

AN EXAMINATION OF THE FAMILY IN  
“THE TALE OF SIR GARETH”

A Thesis

by

NOAH GENE PETERSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2011

Major Subject: English

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“The Tale of Sir Gareth”

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## ABSTRACT

An Examination of the Family in  
“The Tale of Sir Gareth.” (May 2011)  
Noah Gene Peterson, B.A., Baylor University  
Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Britt Mize

Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* has become one of the most popular medieval romances, and it has remained continually in print since Caxton’s 1485 edition. The “noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murder, hate, vertue, and synne” which William Caxton found within the book have captivated both scholars and average readers for centuries. Curiously absent from the critical record, however, have been examinations of gender and the family, themes which are of the utmost importance to the characters within the *Morte Darthur*. This thesis investigates the theme of family interactions within Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth,” examining the tale itself as well as looking at several analogous stories to determine if the theme is Malory’s own or if it could have come from a probable source.

“The Tale of Sir Gareth” follows the thematic patterns set forth early in the *Morte Darthur*. The tale’s main interests are knightly gaining of worship and how knightly families interact. The two themes are connected by the proof-of-knighthood quest which calls for a combat between family members. Gareth operates within a realm dominated by familial groups. Outside of Arthur’s court, knights rely on family links for

protection and honor. Even within Arthur's Round Table fellowship, knights cleave to kin groups. Gareth enters Arthur's kitchens with the intention of discovering who his true friends are. He breaks the normal pattern of familial association: after gaining worship, he separates himself from his brothers.

Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth" has been troubling to scholars, as "Malory had before him in the writing of this 'Tale' no 'source,' at least not in the sense that we use in considering the other segments of *Le Morte Darthur*." While no clear source is available, many analogous Fair Unknown Romances exist. Five romances which have been suggested by Robert H. Wilson and Larry D. Benson are *Le Bel Inconnu*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois*, *Erec and Enide*, and *Ipomadon*. In these romances, the theme of familial conflict is not an important one. This suggests that Malory inserted the theme of familial violence into his tale.

The majority of the action within the *Morte Darthur* comes in the form of knights on quests to gain honor and worship. Being a member of a knightly family is a necessary pre-condition for being a great knight as knights rely on their family for honor and renown and also must fight against close family members as proof of their prowess. This creates a destabilizing force within Arthur's Round Table Fellowship, and the majority of the conflicts within Malory's *Morte Darthur* can be traced to interfamilial conflict.

## DEDICATION

To God, my parents, and Breanna.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The *Morte Darthur* was finished in 1469 or 1470 in “the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the fourth, by Syr Thomas Maleoré, knyght, as Jesu helpe hym for hys grete myght, as he is the servaunt of Jesu bothe day and nyght” (726.19-22)<sup>1</sup>. The work has become one of the most popular medieval romances and has remained continually in print since Caxton’s 1485 edition. The “noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynnesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murder, hate, vertue, and synne” (xv) which William Caxton found within the book have captivated both scholars and average readers for centuries. Scholars have examined Malory’s work through a wide variety of critical lenses, including: Freud and dream theory, source studies, examinations of medieval mysticism and medicine. Curiously absent from the critical record have been examinations of gender and the family, themes which are of the utmost importance to the characters within the *Morte Darthur*. Recently, however, numerous critics have turned to examine these important issues within the text. One such critic is Dorsey Armstrong. She has written a monograph examining gender in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. Armstrong argues for a gendered examination of the Pentecostal Oath. She calls the oath a “master signifier” which “produces and mediates the movement of the text, functioning as the master trope to which all the actions of the characters refer” (29). Armstrong goes on to say that familial issues are one of the greatest blind-spots of the

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This thesis follows the style of *Literature Interpretation Theory*.

<sup>1</sup> References to *Le Morte Darthur* come from the second edition of Vinaver’s *Works* and appear as page.line number.

Pentecostal Oath, and she notes that “character after character in the *Morte d’Arthur* will ignore or manipulate the rules of the Pentecostal Oath when attempting to fulfill a perceived obligation to his or her kin” (61). She recognizes that the family is an important concern in the *Morte Darthur*. Gender and familial issues are closely linked in Malory’s work. Most of the interactions between family members occur within and are shaped by the intensely homosocial context of knightly activity. When family members encounter other relatives, the genders of the two dominate the subsequent actions. When men encounter male relatives, they either honor one another or fight, sometimes both. When women encounter male relatives, they are meek and obedient, unless they are Morgan le Fay.

This thesis investigates the theme of family interactions within Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth,” examining the tale itself as well as looking at several analogous Fair Unknown stories in order to determine if the theme is Malory’s own or if it could have come from a probable source. “The Tale of Sir Gareth” is an excellent tale to examine in a study of how the family operates in the *Morte Darthur*. In this tale, Malory shows two types of families: those within and without the Arthurian court. Within the tale, Malory also presents the unusual case of a knight rejecting his own familial group in favor of another. This is interesting as “The Tale of Gareth” allows the reader to see the norms of chivalric society as well as a unique deviation from that norm. The tale is also unique in *Le Morte Darthur* as scholars have been unable to identify a major source for the story, though several minor sources and analogues have been identified. Without a major source for the tale, it is highly likely that the themes which Malory found the most

important in his romance would be emphasized. Some critics, such as Wilfred L. Guerin, have even gone so far as to argue that “this ‘Tale’ is Malory’s original creation, with bits taken from earlier romances, specifically to serve certain functions within the book as a whole” (106). If the tale is original to Malory, it certainly is worthy of a focused study.

Helpful for understanding the emphasis on the family within the *Morte Darthur* is some knowledge of the biography of its author, Sir Thomas Malory. Malory names himself repeatedly throughout the *Morte Darthur* as “Sir Thomas Malleorré, Knight.”<sup>2</sup> With just a name and a statement that he was a prisoner, scholars have searched through the various Thomas Malorys of fifteenth century England, and have chosen Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel in Warwickshire as the most probable author of the *Morte Darthur* (Field “Malory” 115).<sup>3</sup> This Sir Thomas Malory certainly led an interesting life. He was born between 1415 and 1417 and died in March of 1471. During his fifty-four to fifty-six years on this earth he changed from a respectable land-owner with an interest in politics to a knight accused of rape, theft, and extortion. Early in his life, Malory seemed quite innocent: “he dealt in land, witnessed deeds for his neighbours, acted as a parliamentary elector, and by 1441 had become a knight” (Field “Malory”

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<sup>2</sup> Malory names himself in the explicits at the ends of “The Tale of King Arthur,” “The Book of Sir Tristram,” “The Sankgreal,” “Launcelot and Guinevere,” and “The Morte Arthur.” In “The Book of Sir Tristram,” Malory interjects with, “Amen, sayde Sir Thomas Malleorré” (416.30) after a passage of praise for Tristram. Caxton also identifies Malory as the author:

I have . . . enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystories of the sayd Kynge Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a cople unto me delyverd, whyche cople Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn books of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe. (xiv-xv)

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of critical theory and discussion of the identity of Sir Thomas Malory see Hyonjin Kim’s *The Knight without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry* and William Matthews’ *The Ill-Framed Knight: A Skeptical Enquiry into the Identity of Sir Thomas Malory*.

115). Near the end of the 1440's he even found time to bear a son (Field *Life* 54). Six years later, in 1450, however, Malory apparently went through a drastic transformation. In January of 1450, Malory was accused of lying in ambush for the lord of Buckingham in woods near Newbold Revel (Field "Malory" 116). After this, the flood-gates open. In 1451, Malory allegedly stole cattle in Warwickshire and then stole 6 does and committed £500 of wanton damage in Buckingham's hunting lodge (Field "Malory" 116, 122). Malory was arrested, imprisoned, and then escaped by swimming the moat at night. Following his escape, he allegedly raided Combe Abbey twice "with a large band of men, breaking down doors, insulting the monks, and stealing a great deal of money" (Field "Malory" 116). By 1452, he was arrested again and imprisoned in London, where he spent the next eight years.

Malory was bailed out repeatedly, and in 1454 "seems to have joined an old crony on a horse-stealing expedition across East Anglia that ended in Colchester jail. He escaped from there too, using swords, daggers, and *langues-de-boeuf*" (Field "Malory" 116). He was eventually recaptured and moved from prison to prison in London. In 1461, following the Yorkist expulsion of the Lancastrians, Malory, who had connections with the Earl of Warwick, was pardoned and released (Field "Malory" 117). Malory joined with "King Edward and Warwick in the winter of 1462 to beseige [sic] three Lancastrian-held castles in Northumberland" (Field *Life* 54). When Warwick fell away from the king, however, Malory "was named in lists of irreconcilable Lancastrians who were excluded from royal pardons" in 1468 and 1470 (Field "Malory" 117). Late in 1470, "a sudden invasion brought the Lancastrians back, and among their first acts was

freeing those of their party who were in London prisons” (Field “Malory” 117). The next year, Sir Thomas Malory died.

During Malory’s own life, he was keenly interested in matters of the family. Malory clearly sees himself as a “jantyllmen that beryth olde armes” (232.15), and like many of the characters in the *Morte*, Malory was invested in his own genealogy:

His grandson had an armorial window constructed in the parlour at Newbold Revel that included the arms of Sir Peter Malory the judge, who had died eight generations earlier. That would not have been possible unless the necessary records had been preserved and transmitted down the generations by successive members of the family, including Sir Thomas. (Field *Life* 36)

Malory’s real life interest in his family and his heritage has translated into a keen interest in how knightly families interact within his own Arthurian story. Malory was a member of a large family, and even the events of the socio-political world in which he lived were focused on families. The last twenty years of Malory’s life were greatly affected by the War of the Roses, which lasted between 1455 and 1485. Malory took part in and suffered greatly because of the war between the Houses of York and Lancaster.

It is no surprise, then, that Malory’s book of King Arthur’s history shows both the good that families are capable of and the destructive potential of conflict between family members. What is surprising is the lack of critical interest in the issue. This thesis examines how the theme functions within “The Tale of Sir Gareth” within Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*. The thesis will be separated into two main body chapters: one examining how the family functions within Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth,” and the second looking at several analogous romances in order to determine if the emphasis on the family could be derived from the possible source which Malory may

have used. Understanding how knights interact within their families and how those familial actions can affect the larger body politic is necessary for understanding one of the greatest motivators in Malory's Arthurian romance.

## CHAPTER II

## FAMILIES WITHIN “THE TALE OF SIR GARETH”

Sir Thomas Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth” has puzzled and troubled critics throughout the history of scholarship on *Le Morte Darthur*. Much critical ink has been spilt in attempting to elucidate the indeterminate source of “The Tale of Gareth,” but for all that, it is clear that the themes and motifs of the preceding tales continue through “The Tale of Gareth.” One of the major themes found in the *Morte Darthur* is that of conflict between family members. Families and the interactions between family members, especially fathers, sons, uncles, and nephews, is of vital importance to the story of King Arthur’s life, as Malory tells it. Charles Moorman has written:

I would conjecture that, to Malory, this slaying of brother by brother is a major symbol of the civil strife of the Round Table. The masking and consequent confusion of knightly opponents can be observed on almost every page of the *Morte Darthur*. Thus, very often, the sworn brothers of the Round Table fight bitterly against one another in ignorance. Many of the major conflicts of the book are caused by brother contending against brother, culminating in the final conflicts between Gawain and Gareth, between Launcelot and Gareth, between Arthur and his son Mordred. (508)

Malory’s *Morte* is keenly interested in questions of the family, both literal and figurative. This issue is central in the story of the youngest of the Orkney brothers, Gareth. He enters deadly combat with both his genetic and adopted family. As Moorman has noted, Gareth is one of the central characters within the theme of familial conflict. This makes “The Tale of Sir Gareth” an excellent tale to focus upon in a study of the family in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.

“The Tale of Sir Gareth” tells of the coming to court, the first adventures, and the gaining of fame of Sir Gareth, King Arthur’s nephew and Gawayne’s brother. One of

the major themes of the tale is that of how the family functions in chivalric society. Identifying one's family and interacting with its members in the noble context of the *Morte Darthur* is of vital importance to the knights of Arthur's England. Though the theme centers on Gareth and how he interacts with his own family, he is not the only knight for whom this is an issue within his titular tale. Rather, almost every knight in the tale acts within the context of his relations. Knights move about the romance world in familial groups, and align themselves based on familial patterns. This chapter will focus on three examples of this theme within "The Tale of Sir Gareth": first, baseline examples of kinship affiliation as the basis of knightly identity; following this will be an examination of Gareth's deviation from this base seen during his service in Arthur's kitchens and through his knightly gaining of worship.

Gareth's ultimate removal from his family stands in stark contrast to the majority of the other knights within "The Tale of Sir Gareth." As Gareth leaves Arthur's court on his quest, he enters a land traversed and dominated by familial groups. During his journey to the Red Knight of the Red Lands, Sir Ironside, Gareth encounters twelve opponents after his knighting by Sir Launcelot: six thieves, two knights guarding a river crossing, and the Black, Green, Red, and Blue Knights. Of these dozen, the first six are lower class thieves who are forgotten almost as soon as they are killed, and the other half are all members of the knightly class. All six of the knights live outside of Arthur's good graces and travel in familial groups for protection. The two knights who are encountered at the river crossing are Gerrarde le Brewse and Arnolde le Brewse. The four colorful knights rest sequentially along the road in their eldest brother's lands. Sir

Perarde, Sir Pertolype, Sir Perymones, and Sir Persaunte of Inde are well known in Arthur's court as brothers: "thes four *brethyne* were full well knowyn in kynge Arthures courte for noble knyghtes, for long tyme they had holdyn werre ayenste the knyghtes of the Rownde Table" (209.13-15, emphasis added). The four are known as a group of brothers for warring against the Round Table, and it is for no small reason that they are well known to Arthur's court. When they surrender themselves to Gareth, they bring with them numerous knightly followers. Sir Partolype has fifty followers, Sir Perymones has sixty followers, and Sir Persaunte has one hundred knights at his command. Together, the brothers controlled a small army which worked in opposition to Arthur's court. Through the actions of Gareth, however, we see another of the themes prevalent throughout the *Morte Darthur*: the incorporation of foreign elements into Arthur's Round Table society. In this case, the themes overlap as the knights that Gareth brings to the Round Table are also brothers. The Round Table, then, becomes "essentially a new kinship group" for the knights who join the select fellowship, offering protection and the renown and honor of belonging to the elite fellowship (Cherewatuk 76).

The Round Table should function as a new family for the knights who take the Pentecostal Oath and join the elite of Arthur's court. However, as we can see in the tournament which Lyones calls on Gareth's advice, the primary familial group is almost always that by which knights organize themselves. When the knights arrive at the tournament, they travel in familial groups. The knights that hold against Arthur's Round Table fellowship are small parties of families. The knights who will fight on Gareth's

side of the tournament include Sir Ironside, Persaunte and his brothers, and “sir Palamydes the Saresyn was another, and sir Safere and sir Segwarydes, hys bretherne,” as well as “sir Carados of the Dolowres Towre, a noble knyght, and sir Terquyne his brother, and sir Arnolde and sir Gauter, two bretherne, good knyghtes of Cornuayle” (212.36-37, 40-42). These knights operate outside of Arthur’s court, and because of this, their family is the primary site of loyalty. When Arthur and his retinue arrive, however, we see that even for many of the Round Table knights, the family is also the foremost center of loyalty. I quote at length the arrival of Arthur and the Round Table knights to highlight the fragmentation of the Round Table along family lines:

Than turne we to kyng Arthure that brought wyth hym sir Gawayne, Aggravayne, Gaherys, his *brethren*; and than his *nevewys*, as sir Uwayne le Blaunche Maynes, and sir Agglovale, sir Tor, sir Percivale de Galys, sir Lamerok de Galys. Than com sir Launcelot du Lake with his *bretherne*, *nevewys*, and *cosyns*, as sir Lyonell, sir Ector de Marys, sir Bors de Gaynys, and sir Bleobrys de Gaynes, sir Blamour de Gaynys, and sir Galyhodyn, sir Galyhud, and many mo of sir Launcelottys *kynne*; and sir Dynadan, sir La Cote Male Tayle, his *brother*, a knyght good, and sir Sagramoure le Desyrus, sir Dodynas le Saveage; and all the moste party of the Rounde Table. (213.6-15, emphasis added)

The entire passage is devoted to splitting the Round Table knights by their family.

Brothers, nephews, cousins, and kin dominate the section. There is a certain fluidity to kinship terms in Malory’s time, but all of the knights in the above quote are grouped according to blood relations. Here, we see the Round Table Fellowship split between the three greatest members: Gawayne, Lamerok, and Launcelot.<sup>1</sup> Arthur arrives leading

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Tristram is not yet a member of the Round Table and joins the tournament opposing Arthur and the Round Table, but Malory is quick to remind the reader that Tristram is still one of the greatest knights: “but this sir Trystrams was nat at that tyme knyght of the Rounde Table; but he was at that tyme one of the beste knyghtes of the worlde” (212.44-213.2).

the two feuding families of Lot and Pellinore, and they are followed by the extended family of Launcelot.

The knights not only arrive at the tournament segregated according to their familial affiliations, but the way in which the knights participate in the tournament is also governed by family allegiances. Once the tournament is underway, the knights travel and fight in small kin groups. The brothers Sir Safer and Sir Segwarydes encounter the brothers Aggravayne and Gaherys. Perceval and Lamerok encounter Carados and Tarquin. Persaunte and Pertolype joust with Launcelot and Lionell. The different family groups stay together in the midst of the tournament and fight together. Even when Gareth enters the tournament and begins to fight, he encounters his opponents in familial groups. He enters the tournament riding alongside Sir Ironside and encounters Bors and Bleoberis. Next, while alone, Gareth overcomes Galyhuddyn and Galyhud quickly followed by Sir Dynadan and his brother Brewnor le Noyre, La Kote Male Tayle. Following his victory over these brothers, Gareth encounters King Bagdemagus and his son Mellyagaunt. Despite their affiliation with the Round Table, the knights turn their loyalty to something more important: the family. The knights of Arthur's kingdom walk a tightrope of loyalties as they shift between focusing on the family while outside of the Round Table fellowship to acting as a member of the kinship group represented by the Round Table. Finally, however, the knights make their priority the first and most important allegiance to the family. Duty to blood, to brothers and cousins, to uncles and nephews, to fathers and sons, proves more important to the knights than the figurative brotherhood of the Round Table.

Gareth, however, presents an interesting inconsistency in this pattern. Gareth approaches Arthur's court in disguise and refuses to reveal his own name. When Gareth arrives at Arthur's court during the Pentecostal feast, he makes a simple request of the king: "for this cause I come hydir, to pray you and requyre you to gyff me three gyftys. And they shall nat be unresenablé asked but that ye may worshypfully graunte hem me, and to you no grete hurte nother losse" (177.34-36). He asks for one gift immediately and saves the other two for the following year's feast of Pentecost. Gareth's first request is "mete and drynke suffyciauntly for this twelve-monthe" (177.41-178.1). Arthur counsels the youth to ask for a better gift, but Gareth is adamant. When he sees that he cannot change Gareth's mind, Arthur asks for his name. Gareth replies that he cannot tell Arthur his name. Arthur takes this to mean that Gareth does not know his own name: "'That is mervayle, seyde the king, 'that thou knowyste nat thy name, and thou arte one of the goodlyest yonge men that ever I saw'" (178.13-14). Arthur sends him to Kay the steward who puts him to work in the kitchens.

There are several reasons why Gareth arrives at his uncle's court anonymously and asks for only food and drink for a year. One of the major reasons, which will be discussed later, is that in order to gain the most honor, a knight must start in a low position. Another reason for the secrecy is that Gareth is arriving incognito in order to determine the situation of the court, especially his immediate family. Gareth's family is large and diverse, and "clearly, Malory considered the family of Gawain as a complex of personality traits, with Gareth at its center, epitomizing more admirable qualities than

any of his brothers” (Guerin 113). Before the reader finds out that Gareth is the best of his blood, however, Gareth has to find out for himself.

By living and working in Arthur’s kitchens, the kitchens of the greatest courtly family of the day, Gareth occupies a unique position. He can see and not be seen. No one pays any attention to the help. He can freely observe the court without the pageantry and role-playing that would occur if he arrive and announced himself and his heritage.

Speaking of Gareth and other knights who spend time as menials, Sarah Gordon writes:

Though physically their bodies are situated within the confines of the court when at work or at play in the kitchen, they are actually living and eating outside the courtly world, away from the community of knights. Ironically, their marginality and grueling kitchen service lead them to be exemplary figures of knighthood based on the chivalric principles of *publica utilitas*, or service to society. (190)

Gareth lives for a year in a doubled position, both within and without, central and marginal, part and apart. In this liminal position, Gareth is able to see the condition of the court, especially that of his family. It is only from this marginal position that Gareth is able to begin and complete his adventure.

Gareth’s quest, after all, is one of finding and proving identity, and “his quest is to prove himself worthy of that name, to show himself, King Arthur, and his brother Gawain that he is worthy of his lady, his place at the Round Table, and membership in his own family” (Benson 102). Though Benson does not focus his study on issues within the Orkney family, he is right to note that through his quest, Gareth is locating himself within his family. Before he can do that, though, an identity is prescribed to him by Sir Kay. Because of his unrevealed origins, “Gareth’s identity is constructed by Sir Kay’s perception of his poverty, brawny physique, hunger, and usefulness” (Gordon

201). Mockingly, Kay christens Gareth “Bewmaynes,” because of his fair hands. When Kay is reminded that mockingly naming young knights has backfired on him in the past by Gawayne and Launcelot, Kay responds by crafting a history for Gareth based upon his one request, saying:

‘As for that,’ seyde sir Kay, ‘this shall never preve none suche, for sir Brunor desired ever worshyp, and this desyryth ever mete and drynke and brotthe. Uppon payne of my lyff, he was fosterde up in som abbey, and howsomever hit was, they fayled mete and drynke, and so hydir he is com for his sustynance.’ (178.36-40)

Kay casts Gareth as a lower class sluggard, someone who would be fostered to an abbey, but leave for lack of food. Kay further constructs an identity for Gareth by physically placing him at certain locations within the court: “and so sir Kay bade gete hym a place and sytte downe to mete. So Bewmaynes wente to the halle dore and sette hym down amonge boyes and laddys, and there he ete sadly” (178.41-43). Even when it is not meal time, Gareth is placed with the servants: “so thus he was putt into the kychyn and lay nyghtly as the kychen boyes dede. And so he endured all that twelve-monthe” (179.6-7). Both Launcelot and Gawayne offer to harbor Gareth in a better location and to feed him better food, “but he refused them all, for he wolde do none other but as sir Kay commaunded hym, for no profyr” (179.1-3). Gareth refuses to accept a position which would be considered a more conventionally privileged one: the friendship and hospitality of Arthur’s greatest knight, Launcelot, and Arthur’s favorite nephew, Gawayne.

Even at this early point in the narrative, we see Malory emphasizing the role of the family as it structures courtly interactions: “but as towchyng sir Gawayne, he had reson to proffer hym lodgyng, mete, and drynke, for that proffer com of his bloode, for

he was nere kyn to hym than he wyst off; but that sir Launcelot did was of his grete jantylnesse and curtesy” (179.3-6). Here, Malory contrasts Launcelot and Gawayne. Launcelot offers to lodge and feed Gareth because he is the greatest knight, the most gentle and courteous. Gawayne, on the other hand, is not the greatest and most courteous knight of many of the previous French and English romances from which Malory takes material. Instead, Gawayne is compelled by the unknown blood relation into offering kindness to Gareth. One of the major reasons for Gareth’s time in the kitchens is that he has a year to see the condition of the various members of the court and to see whom he wants to associate himself with when he does begin his knightly exploits.

This purpose becomes evident when Gareth asks for his second and third gifts from Arthur. He asks for the adventure that Lyonet brings to Arthur’s court. He also asks to be knighted by Launcelot: “this is that other gyffte that ye shall graunte me: that sir Launcelot du Lake shall make me knyght, for of hym I woll be made knyght and ellys of none. And whan I am paste I pray you lette hym ryde aftir me and make me knyght whan I requyre hym” (180.12-15). Gareth’s service in Arthur’s kitchen and his observations of the court have led him to forgo his own immediate family and to cleave to Launcelot. A special bond exists between a knight and the knight who dubs him. Gareth seeks this bond with Launcelot, not his own family. In fact, Gareth explicitly tells Lyonet that he served in the kitchen to find out the truth about members of the court, saying, “thoughe hit lyst me to be fedde in kynge Arthures courte, I myght have had mete in other placis, but I ded hit for to preve my frendys” (191.15-17). At the end

of the tale, before the weddings, the reader learns from the narrator that “for evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe hymself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth” (224.20-23). Gareth observes his brother and finds that he wants nothing to do with that part of his family.

Although Gareth deviates in his ultimate familial association, his method of gaining honor and renown are quite ordinary within the *Morte Darthur*. Much of the matter of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* concerns the High Order of Knighthood and how to be a worshipful knight. Worship in Malory is so much more than simple reputation. It becomes almost a physical commodity that one knight can take from another by force. Malory shows two methods through which a knight can gain worship: fighting with other knights, usually in tournaments, with the fight acting as a sort of currency of worship (Lynch 35), or going on dangerous adventures, as Gareth does, which more often than not lead to fights between knights. A knight proves his name and fame by fighting with other knights, both within and without his family. Knights run from tournaments to single battles to tournaments again, which act like “sporting events in which league tables of chivalric prowess are drawn and redrawn” (Cooper 186). Herein lies the problem: Malory’s *Morte* is full of large, expansive family groups, but the knights, in their tunnel-vision quest for worship, will fight with anyone in front of them in order to improve their renown. After all, “a great knight has a role to maintain, and it is his duty to maintain it” regardless of how he goes about preserving his worship (Mahoney 112). This single-mindedness often leads to fights between family members,

despite a knight's "sacred responsibility not to harm a member of his own family" (Nolan 166). This conflict between knightly gaining of worship and familial duty can clearly be seen in Gareth's quest.

"The Tale of Sir Gareth" is structured by the thematic pattern of the proof-of-knighthood quest which Malory establishes quite early in the *Morte Darthur*. As soon as Malory establishes Arthur as rightful King of England and Emperor of Rome, he turns to the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table, beginning with "A Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake" wherein he establishes his preferred thematic structure of winning worship: the proof-of-knighthood quest. This theme gives his characters a vertical motivation and can be easily traced within "The Tale of Sir Gareth."<sup>2</sup> In his monograph, *Malory's Morte Darthur*, Larry Benson established four steps in the thematic structure of the proof-of-knighthood quest:

In the proof-of-knighthood, there is first a preliminary adventure as a demonstration of the knight's worthiness to undertake the following adventures. Next comes the tournament, in which the hero triumphs, and then the quest to abolish some "ill custom" (which often involves the rescue of prisoners). Finally, having proven his prowess against the enemies of the Round Table, he successfully jousts with a series of members of the Round Table. (70-71)

To Benson's excellent outline, I would add a fifth step: a battle between the knight on the proof-of-knighthood quest and a member of his family. Benson passes over the theme of combat between relatives in his discussion of "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term "vertical motivation" for any motivation that comes from a pattern outside of the world of the tale. This is opposed to the concept of "horizontal motivation," which is the simple cause and effect processes which can be logically traced. Vertical motivation: Gareth convinces Lyones to hold a tournament after he discovers that his family is looking for him. Gareth has only just finished his preliminary adventure and cannot return to the court according to the proof-of-knighthood schema. Horizontal motivation: After Morgause complains at Arthur for the mistreatment of Gareth, Gawayne and his brothers ask their uncle for permission to ride in search of Gareth.

du Lake,” but he recognizes, to a limited extent, its importance in “The Tale of Sir Gareth” (Benson 94). This combat between kin is a necessary part of the proof-of-knighthood theme because it firmly establishes the knight’s position within his family.

Because there is no immediate source known for “The Tale of Sir Gareth,” some critics have seen the tale as “Malory developing his own kind of knightly adventure,” and in this section of his *Morte*, Malory shows that he can freely invent new material while conforming to a thematic pattern (Pigg 22). A knight looking to gain the most worship must start in a low position, and to this end, Gareth arrives at Arthur’s court anonymously. As a Fair Unknown, Gareth needs little help beginning his adventure from a lowly position. However, he is pushed into a lower position by Kay who names him Beaumains and puts him to work as a kitchen knave.<sup>3</sup> Following traditional Fair Unknown romance patterns, Gareth receives the promise of an adventure and quickly begins to follow the proof-of-knighthood pattern. When Gareth leaves Arthur’s court, he is faced by a plethora of challenges within his preliminary adventure which demonstrate his knighthood and honor. He faces the damsel Lyonet’s cruel words, which Daniel Pigg sees as “clearly his greatest foe” (25). Lyonet mocks and derides Gareth while exhorting his opponents to fight harder. While he is facing the dangerous words of Lyonet, he faces a host of opponents. He overcomes Kay, fights Launcelot to a draw, kills six thieves who are tormenting a captive knight, kills two brothers who are guarding a river crossing, kills Sir Perarde the Black Knight, and overcomes the Red,

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<sup>3</sup> In his essay “Malory’s Beaumains,” Roger Loomis accounts for the odd name given to Gareth as a corruption of Gauuains and sees the fight between Gawayne and Gareth as an absurdity of romance.

Green, and Blue knights on his way to the Red Knight of the Red Lands. Once Gareth overcomes Sir Ironside and his identity becomes known to Lyones and her family, his preliminary adventure is finished and he has proven himself worthy for the following adventures.

Once Gareth learns that Arthur and his family are looking for him, he advises Lyones to call a tournament and to offer herself and all of her lands as the prize. The triumph at a tournament is vital for a knight looking to increase his worship. The tournament is a spectacle, and “the tournament is a site not only for activities that establish, consolidate, and maintain knightly identity, but also dramatizes those activities for an audience of witnesses” (Armstrong 136). Armstrong discusses tournaments in Malory’s *Morte* as “a representation of gender that complicates gaze theory, in which men look and women are *looked at*. Here, men perform, and an audience made up primarily of women watch...the performance itself appears staged, designed to produce the same results as knightly questing” (136). This representation of tournamenting is a far cry from other medieval literary tournaments where knights leave with broken bones, without arms, or die during the course of the event.<sup>4</sup> The tournament is essential as a site for the viewing of knightly activity. It is a location where the court at large can recognize the prowess of a knight. This recognition “is significant since it brings about Gareth’s (re)integration into courtly society as an insider” (Gordon 208). In the

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<sup>4</sup> During the three-days tournament in *Ipomadon*, Ipomadon and other knights slay numerous opponents on each day of the tournament. The anonymous author, in fact, relishes in relating how ears and arms are cut off and heads split in two. In Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale,” Theseus makes special rules for the tournament between Palamon and Arcite in order to “shapen that they shal nat dye” (l.2541). Theseus’ rules are specially designed to preserve the lives of the combatants. Because the rules are specifically created for this tournament, it is safe to assume that other tournaments were far more dangerous.

tournament, Gareth disguises himself with the help of Lyones. Gareth comports himself extremely well during the tournament, overcoming all who come before him. Because he is in the tournament opposing the Round Table, however, it is only a matter of time before he encounters one of his brothers:

And than sir Gareth rode here and there and smote on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde, that all folkys myght well aspye where that he rode. And by fortune he mette with his brother, sir Gawayne; and there he put hym to the wors, for he put of his helme. And so he served fyve or six knyghtes of the Rounde Table, that all men seyde he put hym in moste payne and beste he dud his dever.  
(216.37-42)

This is not the only time during the tournament that the two brothers encounter one another. After Gareth is identified to the court and the combatants, “than he dowbled his strokys and smote downe there sir Sagramoure and his brother sir Gawayne” (218.5-7). Gawayne’s response to being struck down by his, now identified, brother is an interesting crux in the textual history of the *Morte Darthur*.

The Winchester Manuscript and Caxton’s *Morte* offer two very different readings of the passage which can drastically affect the meaning of the text. Caxton’s 1485 edition of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* has been the basis of Malorian studies until the discovery of the Winchester Manuscript in 1934 by Walter Oakeshott. The Winchester Manuscript predates Caxton’s edition by almost a decade and was even in Caxton’s print shop while he was working on his own edition. The difficulty for the reader is that the meanings suggested by both readings are supported elsewhere in the text. The Winchester Manuscript reads, “A broþ<sup>f</sup> seyde sir Gawayne I wente ye wolde haue smyttyn me so • whan he herde hym sey so he thrange here and there And so w<sup>t</sup> grete payne he gate oute of the pres” (f. 142 verso). Caxton’s edition of the *Morte*, however,

reads, “O broder saide sir gawayn I wende ye wolde not haue stryken me / so whan he herd hym say so he thrang here & there / & so with grete payne he gat out of the prees” (VII.xxxi). The one “not” makes a large difference in any interpretation of how family members are expected to interact with one another during knightly activities. Are knights expected to fight against their close blood relations, as the Winchester Manuscript suggests? Gawayne says that he knew Gareth would strike him. On the other hand, is it a shocking and inconceivable turn of events when Gareth strikes down Gawayne for the second time, once both are known to each other? Gawayne, in Caxton’s edition, did not think that Gareth would attack him.

What makes this crux difficult to resolve is that passages elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur* support the meaning of both the Winchester Manuscript and Caxton edition. Supporting the Winchester Manuscript, Launcelot tells Arthur, “but whan men bene hote in dedis of armys, oftyn hit is seyne they hurte their frendis as well as their foyes” (330.37-39). The most loyal friends that knights seem to have in *Le Morte Darthur* are their extended family members, yet Launcelot excuses combats between friends when they are hot in deeds of arms. Launcelot presents this as a fact of knightly combat, but he does not comment on morals of the combat. He does not say it is necessary or repugnant, just that it happens. This may be because Launcelot himself regularly fights against his extended family, often while not “hot in deeds of arms.” Usually he knows his family but they do not recognize him because of a disguise. Supporting Caxton’s edition and the prospect of a combat between family members being a tragedy is the reunion between Gareth and Gawayne at the end of “The Tale of Sir Gareth.” As soon

as Gawayne learns that he is fighting his brother, he throws his arms from him, embraces Gareth, and begs for mercy. Regardless of what the “right” reading is, Gareth’s reaction to Gawayne’s speech is unambiguous: Gareth immediately flees the tournament and his brother.<sup>5</sup>

Because of Gareth’s repeated combats with Gawayne, P.J.C. Field has, in his essay “The Source of Malory’s Tale of Gareth,” seen “The Tale of Sir Gareth” as structured by a folk-tale motif in which brothers compete to demonstrate prowess.<sup>6</sup> However, there is a problem with arguing for the folk-tale structuring of Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth.” The basis of the folk-tale motif is a younger brother who “has an older relative at Arthur’s court, to whom he must prove himself to be worthy” (Norris 82). Field himself recognizes the problem with reading “The Tale of Sir Gareth” as a folk-tale:

The story disintegrates unless the elder brother is admirable enough to serve as a yardstick for the younger; but, as Wilson said, Malory’s tale disturbs the pattern in two ways: at point after point, when Gawain does something admirable, Lancelot is said to do it as well or better. At the end, even Gawain’s *proxime accessit* status is undermined – we are told that when Gareth understood his brother’s murderous nature...he left Gawain’s company for Lancelot’s. (*Malory* 248-249)

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<sup>5</sup> This portion of the tournament also raises questions about what actions are permissible for a knight while in disguise. Gareth does not seem to have any compunction about striking Gawayne while he himself is in disguise. Once his disguise is removed without his knowledge and he is discovered, however, there is a shame attached to the act of striking his brother in combat.

<sup>6</sup> D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. furthers P.J.C. Field’s argument for a folk-tale structure in “The Rhetoric of the Folk Fairy Tale in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Tale of Sir Gareth*.” In his article, he identifies seven “rhetorical patterns” (55) to which “The Tale of Sir Gareth” conforms. Field restates his argument in *Malory: Texts and Sources* during his discussion of the Gareth section.

Gareth is not measuring up to Gawayne in “The Tale of Sir Gareth.” Rather, he is proving that he is honorable and worshipful without his family. In fact, “Gareth is a foil to Gawain: his actions and statements consistently point up his brother’s faults” (Guerin 112). As Larry D. Benson has written, “Gareth is thus displacing Gawain, taking his brother’s rank among the four best knights of the world” (Benson 103-104). Through his proof-of-knighthood quest, Gareth shows himself to be a better knight than Gawayne.

After the tournament, Gareth still has several steps remaining on his proof-of-knighthood quest: he must abolish an ill custom and joust with Round Table knights. Shortly after leaving the tournament, Gareth comes upon a castle of widows who are kept prisoner by the Brown Knight. He slays the knight and frees the widows. With an “ill custom” struck down, Gareth has only to fight with members of the Round Table and, according to my extension of Benson’s scheme, a family member. He accomplishes these tasks in one battle. Encountering Gawayne for the third time, Gareth fights his brother and one of the best members of the Round Table. The two do not recognize one another and ride against each other without speaking. They fight for over two hours with blood trailing to the ground before Lyonet arrives and identifies Gareth to Gawayne:

And whan he herde hir sey so, he threwe away his shyld and his swerde, and ran to sir Gareth and toke hym in his armys, and sytthen kneled downe and asked hym mercy. ‘What are ye,’ seyde sir Gareth, ‘that right now were so stronge and so mighty, and now so sodeynly is yelde to me?’ ‘A, sir Gareth, I am your brother, sir Gawayne, that for youre sake have had grete laboure and travayle.’ (221.44-222.6)

Gareth has completed his proof-of-knighthood quest, and through his deeds he has shown himself more worthy than Gawayne. He returns to Arthur's court where he finds all of the knights he has overcome. He, along with many of the knights he has defeated, is made a member of the Round Table. Gareth ends the tale as the head of new chivalric household separate from his own blood family. He separates himself from Gawayne and his other brothers, but surrounds himself with a knightly coterie of his former opponents and a new family. It is because he has proven himself a better knight than Gawayne that Gareth is able to extract himself from the influence of his elder brother.

The major theme within "The Tale of Sir Gareth" is how a knight interacts with his family in the knightly context of the land of romance. It is a theme that is carried from the earlier books of *Le Morte Darthur* and which continues throughout the remainder of Arthur's story. In "The Tale of Sir Gareth," the groups of knights associate themselves with their immediate blood relations. They travel throughout the land and fight in tournaments in small familial groups. Gareth goes to Arthur's court as an anonymous youth in order to see what the condition of the court is and who his true friends are. Once he begins his own proof-of-knighthood quest, the family is at the center of the quest. He ends his quest by entering into and creating a family through marriage, and the combat with his brother is the most important episode in his quest. Gareth is unique in the chivalric landscape through which he navigates. Unlike the many knights within and without the Round Table Fellowship, Gareth does not cleave to his family for protection and honor. Instead, he arrives at Arthur's court in disguise in order to discover the condition of his family members and to gain honor without the help

of his name. Upon discovering the nature of his relatives at the court, Gareth distances himself from his family and even goes so far as to associate himself with another courtly family.

## CHAPTER III

## FAMILIAL VIOLENCE IN FIVE “FAIR UNKNOWN” ROMANCES

Sir Thomas Malory is interested in the theme of familial violence in his “Tale of Gareth.” Knowing that Malory, more often than not, found the material for his “hoole book of kyng Arthur and of his noble knyghtes of the Rounde Table” (726.10-11) in other medieval romances, one wonders whether or not Malory found this emphasis on familial conflict in his sources and simply transferred it along with the story. However, if one is to take this approach with Malory’s “Tale of Gareth,” one will quickly run into a major problem: so far as modern scholars know, “Malory had before him in the writing of this ‘Tale’ no ‘source,’ at least not in the sense that we use in considering the other segments of *Le Morte Darthur*” (Guerin 106). This has led some scholars to regard the story as “Malory’s most surprising addition to Arthur’s biography” (Norris 81) and others to see the tale as “Malory’s most puzzling work” (Vinaver 746).

Without a source, how can one examine the tale on which Malory based his story in order to search for similar themes? Thankfully, the basic structure of Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth” falls into the “Fair Unknown” category, “one of the most widespread of romance themes” (Benson 92). The “Fair Unknown” theme was apparently a well-admired one, and many authors used the convention to structure their own romances. The theme was “a very popular medieval story type...it left its influence of the *enfances* of almost every Arthurian knight for whom an *enfances* has been written, including Gawain, Lancelot, and Perceval” (Norris 83). Robert H. Wilson identifies several of the

romances falling into the “Fair Unknown” category that can be considered analogous to Malory’s romance:

Many of these details in [“The Tale of Sir Gareth”] are also paralleled in one or more of the Fair Unknown romances: Renaut de Beaujeu’s *Bel Inconnu* (*BI*), the English *Lybeaus Desconus* (*LD*), the *Wigalois* (*Wig.*), and the *Carduino* (*Car.*). Existence of these further parallels is worth noting because it suggests, first, that the details in question may have been derived by the source of [“The Tale of Sir Gareth”]. (6)

Wilson goes on to also identify Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec and Enide* as being similar in several aspects to Malory’s tale.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these romances, Larry D. Benson presents *Ipomadon* as a likely source for Malory’s tale. Benson argues that “*Gareth* is much closer to *Ipomadon* than to *Lybeaus Desconus*” (97). In their examinations of the romances, these critics have been looking at the overarching structures of the various romances, but not the themes found within those tales. They have examined the structural elements of the romances such as how the hero comes to Arthur’s court, the nickname the hero receives, how many opponents he overcomes, and how many ladies he falls in love with. In this chapter, I plan to inspect five of these “Fair Unknown” analogues, all of which were written and in manuscript circulation before Malory finished the *Morte Darthur*, in search of the theme of familial violence which is so important within Malory’s own tale. *Le Bel Inconnu*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois*, *Erec and Enide*, and *Ipomadon* will be summarized and examined with an eye for the theme of familial violence in order to determine if Malory took the theme along with the “Fair

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<sup>1</sup> The links between Malory’s *Morte* and Chrétien’s romances have been noted by various scholars. In his monograph *Malory: Texts and Sources*, P.J.C. Field writes, “There are manifest similarities between Malory’s fourth tale, his ‘Tale of Sir Gareth’ and Chrétien’s *Erec*, but in the present state of scholarly disagreement about the tale’s major source (if any), it would take a bold mind to maintain that the points of similarity were created by Malory working directly from Chrétien’s romance” (238).

Unknown” story type, or if he added the theme to the romance in order to make it better conform with the other sections of his *Morte* which are also keenly interested in how the members of a chivalrous family can interact with each other.

Renaut de Bâgé’s *Le Bel Inconnu* has been dated “from 1191 into the first quarter of the thirteenth century” (xii). The romance was very popular and was translated into Middle English by at least three different translators. It is either the source for the Middle English *Lybeaus Desconus* or the two share a common source, and *Le Bel Inconnu* also shares a number of similarities with the Middle High German *Wigalois*. The romance begins with Arthur at his court in Caerlion preparing for a meal. A fair, young messenger appears before the king and asks for a boon. Arthur grants the request, and the messenger joins with the court at the meal. Arthur requests that young man reveal his name. However, he replies, saying, “Truly, I cannot, / except to tell you / that my mother used to call me ‘fair son’” (115-117). Then, because of and in praise of the youth’s striking beauty, Arthur names him the Fair Unknown. Before the meal is finished, a maiden, Helie, and a dwarf arrive to ask Arthur for aid. Their mistress, the daughter of King Guingras requires a knight to accomplish the adventure of the “Fearsome Kiss” (191). The Fair Unknown immediately asks for the promised boon, and requests the honor of the adventure. It is granted to him, but the maid leaves the court, insulted by Arthur’s giving the adventure to such a young knight.

The Fair Unknown follows the maiden, who continually insists that he will not be strong enough for the adventure and advises him to turn back. They arrive at a Perilous Ford and the Fair Unknown defeats the knight guarding it, Bliobleris.

Following this in quick succession, the Fair Unknown saves a new maiden from two giants after hearing her cries at night. After this combat, Helie asks the Fair Unknown to pardon her for her harsh words towards him. Next, three companions of Blioblieris fall upon the Fair Unknown, who defeats the three knights. As the Fair Unknown and Helie travel onwards, a hunt passes before them. A stag crosses their path, followed by greyhounds and brachets. A beautiful brachet passes in front of the maiden, behind the pack. The dog

Was whiter than snow  
 With only his ears as black as pitch,  
 Or so it appeared from his left side;  
 On the other side, on his right flank,  
 Was a black spot. (1287-1291)

The small dog has a thorn in its paw and stops in front of the maiden, who quickly dismounts and picks up the dog. The owner of the dogs arrives and asks Helie to return his dog. She refuses and the Fair Unknown asserts her right against the unarmed knight. The knight returns to his castle, arms himself, and rides back to the Fair Unknown. The two fight, and after a long battle, the Fair Unknown overcomes the hunter knight.

Following these adventures, the Fair Unknown enters into a contest for a sparrowhawk. The Fair Unknown comes across a weeping maiden. She tells him that her lord has been killed by the knight who keeps the sparrowhawk, and she explains the contest to the Fair Unknown. Any knight who wishes to take possession of the sparrowhawk must bring with him a maiden whose beauty will be compared with that of the lady of the castle. Each knight will maintain that his own damsel is the most beautiful. Thus, the knights fight for the honor of having the most beautiful lady. The

Fair Unknown promises to defend the weeping maiden's right to the bird, and they approach the castle. The knight of the castle arrives, leading his own lady who "was quite ugly and wrinkled! / Without exception, all were displeased / that he maintained her to be the most beautiful of women" (1727-1729). The Fair Unknown and the knight fight, and the Fair Unknown is victorious. Following the joust, Helie and the maiden who claims the sparrowhawk realize that they are cousins.

Following this adventure, the Fair Unknown travels to the Isle d'Or, the home of the beautiful and learned Maiden of the White Hands. The Maiden of the White Hands is being harassed by Malgier the Gray, a knight who defends the pass before the castle. He kills all whom he encounters and places their decapitated heads on pikes surrounding his tent. The Maiden of the White Hands praises the Fair Unknown for his victory and promises herself and her lands to him. Helie reminds the Fair Unknown of his promise to her and arranges for them to leave early in the morning to continue their quest.

After their departure from the Isle d'Or, the Fair Unknown and Helie quickly arrive at the Desolate City, where the Fair Unknown jousts with Lampart, the steward of Helie's lady. After the joust, Lampart lodges and feeds the Fair Unknown, and in the morning, the steward leads him to the Desolate City where the Fair Unknown is to complete the adventure of the Fearsome Kiss. After entering an enchanted building, the Fair Unknown defeats two enchanter, Mabon and Evrain. Following their deaths, a marvelous, fire-breathing serpent enters the hall. It acts deferentially toward the Fair Unknown then kisses him and leaves. As he stands there stunned, a voice from the aether tells him his entire life. The voice identifies Gawain as his father, Blanchemal the

Fay as his mother, and goes on to reveal his true name, “King Arthur called you by the wrong name: / he called you the Fair Unknown, / but Guinglain is the name you were given at baptism” (3231-3233). Guinglain then takes a nap and awakes to find a beautiful maiden who identifies herself as the daughter of King Guingras, Blonde Esmeree. She reveals that she was the serpent and then tells Guinglain the true name of her lands: she is the queen of Wales and the Desolate City is properly called Snowdon. She wishes to wed Guinglain and make him king of Wales, but Guinglain insists that he needs King Arthur’s approval before marrying.

At this point in the story, Guinglain remembers the stunning beauty of the Maiden of the White Hands and desires to return to her lands. As Blonde Esmeree begins to travel to Arthur’s court, Guinglain returns to the Isle d’Or and the Maiden of the White Hands. After she torments him with magic for his earlier unannounced departure, she invites him to her bed, where he is flooded with joy. As Renaut de Bâgé writes:

I do not know whether he made her his true love,  
For I was not there, and I saw nothing of it,  
But I know that the lady lost the name of maiden  
There at her love’s side. (4815-4818)

Following their night of happiness, the Maiden of the White Hands reveals her knowledge of arithmetic, geometry, necromancy, astronomy, and enchantment. She tells Guinglain that she knew he would succeed at the adventure and that she herself advised Helie to venture to Arthur’s court to ask for a champion. Weeks later, Blonde Esmeree, all of the knights Guinglain has sent to Arthur, and Arthur’s court are worried that Guinglain is not coming to court. They arrange to hold a tournament and send

messengers around the realm to announce the festivities. Guinglain hears of the tournament and leaves the Maiden of the White Hands. Guinglain arrives at and fights well during the tournament. He is declared the winner of the tournament and travels to London where Arthur approves of the union of Guinglain and Blonde Esmeree. The romance ends with the marriage between the two, but in the final lines, Renaut de Bâgé asks for the favor of his own lady, promising to reunite Guinglain with the Maiden of the White Hands if she does so.

The romance is not particularly interested in the intricacies of the family which are possible within the Fair Unknown structure. At the beginning of the romance, it is Gawain who arms Guinglain and gives him a squire, but this is not recognition of the familial bond that is shared between the two. Rather, these actions of Gawain are instances of his courtliness. Unlike Malory's, this is a romance wherein the greatest knight is Gawain. He is the most courtly knight and the strongest knight. Throughout the romance, Guinglain is told repeatedly that only he or Gawain the greatest knight could accomplish such adventures.

When the Fair Unknown is revealed as Guinglain to Arthur's court, it is Blonde Esmeree who does so. Gawain is not even present for the revelation of the identity. Arthur is told the true identity of the Fair Unknown and then calls his knights together as well as Gawain to tell the assembled court the news. Even at the end of the romance when Guinglain has returned to Arthur's court, the only familial connection that is emphasized is his relation to King Arthur. Arthur subsumes Gawain as the strongest bond that Guinglain has with family. And this only makes sense, as Renaut de Bâgé was

highly influenced by the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, especially *Erec and Enide*. The poem is full of “self-conscious literariness” (xv) as Renaut de Bâgé copies the high literacy of Chrétien. The love versus honor theme of *Erec and Enide* is strongly felt within *Le Bel Inconnu*. Instead of the conflict being focused on one woman however, “the narrative reveals Renaut’s affinity for doubling; there are two heroines, two love stories, two endings” (xiv). The Maiden of the White Hands represents love and erotic desire, whereas Blonde Esmeree, as the queen of Wales, represents honor and duty. Guinglain literally goes between focusing on honor and erotic, physical desire as the romance progresses. It is only when he arrives at Arthur’s court and is accepted as a proven knight and relative of the king that he focuses on his duty to the kingdom. By marrying Blonde Esmeree, Guinglain brings the land of Wales under control of Arthur.

*Lybeaus Desconus* was a very popular Middle English romance, surviving in at least six different manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> In the Early English Text Society edition of the text, M. Mills presents an edition of what he calls “the two best copies (those of MSS. Cotton Caligula A. II. and Lambeth Palace 306)” (foreword) with the two texts parallel on facing pages. He dates the Cotton MS to the 1450s and Lambeth Palace 306 to c. 1450. Mills argues that these texts are two and three steps, respectively, from the original romance (14). The romance itself is dated to about 1350. In my summary and

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<sup>2</sup> *Lybeaus Desconus*’s popularity in the medieval period is also attested by the hero’s appearance within Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, in the mocking “Sir Thopas”:

Men speken of romances of prys,  
Of Horn child and of Ypotys,  
Of Beves and sir Gy,  
Of si Lybeux and Pleyndamour—  
But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour  
Of roial chivalry! (VII.897-902)

The Lybeaus romance was popular enough to stand next to the likes of *King Horn*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Guy of Warwick*, as well as the lesser known *Ypotis* and the unidentified Pleyndamour.

discussion of *Lybeaus Desconus*, I will follow Mills' suggestion of accepting Lambeth Palace 306 as the best version available:

MS. Lambeth is quite free from the omissions of [Cotton Caligula A. II.], and since it likewise shows no trace of the spurious interpolations of [Bodleian Lib. Ms. Ashmole 61, Biblioteca Nazionale Naples Ms. XIII B. 29, and BM Add. Ms. 27879] and is not defective in the manner of [Lincoln's Inn Ms. Hale 150], it is fundamentally the best text of those available to us. (12)

MS. Lambeth Palace 306 may be the best text available, but when the Cotton MS contains passages that do not appear in Lambeth, or differ significantly, I will also look to Lambeth for the story of *Lybeaus Desconus*.

The romance begins with the narrator identifying the hero of his romance as Gyngelayn, the son of Gawain. Gyngelayn is kept by his mother so that he never sees any armed knights, "and all for dred of wycke loose / his moder alwey kept[e] him close / as dughty childe and dere" (22-24). His mother even hides his own identity from him, and only calls him Bewfiz. However, one day as Gyngelayn is hunting he comes across a dead knight in the forest. He takes the dead knight's armor, as one does, and arms himself. He immediately rides to Glastonbury, where Arthur is holding court. He asks Arthur to knight him, but Gyngelayn is unable to give his own name. In praise of the youth's fair looks, Arthur names him *Lybeaus Desconus*. After being knighted, he also asks Arthur for the honor of the first adventure, which Arthur grants to him. Here, the Cotton MS includes three lines which state that Gyngelayn is taught how to be a knight by Gawain, but the training must have been short, as both texts immediately bring the court to a meal after the knighting. At the meal, before Arthur had been seated for "the mountence of a myle" (113), a maid, Elyne, and a dwarf arrive to ask Arthur for aid.

Their lady, the lady of Synadown, has been imprisoned and they request a knight to aid them in freeing her. Gyngelayn immediately asks for the adventure and receives it from the king. The maiden leaves the castle accompanied by Gyngelayn, but she is very displeased. Elyne lets him know in no uncertain terms that she believes he is too young and weak to finish the adventure.

The group comes across a pass-perilous guarded by Sir William Delaraunche. Gyngelayn defeats Sir William and sends him to Arthur's court. On the way, Sir William's three nephews encounter him, and after he explains his situation, the three promise to avenge their uncle's defeat. After witnessing Gyngelayn's prowess, Elyne asks for mercy for her harsh words towards the young knight. The next day, the three nephews encounter Gyngelayn and challenge him. That night, the dwarf sees a fire, and as Gyngelayn approaches the fire, he discovers two giants holding a maiden captive. Gyngelayn kills the two giants and rescues the maiden.

The maiden leads Gyngelayn and Elyne to her father's castle. Once they arrive, the earl tells Gyngelayn about a knight, Jeffron, who claims that his love is the most beautiful lady. Jeffron offers as a reward a gersfalcon to any knight who can prove that his own lady is more beautiful than Jeffron's. Jeffron kills those who do not defeat him and places their heads upon spears. Gyngelayn brings Elyne with him to compare to Jeffron's lady. The crowd judges that Jeffron's lady is more beautiful, but Gyngelayn fights and maims Jeffron. After doing so, he sends the gersfalcon to Arthur. In response to the gift of the gersfalcon, Arthur sends one hundred pounds of florins to Gyngelayn. With the money, Gyngelayn hosts a feast which lasts for forty days. At the end of six

weeks, Gyngelayn and Elyne continue on their journey to Synadown. As they travel, they hear hunting horns blow and hounds running. The dwarf identifies the horn as belonging to Sir Otis de Lyle, a knight who formerly served the lady of Synadown but was taken with some “gile” (1038) and fled from her kingdom. A beautiful hunting dog passes before the group. The dog is “of all coloures / that man may se of ffloures / by-twene Mydsomer and Maye” (1047-1049). Gyngelayn picks up the dog and gives it to Elyne. Shortly thereafter, Sir Otis de Lyle equipped for hunting arrives and demands the return of his dog. Gyngelayn refuses to return the marvelous dog, and Sir Otis de Lyle returns to his castle in order to recruit his friends and family to help him recover the dog. Otis de Lyle along with numerous of his friends and his four sons ride after Gyngelayn. They attack him at once, and after a long battle, Gyngelayn overcomes Sir Otis de Lyle, who surrenders.

Once he recovers from this battle, Gyngelayn rides again towards Synadown. Along the way, he passes the Ile d’Or. The pass before the castle is guarded by a Saracen giant named Maugys. After a battle which lasts into the night, Gyngelayn defeats Maugys and is welcomed into the Ile d’Or by the lady of the town, la Dame Amoure. La Dame Amoure is a sorceress and seduces Gyngelayn. He spends over a year living in joy with the enchantress until Elyne reminds him of his duty to free the lady of Synadown from her prison. Gyngelayn and Elyne leave the Ile d’Or and travel to Synadown within three days. When they arrive, Gyngelayn must joust with Sir Lambard, the steward of the castle. Gyngelayn unhorses Lambard, and then Lambard welcomes Gyngelayn to Synadown and explains the circumstances of the lady’s

imprisonment. Two necromancer brothers, Mabon and Irayne, have imprisoned the lady. The next day, Gyngelayn fights and kills the two brothers. Upon their deaths, a serpent with a woman's face approaches and kisses Gyngelayn. Immediately after the kiss, the serpent transforms into a woman, the lady of Synadown. The lady promises to wed Gyngelayn and to give him control of her lands. Gyngelayn and the lady then travel to Arthur's court where they are soon wed happily with great ceremony.

In both the Lambeth and Cotton versions of *Lybeaus Desconus*, which Mills considers "the two best copies" (foreword), this is the end of the romance and the fair unknown, identified to the reader by the narrator but never to the other characters, remains Lybeaus Desconus. The Fair Unknown element of the story remains unresolved by the time the hero receives his happy ending. For this reason, J.W. Thomas has said that "*Lybeaus Desconus* is unproblematic and uncomplicated: it begins with a nameless youth and ends with a happily married king, and what lies between is simply a series of interesting adventures which are unburdened by pervading motifs or symbols" (16). However, the text is complicated and problematic because of the lack of the traditional revelation of identity common in Fair Unknown romances. The romance raises many questions about knightly, social, and personal identity, touches upon religious issues between Christians and Muslims, and more.

Concerns within the family, however, are not a central issue in the text. Aside from the shame Gyngelayn's mother fears because of him, the reader does not see the hero interacting with any other characters who know that he is related to them. When Gawain teaches Gyngelayn, for whatever amount of time, and arms him for the

adventure, Gawain is acting as the best and most courteous of knights, not as a father. Arthur knights Gyngelayn “for neuer sethe J was born, / sawe J neuer me be-forne / so semely to my sight” (58-60). Even the mother’s fear of shame is somewhat problematic. Depending on which text one reads, the passage can have very different interpretations. The stanza in the Cotton MS lacks six lines which appear in Lambeth. In the Cotton text, the narrator writes that Gyngelayn was fair, gentle, and bright even though he is a bastard. Then the narrator says that his mother kept him close for fear of a wicked reputation. This connects the expected reputation with the bastard status of the son. The six lines in the Lambeth MS come after the description of Gyngelayn’s beauty, and in the lines, the narrator says that Gyngelayn was a wild child and would harm his companions. This is followed by the lines describing the mother sequestering the child away for fear of shame. Here, the shame is connected to the violent tendencies of the child, not Gyngelayn’s bastard status. This romance is quite uninterested in questions of the family dynamic. The one location in the romance which does handle questions relevant to a discussion of family matters is a textual crux in the manuscript record of the text with variants that make the passage not about the family at all. Also, two of the best surviving manuscripts of *Lybeaus Desconus* do not contain the conclusion of the Fair Unknown structure, within which one would expect the revelation of Gyngelayn’s identity and a reunion with his family members at Arthur’s court.

*Wigalois* is an early thirteenth century Middle High German romance composed by Wirnt von Grafenberg. There is no definite dating of *Wigalois*, but scholars have given the romance “a composition date of somewhere between the years of 1204 and

1210” (Thomas 4). It has been called “undeniably a most important text, but its presentation of the traditional material is often very garbled indeed” (Mills 44). The traditional material which seems garbled comes to Wirnt through a squire. At several points in the narrative, Wirnt reminds the reader that he has received this story from a squire. At one point in the text, after Gawain is overcome in combat, Wirnt writes, “it also would never have come from my lips if it had not been related to me as the whole truth by a squire, with whom I argued all the while” (110). At the end of the romance, Wirnt writes, “I shall now end the story just as the squire told it who gave it to me to compose. I know it only from his lips, so some parts may be missing” (236). With Wirnt arguing through the tale and the squire perhaps forgetting sections of the text, it is no wonder that some scholars see *Wigalois* as presented a garbled version of traditional materials. These traditional materials are the same as those of *Le Bel Inconnu*. Both tales are structured by the Fair Unknown thematic form and present numerous parallel episodes. However, the tales differ in significant ways, and scholars have not been able to determine exactly how the two are related.

*Wigalois* begins with Arthur in Brittany at Caridoel. While Arthur is waiting for news of a marvelous event or adventure before eating, a knight arrives and offers a gift of a belt to the queen. The queen is hesitant to accept such a gift, but at last agrees to wear the belt for a day and then return it to the knight. When Guinevere puts on the belt, she “at once became joyful and wise: no sorrow troubled her, she knew all languages, her heart was full of happiness, she was a master at every game, she lacked no art or skill” (107). The next day, the knight returns for the belt and then challenges the knights

of the Round Table. He overcomes all who joust against him, including Gawain. The overcome Gawain is taken as a prisoner by the knight who then leads Gawain through a desolate and fearful landscape into a beautiful land surrounded by mountains. The knight, who is the king of the land, then offers Gawain the hand of his beautiful niece in marriage. Gawain accepts the offer and marries the maiden, and “the faultless woman became as dear to him as life itself. So he rested from the journey until the lady was with child” (115). After half a year, though, Gawain begins to miss the company of his fellow members of the Round Table. Gawain takes his leave of his wife before secretly leaving the mystical, mountainous realm. The journey back to Caridoel takes Gawain another half year. Arthur and his court welcome Gawain, whom they believed dead. Shortly, however, Gawain begins to miss his wife. He travels for an entire year before he discovers that there is no way to pass the mountains and enter the kingdom. Gawain returns to Arthur’s court in distress.

The *enfances* of Wigalois follows. He is raised by his mother and the wisest queen until he is twelve years old. Next, noble and wise knights take over Wigalois’ education, teaching him all that a knight and courtier should know. Nothing of his parentage or heritage is held back from Wigalois. In fact, Gawain is held up as a model of knightliness and bravery. When he is twenty years old, Wigalois desires to ride forth from the faerie realm:

I want very much to journey forth to earn in my youth the right to be better known than others—just as my father did. What good is my strength if I am to stay at home here like a woman? I want to seek him of whose manly virtues I have been told all my life, my father, sir Gawain, who always shone in knightly honor, as I have heard. (118)

When his mother attempts to dissuade him, Wigalois responds by saying that he is determined to ride into foreign lands in order to make his name known and gain honor and fame. Seeing that she is unable to prevent Wigalois from leaving, his mother gives him the magical belt which appeared at the beginning of the romance. After leaving the mountain kingdom, Wigalois wanders aimlessly until he arrives in the lands near Caridoel. Wigalois sits on a stone, the property of which is that “no man who had been false in any way could place his hand on it” (120). This miraculous event is reported to Arthur who arrives to meet the young knight. Wigalois gives Arthur his name, but conceals his parentage. Arthur welcomes Wigalois into his household and turns him over to Gawain for further knightly training, but “they did not then feel the great loyalty which binds father and son, for neither knew their relationship” (121). Wigalois prospers under Gawain’s tutelage and is soon knighted.

After the feast of Pentecost, a maiden, Nereja, and a dwarf arrive to ask Arthur to send aid to their lady in the land of Korntin. Wigalois immediately asks for the adventure. Arthur gives the quest to Wigalois, and Nereja is offended that such a young and inexperienced knight should be given the task. They ride away from the court with Nereja until at nightfall they arrive at a castle. The lord of the castle jousts with any knight who requests lodging and if he overcomes the knight, he takes all of the knight’s gear. Wigalois and the lord of the castle joust, and Wigalois kills the other knight. Fearing revenge from the inhabitants of the castle, Wigalois and Nereja leave the castle and prepare to camp in the nearby forest for the night. In the forest, Wigalois encounters and overcomes two giants who are about to rape a maiden. Following this combat, a

small dog runs in front of the group, “all white except that one ear was yellow and the other blood-red” (128). Wigalois picks up the dog and gives it to Nereja. A hunter arrives and claims that the dog is his and asks for its return. Wigalois insults the hunter who leaves to arm himself for combat. The two fight and Wigalois kills the hunter-knight. Following this adventure, they encounter a weeping, Persian maiden. She explains that the king of Ireland had held a beauty contest with a prize of a beautiful horse and a parrot. The maiden was judged the most beautiful, but a red knight took the prizes by force and gave them to his own lady. Wigalois promises to regain the horse and parrot for the maiden. Wigalois arrives at the field of the contest and is welcomed by the daughter of the king of Persia. Wigalois then challenges the red knight, Count Hojir of Mannesvelt, who took the prize. Wigalois overcomes Hojir and sends him to Arthur’s court.

Wigalois rides onwards, eager to reach the adventure in Korntin. At night, they find a tent inhabited by a knight who warmly welcomes them and offers them lodging for the night. In the morning, the two joust, and Wigalois kills the knight. Following this combat, Nereja accepts Wigalois as a knight capable of accomplishing the adventure, and tells him how a heathen who sold his soul to the devil, Roaz of Glois, disinherited the lady of Korntin, Lorie. The king of Korntin independently held his lands until Roaz befriended and betrayed him. Roaz killed the king and many of his knights in the middle of the night and began to conquer the land. The king’s daughter, Lorie, lost all of her lands except for one castle. Wigalois and Nereja soon arrive in the land of Korntin. Wigalois jousts with the steward of the castle. After they each break a

lance, Wigalois is welcomed to the castle by Lorie and her mother, the queen of Korntin. The next day, Wigalois sets out to win back Lorie's lands. He follows a mystical beast through a forest and to Korntin castle. There, the beast transforms into the king of Korntin. The king explains that he is suffering in purgatory and also tells Wigalois about the dragon Pfetan which is tormenting the countryside. Wigalois finds the dragon and kills it, saving Jorel, a knight, in the process, but in its death throes, Pfetan knocks Wigalois unconscious. A fisherman and his wife believe that Wigalois is dead and strip his armor from him and steal his magical belt. Wigalois is found by Jorel's wife and rearmed. He continues on his adventure and fights a wild woman. He then encounters the Muslim Karrioz of Glois. During the combat, Karrioz retreats into the poisonous fog surrounding Glois and is killed by the fog. When the fog recedes, Wigalois passes beyond it to Glois where he overcomes the puzzle of a waterwheel and two old gatekeeper-knights. Wigalois then enters the castle and kills Roaz. Once she sees her husband die, Lady Japhite, his wife, dies of sorrow on the corpse of Roaz. After the combat, Count Adan of Alarie, one of the gatekeepers, tends to Wigalois' wounds and promises to serve him. Wigalois returns to Lorie, and all of Glois and Korntin arrive for the wedding and to swear fealty to Wigalois. After the wedding, Count Adan and his granddaughter, Lady Marine, convert to Christianity and are baptized. Shortly thereafter, Arthur and several Round Table knights arrive, including Gawain. Gawain is reunited with Wigalois and accepts Lorie as his daughter.

Into this happy festival news arrives that King Amire of Libia was killed by a knight, the Lion of Namur, while on his way to the wedding festivities. The squire of

Amire insists that Wigalois right this wrong because Amire was under his protection while traveling to the wedding and also because Lady Larie and the king were related. Wigalois agrees to declare war on the Lion and appoints Gawain as head of his army because of his wisdom and experience. Wigalois summons an army composed of all of those who hold fiefs in his name and with elephants and other exotic siege machines, lays siege to Namur. The Lion sallies out but is killed by Gawain. After the battle, Wigalois leaves with his wife and Gawain to travel to Arthur's court. During the journey, Gawain and Wigalois learn that the lady, Gawain's wife and Wigalois' mother, has died. When they arrive at Arthur's court, Wigalois reveals his parentage to Arthur then leaves to return to his lands after swearing to be subject to Arthur during his life. Before he leaves, Gawain gives him advice on how to be a good ruler. The romance ends with Wirnt reporting that Wigalois and Lorie lived happily in Korntin and had a son named Lifort Gawanides, who subsequently became widely known.

The importance of the family is a theme in *Wigalois*; however, it is not an important one. It is a tertiary or quaternary theme, if that. Far more important in the romance are the themes of education and fortune or luck. Even the exoticism and Orientalism and anti-feminism are more important than the familial concerns within the text. J.W. Thomas writes, "the central idea of *Wigalois*, [unlike Chrétien's *Erec and Enide*,] is not a love-duty conflict, but the working of fortune in the education for kingship" (13). From before his birth, Wigalois is groomed to be a king, as the faerie lord travels to Caridoel in order to bring Gawain back as a groom for his niece. Wigalois receives the best training possible and is a perfect student. When he can learn

no more in his mother's kingdom, he travels to Arthur's court and receives training from the best knight in the land. He is an excellent student and soon leaves the court to apply what he has learned. After winning a kingdom, Wigalois is trained in the business of waging a large scale war by Gawain. Later, his father gives him additional education on how to be a proper king. Wigalois is not the only one Wirnt expects to be learning. The narrative is full of authorial interpolations, which gives the romance a very didactic tone. The narrator is constantly interrupting the romance in order to remind the reader of which actions are noble and which are not. Thomas writes, "the distinguishing characteristic of Wigalois's education is that he is the perfect pupil. He is not portrayed as such because Wirnt takes an ideal or naive approach, but because the author wants to emphasize the role of a benevolent destiny in the affairs of a chosen few" (29).

Wigalois' fantastic ability as a student is related to the second most important theme of the romance: the role of luck and destiny in a knight's gaining a kingdom. Destiny, luck, fortune, and Dame Fortune are invoked almost non-stop throughout the romance. Fortune's wheel is emblazoned on Wigalois' shield, and the crest of his helmet holds a miniature, spinning wheel of fortune. Throughout the narrative, Dame Fortune is invoked almost as many times as God and the Trinity. Less important themes in *Wigalois* are the importance of good storytelling and the motif of anti-feminine sentiment. Only after these does the importance of family enter the narrative. The theme, however, is uncomplicated, and aside from Wigalois's initial concealment of his name, there is no conflict in his relationship with Gawain.

The composition of Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* has been placed in the 1170's. Although Chrétien's narrative is not a Fair Unknown romance, it contains many episodes which are closely analogous to events within several of the traditional Fair Unknown stories. Renaut de Bâgé's *Le Bel Inconnu*, especially, was influenced by Chrétien's romance, and the Joy of the Court episode is mirrored in almost all of the Fair Unknown romances in one form or another. Erec begins the story as an established member of the Round Table, and is well known in the kingdom. On Easter day at Cardigan castle, Arthur decides to hunt a white stag which has a tradition attached to it. Whoever kills the white stag must kiss the most beautiful maiden in the court. The king and members of the Round Table join in the hunt. Erec, however, joins the queen to keep her company during the hunt. As the queen's party is waiting in a clearing, a knight, a lady, and a dwarf pass nearby. The queen desires to know who the knight is, and sends a maiden to inquire of the knight's identity. The dwarf, however, stops and beats the maiden. Next, Erec goes to ask, but he is treated the same way by the dwarf. Erec is unarmed, but fearing to lose the trail of the knight, he follows in hopes of finding armor. Meanwhile, Arthur successfully kills the white stag, which causes unrest in the court as the king will have to choose the most beautiful maiden. Guinevere suggests that Arthur postpone the decision until Erec returns. Erec follows the knight to a town and once he sees that the knight is lodging in the town, he searches for lodging himself. Erec comes across a poor vavasour who welcomes Erec and offers him hospitality. The vavasour's beautiful daughter, Enide, arrives to care for Erec's horse, and Erec asks his host about the gathering of knights in the town. The vavasour tells Erec that on the next

day there will be a contest for a fine sparrow-hawk. The knight who brings the most beautiful maiden will receive the sparrow-hawk. Erec asks for and receives armor and an engagement to Enide. The next day, Erec leads Enide to the field where the sparrow-hawk contest will be decided. He fights and overcomes the proud knight, Yder, and sends him along with his maiden and dwarf to Guinevere. Erec returns to the home of the vavasour and announces his intention to return to Arthur's court and wed Enide. He also promises the vavasour two fine castles within his father's lands. The next day, Erec departs with Enide for Arthur's court. The vavasour and his wife weep and kiss their daughter as she leaves, "such is love, such is nature, such is the tenderness for one's offspring. They wept because of the tenderness and the sweetness and the friendship that they had for their child" (55).

Erec and Enide quickly return to Cardigan and during the wedding preparations, Chrétien gives a list of present Round Table knights in order of prowess, "before all the good knights Gawain must be the first, second Erec, son of Lac, and third Lancelot of the Lake..." (58). The king awards the kiss of the white stag to Enide without complaint from the members of the court. The wedding arrives with great splendor and a tournament is held to celebrate. Erec succeeds spectacularly during the tournament and then takes his leave of Arthur to return to his own lands. However, Erec's fame begins to suffer because of his love for Enide:

But Erec was so in love with her that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments. He no longer cared for tourneying; he wanted to enjoy his wife's company, and he made her his lady and his mistress. He turned all his attention to embracing and kissing her; he pursued no other delight. His companions were grieved by this and often lamented among themselves, saying that he loved her far too much. Often it was past noon before he rose from her side. (67)

Enide hears these complaints and tells Erec, who immediately summons his armor and horses for himself and Enide. He departs his kingdom riding behind Enide. He tells Enide to be silent and not to speak to him. Shortly, three thieves attack. Enide warns Erec, who kills the thieves and takes their horses before threatening Enide for speaking to him. Before they travel another league, five knights approach. Enide again warns Erec. He overcomes the five knights, takes their horses, and again threatens Enide. The next day, the two take lodging with Count Galoain who tries to seduce Enide. Enide warns Erec that the count plans to kill him, and they leave early in the morning. The count and one hundred knights give chase. The count and his seneschal advance before the other knight, and Erec overcomes the two. The remaining knights stop over the wounded count and take him back to his castle in order to treat his wounds. Next, Erec passes before the lands of Guivret the Short, who he fights and overcomes. Erec and Enide travel onwards and soon find Arthur camped in a forest. They camp with Arthur for the night, but depart in the morning. During that day, Erec frees Cadoc of Cabruel from two giants, but his wounds overcome him and he collapses as he returns to Enide. Enide believes that Erec is dead and begins to lament. A count arrives, and upon seeing the beauty of Enide, is determined to marry her. He takes her and Erec's unconscious body to his castle. Erec awakes when he hears Enide crying and slays the count. All of the inhabitants of the castle believe that a devil has come into their midst and flee for their lives. Erec and Enide leave and encounter Guivret again. Guivret overcomes the injured Erec, but as soon as he learns Erec's identity, he takes him to a nearby castle to treat his wounds.

Once Erec recovers from his wounds, he leaves with Enide and Guivret to return to Arthur's court. On the way, they pass castle Brandigan, and its owner, King Evrain, tells them about the adventure of the Joy of the Court. King Evrain lodges Erec and brings him to the adventure the next day. The adventure takes place in a garden that is full of sharpened stakes with the heads of defeated knights impaled upon them. In the garden, Erec encounters and defeats Maboagrain. Maboagrain then explains that he has promised the maiden he loves to defend the garden until defeated. The Joy of the Court occurs when Maboagrain is freed to return to the court of his uncle, King Evrain. Erec, Enide, and Guivret celebrate with King Evrain and Maboagrain before returning swiftly to Arthur's court. Erec remains at Arthur's court until the death of his father. Upon receiving the news that King Lac has died, Erec "did all he was expected to do" (117). After the funerary rites are complete, Erec and Arthur travel to Erec's new lands. Arthur crowns Erec, and the tale ends with the splendid coronation celebration.

The major theme of *Erec and Enide* is the conflict between love and duty or honor. Throughout the story, Erec fluctuates between the two extremes of love and honor. The tale begins with him defending his and Guinevere's honor. Following the success at the sparrow-hawk joust, Erec devotes himself completely to love. Once he hears of the rumors and displeasure of his friends at his devotion to love, Erec swings to the opposite extreme, even going so far as to threaten Enide if she so much as speaks with him. The two are reconciled by the end of the story, and Erec ends the story accepting the duty of kingship once his father dies.

The importance of the family does appear in *Erec and Enide*, but it is only important in the tale because it is uncomplicated. The family is the one constant in the tale. Erec shifts wildly between love and honor, but Erec's family is static. Chrétien presents a perfect father-son relationship between Erec and Lac. The romance presents the reader with an untroubled, perfectly functioning patrilineality. The heredity of Erec and Lac is uncomplicated by bastardry or any other siblings. Lac perfectly loves his one son, and Erec knows that his father's lands will be his. When Erec combines his family with Enide's through marriage, it is the joining of two perfect families. Even though Enide's father has fallen into poverty, he still has a constant love for his daughter. Chrétien does have a slight focus on the family with *Erec and Enide*, but only as an unproblematic, uncomplicated social system that ensures that Erec becomes a king and Enide becomes a queen.

*Ipomadon* is “an anonymous Middle English rendition, dating from anywhere between the last decade of the fourteenth century and the middle of the fifteenth century, of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman romance *Iopmedon* by Hue de Rotelande” (Purdie xi). The Anglo-Norman *Iopmedon* was quite a popular text and was translated into Middle English three times: the nearly 9,000 line tail-rhyme *Ipomadon*; the 2,300 line *Lyfe of Ipomydon*; and a prose rendition, *Ipomedon*. The tail-rhyme *Ipomadon* has been called “one of the most notable in Middle English” (Purdie xi). Rhiannon Purdie gives several reasons for this:

It is the longest continuous example of tail-rhyme verse in Middle English; it is elegantly written—nothing like the kind of verse parodied in Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*—and finally, it is unusual among Middle English translations for its

faithfulness to its source, a copy of which the translator almost certainly had before him. (xi-xii)

Larry D. Benson has introduced this tale into discussions of Malory's "Sir Gareth" because of the numerous similarities which *Ipomadon* shares with "Gareth" and other Fair Unknown romances.<sup>3</sup> This tale, however, does not quite follow the traditional Fair Unknown structure.

The romance begins by introducing Mellyagere, king of Cessyle, and his son, Cabanus. King Mellyagere's niece, the heir to Calabria, is also introduced. She is named The Fere because of her pride. She vows never to marry anyone unless he is the best knight in the world and well proved in knightly deeds. Once the heroine and her family are introduced, *Ipomadon* is presented. He is the son of the king of Apulia, Ermagynes. *Ipomadon* hears of the outstanding beauty of The Fere and is determined to see her. He travels with his trusty servant, Talamewe, to the court of The Fere. Once he arrives, he conceals his paternity and is known as the Strange Valet. He is content with working under the butler and hunting in his free time. However, *Ipomadon* shuns chivalric pursuits. One day, The Fere goes on a rant about how men are worthless if they do not act as knights and work to be chivalrous. *Ipomadon* takes his leave from The Fere's court and returns to his father's kingdom. Immediately, The Fere realizes that she loves *Ipomadon* and is thrown into grief at his departure. When *Ipomadon* arrives in his lands, he finds his mother on her deathbed. She informs him that he has a half-brother and gives him a ring which will identify the brother. *Ipomadon* is quite elated to hear of his unknown brother:

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<sup>3</sup> See *Malory's Morte Darthur*, especially pages 94-101.

Then was Ipomadon glade,  
 And as grette sorowe in hertte hadde,  
 He syhyde and sayd ‘alas’;  
 Ioyefull he was that he had a broþur,  
 And well more sory of that othere,  
 He wyste never where he was. (1667-1672)

Ipomadon does not let the death of his mother slow him down, but immediately asks his father to knight him. Ipomadon leaves and travels across Europe winning renown, “In Brettayne, Fraunce and Lumbardy, / In Allmayne and in Arabye / They hylde hym for the floure” (1733-1735). In every combat he takes the prize. However, he does not give out his name, and he is called “the worthy knyghte þat had no name” (1749).

While Ipomadon is anonymously winning renown throughout the continent, The Fere’s barons are displeased because of her refusal to wed. She calls her uncle, King Mellyagere to advise her in the hopes that the barons will not want to displease their liege lord. With The Fere’s advice, King Mellyagere arranges a three-day tournament, the winner of which will wed The Fere. Ipomadon learns of the tournament and travels to King Mellyagere’s court. When he arrives, he requests to serve the queen and be called the Drew le Rayne. He serves as a huntsman for the queen. During the days of the tournament, Ipomadon leaves early in the morning dressed as a hunter and disturbing the queen’s ladies’ sleep with his horn. In the forest next to the tournament he changes into armor and fights in the tournament. On each day, he fights in different armor, and at the end of the day, he tells a messenger from The Fere that he is the Strange Valet but that he is leaving at the end of the day. The Fere is incredibly distraught throughout the tournament. At the end of the tournament, Ipomadon leaves the service of Mellyagere. He also sends his winnings to the court of Mellyagere and The Fere and identifies

himself as the Strange Valet. Ipomadon travels abroad again, not content to be a wedded man yet. He travels to France and ends a war between two brothers.

After winning the war for the king of France, Ipomadon learns that The Fere is besieged by Sir Lyolyne of Inde Major. Once again, Ipomadon travels to King Mellyagere's court. He disguises himself as a fool and receives a promise from Mellyagere to have the first adventure. Later that day, Imayne, a servant of The Fere, and a dwarf arrives to ask Mellyagere for a knight to free The Fere. Ipomadon, as a fool, immediately takes the adventure. Imayne is distraught and leaves while Ipomadon is armed. As they travel, they encounter Sir Maugis who demands Imayne. Ipomadon defeats him and takes his armor. The next day, they encounter Sir Maugis' cousin, Sir Greon, who also demands to have Imayne. Once Ipomadon defeats Greon, Imayne repents her cruel demeanor towards Ipomadon and attempts to seduce him. She even goes so far as to plead with Ipomadon to leave the quest to save The Fere and to travel with Imayne to her own lands. Ipomadon acts like a fool and dissuades her. The next day, they encounter Sir Lyander, the brother of Sir Lyolyne. Ipomadon kills him and takes his armor. He tells Imayne and the dwarf to ride ahead to The Fere while he encounters Lyolyne. The Fere learns that a fool has been sent to fight her battle and is terrified of Sir Lyolyne. She plans to prepare ships and drown herself in the sea if Lyolyne wins the fight. Ipomadon ensures that he is wearing the same color armor as Lyolyne and prepares for combat. Ipomadon does this with the express purpose of ensuring that The Fere does not know who wins the combat, "that she shuld no knowlege haue / whedyr of them were here foo" (7696-7697). Ipomadon goes to

Lyolyne, has a curious discussion of parentage and equipage, and the two prepare to fight. After a long and difficult battle, Ipomadon overcomes Lyolyne and sends him back to Inde Major. During the combat, the people watching were unable to determine who was who. Further making the task difficult, Ipomadon rests in Lyolyne's pavilion for a short while before riding to The Fere's castle and delivering an unusual speech:

Haue done and dight you, damysell—  
 Now maye ye se yourselff full well  
 That Lyolyne ys wyght!  
 Wete ye well I am hee;  
 Tomorowe into Yndde ye shall wyth me,  
 For I haue slayne youre knyght! (8147-8152)

Ipomadon prepares to leave with thoughts on gaining more renown while The Fere is preparing for suicide. Before The Fere can enter her ships, however, Cabanus arrives with five hundred knights and prevents her from killing herself. Cabanus prepares to go out and encounter Ipomadon who is still disguised as Lyolyne. Cabanus questions Ipomadon, and Ipomadon identifies himself as Lyolyne. Following a short conversation about who has the right to what lands and ladies, Ipomadon and four of his followers fight with Cabanus and his retinue of ten knights. During the combat, Ipomadon's followers are killed in the process of killing six of Cabanus's knights. Cabanus and his four remaining knights corner Ipomadon, and one of the knights knocks off one of Ipomadon's gloves. Cabanus instantly sees the ring and realizes that he is fighting his brother. Ipomadon tells Cabanus who he truly is. One of Cabanus's knights returns to tell the good news to The Fere. Cabanus and Ipomadon return to The Fere's court and inform King Mellyagere of the outcome of the quest. Following this, Ipomadon marries The Fere and returns to be crowned king in Apulia. Imayne is given to Talamewe, the

faithful servant, as a wife. Cabanus becomes king after Mellyagere, and the two brothers die together, “they were full good at all degre, / but wyth his brothere dyed hee, / they bothe had one endyng” (8873-8875).

Larry D. Benson writes that “Hugh’s *Ipomedon* is a long and leisurely romance built around three major themes: the three-days tournament, the ‘Fair Unknown,’ and the combat between brothers” (94).<sup>4</sup> These are themes which appear in the romance, but they are by no means the major themes of *Ipomadon*. Rhiannon Purdie is far more accurate when she writes, “from the very beginning, [the English poet] tightens and makes explicit its theme of the relationship between chivalry and love” (lxxii-lxxiii). The poem is also concerned with privacy, and to a lesser extent, the narrative is critical of women, especially if they are proud. The romance is certainly not interested in issues of the family. The deaths of his parents affect Ipomadon as much as Imayne believing that he is a fool bothers him—not at all. The combat-between-brothers motif would be felt strongly if the reader knew that Cabanus and Ipomadon were brothers. Instead, the reader learns the identity of Ipomadon’s brother when he does. It does not increase the drama of the combat. The fight is like any other between two strong knights, and it is only after the fight is over that the audience can consider the importance of the relationship between the combatants. The romance is also critical of the genre of the Fair Unknown. Ipomadon is not an unknown because he does not know his own identity or because he wants to espy the condition of the court, but rather because he is “one of the preveyst knyght / that euer was borne be day or nyght” (5658-8659). Ipomadon’s

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<sup>4</sup> Benson references Hue, but his summary and analysis is of the Middle English tail-rhyme *Ipomadon*.

desire for privacy runs counter to his stated mission and seems downright cruel at times. Ipomadon wishes to become the knight of most renown in the world, but he gives a different name everywhere he goes. When he hears that his love will die without him, he responds by saying that he is going to leave the tournament. When he frees his beloved from one who would force himself on her, he pretends that he is the villain and has killed the champion.

Many of the episodes within *Le Bel Inconnu*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois*, *Erec and Enide*, and *Ipomadon* are similar to parts of Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth." Many of the themes are similar as well, but the stress on the theme of familial relations is not an apparent theme in any of the analogous Fair Unknown romances which were considered in this paper. It stands to reason, then, that the emphasis on this theme is Malory's own. Malory highlighted the theme while he was composing his romance in order to make his "Tale of Sir Gareth" fit within the rest of *Le Morte Darthur*, where kinship affinities are one of the major forces which tear the Round Table apart.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is a text which is keenly interested in how family members interact with each other in a knightly context. From beginning to end, Malory presents the reader with a wide variety of families and the devastating affects which occur when members of those families come into conflict with their own blood. From Arthur's incestuous union leading to the May-day slaughter and the deaths of Balin and Balan at each other's hands in "The Tale of King Arthur" to the overpowering desire of Gawayne to avenge the death of his brother Gareth and Mordred's treacherous and incestuous attempt to steal the crown and queen, the pages of the *Morte* are filled with families who are almost incapable of coexisting with their close blood relations.

"The Tale of Sir Gareth" follows the thematic patterns set forth early in the *Morte Darthur*. The tale's main interests are knightly gaining of worship and how knightly families interact. The two themes are connected by the proof-of-knighthood quest which calls for a combat between family members. Gareth waits anonymously in the kitchens in order to espy who are his true friends are. He discovers that his brothers are not the knights who he wants to associate himself with. Accordingly, he requests to be knighted by Launcelot and shuns the company of Gawayne at the end of the tale. As he goes on his adventure, Gareth rides through a landscape dominated by small family groups who rely on their close blood relations for protection. Instead of the Round Table fellowship or King Arthur, these knights have only themselves and their

immediate family members for safety. Even when these knights enter into the Round Table fellowship, however, they still cleave to their family member, forming factions within Arthur's court which ultimately conflict with each other, as in the Lot-Pellinore feud. The sources of many of Malory's tales can be readily identified, and studies can be done to determine how the source affected Malory's own tale. "The Tale of Sir Gareth" is unique in this regard, as the only tale without a clearly determinable source. There do exist, however, many analogous tales and parallel episodes within other medieval romances. In an examination of five of these analogous romances, *Le Bel Inconnu*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois*, *Erec and Enide*, and *Ipomadon*, no strong emphasis was found on the family or issues related to the incognito aspect of the Fair Unknown structure. This emphasis on the family seems to be original in Malory's own telling of a Fair Unknown romance.

Within "The Tale of Sir Gareth" and elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur*, intrafamilial combat is a necessary part of a knight's quest to prove his prowess. A knight must fight his family in order to gain honor and worship, but as seen in "The Tale of Sir Gareth," the family is the basis of the knight's own identity as he navigates the Arthurian world. A knight relies on his family for protection and as a form of renown and honor. Despite all of this, however, a knight who seeks greatness must fight against members of his own family. Gareth conforms to this pattern up to a point. He follows the proof-of-knighthood quest diligently including multiple fights against his older brother Gawayne. Ultimately, however, Gareth deviates from the normal pattern by departing from the company of his family. Instead of focusing his allegiance to his

blood family, Gareth shifts his loyalty to Launcelot, a brother in arms of the Round Table fellowship. Understanding how the knights of Malory's *Morte Darthur* interact with their close blood relations is essential for understanding one of the greatest motivators for the knights of Arthur's realm. The immediate familial unit serves as the basis of knightly identity in "The Tale of Sir Gareth" and all of the other tales of the *Morte Darthur*. The majority of the action within the *Morte Darthur* comes in the form of knights on quests to gain honor and worship. Being a member of a knightly family is a necessary pre-condition for being a great knight as knights rely on their family for honor and renown and also must fight against close family members as proof of their prowess. Gareth is a unique exception to the social structure of the close family ties which most of the knights of the *Morte Darthur* align themselves with. Despite his reluctance to associate himself with his family, however, Gareth's death is the prime motivator for Gawayne's war against Launcelot which destabilizes the Round Table and opens room for Mordred's rebellion. Gareth's affiliation with Launcelot enhances the tragedy of his murder at Launcelot's hands, and his distance from his own family members allows Malory to further the negative characterization of Gawayne which is seen throughout the *Morte Darthur*.

The conflict between family members is a theme which remains understudied in Malory's work. It is highly important in the knightly process of gaining worship, and the family dominates many of the larger political actions in *Le Morte Darthur*. As Launcelot tells his brother Sir Bors, "hit ys an old-seyde sawe, 'there ys harde batayle

thereas kynne and frendys doth batayle ayther ayenst other,' for there may be no mercy,  
but mortall warre" (634.31-34).

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