that still lives today. Though Arthur has never been proved to be a historical figure, and all evidence points towards his character being a literary invention, Arthurian legends still permeate modern literature, and have been central to the idealised medieval culture of chivalry and courtly values. The legend of King Arthur grew and expanded throughout the Middle Ages, until Sir Thomas Malory compiled a complete structured narrative

from the various existing sources, and created what is now known as the most complete collection of Arthurian stories in his late medieval text, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. This work can be considered the biggest medieval compendium of Arthurian stories, and as such it provides an important insight into how a popular literary topic evolved throughout the entire Middle Ages.

Though *Le Morte d'Arthur* is not known for its comedy, there are various examples of humour in this work that, to my mind, have not been given enough attention. Consequently, my intention is to produce an in-depth analysis of these passages. On the basis of my analysis, I will demonstrate how the humour found in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, rooted in a medieval framework as it is, has been subsequently changed or omitted in the modern English translations, and I will analyse what consequences those changes have for how we see and understand this work. Studying the use of humour in *Le Morte d'Arthur* will give us an important insight into the way Malory used comedy in his work to address situations from his world, and how he reflects on his time and society through the use of his writing. Conversely, studying how these reflections have been rendered in the modern translations can help us understand how we currently consider Malory and his work.

Because humour is completely subjective and determined, among other things, by cultural conditions, I cannot make assumptions or statements without describing my use of the concept. The humour I found in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is either explicitly acknowledged as such by the narrator or the characters, or it can be inferred from the use of conventions associated with the genres of farce or burlesque. I do not claim that I know the intentions of the authors whose works I cite or analyse; I will only refer to their works. As I cannot represent a real audience in this thesis, I shall limit myself to these definitions of humour, and speculate on the nature of the intended audience in order to be able to make generalisations about humour and this text.

When characters are found laughing in a literary work, some sort of humour must be involved, even when it is harder to recognise for the reader than for the characters, who evidently realise the humour of the situation. When a joke involves characters, but does not elicit a response from them, it becomes harder to recognise. In such cases I must rely on general knowledge of the different traditions of humour which exist, and how they have been used in other literary works in order to recognise them. Some situations may not seem humorous to us at all, now, but would probably have been seen as humorous by a contemporary audience. In these instances, knowledge of the contemporary culture is indispensable. By considering different types of humour that have already been identified in medieval literature by others, I hope to identify the function of the types of humour found in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and how they are translated today.

Methodology.

For my analysis of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, I make use of the edition based on the Winchester Manuscript by Stephen Shepherd. The first modern rendition was by Dorsey Armstrong and was originally published in 2009. Dorsey Armstrong created her translation of *Le Morte d'Arthur* from a background of medieval literature and took a scholarly interest in the Arthurian legends. She aims to accurately render the original into modern English, keeping the narrative close to the original but making the text more accessible. The resulting translation, often quite literal, can be explained by her wish that "this translation makes this remarkable narrative accessible for those who might otherwise be daunted by the late Middle English of Malory's prose" (xi).

The second translation was created by Keith Baines and was originally published in 1983. Baines undertook his translation of *Le Morte d'Arthur* from a background of poetry rather than medieval studies. His translation is not only aimed at students of medieval literature,

but at anyone who is interested in the story in general. This explains the often freer translation choices he makes. As he himself puts it:

the purpose of this book is to provide a concise and lucid rendering of *Le Morte d'Arthur* in modern idiom for the benefit of those students and general readers who wish to obtain a firm grasp of the whole, but lack the time and enthusiasm necessary to perform this task for themselves. (vii)

In Chapter 1 I will provide an introduction to the primary text, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and to Sir Thomas Malory and his life. I will continue with a New Historicist analysis of the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, to show how they may provide insight into Malory's view of contemporary England and its connection to the idealised world of King Arthur. In Chapter 2, I analyse the comedic passages in question. In Chapters 3 and 4, I provide a close reading of relevant passages and compare the original Middle English text to the modern translations, to identify and analyse the differences. I will also attempt to ground the comedic passages in their historical framework. In each chapter I will introduce more specific methodology and offer more detailed explanations of theories when they become relevant. I will summarise my findings in my conclusion and provide answers to the research questions and a substantiation of the claim posed in this thesis. And lastly, I will provide a list of my sources and an appendix with the complete passages for Chapters 3 and 4, to make the comparison of the original texts to the translations easier.

Chapter 1: Malory and his *Le Morte d'Arthur*

The legends of King Arthur have been passed down through the ages and have sparked our imagination, both in the Middle Ages and beyond. Though the first mentions of Arthur in literary works do not remotely bring to mind the figure we now imagine as the King of Camelot, the legend has grown and grown through the years, added upon and changed, until the collection of stories was put into a single narrative by Sir Thomas Malory. First, I will describe the history of Arthurian literature in general, after which I will focus on Malory and his *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Next I will provide a New Historicist analysis of the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, to shed light on the connection between Malory's life and surroundings and his work.

History of Arthurian Literature

Though there is little to no evidence that Arthur was ever a real historical character, the tales about him are set in roughly the 6th century CE. The history of Arthurian literature has been listed by Stephen Shepherd, in a chronology of Arthur alongside his edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. I will focus only on some of the texts and events that have directly influenced Malory, as the vast corpus of Arthurian literature is too large to address completely.

At the beginning of the 7th century, the name Arthur starts appearing in Welsh sources, and around the year 1000, a body of Welsh Arthurian tales indicates the possibly Celtic origins of aspects of the Quest for the Holy Grail. It is not until around 1136 that the first Anglo-Saxon account of Arthur's life is created, albeit in Latin. Geoffrey of Monmouth lays the foundations for the legends of King Arthur by including him in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* and provides such standard Arthurian elements as Merlin's prophecies, the Roman storyline, Arthur's battle with Mordred, and his departure to the Isle of Avalon at the time of his death. The Anglo-Norman *Brut* by Wace, finished in 1155, introduces the Round Table

and modernises Arthur's court into a chivalric institution. Between 1160 and 1191, Chrétien de Troyes produces the Vulgate Cycle, one of the most influential works in Arthurian romance and one of Malory's main sources, introducing Camelot and the characters Lancelot, Gawain and Perceval, all of which will be vital elements in the following Arthurian tales. Around 1190 Layamon completes his translation of Wace's *Brut*, the first rendition of Arthurian literature in English. Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries various new works on Arthur and his knights were created, including the French Vulgate Cycle, which aimed to represent a full and didactic range of Arthurian tales, an English metrical romance of Arthur and Merlin, and the alliterative and stanzaic *Morte d'Arthur*, both of which were important sources for Malory's work (xviii). In the 15th century the first prose romance of Arthurian literature was created, and in 1469 Malory himself began work on *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

History of Sir Thomas Malory

At the end of the 14th century, the War of the Roses began, which would heavily influence Malory's life and writing. Malory himself was born around 1415-1417, though exactly when is unsure. In 1451 he was charged with various crimes, among which attempted murder, rape, extortion, theft, escaping imprisonment, and robbery. He was held from 1452 to 1460 in various prisons, awaiting a trial that eventually did not take place. During the several periods of time Malory was released on bail, he got implicated in further charges of theft and harbouring another alleged criminal, his servant John, who was also charged with attempting to steal horses together with Malory. The latter escaped from prison in 1454, was recaptured, and finally freed from prison when Yorkish forces seized London in 1460.

However, it is generally suspected Malory was back in prison in 1468, most likely for being a Lancastrian sympathiser under Edward IV. He was named as one of the witnesses to a deathbed declaration of Thomas Mynton, who was an inmate of Newgate prison in 1469.

According to Shepherd, *Le Morte d'Arthur* was completed between March 4th 1469 and March 3rd 1470 and may have been mostly or entirely written in prison, judging from Malory's references to his imprisonment throughout the work (xxvi). He finally died on the 14th of March 1471, still imprisoned, and was buried at Greyfriars Church, in the immediate vicinity of Newgate prison.

Despite Malory's incarceration during his work's completion, *Le Morte d'Arthur* has become one of the greatest collections of Arthurian myths and legends in history, and perhaps the most famous medieval work of Arthurian literature. Nellie Aurner describes the unusual circumstances of Malory's imprisonment while writing *Le Morte d'Arthur* in her 1933 article "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?", noting that Malory was granted access to the large library at the Greyfriars Monastery by the then Mayor of London, Richard Whittington, who was a famous medieval philanthropist. Thanks to his use of this library, which contained various sources of Arthurian literature, Malory was able to find an outlet for his imprisoned literary energies (363).

According to Ralph Norris in his 2008 article "Malory's Library: The Sources of the 'Morte d'Arthur'", Malory brought a previously unrealised harmony to the diverse collection of Arthurian legends. He did this by incorporating elements from various existing Arthurian works, and essentially producing an English Arthurian prose cycle. (4). Though there is a long list of sources that he used as background material for his compilation he also introduced material that could not be found in his major sources, varying from such small details as the names of minor characters to entire new storylines and adventures for major characters. This approach resulted in a uniquely detailed version of the vast Arthurian legend, specifically focused on Arthur and his knights.

Malory's Comedy – a New Historicist Analysis

The creation of this large work would not have been an easy task. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory may have attempted to come to terms with his own life during the War of the Roses, the reality of society changing around him, and his imprisonment. His work reflects his own ideas on his changing society, the war raging around him, and the idealised historical world of King Arthur. In his *Arthurian Romance – A Short Introduction*, Derek Pearsall questions Malory's choice of the Vulgate Cycle, which incorporated the large amounts of highly religious symbolism in the Arthurian legends, as background for his own work. In his view Malory searched for a way to express a renewed idealism about chivalry after his own experiences of the War of the Roses and its sordid realities. Yet the Vulgate Cycle's narrative had such a complex, elaborately interlaced structure, containing so many local significances, that it was almost impossible to assign it to a single overall purpose (83).

There is a touch to *Le Morte d'Arthur* that is distinctly Malory's, and that is quite possibly influenced by Malory's own life and his opinion of the values so widely expressed in previous Arthurian sources. Pursuing this line of thought, Pearsall claims that "there is also a heroic quality in Malory's resistance to the single informing ideology of the Vulgate Cycle – the theme that gave point to the apparent pointlessness of much of the action – namely the nothingness of secular chivalry" (84). By contrast, the Vulgate Cycle tells us of the impending doom of the Round Table and Arthur's world because the Holy Grail is withheld from the entirety of Arthurian knighthood, thereby creating a transcendental, higher spirituality that is lacking in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In the Vulgate Cycle, this higher spirituality goes beyond the system of secular chivalric idealism, and renders the secular chivalric idealism, that is so important and revered in Malory's work, worthless.

Malory's use of comedic passages in an otherwise elevated, formal, and serious context has been a cause of confusion among scholars, who have been unable to situate his

work in one genre or another because of its often clashing moments of seriousness and comedy. As Ruth Morse states in her article “Back To the Future: Malory’s Genres”, Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* has been characterised as “a compilation of tales, an epic, a history, a long prose fiction, a novel, a redaction of its French sources, a romance, a tragedy, a translation” (100). He picks and chooses elements from a multitude of genres, and extends the boundaries of those genres to incorporate aspects of others. The difficulty that arises from this practice is also recognised by Sandra Hordis, who explains that “with each argument in defense of one category, arguments in favor of the others convincingly refute the first” (“Unity, Genre, and Subverting the Absolute Past”, 1). I believe, however, that it was not Malory’s aim to destroy or mock the existing genres he blends together. On the contrary, it seems that he enjoys exploring previously untapped potential, by combining elements from his various Arthurian sources within these pre-existing genres. This mixing of literary genres is one of the ways that Malory’s comedy manifests itself in his work. By adding elements of other genres, like the farce, he disrupts the static repertoire of the usual genres for Arthurian literature, like the epic or the knightly romances, and draws attention to the topics he discusses within his narrative.

It might seem that Malory simply added comedic passages to his *Le Morte d’Arthur* to stretch the limits and overcome the boundaries of genre. However, considered in the light of his reaction to the changing world around him, I believe his use of comedy gains a new, more important function. He uses this mixing of genres, the high literary genre of knightly romance with the low comedy genre of farce, to show how his contemporary society has been turned upside down. This procedure can be explained with the help of a New Historicist approach. This approach, as Stephen Greenblatt states in his essay “Resonance and Wonder”, aims to “reflect upon the historical circumstances of their [literary texts] original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own” (42).

Through this analysis it is conversely possible also to learn more about contemporary intellectual history. In the introduction to his study *The New Historicism*, Aram Veesser states that New Historicists “seize upon an event or anecdote (...) and re-read it in such a way as to reveal through the analysis of tiny particulars the behavioral codes, logics, and motive forces controlling a whole society” (xi), concluding that “New Historicism seeks less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other” (xii).

This theory is useful in identifying how Malory may have used humour and comedy in his work to reflect on the social and political circumstances of fifteenth-century England. Most of the comedic instances in *Le Morte d'Arthur* discuss a topic having to do with knighthood: kingship, knightly values, gender roles, or courtly love. From a New Historicist perspective, these comedic moments may have been used by Malory to comment on and perhaps criticise the state of these concepts in his contemporary society.

In her study *Medieval English Comedy*, Sandra Hordis explains that the ideals presented in earlier Arthurian literature could seem bleakly unapproachable or unrealistic in the absence of comedy. According to her, Malory understood these difficulties and inconsistencies in idealistic chivalric behaviours, which explains why he

expanded and developed the comic moments of the sources not to subvert the literary-chivalric ethos which was so important to that late Middle Ages, but to question those inconsistencies in such a way that the more ecumenical values of the chivalric idiom survived the dialogic process (147).

This view is echoed by Sandra Salla in her dissertation *The Comedy of Malory's Morte Darthur*, in which she describes *Le Morte d'Arthur's* comic moments as “a reflection of the changing, crisis-charged aristocracy of fifteenth century England, where the comic moments

continually renegotiate the chivalric past in terms of nobility, community, and knightly authenticity” (1).

Hordis explains how the comedic moments discussing kingship and knightly values might reflect Malory’s opinion of the reality around him. The War of the Roses threw the country into turmoil and radically changed the role of kingship in England. As two noble houses, both with royal roots, fought for the right to rule the country, and the feudal system slowly gave way to a more modern society, the traditional values of kingship changed as well. Then, after the war ended, the role of the nobility changed with the rise of a whole new generation. As the wealthier middle class rose to aristocracy, they began to redevelop the rules and values of that upper class. These contributions provided by Salla and Hordis, as well as my own analysis, have made me believe that Malory’s humorous passages concerning the values of kingship, the responsibilities of knights, and the role of knightly values can be seen as reflecting on those changes in Malory’s society, and as criticism on the outdated values of the medieval system.

Another topic found more than once in the comedic passages of *Le Morte d’Arthur* concerns the inversion of traditional gender roles. In those passages, Lancelot dresses up as a maiden, and pranks Dynadan by dressing him up as a maiden too, or Lancelot ends up in bed with a man who mistakes him for his lady lover. Elsewhere Lancelot gets emasculated by a female huntress who shoots an arrow into his buttocks. Finally, a damsel dressed in men’s armour and bearing a sword and shield saves the knight Alexander, only to be laughed at for her trouble. In my view, Malory’s comedy in these passages aims to address and criticise the idealised and therefore unrealistic gender rules which were enforced in King Arthur’s kingdom, and which were still very powerful in Malory’s own society. At the same time, these comedic passages show cross-dressing as being greeted with laughter and ridicule, resulting in the status-quo being upheld. It is important for my analysis to be understood that

these gender roles, as well as courtly love as a literary genre, existed only among the aristocracy. Only noblemen and noblewomen were relevant in courtly romance, and the parallel to historical England would have been looked for in its aristocracy, not any of the lower classes. My analysis, unless specified, will therefore only look at the aristocracy, which Malory features almost exclusively in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

During Malory's time, gender was a complex concept. On the one hand, the literary genre of courtly love had always prescribed rigid gender roles for both men and women. The men were knights, masters of their own fate, destined to prove their masculinity through acts of honour and martial prowess, whereas women were passive, with only their elevated social position and the embellishment of their looks to provide status and nobility to their posture, doomed to be a mere object of desire for the knights to moon after. We find these roles enacted not just in literature, but in medieval social reality as well. As a rule, women had little agency and were merely passed on to an eligible husband to forge political alliances or bring wealth, status, or power to their family. They existed only to serve first their family and then their husbands, to maintain the home and to provide children.

On top of that, the two genders were usually kept separate. Men were men, and women were women, and there were few if any ways for the two sexes to mingle. In her work "Shifting Mythology – The Transformation of Gender in Modern Arthurian Retellings", Caroline Redmond describes how only men had access to power, either through knightly acts of physical prowess or through logical debates in universities. Women did not exist in either of these realms; they were excluded from universities altogether, and only served as objects to bring honour and prestige to knights (4). Men and women were both restricted to these rigid gender boundaries, with few instances of either men or women identifying with their opposite gender or moving outside of their own gender boundaries to the other.

On the other hand, late 15th century English noblewomen, especially those who were raised to nobility from the higher middle class relatively recently after the war, were provided with a relative freedom that seems astonishing considering the expectations of their time, and that would dwindle again during the Renaissance. While widowed noblewomen had already had the power to inherit their estates and, sometimes, their late husband's business, this practice would sometimes extend to married noblewomen as well. The addition of the wealthy merchants to the aristocracy definitely affected the existing rules and regulations for the nobility. Diana Watt considers this contrast in her interpretive essay accompanying her book *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*. She describes how, while "women played a major role in the running of the household and the estates", were well versed in topics of politics and patronage, and were responsible for the health and piety of their family (158), it is also important to remember that women's "autonomy was limited and their authority often circumscribed" (141). Though the Paston women, Margaret and Agnes, were famously successful in increasing their social status, Watt describes Margaret's bitterness and pain in having to "betray the depths of her attachment" (157) to her daughter Margery. Women could rise to a relatively powerful position, but the road there was still littered with sacrifices. They would never hold their position as naturally or as easily as men.

And Malory does not just scrutinize heterosexual gender roles in this manner. Homosexuality, too, is a concept explored and studied in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. As medieval England was a strictly Christian society, homosexual contacts were not accepted. Yet the way Malory addresses this topic in some of the comedic passages I have studied seems to indicate a more accepting stance on the subject. He tries to differentiate between the chivalric masculinity inherent to the knightly order, and the underlying homosociality in an essentially masculine society. Homosociality is a term considered in depth by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her study *Between Men* (1985). According to her, the very masculine nature of male

society often masks an underlying forbidden homosexual desire, in which men can thus still indulge because it is hidden behind their usual masculine contact. In medieval Christian society, love between men could of course never take place. Yet the existence of a homosocial culture among the Knights of the Round Table makes a jump to homosexual interaction very easy to take. This allows Malory to use comedic conventions from the genre of farce, like gender reversal or mistaken identity, in order to play with the potential of homosexuality. On the one hand Malory focuses heavily on the masculine traits of the knights, and places the secular adventurous aspect of the lives at Camelot above the spiritual, religious side found in many of his sources. Yet on the other hand he unites these masculine features on various occasions with homosexuality or gender reversal in Lancelot, the most chivalric of knights. I believe he does this to reflect his own society, which in his time had its traditions and conventions turned upside down, and which allows him to try and redefine masculinity.

It seems to me that Malory plays with these seemingly clashing gender roles and the conflicting occurrences of masculinity and homosexuality, in order to question the flaws in the status-quo, as he does with other aspects from the chivalric genre that were put to the test in contemporary events. As the role of kings and knights shifted after the War of the Roses, with the arrival of a whole new generation of nobles raised from their previous middle-class standing, so did the role of women change. As Hordis states, “Malory’s version points to the flexibility of gender in chivalric culture, despite the categorical gender roles assigned in chivalric discourses” (152). To build upon Hordis’ statement, I believe Malory used the rare instances of humour in his otherwise serious and reverent piece of high literature to put those changing values to the test, to show the clashes of the old traditional values with the new modern reality and dialogise the differences and inconsistencies.

When the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are viewed in the light of Malory's turbulent contemporary world, it becomes apparent that Malory strains to reconcile his apparent nostalgia for King Arthur's idealised world with the existing boundaries of his society. He describes King Arthur's society as an ideal world, from which his own flawed existence is far removed, yet also shows that those same high moral ideals of knightly chivalry, honour, and courtly love are doomed to fail, to the destruction and ruin of King Arthur's kingdom. Yet Malory's comedic criticism not only reveals the inconsistencies and flaws of King Arthur's world, but also of the traditions and boundaries of 15th Century England. Through humour, Malory attempts to test the existing boundaries of gender, kingship, and nobility in his contemporary surroundings, so that contrasting sets of values can be united to create a better, more realistic society. It is my claim that this New Historicist analysis will shed light on various comedic passages from *Le Morte d'Arthur* that I will address in the following chapter, as they will serve as examples to showcase the connection between the high ideals of King Arthur's literary world and the turbulent reality of Malory's contemporary world. For the relevant passages, I will draw on this analysis to add new meaning to the humorous undertones in these passages and ground them in their historical context.

Chapter 2: *Le Morte d'Arthur*

In this chapter, I will discuss each passage containing comedy in *Le Morte d'Arthur* through the use of traditional comedic devices used to signal that humour is intended, to identify the specific types of humour that can be found. I have found that scenes containing humour in *Le Morte d'Arthur* seem to fall into two general categories. In the first category, the comic passage is acknowledged as such in the narrative itself by the characters, who laugh in response to a comic situation. This is the easiest way to identify humour, as the presence of comedy is confirmed by the reaction of the characters. In the second, we are made aware of comic content through the narration, but this comic element is not explicitly acknowledged either by the characters or the narrator. The comedy is thus implied, signalled only through context and comedic traditions that we can recognise. I will analyse these comedic episodes one by one, and consider their function in the text, seen in the light of Malory's contemporary situation. As we cannot know how a contemporary reader reacted to this work, that recognition and reaction must remain entirely speculative, yet certain conventional themes and comedic tropes in the text may be seen as signposts, meant to trigger a conventional response from the originally intended audience.

Explicit Comedy

As I mentioned, the first type of humour is the easiest to recognise. In these passages, when a comical situation occurs in the narrative, the characters react to the situation by laughing, thereby effectively drawing attention to the humour of the situation within the narrative itself. In Chapter XI of Book X, *Syr Tristrams de Lyones*, no fewer than four instances of laughter occur. This chapter contains the tale of the Tournament at Surluse, organised by Galahad, the Haute Prince. During this tournament the knights joust during the day and feast afterwards, making merry with each other every night. On the fifth day of the tournament we are told, not

for the first time, about the might of sir Dynadan and his joking, scoffing manner and merry disposition: “But he [Dynadan] was a grete skoffer and a gaper, and the meryste knyght amonge felyship that was that tyme lyvyng” (Shepherd 396, ll. 29-31). The reader is thus alerted to Dynahad’s qualities as a shrewd, comical prankster, for which he is loved by all good knights.

The first passage in which we find laughter appears when Galahad orders Lancelot to defeat Dynadan, who is doing very well in the tournament. Lancelot disarms Dynadan and brings him before Galahad and Queen Guinevere, “[and they] lowghe at Sir Dynadan that they myght not stonde. ’Well,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ’yet have I no shame, for the olde shrew Sir Launcelot smote me downe” (Shepherd 396, ll. 37-43). Galahad attempts to play a prank on the prankster-knight Dynadan by sending in his best knight, Lancelot, to disarm Dynadan. However, though the passage is humorous and the pranksters obviously see the humour, Dynadan keeps his dignity through his response, and revenges himself by pranking Galahad in return in the next passage containing laughter.

During dinner that same day, Dynadan notices Galahad’s displeasure on being served fish, which he does not like to eat. Dynadan immediately pranks Galahad back by taking up two platters of fish, and presenting them to him, stating “Sir Galahalte, well may I lykkyn you to a wolff, for he woll never ete fysshe, but fleysshe” (Shepherd 398, ll. 34-35). This verbal joke elicits laughter from Galahad: “And anone the Haute Prynce lowghe at his wordis” (Shepherd ll. 35-36). Dynadan then turns his attention to Lancelot, who is seated next to Galahad, and professes his desire never to meet Lancelot nor his spear or his steed again while jousting. In the passage immediately following Lancelot, looking to prank Dynadan in return, replies that he must be very vigilant, and pray to God that they may never *meet*, except at a dish of *meat*, a wordplay that makes the Haute Prince and Queen Guinevere

laugh so hard they fall from their chairs: “Than lowghe the Quene and the Haute Prynce, that they myght nat sytte at their table” (Shepherd 399 ll. 1-2).

These are all little jokes, without any implications that go beyond the story itself. But Lancelot’s final, elaborate practical joke on Dynadan, I believe, has a broader meaning outside the narrative. This occurs on the next day, when Dynadan challenges Galahad and Lancelot, requesting either of them to face him in the tournament. To this challenge, Galahad and Lancelot reply: “ye may se how we sytte here as jouges with oure sholdis, and allway may ye beholde where we sytte here or nat” (Shepherd 399, ll. 20-21). The two vehemently emphasise their roles as judges, which keep them from participating in the tournament or accepting Dynadan’s challenge, and press him always to note whether they are sitting in their rightful place. This emphasis on Dynadan literally seeing Lancelot and Galahad in their places signals that something is off, and as soon as Dynadan turns around to get ready to joust, Lancelot slips away and dresses up as a lady. To the reader, Lancelot’s words and his transformation already signal the upcoming practical joke, but Dynadan does not know yet what is going to happen, which creates a setting of dramatic irony foreshadowing the comedy of this episode. Dynadan’s observant nature warns him that something is off when, as instructed, he looks and sees someone sitting in Lancelot’s place, but not Lancelot, and when he sees “a maner of a damesell” (Shepherd 399 ll. 32), he does not know who she is, but he is scared she might be a disguised Lancelot, as he fears revenge for his pranks the previous day.

As the reader is made aware that the lady is indeed Lancelot, Dynadan’s fear and his obliviousness to the joke produce a comical effect. However, Dynadan realises very soon that it is indeed Lancelot, dressed up as a lady, when the lady in question rides upon him and smites him off his horse, drags him into the forest, and dresses him up as a lady in turn. Lancelot and his men then bring out Dynadan in front of everybody wearing female attire, which elicits the loudest laugh of all: “and whan Quene Gwenyver sawe Sir Dynadan i-

brought in so amonge them all, than she lowghe, that she fell downe – and so dede all that there was” (Shepherd 399 ll. 40-44). The laughter concludes the comic episode and serves as an explicit illustration of its humorous intent, but the reader would already have seen this conclusion coming, especially after Lancelot’s and Galahad’s failed attempts to prank Dynadan during the previous days of the tournament; as such, the scene would have been met with comic anticipation from the reader.

This joke might seem as innocent as the previous ones, had the gender-inversion element not been a part of it. As explained earlier, men and women in both Arthurian literature and Malory’s own society were bound by rigid gender boundaries. In that light, Malory’s use of gender inversion as comedy can be interpreted as highlighting those boundaries and their inconsistencies and problems, and dialogising them to reflect on the possibility of a more balanced society. This is not the only scene in *Le Morte d’Arthur* in which Malory makes use of comedy to highlight the problematic nature of gender structures in Arthurian society, and also to reflect the situation in his own contemporary surroundings. According to Hordis, “the values contained in the hegemonic sex/gender categories of masculine male and feminine female are disrupted and dialogized when heroic knights dress in women’s clothing and damsels valiantly don armour and use swords” (146). This view is echoed by Salla, who underlines the function of the comic gender-inversion in these passages to emphasise the flexibility of gender, but also to mock those who get tangled up in the gender-inversion process.

In this passage, where Lancelot and Dynadan both appear in female attire, the comic inversion of the otherwise strict gender rules works in Lancelot’s favour, but not in Dynadan’s. While the audience in the text laughs at Dynadan, they do not laugh at Lancelot. This is because Lancelot is in control of the situation, and his metamorphosis is thus immediately forgotten when Dynadan enters the scene, unable to act or defend himself.

Lancelot takes charge of his gender transformation, normalising his appearance by acting as if nothing is wrong. Dynadan's inability to do anything when he is forced to take on the looks of a lady thus catches the attention of the audience in the text, and is made all the funnier because Lancelot's performance brings the other characters to close proximity with this absurd situation, allowing them to laugh in response.

Apart from this chapter, there is another passage which contains a comic instance of gender-inversion, in which Malory attempts to comment on the contemporary gender roles in place. In this passage, though, the results are slightly more complex than Lancelot's practical joke on Dynadan. During this episode, found in the next chapter of Book X, gender-inversion is not only used to shed a comic light on gender roles, but also on the perfunctory activities of courtly love, and the knights who are hurting from that love. The passage ends with laughter signalling the humour of the episode, yet the laughter is problematized by the context of the joke.

This time it is the knight Mordred, often considered a villain, who intends to play a prank on the young knight Alexander, who is enraptured by the sight of the Lady Alys la Beall Pylgryme. According to Hordis, lovesickness like Alexander's is considered as ennobling to a knight-lover in the genre of courtly love stories: "the sighing, swooning illness experienced by lovers in the name of courtly love behaviours is a construct of masculine legitimacy and shows the masculine difficulty with the ascendancy of a woman" (Hordis 157). By swooning and sighing, lovesick knights actively distance themselves from that which controls them – their loved one – and precisely by doing that they assert their masculine power and dominance. Mordred's status as a villain explains why he cannot understand the ennobling power of Alexander's love-suffering, and he consequently mocks the behaviour of Alexander which he deems not in line with the chivalric values of knights.

While Alexander sits on his horse, staring at his lady and unaware of his surroundings, Mordred attempts to comically shame him by grabbing his horse's reigns and leading him around, here and there, and out for the world to see what Mordred considers to be his shameful behaviour. Another damsel, confusingly named Lady Alys la Beall Pillaron, notices Alexander's plight, however, and reacts by dressing up in a knight's armour, taking an unsheathed sword in hand, and riding up to Alexander, giving him such a hit on the head that the fire of love is literally knocked out of his eyes. Alexander wakes up from the blow and draws his sword by instinct, causing both the lady in armour and Mordred to flee. He realises how the villainous Mordred would have shamed him, had the lady not saved him, and becomes angry with himself for letting Mordred escape. The episode ends with Alexander and his lady Alys laughing at how the other Alys hit him on the head: They "had good game at the damesell, how sadly she smote hym upon the helme!" (Shepherd 388, ll. 34-35).

Salla analyses this scene as part of her argument concerning gender-inversion, an element which this passage indeed contains. However, I believe the comedy in this scene stems mainly from the fact that Mordred's prank exposes Alexander as a love-struck fool, and the chief function of the comedy in this scene is to draw attention to Mordred's failing as a knight, by his failure to recognise the honour in Alexander's foolish behaviour. Salla's reading of the humour in this scene as being caused by gender-inversion is supported by Hordis, who treats this scenario similarly. This scene, I believe, problematizes the function of laughter as a denotation of humour, as there is indeed laughter, but not in response to the scene involving the comedy, namely the passage in which Mordred pranks Alexander. The laughter of the characters in this scene serves to reinstall the rigid boundaries of gender, but I believe the comedy for the reader is also found elsewhere in this passage, that is, in Mordred leading Alexander's horse by the reigns, a shameful act that indicates the emasculation of Alexander as a knight and as a man.

The scene pictured creates comedy in its absurdity – Alexander dreaming away on his horse, while a smirking Mordred is leading him here and there for his amusement. Only afterwards do Alexander and Alys laugh, yet only because it was a lady who saved Alexander – they laugh not because of her brave act, but because she dressed up as a male character, and acted as a male character. She defied gender boundaries, and as such became a subject of laughter herself for her trouble. This mockery, in my view, functions as a screen to distract attention from Alexander’s own shame and his perceived feminine vulnerability. The laughter here thus serves to restore and confirm the conventional distribution of gender roles in this episode, and to protect Alexander’s reputation as a masculine knight, even with his behaviour as a lovesick knight (Salla 120-121). The instance of gender-inversion may thus be comical to the characters, but it stands apart from the humour found in Mordred’s attempted prank. As Salla states, Mordred “troubles the interpretation of masculinizing behavior, exploits it, and is then shown to be an unchivalric coward” (121).

The problematic status of knights as love-sick fools is dealt with even more openly in a debate between Dynadan, Tristram, and his lady Isolde. In Chapter X of the Book of Tristram, Dynadan and Tristram engage in a teasing, mocking dialogue about the function of love in the life of a knight. Dynadan argues that love is useless for a knight and will only cause him pain, so it is better avoided, whereas Tristram believes the power of love is ennobling for a knight, and a knight can only fight honourably if he fights for the love of a woman. As Dynadan equates silence and what he perceives to be foolish pleasure with being a lover, Tristram’s playful silence is similarly targeted by him. Dynadan’s response to the question if he is a lover, “Mary, fye on the crauffte!” (Shepherd 409 l.31) is a sign that Tristram is successfully getting under Dynadan’s skin, and making him look like a fool the same way Dynadan first attempted to do with Tristram in this argument. Tristram is exploring the relationship between chivalric prowess and courtly love with his teasing play.

When the argument is brought up again between Dynadan and Isolde, Tristram's lady, Isolde also aims to provoke Dynadan, playfully demanding that Dynadan counter each point of her argument: "Why," seyde La Bealle Isode, "ar ye a knyght an ar no lovear? For sothe, hit is grete shame to you, wherefore ye may nat be called a good knight by reson but yf ye make a quarrel for a lady" (Shepherd 412 ll.36-38). Though her argument is clearly flawed – Dynadan is a proven knight even according to Tristram, yet he is not a lover – she sticks to her guns, employing increasingly aggressive debate tactics, though her tone remains light. When Isolde asks Dynadan to fight for her, if not as a lover, then as a knight of Arthur's court, Dynadan's vehement response causes her to laugh.

Isolde's response indicates that Dynadan has not won the argument: "Than Isode lowghe, and had good game at hym" (Shepherd 413 ll.9-10). However, her good-natured laughter does allow Dynadan's status as a witty prankster-knight to remain intact throughout the repartee between him, Isolde, and Tristram. Repartee is another comedic concept, described by Meyer Howard Abrams as "a witty conversational give-and take which constitutes a kind of verbal fencing match" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 40). As described earlier, Malory seems to revere the concept of courtly love, yet his treatment of it also signals the destruction of King Arthur's entire world. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory's nostalgic wish to return to that better, more idealistic time permeates the text, yet he uses comedy to single out the problems and inconsistencies between his own time and those chivalric values of the past. Dynadan's repartee concerning the concept of love as a knightly value may thus be read as indicating an underlying criticism of the conventional ideas about courtly love and knightly love.

There is one final scene which contains laughter as an explicit reminder of its humorous content. However, this scene also possesses a singular narrative structure that is not found in any of the other instances of comedy I have found, and as such it will be treated

here on its own. In the book of Tristram we come across Sir Dynadan once again. He is riding with Sir Mark, Sir Tristram's uncle and King, whom we learn has an evil disposition and displays traits that are not at all chivalric or honourable. This becomes clear in an episode where the cowardly King Mark, facing the prospect of battling six knights, abandons Dynadan and flees. Dynadan instead rides up to meet the knights, who turn out to be of the Round Table just as Dynadan, and under Dynadan's supervision they devise a plan to play a prank on King Mark, to teach him a lesson about honour and chivalry.

Mordred, nephew and future enemy of King Arthur, lends his shield to Dagonet, the King's Fool, and Dynadan tells King Mark that the knight bearing Mordred's shield is in fact Lancelot, the best knight of the Round Table. King Mark has only heard of Lancelot's knightly prowess and does not know what he looks like, and therefore is frightened when he hears Lancelot is in the company. Mordred and the other knights dress Dagonet up as a real knight, and the King's Fool, whose job it is to make King Arthur laugh, now makes the other knights and the reader laugh by acting as a real knight, and racing menacingly after a truly frightened King Mark. Mark's cowardice turns him into a laughing stock with the knights, who "lawghed all as they were wylde" (Shepherd 353 l. 17). They chase after King Mark and Dagonet, mocking him and laughing at him.

In this situation, Dynadan has pranked King Mark to emphasise the King's lack of knightly valour. According to Salla, Malory uses these jokes, which stab at such chivalric ideals as honour, physical prowess, fearlessness, and mercy, in an attempt to come to terms with the changing times he lived in. The Hundred Year's war was followed by a time of turmoil in which the kingship of both France and England was renegotiated; during the War of the Roses the throne of England was disputed for nearly 50 years. Through these events the role of king and the function of kingship in late medieval England became unclear, and Malory uses this opportunity to introduce a character like Dynadan into his *Morte d'Arthur*,

using his comic potential to reveal the flaws of a king as he knew them: the cowardice, fear, and gullibility, which to the high morals of the Arthurian court were so abject.

Rather than simply turning King Mark into a joke for the characters in the narrative, Malory uses this episode to provide a commentary upon the changing roles of kingship and the new English nobility of the fifteenth century, whom *Le Morte d'Arthur* was targeting (Salla 70-71). As a large number of the nobility had been killed during the Wars of the Roses, those vacant places were filled by wealthy merchants, who had hopes of nobility but not the upbringing to teach them how to act when they got there. King Mark represents the outdated values of traditional kingship and the need to modernise the role and responsibilities of kings in Malory's time, while the new group of nobility, middle class people risen in social status after the War of the Roses, is represented in this passage by Dagonet, King Arthur's Fool. Dagonet relishes the chance to act as a real knight and races after the cowardly King Mark with true passion and vigour, despite lacking the chivalric upbringing of a knight. So Malory uses comedy to address the changing political situation of both kingship and social status in contemporary England, and the positive and negative aspects of the lost values of feudalism of King Arthur's world.

The reason why this passage is unique is because of the comment placed by the narrator to indicate its comic nature, something he does not do elsewhere. While the characters' laughter in the end explicitly denotes the humorous intent of this episode, the comedy is already hinted at twice earlier. When King Mark asks who the leader of the company before them is, the narrator uses indirect speech to state that "for to feare hym, Sir Dynadan seyde hit was Sir Launcelot" (Shepherd 352, ll. 26-27). When King Mark follows that answer up with the question whether he can recognise Lancelot by a shield, and Dynadan replies that yes, Lancelot bears a shield of silver and black bands, the narrator remarks: "All this he seyde to feare Kynge Marke, for Sir Launcelot was nat in the felyship" (Shepherd 352,

ll. 30-31). This comment creates a dramatic irony that the reader is able to pick up on, generating the comedy in this scene.

Implicit Comedy

In the passages belonging to the second category, the humour stems from context and the use of popular comedy tropes, and for this reason it can be recognised only with prior knowledge of these tropes. Some episodes contain comedic elements that can be recognised as such through correspondences with other well-known literary works, others are recognisable through the use of conventional literary devices particular to the comic genre. A few of these comedic devices are repetition, hyperbole or overstatement and its counterpart understatement, double entendre, wordplay, irony, mistaken identity, and farce. As these devices are commonly used to indicate humour, or at least the intention of humour, we can recognise humorous passages by identifying them.

These passages are more difficult to assess than the passages in Section Four, as is also noted by Donald Hoffman when he discusses a passage in Chapter III of the first book, *The Tale of Kyng Arthur*, in which the humour is more obscure and subjective than anywhere else. During the strange activities taking place at Arthur's wedding feast, a white hart and a white 'brachet' (a particular type of hunting dog) run into the hall and cause chaos, after which a knight picks up the brachet and leaves. A lady then enters and beseeches King Arthur to get her brachet back, and when Arthur refuses, another knight enters and picks the lady up, carrying her away, though "ever she cryed and made grete dole" (Shepherd 66, l. 19). Arthur's reaction here seems comical: "So whan she was gone the Kyng was gladde, for she made such a noyse" (Shepherd 66 ll. 20-21).

Part of the humour of this passage lies in the understatement implied in Arthur's reaction towards the damsel, as this is one of the traditional comedic devices. According to

Abrams, understatement “deliberately represents something as very much less in magnitude or importance than it really is” (120). Arthur’s downplayed, cool reaction to the drama unfolding before him sheds a humorous light on this passage. Hoffman echoes my sentiment, but acknowledges the passage’s problematic nature, admitting that “the line makes me smile, but I could not guarantee that Malory meant me to. On the other hand, if Malory did not mean it to be funny, what did he mean it to be?” (*Comedy in Arthurian Literature*, 177). It is easy to assume that this passage is meant to be funny, envisioning an Arthur tired of all these adventures and longing to be rid of demanding damsels and their quests so he can eat his dinner in peace. This passage seems to play with the late medieval English stereotype of ‘scold’: a loud, shrewish female who would curse and criticise everyone around her, and who would target anyone in her bouts of verbal abuse, as explained by Michelle Wolf in *Policing Women’s Speech in Late Medieval England* (1). This comic medieval stereotype appears more than once in Malory’s work, and seems to imply the presence of the comic genre. However, though we can recognise the comedic devices used, we can never know for sure how these passages were meant to be read. Some passages are funny to us, but they may not have been intended that way; other passages are clearly intended to be comical, but would not commonly be considered so now.

The next passage can be found in Book VI, *Sir Launcelot du Lake*, when Lancelot gets captured by four queens in a castle, and is made to choose between them. Lancelot refuses, out of his love for Guinevere; however, a young damsel appears to rescue him from the castle. Lancelot is determined to repay his debt, and the damsel tells him to meet her by an abbey with white monks, to give aid in return to her and her father. However, Lancelot cannot find the abbey, and ultimately ends up by a seemingly deserted pavilion, where he decides to spend the night and resume his search in the morning. However, just as he has lain down and gone to sleep in the bed, the owner of the pavilion arrives, thinking to meet his lady

love. He thinks his lady is lying in the bed, enters it and wraps his arms around the person lying there, attempting to kiss 'her' lips:

He wente that his lemman had layne in that bed, and so he leyde hym adowne by Sir Launcelot and toke hym in his armys and began to kysse hym. And when Sir Launcelot felte a rough berde kyssyng hym, he sterte oute of the bed lightly – and the othir knight after hym. (Shepherd 156 ll. 33-37).

The humour in this scene is not signalled by characters laughing, or by the narrator commenting on the scene. Instead, the description of the setting (the abandoned pavilion, the presence of two knights in the bed) combined with the narrative delivered from the two knights' point of view (the knight embracing and kissing Lancelot, Lancelot starting awake from the sensation of a rough beard kissing him) results in a scene that is comedic because of the familiar farcical devices used.

The comedic devices used here to create humour are mistaken identity and gender reversal, both themes that have been employed often by Shakespeare in his comedies. An example of mistaken identity and gender reversal would be the characters Viola and Sebastian, twins in *Twelfth Night*, who are mistaken for one another towards the end of the play when Viola, disguised as a page named Cesario, gets challenged to a fight. In the end, her twin brother ends up being mistaken for her and is forced to fight in her stead. Another example of gender reversal would be the character Rosalind in *As You Like It* who, disguised as a shepherd named Ganymede, becomes the love interest of a shepherdess while her own love interest Orlando tells Ganymede about his love for Rosalind (Stone, *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare*, 24). In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a comic situation arises when the lord enters the bed expecting a different partner. The rigid gender roles implied in earlier passages serve here to create a twisted image that can only add to the comedy in its absurdity, while the gender reversal acquires an added dimension by the suggestion of a sexual relationship between two

same-sex characters, as it does in the examples from *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. Once again, this depiction of gender inversion as a humorous and dynamic construct could indicate a reaction to gender roles in fifteenth century society, as Malory uses comedy here to break through the usually rigid gender boundaries of medieval men and women by placing Lancelot in a position as a female.

Another episode in which humour is signalled in a similar way is found in Episode VII of the Book of Tristram. King Mark, who has already been shown to have a villainous and cowardly character and to lack the characteristics of a good king, writes two letters to Arthur and Guinevere respectively that speak of the love between Guinevere and Lancelot. Arthur, remembering that Mark is an enemy of Tristram, ignores his letter, but Guinevere shows hers to Lancelot, who becomes so angry he goes straight to sleep: "he was so wrothe that he layde hym downe on his bed to slepe" (Shepherd 372, ll. 19-20). Dynadan notices Lancelot's weird behaviour and, after Lancelot has shown him the letter, devises a plan to mock King Mark not just in his own court, but in courts around the country. He writes a lay filled with mockery and unkind words about King Mark and teaches it to Elias the Harper, who then teaches it to many others who will spread the message. The comedy of the situation is already evident from the readers' knowledge of Dynadan's nature as a mocker, a jester; but even if we do not know the exact contents of the lay, we know Dynadan would not belie his character. Elias meanwhile travels to King Mark's court and there performs the lay for Tristram in secret, before daring to perform it in front of the King:

Than cam Elyas the harper with the lay that sir Dynadan had made, and secretly brought hit unto sir Trystram, and tolde hym the lay that sir Dynadan had made for kinge Marke. And whan sir Trystram harde it, he seyde, "O Lord Jesu! That sir Dynadan can make wondrously well and yll. There he sholde make evyll!" "Sir," seyde

Elyas, "dare I synge this songe afore kyng Marke?" "Yee, on my perell," seyde sir Trystram, "for I shall be thy waraunte." (Shepherd 378 ll. 10-17).

Tristram realises the hilarious mockery of the lay and enthusiastically tells the harper to play it for King Mark. The latter becomes incredibly angry on hearing it, a response which completes the comic episode. The comedy here is signalled by Dynadan's words, combined with the foreknowledge of his habit as a trickster, in King Mark's subsequent anger, and in Tristram's gleeful reaction on hearing the lay performed. The lay itself is not recited in the text, yet readers know Dynadan's love of pranks and Tristram's bad relationship with his uncle King Mark. Though there is no particular comedic device signalling the comedy in this episode, the humour of the scene can again be deduced from the characters' motivations and actions, along with foreknowledge of Dynadan and Tristram's personalities that readers would have. Once again, this negative depiction of King Mark and the positive portrayal of Dynadan could indicate Malory's underlying criticism of kingship in his contemporary England.

Book VII, *Sir Gareth of Orkeney*, contains another episode in which Malory uses mockery and sharp wit as his comedic tools, this time not to indicate negative traits in a character, but precisely to reveal nobility and chivalry. It involves the young knight Sir Gareth, whose true identity in the narrative is still unknown. Sir Gareth is in fact the brother of Gawain, but is known to the court only as the kitchen knave Beaumains. When King Arthur grants his request to accept a quest for a lady, she spends the whole quest mocking and insulting him, believing him only to be a kitchen knave: "thou bawdy kychyn knave! ... What art thou but a luske and a turner of brochis and a ladyllwaysher?" (Shepherd 182-3, ll. 44-45, 1-2); "Fy, fy, foule kychyn knave!" (Shepherd 184, l. 28); "Fy, fy," seyde the damesell, "that evir suche a stynkyng kychyn knave sholde blowe suche a boste!" (Shepherd

191, ll. 23-24) are but a few of her many resourceful insults. In the course of the adventure, it becomes clear that the knight is in fact of noble birth, and he bears the lady's insults patiently, with a knight's virtue. His actions and words ever remain courteous and chivalric, until the lady finally realises she has been wrong all along: "what maner a man ye be, for hit may never be other but that ye be com of jantyll bloode; for so fowle and shamfully dud never woman revile a knight as I have done you, and ever curteysly ye have suffyrde me – and that com never but of jantyll bloode" (Shepherd 192, ll. 4-8).

Hoffman argues that Malory enjoyed developing the damsel's character and elitist malice (182). Certainly the audience's knowledge of Gareth's true identity, unknown to the characters, represents a case of comic dramatic irony, and the pleasure found in the damsel's inventiveness and malicious wit creates a comic energy which permeates the episode. Aside from the dramatic irony, repetition and hyperbole, the latter described by Abrams as "the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility" (120), are also comic devices at play here that we find in the repeated overreactions of the lady to her predicament and to Gareth's actions. These overstatements, combined with the readers' knowledge of Beaumains' real lineage, create humorous situations in this passage which showcase Malory's skill at comedic writing. Malory shows here that he is able to use comedy not only to comment on the negative character of kings, but also on the positive traits all nobility should possess.

The next episodes of humour are concerned with courtly love, when knights go mad for the love, or unrequited love, of a lady. Dynadan and Mordred have both attempted to mock the behaviour of knights burdened with love-suffering. Though the arguments seemed to be swayed against them, they have each won a small victory at least in their respective battles. In these last two scenes, however, the humour lies not in their mockery of the love-sick knights, but in the behaviour of the knights themselves. They get tangled up in comically absurd situations because of their own lovesickness, or their inability to act according to their

chivalric values due to love-induced madness. As described previously, courtly love was a concept Malory nostalgically yearned for, yet he also realised its ultimately self-destructive and ridiculous nature. These passages could thus be considered comments, or perhaps even criticism, on the conventional values and behaviour a knight is supposed to exemplify when he is in love.

The first of these two episodes on love-madness can be found in Chapter IV of Book X, *Sir Trystram de Lyones*, and concerns Tristram, when it seems La Bealle Isode, his uncle's wife, has been exchanging letters with another suitor, Kehedins, and Tristram goes mad as a result. First, he challenges the other suitor, while disclaiming the pain Isolde is causing him by being unfaithful to him as her lover. Kehedins quickly gives up his suit out of fear for Tristram, and jumps out of a window in order to escape him. Unfortunately, that jump lands him right in front of King Mark, Isolde's husband, whom neither Kehedins nor Tristram want to see at this point, creating a hilariously absurd situation where a lady's lover is confronted by both her other lover and her husband consecutively. Kehedins' reply to King Mark as the latter inquires why he jumped out of the window indicates the comedy in this scene, as readers can clearly discern the absurdity of Kehedins' lie: "hit fortunede me that I was aslepe in the wyndow abovyn youre hede, and as I slepte I slumbirde, and so I felle downe" (Shepherd 300 ll. 4-6).

Though there is no explicit laughter here to indicate humour, the description and implications of a knight slumbering in a window and falling out are clearly humorous. Kehedin's reaction and the whole scene contain a farcical element that signals the comedy present in this scene. Farce is described by Abrams as a genre which

employs highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of sexual mix-ups, broad verbal humor, and physical bustle and horseplay (40),

all of which we find in Kehedin's behaviour and the ensuing humorous situation.

Out of fear of discovery by King Mark, Tristram then goes off into the woods and lives as a madman in the wilderness, losing his chivalric values as a knight while he is mad with grief. Eventually he is found by some shepherds, naked and in bad physical shape. However, though they give him food and drink, they also beat him with sticks when he does anything they do not like, cut his hair with shears and make him look like a fool for their amusement. This is an example of slapstick, a comedic device making use of exaggerated violence. Tristram's treatment by the shepherds also reflects the class-related aggression between the nobility and the lower and middle classes in Malory's reality. The newly ennobled knights of the Hundred Years' War were caught in between this class feud, and Tristram commits himself to this position in his madness (Salla 193).

During this madness Tristram does not recognise anyone he encounters. He dunks Dagonet, King Arthur's Fool, and his two squires in a well to make the shepherds laugh. In a later episode Tristram almost slays Dagonet when the Fool returns to take revenge for this treatment. This situation could also be considered an example of slapstick, "boisterous or clownish physical activity" (40) according to Abrams. After all, the violence Tristram inflicts upon Dagonet makes the shepherds laugh, and also creates the comical image of Dagonet being dunked into a well for the reader. Thinking after the repeated instances of violence that Tristram was sent by those shepherds to mock him ("he demyd that the shyperdis had sente that foole to aray hem so bycause that they lawghed at them", Shepherd 302 ll.32-33), Dagonet then indulges in a clever wordplay. He explains what happened to King Mark, that in the forest "there ys a foole naked – and that foole and I, foole, mette togydir" (Shepherd 302 ll. 45-46), at once declaring himself to be a jester and Tristram to be an idiot, both of which are senses of the word 'fool'.

Tristram remains in the woods for a while longer, until he is brought back to King Mark's court, and nobody recognises him. The humour, problematised by the cruel laughter of the shepherds, comes to the fore here when Tristram is recognised by nobody but a little dog: "And anone thys lityll bracket felte a savoure of sir Trystram" (Shepherd 305 l. 8). The humour of this scene lies in the dramatic irony of the audience and the little dog knowing Tristram, while the love of his life does not recognise him. The sudden shift from despair to joy, when of all creatures, the little dog identifies Tristram, makes for a light-hearted scene with its excessively joyous reaction.

In the final two episodes, we see Lancelot going mad and getting hurt for the love of Guinevere. The first passage can be found in Chapter XIV of the Book of Tristram, the greater part of which is devoted to Lancelot's life as a madman in the woods as a result of Guinevere's rejection. The Lady Elaine tricks Lancelot into thinking she is Guinevere, and sneaks into his bed, where Lancelot happily receives her. This awkward mistake is followed by an embarrassing love confession which Lancelot later makes to Guinevere while he sleeps, which Guinevere hears from another room, and which results in a comic scene for the reader: "And whan she harde hym clatter she was wrothe oute of mesure, [and for anger and payne wist not what to do]. And than she cowghed so lowed that sir Launcelot awaked" (Shepherd 472 ll.11-14).

A case of mistaken identity takes place when Lancelot mistakes Elaine for Guinevere, setting the scene for the comedic instant. Additionally, a humorous effect is created by the hyperbole in this scene of Lancelot apparently sleep-talking so loudly Guinevere can hear him mumble embarrassing love confessions about herself for anyone to hear from another room. Dramatic irony also is also in play here, as readers would know Lancelot is talking about Guinevere, but Guinevere herself is under the impression that Lancelot's words are directed to someone else. Finally, Malory's choice of verb in this line, "clatter", indicates the

humour of the situation. According to the MED it is derived from the noun “clater”, meaning noisy chatter, and related to “claterer”, indicating a ‘betrayor of secrets’, a ‘noisy talker’ (MED). The word already betrays Lancelot’s role in this situation, and allows for a more comical reading than if Malory had used a more formal word.

The comedic tropes of mistaken identity, hyperbole, and dramatic irony, together with Malory’s ingenious choice of words are then combined with the awkward but hilarious image of Guinevere coughing to wake Lancelot up. Guinevere is angry that Lancelot is in bed with another lady, and in pain upon hearing his confession, and Lancelot is shocked and ashamed when he realises that the lady in his bed is not Guinevere. When Guinevere later banishes Lancelot from her presence, he goes mad with lovesickness, and jumps through a window to live in the woods as a madman.

Throughout this ordeal the overall tone accords with his suffering, until another episode of bawdy comedy jumps out of the narrative. Lancelot is banned from the court by Guinevere’s command, fights and then runs away from a kindly knight who offers to help him, after which he hides in a pavilion and jumps into the bed. “And there was a lady that lay in that bedde; and anone she gate her smoke, and ran oute of the pavylon” (Shepherd 480 ll. 41-42). The humorous image of a lady in her nightgown jumping out of the bed after a mad, dishevelled Lancelot jumps into it creates a comic effect reminiscent of the start of Lancelot’s madness, when he lay in bed with the wrong lady. Lancelot eventually finds his way back to himself, and his relationship with Guinevere is mended, but the comedy streaking through this ordeal of love-suffering offers another comment on the nature of courtly love which I read as a reflection on the conventional aspects of courtly values in Malory’s time.

In the next episode, humour is again of a bawdy nature, intended not for the characters in the narrative, but only for the readers. In Chapter III of the Book of *Sir Launcelot and Quene Gwenyvere*, Guinevere asks Lancelot to wear her golden sleeve as her

token during the tournament, so that all may see that Lancelot possesses Guinevere's love. After she orders him to win the tournament to prove his love to her, Lancelot spends his time in a hermitage to save his strengths for the occasion. While he slumbers near a well by the hermitage, a mighty huntress appears with her hounds, chasing a hind that bounds through the forest. While the huntress is universally acknowledged as possessing great skill, she misses when she attempts to shoot an arrow at the hind, and hits Lancelot in the buttock instead: "and so she overshotte the hynde, and so by mysefortune the arow smote Sir Launcelot in the thycke of the buttok, over the barbys" (Shepherd 619 ll. 24-26).

Though the imagery of Lancelot with an arrow protruding from his buttock is humorous enough, the real comedy lies in Malory's rendition of the episode. In what is a clear example of the pun as a comedic device, Malory changes the stag found in the French source, *Le Mort Artu*, to a female "hynde", one that has gone "to soyle", generating a scatological comic construct. Abrams describes the pun as "a play on words that are either identical in sound (homonyms) or very similar in sound, but are sharply diverse in meaning" (253), and Salla invokes the Oxford English Dictionary to prove that the word 'hind' was a colloquial form of the word 'buttok' as early as the 13th century (142). Thus it is not only the masculine huntress who effectively emasculates Lancelot by shooting the phallic arrow at his butt, a place of homoerotic significance, but also the colloquialism of the word 'hind' mirroring 'buttok' that places extra humorous emphasis on the scene.

In this case, Malory's habit to combine elements from various genres and sources adds yet another humorous element. The mighty huntress relates back to Greek and Roman mythology and the goddess of the hunt, Artemis or Diana respectively. Myths about the gods would usually be set in high literary form, since to speak of deities in low literary form would be considered unworthy of the topic. However, here Malory does exactly that, as he transfers a character from ancient mythology to the low, banal literary form of farce. Though the scene

feminizes Lancelot, as the wound troubles his ability to fight in the tournament, his masculinity and chivalry are reinstated when he wins the tournament regardless of his injury, and only after winning discloses the truth about his discomfort, thereby adding to the triumph of his victory. There is no fictional audience here to laugh at the Huntress' misfire. The comic effect is achieved with only the external reader sharing the puns and the irony of the moment.

This bawdy type of humour is found in yet another episode; however, the comedy found in this passage is more sexual in nature than in the episode discussed before. The passage is found in Book VII, and depicts the tortures of chastity suffered by Sir Gareth and his love, lady Lyonesse. Both lovers are equally eager to consummate their relationship, only to be thwarted in every attempt by Lyonesse's sister Lyonette: "the damesell Lyonett was a lytyll dyspleased, and she thought hir sister Dame Lyonesse was a lytyll overhasty that she myght not abyde hir tyme of maryage; and for savyng of hir worshyp she thought to abate their hoothe lustis" (Shepherd 206 ll. 24-27). Soon plans are made for the two lovers to meet: "and within a whyle came Dame Lyonesse wrapped in a mantel furred with ermyne, and leyde hir downe by the sydys of Sir Gareth – and therewithal he began to clyppe hir and to kysse hir" (Shepherd 206 ll. 36-39). In response Lyonette sends in an armed knight, whom Gareth then reluctantly has to deal with, only to return wounded to a room full of people.

After ten nights the couple tries again, meeting the same frustrating fate, as Malory demonstrates his mastery of the comic tool of repetition. This comic scene, as noted by Hoffman, paradoxically reinforces conventional morality through the comic devices (183) of repetition, sexual comedy, and farce. The high Arthurian morals of chastity, chivalry and the rules of courtly love are upheld through a surprisingly raunchy scene displaying sexual activity, the pains of chastity, and the comic impatience of young lovers. As Malory seemed to criticise the behaviour of a love-sick knight through his comedy in earlier passages, here he appears to reflect on the higher values of knighthood and courtship once again in this

humorous scene. While the couple does not succeed in their attempts at pre-marital consummation in the end, Malory does seem to make fun of the conventions and ideals of courtly love here.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to analyse the comedy Malory injects into his rendition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. I have made a distinction between the different types of comedy, and the functions they hold within the narrative. In my discussion of Malory's motives for *Le Morte d'Arthur* in Chapter 1 I identified these comedic passages as potential criticisms or reinforcements of the idealised world of Arthur inspired by the turbulent socio-political situation of fifteenth century England in which Malory finds himself. The types of humour found in *Le Morte d'Arthur* can generally be placed in one of two categories, though the individual cases are often more complex: humour that is acknowledged as such by the characters and made explicit through their laughter, and humour that proceeds from a particular situation, that is implied through the use of traditional comedy tropes, and that depends on the reader for its recognition.

Malory uses comedy as a tool to provide the fifteenth-century new nobility in England with a type of chivalry suitable to the changing concept of knighthood. On the one hand, he subverts the textual and ideological structures of his sources and stages clashes between different literary genres in order to create a comedic dialogue in his own work. Yet on the other, he also builds on the chivalric tradition as he supports class ambition, emphasises knightly authenticity, and strengthens the sense of community through laughter. In my following chapters, I will compare selected passages of *Le Morte d'Arthur* to two modern English translations, to see how these adaptations fare in converting Malory's text into Modern English.

Chapter 3: Explicit Humour

Before I continue to compare the passages containing explicit humour in the two modern English translations, I will provide the theoretical framework necessary to explain this part of my research. I begin by explaining the theoretical terms I will use to elucidate my analysis, and then continue with a description of the difficulties concerning the translation of medieval literature, with a special focus on comedy. Then I will present my comparison and analysis of the translations. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I cannot give an analysis of each passage. I will moreover restrict myself to analysing passages in Malory's work reflecting his opinions or criticism of his own society, and how the translators treat these passages in their translations.

Introduction

Translation studies emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. The growth of this field as an academic discipline and its growing importance during the twentieth century led to the rise of various translation theories. However, I will not use one specific translation theory to establish the success or failure of the two modern translations of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as this study does not aim to discover which of the two translations produces the most effective translation of Malory's work. It rather seeks to identify whether the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are still recognisable as such in the modern translations by analysing how each passage has been rendered in both translations, and with what consequences. I will therefore make use of various theoretical concepts from translation studies to explain the choices made by the translators, and to explain how those choices affect the understanding of the original work through the translation.

There are two theoretical distinctions I will be making use of in this analysis. The first distinction is between 'literal' and 'free' translation, also known as 'word-for-word' and

‘sense-for-sense’ translation. A literal translation will strive to rigidly translate each word individually by the closest equivalent in the target language. However, this practice often leads to “an absurd translation, cloaking the sense of the original” (Munday 31). A free translation will focus more on the sense or content of the source text, and strive to convey that correctly into the target language. This distinction runs parallel to the fundamental distinction between a source-oriented vs. a target-oriented approach in translation studies, as a literal translation will focus mainly on the source material, and how to remain true to it, while a free translation will concentrate more on the target audience, and how to produce a functional translation to that end.

This last distinction was introduced in its modern form by the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834). Schleiermacher’s approach shifted away from more specific methods of translation, which focused on the technicalities of how to translate a particular sort of text, to a more general understanding of texts. He believed the real question in translation was how to bring the source text and the target audience together (Munday 46). Centuries later, Lawrence Venuti (b. 1953) adopted this approach to introduce the terms ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’. Foreignization is the type of approach in which the translator attempts to maintain the foreign feel of the text, keeping the linguistic and cultural differences in the translation on purpose. It is meant to convey an authentic experience of the source text, so readers will be alerted to the differences between the source text and their native language. Domestication is the type of translation in which the alien nature of a text is minimized, and which is made to read as naturally to the target audience as possible. This method tends to smooth away any cultural or lingual differences, the aim being that the reader will barely notice the text is a translation at all (Munday 46).

These approaches can all be found in the two translations I will be treating in this and in the following chapter. The rendering by Dorsay Armstrong displays signs of a literal

approach to translation, while the translation by Keith Baines shows aspects of a free approach. Both texts will be seen to contain both domesticating and foreignizing elements. I will be using these terms to explain certain choices in the translations, while my main focus will be on the question whether the comedy from the original passages is still recognisable in the modern translations.

Translating medieval sources, let alone translating medieval comedic sources, is not an easy task. While all translators encounter difficulties in transferring words, syntax, idioms and metaphors from one language to another, translators of medieval sources have the added issue of not being able to rely on native speakers who have complete knowledge of the source language. As medieval English was by definition only used during the Middle Ages, understanding of its intricacies can only be achieved through extensive reading of source material and a fair bit of speculation and assumption. This may be the reason why, as stated by Hordis, scholars tend to miss instances of comedy in most medieval literature, save for some well-known exceptions like the Exeter Book Riddles and Chaucer's works.

Add to that the hardships of attempting to translate jokes, humour, and comedy from one language to another, and the task which seemed merely daunting now rises to near impossibility. In her study *Translation, Humour and Literature*, Delia Chiaro explains that "the problem with translating humour more often than not is that it is 'untranslatable' in the sense that an *adequate degree of equivalence* is hard to achieve" (8). This is true of works that are widely known for and unmistakably intended to contain humour; it will, if possible, hold even more for *Le Morte d'Arthur*, in which comedy is unexpected and often difficult to define. Translators of this medieval text may very well have focused on wholly different aspects in this essentially serious and moral tale. Yet I contend that these comedic instances are essential for the overall understanding of the work and the turbulent age of its creator, and therefore it is also important to convey these elements into a modern English translation.

Comparison

As I said, this chapter will focus on my comparison of the two modern translations to the Middle English original regarding the passages which contain explicit humour. The main topics treated in these comedic passages are the knightly values and kingship, courtly love, and gender roles. Therefore I will highlight three passages each of which discusses one of these topics, and give an in-depth analysis not only of the comedic content, but of the connections to Malory and his world. I give a short description of each passage and refer back to the more extensive analysis in the previous chapter, after which I analyse and compare both translations. I will focus on how successful the translations are in conveying the humorous content of the original, and how they deal with Malory's implicit commentary on cultural situations and values of his time. Finally I will provide a short conclusion.

1. 'Perdeus!' seyde the Haute Prynce and Sir Launcelot, 'ye may se how we sytte here as jouges withoure shyldis, and allway may ye beholde where we sytte here or nat.'

(...)

And so as Sir Dynadan cam into the raunge, Sir Launcelot, that was in the damesels aray, gate Sir Galyhodys speare and ran unto Sir Dynadan. And allwayes he loked up there as Sir Launcelot was – and than he sawe one sytte in the stede of Sir Launcelot armed – but whan Sir Dynadan saw a maner of a damesell, he dradde perelyss lest hit sholde be Sir Launcelot disgysed.

(...)

And than was Sir Dynadan brought in amonge them all; and whan Quene Gwenyver sawe Sir Dynadan i-brought in so amonge them all, than she lowghe, that she fell downe – and so dede all that there was.

‘Well,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘Sir Launcelot, thou arte so false that I can never beware of the!’ (Shepherd 399, ll. 16-45)

- a. ‘No indeed!’ said the High Prince and Sir Lancelot. ‘You can see how we sit here as judges with only our shields; you will be able to see whether we remain seated here or not.’

(...)

As Sir Dinadan entered the field, Sir Lancelot, wearing the maiden’s clothes, took up Sir Galyhodyn’s spear and ran at Sir Dinadan. Sir Dinadan was constantly checking to see if Sir Lancelot had remained in his seat, and there was someone sitting there, pretending to be Sir Lancelot, armed. When Sir Dinadan saw someone who looked like a damsel, he was in great fear, as he suspected that it might be Sir Lancelot in disguise.

(...)

Then Sir Dinadan was brought in among them all. When Queen Guenevere saw him brought in wearing a woman’s dress, she laughed so hard she fell down – and so did everyone else who was there.

‘Well,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘Sir Lancelot, you are so sly that I must always beware of you!’ (Armstrong 361-2)

- b. ‘Sir, you may set your mind at rest, for we shall sit here in the judges’ seats with our shields before us, and should we leave them, you will be able to see that we have done so.’

(...)

Sir Dynadan looked up in time to see a maid charging at him with a spear, and to suspect Sir Launcelot, but not in time to escape him, and he was sent crashing to the ground

(...) and taken thus before the High Prince and the queen, who all but fell down with laughing. ‘Sir Launcelot, you traitor! Shall I never escape you?’ he said. (Baines 299)

This first passage concerns the gender-inversion episode with Lancelot and Dynadan.

Armstrong’s adaptation of Lancelot’s and Galahad’s words to Dynadan is quite literal, yet loses the “allway” from Malory’s original. The resulting passage loses in comedic value, as in the original text it is emphasised more than once that Dynadan may *always* see them sitting there as judges, and it is this emphasis, which conveys absolute certainty, that indicates the comedic intent behind the words. Armstrong’s rendition still contains some of that comedic intent, in her “you will be able to see *whether* we are seated here or not” (361; emphasis mine), yet it loses some of its humorous power by adding doubt and making the later deception less powerful.

In the next paragraph, Armstrong removes any question concerning the deception, replacing “one sytte in the stede of Sir Launcelot” with “someone sitting there, *pretending to be Lancelot*”, translating “some kind of damsel” with “someone who *looked like* a damsel”, and rendering “lest hit sholde be” as “he *suspected that it might be*” (361; emphasis mine). Armstrong’s choice of words here diminishes the comedic power of the prank, in the sense that too many hints spoil a surprise. The uncertainty in Dynadan’s mind in this passage creates comedic tension, resulting in dramatic irony since the reader already knows, in fact, that the damsel is Lancelot disguised. When dramatic irony is thus removed, the surprise is ruined, and the passage loses its comic anticipation of Dynadan realising he has been the butt of a practical joke. Armstrong’s rendition of this passage thus not only diminishes the comedic intentions of this episode, it also, and more importantly, changes the meaning of the original, wrongly suggesting Dynadan is aware of the disguise and knows he is being

pranked. So Armstrong's translation is incorrect as well as devoid of humour. Her translation of Guinevere's final reaction is a word-for-word translation without any comic undertones.

Baines' rendition of this passage is also problematic. He translates Lancelot's reply to Dynadan's comment that he, Dynadan, will lose if he enters the competition against Lancelot or Galahad as follows: "Sir, you may set your mind at rest, for we shall sit here in the judges' seats with our shields before us, and should we leave them, you will be able to see that we have done so" (299). On the one hand, he emphasises the humorous intention behind Lancelot's reassuring words, as the following passage in which Lancelot gets up and leaves his seat immediately indicates the opposite of that statement. He also points out their exact location in the judges' seats, rather than focusing on their role as judges, and thus emphasises the fact that Dynadan may see them in that exact location at any time, and may notice them leaving those seats. On the other hand, the change from "as jouges" to "in the judges' seats" and from "allway may ye beholde where we sytte here or nat" to "should we leave them, you will be able to see that we have done so" detracts from the ambiguous nature of Lancelot's words, diminishing the humorous undertones that Lancelot's open-ended description of his own and Galahad's whereabouts indicates.

The remaining part of Baines' translation displays the comedic undertones of this episode, yet in a different way than the original. His rendition of Lancelot's attack on Dynadan and his reaction displays more comedic sensitivity to Malory's comedy than Armstrong's, which describes the execution of the prank as too obvious for Dynadan to be humorous. Baines describes the swiftness of Dynadan's demise accurately, and though he disregards any reasoning as to Dynadan's suspicion of Lancelot, he also describes Dynadan's incapability to do anything but be dragged along and surrender to the prank, which results in his appearance before the High Prince and the queen, and his exasperated, defeated, but nonetheless comical and good-natured reply.

However, both Armstrong and Baines' translation fail to reflect one aspect of the original scene. In my discussion of the Middle English passage, I argued that Malory makes use of comedy to call attention to the complicated nature of gender structures in both the Arthurian world and Malory's own society. The mockery directed at Dynadan for appearing in women's clothing clearly implies a strict divide between gender roles. Breaching that divide seemingly leads only to ridicule, as gender inversion does not have a place in either Arthurian or Malory's society. The scene with Alexander being saved from Mordred's prank by lady Alys dressed as a knight drives that point home, as Alys too becomes the butt of Alexander's and his lover's laughter for dressing as a man. Clearly this is a topic Malory wished to draw attention to, as humour in *Le Morte d'Arthur* breaks through the formality of the text and allows close investigation of the subject. It seems Malory aimed for the rigidity of gender roles in his time to be reconsidered, just as the status of the aristocracy had been.

Yet neither of the modern English translations indicate any explicit connection to the issues of gender roles and the role of the comedy in exposing them. Baines' translation removes all but Galahad and Guinevere from the scene where Dynadan is brought in wearing a dress, removing any sense of judgement from the surrounding people and thus ignoring the idea of any hidden meaning behind this scene. Armstrong's translation is very literal, exactly recounting the passage in the same way; yet her analysis reveals just as little dispute regarding the gender categories problematized in Malory's original. Though gender roles continue to be contested, the strictures on conventional dress and behaviour have been alleviated in many western countries, and as such it becomes more difficult to reflect these issues in modern translations. However, neither translator seems to have made an effort to reflect the emphasis on these issues in their translation.

2. ‘for suche a folyshe knyght as ye ar,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘I saw but late this day llynge by a welle: and he fared as he slepte, and there he lay lyke a fole, gennyng, and wolde nat speke – and his shyld lay by hym, and his horse also stood by hym – and well I wote he was a lovear.’ ‘A, fayre sir,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘ar nat ye a lovear?’

‘Mary, fye on that crauftte!’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘Sir, that is yevell seyde,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for a knyght may never be of proues but yf he be a lovear.’

(...)

And anone Sir Trystram rode to Sir Dynadan, and sayde ‘How now? Mesemyth the lover has well sped.’

(...)

‘That same is he,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for he is the beste bourder and japer that I know, and a noble knyght of his hondis, and the beste felawe that I know – and all good knyghtis lovyth his felyship.’

(...)

And there Sir Trystram tolde La Beall Isode how Sir Dynadan hylde ayenste all lovers.

(...)

‘Madame,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘I mervayle at Sir Trystram and mo other suche lovers: ‘What aylyth them to be so madde and so asoted uppon women?’

‘Why,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘ar ye a knyght and ar no lovear? Forsothe, hit is grete shame to you; wherefore ye may nat be called a good knyght by reson but yf ye make a quarrel for a lady.’

‘God deffende me!’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘for the joy of love is to shorte, and the sorrow therof, [and what cometh therof,] is duras over longe.’

(...)

‘Now I pray you, for my love,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘wylle ye fyght for me wyth three knyghtes that doth me grete wronge? And insomuche as ye bene a knyght of Kynge Arthurs, I requyre you to do batayle for me.’

Than Sir Dynadan seyde, ‘I shall sey you ye be as fayre a lady as evir I sawe ony – and much fayrer than is my lady Quene Gwenyver – but wyte you well, at one worde, I woll nat fyght for you wyth three knyghtes – Jesu me defende!’ Than Isode lowghe, and had good game at hym. So he had all the chyre that she myght make hym, and there he lay all that nyght. (Shepherd 409-413, ll. 21-11)

- a. ‘For such a foolish knight as you are,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘I just recently saw today lying by a well. He lay as if he slept. He looked like a fool, grinning and not speaking. His shield and his horse were nearby him, and I could tell that he was a lover.’

‘Ah, fair sir,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘are you not a lover?’

‘Marry, fie on that!’ said Sir Dinadan.

‘Sir, that is evil said,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘for a knight will never be a true knight of prowess unless he is a lover.’

(...)

Sir Tristram rode to Sir Dinadan and said, ‘How now? It seems the lover has done well.’

(...)

‘He is the same,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘for he is the best jester and joker that I know of, and a noble knight of prowess, and the best fellow that I know. All good knights love his company.’

(...)

Then Sir Tristram told La Beale Isode how Sir Dinadan had a negative opinion of all lovers.

(...)

‘Madam,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘I marvel much at Sir Tristram and other such lovers; what ails them to be so madly besotted with women?’

‘Why,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘are you a knight and not a lover? Truly, that is great shame to you; you may not be called a great knight unless you engage in a quarrel on behalf of a lady.’

‘God defend me!’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘The joy of love is too short, and the sorrow that comes from love lasts too long.’

(...)

‘Now I ask you, for my love,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘will you fight with me against three knights who have done me a great wrong? Inasmuch as you are a knight of King Arthur, I require you to do battle for me.’

‘Then Sir Dinadan said, ‘I will say that you are as fair a lady as I ever saw – and much fairer than my lady Queen Guinevere – but know well, I will not fight for you against three knights. God forbid!’ Then Isode laughed and was much amused by him. So he had all the comforts and hospitality that she could provide for him and he stayed there that night.
(Armstrong 372-5)

b. ‘Sir, only lately I saw just such a knight as you must be,’ said Sir Dynadan. ‘He was lying asleep by a well, his helmet was by him, and he had a foolish grin on his face; he did not say a word, and I’ll wager he was dreaming of his beloved.’

‘Sir, are you not yourself a lover?’

‘No! God forbid that I should meddle in that game.’

‘Sir, surely a knight’s prowess is enhanced by his being a lover?’

(...)

‘How now? It seems the lover did well,’ said Sir Tristram.

(...)

‘The same; he is one of the best knights, and certainly the wittiest in the realm.’

(...)

‘My love, he has come here to find me, and find me he shall; but just now he rehearsed a whole diatribe against lovers.’

(...)

‘My lady, I never cease to wonder at Sir Tristram, and lovers such as he is. What causes such insensate devotion?’

‘For shame! Are you a knight and no lover? The very purpose of a knight is to fight on behalf of a lady.’

(...)

‘Sir, I pray you: Three knights have wronged me; will you not challenge them on my behalf?’

‘My lady, you are the fairest in the land, not excepting Queen Gwynevere; but may God be my witness! I would never undertake to fight three knights on your behalf.’

Iseult laughed. Sir Dynadan remained for the night. (Baines 305-8)

This passage concerns the playful banter between Lady Isolde, Tristram, and Dynadan on the topic of courtly love. The first indication of comedy is to be found in Dynadan’s insult towards Tristram, when he calls him “a folyshe knyght” (409 l. 25). Dynadan continues with a mocking description of such knights, triggering Tristram’s question, “Ar nat ye a lovear?” (409 l. 30), to which Dynadan again responds, “Mary, fye on that crauffte!” (409 l. 31). When Dynadan is asked if he himself is a lover, he responds acidly, prompting Tristram to continue this playful banter, and prod a little further into the trickster’s mind.

While part of the humour lies in the dramatic irony created by the fact that Dynadan does not know Tristram's identity while Tristram knows his, Tristram's question and Dynadan's answer really set the mood for the following episode, and in Armstrong's translation that mood has been weakened considerably. In Dynadan's answer, Armstrong has regrettably removed the "crauffte" from her translation, resulting in a far less pointed "Marry, fie on that!" (372). The word "crauffte", according to the Middle English Dictionary, can be translated as 'power' or 'strength', yet that translation makes no sense in this context. In addition, however, the word is often used in the sense of 'trickery' or 'skill in deceiving'. Another sense, according to the MED, is 'handicraft', along with 'sorcery' or 'witchcraft'. It definitely conjures an image of Dynadan exaggerating his argument in a comedic way. By domesticating the translation, Armstrong causes these lines to lose their distinction within the narrative, blending into the surrounding text so that the comedic power is partially lost.

The following part of this episode recounts Dynadan's rising temper, and Tristram's calm reaction creating a playful, humorous setting, and this passage is translated accordingly by Armstrong. She shows Dynadan's anger and his desire to battle Tristram, while Tristram quietly refuses until his chance to goad Dynadan rises again, and Dynadan gets defeated by another knight who is a lover. Armstrong translates Malory's "How now? Mesemyth the lover hath wel sped" (410 ll. 20-1) almost literally with "How now? It seems the lover has done well," (373), retaining the playful banter inherent in Tristram's jest.

The two part ways, but this comedic passage is not at an end; Tristram and Isolde meet Dynadan again, during which meeting Isolde also joins in the discussion. Armstrong translates Isolde's first argument in Malory's original quite literally. She leaves out the "by reson", slightly weakening the argumentative background of Isolde's words, and her translation of the original "yf ye make a quarell for a lady" is slightly long, but she retains the playful questioning of the original version, and in Dynadan's reply, echoes the original with

“God defend me!” (375). When Isolde then asks Dynadan to fight three knights for her love, as would befit a great knight, Armstrong’s translation echoes Dynadan’s earlier exclamation with “God forbid!” Dynadan’s comic exasperation at Isolde’s request and her following mirth neatly rounds off the comedic episode.

When Tristram tells Isolde of Dynadan’s impending arrival, he describes him as “the beste bourder and japer that I know” (411 l. 48 – 412 l. 1), pointing out Dynadan’s wit, and this is well translated by Baines as “certainly the wittiest in the realm” (307). Malory’s Tristram then replies to Isolde’s question why he has not come along, stating that Dynadan holds an opinion against all lovers. While Armstrong’s literal translation offered no comedic undertones, Baines’ freer adaptation of the original turns this descriptive line into character dialogue, having Tristram tell Isolde “My love, he has come here to find me, and find me he shall; but just now he rehearsed a whole diatribe against lovers” (307). This translation infuses Tristram’s speech with a humorous undertone and further emphasises the comedic nature of this episode.

Baines’ translation echoes the humour in Dynadan’s insult to Tristram, when Dynadan describes the knight in love he encountered earlier. Baines here echoes the implication that Tristram is just as foolish as this knight is, and his addition of “I’ll wager” for the original “well I wote” emphasises Dynadan’s contempt for and mockery of the subject. The following “Sir, are you not yourself a lover?” and Dynadan’s reply, “No! God forbid that I should meddle in that game” (305) retains the humour found in the original “Fye on that crauffte!” (409 l. 31) equally well. When the foolish love-struck knight rides past, and Dynadan loses a duel against this knight, Tristram’s comment perfectly displays the mockery of the original, as Baines uses the same translation as Armstrong. Tristram’s calm words, in the light of his knowledge that Dynadan is looking for him but does not know who he is yet, are further signifiers of the comedic nature of this entire passage.

While Baines has successfully displayed the comedy in this passage until now, his translation of Isolde's last request to Dynadan, unlike Armstrong's rendering, fails to convey the humour in the original dialogue. Baines changes Isolde's plea to Dynadan to fight for her love to "on my behalf" (308), which completely undercuts the humour in Isolde's request, as he loathes lovers. Furthermore, Dynadan's reply, displaying such witty mockery in the original Middle English, is devoid of any humour in Baines' translation. Isolde's laughter at the end seems forced; a rigid translation of the original rather than ensuing naturally from the narrative. Baines' translation of this episode started well in conveying the humour of this passage, but at the end the comedy is partially lost.

This scene in the original Middle English seemed to convey an underlying criticism of the conventions of courtly love and knightly love-sickness. It is not the first time Dynadan is used as a foil to address issues Malory himself wishes to address. Known as the witty and clever, but still honourable and chivalric knight, Dynadan seems to be Malory's instrument to expose issues Malory himself deems worthy of reconsideration, and allows to be acted out by Dynadan. However, neither of the modern English translations seems to portray this aspect to the same effect. Though both describe the playful banter accurately enough, the humour is lost in several places, and causes the hidden meaning to fade away. It is possible that the modern English language does not lend itself well to portraying these issues, as knightly values of courtly love no longer play a part in modern society. However, there is no visible attempt in either of the translations to at least pursue that goal.

3. 'Who is captayne of this felyshyp?' seyde Kynge Marke. For to feare hym, Sir Dynadan seyde hit was Sir Launcelot.

‘A, Jesu!’ seyde Kynge Marke, ‘myght Y knowe Sir Launcelot by his shyld?’ ‘Ye,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘for he beryth a shyld of sylver and blacke bendis.’ All this he seyde to feare Kynge Marke, for Sir Launcelot was nat in the felyship.

(...)

‘Hit is well seyde,’ seyde Sir Gryfflet, ‘for here have I brought Sir Dagonet, Kynge Arthurs foole, that is the beste felow and the meryeste in the worlde.’

‘Woll ye than do well?’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘I have tolde the Cornyshe knyght that here is Sir Launcelot, and the Cornyshe knyght asked me what shyld he bare, and I tolde hym that he bare the same shyld that sir Mordred beryth.’ ‘Woll ye do well?’ seyde Sir Mordred. ‘I am hurte and may nat well beare my shyld nother harneys; and therefore put my harneys and my shyld uppon Sir Dagonet, and let hym sette uppon the Cornyshe knyght!’ ‘That shall be done,’ seyde Sir Dagonet, ‘be my fayth.’ And so anone Sir Dagonet was armed in Sir Mordredis harneys and hys shyld, and he was sete on a grete horse, and a speare in his honde.

‘Now,’ seyde Sir Dagonet, ‘sette me to that knyght, and I trowe I shall beare hym downe.’ So all thes knyghtes rode to a woodis syde and abode tyll Kynge Marke cam by the way. Than they pur forth Sir Dagonet, and he cam on all the whyle his horse myght renne upon Kynge Marke; and whan he cam bye to Kynge Marke, he cryed as he were woode, and sayde, ‘Kepe the, knyght of Cornwayle, for I woll sle the!’ And anone, as Kynge Marke behylde his shyld, he seyde to hymself, ‘Yondyr is Sir Launcelot! Alas, now am I destroyed!’ And therewithall he made his horse to ren, and fledde as faste as he mygyht, thorow thycke and thorow thynne – and ever Sir Dagonet folowed aftir Kynge Marke, cryynge and ratynge hym as a woode man, thorow a grete foreste.

Whan Sir Uwayne and Sir Brandules saw Sir Dagonet so chace Kynge Marke, they lawghed all as they were wylde; and than they toke their horsys and rode aftir to se how Sir

Dagonet spedde, for theym behoved for no good that Sir Dagonet were shente, for Kynge Arthure loved hym passynge well and made hym knyght hys owne hondys – and at every turnemente he began, to make Kynge Arthure to lawghe.

Than the knyghtes rode here and there cryynge and chasyng after Kynge Marke, that all the foreyste range of the noyse. (Shepherd 351-353, ll. 25-24)

- a. ‘Who is captain of this fellowship?’ asked King Mark. To frighten him, Sir Dinadan said it was Sir Lancelot.

‘Ah, Jesus!’ said King Mark. ‘Would I know Sir Lancelot by his shield?’

‘Yes,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘for he bears a shield of silver with black bands.’ He said all this to frighten King Mark, for Sir Lancelot was not in the fellowship.

(...)

‘This is a good thing,’ said Sir Grifflet, ‘for here I have brought Sir Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, who is the best and merriest fellow in the world.’

‘Really?’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘I have told the Cornish knight that Lancelot is here. The Cornish knight asked what shield he bore, and I told him that he bore the same shield that Sir Mordred bears.’

‘Did you now?’ said Sir Mordred. ‘I am hurt and not well able to bear my shield or armor; therefore put my shield and armor on Sir Dagonet and set him on the Cornish knight.’

‘That shall be done,’ said Sir Dagonet, ‘by my faith.’ Then immediately Sir Dagonet was armed in Sir Mordred’s armor and given his shield; he was mounted on a great horse and a spear was placed in his hand. ‘Now,’ said Sir Dagonet, ‘direct me to that knight, and I believe that I shall bear him down.’

So all these knights rode to the side of the woods and waited until King Mark came by that way. Then they sent Sir Dagonet out; he came riding as fast as his horse could run, and when he came near to King Mark, he cried out as if he were crazed, saying, ‘Defend yourself, knight of Cornwall, for I will slay you!’

As soon as King Mark saw his shield he said to himself, ‘Yonder is Sir Lancelot! Alas! Now I will be destroyed!’ With that, he spurred his horse to a run and fled as fast as he could, through thick and thin, and ever Sir Dagonet followed after King Mark, yelling and ranting like a madman, through the great forest.

When Sir Uwain and Sir Brandiles saw Sir Dagonet chase King Mark, they laughed wildly. Then they took their horses and rode after to see how Sir Dagonet had done, for it would not go well for them if they should lose Sir Dagonet, for King Arthur loved him very much and had knighted him with his own hands. He performed first at every tournament to make King Arthur laugh. Then the knights rode here and there yelling and chasing after King Mark so that all the forest rang with the noise. (Armstrong 317-18)

b. ‘Who is their leader?’

‘Sir Launcelot.’

‘God forbid! Can one know him by his shield?’

‘He bears a silver shield with black bands.’

(...)

When he caught up with them they were all talking of the Cornish knight, and he described how he had deceived him so that he would suppose, by the shield that Sir Modred was bearing, that Sir Modred was Sir Launcelot.

‘But alas! I am wounded, and if he follows us I cannot fight,’ said Sir Modred.

‘Then let Sir Dagonet the fool bear Sir Modred’s shield and armor, and we shall soon see some sport,’ said Sir Grifflet.

This was done, and before long King Mark appeared; then Sir Dagonet shouted in a tremendous voice:

‘Knight from Cornwall, beware! Now defend yourself.’

‘Alas, I am undone!’ said King Mark to himself, and turning his horse, fled into the forest.

Sir Dagonet pursued him, roaring and raving, and the other knights all galloped after them, laughing so much that they nearly fell from their saddles. They were also anxious that Sir Dagonet should not actually joust with King Mark, since Sir Dagonet was a favorite of King Arthur’s.

King Mark rode helter-skelter until he came to a well, (...). (Baines 261-2)

This final comedic passage considered in this chapter contains comments on knightly values and kingship, in the scene in which Dynadan and his fellow knights prank King Mark.

Armstrong’s rendition seems to be devoid of humour. While the narrator’s admission that Dynadan only told King Mark Lancelot was in the company of knights to scare him is comical in the original text, in the modern version it seems only to serve a purpose of information, and does not lead up to the next comic scene. The passage is translated as literally and as rigidly as possible, sucking out all the life in an attempt to stick as close to the text as possible. Literal translations, despite their attempt to stick to the original as closely as possible, often lose something in their pursuit, as the historical and cultural context is just as important as the literal wording.

Armstrong’s translation of “they lawghed all as they were wylde” (353 l. 16), “they laughed wildly” (318), here shows an almost aggressive vehemence in the knights, rather

than the comical humour bubbling from the knights. Dynadan's "Woll ye than do well?" (352 l. 41) indicates the prank Dynadan is about to play on King Mark with the help of the knights, followed by Mordred's "Woll ye do well" (352 l. 44) in response. Armstrong's translation of Dynadan's words as "Really?" (318) takes that comic indication away from the passage and transforms the dialogue into a neutral conversation concerning the stranger Cornish knight, indicating more surprise than humorous intent, just like Mordred's response, "Did you now?" (318). There is no noticeable attempt to bring the comic intent of this passage across in Armstrong's translation.

Baines' translation seems to attempt a freer adaptation of the original, trying to convey the overall feeling of the story more than the literal language. As a result, his rendition offers a slightly different reading from the original. Though a freer translation would possibly have greater potential for a comical reading and translation of this passage, Baines' rendition does not do much more than Armstrong's to convey the humour here. His translation completely removes the narrator's comments on Dynadan's plans to prank King Mark, and only translates the dialogue, without any inserted comments to recreate the dramatic irony displayed in the original.

Baines does introduce the deceit later. However, the dismissal of the passages in which the narrator reveals Dynadan's plans and King Mark's ignorance of the true situation destroys the dramatic irony which governs most of the humour in this passage. He then attributes Mordred's suggestion to dress Dagonet up as himself to Sir Gryfflet instead, even though Shepherd's edition clearly describes Mordred suggesting that prank, and Baines' translation is based on the same manuscript. With "some sport", Baines then attempts to indicate that comedy and entertainment are soon coming. The joke is still clear from Dagonet's actions, and humour is indeed indicated through laughter, but Baines leaving out

the narrative structure of the narrator's comments completely results in a less humorous passage.

This passage is yet another example of Dynadan pointing out the flaws in existing traditions and values. For Malory, the values of kingship and aristocracy and their upheaval were fresh in his memory, after the war. With the people's opinions about the rights and responsibilities of their king changing, and the upper middle class rising to join the ranks of the aristocracy, there could perhaps not be a better time to reveal his opinions about what the true values of the higher class and kings should be. Dynadan is a perfect voice for those opinions, as he is both part of, and an outsider to, the nobility of Arthurian society. He is considered a chivalric knight, yet he also uses his wit and sharp tongue to criticise those very same values his noble rank was supposed to pursue. King Arthur is portrayed as benevolent, brave, kind, and responsible, and therefore receives due credit. King Mark clearly depicts none of these values, instead showing cowardice, cruelty, and irresponsibility, and Dynadan mirrors Malory in calling him out for his faults.

Baines fails to address the exposure of these issues by Dynadan, instead passing the episode off as a harmless prank initiated by other knights. Armstrong similarly takes the initiative slightly away from Dynadan, making him rather seem to react to the other knights than taking control of the situation to make sure King Mark does not escape his justice for not embodying the values a king should exemplify. Without Dynadan taking action, this passage is played off as a mere story played for comedic value, while the underlying meaning of the comedic moments in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as I see it, show something far more important about Malory's views of his own country in relation to the Arthurian world.

Conclusion

Though the laughter in these scenes makes it easy, or at least easier, to recognise the comedic intentions present, the translators do not necessarily pick up those signals. As shown in the comparison, Armstrong's literal translations of the passages sometimes help to bring the humour of the passage to light, as in the second passage. However, in the third passage the comedy is lost in her translation, and in the first passage her translation of the original text seems not only humourless but incorrect. Her translation decisions for the scenes that fail to bring the humorous message across can be considered as indicative of a more general failure to perceive humour in Malory. Presumably the comedy that Malory created is lost to a modern audience, and those encounters in which the humour is not obvious enough either need extra emphasis through translation, or fade away in modern renditions to make place for a more formal, historical approach to Malory's work. This could also explain why Armstrong's translation does not seem to put stress on those values, such as gender, courtly love, the chivalric code, and kingship, which jumped to the forefront in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Malory's attempt to highlight and reconsider these prescribed values through the use of comedy is not preserved in her modern translation.

In Baines' version, the focus lies more on telling the same story as the original, and less in rendering the specific words with which the story was told. It would therefore seem possible for Baines to offer a much more humorous translation of Malory's episodes. This suspicion was confirmed by his translations of the first passage, but not by the second. In the third passage Baines changed parts of the story, which in turn removed the emphasis from the theme that Malory aimed to highlight.

Both translators do manage to convey the comedy accurately in one or more passages, and consequently, an argument could not be made for them simply being unaware of Malory's comedic abilities. But more often than not, they focus on different elements of *Le*

Morte d'Arthur rather than on the humour, losing the comedy in their translation. Where Armstrong attempts to display a formal, literal translation of Malory's language, Baines wants to relay the adventurous, exciting story of Malory's idealised chivalric world, with action and emotion, high ideals and courtly values. In both versions, Malory's comedy does not seem to be a priority to retain, and as such does not fully appear.

Chapter 4: Implicit Humour

In this chapter, I will analyse all the passages containing implicit comedy. I will again treat selected passages to highlight the way Malory uses comedy to comment on, question, or criticise existing traditions in his contemporary society. I will compare the two modern English translations in turn, to discover whether they have been successful in conveying the comedy of the original passages. In other words, I will examine whether the comedic tropes and traditions that created the comedy in the original text are preserved in the modern translations, and if they fulfil the same purpose. Finally, I will identify whether the function of these comedic passages has remained unaltered in the translations.

Comparison

1. Ryght so com in a lady on a whyght palferey, and cryed alowde unto Kynge Arthure and seyde, ‘Sir, suffir me nat to have thys despite, for the brachet ys myne that the knyght lath ladde away.’ ‘I may nat do therewith,’ seyde the Kynge. So with thys there com a knyght rydyng all armed on a grete horse, and toke the lady away with forse wyth hym, and ever she cryed and made grete dole.

So whan she was gone the Kynge was gladde, for she made such a noyse.

(Shepherd 66, ll. 14-21)

- a. At that moment a lady came in on a white palfrey and cried aloud to King Arthur, saying ‘Sir, do not allow me to suffer this humiliation, for that brachet is mine which the knight has led away.’

‘There is nothing I can do,’ said the king.

Then at this a knight – riding fully armed – came in on a great horse, and took the lady away with him by force. And ever she cried out and made great dole. When

she was gone the king was glad, because she had made so much noise. (Armstrong 57-58)

- b. Almost immediately a young noblewoman rode into the hall on a white palfrey. She was sobbing with anger and dismay, and rode straight up to Arthur. ‘Sire,’ she cried, ‘summon the knight who has stolen my brachet at once, for I cannot be without it.’

‘I may not summon him now,’ Arthur replied.

Next, a knight appeared, fully armed and riding a powerful charger. He rode up to the young noblewoman and, despite her screams, seized her around the waist, threw her across the withers of his horse, and galloped out of the hall again. Arthur was relieved that the hubbub was over; (Baines 43-44)

The first passage to be considered is when a lady accosts King Arthur during his feast. While there is a touch of ambiguity about the comedic nature of this passage, the concept of a nagging, screaming woman as comedy would not be an unfamiliar one either to a contemporary audience or a modern one. As described in the first chapter, the concept of a ‘scold’, a loud, shrill female who would never stop talking and spouting negativity is a traditional caricature of women in medieval antifeminist satire. Even in *Le Morte d’Arthur* itself, we find another such instance in the damsel who constantly abuses Beaumains in the corresponding passage described in the first chapter.

Armstrong’s translation does not offer a clear departure from the original ambiguity. Her translation is very similar to the original, translating the final line quite literally with, “When she was gone the king was glad, for she had made so much noise” (58). Though Armstrong’s translations often lack imagination and humour, focusing on relaying the story literally more than the underlying tones of comedy, in this passage the existing comedy is

already ambiguous, and so Armstrong's translation contains the same connotations as the original passage. The phrase jumps out of the original as comedic in the otherwise elevated genre of medieval romance. However, as a modern audience is likely to be less familiar with the conventions of the genre of medieval romance, this phrase loses its comedic value when the clash between this genre and comedy is attenuated.

Baines' translation takes away some of the ambiguity of this passage. In his translation, "Arthur was relieved the hubbub was over" (44), he seems to imply a comic note. There is no straightforward comment indicating seriousness here, yet the word "hubbub" humorously conveys the chaos in King Arthur's hall caused by the yelling damsel, and Arthur breathing a sigh of relief as she is being dragged out of his hall so he may have peace. Though understatement as a comedic device plays less of a role here, the word choice succeeds in conveying the clash between the genre of medieval romance and the invading comedy. As a result, the same comedic function is, to some extent, retained.

Both these translations do maintain the comedic value of the original in their own way, either by following Malory's original closely, or by a drastic change of the words. And Malory's invocation of the antifeminist gender stereotype also seems to live on in the modern renditions. In both this passage and the Beaumains episode, we find women portrayed as loud, annoying shrews, either refusing to stop screaming or continuously pelting the protagonist with verbal abuse. In medieval England, women had relatively few rights, and were often seen as mere property of their fathers or husbands to use at will. Their job was usually to be quiet and obedient, never speak against a man, or out of turn. In the modern Western world, men and women are more or less equal. However, we are still familiar with caricatures portraying loud, annoying women. Jokes about how much women talk in comparison to men, and about how annoying men find women who talk or cry a lot, still exist today. Malory uses comedy to stage a clash between different genres. The scold, being a

stock character in medieval comedy, now has infected the high morality of the chivalric romance genre. Malory has taken the existing caricature from its original genre and inserted it into his story of knightly romance, resulting in a passage that does not quite fit in with the general tone and so stands out as being different.

2. Than within an owre there com that knyght that ought the pavylon. He wente that his lemman had layne in that bed, and so he leyde hym adowne by Sir Launcelot and toke hym in his armys and began to kysse hym. And whan Sir Launcelot felte a rough berde kyssyng hym, he sterte oute of the bedde lightly – and the othir knyght aftyr hym. And eythir of hem gate their swerdys in their hondis, and oute at the pavylon dore wente the knyght of the pavylon – and Sir Launcelot followed hym. And there by a lytyll slad Sir Launcelot wounded hym sore, nyghe unto the deth. And than he yelded hym to Sir Launcelot, and so he graunted hym so that he wolde telle hym why he com into the bed. (Shepherd 156, ll. 32-42)

- a. Within an hour or so, the knight who owned that pavilion arrived. He thought that his lover was lying in the bed, so he laid himself down by Sir Lancelot, took him in his arms, and began to kiss him.

When Lancelot felt a rough beard kissing him he leapt out of bed quickly. The other knight jumped out after him, and they each took up their swords in their hands. The knight of the pavilion ran out the door and Sir Lancelot followed him. There in the small glade Sir Lancelot wounded him almost to the death, and the knight then yielded to Sir Lancelot. He granted him mercy as long as he told him why he had come into his bed. (Armstrong 139)

- b. He had not been asleep for more than an hour, however, when the knight who owned the pavilion returned, and got straight into bed with him. Having made an assignation with his paramour, the knight supposed at first that Sir Launcelot was she, and taking him into his arms, started kissing him. Sir Launcelot awoke with a start, and seizing his sword, leaped out of bed and out of the pavilion, pursued closely by the other knight. Once in the open they set to with their swords, and before long Sir Launcelot had wounded his unknown adversary so seriously that he was obliged to yield.

(Baines 110)

The second passage concerns the scene where the knight Belleus slips into bed with Lancelot, thinking it is his lover. This episode addresses the topic of changing gender roles and hints of homosexuality. Lancelot lies in bed cuddling another male knight, as that knight begins to caress and kiss him, thinking it is his lover. The ensuing confusion, surprise, and shock indicate the unexpected nature of this scene, making the almost slapstick-like episode stand out against the usually elevated subjects of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In Armstrong's translation, the comedy of the scene is partially gone, lost in the bland description and her wish to accurately describe what happened.

Part of the humour found in *Le Morte d'Arthur* lies in the stark contrast between the traditionally elevated, formal genre of chivalric romance, and the invading humour from the low comedic genre of farce. Humour is unexpected in Malory's work, and so when it appears, it has all the more effect. Armstrong, perhaps attempting to adopt a more neutral tone and language for the whole work, smooths over the contrasts between the clashing genres and corresponding stylistic registers from the original. However, because she disregards Malory's mixing of genres, she loses this stark contrast between the comedic scenes and the rest of the

work. The translation is completely literal, and thus fails to bring the humorous undertones of this passage to light.

Baines' translation, although slightly freer than Armstrong's literal translation, does not offer much more in terms of comedic value. It describes the accident almost mechanically, without any attempt to paint a humorous picture in any way. Both translations retain the comedic motif used in the original scene to create the comedy, the concept of mistaken identity and gender reversal. However, in the modern translations, these comedic commonplaces do not seem to achieve the same effect, and are here blandly portrayed as reasons for the knight's actions, no more or less.

This episode is yet another of Malory's attempts to question traditional gender roles. He uses the comedic genre of farce to set the passage apart from the surrounding genre, and so focuses on the theme of homosexuality. Lancelot has already proven he can deflect some ridicule when he dressed himself in women's clothes in the Tournament episode described in the previous chapter. He is after all the best, most chivalric knight in Arthur's court. Now, he retains his honour even after finding himself in bed embracing another man. Lancelot interestingly seems to encounter these situations involving the reversal or questioning of gender roles more often, not only during the Tournament, but also in the episode where he lives through an encounter with a huntress who shoots an arrow at his backside, effectively emasculating him. Lancelot suffers through these ordeals but his honour and status are never stained.

3. And whan Sir Dynadan undirstoode hit well, he seyde, 'Sir, thus is my counceyle: sette you right naught by thes thretenynges, for Kynge Marke is so vylaunche a knyght that by fayre speche shall never man gete ought of hym. But ye shall se what I shall do: I woll make a lay for hym, and whan hit is made I shall make an harpere to syng hit afore hym.'

And so anone he wente and made hit, and taught hit to an harpere that hyght Elyot; and whan he cowed hit, he taught hit to many harpers. And so by the wyll of Kynge Arthure and of Sir Launcelot, the harpers wente into Walys and into Cornwayle to synge the lay that Sir Dynadan made by Kynge Marke – whyche was the worste lay that ever harper songe with harpe or with ony other instrument!

(...)

Now woll we passe over this mater and speke we of the harpers that Sir Launcelot and Sir Dynadan had sente into Cornwayle. And at the grete feste that Kynge Marke made for the joy that the Sesoynes were put oute of his contrey, than cam Elyot the harper with the lay that Sir Dynadan had made, and secretly brought hit unto Sir Trystram and tolde hym the lay that Sir Dynadan had made by Kynge Marke. And whan Sir Trystram harde hit, he sayde, O Lord Jesu! That Sir Dynadan can make wondirly well – and yll there he sholde make evyll!’ ‘Sir,’ seyde Elyot, ‘dare I synge this songe afore Kynge Marke?’ ‘Yee, on my perell,’ seyde Sir Trystram. ‘for I shall be thy waraunte.’ So at the mete in cam Elyot the harper, amonge other mynstrels, and began to harpe; and because he was a coryous harper, men harde hym synge the same lay that Sir Dynadan made, whyche spake the moste vylany by Kynge Marke and of his treson that ever man herde. And whan the harper had sunge his songe to the ende, Kynge Marke was wondirly wrothe (...). (Shepherd 372 ll. 33-44 – 378 ll. 7-24)

- a. When Sir Dinadan understood the situation, he said, ‘Sir, this is my advice: do not pay any attention to these threats, for King Mark is so villainous a knight that no man can get anything out of him through fair speech. But you shall see what I shall do. I will compose a lay for him, and when it is done I will get a harper to sing it before him.’

So immediately he went and composed it, and taught it to a harper named Eliot. When he knew it, he in turn taught it to many other harpers. Then by the will of King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, the harpers went into Wales and Cornwall to sing the lay that Sir Dinadan had made about King Mark, and it was the worst song that ever any harper had sung with a harp or other instrument.

(...)

Now we will turn away from this matter and speak of the harpers that Sir Lancelot and Sir Dinadan had sent into Cornwall. At the great feast that King Mark held to celebrate the rout of the Soissons host, the harper Eliot came; he had learned the lay that Sir Dinadan had made about King Mark, and he went to Sir Tristram secretly and told him the lay that Sir Dinadan had composed.

When Sir Tristram heard it, he said, ‘Lord Jesus! That Sir Dinadan composes wonderfully well – he can even write badly when he wishes!’

‘Sir,’ said Eliot, ‘do I dare sing this song before King Mark?’

‘Yes, with my assurance,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘I will be your warrant.’

So at the feast Eliot the harper came in, with other minstrels, and began to harp. Because he was an attentive harper, men heard him sing that lay that Sir Dinadan had composed; and that lay said the most cutting things about King Mark and his treason that ever any man had heard.

When the harper had sung his song to the end, King Mark was extremely angry (...). (Armstrong 336-42)

- b. ‘Sir Launcelot, King Mark is well known for his treachery, hence no one will take his insinuations too seriously. To reply courteously would be a waste of courtesy; therefore I

shall compose a lampoon and teach it to the minstrels at the court, and that shall be our reply to him.’

Sir Dynadan composed his lampoon. It was excellent, and told of King Mark’s treachery and cowardice since the beginning of his reign. King Arthur and Queen Gwynevere were delighted with it, and it was taught to all their minstrels, who were then given instructions to sing it throughout the realm, especially in Cornwall.

(...)

While Sir Tristram was recovering, King Mark held a feast to celebrate the defeat of Sir Elyas, and to this feast came one of King Arthur’s minstrels, to sing Sir Dynadan’s lampoon. He went first to Sir Tristram and sang it to him.

‘By Jesu!’ said Sir Tristram when he had heard it, ‘Sir Dynadan certainly is a good composer, for good or for evil!’

‘Sir, dare I sing it before King Mark?’

‘Certainly! I shall be your warrant.’

King Arthur’s minstrel was an accomplished singer, and once he had struck up with his harp he commanded the attention of everyone at the feast. He sang the lampoon straight through; instance after instance of King Mark’s treachery and cowardice was enumerated. King Mark was outraged. (Baines 278-81)

Armstrong’s rendition of Dynadan’s plan is equal to Malory’s – the comic anticipation that a reader would feel as soon as Dynadan starts to plan a prank exists in both versions.

Armstrong’s final sentence in this passage barely differs from Malory’s. However, Armstrong’s shifts the modifying “any” to precede “harper”, rather than “instrument”. This way, the focus lies not on the instrument used to perform the lay, but rather on Dynadan’s

exceptional skill, to have written such a universally bad lay. She thus emphasises Dynadan's comic talents more than Malory does.

In the second part of this comedic episode, Malory's Tristram utters a well-crafted play on words concerning Dynadan's lyrical prowess, "That Sir Dynadan can make wondrously well – and yll there he sholde make evyll!" (378 ll. 14-5). Armstrong translates this passage more in accordance with the meaning of the words than with the form: "That Sir Dinadan composes wonderfully well – he can even write badly when he wishes!" (341). Though Armstrong's version does not display quite the same mastery of words as Malory's, it still reveals the same comedic undertones in this passage, and the gleeful expectation of Tristram to hear this song performed to King Mark, an elation that would be shared by the reader, and confirmed by King Mark's anger.

Baines' choice of words for the mocking lay is 'lampoon', meaning "a virulent or scurrilous satire upon an individual" (OED). This choice of words immediately introduces the comedic intent to readers who know its meaning. The ruse involving the insult directed at King Mark is already an example of Dynadan's sharp wit; the lay itself, though unquoted, can only be imagined much worse, and much funnier. Tristram's reaction in Baines' translation slightly differs from Armstrong's, and actually seems to render Malory's words a bit more literally. This reaction is very humorous, yet the comedy is reduced slightly by Tristram's answer to the minstrel, when the latter asks if he should sing the lampoon to King Mark. Tristram allows it, yet the gleeful anticipation that existed in Malory's words, and that is preserved in Armstrong's translation, is missing. Yet the result is the same; an outraged King Mark, and delight from everyone else at the feast.

The commentary on kingship and knightly values in this passage is also left intact in both translations. Both Armstrong and Baines make it clear that King Mark is not a model king, and imply a strong criticism regarding his knightly and kingly values. As I argued in the

previous chapter, King Mark seems to embody the wrong idea of what a king should be, and what a knight should act like and stand for. Dynadan, for his part, figures in these comedic instances to point out King Mark's flaws, and to address the failings of kings and nobility in Malory's society. Though Dynadan is not the ideal embodiment of a knight according to Arthurian standards, he shows that wit and cleverness can in fact make a good and honourable knight. These 'new' qualities could also be considered beneficial for the nobility and royalty of Malory's own world.

4. And so they brente bothe in hote love that they were accorded to abate their lustys secretly.

And there Dame Lyonesse counceyled Sir Gareth to slepe in none other place but in the halle, and there she promised hym to com to his bed a lytyll afore mydnyght.

This counceyle was nat so prevyly kepte but hit was undirstonde, for they were but yonge bothe and tendir of ayge, and had nat used suche craufftis toforne.

Wherefore the damesell Lyonett was a lytyll dyspleased, and she thought hir sister Dame Lyonesse was a lytyll overhasty that she mught nat abyde hir tyme of maryage; and for saving of hir worship she thought to abate their hote lustis. And she lete ordeyne by hir subtyle craufftes that they had nat their intentys neythir with othir as in her delytes until they were maryed. And so hit paste on; at aftir souper was made a clene avoydaunce, that every lorde and lady sholde go unto his reste.

But Sir Gareth seyde playnly he wolde go no farther than the halle – 'for in suche placis,' he seyde, 'was convenyaunte for an arraunte knyght to take his reste in.'

And so there was ordained grete cowchis, and thereon fethir beddis, and there he leyde hym downe to slepe; and within a whyle came Dame Lyonesse wrapped in a mantel furred with ermyne, and leyde hir downe by the sydys of Sir Gareth – and therwithall he

began to clyppe hir and to kysse hir. And therewithal he loked before hym and sawe an armed knyght with many lyghtes aboute hym, and this knyght had a longe gysarne in his honde and made a grymme countenance to smyte hym.

(...)

‘My lorde Sir Gareth,’ seyde Lyonett, ‘all that I have done I woll avowe hit – and all shall be for your worship and us all.’ And so within a whyle Sir Gareth was nyghe hole, and waxed lyght and jocounde, and sange and daunced –

That agayne Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse were so hote in brennyng love that they made their covenantes, at the tenthe nyght aftir, that she sholde com to his bedde. And because he was wounded afore, he leyde his armour and his swerde nygh his beddis syde.

And ryght as she promised she com.

And she was nat so sone in his bedde but she aspyed an armed knyght commynge towarde de bed, and anone she warned Sir Gareth (...).

But the sorrow that Dame Lyonesse made there may no tunge telle, for she so fared with herself as she wolde have dyed. (Shepherd 206 l. 16 – 208 l. 23)

- a. They both burned so in hot love that they agreed to satisfy their lust in secret, and Dame Lyonesse advised Sir Gareth to sleep nowhere but in the hall, and she promised to come to his bed there a little before midnight.

Because they were both young and tender of age, and not accustomed to such subterfuge, their plan soon became known, which made the Damsel Lyonette more than a little displeased. She thought her sister Lyonesse was a little overhasty, not to wait until the time of her marriage, and to save her honor she thought to cool their

lust. Through her subtle crafts she caused it to be that they would not delight in each other until they were married.

So the time passed on, and after supper the hall cleared, so that every lord and lady could go to rest. Sir Gareth announced that he would stay in the hall, 'for in such places,' he said, 'it is fitting for knight-errant to take his rest.'

So there were brought in great couches with a featherbed placed on top, and there he laid himself down to sleep. Within a short while Dame Lyonesse came in, wrapped in a mantle furred with ermine, and she lay down beside Sir Gareth. He began then to embrace and kiss her.

Suddenly, he saw in front of him an armed knight, bearing a long battle-axe in his hand, who with a grim countenance was coming forward to smite him.

(...)

'My lord Sir Gareth,' said Lyonette, 'all that I have done, I will own up to, and it shall be for the honor of you and all of us.'

Within a while, Sir Gareth was almost completely healed, and grew light and happy, and sang and danced. Then again, Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse burned so hot in love that they made a covenant that on the tenth night after, she should come to his bed. Because he had been wounded before, he placed his armor and his sword near the side of the bed.

And just as she had promised, she came. No sooner was she in his bed than she saw an armed knight coming toward the bed,

(...) but the sorrow that Dame Lyonesse made there is beyond the capability of any tongue to tell; she carried on as if she would have died. (Armstrong 182-4)

- b. Sir Gareth was overjoyed, and there followed an exchange of vows and an assignation for the same night in the hall where he would ask to sleep.

When the company dispersed to their chambers for the night, and Sir Gareth rather clumsily made his request to sleep in the hall, neither Sir Gryngamour nor Lady Lynet was deceived; but a comfortable couch was made up for him, with a feather mattress and furs.

Just before midnight Lady Lyoness came to the hall, and throwing off her ermine cloak – her only covering – slipped into bed with Sir Gareth. However, they had no sooner embraced than a knight appeared, strangely illumined, with grim countenance, fully armed and brandishing a huge spear.

(...)

‘Sir Gareth, what I do is only for the best,’ Lady Lynet replied, and departed.

Sir Gareth soon recovered from his wound, and became so full of joy that he danced and sang wherever he went; and ten days later made another assignation with his lover. This time he took the precaution of setting both armor and sword within easy reach.

Once more the illumined knight appeared, (...). (Baines 150-1)

The final passage recounts the attempted sexual encounters between Sir Gareth and his lady love, Lady Lyonesse, in a hilarious commentary on courtly love. This passage would be difficult to translate with all the comedic contents intact, as much of the humour lies in the clash between the chivalric demand of chastity and the clashing image of two young people described as mindless lovers, unable to keep their hands off each other. Chastity was an important conventional virtue in the genre of knightly romance, as well as a condition of the ideal of courtly love. Of course, secret passionate encounters were not part of that ideal, let

alone pre-marital consummation of the love between two courtly lovers. It is clear that the genre of farce is once again invading the genre of courtly romance here, breaking through the landscape of high morals, ideals, and conventions with lewd and raunchy comedy. This mixing of genres is most likely less noticeable for a modern audience than it was to Malory's contemporaries. Still, a modern audience, knowing the elevated and formal surroundings in which Malory's characters find themselves, might find the image of the young lovers, wanting to sleep together so badly they would forgo their honour, hilarious in its desperation.

Yet this passage does not only break with literary conventions. In the Middle Ages, chastity was a virtue often demanded from the aristocracy, mostly to ensure the children could without a doubt be credited to the married couple and so be legitimate heirs to their family's wealth and status. However, this demand was by no means universally enforced in practice. Lower classes had less need, if no need at all, to prove their children's legitimacy, and so the rule of pre-marital chastity was really mostly required of the nobility. Thus what we see is not only a clash between literary genres, but between conventions associated with different social classes. As more people from the upper middle class were joining the ranks of the nobility, the traditions and ideals conventionally associated with the aristocracy were muddled too. I believe this passage is an example of Malory using comedy in his work to reflect on those clashing conventions.

Armstrong's translation of this passage is quite successful. The literal way in which she renders Malory's line "And so they brente bothe in hote love that they were acorded to abate their lustys secretly" (206 ll. 16-7) as "They both burned so in hot love that they agreed to satisfy their lust in secret" (182) does not take away from the comical image of two young people practically jumping up and down for a chance to be alone with each other. Especially Armstrong's rendition of Lyonette's reaction when she discovers the couple's plans emphasises the comedy in this scene; where Malory's Lyonette is merely "a lytyll

displeased” (206 l. 24), Armstrong’s Lyonette is “more than a little displeased” (182), the informal intensification of her feelings reinforcing the departure from the usual formal setting and emphasising the comedy in this scene.

In Malory’s rendition the comedy lay for a large part in the hilarious image of the aroused Gareth having to fight knight after knight when really all he wants to do is lie with his lady. Armstrong renders Malory’s humorous image of Lyonesse as a hysterical female quite closely, with an equally humorous result. She echoes the deadpan description of Lyonesse’s reaction from Malory’s original, and so retains the comedic value of the passage, allowing the reader to consider both characters as equally participating in this comical scene. Though a modern English audience would be less sensitive to the clash between conventions of different genres, Armstrong plays with the description of the scene to enhance this difference once more and let the comedy jump out.

Baines’ translation lacks the description of Lyonette’s disapproval. Though the code of conduct is still transgressed upon, the description does not describe the lovers’ comic urgency, rather rendering the passage in a toneless, dull manner. The actual meeting brings just as little comedic value to the story, as Baines describes it rather factually without any attempt at a humorous description or dialogue. There is no humorous description here of the impatient young lovers scrambling to have their alone time, and no displeased reaction from Lyonette. However, Baines attempts to make the scene more explicitly erotic to a modern audience by adding the classic concept of the naked woman in a fur coat. Since Peter Paul Rubens painted his work “The Little Fur Coat” (KMH), this image has become a classic of the erotic repertoire, for example returning in the 1949 Hollywood movie “Beyond the Forest”, in which Bette Davis dons a fur coat while wearing nothing else. Though his description of this scene is rather flat and humourless, he adds a different detail to his translation that brings out the erotic undertones of this scene to a modern audience.

This scene comments on courtly love in a different way than the passage in the previous chapter. The quick-witted discussion on the virtues and flaws of knightly love between Dynadan, Tristram and Isolde shows how courtly love can negatively affect knights. The two episodes concerning courtly love and the lovesickness of Tristram and Lancelot, addressed in the first chapter, address the same topic, focusing on how infuriated passion can transform good knights into unrecognisable madmen. This episode, by contrast, describes how a happy couple may also run into problems, with ridiculous consequences. Once again the passions of love drive knights and ladies to extremes, acting like fools and behaving quite unlike the formal and elevated knights and ladies they are supposed to be. Love drives conventionally courteous and knightly people to improper actions, and Malory seems to address the absurdity of these rules by recreating this courtly love within the genre of farce. His comedy thus opens up the possibility of change and adjustments to the rigid aristocratic codes of conduct and traditions.

Conclusion

As in the passages containing explicit humour, both Baines and Armstrong have managed to translate some passages with the humorous intent intact, while failing to address the comedy adequately in others. In the first passage, Armstrong's translation was literal and bland, while Baines seemed to recognise that some comedy was intended, and responded with an equally humorous translation. The comedy in the second passage was lost in both modern renditions, while the third passage was translated into modern English quite well, retaining the comedy inherent in the episode. In translating the last episode, Armstrong kept the original comedic descriptions, while Baines replaced them with a classic image that would yet be more recognisable to a modern audience. Armstrong tends to rely too much on a word-for-word translation, which produces a mostly accurate, but bland retelling of Malory's text but which

removes any freedom and often loses the hidden meaning in the text. Baines' freer adaptations do sometimes allow for a more, or different, comedic reading of the scenes, but they just as often serve to remove all the comedic references from the translation completely. The comedy in these passages is often used to focus on issues or traditions that Malory wanted to comment on or criticise. The comedy would have been instantly recognisable to a contemporary audience because of the mixing of genres, but this is likely much less visible to a modern audience. Therefore the translators needed to make additional changes in order to retain that aspect of the text, and when they did not, that aspect was lost.

Conclusion.

I started this thesis because I believed that the comedy found in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was an interesting feature worthy of study. Along the way I realised that this feature could also give more insight into the way Malory saw social change in his world and responded to it. Analysing how this comedy was rendered in the modern translations could then tell us more about the way we envision that medieval society now. My claim in this study has been that the comedic moments in *Le Morte d'Arthur* do not just appear for comedy's sake, but that Malory's aim was to focus on the gap between traditional rules of conduct and the changed needs of his contemporary world through the use of these comedic passages. By allowing different genres to invade the elevated, high moral genre of medieval, knightly romance, he is able to reflect on traditional topics such as knightly chivalric values, kingship, gender roles, and homosociality. I believe Malory addresses these traditional topics to acknowledge the turbulent, changing times in which he lived, which completely turned around the traditions and conventions of his society. Therefore, these comedic passages are worthy of study not just as examples of different genres mixing within a single literary work, but as symptoms of real historical change.

In Chapter 1 I introduced the history of Sir Thomas Malory himself, and of Arthurian literature in general. I outlined a possible approach to the issues I argue Malory addressed in his work and their connection to his world. In Chapter 2 I produced an in-depth analysis of the comedic passages in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and their possible function for Malory's commentary on his own society. In Chapters 3 and 4 I discussed selected passages from the original in comparison to two modern translations, in order to analyse how these passages and their accompanying functions were rendered. I thus aimed to discover whether the comedy would still be recognisable to a modern audience.

It is clear from my analysis of both translations that it is not completely impossible to recognise and accurately convey the comedy in Malory's writing. Both translators have in some instances succeeded not only to reflect the comedy, but sometimes even to improve the comedic experience of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. However, it seems that the invasion of different comedic genres into the traditional medieval genre of knightly romance becomes much more difficult to recognise for a modern audience. As a modern audience is likely to appreciate the traditional genre very differently than a contemporary audience would have, both the comedy and the meaning behind it will have been understood very differently. While it was often possible to recreate the comedy in various passages, Malory's underlying criticism of his turbulent social environment and the accompanying changes was usually much harder to transmit.

Issues that were highly relevant in Malory's time are not always recognizable as such to modern society. Antifeminist caricatures of loud, annoying women might still exist, but the knightly values of honour and kingship are no longer concerns in modern western society. Most western countries are run by a democratic government. Additionally, women have equal rights and standing at least in theory, and homosexuality is no longer a punishable offence. The rules of courtly love, then, seem remarkably out of place today. Much of Malory's mockery is thus likely to be lost on modern readers when they have only a modern English translation to serve them. Additionally, a modern audience would be less familiar with the conventions of the genres Malory intertwines in *Le Morte d'Arthur* than Malory's contemporaries. While the cultural gap is occasionally successfully bridged to reveal the comedy of the original, for the most part the focus for both translators does not seem to lie with this rare and often forgotten aspect of Malory's work.

Malory longed for, but also questioned, the values of courtly love and the chivalric code of the knights through his use of comedy. This would have allowed his readership to do

the same; an invitation that is likely to be lost on a modern audience. Nevertheless I believe that Malory's humorous commentary on social change in *Le Morte d'Arthur* deserves more credit than it has so far received. Therefore I hold that this element should be studied more closely so that it may be rendered more appropriately in modern translations and help to rekindle public interest in Malory's Arthurian *tour de force*.

Cited Sources

Primary Sources:

Armstrong, D. *Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur: a New Modern English Translation*

Based on the Winchester Manuscript. Anderson, Parlor Press, 2009.

Baines, K. *Le Morte D'Arthur: King Arthur and the Legends of the Round Table.* New York,

Signet Classics, 2001.

Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur or The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble*

Knyghtes of the Rounde Table: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds,

Criticism. Ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Print.

Secondary Sources:

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* Boston, Heinle & Heinle, 1999. Print.

Aurner, N.S. "Sir Thomas Malory—Historian?" *PMLA*, 48.2 (1933): 362-391. *Modern*

Language Association. Web. 14-01-2017.

Chiaro, D. *Translation, Humour, and Literature.* New York: Continuum, 2010. Print.

Hoffman, D. "Malory and the English Comic Tradition". *Comedy in Arthurian*

Literature. Suffolk, D.S. Brewer, 2003. Print.

Hordis, S. M., and Paul Hardwick. *Medieval English Comedy.* Turnhout,

Brepols, 2007. Print.

Hordis, S. M. "Unity, Genre, and Subverting the Absolute Past: The Case of Malory's

"Tournament at Surluse". *Medieval Forum.* 2004, 4. Web.

Morse, R. "Back To the Future: Malory's Genres". *Arthuriana.* 1997, 7.3. *Scriptorium Press.*

Web. (JSTOR)

Munday, J. *Introducing Translation Studies, 3rd Edition.* Abingdon, Routledge, 2012.

Norris, R. *Malory's Library: The Sources of the "Morte d'Arthur"*. *Arthurian Studies*, lxxi.

Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2008. Print.

Pearsall, D. *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*. Malden, Blackwell Pub., 2003.

Print.

Redmond, C. S. "Shifting Mythology - The Transformation of Gender in Modern Arthurian

Retellings." St. Louis, *Maryville College*, 2010.

Salla, S. M. *"They Lowghed All as They Were Wild": The Comedy of Malory's Morte*

Darthur. Diss. Bethlehem, Lehigh University, 2000. Print.

Stone, J. W. *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the*

Difference Within. New York, Routledge, 2010. Print.

Veese, H. Aram. *The New Historicism*. New York, Routledge, 1994. Print.

Watt, D. *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*. Rochester, D. S. Brewer, 2004.

Wolf, M. "Policing Women's Speech in Late Medieval England". *H-Women*. May, 2008. *H-*

Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Web.

Dictionaries:

Kurath, H., and R. E. Lewis. *Electronic Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor, Univ. of

Michigan Press, 2001. Web.

Appendix.

As I have to accommodate the constraints of this thesis, I have reduced the passages in Chapters 3 and 4 to the specific parts that are being discussed. In order to make the passages easier to read and compare, I have added the complete texts in this appendix. Where I have chosen to omit text in these passages, it is because the omitted text belonged to a wholly different storyline that was irrelevant to the passages discussed in the chapters.

Passages Chapter 3.

1. This, meanwhyle, Quene Gwenyver and the Haute Prince and Sir Launcelot made there Sir Dynadan to make hym redy to juste. ‘I woll,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘ryde into the fylde – but than one of you twayne woll mete with me!’ ‘Perdeus!’ seyde the Haute Prynce and Sir Launcelot, ‘ye may se how we sytte here as jouges with oure shyldis, and allway may ye beholde where we sytte here or nat.’

So Sir Dynadan departed and toke his horse, and mette with many knyghtes and ded passingly well; and as he was departed, Sir Launcelot disgysed hymselff and put upon his armour a maydyns garmente freysshely attyred.

Than Sir Launcelot made Sir Galyhodyn to lede hym thorow the raunge – and all men had wonder what damesell was that. And so as Sir Dynadan cam into the raunge, Sir Launcelot, that was in the damesels aray, gate Sir Galyhodyns speare and ran unto Sir Dynadan. And allwayes he loked up there as Sir Launcelot was – and than he sawe one sytte in the stede of Sir Launcelot armed – but whan Sir Dynadan saw a maner of a damesell, he dradde perelyss lest hit sholde be Sir Launcelot disgysed. But Sir Launcelot cam on hym so faste that he smote Sir Dynadan over his horse croupe – and anone grete coystrons gate Sir Dynadan, and into the foreyste there beside; and there they dispoyled hym unto his sherte and put upon hym a womans garmente, and so

brought hym into fylde. And so they blew unto lodging, and every knyghte wente and unarmed them.

And than was Sir Dynadan brought in amonge them all; and whan Quene Gwennyver sawe Sir Dynadan i-brought in so amonge them all, than she lowghe, that she fell downe – and so dede all that there was.

‘Well,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘Sir Launcelot, thou arte so false that I can never beware of the!’ (Shepherd 399, ll. 16-45)

- a. In the meantime, Queen Guenevere, the High Prince, and Sir Lancelot told Sir Dinadan to make himself ready to joust.

‘I would,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘ride into the field, but then one of the two of you would challenge me!’

‘No indeed!’ said the High Prince and Sir Lancelot. ‘You can see how we sit here as judges with only our shields; you will be able to see whether we remain seated here or not.’

So Sir Dinadan went and mounted his horse. He contested with many knights and did very well. But as soon as he departed, Sir Lancelot disguised himself, putting a maiden’s dress on over his armor.

Then Sir Lancelot had Sir Galyhodyn lead him to the lists, and all men wondered what damsel that was. As Sir Dinadan entered the field, Sir Lancelot, wearing the maiden’s clothes, took up Sir Galyhodyn’s spear and ran at Sir Dinadan. Sir Dinadan was constantly checking to see if Sir Lancelot had remained in his seat, and there was someone sitting there, pretending to be Sir Lancelot, armed. When Sir Dinadan saw someone who looked like a damsel, he was in great fear, as he suspected that it might be Sir Lancelot in disguise.

Sir Lancelot came at Sir Dinadan so fast that he knocked him off his horse. Then several big serving men took Sir Dinadan into the forest beside the tournament field and they stripped him down to his shirt, put him in a woman's garment, and then brought him on to the field. The horn sounded summoning the knights to their lodgings, so every knight went and unarmed.

Then Sir Dinadan was brought in among them all. When Queen Guenevere saw him brought in wearing a woman's dress, she laughed so hard she fell down – and so did everyone else who was there.

'Well,' said Sir Dinadan, 'Sir Lancelot, you are so sly that I must always beware of you!' (Armstrong 361-2)

- b. Meanwhile, the High Prince, Sir Launcelot, and Queen Gwynevere were persuading Sir Dynadan to arm and enter the field.

'My lords, I am afraid that if I do so, before long I shall have to encounter one or the other of you.'

'Sir, you may set your mind at rest, for we shall sit here in the judges' seats with our shields before us, and should we leave them, you will be able to see that we have done so.'

Sir Dynadan entered the field and did well. Sir Launcelot hastily found a substitute for his seat, then armed himself and put on a maiden's gown above his armor. He rode onto the field and took a spear from Sir Galyhodyn and charged at Sir Dynadan. Sir Dynadan looked up in time to see a maid charging at him with a spear, and to suspect Sir Launcelot, but not in time to escape him, and he was sent crashing to the ground. He was then dragged into the forest by some of the High Prince's servants, stripped, dressed in the gown, and taken

thus before the High Prince and the queen, who all but fell down with laughing.

‘Sir Launcelot, you traitor! Shall I never escape you?’ he said. (Baines 299)

2. Now turne we unto Sir Trystram, that as he rode an-huntynge he mette wyth Sir Dynadan, that was commyn into the contrey to seke Sir Trystram. And anone Sir Dynadan tolde Sir Trystram his name – but Sir Trystram wolde nat tell his name. Wherefore Sir Dynadan was wrothe – ‘for suche a folyshe knyght as ye ar,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘I saw but late this day lynyng by a welle: and he fared as he slepte, and there he lay lyke a fole, gennyng, and wolde nat speke – and his shyld lay by hym, and his horse also stood by hym – and well I wote he was a lovear.’ ‘A, fayre sir,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘ar nat ye a lovear?’

‘Mary, fye on that crauffte!’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘Sir, that is yevell seyde,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for a knyght may never be of proues but yf he be a lovear.’ ‘Ye say well,’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘Now I pray you telle me youre name, syth ye be suche a lovear; othir ellys I shall do batayle with you.’

‘As for that,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘hit is no reson to fight wyth me but yf I tell you my name; and as for my name, ye shall nat wyte as at this tyme for me.’

‘Fye, for shame! Are ye a knyght and dare nat telle youre name to me? Therefore, sir, I woll fight with you.’

‘As for that,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘I woll be avysed, for I woll nat do batayle but yf me lyst – and yf I do batayle wyth you,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘ye are nat able to withstonde me.’ ‘Fye on the, cowarde,’ seyde Sir Dynadan. And thus as they hoved styll, they saw a knyght com rydyng agaynste them.

‘Lo,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘se where commyth a knyght rydyng whyche woll juste wyth you.’ Anone, as sir Dynadan behylde hym, he seyde, ‘Be my fayth, that same is the doted knyght that I saw lye by the welle, nother slepyng nother wakyng.’

‘Well,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘I know that knyght well, wyth the coverde shyld of assure, for he is the Kynges sonne of Northumbirlonde: his name is Sir Epyngrys, and he is as grete a lover as I know, and he lovyth the Kynges doughter of Walys, a full fayre lady –

‘And now I suppose,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘and ye requyre hym, he woll juste wyth you – and than shall ye preve whether a lover be nettir knyght, or ye that woll nat love no lady.’

‘Well,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘now shalt thou se what I shall do.’ And therewythall Sir Dynadan spake on hyght and sayde, ‘Sir knyght, make the redy to juste wythe me, for juste ye muste nedis, for hit is the custom of knyghtes arraunte.’ ‘Sir,’ seyde Sir Epyngrys ‘ys that the rule and custom of you [arraunt knyghtes, for to make a knyght to juste will he or nyll he?’] ‘As for that,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘make the redy – for here is for me!’ And therewythall they spurred their horsys, and mette togydirs so harde that Sir Epyngrys smote downe Sir Dynadan. And anone Sir Trystram rode to Sir Dynadan, and sayde ‘How now? Mesemyh the lover has well sped.’

‘Fye on the, cowarde,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘frome thy felyshyp, for I never spedde well syns I mette wyth the.’ And so they departed.

(...)

And so Sir Trystram rode unto Joyus Garde; and there he alyght and unarmed hym. So Sir Trystram tolde La Beall Isode of all this adventure, as ye have harde toforne. And whan she harde hym tell of Sir Dynadan, ‘Sir,’ she seyde, ‘is nat that he that made the songe by Kyng Marke?’ ‘That same is he,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for he

is the beste bourder and japer that I know, and a noble knyght of his hondis, and the beste felawe that I know – and all good knyghtis lovyth his felyship.’

‘Alas, sir,’ seyde she, ‘why brought ye hym nat wyth you hydir?’

‘Have ye no care,’ seyde Sir Trystram, ‘for he rydyth to seke me in this contrey, and therefore he woll nat away tyll he have mette wyth me.’ And there Sir Trystram tolde La Beall Isode how Sir Dynadan hylde ayenste all lovers.

‘Ryght so cam in a varlette and tolde Sir Trystram how there was com an arraunte knyght into the towne, wyth suche a coloures uppon his shyld.

‘Be my fayth, that is Sir Dynadan,’ seyde Sir Trystram. ‘Therefore, madame, wote ye what ye shall do: sende ye for hym, and I woll nat be seyne. And ye shall hyre the myrryeste knyght that ever ye spake wythall, and the maddyst talker – and I pray you hertaly that ye make hym good chere.’

So anone La Bealle Isode sente unto the towne, and prayde Sir Dynadan that he wolde com into the castell and repose hym there wyth a lady.

‘Wyth a good wyll!’ seyde Sir Dynadan; and so he mownted uppon his horse and rode into the castell, and there he alyght and was unarmed and brought into the halle.

And anone La Bealle Isode cam unto hym, and aythir salewed other.

Than she asked hym of whens that he was. ‘Madame,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘I am of the courte of Kynge Arthure, and a knyght of the Table Rounde; and my name is Sir Dynadan.’ ‘What do ye in this contrey?’ seyde La Beall Isode. ‘Forsothe, madame, I seke after Sir Trystram, the good knyght, for hit was tolde me that he was in this contrey.’ ‘Hit may well be,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘but I am nat ware of hym.’ ‘Madame,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘I mervayle at Sir Trystram and mo other suche lovers:

‘What aylyth them to be so madde and so asoted uppon women?’

‘Why,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘ar ye a knyght and ar no lovear? Forsothe, hit is grete shame to you; wherefore ye may nat be called a good knyght by reson but yf ye make a quarrel for a lady.’

‘God deffende me!’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘for the joy of love is to shorte, and the sorrow therof, [and what cometh therof,] is duras over longe.’

‘A,’ sayde La Beall Isode, ‘say ye nevermore so! For hyre faste by was the good knyght Sir Bleoberys de Ganys, that fought wyth three knyghtes at onys for a damesell; and he wan her afore the Kynge of Northumbirlonde – and that was worshipfully done,’ seyde La Beall Isode. ‘Forsothe, hit was so,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘for I knowe hym well for a good knyght and a noble; and commyn is of noble bloode – and all be noble knyghtes of the blood of Sir Launcelot de Lake.’ ‘Now I pray you, for my love,’ seyde La Beall Isode, ‘wyll ye fyght for me wyth three knyghtes that doth me grete wronge? And insomuche as ye bene a knyght of Kynge Arthurs, I requyre you to do batayle for me.’

Than Sir Dynadan seyde, ‘I shall sey you ye be as fayre a lady as evir I sawe ony – and much fayrer than is my lady Quene Gwenyver – but wyte you well, at one worde, I woll nat fyght for you wyth three knyghtes – Jesu me defende!’ Than Isode lowghe, and had good game at hym. So he had all the chyre that she myght make hym, and there he lay all that nyght. (Shepherd 409-413, ll. 21-11)

c. Now we turn back to Sir Tristram. As he rode hunting he met with Sir Dinadan who had come into the country to seek Sir Tristram. Sir Dinadan immediately told Sir Tristram his name, but Sir Tristram would not tell him his.

Because of this, Sir Dinadan was angry. ‘For such a foolish knight as you are,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘I just recently saw today lying by a well. He lay as if he slept. He

looked like a fool, grinning and not speaking. His shield and his horse were nearby him, and I could tell that he was a lover.’

‘Ah, fair sir,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘are you not a lover?’

‘Marry, fie on that!’ said Sir Dinadan.

‘Sir, that is evil said,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘for a knight will never be a true knight of prowess unless he is a lover.’

‘You say well,’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘Now I pray you, tell me your name, since you are such a lover; if you do not, I will do battle with you.’

‘As for that,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘there is no reason to fight with me if I do not tell you my name. And as for my name – you shall not learn it from me at this time.’

‘Fie, for shame! Are you a knight and dare not tell your name to me? Therefore, sir, I wish to fight with you.’

‘As for that,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘I am reluctant. I will not fight unless I wish to, and if I do battle with you,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘you would not be able to withstand me.’

‘Fie on you, coward!’ said Sir Dinadan.

As they were standing there, they saw a knight come riding up to them.

‘Lo,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘see, here comes a knight riding along who will joust with you.’

As soon as Sir Dinadan beheld him, he said, ‘By my faith, that is the same dazed knight that I saw lying by the well, neither sleeping nor waking.’

‘Well,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘I know that knight well, who bears the shield covered in azure; he is the son of the King of Northumberland. His name is Sir Eponigrous and he is as great a lover as any I know. He loves the daughter of the King of Wales, who is a very fair lady.’

‘And now I suppose,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘if you ask him, he will joust with you. Then you shall prove whether a man who is a lover is a better knight than you, who will not love any lady.’

‘Well,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘now you shall see what I shall do.’ With that, Sir Dinadan called out and said, ‘Sir knight, make yourself ready to joust with me, for joust you must, as it is the custom of knights-errant.’

‘Sir,’ said Sir Epinogrous, ‘is the custom and the rule of you errant knights to make a knight joust whether he wishes to or not?’

‘As for that,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘prepare yourself – here I come!’ Then they spurred their horses and met together so hard that Sir Epinogrous smote down Sir Dinadan.

Sir Tristram rode to Sir Dinadan and said, ‘How now? It seems the lover has done well.’

‘Fie on you, coward!’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘If you are a good knight, avenge me!’

‘Nay,’ said Sir Tristram. ‘I will not joust at this time. Take your horse and let us go from here.’

‘God defend me,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘from keeping fellowship with you, for I have never done well since I met with you.’

(...)

So Sir Tristram rode to Joyous Gard and there he dismounted and unarmed himself. He then told La Beale Isode everything that had happened to him, as you have heard before. When she heard him tell of Sir Dinadan, she said, ‘Sir, is he not the one who made the song about King Mark?’

‘He is the same,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘for he is the best jester and joker that I know of, and a noble knight of prowess, and the best fellow that I know. All good knights love his company.’

‘Alas, sir,’ she said, ‘why did you not bring him with you hither?’

‘Do not be concerned,’ said Sir Tristram, ‘for he is riding through this country to seek me, and he will not depart until he has met with me.’ Then Sir Tristram told La Beale Isode how Sir Dinadan had a negative opinion of all lovers.

Just then a servant came in and told Sir Tristram that a knight-errant had arrived in town with heraldic colors on his shield.

‘By my faith, that is Sir Dinadan,’ said Sir Tristram. ‘Therefore, madame, here is what you should do: Send for him, and I will not let him see me. You shall then hear the merriest knight with whom you have ever had a conversation and the craziest talker. I pray you heartily - show him good hospitality.’

So then La Beale Isode sent word into the town asking Sir Dinadan if he would come to the castle and rest himself with a lady.

‘Gladly!’ said Sir Dinadan. So he mounted on his horse and rode into the castle; there he dismounted, unarmed, and was brought into the hall.

As soon as La Beale Isode came to him, either greeted the other. Then she asked him from whence he came. ‘Madame,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘I am of the court of King Arthur and a knight of the Rouynd Table; my name is Sir Dinadan.’

‘What are you doing in this country?’ asked La Beale Isode.

‘Truly, madam, I am seeking Sir Tristram, the good knight, for I was told that he was in this country.’

‘That may well be,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘but I do not know where he could be.’

‘Madam,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘I marvel much at Sir Tristram and other such lovers; what ails them to be so madly besotted with women?’

‘Why,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘are you a knight and not a lover? Truly, that is great shame to you; you may not be called a great knight unless you engage in a quarrel on behalf of a lady.’

‘God defend me!’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘The joy of love is too short, and the sorrow that comes from love lasts too long.’

‘Ah,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘do not say so again! For here nearby was the good knight Sir Bleoberis de Ganis, and he fought with three knights at once for love of a damsel. He won her before the King of Northumberland, and that was worshipfully done,’ said La Beale Isode.

‘Truly, that was so,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘for I know him well for a good and noble knight. He comes from noble blood; all knights are noble who come from the blood of Sir Lancelot du Lake.’

‘Now I ask you, for my love,’ said La Beale Isode, ‘will you fight with me against three knights who have done me a great wrong? Inasmuch as you are a knight of King Arthur, I require you to do battle for me.’

‘Then Sir Dinadan said, ‘I will say that you are as fair a lady as I ever saw – and much fairer than my lady Queen Guinevere – but know well, I will not fight for you against three knights. God forbid!’ Then Isode laughed and was much amused by him. So he had all the comforts and hospitality that she could provide for him and he stayed there that night. (Armstrong 372-5)

d. One day while Sir Tristram was hunting, Sir Dynadan rode up to him and told him his name and asked Sir Tristram his. Sir Tristram refused to tell him.

‘Sir, only lately I saw just such a knight as you must be,’ said Sir Dynadan. ‘He was lying asleep by a well, his helmet was by him, and he had a foolish grin on his face; he did not say a word, and I’ll wager he was dreaming of his beloved.’

‘Sir, are you not yourself a lover?’

‘No! God forbid that I should meddle in that game.’

‘Sir, surely a knight’s prowess is enhanced by his being a lover?’

‘For love, then, I pray you, sir, tell me your name; otherwise defend yourself.’

‘I shall neither fight with you, nor yet tell you my name.’

‘Coward!’

‘Your challenge is foolhardy.’

Just then a knight rode towards them.

‘Why, there is the very knight who lay sleeping by the well,’ said Sir Dynadan.

‘I know him well: he is Sir Epyngres, Prince of Northumberland, and an ardent lover if ever there was one. His lady is the Princess of West Britain. Now, sir, I pray you, joust with him, and we shall see if a lover cannot prove his mettle.’

Sir Dynadan challenged the knight; they jousting, and Sir Dynadan was overthrown.

‘How now? It seems the lover did well,’ said Sir Tristram.

‘Coward! Why do you not avenge me?’

‘I pray you, mount, and we will ride together.’

‘Your company does not please me,’ said Sir Dynadan, who then remounted and rode away.

(...)

Sir Tristram returned to the Joyous Gard, and told Iseult all that had happened to him that day.

‘My lord, is not Sir Dynadan the knight who composed the lampoon?’

‘The same; he is one of the best knights, and certainly the wittiest in the realm.’

‘Then why did you not invite him to the Joyous Gard?’

‘My love, he has come here to find me, and find me he shall; but just now he rehearsed a whole diatribe against lovers.’

At that moment a squire came to Sir Tristram and reported that a knight bearing Sir Dynadan’s arms had entered the town.

‘My lady, Sir Dynadan is here. I pray you, invite him to the castle; he will entertain you well, and I will disappear.’

‘My lord,’ said Iseult when Sir Dynadan arrived, ‘pray tell me what brings you to these parts.’

‘My lady, I have come in search of Sir Tristram.’

‘Perhaps he is here, but I have heard no news of him.’

‘My lady, I never cease to wonder at Sir Tristram, and lovers such as he is. What causes such insensate devotion?’

‘For shame! Are you a knight and no lover? The very purpose of a knight is to fight on behalf of a lady.’

‘God forbid! The sweetness of love is short-lived, but the pain endures.’

‘Sir, only lately Sir Bleobris fought three knights together for the love of his lady, and won them all in the presence of the King of Northumberland. Now, was not that splendidly done?’

‘Certainly he is a great knight, and of the same blood as Sir Launcelot.’

‘Sir, I pray you: Three knights have wronged me; will you not challenge them on my behalf?’

‘My lady, you are the fairest in the land, not excepting Queen Gwynevere; but may God be my witness! I would never undertake to fight three knights on your behalf.’

Iseult laughed. Sir Dynadan remained for the knight. (Baines 305-8)

3. ‘A, Jesu!’ seyde Kyng Marke, ‘myght Y knowe Sir Launcelot by his shyld?’ ‘Ye,’ seyde Sir Dynadan, ‘for he beryth a shyld of sylver and blacke bendis.’ All this he seyde to feare Kyng Marke, for Sir Launcelot was nat in the felyship. ‘Now I pray you,’ seyde Kyng Marke, ‘that ye woll ryde in my felyship.’ [‘That is me lothe to doo,’ said Syre Dynadan, ‘because ye forsoke me felauship.’ Ryght soo Sir Dynadan went from Kyng Mark and wente to his own felauship.] And so they mownted upon there horsys and rode on their ways and talked of the Cornyshe knyght, for Sir Dynadan tolde them that he was in the castell where they were lodged. ‘Hit is well seyde,’ seyde Sir Gryfflet, ‘for here have I brought Sir Dagonet, Kyng Arthurs foole, that is the beste felow and the meryeste in the worlde.’

‘Woll ye than do well?’ seyde Sir Dynadan. ‘I have tolde the Cornyshe knyght that here is Sir Launcelot, and the Cornyshe knyght asked me what shyld he bare, and I tolde hym that he bare the same shyld that sir Mordred beryth.’ ‘Woll ye do well?’ seyde Sir Mordred. ‘I am hurte and may nat well beare my shyld nother harneys; and therefore put my harneys and my shyld uppon Sir Dagonet, and let hym sette uppon the Cornyshe knyght!’ ‘That shall be done,’ seyde Sir Dagonet, ‘be my fayth.’ And so anone Sir Dagonet was armed in Sir Mordredis harneys and hys shyld, and he was sete on a grete horse, and a speare in his honde.

‘Now,’ seyde Sir Dagonet, ‘sette me to that knyght, and I trowe I shall beare hym downe.’ So all thes knyghtes rode to a woodis syde and abode tyll Kyng Marke cam by

the way. Than they pur forth Sir Dagonet, and he cam on all the whyle his horse myght renne upon Kynge Marke; and whan he cam bye to Kynge Marke, he cryed as he were woode, and sayde, ‘Kepe the, knyght of Cornwayle, for I woll sle the!’ And anone, as Kynge Marke behylde his shyld, he seyde to hymself, ‘Yondyr is Sir Launcelot! Alas, now am I destroyed!’ And therewithall he made his horse to ren, and fledde as faste as he mygyht, thorow thycke and thorow thynne – and ever Sir Dagonet folowed aftir Kynge Marke, cryynge and ratynge hym as a woode man, thorow a grete foreste.

Whan Sir Uwayne and Sir Brandules saw Sir Dagonet so chace Kynge Marke, they lawghed all as they were wylde; and than they toke their horsys and rode aftir to se how Sir Dagonet spedde, for theym behoved for no good that Sir Dagonet were shente, for Kynge Arthure loved hym passynge well and made hym knyght hys owne hondys – and at every turnemente he began, to make Kynge Arthure to lawghe.

Than the knyghtes rode here and there cryynge and chasyng aftir Kynge Marke, that all the foreyste range of the noyse. (Shepherd 351-353, ll. 25-24)

- c. ‘Who is captain of this fellowship?’ asked King Mark. To frighten him, Sir Dinadan said it was Sir Lancelot. ‘Ah, Jesus!’ said King Mark. ‘Would I know Sir Lancelot by his shield?’ ‘Yes,’ said Sir Dinadan, ‘for he bears a shield of silver with black bands.’ He said all this to frighten King Mark, for Sir Lancelot was not in the fellowship.

(...)

‘This is a good thing,’ said Sir Grifflet, ‘for here I have brought Sir Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, who is the best and merriest fellow in the world.’

‘Really?’ said Sir Dinadan. ‘I have told the Cornish knight that Lancelot is here. The Cornish knight asked what shield he bore, and I told him that he bore the same shield that Sir Mordred bears.’

‘Did you now?’ said Sir Mordred. ‘I am hurt and not well able to bear my shield or armor; therefore put my shield and armor on Sir Dagonet and set him on the Cornish knight.’

‘That shall be done,’ said Sir Dagonet, ‘by my faith.’ Then immediately Sir Dagonet was armed in Sir Mordred’s armor and given his shield; he was mounted on a great horse and a spear was placed in his hand. ‘Now,’ said Sir Dagonet, ‘direct me to that knight, and I believe that I shall bear him down.’

So all these knights rode to the side of the woods and waited until King Mark came by that way. Then they sent Sir Dagonet out; he came riding as fast as his horse could run, and when he came near to King Mark, he cried out as if he were crazed, saying, ‘Defend yourself, knight of Cornwall, for I will slay you!’

As soon as King Mark saw his shield he said to himself, ‘Yonder is Sir Lancelot! Alas! Now I will be destroyed!’ With that, he spurred his horse to a run and fled as fast as he could, through thick and thin, and ever Sir Dagonet followed after King Mark, yelling and ranting like a madman, through the great forest.

When Sir Uwain and Sir Brandiles saw Sir Dagonet chase King Mark, they laughed wildly. Then they took their horses and rode after to see how Sir Dagonet had done, for it would not go well for them if they should lose Sir Dagonet, for King Arthur loved him very much and had knighted him with his own hands. He performed first at every tournament to make King Arthur laugh. Then the knights rode here and there yelling and chasing after King Mark so that all the forest rang with the noise. (Armstrong 317-18)

d. ‘Who is their leader?’

‘Sir Launcelot.’

‘God forbid! Can one know him by his shield?’

‘He bears a silver shield with black bands.’

(...)

When he caught up with them they were all talking of the Cornish knight, and he described how he had deceived him so that he would suppose, by the shield that Sir Modred was bearing, that Sir Modred was Sir Launcelot.

‘But alas! I am wounded, and if he follows us I cannot fight,’ said Sir Modred.

‘Then let Sir Dagonet the fool bear Sir Modred’s shield and armor, and we shall soon see some sport,’ said Sir Grifflet.

This was done, and before long King Mark appeared; then Sir Dagonet shouted in a tremendous voice:

‘Knight from Cornwall, beware! Now defend yourself.’

‘Alas, I am undone!’ said King Mark to himself, and turning his horse, fled into the forest.

Sir Dagonet pursued him, roaring and raving, and the other knights all galloped after them, laughing so much that they nearly fell from their saddles. They were also anxious that Sir Dagonet should not actually joust with King Mark, since Sir Dagonet was a favorite of King Arthur’s.

King Mark rode helter-skelter until he came to a well, (...). (Baines 261-2)

Passages Chapter 4.

5. Ryght so as they sate, there com rennynges inne a whyght herte into the hall, and a whyghte brachet nexte hym, and thirty couple of blacke rennynges houndis com afftir with a grete cry. And the herte wente aboute the Rounde Table, and as he wente by the syde bourdis the brachet ever boote hym by the buttock and pulde outte a pece, wherethorow the herte lope a grete lepe and overthrew a knyght that sate at the syde

bourde. And therewith the knyght arose and toke up the brachet, and so wente for the oute of the halle, and toke hys horse and rode hys way with the brachet.

Ryght so com in a lady on a whyght palferey, and cryed alowde unto Kynge Arthure and seyde, ‘Sir, suffir me nat to have thys despite, for the brachet ys myne that the knyght lath ladde away.’ ‘I may nat do therewith,’ seyde the Kynge. So with thys there com a knyght rydyng all armed on a grete horse, and toke the lady away with forse wyth hym, and ever she cryed and made grete dole.

So whan she was gone the Kynge was gladde, for she made such a noyse.
(Shepherd 66, ll. 5-21)

- c. So as they sat there a white hart came running into the hall, followed by a white brachet; they were pursued by a pack of sixty black hounds, who came running after them making great noise.

The hart ran around the Round Table, and as he passed by the sideboard the brachet bit him on the buttock and ripped out a chunk of flesh, which caused the hart to make a great leap that knocked over a knight who was sitting at the sideboard. Then the knight took up the brachet, went out of the hall, got on his horse, and rode away with the brachet.

At that moment a lady came in on a white palfrey and cried aloud to King Arthur, saying ‘Sir, do not allow me to suffer this humiliation, for that brachet is mine which the knight has led away.’

‘There is nothing I can do,’ said the king.

Then at this a knight – riding fully armed – came in on a great horse, and took the lady away with him by force. And ever she cried out and made great dole. When

she was gone the king was glad, because she had made so much noise. (Armstrong 57-58)

- d. And just as he spoke, a white hart galloped into the hall, pursued by a white brachet and thirty pairs of black hounds. The brachet kept snapping at the hart's haunches, and finally succeeded in tearing off a piece of flesh. The hart made a tremendous leap and, in doing so, overturned a knight who was sitting at one of the side tables. The knight jumped up, seized the brachet, and went off with her.

Almost immediately a young noblewoman rode into the hall on a white palfrey. She was sobbing with anger and dismay, and rode straight up to Arthur. 'Sire,' she cried, 'summon the knight who has stolen my brachet at once, for I cannot be without it.'

'I may not summon him now,' Arthur replied.

Next, a knight appeared, fully armed and riding a powerful charger. He rode up to the young noblewoman and, despite her screams, seized her around the waist, threw her across the withers of his horse, and galloped out of the hall again. Arthur was relieved that the hubbub was over; (Baines 43-44)

6. And so he rode into a grete foreste all that day, and never coude fynde no hygheway, and so the nyght fell on hym; and than was he ware in a slade of a pavylon of rede sendele.

'Be my feyth,' seyde Sir Launcelot, 'in that pavylon woll I lodge all this nyght.' And so he there alyght downe, and tyed his horse to the pavylon, and there he unarmed hym; and there he founde a bed, and layde hym therein, and felle on slepe sadly.

Than within an owre there com that knyght that ought the pavylon. He wente that his lemman had layne in that bed, and so he leyde hym adowne by Sir Launcelot and toke hym in his armys and began to kysse hym. And whan Sir Launcelot felte a rough berde kyssyng hym, he sterte oute of the bedde lightly – and the othir knyght aftyр hym. And eythir of hem gate their swerdys in their hondis, and oute at the pavylon dore wente the knyght of the pavylon – and Sir Launcelot followed hym. And there by a lytyll slad Sir Launcelot wounded hym sore, nyghe unto the deth. And than he yelded hym to Sir Launcelot, and so he graunted hym so that he wolde telle hym why he com into the bed. (Shepherd 156, ll. 25-42)

- c. He rode through a great forest all day, and was never able to find a road. As night fell, he became aware of a pavilion of red silk in a glade. ‘By my faith,’ said Sir Lancelot, ‘I will sleep in that pavilion tonight.’ So he dismounted, tied his horse to the pavilion, and then unarmed himself. He found a bed therein, laid himself down, and fell asleep with a sad heart.

Within an hour or so, the knight who owned that pavilion arrived. He thought that his lover was lying in the bed, so he laid himself down by Sir Lancelot, took him in his arms, and began to kiss him.

When Lancelot felt a rough beard kissing him he leapt out of bed quickly. The other knight jumped out after him, and they each took up their swords in their hands. The knight of the pavilion ran out the door and Sir Lancelot followed him. There in the small glade Sir Lancelot wounded him almost to the death, and the knight then yielded to Sir Lancelot. He granted him mercy as long as he told him why he had come into his bed. (Armstrong 138-9)

- d. Sir Launcelot rode through the forest in search of the abbey, but at dusk had still failed to find it, and coming upon a red silk pavilion, apparently unoccupied, decided to rest there overnight, and continue his search in the morning.

He had not been asleep for more than an hour, however, when the knight who owned the pavilion returned, and got straight into bed with him. Having made an assignation with his paramour, the knight supposed at first that Sir Launcelot was she, and taking him into his arms, started kissing him. Sir Launcelot awoke with a start, and seizing his sword, leaped out of bed and out of the pavilion, pursued closely by the other knight. Once in the open they set to with their swords, and before long Sir Launcelot had wounded his unknown adversary so seriously that he was obliged to yield. (Baines 110)

7. And whan Sir Dynadan undirstoode hit well, he seyde, 'Sir, thus is my counceyle: sette you right naught by thes thretenynges, for Kynge Marke is so vylounce a knyght that by fayre speche shall never man gete ought of hym. But ye shall se what I shall do: I woll make a lay for hym, and whan hit is made I shall make an harpere to syng hit afore hym.' And so anone he wente and made hit, and taught hit to an harpere that hyght Elyot; and whan he cowed hit, he taught hit to many harpers. And so by the wyll of Kynge Arthure and of Sir Launcelot, the harpers wente into Walys and into Cornwayle to syng the lay that Sir Dynadan made by Kynge Marke – whyche was the worste lay that ever harper songe with harpe or with any other instrument!

(...)

Now woll we passe over this mater and speke we of the harpers that Sir Launcelot and Sir Dynadan had sente into Cornwayle. And at the grete feste that Kynge Marke made for the joy that the Sesoynes were put oute of his contrey, than

cam Elyot the harper with the lay that Sir Dynadan had made, and secretly brought hit unto Sir Trystram and tolde hym the lay that Sir Dynadan had made by Kynge Marke. And whan Sir Trystram harde hit, he sayde, ‘O Lord Jesu! That Sir Dynadan can make wondirly well – and yll there he sholde make evyll!’ ‘Sir,’ seyde Elyot, ‘dare I synge this songe afore Kynge Marke?’ ‘Yee, on my perell,’ seyde Sir Trystram. ‘for I shall be thy waraunte.’ So at the mete in cam Elyot the harper, amonge other mynstrels, and began to harpe; and because he was a coryous harper, men harde hym synge the same lay that Sir Dynadan made, whyche spake the moste vylany by Kynge Marke and of his treson that ever man herde. And whan the harper had sunge his songe to the ende, Kynge Marke was wondirly wrothe (...). (Shepherd 372 ll. 33-44 – 378 ll. 7-24)

- c. When Sir Dinadan understood the situation, he said, ‘Sir, this is my advice: do not pay any attention to these threats, for King Mark is so villainous a knight that no man can get anything out of him through fair speech. But you shall see what I shall do. I will compose a lay for him, and when it is done I will get a harper to sing it before him.’

So immediately he went and composed it, and taught it to a harper named Eliot. When he knew it, he in turn taught it to many other harpers. Then by the will of King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, the harpers went into Wales and Cornwall to sing the lay that Sir Dinadan had made about King Mark, and it was the worst song that ever any harper had sung with a harp or other instrument.

(...)

Now we will turn away from this matter and speak of the harpers that Sir Lancelot and Sir Dinadan had sent into Cornwall. At the great feast that King Mark held to celebrate the rout of the Soissons host, the harper Eliot came; he had learned the lay that

Sir Dinadan had made about King Mark, and he went to Sir Tristram secretly and told him the lay that Sir Dinadan had composed.

When Sir Tristram heard it, he said, 'Lord Jesus! That Sir Dinadan composes wonderfully well – he can even write badly when he wishes!'

'Sir,' said Eliot, 'do I dare sing this song before King Mark?'

'Yes, with my assurance,' said Sir Tristram, 'I will be your warrant.'

So at the feast Eliot the harper came in, with other minstrels, and began to harp. Because he was an attentive harper, men heard him sing that lay that Sir Dinadan had composed; and that lay said the most cutting things about King Mark and his treason that ever any man had heard.

When the harper had sung his song to the end, King Mark was extremely angry (...). (Armstrong 336-42)

- d. 'Sir Launcelot, King Mark is well known for his treachery, hence no one will take his insinuations too seriously. To reply courteously would be a waste of courtesy; therefore I shall compose a lampoon and teach it to the minstrels at the court, and that shall be our reply to him.'

Sir Dynadan composed his lampoon. It was excellent, and told of King Mark's treachery and cowardice since the beginning of his reign. King Arthur and Queen Gwynevere were delighted with it, and it was taught to all their minstrels, who were then given instructions to sing it throughout the realm, especially in Cornwall.

(...)

While Sir Tristram was recovering, King Mark held a feast to celebrate the defeat of Sir Elyas, and to this feast came one of King Arthur's minstrels, to sing Sir Dynadan's lampoon. He went first to Sir Tristram and sang it to him.

‘By Jesu!’ said Sir Tristram when he had heard it, ‘Sir Dynadan certainly is a good composer, for good or for evil!’

‘Sir, dare I sing it before King Mark?’

‘Certainly! I shall be your warrant.’

King Arthur’s minstrel was an accomplished singer, and once he had struck up with his harp he commanded the attention of everyone at the feast. He sang the lampoon straight through; instance after instance of King Mark’s treachery and cowardice was enumerated. King Mark was outraged. (Baines 278-81)

8. Than was Syr Gareth more gladder than he was tofore. And than they trouthe-plyght other to love and never to fayle whyle their lyff lastyth.

And so they brente bothe in hote love that they were accorded to abate their lustys secretly.

And there Dame Lyonesse counceyled Sir Gareth to slepe in none other place but in the halle, and there she promised hym to com to his bed a lytyll afore mydnyght.

This counceyle was nat so prevyly kepte but hit was undirstonde, for they were but yonge bothe and tendir of ayge, and had nat used suche craufftis toforne.

Wherefore the damesell Lyonett was a lytyll dyspleased, and she thought hir sister Dame Lyonesse was a lytyll overhasty that she mught nat abyde hir tyme of maryage; and for saving of hir worship she thought to abate their hote lustis. And she lete ordeyne by hir subtyle craufftes that they had nat their intentys neythir with othir as in her delytes until they were maryed. And so hit paste on; at aftir souper was made a clene avoydaunce, that every lorde and lady sholde go unto his reste.

But Sir Gareth seyde playnly he wolde go no farther than the halle – ‘for in suche placis,’ he seyde, ‘was convenyaunte for an arraunte knyght to take his reste in.’

And so there was ordained grete cowchis, and thereon fethir beddis, and there he leyde hym downe to slepe; and within a whyle came Dame Lyonesse wrapped in a mantel furred with ermyne, and leyde hir downe by the sydys of Sir Gareth – and therewithall he began to clyppe hir and to kysse hir. And therewithal he loked before hym and sawe an armed knyght with many lyghtes aboute hym, and this knyght had a longe gysarne in his honde and made a grymme countenance to smyte hym.

Whan Sir Gareth sawe hym com in that wyse, he lepte oute of his bedde, and gate in his hande a swerde and lepte towarde that knyght.

And whan the knyght sawe Sir Gareth com so fersly uppon hym, he smote hym with a foyne thorow the thycke of the thygh, that the wounde was a shafttemonde brode and had cutte atoo many vaynes and synewys. And therewithal Sir Gareth smote hym uppon the helme suche a buffette that he felle grovelyng; and than he lepe over hym, and unlaced his helme, and smote off his hede fro the body. And than he bled so faste that he myght not stonde; but so he leyde hym downe uppon his bedde and there he sowned and lay as he had bene dede.

Than Dame Lyonesse cryed alowde that Sir Gryngamoure hard hit and com downe; and whan he sawe Sir Gareth so shamfully wounded he was sore dyspleased, and seyde, ‘I am so shamed that this noble knyght is thus dishonoured –

‘Sistir,’ seyde Sir Gryngamour, ‘how may this be that this noble knyght is thus wounded?’

‘Brothir,’ she seyde, ‘I can nat telle you, for hit was nat done by me nor by myne assente – for he is my lorde and I am his, and he muste be myne husbonde:

‘Therefore, brother, I wolle that ye wete I shame nat to be with hym nor to do hym all the pleasure that I can.’

‘Sistir,’ seyde Gryngamour, ‘and I woll that ye wete hit, and Gareth bothe, that hit was never done by me, nother be myne assente this unhappy dede was never done.’ And there they staunched his bledyng as well as they myght, and grete sorrow made Sir Gryngamour and Dame Lyonesse. And forthwithall com Dame Lyonett and toke up the hede in the sight of them all, and anointed hit with an oyntemente as hit was smyttyn off, and in the same wyse he ded to the othir parte there as the hede stake.

And than she sette hit togydirs, and hit stake as faste as ever hit ded – and the knyght arose lyghtly up, and the damesell Lyonett put hym in hir chambir. All this saw Sir Gryngamour and Dame Lyonesse, and so ded Sir Gareth – and well he aspyed that hit was Dame Lyonett that rode with hym thorow the perelouse passages.

‘A, well, damesell,’ seyde Sir Gareth, ‘I wente ye wolde nat have done as ye have done.’

‘My lorde Sir Gareth,’ seyde Lyonett, ‘all that I have done I woll avowe hit – and all shall be for your worship and us all.’ And so within a whyle Sir Gareth was nyghe hole, and waxed lyght and jocounde, and sange and daunced –

That agayne Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse were so hooete in brennyng love that they made their covauntes, at the tenthe nyght aftir, that she sholde com to his bedde. And because he was wounded afore, he leyde his armour and his swerde nygh his beddis syde.

And ryght as she promised she com.

And she was nat so sone in his bedde but she aspyed an armed knyght commynge towarde de bed, and anone she warned Sir Gareth – and lyghtly, thorow the good helpe of Dame Lyonesse, he was armed; and they hurled togydys with grete ire and malyce all aboute the halle.

And there was grete light as hit had be the number of twenty torchis bothe byfore and behynde.

So Sir Gareth strayed hym so that his olde wounde braste ayen on bledynge; but he was hote and corragyous and toke no kepe, but with his grete forse he strake downe the knyght, and voided hyse helme, and strake of his hede.

Than he hew the hede uppon a hondred pecis, and whan he had done so he toke up all tho pecis and threw them oute at a window into the dychis of the castell. And by this done, he was so faynte that unnethis he myght stonde for bledynge, and by than he was allmoste unarmed, he fell in a dedly sowne in the floure.

Than Dame Lyonesse cryed, that Sir Gryngamoure herde her; and whan he com and founde Sir Gareth in that plyght he made grete sorow. And there he awaked Sir Gareth and gaff hym a drynke that releved hym wondirly well.

But the sorrow that Dame Lyonesse made there may no tunge telle, for she so fared with hirself as she wolde have dyed. (Shepherd 206 l. 16 – 208 l. 23)

c. Then Sir Gareth was even gladder than he had been before. Then they plighted their troth, pledging to love one another, never failing, as long as their lives lasted.

They both burned so in hot love that they agreed to satisfy their lust in secret, and Dame Lyonesse advised Sir Gareth to sleep nowhere but in the hall, and she promised to come to his bed there a little before midnight.

Because they were both young and tender of age, and not accustomed to such subterfuge, their plan soon became known, which made the Damsel Lyonette more than a little displeased. She thought her sister Lyonesse was a little overhasty, not to wait until the time of her marriage, and to save her honor she thought to cool their

lust. Through her subtle crafts she caused it to be that they would not delight in each other until they were married.

So the time passed on, and after supper the hall cleared, so that every lord and lady could go to rest. Sir Gareth announced that he would stay in the hall, 'for in such places,' he said, 'it is fitting for knight-errant to take his rest.'

So there were brought in great couches with a featherbed placed on top, and there he laid himself down to sleep. Within a short while Dame Lyonesse came in, wrapped in a mantle furred with ermine, and she lay down beside Sir Gareth. He began then to embrace and kiss her.

Suddenly, he saw in front of him an armed knight, bearing a long battle-axe in his hand, who with a grim countenance was coming forward to smite him. When Sir Gareth saw him come at him he leaped out of bed, got his sword in his hand, and leapt at the knight.

When the knight saw Sir Gareth come at him so fiercely, he smote him with a thrust through the thigh, giving him a wound the size of a hand's breadth and cutting through many veins and sinews. At that, Sir Gareth smote him on the helmet with such a blow that he fell grovelling to the ground. Sir Gareth then leapt over him, unlaced his helmet, and struck his head off his body.

Sir Gareth was bleeding so hard that he could not stand, and laid himself down upon his bed, where he swooned and lay as if he were dead. Then Dame Lyonesse cried so loud that Sir Gringamore heard the noise and came down. When he saw Sir Gareth so shamefully wounded he was seriously displeased, and said, 'I am ashamed that this noble knight is thus dishonored. Sister,' said Sir Gringamore, 'how did it happen that this noble knight is so wounded?'

‘Brother,’ she said, ‘I cannot tell you, for it was not done by me nor with my consent, for he is my lord and I am his, and he will be my husband. Therefore, brother, I want you to understand that I am not ashamed to be with him or to give him all the pleasure I can.’

‘Sister,’ said Sir Gringamore, ‘I want you and Gareth both to know that this was not done by me, nor was this unhappy deed ever done with my consent.’ They then staunched his bleeding as well as they could, and Sir Gringamore and Dame Lyonesse made great sorrow.

Then Dame Lyonette came in and took up the head of the knight, in the sight of everyone, and anointed it with an ointment at the spot where it had been smitten off, and then she did the same to body, where the head had been struck off. Then she put the two together and they stuck as fast as if they never had been separated. The knight then rose up, and the Damsel Lyonette took him to her chamber.

Sir Gringamore and Dame Lyonesse saw all this, as did Sir Gareth, and he recognized that it was Dame Lyonette who had ridden with him through so many perilous passages.

‘Ah, damsel!’ said Sir Gareth, ‘I believed that you would not have done as you have.’

‘My lord Sir Gareth,’ said Lyonette, ‘all that I have done, I will own up to, and it shall be for the honor of you and all of us.’

Within a while, Sir Gareth was almost completely healed, and grew light and happy, and sang and danced. Then again, Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse burned so hot in love that they made a covenant that on the tenth night after, she should come to his bed. Because he had been wounded before, he placed his armor and his sword near the side of the bed.

And just as she had promised, she came. No sooner was she in his bed than she saw an armed knight coming toward the bed, and she immediately warned Sir Gareth. Quickly, with the help of Dame Lyonesse, he armed himself, and they came together with great ire and malice throughout the hall.

There was a great light, as if there were many torches lit throughout the hall. Sir Gareth strained himself so that his old wound burst open, bleeding; nevertheless, he was hot and courageous and took no heed of his wound, but with great force struck down the knight, took off his helmet, and struck off his head. Then he cut the head into a hundred pieces and threw them out of the window in the castle ditch.

When this was done he was so faint from bleeding that he could barely stand; he was almost unarmed when he fell in a deadly swoon to the floor. Then Dame Lyonesse cried out so that Sir Gringamore heard her, and when he came and found Sir Gareth in that plight he made great sorrow. He awakened Sir Gareth with a drink that brought him much relief, but the sorrow that Dame Lyonesse made there is beyond the capability of any tongue to tell; she carried on as if she would have died.

(Armstrong 182-4)

- d. Sir Gareth was overjoyed, and there followed an exchange of vows and an assignation for the same night in the hall where he would ask to sleep.

When the company dispersed to their chambers for the night, and Sir Gareth rather clumsily made his request to sleep in the hall, neither Sir Gryngamour nor Lady Lynet was deceived; but a comfortable couch was made up for him, with a feather mattress and furs.

Just before midnight Lady Lyonesse came to the hall, and throwing off her ermine cloak – her only covering – slipped into bed with Sir Gareth. However, they

had no sooner embraced than a knight appeared, strangely illumined, with grim countenance, fully armed and brandishing a huge spear. Sir Gareth jumped out of bed and seized his sword. They fought furiously for a few minutes and first the knight wounded Sir Gareth in the thigh, then Sir Gareth knocked him to the ground and beheaded him, after which he staggered back to the bed and fainted from his wound.

Lady Lyonesse cried aloud, and in a moment Sir Gryngamour came running into the hall, and was shocked by the scene that confronted him.

‘My dearest sister, I am deeply ashamed that this should have happened. Not for the world would I have wished Gareth to be molested.’

‘Dear brother, this was certainly none of my doing, for I have pledged myself to Sir Gareth, and he has sworn to be my husband.’

Sir Gryngamour and his sister did their best to staunch the wound, which was very deep. Then Lady Lynet appeared; going up to the decapitated knight, she took the head, and covering the exposed flesh with ointment, fixed it back on the trunk. The knight immediately revived, and walked calmly out of the hall.

‘My lady,’ said Sir Gareth, ‘as ever, it seems that you wish me nothing but evil.’

‘Sir Gareth, what I do is only for the best,’ Lady Lynet replied, and departed.

Sir Gareth soon recovered from his wound, and became so full of joy that he danced and sang wherever he went; and ten days later made another assignation with his lover. This time he took the precaution of setting both armor and sword within easy reach.

Once more the illumined knight appeared, and once more Sir Gareth fought him. His wound broke open, but regardless of this Sir Gareth did not rest until he had

not merely beheaded the knight, but chopped his head into a hundred pieces which he threw into the moat below. And once more he retired to the bed and fainted.

Both Sir Gryngamour and Lady Lynet appeared, the latter with the pieces of the knight's head, which she fastened together by means of her magic ointment, and revived the knight as before. (Baines 150-1)