The Significance of the Lot-Pellinore Feud in Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur"

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https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-nkkm-k985

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOT-PELLINORE FEUD

IN MALORY'S LE MORTE DARThUR

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Sheila Anne Core

1988
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved, May 1988

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the feud between the families of King Lot and King Pellinore as portrayed in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, and to consider its place in the total structure of that work.

A chronology of the events in the feud shows that it runs throughout the entire work, beginning very early in King Arthur's reign and continuing until the final battle in which he is killed. Each incident contributes to the eventual destruction of the Round Table fellowship, and the feud mirrors the fellowship's gradual deterioration.

The incidents of the feud help to define the characters of Gawain and his brothers. Their actions and their reactions to the behavior of others sharply delineate their natures, making them stand out as memorable individuals in a work in which many characters are hard to distinguish from one another.

Most critics have paid little attention to the feud, even while examining the roles of one or more of Lot's sons. The continuing presence of the feud indicates a unity which supports the contention that Malory intended to write one unified work, particularly considering the changes which he made from his source material in writing about the incidents.
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOT–PELLINORE FEUD

IN MALORY'S LE MORTE DARThUR
In his *Le Morte Darthur* Sir Thomas Malory has woven together many plots, subplots and motifs in his large and complex narrative. One such element of the plot which runs throughout the work concerns the long-standing feud between the families of King Lot of Orkney and King Pellinore de Galys, a feud which begins before Arthur has securely taken possession of his throne, and which continues on throughout the work until the final battles which destroy Arthur's kingdom. The causes of the strife between the factions are established in the very first book of Malory's work. Lot refuses to acknowledge Arthur as king, and he joins the alliance of the eleven kings who oppose Arthur. Not long after this Lot sends his wife Morgause to Arthur's court as a messenger and spy. Arthur's lust for Morgause leads to his incestuous union with her and the begetting of Mordred. Lot resents having been cuckolded by Arthur, and his rebellion is now reinforced by his personal hatred. Thus, before the first tale of Arthur's court is finished, the seeds of its destruction have already been sown.

To be sure, many factors in addition to Arthur's fathering of Mordred contribute to the eventual downfall of the court, but the alienation of Lot leads directly to the feud between his family and that of King Pellinore, a feud which continues throughout Arthur's reign, gradually worsening. Thus the feud between the houses of Lot and Pellinore both aggravates and mirrors the gradual destruction of the fellowship of the Round Table.
In addition to its contribution to the destruction of the Round Table fellowship, the Lot-Pellinore feud performs another function. Malory uses the incidents of the feud to distinguish between Morgause's five sons and to develop their characters. While many of the figures who appear in Malory are little more than names or are at best one-dimensional characters, Gawain and his brothers are fairly complex individuals who are rendered more realistically than their fellow knights. It is largely the feud incidents which are responsible for this character development. The way in which the brothers participate in and respond to these incidents demonstrate, for example, Gawain's stubborn loyalties and Gaheris' confused ones, Agravain's bellicosity which contrasts with Gareth's gentleness, and Mordred's treacherous nature. Without the feud, the brothers would still be major characters in the action, but their individual natures would be less well defined.

I

As Malory's tale begins, Lot is apparently Uther's ally. When Uther marries Igraine following Arthur's conception, Lot marries Igraine's daughter Morgause "at the request of kynge Uther," which indicates that he is either friendly or willing to enter into a marriage of alliance (Malory 5). There is no hint of any enmity or rivalry. When Arthur becomes king, however, Lot is one of the rebellious kings who come to the coronation in order to make war upon Arthur. Lot is not alone in his resistance, as Arthur's other brothers-in-law, Nentres and Uriens, are also among the six (and later eleven) rebellious kings who challenge Arthur's claim to the throne. It is after these eleven kings have withdrawn to the north to regroup that Morgause, Lot's wife and
Arthur's half-sister, enters the picture. Arriving at Caerleon with an entourage which includes her four sons, she is to all appearances a messenger, but in fact she is spying for her husband. Morgause is a beautiful woman and very attractive to Arthur, who desires to lie with her. She agrees to sleep with him, and as a result, Mordred is begotten. Soon after this has taken place, Arthur dreams a symbolic dream which foretells his eventual destruction, to be caused by the child he has unwittingly fathered in incest. Later Arthur, following a warning from Merlin, attempts to destroy all the male children born around the time of May-Day, by placing them in a ship which is set adrift. When the ship is wrecked, the children drown, but Mordred is saved by chance. He is then fostered away from the court, so the action is fruitless. Moreover, this action earns Arthur a great deal of hostility from those subjects whose children were destroyed. Apparently, however, the attempted slaying of Mordred does not anger Lot nearly so much as the fact of his cuckolding by Arthur. Lot continues to be a leading figure in the rebel forces, "for because that kynge Arthure lay by hys wyff and gate on her sir Mordred, therefore kynge Lott helde ever agaynst Arthure" (48).

Although Arthur's cuckolding of Lot (which was a conscious action, unlike the act of incest he committed) serves to increase the enmity which Lot feels toward Arthur, the feud between the two families actually begins during the second round of fighting between Arthur's forces and the rebellious kings, when Lot is slain by Pellinore: 2

So there was a knyght that was called the Knyght with the Strange Beste, and at that tyme hys ryght name was called Pellynore, which was a good man off prouesse as few in tho dayes lyvynge. And he strake a myghty stroke at kynge Lott as he fought with hys enemyes, and he fayled of hys stroke
and smote the horse necke, that he foundred to the erthe with kyng Lott. And therewith anone kyng Pellinor smote hym a grete stroke thorow the helme and hede unto the browis. (48)

Lot's death occurs on the field of battle, and there doesn't appear to be anything underhanded about the circumstances. However, Malory immediately makes it known that it is not an isolated incident, for he tells us that "kynge Pellynore bare the wyte of the dethe of kyng Lott, wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the ten yere aftir he was made knyght, and slew kyng Pellynor hys owne hondis" (48). The insertion of this reference to future events emphasizes the importance of Lot's death, and it marks the beginning of the feud between Lot's and Pellinore's families, a feud which continues to the end of Arthur's reign. Malory seems to be suggesting at this very early stage that even before Arthur has secured his kingdom fully, some of the forces which will eventually cause it to disintegrate are already at work.

A short time later, the prophecy of Gawain's revenge is repeated. This second prophecy occurs within "The Book of Balyn," when Balyn is in quest of the invisible knight Garlon. Balyn's companion, Peryne de Mounte Belyarde, is "slayne by thys traytoure knyght that rydith invisible" (51). Balyn and a hermit bury the slain knight, and "on the morne they founde letters of golde wretyn how that sir Gawayne shall revenge his fadirs dethe kyng Lott on kyngge Pellynore" (51). This is a curious insertion, for there seems to be no direct connection between the tomb and the prophecy. The fact that Peryne was slain in a traitorous manner may be suggestive of Gawain's future behavior, but no specific analogy is drawn.

A more important and more clearly comprehensible development in the growing feud takes place during the wedding festivities of Arthur and
Guenevere. At this time, Gawain requests that he be knighted at the wedding feast, and Arthur agrees to honor his request. Before this ceremony can take place, an unknown young man named Torre appears and is knighted first, and shortly thereafter Merlin reveals that Torre is the illegitimate child of Pellinore. The next day Pellinore arrives, is treated with great honor, and is led by Merlin to one of the empty seats at the Round Table. Although Malory has mentioned Gawain's vengeance before, here for the first time Gawain himself reveals his vengeful intention:

And thereat had sir Gawayne grete envy and tolde Gaherys hys brothir,
"Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, whych grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir kynge Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym ... with a swerde that was sette me that ys passynge trencheaunte."
"Ye shall nat so," seyde Gaheris, "at thys tyme, for as now I am but youre squyre, and whan I am made knyght I woll be avenged on hym; and therefore, brothir, hit ys beste to suffir tyll another tyme, that we may have hym oute of courte, for and we dud so we shall trouble thys hyghe feste."
"I woll well," seyde Gawayne. (63)

This exchange also gives a clue as to the future nature of many of the incidents: these acts of vengeance will take place outside the court.

After the wedding, Gawain, Torre, and Pellinore are sent on quests, and in his adventure Gawain accidentally slays a lady as a result of his refusal to grant mercy to a knight he has defeated. Just at the moment when Gawain tries to strike off the knight's head, the lady flings herself over the knight and is killed instead. When the king and queen learn of Gawain's actions, they are greatly displeased with his behavior, and Gawain is charged to be a defender of ladies ever after. Torre, on the other hand, fulfills his quest, pleases the king and queen, and is rewarded with an earldom. Pellinore does not fare as well
as his son Torre, for although he fulfills the quest assigned to him, in his haste he fails to prevent the suicide of a young lady who turns out to be his daughter. Pellinore receives no punishment from the court, but Merlin prophesies that those whom Pellinore trusts will desert him in his hour of need, presumably a prophecy concerning Pellinore's later killing by the Orkney faction. Although no specific mention is made of it, the fact that Gawain is the least honored of the three questing knights surely must rankle, and no doubt adds more fuel to his hatred of Pellinore and his kin.

Although up to this point Gawain has not shown himself to be the most admirable of Arthur's knights, his sense of family loyalty does seem to be one of his more admirable traits. For instance, when his cousin Uwain is banished from the court over the matter of the poisoned mantle which was sent to Arthur by Morgan le Fay (Uwain's mother), Gawain goes with him, saying that "whoso banyshyth my cosyn jarmayne shall banyshe me" (94). It is interesting to note that Gawain makes no protestation of Uwain's innocence; apparently Gawain chooses to side with his cousin, whether he has been rightly or wrongly banished. At this point, Gawain's sense of loyalty is not yet shared by the other members of his family; while Gaheris regrets the departure of his brother and cousin, he makes no attempt to go with them.

A second episode in the group of adventures titled "Gawain, Ywain, and Marhalt" is also indicative of Gawain's character, the episode involving Pelleas and Ettarde. While the Uwain episode reveals that Gawain's family loyalty is so strongly felt that it will cause him to desert the court, this episode reveals that his oath given to another knight does not bind him so easily, especially when it conflicts with
Gawain's sexual desires. It is during these adventures that Gawain meets Pelleas and vows to help him win the lady Ettarde, who has spurned his love. As it turns out, Gawain is smitten by Ettarde himself, tells her that he has killed Pelleas, and essentially tricks her into becoming his lover by having her promise to aid him before explaining what the promise will entail. Pelleas discovers them in bed together and lays a naked sword across their throats. When they awaken, Ettarde recognizes the sword and realizes that Pelleas is not dead. She rebukes Gawain for his deceit and sends him away. Pelleas is eventually granted the love of Nynyve, who then turns the tables on the proud Ettarde by causing her to fall madly in love with Pelleas, who will now have nothing to do with her. Ettarde eventually dies of her unrequited love. Gawain, it would seem, escapes reasonably unscathed, despite his treachery. The one lasting result, though, is that Gawain has made an enemy, for "Pelleas loved never aftir sir Gawayne" (109). Another undercurrent of hatred has been added to the fellowship of the Round Table, and Gawain has been revealed as a knight capable of selfishness, treachery, and deceit.

When Gareth comes to court, Gawain once again reveals the better side of his nature. Gareth is scornfully nicknamed "Beawmaynes" by Sir Kay and is sent to work in the kitchen. Gawain, even though he is unaware of the blood relationship between himself and Beawmaynes, is one of the few knights at the court who show some kindness to young Gareth. After Gareth has been at court for a while, and has experienced some adventures of his own in rescuing Lyonesse from Sir Ironsyde, he has perceived the darker side of Gawain's nature, and he vows not to be like him: "For evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conductions, he wythdrew hyme self fro his brother sir Gawaynes felwyshyp, for he was evir
vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth" (224).

Other small incidents continue to add to Gawain's hatred of the Pellinore clan. In one episode Lamerok, Pellinore's son, interferes when Gawain tries to abduct another knight's lady:

Than . . . sir Lamerok founde a knyght at a welle slepynge, and his lady sate with hym and waked. Ryght so com sir Gawayne and toke the knyghtes lady and sette hir up behynde hys squyer. So sir Lamerok rode aftir sir Gawayne and seyde, "Sir, turne ayen!"

Than seyde sir Gawayne, "What woll ye do with me? I am nevew unto kynge Arthure."

"Sir, for that cause I woll forbeare you: othir ellys that lady sholde abyde with me, other els ye shold juste with me."

Then sir Gawayne turned hym and ran to hym that ought the lady with his speare, but the knyght wyth pure myght smote downe sir Gawayne and toke his lady with hym.

And all this sye sir Lamerok and seyde to hymselff, "but I revenge my fellow he wolle sey me dishonoure in kynge Arthurs courte." Than sir Lamerok returned and profyrde that knyght to fyght.

"Sir, I am redy," seyde he.

And there they cam togedyrs with all theire myght, and sir Lamerok smote the knyght thorow bothe sydis that he fylle to the erthe dede. (280)

Not only does Gawain not succeed in his abduction, but Lamerok defeats and kills the knight after Gawain has failed to unhorse him. This incident surely adds to Gawain's resentment, although no mention of his feeling is made. It is also interesting to note Lamerok's reasoning in his decision to revenge Gawain's fall. He is not concerned so much with the honor of the fellowship as with the fact that he may be reported to have behaved dishonorably. He appears to be well aware of Gawain's personality and his grudge against Pellinore's (and Lamerok's) family.

The feud between the two families continues to escalate, and the discovery that Lamerok has fallen in love with Morgause only adds to the
hatred that Morgause's children feel for all of Pellinore's kin.
Lamerok's feeling for Queen Morgause is first revealed in "The Book of
Tristram," when he fights with Sir Mellyagaunce to prove who is the
fairest, Morgause or Guenevere (298). Lancelot upbraids Lamerok for his
seeming disloyalty to Arthur and his queen. Fortunately for Lamerok,
Lancelot is eventually convinced that no disrespect was meant, but
rather that each man honestly believes his own lady to be the fairest,
as is appropriate for knightly lovers. Lamerok continues to make no
secret of his feelings for Morgause, for he is later overheard by King
Mark as he laments his love (354).

It is ultimately Lamerok's victory over Gawain and his brothers in
a tournament which leads directly to his destruction. When Arthur
decides to give a tournament, Lancelot, Tristram, and Dinadin, as a
courtesy to Arthur, choose not to participate so that Gawain and his
brothers will have a better chance to distinguish themselves. In the
everly fighting the brothers from Orkney do indeed win recognition,
especially Gawain, so that "kynge Arthure and all the knyghtes gave sir
Gawayne the honoure at the begynnynge" (373). Lamerok, in disguise,
then arrives and proceeds to overthrow all the brethren, unseating Sir
Gawain twice. Lamerok departs, but he is followed, and his true
identity is revealed. The reaction at court is indicative of what will
come after:

Than the kynge was gladde and so was all the felyshyp of
the Rounde Table excepte sir Gawayne and his bretherne. And
whan they wyste that hit was sir Lameroke they had grete
despyte of hym, and were wondirly wrothe wyth hym that he
had put hym to such a dishonoure that day. Than he called
to hym prevally in counceyle all his bretherne, and to them
seyde thus:
"Fayre bretherne, here may ye se: whom that we hate kynge
Arthure lovyth, and whom that we love he hatyth. And wyte
you well, my fayre bretherne, that this sir Lamerok woll nevyr love us, because we slew his fadir, kyng Pellynor, for we demed that he slew our fadir, kyng Lot of Orkenay; and for the deth of kyng Pellynor sir Lameroke ded us a shame to oure modir. Therefore I woll be revenged."

"Sir," seyd sir Gawaynes bretherne, "lat se: devyse how ye woll be revenged, and ye shall fynde us redy."

"Well," seyd sir Gawayne, "holde ye styll and we shall aspye oure tym." (374-75)

This is the first mention of Pellinore's death as an accomplished fact; presumably it has taken place somewhere off-stage. (The final mention of Pellinore while he is still alive occurs in Chapter IV of "The Book of Tristram," when Pellinore is wounded by Tristram.) According to Gawain, Lamerok's affair with Morgause is merely an act of vengeance, simply one more instance in which a member of Pellinore's family has done a "despite" against the house of Lot. The truth is, of course, that Lamerok's love for Morgause is quite genuine, and he probably became enamored of her before the death of Pellinore, at least according to Malory's chronology. Gawain and his brothers, however, are convinced that Lamerok's motivation is the same as theirs: vengeance.

Shortly after this incident, the Orkney brethren plot to destroy Lamerok. They send for their mother, knowing that Lamerok will hear of her arrival and undoubtedly make an effort to rendezvous with her. Gaheris is sent to lie in wait for Lamerok, but things do not go as planned. He waits until Lamerok is unarmed and in bed with Morgause, and then he is so enraged at the sight of the lovers that he beheads his mother instead of Lamerok. Gaheris lamely defends his action to Lamerok by saying, "now is my modir quytte of the, for she shall never shame her chyldryn" (378). Lamerok then escapes and flees from court. Gaheris is banished from the court, and even Gawain is upset at what he has done, although as much by his having allowed Lamerok to escape as by his
killing of Morgause. But in the court it is generally believed that
Lamerok will not be safe for long. As Lancelot predicts, "I am sure ye
shall lose sir Lamerok, for sir Gawayne and his bretherne woll sle hym
by one meane other by another" (378).

Agravain and Mordred soon extend their hatred beyond Lamerok to
his friend Dinadin. When one day the two brothers encounter Breunys
sans Pite in the forest, they joust with him, but are decisively
defeated. Dinadin, in pursuit of another knight, then appears on the
scene and revenges their falls, but they are dismayed to discover who he
is. Instead of being grateful to him, they side with the knight he had
been pursuing, Dalan, who claims that Dinadin slew his father. This is
a motive, of course, that Agravain and Mordred can well understand.
Nevertheless, Dinadin bests all three of them and rides off. Malory
indicates that the brothers do not let the matter rest there, for
"aftir, in the queste of the Sankgreal, cowardly and felonsly they slew
sir Dynadan" (379). Now the family feud is no longer restricted to the
members of the families of Lot and Pellinore, but is beginning to spread
to others among the knights of the Round Table.

In the meantime, Lamerok continues to antagonize Gawain and his
brothers unintentionally. On the third day of the tournament at
Surluse, for example, Lamerok arrives in disguise and defeats all
challengers. When his identity is revealed, he is commended and "made
muche of" by all "excepte sir Gawaynes brethirne" (404). Lamerok
continues to distinguish himself throughout the tourney, and on the
fifth day he defeats Palomides after Palomides has defeated Gawain,
Gaheris, Agravain, and Mordred. Lamerok then takes his leave of Arthur,
for he knows of Gawain's hatred, although he himself has given up any
thought of revenge (406). At the end of the tournament, Lancelot once again tries to persuade Lamerok to return to Arthur's court, but Lamerok knows only too well what awaits him there and replies:

I woll nat truste to sir Gawayne, nother none of his bretherne. And wyte you well, sir Launcelot, and hit were nat for my lorde kynge Arthurs sake, I shuld macche sir Gawyne and his bretherne well inowghe. But for to sey that I shall truste them, that shall I never. (410)

As it turns out, this caution does Lamerok little good. A short time later Palomides brings Percivale the news that Lamerok has been slain by Gawain and his brothers as he was leaving the tournament. Percivale is upset to the point of swooning and mourns the loss of both his father and his brother, but he does not express a desire for revenge (420).

Shortly after the news of Lamerok's death has reached Joyous Gard, Tristram returns there to find that a knight has been slain for saying that Lancelot was a better knight than Gawain. Tristram catches up to the knights responsible for the death, unhorses them, and discovers that they are Gaheris and Agravain. Once again, their relationship to Arthur protects them, but Tristram minces no words in telling them what he thinks of them:

Well . . . for kynge Arthurs sake I shall lette you passe as at this tyme. But hit is shame, . . . that sir Gawayne and ye be commyn of so grete blood, that ye four bretherne be so named as ye be: for ye be called the grettyste distroyers and murtherars of good knyghtes that is now in the realme of Ingelonde. And as I have harde say, sir Gawyne and ye, his brethirne, amonge you slew a bettir knyght than ever any of you was, whyche was called the noble knyght sir Lamorak de Galys. And hit had pleased God, . . . I wolde I had bene by hym at his deth day. (422)

After this speech, Tristram departs, but Gaheris and Agravain overtake him and they joust again. Again Tristram unhorses them both, but he does no further injury to them.
The distinction between Gareth and the rest of his kin is again drawn during the episodes at Joyous Gard. Gareth is present when Tristram and Dinadin discuss Lamerok's death, and he makes the following observation:

> for well I undirstonde the vengeaunce of my brethirne, sir Gawayne, sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys, and sir Mordred. But as for me, . . . I meddyll nat of their maters, and therefore there is none that lovyth me of them. And for cause that I undirstonde they be murtherars of good knyghtes I lefte there company, and wolde God I had bene besyde sir Gawayne whan that moste noble knyght sir Lamorake was slayne! (427)

Gareth has not allowed his loyalty to family to corrupt his moral standards. At this point, Palomides gives a fuller description of Lamerok's murder, telling just how treacherously it was done:

> And that day that sir Lamorak was slayne . . . sir Gawayne and his three bretherne . . . sette uppon sir Lamorak in a pryvy place, and there they slew his horse. And so they faught with hym on foote more than three owrys bothe before hym and behyne hym, and so sir Mordrede gaff hym his dethis wounde behynde hym at his bakke, and all to-hewe hym: for one of his squyers tolde me that sawe hit. (428)

Dinadin also gives some indication of the widespread effect that the feud has had, for he says that Gawain and his brothers now hate most of the other Round Table knights, including Lancelot and all of his kin.

> Despite all this ill feeling, for a time there is a respite from all the feuding. Gawain and his brothers participate in tournaments without untoward incident. When Lancelot disappears from court, Gawain and his cousin Uwain are among twenty-three knights who ride to find him. Two of the others who join in the search for Lancelot are Aglovale and Percivale, the younger brothers of Lamerok (and half-brothers of Torre). They ride to see their mother, who reminds them of how their father and brother were murdered, but they are not persuaded to abandon
their knightly duties, and they mention no fear of Gawain's vengeful nature. Shortly thereafter, the fellowship becomes involved in the quest of the Holy Grail, and for a while most of the old enmities seem to be forgotten. Even during the quest, there are enough violent incidents to show that the ill will still lingers. Mention has already been made of the fact that Agravain and Mordred kill Dinadin during the Grail quest, although Malory does not describe the incident, and it is also during this period that Gawain, in spite of his family loyalty, jousts with and mortally wounds his cousin Uwain (560).

Unfortunately, the Grail quest merely postpones the unpleasant happenings at Arthur's court. When the surviving knights have all returned, tempers begin to flare once more, Lancelot begins "to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne," and others at the court take notice, especially the "ever opynne-mowthed" Agravain (611). Lancelot, realizing that both Agravain and Mordred are watching him closely, attempts to do favors for other ladies, with the result that Guenevere becomes jealous and angrily banishes Lancelot from court. She then decides to host a dinner to show her appreciation of the other knights.

Guenevere's dinner, however, is marred by the outbreak of the old Lot-Pellinore feud. Gawain and his brothers are all invited, but so is Pynell le Saveyge, a cousin of Lamerok's. Pynell poisons some of the apples which are to be served, in hopes of killing Gawain, who is very fond of fresh fruit. Instead, one of the apples is eaten by an Irish knight named Patrise, who dies a horrible death. Since Guenevere is the hostess, all of the knights are suspicious of her, although Gawain, who is aware that the poisoned fruit was likely meant for him, will not accuse the queen. Mador de la Porte, a cousin of the murdered Patrise,
accuses Guenevere of the murder. Arthur, who must uphold the laws of
the realm, reluctantly agrees that Guenevere must be burnt if her
champion cannot defeat Mador. Lancelot returns in time to defend
Guenevere, Pynell is revealed as the true murderer, and order is
restored to the court for the time being. But the dissension is still
there. From this point on, frequent mention is made of Agravain's
desire to surprise Lancelot and Guenevere when they are together.

The final book of Malory's work begins with this hatred coming to
the surface. Agravain and Mordred try to enlist their brothers' aid in
trapping Lancelot, but Gareth, Gawain, and somewhat surprisingly,
Gaheris refuse to have anything to do with it. The two plotters are
able to recruit a dozen other knights from the Orkney faction, however,
and they lie in wait for Lancelot. Lancelot wounds Mordred and kills
the rest of his attackers. In addition to Agravain, Gawain's three sons
are among the slain. Even so, in this instance Gawain's family loyalty
does not blind him to the fact that the slain knights' actions were, in
his opinion, disloyal; moreover, Gawain refuses to accuse Guenevere of
disloyalty to Arthur, and he refuses to bear arms against Lancelot in
defending Guenevere at the stake. Nevertheless, when Lancelot in his
haste causes the deaths of the unarmed Gareth and Gaheris, Gawain
reaches his breaking point, and he now insists that the deaths of his
brothers be avenged. The ensuing battles allow Mordred to seize
Arthur's throne, thereby bringing about the final battles and the end of
Arthur's reign. Thus the vindictiveness of the Orkney clan has
contributed a great deal to the interwoven events leading up to the
final destruction of the Round Table.
In addition to contributing greatly to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, the feud between the families of Lot and Pellinore also serves to develop the characters of Gawain and each of his brothers. In a work where the only distinguishing feature between different knights is often the color of their armor, each of Morgause's sons emerges as a distinct personality. This is largely due to the actions which they take and the motives which they voice in connection with the feud.

Malory's first description of Morgause's sons is merely a list of their names, given when they come with their mother to visit Arthur's court. This tells us the order of their birth and that they are still fairly young. Since Morgause and Lot were married after Igraine became pregnant with Arthur, the boys presumably are all younger than Arthur. Mordred, of course, has not yet been born, or even conceived. Morgause is described as a beautiful woman, and evidently a lusty one. Lot, her husband, is strong and brave in battle, a knight of great prowess, but he is temperamental and is likely to hold a grudge. Some of the parents' traits are later evident in their children.

Gawain, the eldest of Lot's sons, begins as a young knight who doesn't always live up to the high ideals of the Round Table. In his first quest, his quick temper and lack of mercy cause him to kill a lady. In his next adventure, he breaks his oath to Pelleas so that he may win the lady Ettarde for himself, allowing his sexual desires to override his sense of honor. As he matures, some good traits develop. He is considered one of the best knights of the Round Table, winning his share of encounters and tourneys. His sense of family loyalty is one of his more admirable qualities; he is quick to accompany his cousin
Uwain when he is banished from court. He is fiercely loyal to Arthur, and even in the later days of the fellowship, the king depends on him and likes to have him nearby.

Gawain does not always succeed at what he tries, and perhaps he tries to accomplish too much. More than once, Lancelot arrives at a place and is asked to do a difficult task, and is told that Gawain has already attempted it and failed. It is Gawain who first declares that he intends to seek the Holy Grail, and the other knights follow suit, greatly displeasing Arthur, who senses that the quest will bring an end to the Round Table fellowship. Yet Gawain is ill-suited to the Grail quest; he knows he is less than perfect, but doesn't seem to want to do anything to better himself. During his travels, he is specifically told several times by holy men that he will not be permitted to have adventures of the Grail because he is wicked, sinful, and murderous. He is offered the opportunity to stay with a hermit, to do penance and yield himself to the Lord, but he refuses. He eventually accepts that this quest is not for him and abandons it.

Gawain's family loyalty, which began as an admirable trait, leads him to seek revenge for any real or imagined wrong to his family. His father was killed honorably in battle, yet he demands that the death be avenged. He sees Lamerok's love for Morgause as a personal insult, intended to shame his family. In the end, though, he is able to distinguish between right and wrong, regardless of family loyalty, by refusing to join Agravain and Mordred in entrapping Lancelot. Because he disapproved of their action, he feels no obligation to revenge the subsequent deaths of Agravain, Florens, and Lovell, even though he is saddened by them. When the unarmed Gaheris and Gareth are killed by
Lancelot during his rescue of Guenevere, Gawain feels that he has no choice but to seek revenge, and the last series of battles begins. Fittingly, one of the chapters of the final book is titled "The Vengeance of Sir Gawain."  

Gawain unquestionably causes Arthur to make war on Lancelot. He refuses to be reconciled to Lancelot, and threatens to break with Arthur if he and Lancelot come to an agreement. At no time, however, does he question Guenevere's loyalty to Arthur; his hostility toward Lancelot hinges solely on the deaths of his brothers. He intends to fight with Lancelot until one of them is killed; he is sorely wounded twice, and only the news of Mordred's treason prevents him from continuing his personal battle. On the return to England, Gawain finally realizes that the real enemy is not Lancelot, but his own half-brother Mordred. When the wounds given him by Lancelot are reopened in the battle with Mordred, Gawain realizes that he is dying, and that it is his own fault. He feels responsible for the rift between Arthur and Lancelot which keeps Lancelot from coming to Arthur's aid. On his deathbed, he writes to Lancelot, asking that he be reconciled to Arthur and come to his assistance. Even after his death, he appears to Arthur in a dream, warning him not to do battle with Mordred until Lancelot can arrive. Despite his shortcomings, Gawain ends his life as a man of honor.  

Gaheris, the second son, is truly a man of conflicting emotions. He follows Gawain's lead in seeking vengeance for Lot's death; as Gawain's squire, he urges his older brother to postpone his killing of Pellinore until he himself has become a full knight and can be an equal partner in the action. His temper is evidently uncontrolled. When the brothers plot to kill Lamerok, Gaheris is sent to attack him, but ends
up killing Morgause instead. Yet he lets Lamerok escape, telling him
that he will not slay Lamerok while he is naked and unarmed. It is
probably the honorable thing to do, but it seems a little odd under the
circumstances.

Gaheris has his good traits also. He is a knight of some prowess;
in fact, Tristram claims that he is a better knight than Gawain (342).
He appears at several tournaments, and generally is supportive of
Arthur, although Arthur does not seem to depend on him in the same way
that he depends on Gawain. For a while he travels with Agravain and
behaves in a less than honorable manner. Yet ultimately he sides with
the "good" brothers Gawain and Gareth when Agravain and Mordred propose
informing the king of Lancelot and Guenevere's affair. He also refuses
to participate in the capture of Lancelot, nor does he wish to guard
Guenevere at her execution. Only because of a direct request from
Arthur does he agree to stand guard, but he refuses to bear arms, and as
a consequence is slain along with his brother Gareth.

Agravain, the other middle brother, appears to be consistently
disagreeable. Although in the early incidents he merely follows his
brothers' leadership, eventually he emerges in his own right as the
instigator of much violence. There is not a single incident in which he
is mentioned that shows him to have any truly positive traits. Together
with Mordred, he is responsible for the feud's spreading to include
Dinadin and then Lancelot. It is Agravain who plans to trap Lancelot,
and he is evidently responsible for much of the dissension at court
through his spreading of rumors. There is clearly no great love between
Gawain and Agravain, and it is not surprising that Gawain cannot grieve
at Agravain's death to the same extent that he does at Gaheris' and
Gareth's, for he states that Agravain brought about his own death in seeking to cause trouble for the entire court.

Gareth, the youngest of Lot's sons, is undeniably the truly good brother. Rather than seeking his brothers' help in making his way at court, he arrives without revealing his identity, and is put to work in the kitchen. He endures many scornful comments; it is difficult to imagine any of the other brothers accepting such treatment complacently. Gareth is gentle and patient; in his first adventure, he receives a constant stream of verbal abuse from his companion, the lady Lyonet, but he rarely rebukes her. He does exhibit some sexual desires, but only toward his true love, Lyonesse, and he is prevented from acting on his impulses until he is married to her. He exhibits none of the typical Orkney vengefulness; early on he recognizes Gawain's nature and dissociates himself from it. As a result, he remains friendly to most factions of the Round Table, and serves as a link between Gawain and Lancelot right up until he is killed. His death at the hands of Lancelot, whom he loves dearly, is certainly a tragedy, and it is little wonder that Gawain demands retribution for the act.

Although Gareth could not be considered a perfect knight in the same way that Galahad is, he does embody those qualities which one would expect to find in a knight of the Round Table. In fact, Arthur is describing Gareth when he sets forth a sort of chivalric code:

"For ever hit ys . . . a worshipfull knyghtes dede to help and succoure another worshipfull knyght when he seeth hym in daungere. For ever a worshipfull man wolli be loth to se a worshipfull man shamed, and he that ys of no worship and medelyth with cowardise never shall he shew jantilnes nor no maner of goodnes where he seeth a man in daungere, for than woll a cowarde never shew mercy. And allayes a good man woll do ever to another man as he wolde be done to hymselff." (648)
Mordred, Arthur's son and the youngest of Morgause's children, is not raised with the other brothers, and arrives at court much later. Although he says little, he is present during many of the incidents and takes an active part. Like Agravain, his personality emerges only in ugly incidents, and it would be difficult to ascribe any positive qualities to him. When the brothers ambush Lamerok, all four of them fight him for several hours, but Mordred finally stabs him in the back, a cowardly act in an already disgraceful incident. With Agravain, Mordred plans to inform the king of Lancelot and Guenevere's affair, and then to capture Lancelot. He alone of the Orkney participants manages to escape the ensuing battle alive.

In spite of the fact that Arthur holds Mordred partially responsible for the discord and strife at court, Mordred is still left in charge when Arthur goes abroad to fight Lancelot. His previous misconduct pales in comparison to his actions when he finds himself in power. He forges letters saying that Arthur has been killed in battle, and has himself crowned as king. Not content with usurping his father's throne, he also tries to take Arthur's wife for himself. Guenevere manages to escape to the Tower, and Mordred follows and lays siege to it. He defies the Bishop of Canterbury and threatens to kill him. He manages to raise an army to defend himself when Arthur returns. Eventually he is responsible for the destruction of the kingdom. Even after he has received his death-wound from his father, he manages to summon up enough strength to stab Arthur and mortally wound him. It is hard to see any redeeming quality in Mordred, and his personality can best be summed up in one word: treacherous.
The personalities of all five brothers are so well-drawn that it is quite easy to distinguish each one as a separate entity. On a scale of good and evil traits, each man occupies a unique place. Gareth is consistently exemplary, and it is hard to find fault with his character. Gawain has many shortcomings, but he is generally well-intentioned. In the end, the better side of his nature wins out and he dies honorably. Gaheris at first lets himself be guided by the more vengeful part of his nature, but as time goes by he spends less time with Agravain and more time with Gareth. When he dies, he is obeying his king and serving on the right side. Agravain is a villain, a loud-mouthed troublemaker. It is hard to say anything good about him, but most of his actions were petty. Mordred is thoroughly evil, a traitor to family, country, and God.

III

Despite the continued presence of the Lot-Pellinore feud throughout the entire Le Morte Darthur, critics have given it little attention. It may be supposed that Eugene Vinaver, in supporting his contention that Malory intended a series of individual tales rather than one unified work, downplays the importance of the feud as a linking factor among the different tales. But even if Malory's intention was to draw individual narratives out of the complex whole of his French source material (Vinaver lvii), he did not remove the feud incidents, which do tie the tales together as well as advance the action in the individual sections.

It is possible that Malory originally intended to write separate, unconnected tales. If "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius" was written before "The Tale of King Arthur," as Vinaver states, then it is
interesting to note that no feud incidents appear in "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius." It is tempting to suppose that Malory originally planned to leave out the feud, but that when he began his second tale (the first chronologically) he discovered the incidents were so integral to the entire story that he could not remove them. However, it is likely that the lack of mention of the feud in "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius" is due to the source Malory used. "Arthur and Lucius" is based upon the reasonably straight-forward English Alliterative Morte Arthure rather than the extensive French source materials into which the feud is so intricately woven (Vinaver xxxv-xl).

Even though Vinaver does not point out how the feud ties the whole of Le Morte Darthur together, he continually mentions how Malory added to and changed incidents when borrowing from the French source material. Lot's anger in the French book was roused by the murder of his wife's child, but in Malory it is Arthur's cuckolding of him which causes Lot's hatred. Some extensive changes were made in the material concerning Lamerok. In the source, the cause of the fight between Lamerok and Mellyagaunce is not explained, but Malory uses it to bring in the first mention of Lamerok's feelings for Morgause. Malory also added several foreshadowings of Lamerok's death and the details of his fatal fight with Gawain and his brothers (Vinaver 1306, 1458, 1495, 1501). Because all these incidents take place in "The Book of Tristram de Lyonesse," Vinaver can point them out without seeing them as a continuing link between the tales. But because of the changes Malory made, the feud becomes a more important part of the action, and its effects are evident long after "The Book of Tristram."
More than any other critic, Thomas Rumble has dealt with Malory's treatment of the feud. Building on Vinaver, he shows how Malory carefully shaped the only loosely connected incidents in his source material into the subplot which helps to tie the entire book together. Malory has Lamerok replace Aglovale as Pellinore's son, and then builds up his reputation until he is acclaimed as the third best knight of the Round Table, after Lancelot and Tristram. As Lamerok becomes more honored and honorable, Gawain and his brothers become increasingly envious and more determined to have their revenge. Because Lamerok is such a worshipful knight, the reaction to his eventual death is widespread shock and outrage. As a result, the feud grows to infect the entire fellowship, and leads to the destruction of the Round Table. As Rumble sees it, the feud is a "constant reminder of the tragic conclusion toward which the principal action of the story is constantly moving." But he also maintains that following Lamerok's death, almost every incident is somehow connected to the feud. Even though the feud is a very important part of the plot, such an assertion is an exaggeration (Rumble 167-176).

T. H. White also considers the feud an important part of Malory's Le Morte Darthur. He finds that the work contains three tragic themes: the feud between the families of Lot and Pellinore, the incest of Arthur and Morgause, and the romance of Lancelot and Guenevere. Morgause is therefore extremely important to the work (even moreso than Guenevere) because she is connected to two of the tragic elements, the feud and the incest. For this reason, he makes Morgause central to much of the feud-related action in The Once and Future King, his modern retelling of Malory's tales. White, however, says that the feud begins when Arthur's
father kills Gawain's grandfather; in other words, the enmity dates from the death of the Duke of Cornwall in battle against Uther's army, while Uther has gone to lie with Igraine at Tintagel (Warner 129-30). This interpretation would place much of the responsibility for the beginning of the feud upon Morgause, since it was her father who was killed. Malory gives no indication that Morgause is in any way responsible for Lot's deciding to fight against Arthur, and White's interpretation would place the original thrust of the feud against Arthur's family rather than Pellinore's.

Other critics who have dealt with the Lot-Pellinore feud have done so only marginally, usually while considering the characterization of one or more of the Orkney brothers. Most of these studies have centered on the character of Gawain, but Lumiansky also considers the development of Agravain's character. Agravain is first mentioned only as one of Lot and Morgause's sons, but as the tales progress, his cowardice and treachery are pointed out. His hatred of Lancelot leads to his attempt to trap Lancelot and Guenevere in their adultery, an attempt which causes Agravain's death. Lumiansky states that Agravain never defeats another knight in the entire book (Lumiansky 212). While he may not be mentioned as specifically besting another knight in single combat, there is at least one tournament in which Gawain and all his brothers win great honor (Malory 373), so it is evident that Agravain must possess some knightly prowess. However, the point is well taken that his frequent defeats in tournament and jousts may lead to envy and enmity on his part.

Much attention has been given to the dual nature of Gawain's character. Vinaver explains the discrepancy by indicating that the
different sources Malory used had different characterizations of Gawain, and that Malory simply copied from each source he used without trying to make Gawain's character consistent (Vinaver 1430). Charles Moorman, however, feels that Malory made changes from his source material in order to degrade Gawain's character in "The Tale of the Sankgreall," so that his actions in the final tale would be understandable (Moorman 201). Wilfred Guerin maintains that Malory purposely made Gawain an ambivalent character, with a good side based on the civilizing Christian influences he experienced, and a bad side based on emotions and instinct. The good side is increasingly in control as Gawain matures, until Gareth's death makes him revert back to his earlier impulsive, instinctive self. It is only on his deathbed that his civilized side re-emerges to urge Arthur to reconcile with Lancelot (Guerin 265-67).

One other explanation of Gawain's dual personality is that he is representative of both the best and the worst of the Round Table, showing both the ideal and its failure (Bartholomew 262).

The critics, then, have had little to say about the overall significance of the Lot-Pellinore feud. Vinaver has failed to see it as a linking factor drawing the tales together into a unified work. White sees the feud as a main theme, but has changed its origin and focus in his own retelling of the Arthurian legend. Others have dwelt on the character of Gawain or one of his brothers without really considering the relationship of each to the feud. Only Thomas Rumble has shown how Malory developed the feud from his sources and made it a main underplot of Le Morte Darthur.
So it is that Gawain's feud with Pellinore's family, which began at the very start of Arthur's reign, contributes substantially to the final destruction of Arthur's kingdom. Each brother plays a unique part in bringing about the final events in Malory's narrative. Pellinore's slaying of Lot in Arthur's early battles for supremacy is just as much a factor in the eventual disintegration of the fellowship as Mordred's conception and birth some months earlier. The feud's continuing escalation and evolution mirrors the growing dissension within the Round Table, and adds to it as well. The feud finally ends only with the death of all Gawain's family in the events leading up to the final battle. In fact, it is only with Mordred's death by Arthur's hand that the feud, along with the noble ideal of Arthur's Round Table fellowship, is finally laid to rest.
Notes

1 This and all subsequent references to Malory's text are taken from Vinaver's one-volume edition of the Works, listed under Malory in the bibliography. All subsequent references are given simply as page numbers in parentheses. References to Vinaver's notes refer to the three-volume edition, entered under Vinaver in the bibliography.

2 Interestingly, Lamerok claims that Balin, not Pellinore, slew King Lot. According to Vinaver's notes, this is a confusion between the names of Pellinore and Pellam, who was wounded by Balin (754). The passage quoted here certainly leaves no doubt as to Pellinore's responsibility for Lot's death.

3 Vinaver points out that Malory has changed this slightly: in the French source, Gawain and Pelleas are reconciled.

4 This title is evidently Vinaver's, based upon the content of the section and Caxton's rubrics describing the final episodes.


VITA

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