

FAYTTES OF ARMES AND OF CHYVALRYE

Malory's *Morte Darthur*, as Caxton entitled it in his print of 1485, is well known and widely admired. This paper will try to relate it to an important part of its literary and cultural background, the fifteenth-century 'literature of knighthood' or 'literature of nobility', which is not well known and not admired at all. It was partly provoked by reading an examination script in which the candidate, discussing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, remarked that 'the fact that Gawain's armour freezes in the cold demonstrates the failure of the code of chivalry as such'. I know that beneath the unfortunate wording he (or she) was attempting to make an arguable point, but several things worried me. The tendency, for instance, to resort to rather absolute abstractions: the word *code* probably suggests something much more monolithic and legal than the not easily definable *mélange* of physical and ethical and practical ideals included under the term 'chivalry'. It seemed to me also that the candidate probably thought the 'chivalry' was not only obviously insufficient and 'flawed'-and therefore ought to be 'criticised' by any proper writer-but was also in decline, a symptom of the 'waning of the Middle Ages'. I suspected that any celebration of the noble life would not be favourably received, and that works which 'subverted' it would certainly be preferred. I rather wanted to quote back a song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* (which makes some gentle fun at the expense of the House of Lords) when the lovesick Lord Tolloller and the peers plead:

Spurn not the nobly born
with love affected
Nor treat with virtuous scorn
the well-connected!
High rank involves no shame,
We boast an equal claim
With him of humble name
To be respected!

... Hearts just as pure and fair
May beat in Belgrave Square
As in the lowly air of Seven Dials.

The majority of us, of course, are not nobly born, and do not share the enthusiasm of the medieval noble classes for warfare, hunting, and for ruling the lower classes as well as defending them. Many of the nobly born loved fighting, whether in real wars or in the ritualised tournaments and *pas d'armes*, which were partly serious, partly 'play'. They undoubtedly cherished their favoured position in the social hierarchy and their political power. No doubt their outlook was conservative and limited (sometimes deliberately). And the shortcomings and faults of actual fifteenth-century nobles are evident enough in chronicles and historical documents. Warwick the Kingmaker was hardly a 'parfit gentil knight', and even the acknowledged 'flowers of chivalry' sometimes have distinct blots on their escutcheons. But what is important for the literary and cultural historian is to try to *understand* something of the role, tastes, and ideology of the English nobility (not only of the relatively few great and powerful families, but the lesser gentry who were becoming of particular importance in the literary culture)-as an audience for 'courtly' literature, as patrons, and, sometimes as authors or translators of it. 'Ideology' is perhaps too grand a term for the overlapping and sometimes inconsistent patterns of thought involved - 'chivalry' in all its variations (involving martial prowess, noble and courteous behaviour, piety and devotion), formal 'religion' (equally varied), and 'learning' (including occasionally the 'new learning' which was beginning to spread from Italy).

The English 'literature of nobility' (i.e. literature by, for, and concerning the noble classes) is an interestingly diverse web of works, forming a colourful background to 'courtly' fiction, of which the most characteristic form is the chivalric romance, still often read in French as well as in English, and, increasingly, in prose. The romance tradition was diverse and extensive, including not only the favourite old stories of Arthur, Alexander, Troy and Thebes, but the newer French and Burgundian Romances.

In the later Middle Ages both social structures and the techniques of warfare were changing -although this is rarely directly reflected in romance, a form notoriously selective in 'realism'. There we do not expect to find much about gunpowder or artillery, or the practicalities of active service -the

provision of feathers for the archers of carts to carry the food- or the growing professionalism of soldiers and captains, or (in the Hundred Years War) the growing involvement of the civilian population and the shift from open warfare and great pitched battles to sieges of castles and towns.¹ There were, however, some striking continuities: military orders of knighthood continue to be founded; chivalric personal encounters still take place in the midst of large campaigns. In the late medieval world some dissident voices (often, though not always, clerical ones) were raised against the excesses of war, and an anti-chivalric strand emerges in humanism which is the source of Ascham's condemnation of Malory's book for its 'bold bawdry and open manslaughter'.² There is popular burlesque (like *The Tournament of Tottenham*), and even within courtly romance some ironic and comic detachment -though that is usually fairly carefully 'contained' (as in the case of Malory's Sir Dinadan). Courtly romance does not allow much space for voices expressing hostile or 'subversive' views -though the bitter and sorrowful voices of the mothers of Tristram and Perceval do have a powerful resonance- but in the hands of its best practitioners it is made to reveal the horror as well as the glory of war. Some of the strategies, techniques and problems of martial behaviour discussed in manuals are touched on in romances. There are also echoes and reflections of real-life situations and contemporary questions.³

Reports of the death of chivalry in this period are greatly exaggerated. The continuing popularity of romance and of the related 'literature of knighthood' rather supports the view that there was 'an Indian summer of English chivalry'.⁴ It is significant that the period is flanked by the French text of Froissart's *Chronicles* (which end in 1400), a celebration of the 'honourable enterprises, noble adventures and deeds of arms' in the wars between France and England, and by its English translation by Lord Berners (printed 1523, 1525) of which the preface echoes Froissart's praise of the 'famous acts':

¹ C. T. Allmand, *The Hundred Years' War: England and France at War c.1300-c.1450* (Cambridge, 1985. See also Allmand, ed., *War, Literature and politics in the Late Middle Ages* (Liverpool, 1976).

² Robert P. Adams, 'Bold Bawdry and Open Manslaughter', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 23 (1959- 60), 33-48.

³ Examples include the Middle English romance *Capystranus* (the siege of Belgrade), the French *Le Jouvencel* (the latter part of the Hundred Years War), the Catalan *Tirant lo Blanc* (the siege of Rhodes, 1444).

⁴ A. B. Ferguson *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (Durham, NC, 1960).

‘what pleasure shall it be to the noble gentylnen of Englande to se, beholde and rede the highe enterprises, famous ectes, and glorious dedes done and atchyved by their valyant aunceytours’.¹ The *Chronicles* are a good example of the limitations and of the breadth of sympathy of the ‘literature of nobility’. Froissart is deeply committed to chivalric ideals, but also portrays with feeling the violence and horror of warfare -as in the Black Prince’s sack of Limoges, in which three thousand men, women and children perished.

There were captains and knights who were regarded as genuine ‘flowers of chivalry’, men who seemed to their contemporaries to embody its ideals. They were celebrated in ‘chivalric biographies’, sometimes a mixture of romance and chronicle. The best known is that by the ‘loyal Serviteur’ of the Chevalier Bayard (1527), but there were others -of Boucicaut, Lalaing, La Trémoille.² The genre seems to have flourished in France: in England, apart from the account of the Black Prince by the Chandos Herald, the ‘flowers of chivalry’ -like Sir Walter Manny (d. 1372) or Sir John Chandos (d. 1370) - usually remain in the pages of the chroniclers.³ Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick (d. 1439), ‘the fadre of curteisy’, is commemorated by a splendid effigy on his tomb in his chapel in the church of St Mary, Warwick, and celebrated (long after his death) in a fine pictorial biography consisting of a series of ‘pageants’ from his life drawn in pencil and accompanied by explanatory commentaries, recording his ‘notable actes of chevalry and knyghtly demenaunce’. We see him being knighted, receiving the Order of the Garter, jousting, fighting, going on pilgrimage (and being honourably received by Sir Baltirdam, ‘the Soldans lieutenant’, who had heard that he was the descendent of Sir Guy of Warwick, ‘whoes life they hadde there in bokes of their langage’), at Calais meeting the Emperor (who assures the king ‘that no prince cristyn, for wisdom, norture and manhode, hadde suche a no er knyght

¹ ed. W. P. Ker (London, 1901), I, p. 6; see George Kane, ‘An Accident of History: Lord Berner’s Translation of Froissart’s Chronicles’, *Chaucer Review* 21 (1986), 217-225.

² *La tres ioyeuse plaisante et recreative histoire xomposée par le loyal serviteur des faiz gestes triumphes et prouesses du bon chevalier sans paour et sans reproche le gentil seigneur de Bayart* (ed. J. H. Roman, Paris 1878); *Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre dit Boucicaut* (ed. D. Lalande, Geneve, 1985); Chastelain, *Livre des faits du bon Messire Jacques de Lalaing*, in *Oeuvres* ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, vol.8 (Brussels, 1866); Jean Bouchet, *Le Panegyric du Chevallier sans Reproche ou mémoires de la Trémoille* (1527, repr. Paris, 1826).

³ *The Chandos Herald* is ed. M. K. Pope and E. C. Lodge (Oxford, 1910).

as he hadde of therle of warrewyk; addyng erto that, if al curtesye were lost, yet myght hit be founde ageyn on hym and so euer after, by the Emperours auctorite, was called the fadre of Curteisy'), and lying sick at Rouen.¹ An account of the acta of Sir John Fastolf (d. 1459), one of the last great English generals of the Hundred Years War, who had fought at Agincourt and Rouen, was projected by his secretary William Worcester, but only notes remain.² In Scotland (where the 'heroic narrative, blending chronicle, epic and romance, seen in Barbour's *Bruce*, had been continued in Hary's *Wallace* (c. 1475-8) the poet Dunbar promised to write the story of the victories of Lord Berbard Stewart of Aubigny, a famous Scottish general in the service of the King of France, who played a prominent part in the invasions of Italy and was praised as a 'tres gentil et vertueux capitaine' and a 'grand chevalier sans reproche'. He visited Scotland in 1508, but died in that same year. The longer poem remained unwritten, it seems, but we have an eloquent poem of welcome as well as a lament for this 'flour of chevelrie'.³

The 'literature of nobility' contains some surprises for the modern reader. The work which gives me my title, *The Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye* translated and printed by Caxton in 1489-90 at the request of Henry VII), specifically directed to 'thende that euery gentyman born to armes & all manere men of werre captayns/ souldiours/ vytayllers & all other shold haue knowlege how they ought to behaue thym in the fayttes of warre & of bataylles' is actually the work of a woman -the remarkable Christine de Pisan, whose books were well known among the literate and noble classes of fifteenth-century England.⁴ She is now better known for her other works, but her authorship of this one is perhaps not too surprising. She was an encyclopaedic, almost a 'professional' writer, and, like some of her male counterparts, ready to turn her hand to all kinds of subject at the request of a patron (in this case, rather vaguely, 'noble men in thoffyce of armes'. She delicately alludes to the

¹ MS BL Cotton Julius E iv, reproduced in a Roxburghe Club Facsimile (1908).

² K. B. McFarlane, 'William Worcester: A Preliminary Survey', in J. Conway Davies, ed., *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Oxford, 1957), 208-9.

³ Douglas Gray, 'A Scottish 'Flower of Chivalry' and his Book', *Words. Wai-te-ata Studies in English* 4 (1974), 22-33.

⁴ Ed. A. T. P. Byles, EETS 189 (London, 1932). See C. C. Willard in *Essays in Honor of Louis F. Solano* ed. R. J. Cormier and V. T. Holmes (Chapel Hill, 1970). Although Christine makes a joke about herself as author of such a manual, I am not sure that the Prologue is (A. Barratt ed., *Women's Writing in Middle English*, London, 1992, p. 139) 'a studied masterpiece of irony'.

apparent unusualness of a woman writing this kind of material - 'this is a thyng not accustomed & out of vsage to wymen/ whiche comynly do not extremete but to spynne on the distaf and ocupie them in thynges of housold'- but requests the noble state of chivalry not to take it amiss in the light of their lady Minerva, who is said to have discovered the art of making harness of iron and steel.¹ In fact, probably most of the 'clerks' who wrote similar treatises had as little actual experience of fighting as she did.

It is a good and sensible work which seems to have been found useful. The French text of *Les faits d'armes* survives in a number of MSS and also made its way into print. Like other books of this kind it is a compilation of 'the doctryne gyuen by many auctors', military advice drawn from a number of sources, classical and medieval. She uses the late Latin *Epitoma rei militaris* of Vegetius, a work that was extremely popular in the Middle Ages (and especially in the later Middle Ages because of its discussion of attacking towns and castles), and the *Stratagemata* of Frontinus (first century AD), which contains historical anecdotes and exempla of use to generals. These treatises contain practical advice on a wide range of topics -sieges, truces, drawing up an army for battle, naval warfare, the use of spies, how to withdraw. Christine adapts this with discrimination: thus she does not use the specifically Roman technical information in Vegetius (Book II). This material sometimes appears in translations of Vegetius, but it is hard to see a sixteenth-century French general deriving much practical benefit from Book II, chapter 24, 'Comment on peult resister aux charriots a faulx et aux elephans en bataille'. She also made use of an equally popular medieval work, *L'Arbre des batailles*, by the Benedictine monk Honoré Bonet or Bouve (c. 1343-c. 1400).² The tree ('l'arbre de deuil') is sometimes pictured in the MSS: 'in its branches can be seen Emperor and Pope, rival kings, knights and serfs, all engaged in deadly conflict, while its branches and its trunk are drenched with blood'.³ Bonet's

¹ And she was born in 'grete grece', which is now called Apulia and Calabria in Italy (and Christine is also 'a woman ytalien'). Christina in other words refers to Minerva as 'the goddess of armes' (Othea XC). In the City of Ladies, among several references, she remarks (1, 38, 5) that nobles should remember 'that the customs of bearing arms, of dividing armies into battalions, and of fighting in ordered ranks, came to them from a woman and were given to them by a woman'.

² It was translated into Scots as *The Buke of the Law of Armys* by Sir Gilbert Hay (1456), ed. J. H. Stevenson, *Gilbert of the Haye's Prose Manuscript*, vol. 1, STS 44 (Edinburgh, 1901).

³ Byles, p. xlvii.

sorrow at the state of Christendom probably struck a responsive chord in Christine, who elsewhere laments the sad state of France, and is clearly no lover of war for its own sake. Bonet's interest in the laws of war and his relatively humane attitudes also find an echo. His condemnation of treachery (as against lawful stratagems) is emphasised by an addition -how can one trust that a safe conduct will be secure nowadays, 'seeving the lytel trouthe and fydelyte that this day renneth thurgh al the worlde'¹ (a sentiment with which Malory would have sympathised). Like Bonet, Christine is opposed to pillaging: soldiers should be properly paid. Sometimes she disagrees with him. Bonet allows the slaying of prisoners in the heat of battle; Christine specifies only those that present a danger to the prince. She includes information from contemporary 'wyse knyghtes that be expert in the sayde thynges of armes' and she adds references to contemporary campaigns. She prefers peaceful negotiation, and quotes approvingly the wise King of France Charles V (whom she greatly admires): when men said to him that it was 'a gee shame... that with money he recouered his fortresses that som of his enemyes held and kept from hym wrongfully/ seeving that he was of might grete ynoughe for to haue recouered thym by strengthe', he replied, 'it seemith me... that that which may be bought ought not to be bought with manny's blode'.² At the same time she can imagine vividly the excitement of desperately defending a town against attackers (expanded from a bald statement in Vegetius).³ Like many others, she laments modern decadence -the ancients did not have their children brought up in courts to learn pride and lechery, nor to wear wanton clothing. Young men should be educated for knighthood. Out of her sources she weaves a fascinating mosaic of information (on sieges, guns and gunpowder, the stores required for a garrison of two hundred men), advice (e.g. on the problem of civilians -should an English student at Paris be taken prisoner and held to ransom?).⁴

Caxton had already printed before this 'art of war' another military book, *The Book of the Ordre of chyualry* (1483-5, dedicated to Richard III), which he translated from the French *Le livre de l'ordre de chevalerie*, an expanded

¹ Byles, pp. 247-8.

² Byles, pp. 128-9.

³ See Byles, pp. 175-7.

⁴ Byles, pp. 226-9.

version of a work by the Catalan mystic and martyr Ramón Lull (1235-1315).¹ This too was a popular and influential work. It is not a general treatise on war but a more narrowly focused disquisition on knighthood. It emphasises the connection of priesthood with knighthood and the symbolic significance of the knight's weapons and armour (his spear is truth, his helmet shame, etc.). It was devised, it says, by an old knight who had become a hermit (similar to those found in the pages of Malory), and given to a squire who was journeying to a court to be knighted. The various chapters discuss the beginning of chivalry and its 'office', how a squire should learn from a knight (as he does in a number of chivalric romances). A knight is a 'defender of the faith and a defender of his lord; he must hunt, and exercise himself, but also follow virtue, for he should have courage of soul rather than strength of body'. Lull's vision of an ideal knight (combining virtue with social duty) is significant for the 'shared ideology' of the 'literature of nobility': 'to a knyght apperteyneth to speke nobly and curtoisly/ and to haue fayr harnoyes and to be wel cladde/ and to holde a good household/ and an honest hows... curtoisye and chyvalry concorden togyder/ for vylaynous and foule wordes ben ageynst thordre of chyvalrye/ pryualte and æqueynsaunce of good folke/ loyalte & trouthe/ hardynesse/ largesse/ honeste/ humylyte/ pyte.'² Caxton says that he translated the book at the request of 'a gentyl and noble esquye', and goes on to lament how in these late days the order of chivalry has been forgotten. Formerly the noble acts of the knights of England were renowned throughout the world, and the thought of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table whose noble acts 'occupye so many large volumes' provokes a famous exclamation: 'O ye knyghtes of Englonde where is the custome an vsage of noble chyualry that was vsed in tho dayes/ what do ye now/ but go to the baynes & playe at dyse...'. they should read, he says, the noble volumes of the Grail, Lancelot, Tristram, Perceforest, Percival, Gawain, and many others; and recall the noble acts of later times – in what is a roll-call of English 'floweres of chivalry': Richard the Lionheart, Edward I, and Edward III and his nobles sons, Sir Robert Knolles, Sir John Hawkwood, Sir John Chandos, Sir Walter Manny ('read Froissart'), and that victorious and

¹ Ed. A. T. P. Byles, EETS 168 (London, 1926). There is an independent Scottish version by Gilbert Hay, *The buke of the Order of Knychthede*, ed. J. H. Stevenson, *Gilbert of the Haye's Prose Manuscript*, vol. 2, STS 62 (Edinburgh, 1914). BL MS Harley 6149 has a Scottish version of Caxton, compiled by Adam Loutfut (1494).

² Byles, p. 113.

noble King Harry the Fifth and the captains under him –his noble brethren, Montacute the Earl of Salisbury, ‘and many other whoos names shyne gloriously by their vertuous noblesse & actes that they did in thonour of thordre of chyualry’. How many knights nowadays, he asks, have the use and the exercise of a knight? Caxton recommends to the King the holding of regular tourneys, and to knights the reading of the treatise. It is an interesting testimony to the relevance which this material was thought to have, and to emotional aftermath of the loss of France (significantly Richard III is given his full title, ‘Kyng of Englund and of Fraunce’) and the nostalgic memory of the great English knights of the past.

Both of these treatises were published after Malory’s book was written, but their French originals were available earlier, together with many other examples of this kind of literature. And ‘arts of war’ continued to be written in the following century –by Lord Bernard Stewart, who, helped by his secretary, made additions to *La nef des batailles* by Robert de Barsac or Barsat, sometimes alluding to his own campaigns;¹ by Machiavelli, and others.

Around these rather specialised books there is a much larger group of works of advice and ‘good counsel’ (sometimes the literary equivalents of the actual wise counsellors so prized in medieval polity). These include the ‘courtesy books’ that offer training in polite behaviour, good manners, and etiquette for young gentlemen and the young of the ‘emerging’ gentry.² These also live on into the sixteenth century. Although the English examples are generally very ‘practical’ and narrowly focused, much less self-conscious and intellectual than famous later Italian examples such as Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, they do give hints of ‘Renaissance self-fashioning’ and of the high idealised courtesy of *The Faerie Queene* (courtesy, says one, came down from heaven when Gabriel greeted Mary). There are also ‘mirrors for princes’, books of advice for rulers, in the tradition of such influential manuals as *De regimine principum* of Giles of Rome or the *Secreta Secretorum*.³ These are common and were, it seems, read avidly: although the discussions of

¹ Gray, pp. 29-32.

² A number are printed in F. J. Furnivall, *The Babees Book*, EETS 32 (London, 1868). See the study by Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy* (Woodbridge, 1983).

³ Cf. K. Bornstein, ‘Reflections of Plitical Theory and Political Fact in Fifteenth-Century Mirrors for the Prince’ in *Medieval Studies in Honor of Lillian Herlands Hornstein* ed. J. B. Bessinger and R. R. Raymo (New York, 1976), pp. 76-85.

governance are primarily designed for kings and princes, the works seem to have been widely used for their practical general advice. This material often makes its way into other literary forms –thus the fifteenth-century Scottish romance *Lancelot of the Laik* contains a long disquisition on the duties of a ruler.

There is an even larger group of ‘educational’ works, concerned with more general moral advice. These are often neglected or ignored, but seem to form a significant part of the ‘literature of nobility’. Here we find noblemen and gentlemen as translators and authors, and are able to place them in the intellectual currents of the time. Examples include *The Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers* translated by Earl Rivers (Anthony Woodville, formerly Lord Scales, and an important political figure), printed by Caxton in 1477.¹ Rivers says that the translation was suggested to him by Louis de Bretilles in 1473 on a pilgrimage to Compostela. The French original, the *Dits Moraulx* of Tignonville, comes ultimately from an Arabic book, *Mokhtar el-Hikam*, which was translated into Spanish in the first half of the thirteenth century and then into Latin. It is a collection of the sayings and ‘sentences’ and ‘examples’ of famous ancient philosophers, Pythagoras, for instance, says to an old man who was ashamed to learn, ‘Whi hast thou shame for to lerne? Cunnyng is more worth to the in the ende of thi dayes thanne it was in the begynnyng’. Another English translation was made by Stephen Scrope (d. 1472) for his father-in-law Sir John Falstolf (a version which was corrected by William Worcester, Falstolf’s secretary and –probably- Scrope’s literary executor). Scrope also translated another work of Christine de Pisan which was extremely popular in late medieval England.² The *Epistre Othea* (written c. 1400) is an encyclopaedic guide to the figures of ancient myth and legend presented in the form of a letter from Othea, goddess of prudence, to the hero Hector, offering him (and the medieval ‘good knight’) moral instruction in the ideals of chivalry, earthly and spiritual. Its treatment of the ancient world owes nothing to the new humanist philological and archaeological learning of Italy; in its enthusiastic engagement with the matter of the old stories and

¹ See the facsimile edition by William Blades (London 1877). Other versions are ed C. F. Bühler, EETS 211 (London, 1941). Four of the surviving MSS contain pictures of the philosophers (e.g. Diogenes with his barrel and a book and pence).

² Ed. C. F. Bühler, EETS 264 (London, 1970).

with their contemporary relevance it belongs to an older and wider tradition of 'medieval humanism'.¹

William Worcester also stands in this tradition: 'he read the classics as he studied modern authors, to use what they taught him. He was less interested in their manner than in their content'.² He was a layman, a towns man's son who may have belonged to the fringes of the gentry, and spent a busy life in the service of Fastolf. He was an antiquarian -his *Itineraries* foreshadow the great achievements of the following century - and also a translator - he turned a French version of Cicero's *De senectute* into English for his noble patron. His most direct contribution to the 'literature of nobility' however, is a very interesting one-the *Boke of Noblesse*, a work of vernacular propaganda which urges the revival of chivalry and the resumption of the war in France³. It seems to have been twice revised: probably originally designed to encourage Henry VI to continue the warlike policy of his father, then revised for the Yorkists in 1472 just before the hostilities were resumed, and finally with some additions offered to Edward IV in 1475. It contains notable *exempla* of courage and chivalry in the manner of the treatises discussed above, uses a good deal of their traditional matter, and discusses many of the same questions: when it is lawful to make war on those of Christian blood; the proper payment of soldiers; the need for young men to exercise themselves, etc. He cites 'Vegetius in his booke of Chevalrie' and Christine de Pisan (who, he thinks, wrote Bonet's *Tree of Battles*). The book's bellicose tone and fierce reiteration of the English claims no doubt reflect the views of Fastolf himself, who is referred to once or twice as 'myne author'. His prudent provisioning of his men (providing enough corn for six months) is praised, and there is (in the account of Publius Decius a nice anecdote about the distinction Fastolf used to make between a 'hardy man' and a 'manly man':

Hyt ys to remember that I hafe herd myne autor Fastolfe sey, whan he had yong knights and nobles at his solace, how that there be twey maner condicions of manly men, and one ys a manly man called, another ys an hardye man; but he seyde the manly man ys

¹ See Douglas Gray, 'Humanism and Humanisms in Late Medieval Literature' in Sergio Rossi and Dianella Savoia, *Italy and the English Renaissance* (Milan, 1989), and the references given there.

² McFarlane, p. 214.

³ Ed. J. G. Nichols (London 1860).

more to be commended, more then the hardy man; for the hardy man that sodenly, without dicrecion of gode avysement, avauncyth hym in the felde allone, but he levyth hys felyshyp destrussed. And the manly man, ys polcie is that, or he avaunce hym and hys felyshyp at skirmisshe or sodeyn recountre, hee wille so discretely avaunce hym that he wille entend to hafe the ovyr hand of hys adversarye, and safe hymself and hys felyshyp.¹

The English claims are supported by a list of the English triumphs of the past and (like Caxton's later *Ordre of Chyualry*) examples of great heroes, including Arthur, Edmund Ironside, William the Conqueror, Richard the Lionheart, Edward I, Edward III, and Henry V (to whose conquest of Normandy a chapter is devoted). His rhetorical 'exortacion of a courageus disposicion for a reformation of a wrong done' again makes us think of Caxton:

O then, ye worshipfulle men of the Englysshe nacion, which bene descendid of the noble Brutis bloode of Troy, suffre yey not than youre highe auncien couragis to be revalid ne desceived by youre said adversaries of Fraunce a t this tyme, neither in tymr to come; ne in this manner to be rebucked and put aback, to youre uttermost deshounoure and reproche in the sighte of straunge nacions... For were ye not sometyme tho that thoroughe youre grete prowesse, corages, feersnes, manlinesse, and of strenght overlaid and put in subgeccion the gret myghte and power of the feers and puissant fighters of alle strunge nacions that presumed to set ayenst this lande?²

From quite a different tradition comes the *Declamacion of Noblesse*, a translation of a humanist dialogue on true nobility (the nobility of soul as against that of lineage) by Buonacorso da Montemagno made by John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester (d.1470), who also translated Cicero's *De amicitia*.³ He had been at Oxford with William Worcester, but was of course from the high

¹ Nichols, p. 65.

² Nichols p. 9. As in the case of Caxton's lament quoted above, this is not concerned with the failure of any 'code', but with men's failure to live up to the ideals of chivalry.

³ See R. J. Mitchell, *John Tiptoft* (London, 1938); Douglas Gray, 'Some Pre-Elizabethan Examples of an Elizabethan Art' in Edward Chaney and Peter Mack, eds., *England and the Continental Renaissance: Essays in Honour of J. B. Trapp* (Woodbridge, 1990).

nobility. He became Constable of England (and noted for his ruthlessness) and composed ordinances (1466) for the conduct of tournaments. He was apparently the first English secular lord after Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, to interest himself in the new Italian humanism. On his way to the Holy Land he visited Florence and attended some lectures. He collected books: those surviving include humanistic MSS of newly discovered works by Lucretius and Tacitus, a humanistic commentary on Juvenal - alongside devotional works and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.¹

Tiptof's library is distinctly different in content and taste from the typical English collections of the 'literature of nobility' of which we have a number of examples, some from the top of the social scale, some from the households of the gentry. The fine MS BL Royal 15 E VI, which Sir John Talbot, the first Earl of Shrewsbury, and a famous 'flower of chivalry', presented to Margaret of Anjou when he escorted her to England for her marriage to Henry VI in 1445, is a compendium of French works probably representative of the tastes of both recipient and donor. Its contents include *chansons de geste* and romances, Christine de Pisan's *Livre des faits d'armes*, Bonet's *L'Arbre des batailles*, a French translation of *De regimine principum*, Chartier's *Breviaire des nobles*, genealogies and chronicles, and the statutes of the Order of the Garter, of which Talbot was a knight. Another splendid MS, BL Royal 14 E ii, made in Bruges for Edward IV, contains *Le chemin de vaillance*, by Jean de Coucey, Christine de Pisan's *L'Epistre Othea*, Chartier's *Breviaire*, and *L'Ordre de chevalerie*, the French version of Lull's treatise.

From the East Anglian gentry, we have an interesting example in the 'Grete Boke' (now MS BL Landsowne 285) of John Paston II (d.1479). His father John I (d.1466) had established connections with Fastolf, and on his death was named as one of the executors, an appointment which led to long litigation with others executors. John II claimed Fastolf's Caister state. He was a courtier, and in 1468 was in Bruges with his brother. John III, for the marriage of Margaret of York to Charles the Bold. (The magnificent spectacles moved his brother to say in a letter, 'I herd never of non lyk to it save Kyng Artourys cort').² John II was interested in tournaments and in books. One he

¹ See R. Weiss, 'The Library of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester', *Bodleian Quarterly Record* 8 (1935-38), 157-64, 234-5.

² *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* ed. N. Davis (Oxford, 1976), vol. 1, No. 330.

possessed, 'a boke de Othea' is perhaps the translation by Scrope. He also possessed 'Tully de senectute and de amicitia', and a copy of Caxton's print of *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* (1475), an encyclopaedic 'educational' work.¹ His 'Grete Boke' in particular shows his interest in chivalry and courtly literature and his connections with noble figures such as Fastolf and Anthony Woodville.² Compiled under Fastolf's directions, it is a commonplace book which includes such items as the form of the ceremony for creating Knights of the Bath, ordinances of war made by Henry V and Montacute the Earl of Salisbury, instructions for organising 'jousts of peace', the feat of arms performed by Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, against the three French Knights at Guines in 1415, and other challenges, feats of arms, tournaments and jousts and pas d'armes (e. g. at Smithfield in 1467 between Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, and Antoine, Grand Bastard of Burgundy, at Bruges in 1468 (the year the Paston brothers were there) the challenge of Antoine, Grand Bastard of Burgundy, to the pas à l'Abre d'Or), together with more substantial works - an English translation of Vegetius, and a *Book of Governance of Kings and Princes* (Lydgate and Burgh's *Secrets of Old Philosophers* from the *Secreta Secretorum*).

Against this background Caxton's evident interest in the 'literature of nobility' does not seem at all strange. It reflects the tastes of his patrons (nobles, knights, squires) and his own, and forms a substantial part of his publishing 'list'. Besides the treatises and books already mentioned, it includes 'courtesy books', moral works (like the translation by Earl Rivers of the *Moral proverbs* of Christine de Pisan), the *Royal Book* ('A Book for a King', but done at the request of a mercer, and therefore like other 'mirrors for princes' read by a much wider audience), chronicles, romances of Troy (including his *Eneydos*), and chivalric romances, including Malory.³

It is to the fictional part of the 'literature of knighthood' that we must return. This is not as entirely separate and clearly demarcated as modern readers might suppose. The books of counsel we have been discussing have an

¹ Ed. W. E. A. Axon (London, 1883).

² BL MS Lansdowne 265, Ed. G. Lester, *Sir John Paston's 'Grete Boke'. A Descriptive Catalogue with an Intro of British Library MS Lansdowne 285* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1984).

³ On the 'chivalric' additions made by Caxton to his own translations, see N. F. Blake, *Caxton and his World* (London, 1969), pp. 129-131.

obvious connection with the ideology of knighthood that infuses the chivalric romance. Some romances (like *Lancelot of the Laik*) have a closer connection. Others draw both on such books and on real life experience. The best known example is *Le Jouvencel* of Jean de Bueil (1406-1477),¹ an 'autobiographical' romance and a *roman à clef*, in which places and persons can be identified (the 'grand capitaine' is La Hire, the Jouvencel Jean de Bueil, Baudouyn the Duke of Bedford, etc.). It is also a kind of moral *Bildungsroman* in which a young poor gentleman comes to the highest honours through good conduct, patience and good fortune. It contains much advice on martial matters, and it also gives a sense of closeness to the actual combats of the Hundred Years War -in a surprise attack the soldiers crawl forward with their helmets covered so that they do not shine. It shares the material found in the practical handbooks, but endows it not only with a sense of realism but also with an enthusiastic, almost mystical, commitment to the ideals of comradeship and 'felyship'. Its famous eulogy of the just war and the soldier's calling, which modern readers often find disturbing, would no doubt have been endorsed by many of the late medieval 'flowers of chivalry':

War is a joyous thing. In it you hear and see many fine things, and learn much that is good. When it is in a good cause, it is just... and when war is undertaken in this cause it is a delightful calling, and good for young men. For they are loved by God and by the world. In war one loves and is loved... there comes a sweetness to the heart of loyalty and pity to see one's friend who so valiantly exposes his body in order to accomplish the commandment of our creator. And then you are prepared to go and die or live with him, and for your love never abandon him. In this there comes a delight such that no one who has not experienced it can comprehend...

There is certainly nothing as explicit as this in Malory's book, and when we turn to it from the 'literature of knighthood', although eventually we come to see some underlying similarities of great importance, at first it is the differences which we notice. It is not filled with disquisitions on tactics and the art of war. Still less is it any kind of didactic manual. Nor is it a *roman à clef*. Attempts to find any close correspondence between actual English cam-

¹ Ed. C. Favre and L. Lecestre (Société de l'histoire de la France, Paris, 1887). The work is described by its editors as 'sous sa forme romanesque, un véritable traité d'éducation militaire et morale, appuyé d'exemples et d'allusions historiques'.

paings or political events and the events of the narrative have not been successful. No doubt some passages may well have been written with some thought to the troubled English situation (like the famous passage on the instability of Englishmen) but they are rather general (and safely so?). As Peter Field has said, 'it is easier and more compatible with the generosity of spirit that informs the *Morte Darthur* to suppose that Malory's sympathies were aroused less by causes than by individuals behaving chivalrously in difficult circumstances'.¹ It is perhaps legitimate to suppose a particular depth of feeling behind some remarks like 'thenne stood the reame in grete stronge, and many wende to have ben king', or the sympathetic introduction of the poor knight Balin, or perhaps the tribulations of Tristram as a prisoner.² Peter Field has pointed out that at the end of his book Malory added an allusion to crusading, where after Lancelot's death he made Hector, Bors, and his other companions go to the Holy Land as Lancelot had already commanded, where they did 'many bataylles upon the myscreantes, or Turkes. And there they dyed upon a Good fryday for Goddes sake'. It seems relevant, as Field notes, that Malory's powerful uncle sir Robert Malory was Prior of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem from 1432 until his death in 1439/40, a great magnate and a crusader.³

Even after Peter Field's research, many questions about Malory's life and his role in the events of his time remain unanswered. The legal records do not exactly suggest a 'flower of chivalry', a 'chevalier sans peur et sans reproche', but it is not clear that the alternative extreme, a picturesque ruffian sitting in prison writing a nostalgic and idealised book of chivalry is any more likely. A member of the Warwickshire gentry (and involved in characteristic networks of links with neighbours, kinsmen, and lords), perhaps with some military experience in Gascony, he seems to have been ambitious and influential, and was increasingly involved (in a period when private quarrels overlapped with, or became, political ones) in national politics. The remarkable series of charges brought against him from 1443 would, if all proved true, add up to quite a criminal record even in those turbulent times. Mostly they

¹ Peter Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 124.

² Field, pp. 124- 5. All quotations from Malory are taken from the edition of E. Vinaver (Oxford, 1947); references are to the page numbers in Vinaver.

³ Field, pp. 80- 82.

were not brought to trial -in those days accusations were easily and frequently made. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to know if what is called theft or extortion is in fact that, or rather a forcible repossession (perhaps on the instructions of a superior). Some charges, certainly, are exaggerated; others conjure up some entertaining vignettes -as the occasion on which (allegedly) he and his men led off seven cows, three hundred and thirty-five sheep and a cart through the quiet lanes of Warwickshire. He seems to have acquired the reputation of a troublemaker, and perhaps more importantly, of one who could raise a body of armed men. Like others, he followed different lords in turn. His various imprisonments seem to be politically motivated.

The few, though flamboyant, 'facts' of his biography do not help very much in placing him in the cultural patterns of the time, beyond demonstrating that he led a different kind of life from that of a gentleman with chivalric interests like John Paston I or the great lords like Rivers and Tiptoft. His own book however does give us a few leads. Not surprisingly, there is no hint of the intense interest in classical literature characteristic of a humanist like Tiptoft, or even of the more practical engagement with it found in William Worcester. This may be partly due to the nature of Malory's sources, but not entirely, I suspect. The nearest he comes to the topic of 'true nobility' not based on lineage is a remark of Balin: 'A, fayre damesell, ... worthynes and good tacchis and also good dedis is nat only ain araymente, but manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person; and many a worshipfull knyght ys nat knowyn unto all people' (63). Consistently, 'manhode and worship' are qualities expected in those of noble birth (though they are not always found). Noble birth may be 'hyd within a mannes person', but is there to be discovered -as it is in the case of Sir Gareth (where Gawain and Lancelot -but not Kay- are acute enough to recognise it early). Sir Torre, the son of Pellinore and a peasant woman, derives his prowess, according to Arthur, from his father. 'Manhode and worship' and the other qualities that make up 'chivalry' are central concerns of the whole book.¹

The most obvious, and the most important, difference between Malory and the majority of the authors of the manuals is that he was a creative artist, who made an original work out of his translation of French and English books. And he was a creative artist of a very special kind. He was not an in-

¹ See the fine study by Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms* (Woodbridge, 1997).

tellectual writer, with the studied self-consciousness of a Chaucer, but one whose imagination was intensely dramatic. His own general reflections, when they occur, are not always very clear. Much clearer and much more impressive is what emerges from his dramatic scenes -the confrontations and the reactions of characters, what actually happens, and what the deeds of men reveal. (It will be by now evident that 'deeds' -acts, faits, etc.- is a key term and a key concept in the literature of knighthood). This, of course, means that it is not easy to extract a clear, unified, and coherent 'ideology' from the book, and very difficult to separate Malory's ethics or ideas from his literary techniques, structures, or characteristic features of style.¹ What emerges is not a fully consistent 'ethic', but rather emotional and dramatic mirror or a chivalric world, a limited world, but one which is intensely perceived and felt.

Caxton's enthusiastic preface to Malory's book fits in into the 'literature of knighthood' and into his own programme of the publication of chivalric works. Acknowledging his audience's request 'from 'many noble and dyvers gentylnen of tys royaume of Englonde') for the printing of the stories of the Grail and of Arthur, 'whyche ought moost to be remembred emonge us Englysshemen tofore al other Crysten kynges', and disposing of the questions about Arthur's historicity, he presents Malory's book as a model:

... to the entente that noble man may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuous dedes that somme knyghtes used in tho dayes, by whyche they came to honour, and how ther that were vycious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke; humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they ben of, that shal see and rede in this seyde book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce, and to folowe the same...

It will be noted that he has 'widened' his audience to accord with the known readership of the literature of knighthood, and that he suggests an explicitly moral reading. But he also senses the inclusiveness of the book's moral world. 'For herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynnesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne...

¹ See Lynch 125- 6.

What first strikes the reader of Malory is his highly distinctive style and manner. He uses a limited vocabulary like that of his thirteenth-century French originals (from our point of view it is fortunate that he used these rather than the more elaborate French and Burgundian romances fashionable in his own day), and by constant rhythmical repetition produces a style that is both mesmerising and emotional, and which gives a curious emphasis to certain 'charged' key terms of value. Sometimes this is done in a way which suggests almost a musical pattern of emphasis. When Gareth defends himself to the king for having left his fellowship to help Sir Lancelot we have an elaborate descant on 'worshyp':

'My lorde', seyde sir Gareth, 'he made me knyght, and whan I saw hym so hard bestad, methought hit was my worshyp to helpe hym. For I saw hym do so muche dedis of armys, and so many noble knyghtes ayenste hym, that whan I undirstode that he was sir Launcelot du Lake I shamed to se so many good knyghtes ayenste hym alone'.

'Now, truly', seyde kynge Arthur unto sir Gareth, 'ye say well, and worshypfully have ye done, and to youreselff grete worshyp. And all the dayes of my lyff', seyde kynge Arthure unto sir Gareth, 'wyte you well I shall love you and truste you the more battir. For ever hit ys', seyde kynge Arthure, 'a worshypfull knyghtes dede to helpe and sucoure antother worshypfull knyght whan he seeth hym in daungere. For ever a worshypfull man wolle be lothe to se a worshypfull man shamed, and he that ys of no worshyp and medelyth with cowardise never shall he shew jantilves nor for maner of goodnes where he seeth a man in daungere, for than wolle a cowarde never shew mercy. And allwayes a good man wolle do ever to another man as he wolde be done to hymselff'. (1114)

The episode (which is a dramatic realisation of a chivalric doctrine found in the manuals) is brought to a conclusion by great feasting, and a remark from the narrator which seems to combine approbation with a hint of melancholy, nostalgia and, perhaps, bitterness: 'And he that was curteyse, trew, and faythefull to hys frynde was that tyme cherysshed'.

The reiteration of these words which embody chivalric norms emphasise the deeply felt values of a limited noble class, but also have a wider interest

for 'al other estates' (as implied at the end of Arthur's speech) celebrating more generally noble and heroic qualities, letting us, as Mark Lambert says, 'recognise more clearly in ourselves, not what true nobility is, but what it is like to view some kind of nobility as the centre and gauge of experience.'¹ There are occasional general 'statements' from the narrator or from a character, ranging from Malory on 'vertuose love' or Arthur's charge to his knights-

never to do outrage nothir morthir, and allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: extrengethe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them uppon payne of dethe. Also that no man take no batayles in a wrongeful quarell for no love ne for no wordlis goodis... (120)

(which is probably the nearest thing in the book to a 'code' of chivalry) to proverbs or remarks on matters of war. (Sir John Falstolf would have approved of the emphasis put by Arthur and Tristram on the value of prudence: 'youre corrage and youre hardynesse nerehande had you destroyed, for and ye had turned agayne ye had loste no worshyp, for I calle hit but foly to abyde whan knyghtes bene overmacched' (217); 'mangode is nat worth but yf hit be medled with wysdome' (700). More often, however, 'sentence' emerges from scenes, actions, what goes without saying. The voice of the narrator often sounds like that of a chronicler, sometimes blending with those of the characters, often sounding as if he was an eyewitness of the events he presents. 'Wit ye well I saw it done' says the mysterious knight at the beginning of *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's court*: Twain, the great parodist of Malory, has unerringly seized on a key feature of his technique. Readers are carried along as if mesmerised by this truth-telling voice with its insistent, often formulaic, repetitions of key-words and patterns. The syntax is simple and often paratactic. There is often 'an impression of careful, accurate record-keeping'.²

¹ Mark Lambert, *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Arthur* (New Haven, 1975), p. ix. See P. E. Tucker, 'Chivalry in the Morte' in J. A. W. Bennett, *Essays on Malory* (Oxford, 1963).

² Lambert, p. 49. Cf. Lynch (p. 31), 'the formulaic nature of the description functions as a guarantee of authority; the story follows an approved course, and

The formulaic similes and phrases used in battle scenes ('hurteled togydys lyke two rammes', 'hurteled togedyrs as two wylde bullys', etc.) give a plain generalised background to the violent actions, but one which is often suffused with emotion. And just as the characteristic plain and limited vocabulary allows Malory sometimes to achieve a special effect by the use of an unusual word, so it is here with a suddenly vivid or realistically violent detail - Arthur 'gaff hym suche a buffette on his hede that the bloode com oute at hes erys, nose and mowthe'. A precise circumstantial detail will have the same function: (during a pause in the fighting) 'they sette hem downe upon two molehyllys ther besydys the fyghtynge place, and aythier of them unlaced othir helmys, and toke the colde wynde' (323). These are carefully used to build up the scene of horror at the end of Balin and Balan - 'thenne Balan yede on al four feet and handes, and put of the helme of his broder, and myght not knowe hym by the vysage, it was so ful of hewen and bledde...' (90).

By this curious combination of the formulaic and the realistic, battle scenes are made genuinely exciting, not only because the outcome often hangs in the balance, but because we are made to share the reactions and the comments of participants and bystanders (and the occasional emotional choric exclamation of the narrator), and sometimes the thoughts of the knights themselves:

'so at that tyme com in the Knyght with the Two Swerdis and hes Brothir, but they dud so mervaylously that the kynge and all the knyghtes mervayled of them. And all they that behelde them seyde they were sente frome hevyn as angels other devilles frome helle. And kynge Arthure seyde hymself they were the doughtyeste knyghtes that ever he sawe, for they gaff such strokes that all men had wondir of hem... But allwayes kynge Lotte hylde hym everin the fore-fronte and dud merveylous dedis of armys; for all his oste was borne up by nys hondys, for he abode all knyghtes. Alas, he myght nat endure, the whych was grete pité!'. (76-7)

Malory can catch the excitement and the emotional tension of an encounter:

simulates a general judgement shared by the knightly peer group in response to known events'.

and than they foughte togiders, that the noyse and the sowne range by the watir and woode. Wherefore kynge Ban oand Bors mede hem redy and dressed thire shyldis and harneysse, and were so currageous that thir enemyes shhoke and byverd for egrinnesse.

And there are moments when, as in the *Jouvencel*, we are made to feel close to actual medieval warfare, as when ‘the scowte-wacche by hir oste cryed: ‘Lordis, to armes! For here be oure enemyes at youre honde!’’, or at the last battle when the pillagers come into the field to despoil the bodies of the dead.¹ The battle scenes, it must be stressed, though not to the taste of many modern readers are absolutely central to the unfolding of the epic tale and to the creation of its emotional and moral world. There is often, alongside the horror and the suffering, a sense of exhilaration at the ‘merveillous dedes of armes’:

So forewithalle kynge Arthur sette upon hem in their lodgyng, and syre Bawdewyn, syre Kay, and Syr Brastias slewe on the right hand and on the lyfte hand, that if was merveylle; and alweyes kynge Arthur on horsback lsyd on with a swerd and dyd maerveillous dedes of armes, that many of the kynges had grete joye of his dedes and hardynesse.

Malory’s sources presented him with a variety of military encounters, which by implication contain a number of the topics discussed in the manuals of the art of war. Besides the individual fights, the common stock of romance, there are jousts and tournaments (sometimes large ones), *mêlées*, ambushes, sieges,² and great pitched battles. For the large battles we are sometimes given an indication of the numbers involved. For instance, at the beginning

¹ Malory picks up this vivid detail from *Le Morte Arthur*: the pillaging of the dead was a feature of medieval warfare, often casually recorded. Froissart notes that when the king of France’s men look for the body of Philip van Artevelde after the battle of Roosebeke (1382) the dead ‘had already been stripped from head to foot’. Later, at Flodden (1513), it was reported to Wolsey that ‘king, bishops, lordes, knights, nobles, and others were not so soon slain but forthwith despoiled out of thair harness and array and lefte lying naked in the felde’.

² See Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege. Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford, 1997). In Malory sieges mostly serve as a background to other encounters, but there is some descriptive detail: ‘ther was many pavylions and tentys and a fayre castell, and there was muche smoke and grete noise’ (319); at the siege of Joyous Gard the defenders issue out to battle; at Benwick ladders are set up.

of the book the kings and their supporters hostile to Arthur raise a great army: 'hir hole oste was of clene men of armys: on horseback was fully fyffty thousand, and on foote ten thousand of good mennes bodyes' (26). Occasionally the disposition of an army is mentioned: Sir Tristram 'lete his oste be deaparted in six batailles, and ordayned sir Dynas the Seneschall to have the voward, and the other good knights to rule the remenaunte' (621). There are references to the 'searching' of wounds by surgeons, to foraging and 'foreryders', and a number of appreciative comments - 'that was well stryken', seyde kyng Arthure (129), 'the Rede Knyghte was a wyly knyght in fyghtyng, and that taught Bewmaynes to be wise' (323).

The qualities of the good knight include physical courage, strength and athleticism (all of which have to be 'proved'). The few detailed references imply something of an ideal promising young warrior described by Christine de Pisan (deriving from Vegetius) - 'of whom the eyen and spirites were open and moevable/ that had a streyght hede a large grest grete sholders and well shapen armes long and bygge and wel made... bygge thyes/ leggis streyght... aboue al othir thyng... the vigour and courage and ... the swift-ness of the body...' ¹ Thus when Torre appears before the king he can be recognised as a potential king: 'he is 'a fayre yonge man of eyghtene yere of age', bigger than his brothers, and says Aries the cowherd, 'woll nat labour for nothyng that my wyff and I may do, but allwey he woll be shotynge, ao casting dartes, and glad for to se batayles and to beholde knyghtes' - 'than the kyng behelde hym faste and saw he was passyngly well made of his yerys' (483). Sir Lamorak impresses Tristram in battle because he is 'so bygge and so well-brethed', and Tristram echoes this when he laments Lamorak's death: 'hit was over grete pité, for I dare say he was the clennyst-myghted man and the beste-wynded of his ayge that was on lyve. For I knew hym that he was one of the best knyghtes that ever I mette wythal but yf hit were sir Launcelot' (698). Outstanding deeds of physical courage and fighting skill merit the word 'prowess' - as Arthur exclaims admiringly of Lancelot, 'Jesu mercy... he ys a mervaylous knyght of proues !' (1174).² But to qualify as a

¹ Byles, p. 35.

² It is Arthur's physical courage which at first is largely influential in drawing men to him: 'all men of worship seyde hit was myrry to be under such a chyffayne that wolde putte hys person in adventure as other poure knyghtes ded' (54). See Lynch, chapter 2.

‘flower of chivalry’ (as Arthur is called by Lamorak) or ‘chief of knighthood’ (as Lancelot is called by sir Persant) inner qualities are necessary.

Here Malory’s dramatic narrative comes closer to the ‘literature of knighthood’, assuming the same chivalric ideology. Characteristically this emerges from scenes, actions, comments from characters and the narrator, and through the repetition of his charged key-words. ‘Worship is clearly very highly esteemed: it goes well beyond ‘prowess’, although that forms an important part of it. Like other noble qualities it is not for him simply an abstract ethical ideal, but has a strong social dimension: it must be acknowledged by others; although it is an inner quality, its external appearance is important. Like ‘honour’ (its near synonym) it seems to be an essential part of a good knight, which can be lost, or destroyed, through ‘shame’.¹ It is intricately involved with ‘fellowship’ (another highly charged word). The book demonstrates the intensity of the bonds of loyalty to lord, companions in arms, and kinsmen, and also the tensions in them which may be aroused by personalities and events. In the end these become destructive, and lead to the final tragedy, and in the last books the phrase ‘the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table is brokyn for ever’ is repeated like a melancholy leitmotif. Throughout the work the emotional power of the bonds of knighthood is constantly in evidence. After a battle Gawain and Marhaus ‘toke of her helmys and eyther kyssed other and there they swore togdyrs eythyr to love other as brethirne’ (161). There are emotional partings and reunions, when ‘than was there grete joy amonge them’ (779).

Knightly virtues are often sharply contrasted with their opposites - fidelity or ‘trouthe’ with treachery or treason, for instance. Such virtues, although central to knighthood, are not restricted to any ‘courtly code’. ‘Trouthe’, for instance, was not only celebrated in literature of other kinds, notably the epic, but was important in medieval life itself. Characteristically Malory’s interests are both closely focused on knightly society but also bear on a wider human society. ‘Good’ knights and ‘bad’ knights are usually also sharply contrasted. Against the ‘flowers of chivalry’ stand figures like the

¹ ‘Shame’ is also a strongly charged word, and given the same kind of emphatic repetition: thus Palomydes rounds on Morgan: ‘thes is a shamefull and a vylounce usage for a quene to use, and namely to make suche warre uppon her owne lorde that is called the floure of chevalry that is crystyn othir hethyn, and with all my harte I woll destroy that shamefull custom’.

cowardly king Mark or Mordred. More rarely, there are knights who stand between the extremes, like Sir Kay: when Tristram meets him and learns his name (and instantly knows his reputation, how he is 'named') he states it explicitly - 'A, sir, ys that your name?' ... 'Now wyte you well that ye are named the shamefullsye knyght of your tunge that now ys lyvyng. Howbehit ye ar called a good knyght, but ye are called unfortunate and passyng overthwart of youre tunge' (488). More interesting are those 'good knights' who are sometimes shown acting badly - like some real-life 'flowers of chivalry' such as the Black Prince at Limoges). The most notable case is, of course, Gawain's change into a grimly vengeful figure.

Eulogies of 'good knights' are sometimes very close to the chivalric biography. The famous threnody of Hector over Lancelot, which is unusually elaborate and formal for Malory, besides its repetition of his charged key-words, rehearses the qualities and achievements of a late medieval 'flower of chivalry':

... thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes hande. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde ! And thou were the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest man and the jentyllest that ever ete in halle emonge ladyes, and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foo that ever put spare in the reeste (1259).

All this, together with the evident delight in chivalric ceremonial, ritual and 'game', indicates an emotional with an admiration of the knightly life. But the story ends in disaster. This, I feel sure, involves something less abstract and more subtle than the 'failure of the code of chivalry'. Malory does not seem to endorse the austere condemnation of 'earthly chivalry' in the *Queste del Graal*, but many of his readers have felt that his narrative does not show that ideals of chivalry have their limitations. If Malory thought this he does not say it explicitly. It is a question of having to trust the tale rather than the teller? To a certain extent it is, but it is a little more complicated. The teller's voice is sometimes sad or perturbed, perhaps suggesting an awareness of some contradictions and tensions, but for much of the time it seems 'innocent' (like the voices of his paragons of chivalry), continually insisting on the importance of fidelity, while the unfolding events reveal the tensions

so cruelly felt by Lancelot. A more clerkly writer may very well have felt impelled to express an 'attitude' about the conflict of loyalty he faces. However, as Miko says, 'judgement in Malory is neither so rigorous nor so easy as a moral system might imply'.¹ Malory's refusal to condemn, the generosity (or the 'looseness') of his ethical views (if indeed they can be called views) might distress a moralist like Ascham, but can also be taken as an evidence of the inclusive breadth of a remarkable creative imagination. Indeed, his treatment of the Lancelot/ Guinevere/ Arthur relationship and the fall of the Round Table makes it a genuinely tragic story. He is concerned not to judge but to see the pity and the horror of it all. And elsewhere in the work, in spite of his liking for moderation, his sympathy can lead him to an impressive portrayal of those who act 'out of measure', with tragic excess, like the Maid of Astolat. The battles are often against chaos (which threatens Arthur's kingdom at its beginning and at its end) in defence of order, and what C. S. Lewis called the 'civilisation of the heart'. That is overwhelmed by darkness and treachery. Miko's remark about 'the inadequacy of any idealistic system' and that 'chivalry too easily ignores the fact that men are often petty creatures',² have a good deal of force, but are perhaps a little too abstract. Malory's book shows from the beginning examples of the pettiness and wickedness of men -and *men*, not exclusively knights. It is not simply a tragedy of knighthood but a tragedy of humanity. Malory's refusal to explain, to offer a framework of *ethos* increases the pathos of the end. His good knights 'take the adventure' with courage and fortitude. Galahad's message to Lancelot - 'bydde hym remember of this world unstable' - clearly has great significance for Malory, who seems to feel deeply the traditional view of the instability of this world, an instability which his book shows derives from a variety of causes, including destiny, chance, the characters and actions of men. He certainly had not read the *Iliad*, but what has been said of its ending is true of his: 'its humanity does not float in shallow optimism: it is firmly and deeply rooted in an awareness of human reality and suffering'.³ Caxton was surely right to see the book as a mirror of chivalric, but also of human, life: 'forherein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardysse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne.'

¹ Stephen J. Miko, 'Malory and the Chivalric Order', *Medium Aevum* 35 (1966) 211.

² Miko, pp. 213, 221.

³ Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* (Oxford, 1992), p. 283 (quoting Colin Macleod).

Douglas Gray
University of Oxford

* † *