THINK INDIA (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

Overview Of Story- Le Morte D' Arthur

[1] Anindita Naha, Dr. Mirza Maqsood Baig

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, Sri Satya Sai University of Technology & Medical Sciences, Sehore (MP)

ABSTRACT

The legend of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table is immemorial. The heroic knights and their king's tales contribute western society a great literature that is still well-known today. King Arthur along with the theme of chivalry greatly impacted not only western civilization, but all of society throughout the centuries. King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table have been around for thousands of years but are only legends. The first reference to King Arthur was in the Historia Brittonum written by Nennius a Welsh monk around 830A.D. The fascinating legends however did not come until 1133 A.D in the work Historia Regum Britaniae written by a Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth. His work was actually meant to be a historical document, but over time many other writers added on fictional tales. The Round Table was added in 1155 A.D by a French poet Maistre Wace. Both the English and French cycles of Arthurian Legend are controlled by three inter-related themes:

- The fellowship of the knights of the Round Table
- The quests for the Holy Grail (the Sangreal)
- The Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot love-triangle

Keywords : King Arthur , Thomas Malory , Geographical , Predominantly , Activity

I INTRODUCTION:

Thomas Malory had mentioned very less about woman in his Morte D Arthur. As per decision of him to recount the total history of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table necessarily a primary focus upon knighthood (and its principal functions, war and governance), from which women were barred by virtue of their sex. We examine closely Malory's representation of courtship and marriage — a sphere of human activity within knightly society where men's and women's interests and activities converge — we will realize that he is not at all "misogynistic." On the contrary, he is remarkably sympathetic towards women. In the way he handles the three main stories of love and marriage in his

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

book, Malory shows not only that he is aware of the more difficult position of young women with regard to courtship and marriage but also that he sympathizes with them. Only the first of these stories — the marriage of Guinevere and Arthur — is an essential part of the history of King Arthur's reign. The other two Malory chose to include in his version. In fact, the second — the marriage of Lyonesse and Gareth — he may have invented, although the possibility of a lost source remains. The third — the marriage of Isode and King Mark — he added as a consequence of choosing to include the adventures of Tristram within his Arthurian history. Both of these added stories of courtship and marriage provide significant contrasts to the Guinevere-Arthur story, particularly with regard to the lady's freedom to choose her husband.

Malory is indeed capable of explicit characterization and providing his reader insight into the inner emotions of his characters, a reader must conclude that Malory predominantly chooses not to provide this information to his reader. Let us not forget that Le Morte D Arthur is an action tale; of this there is no question. It is therefore appropriate that Malory's chosen characterization technique is, indeed, action, as accompanied by dialogue.

Malory's authorial skill in characterization is particularly evident in these passages. At the heart of Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot's troubles is the collision of private and public-sphere responsibilities. Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot have public political duties, as king, queen, and knight of the Round Table. They all also have private chivalric responsibilities to spouses, loves, and comrades. Unfortunately, these responsibilities are sometimes at odds, demanding different actions from their public personalities and their private personalities. Often these characters overstep or underestimate the necessary actions when trying to address these responsibilities; they thus lay the groundwork for public and private upheaval in the final sections of the Morte. In narrating these disastrous choices and actions by Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot that transgress in the public sphere of Camelot, Malory's end result is a profound understanding of the dilemmas the main characters of the Morte face and of how these challenges and difficult choices shape Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot into the characters they become at the story's conclusion. To begin my argument, I first must establish my usage of the term, "private and public spheres." Rather than speaking of physical public and private spaces—a dichotomy that historians note did not fully take shape until the nineteenth century—I use this vocabulary to delineate the familial and political worlds in which Malory's characters live. Certainly, physical space is very important to the Morte; Elizabeth Edwards' essay on "The Place of Women in the Morte D Arthur" is an excellent discussion of the geographical and geometrical positioning of women in Malory's tale. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I explore "public" and "private" on a more abstract plane, examining the attempts of Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot to balance the demands of their "public"—the citizens of the Round Table and Camelot—with the demands of their private relationships among family and friends. Arthur is the first of the triad whom readers meet, and the first to make unfortunate decisions; as such, it seems appropriate to start with him. Although I argue that Arthur is a worthy king whose actions are meant to save the kingdom, I admit that when I first began work on this study, I, like other scholars, was

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

prepared to condemn Malory's Arthur for his seeming inactivity and for weakness of character. After all, he is more than a knight—he is a knight and a king. As king, he certainly has the power to act and to tell others how to act; as a knight, he should be eager to do so. According to Jill Mann, in Malory's version of the Arthurian world knights are expected to dedicate, even to submit, their lives to chance and adventure . She asserts: "the knight's most characteristic activity is within the physical sphere, in physical combat, often undertaken for its own sake" . A knight who fails to act is indeed a failure. How much more, then, can the reader expect a knightly king to act? However, contended that Arthur has problems not because he fails to act, not because his character is lacking in strength, but because he cannot fully counterbalance the conflicting demands of his public and private lives.

Beverly Kennedy, in her 1992 book, Knighthood in the Morte D Arthur, infers that the late fifteenth-century reader might not have thought highly of Arthur's kingly leadership, noting that he actually was not glorified until the Tudor dynasty. Arthur responds to threats too harshly (decreeing the deaths of babies, ordering the execution of Guinevere, and failing to account for the political ramifications of Launcelot's chivalric obligation to rescue Guinevere) or not enough (by not asserting his power over his wife, knights, and kingdom). Such behavior does not exhibit strong leadership skills. In the massacre scene, Arthur intends to serve both public and private spheres—but his plan of action undermines the proper equilibrium of action. He is too active, making a choice that affects many to solve one private problem. Although Merlin predicts that Mordred will have a large public impact if allowed to survive, involving the public at this point was reckless and harmful. Arthur hurts his people in the name of saving them—an abuse and misuse of his kingly powers. Kennedy points out the similarities between Arthur and Tristram: they are both Worshipful knights who modify their expression of the basic feudal virtues—courage, prowess and loyalty—to accord with their ambition .Their primary objective is to make a successful career in the world and in both cases this means that they may sometimes be disloyal to those to whom they are bound by feudal ties .Arthur has a responsibility to his people, but he kills their babies. He has a responsibility to his wife, but he fails to intervene when Launcelot begins to woo her.

Lancelot's knightly achievement is such that "in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms, both for life and death, he passed all other knights; and no time was he overcome but if it were by treason or enchantment" . Warfare is also the foundation of Arthur's and Lancelot's friendship as they gain mutual admiration while fighting in Arthur's Roman campaign. During the war Lancelot is a remarkable aid to Arthur, but it is back in Britain that he proves his status as the king's first knight in various tournaments and knightly adventures. The effect of the parallel, on the one hand, is comic as the immortal grandeur of Arthur and Lancelot may seem incompatible with the experiences of two working class foot soldiers who spend the Second World War advancing and retreating between Egypt and Libya—each of them a "small man at big history". On the other hand, the echo of Arthurian myth may serve as a means to elevate a decidedly less than grand, often traumatic experience shared by thousands which, because of its very ordinariness at the time, is frequently underappreciated.

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

For Ray/Lucky the association with his wartime nickname has occasionally proven a burden. He knows that he is no more or less lucky than the next person, yet he cannot help being taken in, occasionally, by the prophetic quality of Jack's choice of name for him. With Jack terminally ill, Ray fears that people will expect miracles, miracles which he knows are extremely unlikely to come to him. He dreads people's superstitious assumption that "Ray'll swing it, Ray'll fix it. All Jack needs is a dose of his old mate Raysy. And while we're at it, we'll take a bet on the surgeon doing a top-notch job. I thought, It's a terrible burden having all this luck". Correspondingly, Lancelot, heralded as the foremost knight in the world, suffers from people's inflated expectations when he is asked to heal Sir Urry, a Hungarian knight who has been cursed so that his wounds can only be cured by the best knight in the world. Sir Urry is brought by his mother to King Arthur's court in hopes of finding a miraculous source of help there. In deference to her wishes, Arthur makes an attempt to cure the knight by touching his wounds, not expecting to succeed himself but to set an example for his knights. On cue, the great knight arrives and Arthur entreats him to lay his hands on Sir Urry. "Jesu defend me," an unwilling Lancelot stalls, "while so many noble kings and knights have failed, that I should presume upon me to achieve that all ye, my lords, might not achieve" . The pressure on Lancelot is immense, yet, he complies with Arthur's request, who tells his knight plainly that if "ye prevail not and heal him, I dare say there is no knight in this land that may heal him" . Thus, both Lancelot and Ray find themselves faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

At Arthur's court, Lancelot succeeds in healing Sir Urry by a laying on of hands accompanied by humble prayer. In spite of what he sees as his previous sinful existence, Lancelot is granted the performance of this miracle. Overwhelmed by the magnitude and improbability of the event, he falls to his knees "and ever Sir Lancelot wept as he had been a child that had been beaten". Not only is Lancelot's healing of the wounded knight a miracle; "it is a singular demonstration that God has extended his grace". Significantly, Lancelot only attempts the healing of the cursed knight after Arthur commands him to, as the king firmly believes in his first knight's power to work the miracle. Similarly, Ray is granted the miracle of winning twenty thousand pounds by following Jack's firm instruction to place money on a race horse of his choosing. Ray's selection aptly reflects the nature of the enterprise: "**Miracle Worker**" is the chosen horse's name.

II CHARACTERIZATION OF LANCELOT IN MALORY'S MORTE D ARTHUR

Indeed, Launcelot has never been seen to covet the material—he has only sought honor, and Guinevere. Even although Launcelot feels wronged by Arthur and Gawain's treatment of him, and he is confident of his knightly abilities, he chooses ineffective war strategy in lieu of the action that has always defined Launcelot's persona—he gives up the public sphere. Launcelot always has fought for the right side of the cause; now he is no longer certain on which side the right resides. Launcelot's complete retirement to a life of inaction, sacrificing his public identity for the monastic life, then follows logically, as he chooses to stop acting entirely. His character transforms from a courageously active man into a courageously

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

contemplative man of God. The stress of balancing public concerns with the private sphere is too much for Arthur, Guinevere, and Launcelot. Each character ends up sacrificing something, making choices at the expense of one or more of their responsibilities. Arthur in large part stops acting, both as knightly king and as husband, once Launcelot enters the scene. Arthur chooses the Round Table and his kingdom over his other roles. Inversely, Guinevere starts acting, first as Launcelot's lover and later as queen, when Elaine intrudes on her life. To do so, Guinevere gives up her role as Arthur's wife. Launcelot, the consummate actor, sacrifices his active role as knight after all he treasures—his companionship with Arthur, the Round Table fellowship, and his relationship with Guinevere—has been lost. All three hope their balancing acts will maintain the glory of the Round Table; none can succeed, however, because they miscalculate the impact of their actions upon the public and private spheres. However, while none of them can save the kingdom or the Round Table fellowship, they can save themselves in the end. Launcelot's actions get him nowhere in life, but the choice to stop acting (combined with Guinevere's rejection of his proposal) does lead to his salvation. Guinevere, who starts out passive, becomes active, which allows first for her reclaiming her queenship, then for her rejecting marriage to Launcelot. Only then can she attain her salvation. Arthur, after the unfruitful battle with Launcelot, recovers his active side when provoked by Mordred's attempted coup. He acts until the end, killing Mordred and ordering Excalibur returned to the lake . True to his attempts at the Morte's beginning, Arthur miscalculates his efforts to save his kingdom from Mordred, and the decision to fight Mordred is his death. This time, however, without any private sphere complications to confuse the matter, Arthur succeeds in doing away with the threat. Perhaps to prove the valor of this final action, Arthur's ending is ambiguous, leaving open-ended the idea that he might return. However, he could not have attained that ending without acting against Mordred, and he thus reclaims his active, kingly and knightly character. As Batt noted, "In the Morte, the search for meaning often 29 depends more on the exigencies of the moment than on an all-encompassing moral prescription for human behavior".

III CONCLUSION

Malory exacerbates the conflicts that result from the merger of antithetical conceptions of chivalry by increasing Launcelot's role and freely blending 15th-century tales of knightly deeds with stories that are centuries old. At different stages in history and in divergent traditions, chivalry leaned more toward particular facets, which explains why Launcelot is an epic hero in the Alliterative Morte Arthure and a courtly lover or a monk-like figure depending on which section of the Lancelot-Graal Malory used at any particular time. By mixing these sources together, Malory creates a fundamentally discordant work.

ISSN: 0971-1260

Vol-22-Issue-2-April-June-2019

REFERENCES

1. Bernard of Clairvaux. In Praise of the New Knighthood. Trans. Conrad Greenia. 1. 25 March 25 March 2001. <http://orb.rhodes.edu/encyclop/religion/monastic/bernard.html>

2. Amanda Leigh Keys: Characterizing Action: Sir Thomas Malory's Development of Character in Le Morte Darthur: Accepted by the Graduate School August 2009.

3. Beverly Kennedy: Love, Reedom, And Marital Fidelity In Malory's Morte Darthur: Florilegium 10, 1988-91S

4. Clare A. Lees, ed., Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, ed., Becoming Male in the Middle Ages (New York: Garland: 1994).

5. Lees, "Introduction in Medieval Masculinities", xv-xxv, xv-xvi

6. JoAnna Dutka, Music in the English Mystery Plays (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1980), 101; Richard Rastall, Music in Early English Religious Drama, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996-2001).