

**THE EVOLUTION OF IDEAS ABOUT SPORTS THROUGH MEDIEVAL  
LITERATURE**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

### The Evolution of Ideas about Sports through Medieval Literature

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#### Literature Review

The first text selected for analysis in this project is Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, written in the fifteenth century, to use as a foundation for this research. This work has been used very often as a basis for adaptations. Published in 1485AD, Malory's work follows King Arthur and all the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table. The second text selected for analysis is T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, published in 1958. White's work is known to have been influenced by World War II, creating adaptations of Malory's original work for a post-war audience. The third selected text is Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, published in 1983. This work presents a fascinating viewpoint for readers as Bradley presents the tale of King Arthur through a female lens. Lastly, findings in these primary texts will be compared to modern day sport theory as presented by Barrie Houlihan and Dominic Malcolm in their 2016 textbook *Sport and Society* which includes a number of contributions from prominent researchers, detailing observations and issues that arise in sport today.

## **Thesis Statement**

The question this research will revolve around is: what ideas surrounding sport have evolved over time? More specifically, what aspects seem to have evolved, been added, been lost, or remain the same over time, and how do these changes affect the way literature depicts sport?

## **Theoretical Framework**

Rhetorical, literary analysis, specifically historical and cultural criticism, and sport theory will all be used in examining the three main sources which pertain to the research question at hand. After making observations using rhetorical and literary analysis, sport theory will be brought in to make overall conclusions about the evolution of ideas about sport over time.

## **Project Description**

The purpose of this research is to understand how societal ideas surrounding sport have evolved from the time of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in the fifteenth century to more modern adaptations of his work by T.H. White and Marion Zimmer Bradley in the twentieth century, comparing the works to present-day sport theory. No secondary sources have taken into account sport as a whole in any of these three works, resulting in a lack of analysis of the way athletes are portrayed, spectatorship, and the evolution of sport's social significance. By examining the way these factors are described in Malory's work and comparing the descriptions to the accounts of sport in White and Bradley, conclusions will be drawn about what ideas surrounding sport have evolved, remained the same, been created, or have been lost based on present-day sport theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

The topic of sports is something that is oftentimes overlooked and left untouched when discussing history, especially in regard to literature. Since ancient times, sporting events have played a large part in the social lives of citizens everywhere. The first noteworthy sporting events can be traced back to Ancient Greece, where the first Ancient Olympic Games date back to 776BC (“The Legacy of...”). Taking place in Olympia, Greece, the Ancient Olympic Games were a place where “40,000 people, athletes, philosophers, politicians, artists, poets, and other pilgrims travelled from all over the Greek world” to participate in the action (“The Legacy of...”). In present-day, the attention sporting events attract remains the same and has likely even increased; high school, college, and professional sports teams alike have the ability to pack stadiums and arenas with fans cheering for their team. Throughout centuries, sports have continually evolved and have even found ways to create and facilitate comradery and rivalries between spectators. For the purpose of this research, sport will be considered in terms of physically-demanding competition that excludes war and battle, specifically. A majority of the sporting in medieval literature is found within scheduled tournaments used as a display for competition and jousts which typically occur between two opposing knights, usually outside of structured competitions like tournaments.

When evaluating the functions and importance of sports, there are a variety of aspects that can be taken into account. This research will sort these aspects into three broader topics: identity, spectatorship, and influence. The first topic, identity, pertains to how athletes and competitors view themselves, portray themselves, and perform. The way athletes portray and view themselves is an important aspect of analyzing sports because of the impact it has on their

social standings and even the income they earn. Spectators use the way competitors and teams portray themselves to decide if investing in their organization is worth the time, money, and emotion. This is where the spectatorship topic rises to importance. Sporting events have been packing stands for centuries, but understanding who is watching and why is important. In an analytical sense, understanding who watches sporting events is important because it gives depth to the purpose and functions of these events. Furthermore, it allows teams and organizations to understand their target audiences. Finally, the influence athletes and sports have in society and on spectators is important, as well. Examining why professional athletes are so influential in society highlights some very interesting aspects of the society in which it exists. This is where this research will spend much time in analysis; while all of these aspects encompass what sport is as a whole, this paper will examine how their functions have evolved over time.

In order to create continuity, the most famous knight of the Round Table, Sir Lancelot, will be used as a basis for analysis and comparison. The research question can be broken down into three smaller, more specific questions. The first is: Who is competing? This part of the research observes the way Sir Lancelot is portrayed in each work. Primarily, examining the way in which he performs as a competitor, how he carries himself, and how these factors reflect social expectations. Previous work has highlighted knighthood in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, including an article by Tatiana Komova in which she observes how at the time of Malory's writing there was "a revival [of] interest [in] chivalry and consequently the reevaluation of ideas it was based on (including the ideals of a good knight, courtly love and tournaments). The new ideal [of] knighthood was loyal to the lord, [and] following strict rules of honorable life ... The collective identity was shaped through models to aspire as the deeds and actions of individual knights were subjected to constant evaluation and reevaluation in chivalric discourse" (54-55).

This research is important to the topic because it provides framework to use as comparison when examining differences in portrayal between Malory's work and its later adaptations, allowing for some elaboration on how athletes must portray themselves in a social setting.

The second part of the research question asks: Who is watching? Spectatorship plays a large role in sport, and especially in Malory's work. Understanding who is watching, why they are watching, and what benefits they receive for doing so in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and its adaptations is important for analysis. Any differences in spectatorship between the works may indicate an evolution in the function of sport over the centuries. This aspect, in particular, will be important to examine in comparison with present-day sport theory, as sport has become much more inclusive. There is not an abundance of research available on spectatorship on Malory's work specifically, but one of the few that is directly related comes from Roberta Davidson in which she observes how "women characters ... whether named or amongst the ubiquitous 'damsels' of the text, are frequently in the position of spectators, and it is as spectators that they analyze the action in a way the knights cannot" (24). Much of the formal, tournament-style spectating in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is done by women, which is important to note as social expectations for women have changed over time, especially in the sport realm. Nevertheless, this research aims to further observe how spectatorship looks from the eyes of competitors themselves as they compete and watch others compete, as well.

Finally, the research question asks: How do any of these factors matter socially? While social importance will have been discussed on some level in the other two sections, this section will be more of an overall view of how sport seems to have evolved, or remained the same, over the course of the centuries based on these works of Medieval literature in comparison to modern day sport theory, drawing out some primary points of emphasis on what has been found to be



most interesting or notable. The results hope to allow for a better understand of how and if societal ideas of the different time periods are reflected in the works' descriptions of sport. The social significance of sport is a fairly popular topic, however, finding research directly related to Malory's work has produced no results. In lieu of drawing on research directly related to *Le Morte d'Arthur*, articles that examine medieval sport as a whole will be used, instead. Thomas S. Henrick writes: "Medieval sport is interesting because it showcases what might be called 'cultural' discrimination. In this pattern, an elite (or some other group with power to enforce its ambitions) attempts to reserve an entire category of activity for its exclusive use. As has been indicated, the prominent members of society had their jousting ..." (31-32). While this quotation only addresses differences in class, gender also holds a prominent role in how sports are approached in each work.

As previously mentioned, an examination of how all these factors surrounding Sir Lancelot are described and presented in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, White's *The Once and Future King*, and Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* will be done, then compared to modern sport theory. By comparing Malory and works written five centuries later, the literary analysis will examine how descriptions and depictions have changed, remained the same, or been omitted, comparing these findings from each work to present-day sport theory, for which Barrie Houlihan and Dominic Malcolm's *Sport and Society* will be used.

## CHAPTER I

### THE INFLUENCE OF SPORT IN *LE MORTE D'ARTHUR*

As mentioned in the introduction, aspects like how the competitors perform, how they carry themselves, and how these factors reflect social expectations will all be taken into account. In order to examine these factors throughout the course of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a focus will be placed on Sir Launcelot du Lake, who is considered to be the best and most noble knight of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. For some background, knights typically engage in battles, though they also take part in tournaments and jousts which are the engagements that this research will consider to be “sport.” Jousts are one-on-one competitions and tournaments are more team-like, scheduled competitions. The first aspect of this project to be examined will be the question of participation: Who is competing?

Sir Launcelot is very well-known for his incredible jousting skills and is one of the most popular names in King Arthur stories. The first side of athleticism in Malory’s work to look at is how competitors perform. Launcelot in Malory’s work is oftentimes depicted as not only winning the jousts he competes in, but completely dominating his opponent. In one instance, Launcelot even wins against seven opponents in one match:

With that came Sir Launcelot du Lake, and he thrust in with his spear in the thickest of the press, and there he smote down with one spear five knights, and of four of them he brake their backs. And in that thronge he smote down the King of Northgalis, and brake his thigh in that fall...”Now befalleth it to me to joust,” said Mordred, “for Sir Mador hath a sore fall.” Sir Launcelot was ware of him, and gat a great spear in his hand, and met him, and Sir Mordred brake a spear upon him, and Sir Launcelot gave him such a

buffet that the arson of his saddle brake, and so he flew over his horse's tail, that his helm butted into the earth a foot and more, that nigh his neck was broken, and there he lay long in a swoon... Then came in Sir Gahalantine with a great spear and Launcelot against him, with all their strength that they might drive, that both their spears to-brast even to their hands, and then they flang out with their swords and gave many a grim stroke. Then was Sir Launcelot wroth out of measure, and then he smote Sir Gahalantine on the helm that his nose brast out on blood, and ears and mouth both, and therewith his head hung low (Malory 184-185).

This example of Sir Launcelot in arms is just one of many, though it vividly portrays just how dominating he is in his competing and in his attitude. Typically, a joust is a one-on-one competition, however, in this passage Sir Launcelot is being assailed by multiple knights at once. Despite being outnumbered, he manages to defeat five knights using only one sword. Furthermore, not only does he easily win an unlikely match-up, but he continues on to joust Mordred. Launcelot strikes Mordred down, as well, before taking on Sir Gahalantine. The blow that Launcelot delivers to Gahalantine's head causes blood to burst from his nose, ears, and mouth. While these descriptions successfully highlight the major success that Launcelot has in battle, it also brings to light the legitimate gruesomeness of jousts and the necessary technical skills required to win. Wins like this can sometimes seem to be like salt in a wound; such abrasive and detrimental outcomes are not exactly necessary to win a jousting match. This raises the question of sportsmanship and chivalry, asking whether wins as dominating as these are considered to be unnecessary and disrespectful to opponents. The posed question may make the situation seem as if the end results are, in fact, uncalled for; however, jousts are oftentimes life-or-death situations which must be fought to the fullest extent in order to survive. Additionally,

one's performance in such a match is important for social standing. This type of performance highlights the influence a high skill level can have on one's position, not only within a competitions, but also among peers and those in one's social sphere.

Throughout the course of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, there becomes a clear image and emphasis on chivalry, and leads this analysis to the second side of athleticism, which is understanding the way competitors carry themselves. Understanding the attitudes of athletes can be difficult, and Launcelot definitely holds himself to the high standard of chivalry which his society has placed on him. In one scene, Launcelot is seen riding into the woods with a maiden who claims that there is a knight who robs and even rapes women on occasion. Visibly upset, Launcelot is aggravated at the way this knight carries himself: "'What,' said Sir Launcelot, 'is he a thief and a knight and a ravisher of women? He doth shame unto the order of knighthood, and contrary unto his oath; it is pity that he liveth'" (Malory 190). This line makes it evident that Launcelot sincerely values what knights are expected to be. His love for righteousness and chivalry is further highlighted when he defeats the opposing knight over his failure to uphold knightly values and failure to respect women:

With that came Launcelot as fast as he might till he came to that knight, saying, "O thou false knight and traitor unto knighthood, who did learn thee to distress ladies and gentlewomen?" When the knight saw Sir Launcelot thus rebuking him he answered not, but drew his sword and rode unto Sir Launcelot, and Sir Launcelot threw his spear from him, and drew out his sword, and struck him such a buffet on the helmet that he clave his head and neck unto the throat. "Now hast thou thy payment that long thou hast deserved!" (Malory 191).

In this example of Sir Launcelot and the maiden, the maiden is so taken with Sir Launcelot's performance and intentions that she praises him saying, "almighty Jesu preserve you wheresomever ye ride or go, for the curteist knight thou art, and meekest unto all ladies and gentlewomen, that now liveth" (Malory 191). By defeating this knight and protecting not only this maiden, but others who will come to pass through, Sir Launcelot proves himself a noble knight and one who ought to be admired by others. The example that he sets here is one that all knights should strive to be like. The importance of personality is evident here as Lancelot will be viewed more highly by others due to his brave actions. However, since this deed was done only in the company of the maiden and the other knight, the only way for others to hear of his great deed is through word of mouth, which is where spectatorship begins to come into the picture.

Spectatorship is the second aspect of sporting that will be analyzed within this work. When deciding who is considered spectators, something that must be taken into account is that in situations like jousts, there is not always a large crowd or audience watching the competitors every move. Oftentimes, the only ones present are the competitors and possibly a bystander or two. More often than not, Sir Launcelot harnesses a primarily female audience composed of women who would love to be his own. The same maiden from the joust in the woods ponders his popularity amongst the women:

"But one thing, sir knight, methinketh ye lack, ye that are a knight wifeless, that he will not love some maiden or gentlewoman, for I could never hear say that ever ye loved any of no manner degree, and that is great pity; but it is noised that ye love Queen Guenever, and that she hath ordained by enchantment that ye shall never love none other but her, nor none other damosel nor lady shall rejoice you; wherefore many in this land, of high estate and low, make great sorrow" (Malory 191).

This comment made by the maiden highlights a few different things. First, she essentially considers why such a skilled, noble, and chivalrous knight like Sir Launcelot would ever be single. While this seems somewhat unrelated to the importance of spectatorship, it actually plays a large part of sporting, as a whole. Should Sir Launcelot ever fail to meet all the standards of being the best knight, he would be considered less desirable, and in turn, would lose a large portion of his fan base. In order to remain popular amongst the women, he must constantly uphold his image of the perfect knight. Secondly, she addresses that his heart is with King Arthur's wife, Queen Guenever. Sir Launcelot and Guenever's love raises a number of concerns for Sir Launcelot. While this forbidden love threatens his own reputation, it also manages to keep him available, in a way. Should he ever settle down with a woman, he would no longer be in such high-demand among women spectators, consequently moving him down the social ladder.

Though women are the most interesting and dynamic spectators due to the many considerations they bring about, such as chivalry, popularity, availability, and love, there are a number of reasons why male spectators are just as interesting. The first of which, begins with fellow knights who desire to be as exceptional as Sir Launcelot. Sir Tristram is a great example of this, as he converses with Sir Galahad over fellowship with Sir Launcelot:

“And, Sir Tristram,” said Sir Galahad, “the haut prince, well be ye found in these marches, and so ye will promise me to go unto Sir Launcelot du Lake, and accompany with him, ye shall go where ye will, and your fair lady with you; and I shall promise you never in all my days shall such customs be used in this castle as have been used.” “Sir,” said Sir Tristram, “now I let you wit, so God me help, I weened ye had been Sir Launcelot du Lake when I saw you first, and therefore I dread you the more; and sir, I promise you,” said Sir Tristram, “as soon as I may I will see Sir Launcelot and in

fellowship me with him; for of all the knights of the world I most desire his fellowship”  
(Malory 324).

These men, though already knights themselves, still desire to be with and be like Sir Launcelot. Like chivalry is important to the ladies of their society, this is where maintaining success becomes important in regard to spectatorship. Sir Launcelot wins nearly every tournament he competes in, further solidifying his position in their society as the best knight. By performing well, his knightly and royal peers who spectate the events, especially during tournaments, are much more inclined to keep Sir Launcelot’s status high in the ranks. This puts pressure on Sir Launcelot to not only maintain his image as a lady’s man, but also as a fierce competitor; there is no opportunity for him to fall short as social mobility allows for members of society to move both up and down the societal ladder. Spectatorship, in its most simple sense, is something that a competitor must be constantly aware of. Competing naturally requires personal drive, though it also entails a large amount of external pressure in order to maintain one’s social status. This is the point where spectatorship and sports’ influence in society cross paths.

The third aspect of sport that will be examined here is the influence sports have on one’s position in society. In Malory’s work, sport influences a competitor’s popularity among the women, allowing him to be desired and talked about, keeping him higher in social status. Also, his success in competitions allows him to serve as a role model, a competitor to be admired and an example of something to strive for. Finally, the last way sport influences social standing that will be discussed is the legitimate assignment of one to a social position. In this case, as a Knight of the Round Table. At one point before Sir Launcelot really comes onto the scene, King Arthur discusses with King Pellinore how to go about filling empty positions at the Round Table:

And when he was come to Camelot he called King Pellinore unto him, and said, “Ye understand well that we have lost eight knights of the best of the Table Round, and by your advice we will choose eight again of the best we may find in this court.” “Sir,” said Pellinore, “I shall counsel you after my conceit the best: there are in your court full noble knights both of old and young; and therefore by mine advice ye shall choose half of the old and half of the young.” ... “Sir,” said Pellinore, “the first is Sir Gawaine, your nephew, that is as good a knight of his time as any is in this land; and the second as meseemeth best is Sir Griflet le Fise de Dieu, that is a good knight and full desirous in arms, and who may see him live he shall prove a good knight; and the third as meseemeth is well to be one of the knights of the Round Table, Sir Kay the Seneschal, for many times he hath done full worshipfully, and now at your last battle he did full honourably for to undertake to slay two kings.” “By my head,” said Arthur, “he is best worth to be a knight of the Round Table of any that ye have rehearsed, an he had done no more prowess in his life days” (Malory 107-108).

Here the requirements for becoming a Knight of the Round Table are brought to light; the men decide the new members ought to be half old, veterans, and half young, like rising stars.

Additionally, a knight selected to the Round Table must be a good knight, implying he must fulfill social expectations like chivalry, and must excel in battle. For these reasons, it is evident why Sir Launcelot is one of the most ideal knights to be a member of the Round Table.

Furthermore, he is often considered to be the best knight:

Now turn we unto Sir Tristram, that asked the knight his host if he saw late any knights adventurous. “Sir,” he said, “the last night here lodged with me Ector de Maris and a damosel with him, and that damosel told me that he was one of the best knights of the



world.” “That is not so,” said Sir Tristram, “for I know four better knights of his own blood, and the first is Sir Launcelot du Lake, call him the best knight, and Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Bleoberis, Sir Blamore de Ganis, and Sir Gaheris.” “Nay,” said his host, “Sir Gawaine is a better knight than he.” “That is not so,” said Sir Tristram, “for I have met with them both, and I felt Sir Gaheris for the better knight, and Sir Lamorak I call him as good as any of them except Sir Launcelot.” (Malory 363).

The pressure of being the “best knight” is not lost on Sir Launcelot. He is well aware that his reputation is constantly on the line. In a conversation with the maiden in the woods, Sir Launcelot begins to open up to the maiden about how his duty as a knight and competitor would be put in jeopardy should he ever take a lover: “I may not warn people to speak of me what it pleaseth them; but for to be a wedded man, I think it not; for then I must couch with her, and leave arms and tournaments, battles, and adventures” (Malory 191). Despite the glitz and glamor of the life as a knight, Sir Launcelot gives sight into the reality of one’s responsibilities. Though he is a member of high society, serving as both a member of the Knights of the Round Table and King Arthur’s favorite knight, he must constantly monitor his actions. Furthermore, he is constantly deprived of living a life with a lover, despite his numerous suitors, which is constantly inflamed by his forbidden relationship with King Arthur’s wife. Nevertheless, this is a sacrifice that he must make in order to maintain his social position after having climbed the social ladder to get to where he is in their society. Unfortunately, the two lovers are discovered together, resulting in the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom and the removal of Launcelot from a high position in society.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INFLUENCE OF SPORT IN *THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING*

This section of the research will continue to focus on Sir Lancelot, Arthurian Literature's all-star athlete, as he is portrayed within T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. White's work is an interesting adaptation of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* as it is written for an audience following World War II, giving a new outlook to the concepts of battle and war. Throughout the book, White uses Merlyn to develop a King Arthur who fights in war solely to prevent any other fighting. With this viewpoint of battle and war, examining its reflection through Lancelot's character becomes even more critical to an understanding of sport and its relation to societal ideas. The analysis in this chapter will focus primarily on the third book, *The Ill-Made Knight*, which pertains exclusively to story of Lancelot's character.

The first aspect of that will be explored here is participation, again examining the athlete as a whole. White's portrayal of Sir Lancelot is very interesting, as he is given an in-depth backstory. This backstory showcases just how hard Lancelot had to work in order to become such a great knight, emphasizing how his greatness was something that had to be gained, not something that was naturally given. Lancelot's training proves to be what truly sets him apart from all other knights. His one love is King Arthur, for whom he tirelessly worked to perfect himself in all areas of knighthood. Sir Lancelot's training rituals are definitely excessive, though they do not seem to bother him:

Three years may seem a long time for a boy to spend in one room, if he only goes out of it to eat and sleep and to practise tilting in the field. It is even difficult to imagine a boy who would do it, unless you realize from the start that Lancelot was not romantic and

debonair. Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites would have found it difficult to recognize this rather sullen and unsatisfactory child, with the ugly face, who did not disclose to anybody that he was living on dreams and prayers... The other boys did not worry, for they had other things to think about—but for the ugly one ... [he] had to perfect himself for Arthur as somebody who was good at games, and he had to think about the theories of chivalry even when he was in bed at night. He had to teach himself to possess a sound opinion on hundreds of disputed points —on the proper length of weapons, or the cut of a mantling, or the articulation of a pauldron, or whether cedarwood was better than ash for spears (White 248-249).

White paints a vivid picture of Lancelot's young life under the training of his uncle. Due to his intense work, Lancelot is significantly different from other boys his own age as he does not really socialize, is isolated within his own mind, and is, surprisingly, considered to be ugly. This description of Lancelot's physical appearance is different from his typical portrayal as a stunningly handsome knight in shining armor, literally. This small physical differentiation made by White actually contributes significantly to Lancelot's character. People are often quick to praise or respect someone who is aesthetically pleasing, making Lancelot's dreams of "[being] the best knight in the world ... [and] through his purity and excellence ... perform[ing] some ordinary miracle" more difficult (White 250). By creating this image of Lancelot, White emphasizes the work ethic and dedication required to become the best competitor. This training and position is what allowed Lancelot to ride in the ranks. In the time Lancelot spent training relentlessly, his peers were not concerned with knightly things and even thought of him as an outcast.

As a result of his tireless efforts, Lancelot does become the best knight, though he does not appear to be full of himself and of his achievement. Sir Lancelot's deep love for what is considered to be "right" drives him and keeps him humble (White 262). Many of the knights in White's story come to ruin as a result of their toxic pride, something Lancelot works hard to avoid. He does, however, take pride in holding himself to a very high standard for the sake of maintaining dreams he has worked so hard to achieve. One description gives sight into Lancelot's mind, claiming: "A man who was not afflicted by ambitions of decency in his mind might simply have run away with his hero's wife ... [he spent] half his life torturing himself by trying to discover what was right so as to conquer his inclination towards what was wrong" (White 262). A large emphasis within White's work is placed on Lancelot's dedication to God, something that shapes his entire life. As previously mentioned, Lancelot dreams to work miracles and in order to do so, he believes his soul must be pure. His strong morals influence many of his decisions within the story, really emphasizing the dedication to chivalry and doing what is "right." Even in difficult situations, Sir Lancelot helps those in need because of his sense of duty. This kind of personality and self-portrayal was well-known to the public, and likely contributed to his popularity within their society. On one occasion, he is even lured into an entrapping situation created by a woman and her husband in an attempt to kill Lancelot:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried the lady. "I was only trying to call her in cranes and the string broke! My husband will kill me if I do not catch her again. He is so hasty and such a keen Falconer ... Don't you think you could climb up the tree and catch the hawk instead?"

Lancelot looked at the gentlewoman and at the tree. Then he heaved a deep sigh and remarked ... "Well, fair lady, since that ye know my name, and require me of my

knighthood to help you, I will do what I may to get your hawk; and yet truly I am an ill climber, and the tree is passing high, and few boughs to help me withal” (White 275).

Yet, despite his fears, Lancelot does what he can to help the woman in need. He acknowledges the way the woman knows his identity, and accepts her seemingly respectful and desperate inquiry because it is his duty to help her. Lancelot encounters a number of situations in which he must help someone, despite apparent danger. While this is a fairly ideal image of a knight, Lancelot’s humble attitude makes all the difference in becoming the best knight and earning his high position in this society.

The next aspect of sport that will be examined within this work is spectatorship. In White’s work, there is not a large emphasis tournaments. In fact, White multiple times addresses the tournaments only to comment that “there is no need to give a long description of the tourney... [because] Malory gives it” (270). Because of this, spectatorship plays a larger role in terms of peers and opponents, rather than the townspeople who venture out to watch the tournament. White does emphasize, though, the way Lancelot is constantly in the public eye following his youth, even during training:

Sir Lancelot's innings frequently lasted all day, if he were battling against a good knight—and the movements had a feeling of slow-motion, because of the weight of armour. When the sword-play had begun, the combatants stood opposite each other in the green acre like batsman and bowler...and perhaps Sir Gawaine would start with an in-swing, which Sir Lancelot would put away to leg with a beautiful leg-glide, and then Lancelot would reply with a yorker under Gawaine's guard—it was called “foining”—and all the people round the field would clap. King Arthur might turn to Guenever in the Pavilion, and remark that the great man's footwork was as lovely as ever (247).

Here, Sir Lancelot is praised for being a clearly superior competitor, training in a way that elicits an ovation from onlookers and the king, himself, who Lancelot so desperately wished to impress. To be this kind of spectacle is naturally very demanding, requiring one to be constantly aware of his actions. This training scene also highlights the serious work ethic that Lancelot possesses. He trains as hard as he would fight, something that is well-noted by all who witness him, and especially Arthur. The spectatorship here is important as it showcases the way public performance influences one's overall social status, which will be discussed further in a later section.

Another angle that must be explored within this spectatorship aspect is the viewpoint of Lancelot's competitors. Readers meet various other knights through the jousts Lancelot has, creating a number of opportunities to examine how spectators of his own profession view him. For instance, in an encounter with Sir Turquine, Turquine questions Sir Lancelot asking, "Who are you? ... You are the finest knight I ever fought with. I never saw a man with such good wind ... I have killed or maimed hundreds of others, but none were as good as you. If you will have peace, and be my friend, I will loose my prisoners" (White 273). This type of astonishment over Lancelot's skill is not uncommon. Most of his challengers tend to be so impressed and outmatched by his skill that they surrender, otherwise they are slaughtered. In this case, Sir Turquine inquires about Lancelot's identity, wishing to befriend him on one condition: "I will do this for you, if you are anybody except one person. If you are he, I must fight you to the death...If you are Lancelot, I must never yield or make friends. He killed my brother Carados" (White 273). After the discovery of Lancelot's identity, Sir Turquine quickly loses the match and dies. This entire encounter exposes a few interesting features of peer spectatorship. Sir Turquine's initial response to Lancelot's skill is to befriend him, and not to continue the fight.

Though Turquine does not explicitly ask for mercy, he does ask for the joust to be suspended as he knows he is outmatched by Lancelot. This response is important to note as Sir Turquine does not necessarily make himself out to be less skilled than Lancelot, he simply praises Lancelot for his incredible skill. The competitor tactic highlights the way pride drives many competitors, as suspending the joust does not determine either knight as superior, leaving their actual standings undetermined. Despite his initial approach, so not to affect his personal social standings within the society and amongst other knights, Turquine is eventually overcome with the same pride and is killed by Lancelot as a result. Lancelot only further proves his skill and maintains his position in society while even though Sir Turquine views Lancelot as being superior, he loses his own position in society as he loses his life in the unnecessary joust.

The last part of sport to be analyzed is how a competitor's social standing can be influenced by sports. To analyze this, the event in which Lancelot and Guenever are caught together in Guenever's chamber will be examined to observe how status and skill may play a part in such a large-scale scandal. On the evening which Lancelot and Guenever were caught together in her chamber, over a dozen men came to ambush Sir Lancelot and take him to King Arthur as a traitor. Guenever observes how vulnerable and unarmed, "[Lancelot] stood, facing the door with a puzzled, business-like expression, biting his fingers" (White 436). She even comments: "'They are armed and many. You will be killed, and I shall be burned, and our love has come to a bitter end'" (White 436). Despite the seemingly obvious defeat the two were to face, Lancelot's quick thinking and training assist him in obtaining armor from an unsuspecting knight:

[Lancelot] put his shoulder against the leaping door and softly pushed the beam back, into the wall. Then, still holding the door shut with his shoulder ... he settled his right foot firmly on the ground, about two feet from the door jamb, and let the door swing

open. It stopped with a jerk at his foot, leaving a narrow opening so that it was more ajar than open, and a single knight in full armour blundered through the gap with the obedience of a puppet on strings. Lancelot slammed the door behind him, shot the bar, took the figure's sword by the pommel in his padded left hand, jerked him forward, tripped him up, bashed him on the head with the stool as he was falling, and was sitting on his chest in a trice—as limber as he had ever been. All was done with what seemed to be ease and leisure, as if it were the armed man who was powerless (White 438).

While the rest of the evening goes fairly undescribed, Mordred later reveals that once Lancelot obtained the armor, he slaughtered the other twelve knights except Mordred. Lancelot's position in society makes him a prime target for a large scandal and nothing would have pleased these knights in competition for his position more than finally seeing Lancelot finally brought down for his wrongdoing. However, Lancelot's incredible skill once again saves his life and allows him to escape the situation back to his own castle. Upon his escape, Guenevere is left to face Arthur and the laws regarding adultery, ending in the decision to burn her at the stake.

The scenes in which Guenevere is about to be burned at the stake perfectly highlight the various attitudes toward Lancelot and the way his performance and skills influence his social position and standing within Arthur's kingdom. More specifically, King Arthur's reaction highlights the way Lancelot's position within their society has influenced the way even people at the top of the social ladder regard him:

The King was breaking down. "Why doesn't [Lancelot] come at once, then? Why does he wait so long? ... I tried to warn them a few days before they were caught. But it was difficult to say the things in plain English, without hurting people's feelings. And I was a fool, too. I didn't want to be conscious of it. I hoped that if only I was not quite conscious



of everything, it would come straight in the end. Do you think it was my fault? Do you think I could have saved them, if I had done something else?” “Ye did the best ye could.” ... “How horrible it is to wait like this! ... And it is not her fault. Is it mine? Ought I to have refused to accept Mordred's evidence and over-ridden the whole affair? Ought I to have acquitted her? I could have set my new law aside. Ought I to have done that? ... I could have acted as I wished. ... What would have happened to justice then? What would have been the consequence?” (White 612).

In this scene, even as his wife is about to be burned at the stake Arthur is taking the blame for the situation when Lancelot is undoubtedly at fault for causing the affair. Lancelot does eventually save the day, but the turmoil Arthur endures on behalf of Lancelot's wrongdoings should be enough to not only ban Lancelot from Camelot but destroy their relationship, as well. Arthur's position here is interesting because of his strong belief in justice and what is right; while he maintains this position in terms of the law, emotionally and personally he abandons these values for Lancelot. This stands out in terms of Lancelot's social standing because had he not been such an outstanding athlete and possessed such a strong desire for what is right, despite this unfortunate situation, he never would have found his way into his membership within Camelot's high society. As a result, even the king regards Lancelot so highly that he cannot find Lancelot guilty of the offenses Lancelot is legitimately responsible for.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INFLUENCE OF SPORT IN *THE MISTS OF AVALON*

Written in 1983, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* provides a very different outlook for readers in comparison to White's work and the original Malory work. This adaptation is unique in its feminist perspective as it is told from the view of the women of Avalon, even including a narration from Morgaine, more commonly known as Morgan le Fay. This interesting view and character focus allows for an even more interesting portrayal of the medieval all-star, Sir Lancelot.

In terms of examining athletes as a competitor, much focus is placed on Lancelot's personality, rather than his actual athletic skill. This skill, however, does not go entirely unmentioned as Balan, Lancelot's brother, boasts:

“Lancelot has said he will set all things in order in Arthur's kingdom, and so he is always out and about the lands, he has killed more marauding brigands and raiding bands than any other of Arthur's Companions. They say of him that he is an entire legion in himself, Lady-” and Balan raised his head and looked ruefully at Viviane. “Your younger son, Mother, is a great knight, such a knight as that old Alexander of the legends. There are those who say, even, that he is a better knight than Arthur's self. I have brought no such glory on you, my lady” (Bradley 473).

As Balan explains, Lancelot's skill is essentially unmatched as his dominating performances equate to the fighting of multiple knights. These accounts of his battles only emphasize his superiority and lack of weakness in terms of skill. However, Bradley portrays Lancelot with a

number of underlying weaknesses that may not be noticeable to his peers. These weaknesses, though, are not ones physical in nature that may impede his ability to compete.

To examine Lancelot as a competitor outside of skill alone, observing the way he carries himself is very telling about his personality and highlights the weaknesses that Bradley has attributed to his character. Typically, knights are expected to be strong, brave men in character, as well as in battle. Lancelot, however, does not appear to meet these requirements. He is, in fact, quite fearful of his own mother and the power that she possesses. Upon his arrival into Avalon, he finds himself in the midst of a quarrel with his mother, Viviane, arguing in a way teenagers might with their own parent:

“The Merlin came to be as he is through years when he learned to know the real from the unreal,” said Viviane, “and so must you. There are warriors enough in the world, my son. Yours is the task to see farther than any, and perhaps to bid the warriors come and go.” He shook his head. “No! Lady, say no more, that path is not mine.” “You are still not grown to know what you want,” Viviane said flatly. ... “No, my mother, I beg you to give me your blessing and send me forth from Avalon, for to tell the truth, Lady, I will go with your blessing or without it. I have lived in a world where men do not wait for a woman's bidding to go and come.” ... The priestess rose from her seat, a small woman but given height and majesty by her fury. “You defy the Lady of Avalon, Galahad of the Lake?” ... He said quietly, “Had you bidden me this when I still starved for your love and approval, madam, no doubt I would have done even as you commanded. But I am not a child, my lady and mother, and the sooner we acknowledge that, then the sooner we shall be in harmony and cease from quarrelling. The life of a Druid is not for me.” “So ... you are a man and there is no compelling you. Although I wish you would speak of this to the

Merlin.” [Morgaine] thought, He thinks she has given way; he does not know her well enough to know that she is angrier than ever. Lancelot was young enough to let the relief show in his voice (Bradley 204-205)

This conversation as observed by Morgaine highlights a few different aspects of Lancelot's personality. First, although he is clearly considered to be very young, he believes himself to no longer be “a child” (Bradley 204). While readers may be accustomed to a fairly arrogant, but equally skilled and strong Lancelot character, Bradley's Lancelot has a slightly different arrogance in his personality. Here, Lancelot is already showing signs of weakness due to his age and lack of maturity. While his mother does legitimately have great power, making his fear of her slightly more reasonable, he continues to live in great terror of her similar to the way children and teenagers might fear an angry parent. Even in this example, Lancelot thinks he is being brave by arguing with his mother and insisting that he does not need her permission to do as he wishes, though ultimately she has won the argument by allowing him to think this. This example highlights that while Lancelot usually dominates in a competition, he is outmatched here due to his immaturity. He even furthers her victory over him as his face reveals that he has let his guard down. Although his skills in battle might be dominating, his age creates a large weakness that has potential to impede the way he moves his way up the social ladder in Camelot.

Furthermore, Lancelot finds weakness not only in his age and false sense of maturity, but he also fails to be as chivalrous as one would expect the ultimate knight to be. This is particularly evident through his relationship with Morgaine. When the two have their first romantic encounter, they share sweet words like: “It is as if we were the only people alive in all the world today, outside time and space and all cares and troubles, or thoughts of war or battle or kingdoms or strife.’ She said, her voice shaking as the thought struck her that this golden time must end, ‘I

wish this day could last forever!'” (Bradley 217). However, just a little while later, they find and rescue Gwenhwyfar, prompting Lancelot to essentially forget about his time with Morgaine, as the narrator notes: “Morgaine, her heart sinking, saw that he now looked upon the stranger as he had looked on her only minutes before, with love, desire, almost worship” (Bradley 220-221). While Lancelot’s care for Gwenhwyfar may appear commendable, his actions toward Morgaine suggest that he is of questionable character. Shortly after, Gwenhwyfar is betrothed to Arthur, leaving Lancelot upset and desperate to free his mind of the situation. Again, he engages in relations with Morgaine, and though she reciprocates the advance, she reflects on the situation: “Desperation, she thought bitterly; it is not me he wants, it is a moment of forgetfulness of Arthur and Gwenhwyfar in one another's arms this night” (Bradley 406). These events chronicle yet another weakness for Lancelot as he appears to be a user, taking advantage of Morgaine for his own personal gain and consolation. Chivalrous knights ought to care for and protect women from potential abusers, though in his relationship with Morgaine, Lancelot actually becomes somewhat of a predator. This selfishness, though, ultimately will not go without consequence.

The second aspect of sporting to be examined is the concept of spectatorship. Within this work, spectatorship is primarily done through the eyes of Morgaine, who happens to experience Lancelot and his character in ways that the general public might not. Due to her attraction to him, Morgaine takes note of both Lancelot’s appearance and actions. Morgaine’s spectatorship is extremely important to this analysis because it encompasses this insider-like view of the star athlete. As mentioned in the previous section, the two share a small number of intimate encounters that uncover a side of Lancelot fairly unknown or unacknowledged by the public. Morgaine makes Lancelot out to be someone who uses her, even describing one encounter saying, “his kisses were almost savage, driving into her mouth in a rage” (Bradley 407). She

understands that his motivation in this situation is purely desperation due to Gwenhwyfar's new relationship with Arthur. Not only does Morgaine identify the way Lancelet uses her for personal gain, but she also recalls the fact that he left her legitimately exposed, in the heat of the moment, for Gwenhwyfar at his first sight of her. Additionally, Lancelet confides in Morgaine about his mother, at one point following their argument mentioned in the previous section, he considers:

"Perhaps if I bring my mother a present of some waterfowl she will be less angry with me. I would like to make my peace with her," he said, almost laughing. "When she is angry she is still frightening-when I was little, I used to believe that when I was not with her she took off her mortality and was the Goddess indeed. But I should not speak like that about her ... She is great and terrible and beautiful" (Bradley 206-207).

This vulnerability exposes his fear as a weakness and gives insight into his inner thoughts.

Ultimately, Lancelet is not the knight he appears to be on the outside; his is still very much a scared, immature youth. These experiences from Morgaine give insight into Lancelet's private life, something fairly hidden from the public eye for most of his time at the top of the social standings.

Spectatorship must also encompass the public's perception of Lancelet, in order to best understand how he is regarded or received by members of society. He is highly regarded within society for his skills, as Balan mentions in the quotation from the previous section, claiming:

"They say of him that he is an entire legion in himself ... a great knight, such a knight as that old Alexander of the legends. There are those who say, even, that he is a better knight than Arthur's self" (Bradley 473). This high regard for Lancelet speaks volumes about their society's view of Lancelet, as the "they" pronoun emphasizes. However, while he is praised for his athletic

success, his personality and actions are eventually noted by those around him. At one point, his own best friend, King Arthur, argues that Lancelot should not teach the younger boys, saying:

“Lancelot? He's our best rider, though too much of a daredevil for my taste. The lads all adore him, of course-look, there's your little Gareth, Aunt, tagging after him like a puppy-they'll do anything for a kind word from him. But he's not as good at teaching the boys their business as Gawaine; he's too flamboyant and he likes to show off” (Bradley 410).

The particular comment is one that exposes a stark contrast between Bradley's work and those of Malory and White. While Arthur is aware of Lancelot's faults in all three works, particularly those regarding his own wife, he is typically not so critical of his own best knight. Here, Arthur further emphasizes the fact that Lancelot lacks the expected maturity of a perfect knight. He fails to boast the strong, chivalrous character that should be expected of knights and is criticized here for his seemingly typical proud bragging. Lancelot even seeks praise from the younger boys, suggesting that he may feel the need to gain approval from them. This is important because in doing so, not only does he make himself subject to the observation and spectatorship of the public, in general, but appears to even place himself on a similar level as the younger boys. Lancelot chooses to put on a show for spectators that do not have much influence within their society, and seemingly fails to value the opinion of the general public, as a whole but doing so.

These different viewpoints of spectatorship uncover something consistent about Lancelot's character: his immaturity. Morgaine's viewpoint suggests that he is a selfish user, unconcerned about people who he does not value specifically. Furthermore, though the general public of “they” recognize that he is an extremely skilled knight on the battlefield and in tournaments, Arthur's comment portrays him as a skilled but arrogant athlete who appears to

sometimes seek approval from the wrong people. Lancelot may manage his public image well, but the reality of his character is bound to impact his position eventually.

The last aspect of sports to analyze within this work is the social implications that accompany being an athlete. In order to analyze this, the section in which Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar are caught in treason will be examined to observe how one's athlete status may influence his punishment or social standing. In this scene, Gwenhwyfar is waiting for Lancelot in her bedroom when Gwydion, Morgaine and Arthur's son, makes himself known to her along with a number of Arthur's men. Even Gareth, who loves Lancelot dearly is present as Gwenhwyfar asks:

“Gareth! What do you here?” she asked, sorrowfully. “I thought you Lancelot's dearest friend.” “And so I am,” he said grimly. “I came to see no worse done to him than justice. That one” -he flicked a contemptuous gesture at Gwydion- “would cut his throat-and leave you to be accused of murder” (Bradley 1168).

Both Gwenhwyfar's question and Gareth's response highlight important perceptions of Lancelot. Gwenhwyfar questions Gareth seeking justice when she and Lancelot are very much in the wrong, as if Gareth ought to help the two caught in treason. Due to their status, Gwenhwyfar appears to think that their friends should assist them in their predicament, rather than aid in the prosecution of something as unjust as treason. In response, Gareth highlights the fact that Gwydion has such a deep hatred for the two that he would have killed Lancelot and left Gwenhwyfar to be punished for murder. There is a stark contrast between Gwenhwyfar's perception and Gareth's understanding of the situation. Ultimately, Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar escape at the mercy of Lancelot's athleticism and combat skill. Morgause even comments that



“Now ... Lancelot had overreached himself, and everywhere in the land every man's hand would be against him” (Bradley 1173).

Ultimately, this event marked the end of Lancelot and Gwenhwyfar’s time in Camelot, as well as the love they shared as Gwenhwyfar spent the rest of her life in a convent. With Lancelot absent from Camelot, Gwydion rose to power as Morgaine recalls:

After Lancelot fled with Gwenhwyfar, there was enmity among the old Companions, blood feud declared between Lancelot and Gawaine. Later, when Gawaine lay dying, that great-hearted man begged Arthur, with his last breath, to make his peace with Lancelot and summon him to Camelot once more. But it was too late; not even Lancelot could rally Arthur's legion again, not when so many followed Gwydion, who now led half of Arthur's own men and most of the Saxons and even a few of the renegade Northmen against him (Bradley 1183).

This all marks the end of King Arthur’s era, and the downfall of Sir Lancelot. While Lancelot’s status failed to save his life, his skills did prolong it. Nevertheless, he lost his hold over his companions, his athleticism with age, and the kingdom he dearly loved. In this work, the downfall of Lancelot appears to highlight that status and skill are very much temporary if not properly maintained and how the aftermath of such a legacy can be quite brutal.

## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AS COMPARED TO MODERN SPORT THEORY

Over the course of this evaluation of the social influence of sports throughout these pieces of medieval literature of different time periods, a few common themes seemed to appear across the three works. Three of these themes will be discussed in this section: skill and sport as means of climbing the social ladder, women's role in sports as spectators, and the impact social capital has on the success of a great athlete. In order to analyze these concepts in comparison to modern sport theory, Barrie Houlihan and Dominic Malcolm's textbook *Sport and Society* will be used as the framework for these comparisons. These themes are highlighted throughout the analysis of the three works by Malory, White, and Bradley, sometimes emphasizing the same ideas, and sometimes showcasing different ideas, suggesting that there has been a change or evolution within that specific idea or theme. These findings will be compared to modern sport theory by book, with each section beginning with the most interesting comparison.

The first theme that will be analyzed here is the idea of skill and sport being a way for people or athletes to move up the social ladder. With regard to social mobility, Houlihan and Malcolm in *Sport and Society* explain:

Sport provides an opportunity for those who can combine ability and effort to move up the social scale and acquire wealth or prestige ... Social status ... is thought to be based upon an individual's achievements, and sport - where the measurement of achievement is relatively objective and transparent - is thought to be a particularly 'open' route for social mobility (19).

This concept is apparent in each work, but particularly so in *The Once and Future King*. In White's work, Lancelot is given a very moving backstory which entails his rigorous training in pursuit of becoming the greatest knight due to his love for Arthur. This climb stems from Arthur offering a place in his court to young Lancelot, who in turn trains in such a way that he becomes one of, if not the most skilled knight. Lancelot ultimately accidentally proves his worth to Arthur when they unknowingly engage in a jousting contest that Lancelot wins, giving Lancelot the connection and opportunity that he needed to claim a high place within their society.

In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Launcelot's past is a bit cloudier. While readers know his origin and the way he was raised by Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, Launcelot is unaware of who his biological parents really are. This unknowingness creates a situation for Launcelot in which he must find his place in King Arthur's society, absent the influence of a true family. In Malory's work, Launcelot is known for being the best knight and uses his skill to impress Arthur. Using his skill, connections, and charm, Sir Launcelot exemplified this idea of sports being a means for social mobility as he rose through the ranks and became Arthur's closest friend and best knight.

*The Mists of Avalon* is the most unique portrayal of social mobility as Lancelet's origin is well known in Bradley's adaptation. Bradley creates a Lancelet who is not only aware of who his mother is, but does not even wish to be a part of her life. Viviane is the Lady of Avalon, the equivalent of Avalon's queen. This portrayal of Lancelet is interesting as he is already born into a high social position but decides to reject this life. As a result, Lancelet must rely on his skills and close relationship with Arthur to climb the social ladder and maintain such a position within Camelot. This rejection of his true identity further emphasizes this concept that sports allows for

more social mobility as athletes do not always have to remain in the confined life or social status they are born into.

In this instance, all three works reflect the way this concept of sports as a means of social mobility is still relevant and accepted in modern sport theory. This finding gives insight into how sports have significantly impacted societies for hundreds of years and how many opportunities are created through its existence. It may be argued, though, that these opportunities within sport are not necessarily inclusive in terms of who reaps the benefits. This argument leads into the next common theme within these works: women's role as spectators.

The second theme that will be examined is women's role as spectators of sports. The evolution of women's positions and roles within sports is examined by Houlihan and Malcolm, commenting:

Whilst women have made significant strides in sports participation and at times use it to contest and challenge negative gender stereotypes, aspects of sport continue to naturalise gender difference, and thus legitimise gender relations that privilege men over women. As we have illustrated, historically sport has been a long tradition of men shaping and constraining women's participation. ... Women's under-representation in sport has a long history and is closely associated with traditional views of gender relations. Historically women have faced formal and informal restrictions on their sports participation, and have played little role in the production of sport (Houlihan 150-151).

Even in their own comparison to the way women have become increasingly more integrated into the sports world, especially in the United States as a result of Title IX, an amendment that bans sexual discrimination in any publicly-funded institution, and gender equality movements, Houlihan and Malcolm recognize that in many parts of the world, women have still not made

their way into the sporting arena in the same way men have. These insights are interesting, as Americans are very used to the required equality in teams and funding created from Title IX, female professional sports teams, female coaches, and females in other leadership positions within sport. There is an important distinction as Bradley is an American author, unlike Malory and White who are English writers. Though women are merely spectators in all three works, the evolution of their portrayal over the course of time and in comparison between the countries will provide for interesting analysis.

Naturally, the work with most interesting portrayal of women as spectators of sport is Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, which is also the most modern work examined in this research. The female perspectives provided in Bradley's work shed light on the way women may have viewed sport at that point in time. Written not even twenty years after Title IX was enacted in America, *The Mists of Avalon* provides a new take on the entire Arthurian tale, especially in terms of female spectatorship. While Bradley does not integrate women into competitions as competitors, she does give them a large voice. As mentioned in the Bradley section, the women in the work view Lancelot as an extremely childish, selfish jock. The seemingly unconditional respect and praise that Lancelot receives in Malory and White are not present in Bradley, suggesting that there has been a shift in the power that male athletes possess. *The Mists of Avalon* highlight the way women have gained dominance over the past few decades, especially in sports, as their refusal to blindly praise a male athlete suggests a more equal status between the two genders and may reflect the large revolution of female athletes that took place at the same time as Bradley's writing.

While the women in Bradley's work do not idolize Lancelot as an athlete, White's slightly earlier work, *The Once and Future King*, is not necessarily all that different in terms of

women's regard for Lancelot as spectators despite significant differences in the relevance of women to their stories as a whole. White creates a story that places little significance on the women of the story, sometimes depicting them as somewhat conniving. There are a few important things to note and recall about White's work, including the way he creates a Lancelot who, despite being an extremely skilled knight who values chivalry, is not particularly aesthetically pleasing. Additionally, White's adaptation of Malory's work was published following World War II, which was an interesting time for women in both America and England. The emphasis on Lancelot's ugliness possibly contributes to the lack of women swooning over the athlete, but White also uses women to depict Lancelot's good heart as a potential target and weakness. In the example found in the second chapter of this research, Lancelot finds himself in a potentially deadly situation as a result of a woman capitalizing on Lancelot's values, which she has observed due to his popularity and athletic performance. The fairly negative connotation that White attributes to women in *The Once and Future King* is interesting; at the time of publication, many women who had taken over predominantly male jobs in the midst of the war had been forced to return back to their homes and leave behind much of the progress that had been made for women while most men were away at war. Internationally, the movement for gender equality was still in its infancy. White's omission of numerous female characters and negative portrayal of women contribute to Houlihan and Malcolm's observation that "women's under-representation in sport has a long history and is closely associated with traditional views of gender relation" (Houlihan 151). Furthermore, there appears to be a parallel between the way White not only decentralizes female characters, but also significantly reduces their contact with sports and sporting events, and the historical context of the time period, particularly in relation to sports as it was a time before the sports world was inclusive of women.

Lastly, the oldest of the three works, Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* provides an interesting, yet very traditional portrayal of women's interaction with sports and athletes as spectators. The example provided in the spectatorship section of the Malory chapter in which a woman questions Launcelot about his singleness highlights the large emphasis performance and successful competition play in the life of an athlete. Clearly one of Launcelot's many female admirers, the woman explains how it is a "pity" that he has not married (Malory 191). This woman embodies the portrayal and position women held in the sporting world in Malory's work; female spectators were present to be impressed and won over by the competitors. The female attention received by a competitor seemingly boosted his position within society, and ironically his love for Guenevere is what keeps him in the public's eye, as he will never marry any of his female spectators due to his love for her. This portrayal of women is undoubtedly the most traditional of the three works, in which the women acted within very strict gender roles, rarely questioning what was expected of them. This portrayal agrees with the observations of Houlihan and Malcolm, highlighting the way significant strides have been made for women in many parts of the world in terms of sport, not only as spectators of sport, but also as athletes.

The last modern sport theory concept that will be examined in this research is the influence that social capital has on the life and success of an athlete. Houlihan and Malcolm adopt the term "personal social capital" to explain this theory, deriving the term from the theory of social capital coined by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Houlihan 82). In terms of personal social capital in sport, the *Sport and Society* authors explain this theory as: "Taking part for the individual requires confidence, skills, knowledge, ability to manage time and relationships, and having a group of supportive friends and companions, including some who share the same desire to take part" (Houlihan 82). This application of personal social capital as

influencing factors in the life and success of an athlete is something that can be seen throughout all three works. The way these aspects appear in each work do differ, though, which is where a possible evolution in social regard for sport may become apparent.

Beginning again with the work that differs most from the traditional characterization of Lancelot, *The Mists of Avalon*, a few of the required aspects to take part in the sporting arena are lacking. Bradley's portrayal of an immature Lancelet highlights his possession of confidence, skills, and knowledge, though his management of relationships is his largest downfall, ultimately ruining his life. Despite the negative regard for Lancelet by many companions and the women within the work, his confidence and high athletic skill level is indisputable. As discussed in the first part of this modern sport theory section, Lancelet significantly relied on his athletic abilities to move his way up the social ladder to the position he held onto for a long time. His biggest downfall, though, was his ability to manage relationships. Lancelet's love for Guinevere is not well-managed, creating the situation in which they are caught together in her chamber. Though the two escape, Lancelet's mismanaged relationship marked the ruin of not only his own life, but of Camelot, as a whole. Everything he did to work his way up the social ladder was lost in the end, as he crashed down from the social ranks, bringing King Arthur down with him. The lack of one of these personal social capital values not only barred Lancelet from participating and being a competitor, but eliminated the opportunity as a whole.

The second adaptation of Malory's work will be examined next, as White creates an environment in which Lancelot can truly embrace all of the aspects of personal social capital modern sport theory requires to participate in sports. *The Once and Future King* emphasizes the way attitude and skill can play such a large part in the lives of athletes, omitting extraneous characteristics like attractiveness. White's Lancelot is a hard-working, skilled, and chivalrous



knight who legitimately worked his way into Arthur's society. Despite his high level of responsibility, yet again the mismanagement of his relationship with Guinevere is what ultimately results in his banishment from the kingdom he worked so hard to find a place in. This situation emphasizes the claim made by Houlihan and Malcolm as Lancelot has everything required to be successful and find a place in the sporting realm. Even the King loved and supported Lancelot despite the affair he was having with the Queen, acting undoubtedly as a genuine and supportive friend to Lancelot. Nevertheless, between the deep love and friendship Lancelot shared with the King and the knowledge and skill he possessed, these factors were not sufficient to save his position and status as a competitor, completely removing himself from the society he worked so hard to find a place in.

Lastly, Malory's original work, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, portrays a Lancelot who appears to have everything: the looks, the incredible skill, the King as a best friend and companion. The outstanding skill and extreme attractiveness creates a very idealistic athlete, as Launcelot uses these qualities to build relationships and work his way into Arthur's court. With so many of the proposed necessary personal social capital factors, Launcelot appears to have it made for himself as a star-athlete at the center of attention. Yet, like White and Bradley's more modern adaptations, Launcelot's relationship with the King's wife is not managed properly. Once the two's relationship is exposed, a series of battles begin and Launcelot is ultimately banished from Camelot, leaving behind the ruins of a kingdom that used to belong to Arthur, but has since been overtaken by Arthur's evil son Mordred. Again, Launcelot's mismanagement of relationships leads not only to his own destruction, but to the destruction of the very place that he worked so hard to become a part of and rise to high social standing. Houlihan and Malcolm's proposed requirement of personal social capital is validated, again, even in a work that came into existence

over 600 years ago. This finding, in particular, suggests that this aspect of modern sport theory is something that has actually existed within society and sports for a very long time and has not significantly evolved over the course of centuries.

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of this research, works of Arthurian medieval literature have been examined, beginning with Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* published around 1485AD, followed by two more modern adaptations of the work, T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* published in 1958 and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* published in 1983. The emphasis of this examination has been placed on the way sport and society interact, particularly how ideas within and about sport have evolved, changed, or remained the same as depicted and described within these works of literature. In order to analyze these depictions more consistently, a focus was placed on Sir Lancelot, a central character in all three works, as he is the prime example of an athlete in all three works. Through analyzing the way Lancelot carries and portrays himself, how he is spectated by various people within his society, and observing the way his participation in sports affected his social standing, various similarities and differences emerged between the works in regard to the portrayal of Lancelot, but also in terms of the way he was viewed or received by his society. These findings were then compared to modern sport theory as presented by Dominic Malcolm and Barrie Houlihan in their 2017 textbook *Sport and Society*, examining how portrayals in each work compare to the theories presented in the textbook. More specifically, how each work either resembles or differs from modern sport theory surrounding sport as social mobility, women as spectators of sport, and the influence that social capital has on an athlete and their position within society.

The findings within this research do suggest both changes and similarities between the way situations and characters are portrayed in these works. Naturally, there should be some differentiation as the two more recent works are adaptations of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, but the findings appear to carry deeper meaning beyond a simple plot change or different character

portrayals. To recap on the contents of Malory's work in terms of sport and the portrayal of Launcelot, the depictions within the work are what many would consider to be the most traditional. Launcelot is portrayed as a strikingly gorgeous, yet chivalrous, man who is strong and more skilled than any other knight. His looks and talent allow him to move his way up the social ladder of Arthur's society, harnessing significant attention from women along the way, as well. This portrayal of Launcelot is one in which he is most heroic in nature, the true man of all women's dreams and the knight every man wants to be. Despite such a spectacular portrayal, Launcelot is not without fault; most specifically, Launcelot finds himself in love with the King's wife, despite his close friendship with the king, and is eventually banished from Camelot as a result, losing absolutely everything he worked so hard for. These events and portrayals highlight the views of sporting and athletes at the time, creating a basis for comparison to modern sport theory. In terms of sport as a way of social mobility, Malory's work is consistent with this theory as Launcelot uses his talents to move up into Arthur's court. Women in this work are portrayed in a more historical fashion, as referenced by Houlihan and Malcolm, though differ from the way most developed countries have significantly integrated women into sports not only as spectators, but also as participants. Furthermore, the modern sport theory concept that certain personal social capital assets are required to maintain integration in sports is also found in Malory's work as there is a requirement to successfully manage relationships in order to maintain position in the sport world, and Launcelot unfortunately does not manage his relationship with the Queen well, resulting in his removal from their society.

The findings in White's adaptation *The Once and Future King* are fairly similar to those in Malory. There are a few differences, though, in the portrayal of Lancelot and women within the work. Lancelot is given a more in-depth backstory, elaborating on the way Lancelot trained

rigorously for years in order to become the best knight and find a place in Arthur's court. White also emphasizes the fact that Lancelot in this story is not an attractive man, possibly suggesting that his athletic and social success are primarily skill and personality-related. Additionally, women in this work are particularly de-centralized, and even portrayed in somewhat of a negative light as seen in the example where the woman tricks Lancelot in an attempt to kill him. Nevertheless, Lancelot is well-respected and very dedicated to being the best knight both inside and out. Again, though, as in Malory, Lancelot's greatest downfall is his love for the Queen. This love results, again, in his removal from the society he rose to social status in. In comparison to modern sport theory, White's depiction of Lancelot's training and dedication to becoming the best knight reflects the theory of sport as means of social mobility, suggesting that this aspect of sport theory is something that has remained the same over the centuries. White's work also reflects the more traditional view of women within sport, as their underrepresentation reflects a lack of involvement. This finding suggests that at the time of White's writing, women's positions in sport had not evolved into what they are today not only as spectators but also in terms of participation and social positions, as reflected by Houlihan and Malcolm. In terms of the influence of personal social capital, again Lancelot finds himself in an undesirable situation with the Queen. His mismanaged relationship with Guinevere is what proves to be his downfall, removing him from the position he worked hard to obtain. This downfall suggests that Houlihan and Malcolm's list of personal social capital requirements needed to succeed in sports is something that has remained a part of sporting for centuries as it is also found in Malory's work.

Lastly, Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* is significantly different from Malory's work and White's adaptation. Bradley places a large emphasis on the female characters of the story, a striking difference from Whites work, as the story is told from a female perspective. The

influence of women in the work transfers over into the portrayal of Lancelot, as well, depicting a very immature knight whose skills earned him his position in their society. While he has the charm and the skill, he lacks the maturity that would be expected from a knight of his caliber. Additionally, Morgaine gives sight into Lancelot's love life, portraying him as a player and as a user of women. This being said, naturally his relationship with the Queen is somewhat childish in nature, ultimately leading to the ruin of not only their relationship, but of their entire society, as well. This portrayal of sport and of Lancelot as an athlete create a foundation for comparison to modern sport theory, as the work was published not even forty years ago. In terms of social mobility, again Lancelot is portrayed as capitalizing on his skills to work his way up the social ladder. His skills are well-known by everyone in their society, though the general regard for Lancelot as a person is significantly more negative than the other works. Signified by the perspectives used in this work, the women of the story provide interesting observations and commentary about Lancelot due to their positions as spectators. While their lack of participation does not necessarily align with the way most modern sports are inclusive of women, the conversations suggest that there has been an evolution from the traditionalistic view of women's positions within sport observed by Houlihan and Malcolm. The women of the work do not idolize Lancelot the way they do in Malory's work, and even identify the way he acts in a somewhat childish manner. This finding suggests that there definitely has been an evolution in women's positions within sports, especially as spectators as they form their own opinions and do not conform to admiring Lancelot based off his skill and position within society. With regard to the necessity of personal social capital in order to succeed in the sports world, this theory is found again in Bradley's work as the exposure of Lancelot's relationship with the Queen

ultimately results in Lancelet losing his position within society and status as an unbelievable athlete.

Overall, the works highlight the way that ideas surrounding sport have both evolved and remained the same. Some aspects of sport theory are flexible, like the gender expectations that exist and have evolved within sport. Others, however, seem to be deeply integrated into sport, allowing these parts of sport theory to remain the same over time. These aspects are exemplified through the ability to integrate oneself into the sports realm through skill, finding one's place within a certain society through sports, and even needing a certain combination of influences and amenities to be successful in the sports world. The analysis provided in this research does not examine any of these aspects or their presence in these specific works as in-depth as possible, creating a great opportunity for future research. Other opportunities to further the research of literary depictions of sports and athletes as a way to observe evolutions in sport and the social influence of sport could be done by expanding the literature examined beyond medieval literature, including literature from long before the fifteenth century, and certainly venturing into non-medieval literature. The analysis of sports within literature as a whole has been something that has not been well-examined and has so much potential for new discoveries about the history and impact of sport within societies around the world.

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