

**Chaucer and Malory's treatment of outlawry**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Angel, and our newborn little girl, Charlotte. For every stage, and every page, turned and written in our life together (so far!). *Mis amores.*

-Carolyn S. Gonzalez-

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**NOMENCLATURE**

CT	<i>Canterbury Tales</i>
KnT	<i>Knight's Tale</i>
WBT	<i>Wife of Bath's Tale</i>

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Carolyn S. Gonzalez

**ABSTRACT**

The medieval outlaw appears in historical, religious, and legal texts of late Medieval England and is imagined in fiction as well, specifically in the romance narratives of Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Malory. Outlawry was a legal state that could be imposed. Both Chaucer and Malory, especially the latter, found themselves outside the law at different points of their lives, an item to consider when examining the authors' representation of knights acting outside the chivalric code. Both authors populate their romances with outlawry, illustrating the ethical, legal, and social assumptions of their own times. In Chaucer and Malory, knights can sometimes be outlaws, and when they are, they are often portrayed as running amok or going mad, leading them to a quest or to an act that must be completed before they can be reintroduced into society. Early critics Maurice Keen and Eric Hobsbawm narrowly defined what they saw as outlawry in medieval literature, but the more recent work of Timothy S. Jones renews the possibility of better examining outlawry's intersection with medieval romance.

Outlawry has traditionally been associated with the narratives of Robin Hood, who is traditionally depicted as an outlaw wearing green who robbed the rich and gave to the poor. Yet broadening the definitions of what constitutes an outlaw narrative can lead to fresh readings of Chaucer's and Malory's work. To be outlawed, in medieval fiction, carries with it an additional displacement of a character's human connection to others. In this project, I examine fictional knights tarrying in outlawed space while grounding my argument in historical narratives. In doing so, I illuminate how outlawry intersects with medieval romance, unveiling chivalry's ideological blemishes.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Outlaws in medieval literature belong to the forest, whether they lurk in the natural world, idyllic greenwoods, or dismal and bleak woodlands. The tradition of the outlaw surfaces in the greenwood legends of Robin Hood, but ideas of outlawry emerge in romances of the Middle Ages as well, particularly the romances of Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Malory. While this project draws only briefly upon each author's brushes with the law, it is worth noting that both Chaucer and Malory, at various moments of their lives, faced possible sentences of exile or imprisonment. Chaucer's criminal past has long been discussed by scholars in the field. In the case of Chaucer and Cecily Chaumpaigne, Chaucer biographers have tried to clarify the severity of charges placed against him for *raptus*. On May 1, 1380, in the Court of Chancery, a document was enrolled in which Chaumpaigne "agreed unconditionally to release Geoffrey Chaucer from all actions concerning her rape or anything else." Furthermore, "Cecily herself came to the court on May 4 to acknowledge the document, which was witnessed by some of Chaucer's most influential friends" (Pearsall 135).

Commonly, laws of medieval England defined *raptus* as abduction, "the seizing and holding of a young person against his or her will with the purpose of gaining some financial advantage" (Pearsall 135). Chaucer's own father, John, was abducted by his aunt in 1324 when she was trying to force her nephew into marrying her daughter. Interestingly, Chaucer himself served in 1387 on a commission investigating a case similar to John's (Crow and Olson 3). Chaucer faced additional brushes with the law in 1379 and 1380, but as Derek Pearsall contends, the law then was "an instrument for the pursuit of private purposes and interests having nothing to do with moral justice or equity" (Pearsall 135).

However, Malory's troubling legal history is less ambiguous. Malory spent eight years in and out of London prisons, but authorities were unable or, perhaps more likely, "unwilling to assemble the necessary jury" of men to try him (Field 104). As P.J.C. Field points out, the "legal process against him [Malory] is suspect from the beginning, although that does not mean he is innocent" (Field 105). As with Chaucer, Malory's most memorable charge was also one of abduction or assault, pressed not by the alleged victim but rather, by her husband. Malory was brought to the King's Bench in Westminster on January 27, 1452 by the Sheriffs of London. Twice, no jurors appeared, but during his second time in court, "he was not committed to the Sheriffs of London but to the marshal of the court, and therefore to its marshalsea," the most notorious prison in Southwark, South of London (Field 107). Another bad year for Malory was 1456: he was sued in the King's Bench for debt and on November 13 the prison of Newgate, in which he was held in for more secure custody, "was to see a spectacular gaol-break" by which Malory and others escaped (Field 119). Additional crimes pepper Malory's life, including harboring a horse-thief and planning a failed burglary, leading to his placement in various prisons, including the Tower of London (Malory and Cooper xi). Chaucer's and Malory's experiences with the court and the latter's familiarity with prisons materialize in their fictional depictions of outlawry, and while I do not claim that their specific experiences enter their stories, it is worth keeping in mind that each author was familiar with law-breaking and methods of punishment. This exposure, I believe, shapes their telling of romances that deviate from and defy the genre's conventions of heroism and chivalry.

The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were, like much of the Middle Ages, marked by a reverence for divine authority and by a conservative social order. Perhaps such an emphasis on order and authority accounts, at least in part, for the presence of violence and law-breaking men in the era's



popular literature. Maurice Keen's *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* traces the development of the literary outlaw in an effort to reveal its origin, spirit, and background. However, in his thorough examination of the heroic figure in the Robin Hood legends, Keen rejects the possibility that medieval romance could intersect with the outlawry narrative. Keen argues that "the champion of chivalry and the outlaw never met face to face in medieval story, though they adventured in the same forests," since romances appealed to an aristocratic audience and Robin Hood was a hero of the common folk (Keen 2). Likewise, Keen claims, "for Arthur and his knights, the Greenwood was a dangerous no-man's land: for Robin Hood it was sanctuary ... knights of the Round Table and forest outlaws were men of a very different stamp" (Keen 3).

This view has persisted in the study of literary outlawry. Eric Hobsbawm later echoed Keen's ideas in coining the term "social bandit," a figure he describes as an outcast peasant-outlaw. The social bandit, Hobsbawm argues, appears as a phenomenon "ubiquitous in human society as solely a product of class conflict and inequality" (Hobsbawm 23). Critical perspectives on outlawry were shaped by Hobsbawm's thought, along with a growing interest in the study of the history, literature, and sociology of crime, law, suppression, and the language of borders and regionalism (Phillips 13). To early critics, the outlawed space of the forest in medieval romance served as "little more than a useful stage prop" whereas in the outlaw legend, the forest was "an asylum from the tyranny of evil lords and a corrupt law" (Keen 3). Keen argued that romances were unlike Robin Hood legends in that they did not focus on the telling of "a man whom society had placed outside the law's protection" and more often than not, banished into the woods (Keen 2). However, more recent investigations of moments of outlawry in medieval literature suggest otherwise.

Timothy S. Jones, for example, challenges the separation of romance from outlawry in his 2010 volume, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*. As Jones points out, romance has always proved to be a flexible form and has consistently defied easy definition; thus, “it had affinities with the outlaw narrative and so provided a new literary framework in which to contextualize the outlaw’s story” (Jones 130). For example, romance protagonists are typically superior to their fellows and to the environment. Furthermore, as Northrup Frye once suggested, key moments in romance traditionally “suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience” (Frye 33). Finally, in romance, the natural world appears more often than the urban and artificial, and romance narratives follow the predictable descent and return cycle in both plot and structure. These traits, as Jones claims in *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, also appear in most outlaw narratives.

The stock characteristics of the outlaw hero closely resemble those of any medieval hero — particularly the knights of romance. Both figures preserve, for the most part, the values of courage, courtesy, and dignity. Strong and resourceful, the knights of medieval romance possess excellent military prowess and are skilled with weaponry and loyal to their kings’ courts. Yet in the works of both Chaucer and Malory, moments of abandoning social norms, disregard for Church authority, and lawbreaking, among other complications, often overshadow the knight’s chivalric qualities; he finds himself thereafter on a quest to reframe his identity. Chaucer and Malory depict moments of conflict and criminal behavior across a wide range of landscapes in their romances. From towers and prisons to dismal woodlands and civilized communities, the intersection of medieval romance with outlawry appears in a variety of themes, plots, and characterizations.

Renewed interest in the literary outlaw of the Middle Ages calls for an expansion of Keen and Hobsbawm's foundational treatments of outlawry. A distinguishing mark of the study of outlawry and Robin Hood has been the partnership between historians and literary critics, a partnership that Helen Phillips finds fruitful and necessary. The quest for a historical Robin Hood may have lapsed, at least momentarily, but "there is clearly still an important object for historical study and that is the mass of material itself and its ever-changing cultural use and re-use" (Phillips 12). Recent studies of the outlaw theme in literature pinpoint additional British outlaws who deviate from Robin Hood's mold, including the Anglo-Saxon nobleman Hereward the Outlaw and Fouke Fitz Warin.<sup>1</sup> Using outlawry as a lens proves useful when approaching medieval fiction as well as history; like Jones, I argue that expanding Hobsbawm and Keen's range of literary and historical examples to include medieval romance narratives makes possible new readings of Arthurian and Chaucerian texts.

Therefore, I first trace Chaucer's depictions of outlawry in *The Canterbury Tales* (CT) and in the latter half of this project examine Malory's treatment of outlawed knights in *Le Morte d' Arthur*. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale* (WBT), an explicitly violent moment of outlawry complicates the conventions of romance, placing a knight in anti-chivalric territory. In *The Knight's Tale* (KnT), Chaucer depicts the imprisoned noblemen Arcite and Palamon as outlaws. Their development across the story highlights the significance of different forms of outlawry that, according to Jones, appear in medieval romance. In *Le Morte d' Arthur*, Malory brands Sir Tristram as an outlaw by using themes of madness and animality; the experience of exile haunts Tristram's psyche and reframes his identity in *Tristram's Madness and Exile*. Finally, I make the

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<sup>1</sup> Hereward the Outlaw stories depict the Anglo-Saxon hero's rebellions against William the Conqueror. He is the hero of many Norman and English legends. Fouke Fitz Warin is a medieval gentleman turned outlaw. The traditional story of his life survives in a French prose romance.

case for a less obvious outlaw, Malory's Lancelot. Regional and nationalistic tensions largely shape Lancelot's status as outlaw. A reexamination of this outlawed knight's competing desires in *Lancelot and Elaine* illuminates how Malory portrays Lancelot's desires through his gestures and actions.

## CHAPTER 2. MEDIEVAL OUTLAWRY

Outlawry, banishment, and exile have long histories, varying in duration and social context. Early forms of legal outlawry were deeply rooted in community involvement, characterized by arbitrariness. To contextualize my argument concerning fictional treatments of individuals breaking the law, I will briefly outline the historical background on outlawry as a legal practice, which influenced both Chaucer's and Malory's times. In addition, I will highlight how fictional depictions of outlawry differ from outlawry as a legal practice. Outlawry as a means of social exclusion has taken on several forms, but the most prevalent in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries was the declaration of a person to be outside the protection of the law. In medieval England there existed different punishments, including exile and imprisonment. In a 2013 study, Melissa Sartore examines the complexity of outlawry in historical narratives, highlighting the significance of exclusionary practices in law and governance in England from the 10<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The purpose of outlawry as a legal practice, as a whole, functioned as "the root of many 'pure' and 'affective' punishments, such as the death penalty and imprisonment" (Sartore 9). Criminal outlawries arose from indictments for treason or rebellion. Furthermore, civil outlawries were generally proclaimed in cases of debt. An outlaw forfeited all goods, rights, and often, his life.

The application of the law in medieval England, despite there often being few police to enforce it, was frequently employed by the king's chief officer — the sheriff. The sheriff could arrest and imprison criminals and was obliged to hold several courts, the most notable being the county court, which was held every four to six weeks. This court in particular served as the location at which men were declared legally outlawed. If a criminal was at large, he would be summoned to this court. If he failed to appear in court four times, he was declared an outlaw on

the fifth occasion and subsequently, could be beheaded (Pugh 194). As H. R. T. Summerson points out, it was also the county court in which “trials by battle” took place (Summerson 314). Such a trial could occur in the case of a serious crime, likely that of rape or arson. The accuser or the accuser’s representative could fight the accused to determine guilt or innocence. In the event that the accused might be in a different county before his crime was discovered and could not be captured, he could be identified and steps taken “to ensure that he never came back, not only to his place of origin or to where his felony was committed, but to any other law-abiding community” (Summerson 313). The accused was then reduced to the status of “hunted vermin, liable to arrest when seen and execution when arrested” (Summerson 314). Such a status was, of course, that of the outlaw.

In fiction, Maurice Keen points out, an outlaw is a man who has literally been put outside the protection of the law, who eventually takes on the status of outlaw. Legal outlawry has been described as “a violent confession of failure” and as “an admission of weakness on the part of the law itself” (Barlow 314). Likewise, Keen states that the sentence of outlawry as presented in medieval fiction “implied an admission of weakness on the part of the law itself. You have defied us, the Law said to Outlawry, therefore we will disown you” (Keen 9-10). While legal outlawry proved useful as an alternative to a fine or as a response to serious crime and wrongdoing, in fictional accounts, outlawry appears as a marker of self-identity rather than branding by authority. Trevor Dean points out that what “medieval historians have usually done with medieval crime literature is look for the correspondences with history” (Dean 145).

Furthermore, “a number of literary outlaws, both medieval and modern, were based on real, historical persons,” including the protagonist of the *Tale of Gamelyn*.<sup>2</sup>

James Bellamy points out that several rulers preferred to inflict immediate and severe punishments yet there was still a period of time between the surrender (or capture) of a suspect and a trial, when confinement in custody was essential. Bellamy states that there were “more sentences of imprisonment in the Middle Ages than in preceding centuries” perhaps because of “the actions of trespass following misdeeds...had broken the king’s peace” (Bellamy 163-64). When courts found men guilty of such a count, the criminal was both responsible for damages and liable to a period in prison. As time went on, the act of casting a malefactor out of society, through means of exile or banishment, became replaced by mechanisms of social, political, and judicial control that included imprisonment.

As the law developed in England, so did the forms of punishment for specific offences as means of correcting wrongdoing. Imprisonment was initially used to “gain compliance” and was not arbitrary (Bellamy 164). During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, imprisonment was used for a wide variety of crimes, including but not limited to: riots, forcible entry, misbehavior of officials, economic crimes, and offenses against statutes of laborers. These crimes, as Sartore points out, “all in theory, touched the king” (Sartore 218). The same can be said of war criminals and trespassers. Such criminals “were subject to terms of imprisonment” (Sartore 219). Though most sentences typically lasted only a year or two, the king ultimately maintained full jurisdiction over how long the offender should remain imprisoned. Many of those who suffered in later medieval prisons and jails were not awaiting trial but rather, had already been “tried and sentenced to

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<sup>2</sup> *The Tale of Gamelyn* is a romance about a noble robber who becomes a provincial hero. The story illuminates the corruption of the law during the reign of King Edward I. Richard W. Kaeuper examines in “An historian’s reading of the *Tale of Gamelyn*” how court records have been used to verify the details of the story (Kaeuper 52).

imprisonment, either as their sole punishment or as part of it” (Bellamy 163). Those sentenced were often imprisoned because alternate penalties, such as execution, were not available or preferred by the king. The destitute and alone were more likely to be unjustly punished. Those who demonstrated what was seen as abnormal behavior could also find themselves imprisoned.

The ways people of the Middle Ages understood various mental conditions and disabilities are reflected in medical and legal documents of the time. The questionable behavior of criminals is frequently linked with madness and in medieval fiction, outlawry is often linked with the theme of insanity. Irina Metzler has worked through a disability studies lens to employ “a wide-ranging vocabulary to describe the phenomenon of impairment” in the Middle Ages (Metzler 4-5). In the Middle Ages, natural factors were believed to induce madness in individuals. Physiological makeup, the influence of the stars, the changing seasons, as well as social and cultural expectations were thought to play a role. For example, Agnes Wyrseye became “mad after childbirth and killed her daughter” whereas Ida Crekton, oddly, intentionally “killed her child in childbirth” (Turner 121). Medieval physicians thought that physiological, astrological, and seasonal forces could affect the humoral balance and thereby induce madness. Bartholomeus and Robert Burton (slightly later sources than Malory) discuss how the balance of the humours is essential in maintaining proper health (Costerus 162). For them, Original Sin, often considered the primary catalyst in the imbalance of the humours in mankind, was ultimately responsible for illness and disease. Yet attempts to control one’s physiological state were not only commonplace but also expected in the Middle Ages. Failure to maintain this physical balance was no different from a failure to control one’s sinful urges. Through equating these failures, the people of the Middle Ages often made a connection between the spiritual and natural causes of insanity and criminal behavior.



The next chapter discusses Chaucer's depiction of a knight who exhibits criminal behavior resulting from a lack of self-control. When Chaucer wrote WBT, the crime of rape in England was often conflated with the charge of abduction. Dean points out that during this time, "many medieval rapes involved an abuse of trust or authority by men," such as "kinsmen, employers, and officials" (Dean 85). Rape was not a prosecutable crime until 1275 and few prosecutions (which happened only in the form of private accusations) resulted in a jury verdict (Dean 82). The evolution of medieval England's law on rape is complex and muddy, but not uncommon to the continental laws shared by France and the Low Countries. Not until the 14<sup>th</sup> century did "state prosecutions of rape become possible" and likewise, the only successful prosecutions were typically framed by "extreme elements": the rape of underage girls, the betrayal of trust, or accusations by women of good repute (Dean 86). Consequently, the actions of Chaucer's unnamed knight in WBT mirror the occurrence of rape in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### CHAPTER 3. CHAUCER'S OUTLAWS

#### Outlawry in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*

Chaucer's WBT and KnT concern knights who find themselves beyond legal protection, although for vastly different reasons. Chaucer's treatment of the outlawed (and usually exiled) knight in both KnT and WBT demonstrates the malleability of this literary figure. Outlawry and romance narratives center on the nobility, and particularly in WBT, the knight's conflict with the legal system points out his internal conflict between erotic desire and social obligation. The development of Chaucer's outlawed hero in WBT begins with the outlaw realizing he must use his newfound independence from the court's protection in order to negotiate his own set of social associations and accomplish his assigned quest.

Not every outlaw is a criminal on the run, nor, in WBT, is Chaucer's unnamed knight. However, this knight is not "a champion of the good and justice against a corrupt and flawed royal administration" either (Sartore 223). Chaucer's outlaws are not defenders of the penniless, *per se*. They sometimes challenge the idea that an outlaw be characterized as "good-at-heart," as the outlaws of the Robin Hood legends are. Not all outlaws operate in the service of their king but rather, may serve the interest of their own needs and desires. Later, I will draw upon Arcite and Palamon's imprisonment by Theseus, duke of Athens, in KnT to further examine how outlaws change when beyond the king's rule. For now, I will consider the unnamed knight of WBT whose moment of outlawry derives from darker motives.

In WBT, a rapist knight, referred to here as "the unnamed knight," faces the sentence of death by King Arthur immediately following his attack on a young girl, which "rafte hire maydenhed" (888). However, the women in King Arthur's court "longe preyden the king of grace" so that instead the unnamed knight is exiled, sent on a personal and deeply psychological

quest as an outcast to discover what it is that women most desire (895). Although the unnamed knight does not go into the greenwood forests as in the Robin Hood legends, he does find, on the final day of his search, an old hag “under a forest syde,” near the edge of a forest (990). It is upon entering this place that the unnamed knight begins to behave differently. Initially, he raped a young maiden with impunity but here he treats the old hag with politeness, calling her “leeve mooder” (1005). She will tell him the secret of what women want if he will do the first thing she asks — which is that he marry her. Nevertheless, the knight resists union with the hag until she gives him a bedtime sermon, which calls on classical and medieval warnings against treasuring wealth, beauty, or social position. Perhaps, by having the hag in bed with him, the knight has metaphorically brought the wild and the forest into close proximity with him. By the tale’s end, the unnamed knight ultimately matures as a result of his time as an outcast. It is important to note that Chaucer’s unnamed knight is criminally impulsive, but not quite mad or lovesick — an important distinction from the subsequent examples of outlaws I will examine.

By pushing beyond conventions of romance, WBT complicates the idea of what an outlaw is. King Arthur and his knights are often represented in nearly ideal terms, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, yet often the convention of courtly love becomes a veiled and tolerable disguise for passion. The obsessive power of passion, like a kind of love-madness, operates as “a superhuman force which relieves the individual of his moral responsibility and exorcises guilt and shame” (Hughes 71). Chaucer’s writing is deeply engaged with the power of affect and shame on both minds and bodies. He returns again and again to the psychology of love and loss in the *Book of the Duchess*, *The Knight’s Tale*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, among others. Feeling and thinking, and the loss of both, play crucial roles in his stories. Corinne Saunders contends that while women were traditionally assumed to be more bodily and more emotional,

“Chaucer emphasizes the relationship between thinking and feeling, the embodied nature of being in the world, across his works and across genders” (Saunders 12).

The idea of love as passion can be traced back to Constantine the African’s chapter on love in *Viaticum*, an adaptation of a 10<sup>th</sup> century medical handbook. In *Viaticum*, Constantine argues that “just as loyalty is the most extreme form of affection, so eros is the most intense form of pleasure” (Wack 47). Eros, or erotic love, provokes the unnamed knight’s actions. Likewise, Constantine states that just as unthinking fidelity is immoderate love for a lord, eros is “immoderate love for those to be possessed (sexually)” (Wack 47). By comparing intense sexual love to the ideals of loyalty to a lord, Constantine connects passion with chivalric service.

This connection was a literary convention by the time Chaucer wrote in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Constantine’s pupil Johannes Afflacijs further developed *Viaticum* into the manuscript *Liber de heros morbo* to articulate a medical, technical term for passionate nobility. Yet immoderate love, or lovesickness, surface in circumstances in which aristocratic men exert an inordinate degree of power over women, generating fears of reprisal. Mary E. Wack points out that even Christine de Pisan, who elsewhere shows with eloquent pain the sufferings inflicted on women by patriarchal culture, “advocates obedient submission to husbands who may be brutally violent” (Wack 167). The conventions of courtly literature and medieval romance, despite the circulation of stories in which women temporarily or symbolically assume power and reverse hierarchal arrangement, embody a strong medieval sense of hierarchy in which man’s place was on top.

In WBT, the rape of a maiden and marriage to a poor, old, and ugly woman conflict with powerful structures of masculine dominance in moments of unbridled desire. Unlike early social bandits and robbers, the unnamed knight, a “lusty bachelor,” commits what modern readers identify as indisputably rape (883). To readers of Chaucer’s time, this moment would stand out

as a knight acting against chivalric code. Chaucer disrupts our expectations surrounding how such a story *should* unfold based on the conventions of earlier Arthurian legends. Rarely does Chaucer present such a shockingly straightforward account of sexual violence, though *The Reeve's Tale* comes close. Courtliness in general is a philosophy of self-control, yet the knight in WBT dramatically fails to maintain it. Libidinal and aggressive desires make the unnamed knight unable to remain within the bounds of normal social behavior, marking him as flawed.

In WBT, Chaucer creates a conflicting message on the nature of romance. As mentioned, modern readers instantly convict the knight for committing what we see as society's most notorious sign of social and sexual deviancy. However, Brian S. Lee draws attention to the troubling nature of the tale's message when he examines the rape scene precipitating the events of WBT: it apparently was not meant to shock Chaucer's audience. What seems to be the casual inclusion of rape and the knight's indifference derive from a literary tradition that repeatedly depicts similar moments. One literary precedent to the WBT, the Old French *pastourelle*, is a subgenre of pastoral poetry that focuses on a maiden shepherdess. Descriptions that are usually comic or light-hearted saturate *pastourelles*, and initially "unwilling victims soon grow compliant, then grateful, and finally eager for the knight's return" (Lee 19). Additionally, the *pastourelle* rarely portrays the protagonist as a villain and openly favors male aggression. The rape in WBT, at least in medieval times, is less a crime against a woman than a breaking of the rule of Arthur's court. Chaucer's audience, and perhaps even modern readers, are given little time to ponder the maiden's safety and condition. Attention is quickly redirected to Arthur's authority and the expectations of his legal court; the maiden exits the story entirely. The knight must undertake his quest, but he receives no trivial award — such as good luck — but rather, enjoys a lifetime of "parfit joye" by the tale's end (1258). Having submitted to the will of his

hag, he receives an obedient and beautiful wife and hence, the scene shocks modern readers because it is reported as casually as it happened; he is rewarded “as a matter of deliberate judicial policy” (Lee 17). Nevertheless, the knight indisputably commits a crime against the state and faces the ultimate punishment: death. What arises from this moment is a knight who is outlawed and exiled for breaking social order, rather than for performing an explicitly violent crime.

Chaucer’s knight initially faces a death sentence because, “cours of law,” the knight “shoulde han lost his heed” (35). It is the intercession of the ladies and Arthur’s queen, presumably Guinevere, that formally positions the knight as an outlaw. Chaucer then thwarts readers’ expectation that the crime will be taken seriously by shifting into the realm of fantasy. When Arthur submits to Guinevere’s plea, and the demand that he discover what “women most desyren,” the plot shifts dramatically and the tone becomes sympathetic towards the sorrowful, excommunicated rapist; the story’s focus moves away from chivalric ideals about justice. However, the knight’s shocking behavior forces him to explore what he can, and must, do to regain the court’s grace. His banishment from the king’s protection for “A twelf-month and a day, / to seche and leere an answe,” makes him both a legal and social outcast, a role that reconstructs the simple quest narrative of medieval romance as both an external and deeply internal search (900-01). The knight must question his pride, superficial values, and moral impairment in order to fulfil the court’s demand that he find what women most desire. As Kathryn L. McKinley points out, critics traditionally read “the knight's concession to the hag as an act illustrating the virtue of passive obedience, and thus a final exemplum of women's wish for domination over their husbands” (McKinley 363). But Chaucer depicts the knight as deeply conflicted with his choice, as “This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh” (363). Despite labeling

the old hag as his “damnacioun,” the knight ultimately submits (1068). And, after some additional words of loathing, a markedly changed knight speaks kindly:

“My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,  
 I put me in youre wise governance;  
 Cheseth youreself which may be moost pleasance...  
 For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.” (1230-33)

Finally, after she asks him if “I may chese and governe as me lest?” he gives a sincere “Ye, certes, wyf...I holde it best” (1237-38).

WBT becomes less and less concerned with the knight’s ability to return to Arthur’s court and function in the king’s society. Rather, the exiled outlaw with his physically transformed lover transforms into a courtly lover himself. Gone is the youthful rashness focused on the knight’s needs and desires. In its place is a relationship that more closely resembles a fairytale with a traditional happy ending, despite the narrator’s final swipe at men.

I opened this chapter by introducing the literary outlaw as a man of the forest. And while the unnamed knight wanders throughout the countryside seeking to learn what women most desire, it is worthwhile to examine in some detail the woodside encounter of the knight and hag, who appears when 24 dancing maidens disappear. In other words, Chaucer’s forest in WBT is a habitat for supernatural creatures — such as the hag — and for outlaws. Psychological readings of wilderness suggest the outlaw’s journey into the forest functions as a confrontation with the unconscious or the animal nature of human beings. As Jones points out, when the outlaw leaves behind “the cultural or social self” and is left to face “the natural self, he fashions a more complete identity” (Jones 41-42). The world outside the law offers a space for transformation and, contrary to early critiques of the woods as explicitly hostile environments in romance, the

physical space outside the law can offer a respite from legal authorities that might even provide a sense of alternative community. And, as in WBT, this explicitly outlawed space provides banished knights with ways to forge new connections.

The world outside the law often appears emboldening, offering freedom of action and increased agency. Laura L. Howes traces Chaucer's experience of the land and how his knowledge of England's woodland shapes his representations of late medieval landscapes. Howes contends that his "firsthand knowledge of John of Gaunt's holdings and King Edward III's pleasure grounds and parks, among others, correlates to poetic depictions in the *Parlement of Fowls*, and in tales told by the Knight, Nun's Priest, Pardoner, Wife of Bath, and Friar" (Howes 125). In WBT, Chaucer's forest is a place for social outcasts as it houses the outlawed and the physically decrepit. The unnamed knight meets the old woman while riding home "under a forest syde," and she sits "on the green" (990). She is described by the narrator as so hideous that "A fouler wight ther may no man devyse" (999). The strangeness of the old woman — later seen to be a shape-shifter — seems to derive, in part, from the woodland she inhabits. The woods harbor those outcast from society and hence operate under rules and expectations sharply different from those imposed by the legal system.

The old hag's lecture offers the knight a "new way of defining desirability, and thus a way to attain sovereignty over himself by desiring only that which is reasonable and leads to the common good" (Thomas 94). In place of his desire grows an understanding of what women truly expect from men: sovereignty. I would argue that the knight's experience in the unpopulated woodland allows him to contemplate his actions in privacy and isolation not easily achieved elsewhere. Isolation generates strange happenings and significant chance encounters in both medieval romance and in outlaw narratives, permitting moments of profound change beyond the



court's influence. Chaucer's forests provide "space for wild animals, outlaws, and supernatural figures" (Howes 133). By placing a noble outlaw beyond Arthur's court, Chaucer uses the outlaw motif as a way to explore the possibility of change and transformation in human nature.

However, WBT does not end in the woods. The tale ends with the knight and his newfound lover returning to Arthur's court to report his findings, completing the quest. Both in Arthur's court and in the bedroom, the outlawed knight has opportunities to repent of, and abandon, his wrongdoing. Susanne Weli argues that WBT, like its prologue, gives us a representation of conflict in relationships, a suggestion of how it might be resolved, and finally, "a pragmatic notion of how very hard it is to reconcile these human impulses" (Weli 37). The problem with the tale's romantic ending is that the knight is apparently rewarded for breaking a crucial social norm and for following his own desires. The knight followed his desires more than the law and chivalric code, demanding control over others, when he has little to no control over himself. By the end of the tale, the knight receives bliss despite becoming the controlled rather than the controller.

The knight's understanding of sovereignty remains so uncertain that he passes up the opportunity to define what he truly desires. He is, after all, unable to choose whether he prefers obedience or beauty in women. When he responds to the old woman's question, he only says "Cheseth youreself which may be moost pleasance" for "as yow liketh, it suffiseth me" (1232-35). However, neither option he is presented offers much depth. The knight ultimately gets both by the tale's end, "at the cost of giving up *maistrie* but had he been willing to redefine his values, he might have received something less superficial" (Thomas 95). Surely, there are more than two potentially desirable qualities in women, but the hag constrains the knight's unruly desire by the choices she presents. His choice is between two shallow values. Although the knight resigns

himself to his wife's preference, the ending of the outlaw narrative, as Jones points out, does not rely primarily on an assumption of resignation, the logical result of the abandonment of control. Rather, "the story of outlawry is open to a variety of endings," for when an outlaw is found guilty, he might "expect to pay a fine, suffer mutilation, or lose his life depending upon the crime" (Jones 48). In the case of WBT, the story's end conveys a sense of outlawry as malleable.

In the subsequent chapters, we will see how differing times and locations significantly influence tales of outlawry. Chaucer, like Malory, projects the ideals held by the ruling class in his romances, illuminating everything from the histories of Christendom, royal families, and the development of new militaries, to the chaste and erotic codes of chivalry — as well as the realm of the wildly fantastic.

### **Outlawry in *The Knight's Tale***

Outlaws and narratives of outlaws embody many kinds of conflicts and appeal to multifaceted tensions and frustrations in a variety of audiences. Chaucer and Malory offer contrasting means by which outlawry narratives intersect with medieval romance through transcending narrative strictures. The two outlaws of KnT conflict with the legal system, resulting in a clash of community and family with a newfound need to exert independence and negotiate a new set of social associations.

In KnT, Arcite and Palamon's military excellence and episodes of violence demonstrate another aspect of the outlaw as chivalric knight. These two young Thebans are captured and imprisoned by the Athenian ruler Theseus. Their imprisonment is a form of being outcast, since prisoners typically are criminals, but more central to this story, neither knight can speak with Emelye, the woman both desire. Emelye is their chief focus throughout the tale. The knights are also cut off from society as a whole when Arcite is eventually released as a favor to an ally,

while Palamon remains imprisoned, with each knight wishing he were in the other's place. Their frustration suggests a form of psychological imprisonment as well, as neither sees benefit of his position.

Following his release, Arcite undergoes a physical transformation. His desire for Emelye makes him so lovesick that he is "disfigured" and returns, unrecognized, to Theseus's court as a servant (1403). During this time, Palamon flees the prison with the help of a friend, intending to return to win Emelye; even as he escapes, however, he encounters the returned Arcite. Two outlaws face one another, one hiding in plain sight, self-exiled to a lower station in life, and one fresh out of jail. Both claiming the right to love Emelye, they agree to meet again, armed, and the vicious fight between them is described with animal images of lion, tiger, and bear. The knights are unrestrained in their violent behavior:

Thou myghtest wene that this Palamon  
 In his fightyng were a wood leon,  
 And as a crueel tigre was Arcite;  
 As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,  
 That frothen whit as foom for ire wood.  
 Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood. (1655-60)

When Theseus and a hunting party find them, the king pledges to carry out the death sentence each is under, until he responds to the women's pleas —similarly to Arthur in WBT — and declares a formal tournament through which they can resolve their conflict. At the tournament, Palamon is rendered helpless and loses, but by the tale's end, Arcite dies from a wound received right after the battle. After years of desiring her, Palamon marries Emelye.

Both Arcite and Palamon are out-of-bounds at various points of the tale. Their first outlawed experience takes place under the strictures of Theseus's rule. The knights face isolation in the tower and their conversations depict the outlaw's psychological strain — partly due to isolation, and partly to infatuation. Their status as outlaws carries across the tale, shaping their actions and physical conditions; shame and guilt play recurring roles in reframing the psyche of the out-of-bounds knights. Chaucer's outlaws reject the communal values of their society, shaping them as different. They are outlaws first, because they are foreigners. Next, because they flout Theseus's command and finally, because they attack one another. As outlaws, Arcite and Palamon display different behaviors in *KnT*, depending on the forms of punishment imposed: for one, forced isolation and banishment, for the other, self-inflicted exile and escape.

Cousins, Arcite and Palamon are prisoners of war, imprisoned by Theseus, who had “faught, and slough” Creon, “manly as a knight/ In pleyn bataille, and putte the folk to flight” (129-30). The knights find themselves outside the law's good graces as enemies of Theseus, and separated entirely from Athenian society as a whole. Despite Theseus's decree that they will not be ransomed or pardoned, Arcite's punishment eventually is reduced from imprisonment to exile: “at requeste and preyere/ Of Perotheus, withouten any raunsoun” Theseus “hym leet out of prisoun/ Frely to goon wher that hym liste over al” (1206-10). However, Arcite may not, on pain of death, return to Athens. Thus, he is forced into a state of perpetual exile. Palamon, too, leaves the prison, but through the aid of an intermediary. Thanks to the “helping of a freend,” breaks free from the prison “And fleeth the cite faste as he may go” (1466-67).

Arcite's and Palamon's initial sentence as outlaws lands them together in a man-made construction: Theseus's prison-tower. Jones points out that while the forest is the usual home of the outlaw figure, the artificial and “built environment inevitably lead to conflict and even

catastrophe” for outlaws (Jones 130). Both knights experience conflict through their shared experience in Theseus’s tower. Hence, this becomes the first out-of-bounds location in which Chaucer positions his knights and it is in this outlawed territory that incivility and psychological unsoundness take root. Outlawry in medieval legends often represents a struggle against authority and abuse of law, but Chaucer’s outlaws in *KnT* demonstrate a more personal drive and expression of romantic dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction, a result and eventually a cause of their further outlawry, grows from the recurring pestilence that romance writers use to unhinge chivalric men: the intoxication of courtly love.

Upon the first time he “cast his eye upon Emelya,” Palamon grows lovesick, “And therwithal he bleynte and cride, ‘A!/ As though he stongen were unto the herte’” (1078-79). However, as a prisoner, he is unable to pursue her. Arcite, while being the second to view her, argues that Palamon does not love her a woman but rather that “Thyn is affeccoun of hoolynesse, /And myn is love as to a creature” and hence, it is he who is worthiest of her love (1158-59). Lovesickness shapes Arcite’s physical appearance and thus, his actions upon his exile from the tower. It leads to his return and eventual recapture, and finally, causes his deadly battle with Palamon. Courtly love — a love for Emelye, to whom he has never spoken — also motivates Palamon’s escape. It was not uncommon in the Middle Ages for romantic pursuit and scandal to lead to moments of outlawry, as murder and other forms of treachery often plagued the courts. Hood points out that “on the one hand, to feudal society, courtly love was irrelevant to marriage and potentially destructive of feudal relationships” and, to add more fire to the flame, “to the Medieval Church it represented the willful (and wicked) subjection of that highest of human faculties (reason) to unruly passion” (Hood 22).

Even in the Robin Hood legends, the outlaw is often motivated by a love interest, even if romantic love is not an initial motive. Lorinda B. Cohoon points out that across the many reimaginings of Maid Marian, from chaste to bawdy depictions, “Marian is always disruptive; her contrast to the band of merry men places significant pressure on outlaw hierarchies that replicate the patriarchal order of court and the town” (Cohoon 210-11). And, in later versions of Maid Marian, we see “Marian figures that are saintly and sexually provocative, loyal and loving, as well as skilled in outlaw strategies” (Cohoon 213). Likewise, Emelya, in her chaste and largely voiceless manner, ignites Arcite and Palamon’s development as outlaws. Chaucer’s entanglement of lovesickness with outlawry demonstrates the complex relationship and intersection of romance and outlaw narratives.

Distance from the beloved increases the pain of a courtly lover, and lovesickness disrupts Arcite and Palamon’s relationship. It is soon after Arcite “gan to espeye” Emelya from the tower that he is exiled from Athens and from her. His low spirits lead to a physical and psychological change. Feeble and meek,

for al the world he ferde

Nat oonly lyk the lovers maladye

Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye

Engendred of humour malencolyk (1372-75).

Chaucer uses outlawry to convey tensions between the ideals of knighthood and those of chivalric love; Arcite fails to uphold chivalry’s impossible tasks of managing both legal and romantic expectations. Thus, Chaucer shifts attention to the outlaw’s ethics of expediency and deception in order to unveil chivalry’s flaws. Mental hardship becomes central to the rest of the tale, with the most notable moment appearing through Arcite’s ongoing experience with

lovesickness. It is also at this point that Arcite changes his identity, taking on the name of Philostrate, which could mean “prostrated by love” or perhaps “love of humble station” (Barr 155). Arcite transforms physically due in part to his lovesickness and partly through disguise. Disfigured and pale, Arcite catches a glimpse of himself “And saugh that chaunged was al his colour, / And saugh his visage al in another kynde” because of the “maladye the which he hadde endured” (1400-04). Arcite embodies the typical physical features of the lovesick knight that Wack describes. However, Chaucer reframes this typically lovesick Arcite in more animalistic terms to focus on the elements of outlawry in the story. Arcite transitions from lovesick and pale to overtly lusty, as deep in a grove,

By aventure his wey he gan to holde  
 To maken hym a gerland of the greves,  
 Were it of wodebynde or hawethorn leves,  
 And loude he song ayeyn the sonne shene:  
 “May, with alle thy floures and thy grene,  
 Welcome be thou, faire, fresshe May,  
 In hope that I som grene gete may.”  
 And from his courser, with a lusty herte,  
 Into the grove ful hastily he sterte,  
 And in a path he rometh up and doun. (1506-15)

Arcite, “remembrynge on the poynt of his desir,” hides himself in the woods in an attempt to draw nearer to Emelye (1501). Despite his professed devotion for his lady from afar, his heart is described as lusty, and he roams the woods, away from Emelye. Arcite’s restless nature contrasts with Palamon’s blind concentration, and while their initial shared experience as outlaws in the

tower frames both knights as potentially worthy lovers, each takes on markedly different identities when their punishments change. For Arcite, displacement in the woods creates in him a more primal state of being, as Chaucer's use of impulsive language reframes him as less rational, perhaps even less human. Maria K. Greenwood notes that "Arcite plunges into the wood in search of what one can suspect to be a more accessible sexual encounter than his distant lady to pacify his urgently lusty heart" and "his precipitous roaming up and down suggests less the courtly lover than the sexual predator" (Greenwood 142). In short, the conventional language of courtly love is replaced by threatening and predatory descriptions. Hence, Arcite falls short of upholding chivalric expectations concerning romance and courtly love codes. Chaucer veils Arcite's shortcomings through the narrator's passive response to such behavior, as well as by blending the language of the outlaw with "the traditional rhetoric of chivalric and courtly love discourse which suggests by its elevated eloquence that equally elevated feelings are being expressed" (Greenwood 143). Palamon, too, fails to uphold the particulars of the chivalric code.

In *KnT*, the intersection of animality and humanity resembles the intersection of outlawry and romance, as Chaucer expresses both knights' development as outlaws through animal imagery and metaphors. Chaucer complicates the medieval understanding of how man differs from animals to convey intense psychological moments. Palamon begins in the same physical outlawed territory as Arcite but Chaucer's treatment of his lovesickness and his portrayal of Palamon's outlawry greatly differs from his cousin's. While "thilke woful Palamon, / That hath thy [Theseus's] prison broken wickedly" breaks the law outright to flee the tower, he does not mirror Arcite's physical decay, nor does he find himself in the curious moods and potentially predatory states Arcite does. Of course, he has little time to do so, but in addition Palamon hurt "thurghout myn ye/ Into myn herte" by Emelya, displaces lovesickness with jealousy of Arcite



(238-39). The narrator affirms “if that Palamon was wounded sore, / Arcite is hurt as much as he, or more” (257-58). Palamon, then, is another model of Chaucer’s outlaw: the outlaw who chooses exile, fleeing from his captors. Jones points out that those who escaped their imprisonments, such as Palamon does, were “often imagined as leading a desperate or even subhuman existence” (Jones 39).

Palamon has high rank, demonstrates strong combat skills, and has an unnamed friend who conveniently comes to his aid in order to free him, but once he escapes, Chaucer depicts Palamon’s shift from isolated outlaw to conniving evader through animal metaphors. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that Chaucer “frequently employed animals as vehicles through which complaints against the difficulties of existence as a constrained being could be voiced” (Cohen 41). Palamon, initially constrained in the tower, compares his status to that of a caged beast. He moans to the gods:

What is mankynde moore unto you holde  
 Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?  
 For slayn is man right as another beast,  
 And dwelleth eek in prison and arrest (1307-10).

As Jeremy Withers points out, Palamon simultaneously “asserts a fundamental distinction between humans and animals” as “we catch him articulating the desire of humans to become more animal-like due to a belief that animals, unlike humans, live fully liberated lives” (Withers 175). Chaucer’s animal imagery connects moments of chivalric violence with the amoral nature of beasts. Withers argues that as Chaucer deftly shows us in *KnT*, “the lives of animals and oaks are anything but free to follow a path unregulated by chivalric power and control” (181). In a

similar fashion, the outlaw is unable to completely evade social control and, as we see later in *KnT*, neither Palamon nor Arcite remains free for long.

Palamon and Arcite share an immediate danger not from harsh external conditions, but from the immediate persecution by one another in the out-of-bounds space temporarily beyond Theseus's justice. Both men, to a certain degree, choose exile in the woods over attempting a return to civilized society. As Jones points out, psychological readings of the wilderness in medieval romance as an out-of-bounds space in which a knight confronts his unconscious or more animal-like nature suggest "that the experience can be revitalizing" (41). Similarly, medieval English law "imagined a man stripped of his legal and social identity and abandoned him to his desires and those of the other inhabitants of the world outside the law" (Jones 39). The outlaw's journey leads to moments of intense psychological, emotional, and social change. Through abandoning the cultural or social self, a self entrenched in chivalric expectation, both Arcite and Palamon face their natural selves by stepping into the world outside the law.

## CHAPTER 4. MALORY'S OUTLAWS

### *Outlawry in Tristram's Madness and Exile*

In the previous chapter, I sketched some aspects of outlawry in the legal and literary history of medieval England. In this portion of my project, I outline how the theme of exile recurs in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as his knights frequently find themselves outside the law. Malory links the conventions of outlaw tales with those of Arthurian romance to depict moments of a flawed knight's deep-running psychological turmoil.

As has been shown, moments of outlawry often occur in the woods and can lead to significant changes in a knight's identity beyond chivalric society. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as in Chaucer's tales, the status of outlaw is linked to courtly and erotic love. However, Malory pushes this connection further, linking outlawry with madness. A clear moment in which madness intersects with outlawry appears in the dramatic displays of Sir Tristram in *Tristram's Madness and Exile*. *The Book of Sir Tristram* offers a point of entrance into considering the literary outlaw as madman.

Across Medieval Europe, public displays of insanity served as spectacles; the mentally disabled walked the streets, the isolated hermit was a prophet. In many narratives, at least one madman "was a holy man or a hermit, while the second usually lived in the world" in public sight (Gerould 530). Hearing voices and hallucinations were, for the most part, believed to be divinely inspired (Hood 20). Yet at some point in history, madness became a manifestation of danger and sin. The literature of the Middle Ages illuminates this idea of madness, and the theme of madness echoes throughout the tales of Malory's knights. Examining stories in *Le Morte* as outlaw narratives reveals what medieval romance says both overtly and subliminally about what it means to be deemed "mad." Here I define "madness" as including all mental

afflictions in the Middle Ages, including temporary conditions that disable an individual momentarily. I will use the term “madness” to convey a sense of how Malory’s representation of outlaws pairs with his portrayal of mental illness. I will draw upon historical sources, as well as medical texts on madness, to demonstrate the significance of this condition in *Le Morte*.

Michael Foucault’s first major book, *Madness and Civilization*, examines the evolving meaning of madness in European culture, law, politics, philosophy and medicine. Foucault traces the meaning of madness from the Middle Ages to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to draw lines that mark the divide between human and animal, and even between animal and monster. Critics have long relied on Foucault’s claim that animals symbolically “bear the secret nature of man” for it “is animality that reveals the dark rage, the sterile madness that lies in men’s hearts” (Foucault 21). History bears witness to a whole range of human “others” who have been defined as animal-like and less-than-human. Malory’s outlaws demonstrate Foucault’s argument that what separates the madmen and the rational is physical separation and confinement. Foucault argues that the condition of outcasts was understood as moral error, as they were often viewed as having freely chosen prostitution, vagrancy, blasphemy, or unreason (Foucault 33).

Mikuláš Teich points out that in the long literary history of the character Merlin, “it is possible to find both negative and positive images of madness” and likewise, it is possible “to find both negative and positive images of how space was implicated in the dealings of medieval society with madness” (Teich 59). Teich argues that the mad were deliberately excluded from society, and that strenuous efforts were made to “chase mad people into marginal spaces such as the forest and the mountains” (Teich 59). The theme of outlawry, too, appears in depictions of Merlin across Arthurian traditions, including Malory’s. Merlin is repeatedly

banished to woodlands and forests, incarcerated in jails and prisons, or imprisoned in towers and dungeons. As much as medieval culture associated outlaws with the woods, “to the medieval mind there was possibly an even more direct equation of madness and wilderness, which curiously enough may have inspired the wild men myths in the first place” (Teich 60). Teich’s sentiment provides insight into the entanglement of outlawry and madness, as both themes appear in the romances of the Middle Ages.

I return momentarily to Foucault, to note the critical view that *Madness and Civilization* “coincides with, and in many cases has been informed by, the burgeoning animal rights and disability rights movement” (Carlson 117). Foucault’s theory of madness illuminates madness as rage in the Arthurian traditions, including *The Alliterative Morte Arthur*. I believe Foucault’s reflections on the history of madness can be useful in examining Malory’s *Le Morte* as well. Malory’s text, despite its being a compilation, is the most linear collection of Arthurian legends. The question of what is natural threads the stories together and *Tristram’s Madness* contains memorable depictions of knights breaking both chivalric code and natural law. Reading Malory’s depictions of physical fits of lunacy reveals how the medieval imagination captured episodes of insanity and depicted them as animality. *Tristram’s Madness and Exile* and *Lancelot and Elaine* provide the clearest examples in Malory of knights going mad.

Malory took several creative liberties in telling the tale of *Tristram’s Madness and Exile*, and as it unfolds, he presents little of the well-known story of Tristan and Isolde’s forbidden love. Malory transforms the Tristram of his sources into a deeply troubled knight who, from birth, is described as a criminal. As in the French prose romances of Tristan, Tristram’s trouble begins early in his life, detailed in the opening of *Isode the Fair*. Malory’s narrator recounts how Melyodas reigned over the country of Lyones while Arthur reigned over England, Wales and

Scotland. As the story opens, Melyodas loves Elyzabeth, “a full meke lady” who “within a whyle she wexed grete with chylde” (230). However, the tale of Tristram’s origin quickly takes a dark turn when a mysterious woman appears who loves the king but “by no meane she never cowde get his love” (230). The mysterious woman ensnares Melyodas as prisoner:

Therefore she let ordayne upon a day as kynge Melyodas rode an-huntynge, for he was a grete chacer of dere, and there be enchauntemente she made hym chace an harte by himself alone tyll that he com to an olde castell, and there anone he was takyn prisoner by the lady that loved hym. (229)

Shortly thereafter, Tristram’s mother Elyzabeth delivers her child in the forest after she flees the community once her husband commits adultery. Nearing death, Elyzabeth despairs over the infant Tristram:

A, my lytyll son, thou haste murderd thy modir! And therefore I suppose thou that arte a murtherer so yonge, thow arte full lykly to be a manly man in thyne ayge; and bycause I shall dye of the byrth of the, I charge my jantyll-woman that she pray my lorde, the kynge Melyodas, that whan he is crystened let calle hym Trystrams, that is muche to say as a sorowfull byrth. (230)

Tristram’s identity as a murderer, even when only an innocent baby, shapes his self-image across *Le Morte*. Tristram successfully upholds the chivalric ideals of masculinity by being branded a “manly man” but he also struggles in adulthood with his name, which ties him to his perpetual status as a criminal. Following his birth, barons attempt to slay the infant Tristram. They ultimately decide against it, though “sertayne of them wolde have slayne the chylde bycause they wolde have bene lordys of that contrey of Lyonesse” (230). This moment leads Tristram to a life of exile and outlawry through the circumstances of his birth. Emotional conflicts plague the

knight, and although his conception was the product of sincere and pure love, his birth in the dismal woods results from the jealousy of an ensnaring woman. Jones points out that this marriage of love and jealousy creates the emotional conflict surrounding Tristram in *Le Morte*. One “love is creative, the other destructive, and both haunt Tristram across his life, forcing him to be an exile and an outsider” (Jones 156). Perhaps the most notable moment of Tristram’s trouble as a child occurs when he is nearly poisoned by his stepmother. As the wife of Kyng Melyodas she was “wroth that hir chyldirne sholde nat rejoyse the contrey of Lyonesse” and hence, this bitter queen, “ordained for to poison yong Trystrams” (230).

Tristram does not die, for his father intercedes and sentences his wife to death. Yet Tristram, in a moment that perhaps embarrasses the king, upstages him morally by forgiving the queen and persuading his father to have mercy on her. Tristram’s ability to provide love when higher-ranking characters cannot creates conflict with King Mark on more than one occasion. Malory characterizes Mark as unchivalrous and unsympathetic, allowing the complexity of Tristram’s character as an outlawed knight to shine through. When, for the sake of entertainment, King Mark orders Tristram to joust with Sir Lameroke, Tristram responds that Mark bid him to “do a thyng that is ayenste knyghthode,” highlighting his chivalric values (497). Simultaneously, Tristram’s less-than-knightly ideals surface when a kinsman deserts him in a later tale. Andrete conspires to have Tristram exiled in order to ensure an inheritance for himself (431). The psychological complexity of an outlaw shapes the structure of the tales in which he appears. When madness intersects with romance, the story goes awry in ways that typical accounts of lovesickness and jealousy do not. Likewise, Malory’s uses madness to convey Tristram’s development as an outlaw. Following his episode of madness and exile, Tristram returns to civilized society forever changed.

In *Tristram's Madness and Exile*, Tristram discovers that his lover, quene Isode, has been exchanging love letters with Sir Kayhidins, his friend and brother-in-law. When Kayhidins saw Isode, he was so “enamored upon hir that for very pure love he might never withdraw it” (302). For her part, Isode “had pité of hys complaynte, and unadvised she wrote another lettir to comforte hym withal” (302). This act of romantic betrayal drives Tristram to a madness which severs his ties with the Pentecostal Oath. Malory outlines this oath in Book III, detailing how the king commanded that his knights never commit outrageous acts or murder, and always flee treason. Likewise, knights should by no means be cruel, but show mercy to those who request it and always honor gentlewomen. Finally, the oath requires that knights swear not to partake in battles of a “wrongful quarrel for no law, ne for no world’s goods” (115-16).

Following Isode’s betrayal, Tristram “made such sorrow that he felle downe of hys horse in a sowne, and in such sorrow he was inne three dayes and three nyghtes” (308). Tristram flees into the forest, and his fit of insanity peaks:

Thus he there endured a quarter off a yere, and so at the laste he ran hys way and she wüst [knew] not where he was becom. And than was he naked, and waxed leane and poore of fleyshe. Thus sir Trystramys endured there an halffe-yere naked, and wolde never com in towne [ne village]. (308-09)

For these actions, Tristram “was banysshed oute of the contrey for ten yere” (309). Tristram becomes not only emasculated by his “sowne” or swoon, but also, notably, “naked” “lean” and “poore of fleyshe.” Unkempt hygiene and disfiguration, visible markers of madness, force Tristram into isolation. Malory’s descriptions resemble Chaucer’s of Arcite’s physical decay following his exile.



Tristram's response to Isode's letter-writing, seeming outlandish and overly dramatic, is typical of medieval romance. In his foolish and simple state, he rediscovers some sense of knighthood through the fellowship of community and noble deeds outside King Arthur's realm. Tristram's public fit does warrant a sense of shame, however, due to his emotional instability. Malory's reliance on images of wildness in the woods and later, animal metaphors with Lancelot, raises questions as to how shame shapes the outlaw's identity. The idea that love can drive one mad, turning respectable men into "wild men" and eventually "animals" is of continued interest to scholars. On the one hand, mad knights develop features of animality "which put them in radical opposition to the human domain of reason" (Gutting 53). On the other hand, as human beings once part of society, they maintain at least traces of relationships that link them to the community. The irreconcilable opposition of reason and animality keeps the figure of the madman in continuous tension and transcends the ordinary nature-civilization opposition.

Tristram's fall from normalcy bars him from participating in society, and the fact that he is forbidden from entering "towne [ne village]" for ten years demonstrates how individuals who were marked as mad were deemed dangerous. Madmen, like outlaws, must be kept away from "normal" people. The cause of Tristram's episode is clearly identifiable as infidelity and, to a large degree, it is an understandable cause, but his episode of madness is still considered to be a moral flaw, both by himself and his community. Thomas Chobham (fl. 1200-33) coined the term "insane love" which is useful when examining Tristram's experience. Chobham stated, "For many fall into insane love such that they can hardly be turned from this error. This love is moreover a disease, or *morbus*, not only of the mind but also of the body, since the marrows are swollen, the veins disordered, and every bodily sense weakened" (Wack 29). The madness that follows Tristram's exile haunts him, even after he returns to Arthur.

Despite his fall from courtly order and his isolation in the woods, Tristram maintains his desire to uphold a relationship with Lancelot, even when he appears to have no problem in abandoning Isode. As Jones points out, “Malory is emphatic in his comparisons between the two throughout his narrative” and repeatedly, we see Tristram attributing to Lancelot his accomplishments in battle and ability to overcome diplomatic challenges (Jones 159). It would seem then that Lancelot’s intercession might become the means of ending Tristram’s outlawry, but this does not immediately occur. Later, when Tristram deserts La Beal Isode for Isode of the White Hands, Lancelot responds wrathfully after hearing of Tristram’s unfaithfulness:

Fye [shame] uppon hym, untrew knyght to his lady! That so noble a knyght as sir Trystrames is sholde be founde to his first lady and love untrew, that is the queene of Cornwayle...that of all knyghtes in the worlde I have loved hym [most and had most joye of hym], and all was for his noble dedys [deeds]. And lette hym wete that the love between hym and me is done for ever, and that I gyff hym warnyng: from this day forthe I woll be his mortall enemy. (273)

Tristram quickly repents and sends a message to Lancelot saying “he had never ado fleyshe with Isode le Blaunche Maynys” (289). Nonetheless, tension between the knights continues until they again meet face-to-face at the Round Table, following their disguised joust and the subsequent revelation of their names. Though it would seem that this moment would mark the end of Tristram’s time as an outlaw, his identity as one inherently flawed by birth influences his reluctance to rejoin the Round Table. For the remainder of the book, Isode and Mark continuously haunt him. His exile in the woods provides little lasting relief or forgiveness as he is constantly reminded of his past; he remains psychologically disturbed by his experiences. Tristram carries on as an Arthurian outsider, and like “Godwin, Hereward, Fouke, and Robin

Hood he has his own agenda that alienates him from the company of kings” (Jones 160). It should come as little surprise, then, that Tristram dies at the hands of King Mark, a fate that Malory establishes as inevitable since Tristram’s unhappy birth.

In *Tristram’s Madness and Exile*, Malory depicts insanity as the breaking of chivalric associations by which Tristram demonstrates out-of-control emotion. The chivalric code provides individual nobles and knights with a clear set of social expectations to uphold, yet when they are subverted, madness is the result. Likewise, there exists little ambiguity concerning Arthur’s expectations for members of his court; he defines the social norms for interactions between his knights and ladies, damsels, gentlewomen, widows, and with each other. Arthur classifies the different roles of men in relation to their class.

In *Tristram’s Madness*, fits of insanity occur when a good knight acts against the chivalric code. Malory’s Tristram derives from a longstanding “Tristan tradition,” one that both complicates and corroborates Keen’s early theorization of medieval outlawry. Jones points out that the development of Tristram’s story across 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century poetic versions exemplifies “similarities of narrative structure and characterization with the outlaw stories of Godwin, Hereward, Fouke, Gamelyn, and Robin Hood” (143). Elements such as the outlaw’s cleverness, the king’s deception, and banishment and flight to the forest surround the character’s early versions. Although Jones argues that by Malory’s time many of these elements became “lost or subdued,” significant moments of outlawry nonetheless intersect with romance through a variety of motifs (Jones 143).

Tristram stories always describe the conflict between a knight and his lord, primarily centered on the quest not for land or power but for the affections of his lord’s wife. Lancelot’s story, too, follows this narrative structure, leading many critics to believe that Malory’s depiction

of the knights works as complementary triads. The triangle of Tristram, Isode, and Mark parallels that of Lancelot, Guinevere, and Arthur, “and shows that the Arthurian world is rife with decay” (Jones 155). Likewise, Donald Schueler suggests that these triads might be viewed in contrast to each other, in particular because he reads “Lancelot as the consummate member of the fellowship of the Round Table, while Tristram is a ‘free agent’” (Schueler 55). Tristram’s subversion of chivalry and rebranding as an outlaw stems from an extreme form of lovesickness, one that results in a hysterical fit. As we have already seen with Arcite and Palamon, men’s lovesickness often derived from jealousy and, as shown through Tristram’s episode, it “needed explanation and cure because it made them ‘other’” and separated them “from normal ways of behaving” (Wack 175).

In Malory, then, inappropriate emotional responses to interactions with women create a form of madness. In Tristram’s case, a form of lovesickness causes his undoing, leading to the madness that alienates him from what Eve Kosofsk Sedgwick defines as the Arthurian “homosocial order.” This bond, through which men partly define themselves “in relation to women and the potential threat they pose to the male-bonding collective,” plays a crucial role in understanding why Tristram’s madness arises (Sedgwick 1). Tristram’s subversion of Arthur’s social norms results in his becoming ‘othered’ by the knights’ homosocial order. The knight’s entanglement with women, in Malory, results in madness.

In Malory, the mad human becomes wild; knights transform, if only momentarily, into a spectacle that later, must be displaced from “normal” society and moved into the wilderness. The very nature of the “madman” in *Le Morte* means to be wild: to be brutish, loony, and outlawed. In the next section, we will see how the severity of the phenomenon escalates. Although Malory’s Tristram story contradicts Keen’s argument that an outlaw narrative is defined by

forest-dwelling tricksters, it does support Keen's contention that outlaw narratives rely heavily on themes of alienation and conflicts in value systems. Likewise, the intersection of outlawry and romance appears in Malory's telling of the Tristram story through moments of catastrophe and the figuration of identity. No longer is the madman just "wild" and embarrassing to society — here, outlawry coincides with madness.

### **Outlawry in *Lancelot and Elaine***

In *Lancelot and Elaine*, the competing definitions of chivalry and outlawry result in external and internal conflicts. Lancelot becomes alienated by his social obligations and more notably, by his own desire. The madman becomes dangerous, threatening normalcy, pushing beyond animality into the monstrous. Thus far, we have seen several examples of outlawry that complicate Keen's claim that tales of outlaws cannot, and do not, intersect with those of romance. The tale of Sir Tristram can be read as an outlaw narrative, and Jones argues that Tristram is a part of the "cultural machinery of the nobility," not so different from the outlaws Godwin, Fouke, Hereward, and Eustace — also all members of the nobility (Jones 79). Despite this claim, Jones dismisses Lancelot as bearing any semblance to an outlaw figure of this sort, asserting instead that Malory uses Lancelot as a direct foil to Tristram. Tristram displays a strong desire for Lancelot's approval and is concerned about becoming alienated from Lancelot's "Joyous Gard," yet Lancelot, too, displays several of the characteristics of outlawry that, according to Jones, appear in medieval romance.

*Lancelot and Elaine* portrays Lancelot's descent from civilization, leading to a physical display of madness in the woods. Elaine's trickery transforms him from chivalric knight to outlaw, reframing him as an unorthodox yet memorable product of romance's intersection with criminality. Lancelot undergoes a crisis of identity when Elaine dupes him, through magic, into

sleeping with her which leads to the conception of Sir Galahad. This moment of deceit reshapes Lancelot:

And there sir Lancelot toke the fayryst lady by the honed that ever he sawe, and she was as naked as a nedyll. And by enchauntemente queen Morgan le Fay and the queen of Northe Galys had put her there in that paynes, bycause she was called the fayryst lady of that contrey; and there she had bene five yere. (478)

Subsequently:

And than dame Brusen brought sir Lancelot a kuppe of wyne, and anone as he had drunken that wyne he was so asoted [befuddled] and madde that he myght make no delay but wythoute ony let he wente to bedde. And so he wente [believed] that mayden Elayne had bene queen Gwenyver. And wyte you well that sir Lancelot was glad, and so was that lady Eleyne that she had gotyn sir Lancelot in her armys, for well she knew that that same nyght sholde be bygotyn sir Galahad upon her, that sholde preve the beste knight of the worlde... Than he knew hymselff that he had done amysse. (480)

While Lancelot does not commit a crime against the court, *per se*, he does commit what he deems the gravest sin of all: betrayal of his beloved Queen Guinevere. Despite the adulterous nature of his relationship with King Arthur's wife, it is this romantic betrayal, rather than the act of adultery, that reframes him as a flawed knight. Guinevere banishes Lancelot from her court upon hearing of his treachery, calling him a "false traytoure knight" and commanding that he "never abyde in my courte, and lightly that thou voyde my chambir! And nat so hardy, thou false traytoure knight, that evermore thou com in my sight!" (487). In this moment of treachery Lancelot not only faces rejection from Guinevere but also is forced into exile from Arthur's court.

What follows next is unexpected behavior from Lancelot who, up until this point in *Le Morte*, is depicted as the calm and collected knight depicted in previous works. Lancelot wails that he is “sore ashamed” for he is “banysshed the contrey of Logrys for ever. (That is for to sey the contrey of Inglonde)” (500). Malory conveys Lancelot’s downfall by describing his physical deterioration and strange behavior; he does this by using imagery similar to that he employed in describing Tristram’s madness. In doing so, he accentuates how Lancelot’s struggle with being rebranded an outcast transforms him. Lancelot repeatedly exhibits behaviors associated with madness as the story unfolds: he passes out, runs out the window with only his shirt on, and stays away from Arthur’s Court for more than two years. After receiving his sentence from Guinevere, a sentence unknown to King Arthur, Lancelot flees. He

lepte oute at a bay-wyndow into a gardyne, and there wyth thornys he was all tocracched [scratched] of his visage and hys body, and so he ranne furth he knew nat whothir, and was wylde, woode [mad] as ever was man. And so he ran two yere, and never man had grace to know hym (487).

Following this moment, the madness of the newly outlawed knight intensifies, taking on a spiritual component.

As highlighted in previous sections, madness in the Middle Ages was believed to result from astrological, seasonal, or other physiological factors. In addition, factors which disrupt the body’s inner balance could also lead individuals to outlandish behavior that resulted in imprisonment or exile. Among these factors, breaking church doctrine could also produce a kind of guilt-based insanity (Wack 22). There existed in the Middle Ages “an especially close resemblance between sin and madness” where in many cases, an individual’s capacity for rational thought was diminished in part or altogether by passion (Ackerman 10). Just as

succumbing to sin and madness changes Lancelot's identity, so too, does his status as outlaw reflect his sinful descent. Malory uses madness both to emphasize the conventions of romance and to stress themes of displacement and punishment.

Lancelot's plight is detailed in his continual madness in the woods and he repeatedly falls back into his sinful ways despite receiving medicinal and miraculous cures. Ackerman points out that madness often served as "a means of grace" which God could use to purge one's sins before death and thus, help the afflicted to avoid a longer sentence in purgatory (Ackerman 3-4). In the romance cycle, a sinner experiences a "process of sin, disease, self-knowledge, repentance, and [a] cure" (Ackerman 4). However, as an outlaw, Lancelot does not achieve self-knowledge, seek true repentance, or receive a cure for his malady until he faces the threat of death. This is not so different from the outlawed knight in WBT, raising doubt as to how sincere Lancelot is in his quest for redemption. Only at the end of *Le Morte* is Lancelot depicted as redeemed. Malory's narrator asserts, "here was syr Lancelot with me, with mo angellis than ever I saw men in one day. And I sawe the angellys heve up syr Lancelot unto heven, and the yates of heven opened ayenst hym" (724). The text illuminates how Lancelot's madness intertwines with his outlawry, even if indirectly, as a form of spiritual punishment intending to purge him of his sins and return him to knightly ideals.

While Lancelot becomes outlawed for his affair with Elaine, his affair with Queen Guinevere in *Le Morte* more often conflicts with the rules of the court and with Arthur himself. Lancelot's character and the nature of his heroic status, as well as his moral, ethical, and legal values are brought into question. Such topics become increasingly pressing toward the end of Malory's work, particularly in moments following *Lancelot and Elaine*. Lancelot's behavior affects the events leading to the dissolution of the chivalric society, and to King Arthur's death.



Sturges points out that Malory often downplays the scenes of adultery between Guinevere and Lancelot in an attempt to preserve the sanctity of their relationship. He argues that “Malory adds certain passages directly questioning whether physical adultery can be said to have taken place between Lancelot and Guinevere” in an attempt to leave “room for the reader's interpretative interventions” (Sturges 59). Part of this move might be to create a contrast to the Elaine and Lancelot romance, making that scene all the more heinous and sinful.

With Malory's version of Lancelot specifically, we see the rise of an outlaw narrative that draws heavily upon the author's nationalistic tendencies. Malory complicates Lancelot's status as one of Arthur's most renowned knights through reshaping the nationality of a character who, up until the writing of *Le Morte*, was distinctly French. Lancelot's multifaceted identity and Malory's construction of it are useful to consider when it comes to his nationality. Malory is one of the first writers in English to tell a comprehensive story of Lancelot, leading critics such as Hyonjin Kim and Kenneth Hodges to argue that he intentionally uses the Lancelot narrative to balance fantasies of a united Britain with attention to knights' regional loyalties. Generally, in Malory's work, Arthur's most chivalric knights come from regions outside England. Malory says of Lancelot's home, Benwick, that “som men calle hit Bayan [Bayonne] and som men calle hit Beawme [Bommes], where the wyne of Beawme ys” (699). Hodges points out the significance of Lancelot's national identity, arguing that:

This means Lancelot comes from Guienne, the English duchy encompassing parts of Aquitaine and Gascony. It was acquired by marriage in 1152 and, although fought over for years, remained English (with varying boundaries) until 1451; a revolt postponed the final loss until 1453. (Hodges 556)

Recognizing that Lancelot comes from arguably English lands significantly influences how we read Lancelot in *Le Morte*. Hyonjin Kim points out that placing Lancelot in Gascony is Malory's innovation. This intentional move "brings out the political implications of the knights' origins by presenting the knights' shifting relationships through the 15<sup>th</sup> century lens of regional affinities," instead of celebrating an expansionist vision of England (Kim 55). Malory creates complex interactions between the Knights of the Round Table and King Arthur to explore the tensions between imagining an exclusively English nation and imagining a broader one. Through using Kim's reconstruction of Lancelot, we find complex readings of his shifting identity within *Le Morte*.

There is a vast difference between a knight who serves a foreign lord freely, out of love, and a subject who is legally bound to obey. This is particularly relevant when tensions grow between a knight and his lord, and in the case of Lancelot, between a knight, his lord, and his lord's leading lady. Beverly Kennedy argues that through political and personal motives "Lancelot serves Arthur because he is the Holy Roman Emperor, the highest officer in the High Order of Knighthood, overlord of the King of France, and the man who made him knight" (Kennedy 127). Equally, he serves his love interest, Queen Guinevere. Rather than remain a static character across *Le Morte*, Lancelot, who is established early in the text as Arthur's most beloved knight, undergoes significant changes in identity. In tales such as *Lancelot and Elaine*, we see how Lancelot's status as exile and adulterer parallel his physical displays of madness. Likewise, his political identity shifts as well.

Lancelot's complicated national status makes him a particularly interesting figure. Hodges contends that Lancelot, more so than Malory's other knights, struggles with a crisis of

integration, carrying with him an ongoing sense of confusion with borders and out of boundness.

Hodges argues:

He [Lancelot] tries hard to integrate himself in England; even after he is discovered with Guinevere, his initial plan of war reinforces his status as an Englishman struggling for his rights. However, his lands in Guienne give him the option of retreating to a non-English identity, and when forced into exile, he creates a sovereign France as the appropriate base from which to conduct what has now become a war between two states. (Hodges 557)

Prior to Malory's take on the Arthurian tradition, there had existed the question of which people Arthur represents. The earliest sources would say the Celtic British, especially the Welsh, to whom Arthur was a symbol of resistance to the very English who claimed Arthur as their own.

Then there of course is the English or the British, understood as all the peoples of the island.

Lancelot's ambiguous status as a Gascon encapsulates the question of how to imagine those who were lawful subjects of the king of England, but not definitively "English." Malory's treatment of Lancelot highlights the complicated politics of the late Middle Ages, since regions, countries, and international groups used language, law, and stories to create and contest notions of sovereignty and community.

Lancelot is the most prominent character through which Malory explores problems of nationality, which leads to questions of legality and punishment within the court. What proves most relevant here in making a case for Lancelot as outlaw in *Le Morte* is not the external boundaries between Arthur's empire and the world at large. Rather, "the internal boundaries that separate 'England' from other British lands" complicate Lancelot's identity, for "these internal boundaries were also legal boundaries" and hence, "the lack of a unified legal system preserved regional difference" (Hodges 562). At the end of *The Vengeance of Sir Gawain*, Arthur and

Gawain have Lancelot exiled to Guienne for killing Gawain's brothers, Gareth and Gaherys.

Gawain bids Lancelot:

“I wyte thou well, thou shulde nat a comyn here but if hit were magré thyne hede [in spite of yourself]. And if hit were nat for the Popis [Pope's] commaundment...I shulde do batayle with the myne owne hondis, body and body, and preve hit upon the that thou haste ben both false unto myne uncle, kynge Arthur, and to me bothe; and that shall I preve on thy body, whan thou arte departed fro hense, wheresomever that I fynde the!”  
(697)

Finally, the tale concludes with Lancelot departing “to hys landys” with a hundred knights accompanying him (699). And though Lancelot's exile in this moment grants him a reward of land, he does not take much for himself, saying he already possesses sufficient wealth (699). Lancelot exits *Le Morte* with the responsibility of establishing Guiene as a sovereign kingdom, but he retains his English loyalties even after Arthur and Gawain have exiled him to Guienne. In contrast, Hodges points out that his followers, knowing they are unlikely to return with worship to England, are optimistic about turning to other countries (Hodges 568). Malory engages these issues under the mantle of medieval romance. He depicts Arthur's effort to forge a united kingdom throughout *Le Morte*, and in the exile of Lancelot we see conflicting regional identities. Malory's portrayal of Lancelot suggests a complex attitude toward 15<sup>th</sup> century nationalism and law, one that did not automatically accept the king's rule or claims of a unified realm.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Outlaw stories, as Hobsbawm, Keen, and Jones contend, are crafted by the historical and social situations of the times when they appear. Through this exploration of the development of the literary outlaw, I have shown how both Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Malory use the theme outlawry to craft tales that complicate and reinvent the typical medieval romance story. The development of crime, punishment, and law touches each author's employment of such subject matter in his stories, as the medieval outlaw is equal parts cultural artifact and literary convention, reappearing again and again in medieval literature. If we read Chaucer's and Malory's knights against the legal and cultural backdrop of medieval England, their characters emerge as far more complex than the traditional reading of them as solely chivalric figures.

Looking at popular figures such as Arcite, Palamon, Tristram, and Lancelot through the lens of outlawry refreshes our interest in their development as characters. And, by honing in on less examined knights, such as the knight in WBT, I believe we can find that medieval romance does intersect with outlawry, even if it is in discreet ways. These moments challenge the conventions of chivalric romance; medieval romance characters sometimes exhibit transgressive behavior that belies the expectations of the court. The world outside the law, whether the traditional setting of the forest or the solitude of a prison tower, and the hardships of the exiled and imprisoned are frequently imagined in outlaw legends. The immediate threat of isolation reframes banished knights, who have no ready access to the king's justice.

Jail breaks appear in Malory's Arthurian tales, as well as in Chaucer's romances. Figures such as Palamon, who flee from prison and choose exile, contrast with figures such as Arcite and Tristram, who are sentenced to it. Such knights are frequently portrayed as leading desperate

lives. Their desperation is often depicted through animal metaphors and imagery of wildness, leading to associations with madness and barbarism.

Moments of animality intersect with outlawry in a similar fashion in both authors' romances. In Malory, Tristram and Lancelot are courtly lovers who fall susceptible to an intractable, psychologically complex illness — a raging madness triggered by love. Arcite and Palamon transform physically and psychologically due to lovesickness. Chaucer portrays these changes by using animal and woodland imagery. *WBT*, too, features an unnamed knight who displays primitive behaviors. Malory uses similar language in his retelling of the rise and fall of Arthur, depicting classic romance heroes as outlaws. Images connecting wilderness to inhumanity occur in both Chaucer's and Malory's romances. Malory uses the outlaw's tale to insert another theme threading medieval romance and outlawry together: madness. With Malory's knights as well as Chaucer's, outlawry often stems from conflict between knights and a lord but transitions into the fight for the love of a woman.

Like Chaucer's unnamed knight, Arcite, and Palamon, Malory's Lancelot and Tristram undergo rites of passage that force them to forge new identities. When the outlaw must reconstruct his identity in the flux of the world outside the law, he may renew a flawed community, as when Palamon's marriage to Emelye heals the breach between Athenian Theseus and Theban Palamon. But in *WBT*, Chaucer's knight emerges in what Hood describes as "love trickery." Questions of consent surround both Malory's portrayal of Lancelot and Chaucer's portrayal of the unnamed knight, and while in *Lancelot and Elaine* it is Elaine who takes advantage of Lancelot, both authors depict knights partaking in illicit sexual interaction results in their being made outlaws. In both cases, an offense against a woman which is "committed in giving up her virginity outside of marriage lay in the disgrace it caused her family" although

“this disgrace seems much mitigated if the man in question is of high rank” (Hood 25). In WBT, Chaucer omits the maiden’s response, and her family’s reaction to the loss of her virginity remains equally hidden. What is most shocking is that we do see the knight ultimately rewarded for his violent behavior.

Despite initially bearing little resemblance to the more radical outlaws in WBT and Tristram stories, and even less to the revolutionist qualities of Robin Hood, Malory’s Lancelot becomes an outlaw through competing desires that break his identity as a chivalric knight. This results in illicit activity and moments of madness. Breaking chivalry’s expectations haunts Chaucer’s and Malory’s knights, and this wrongdoing, associated with moral flaw and sin, results in both criminality and madness.

Chaucer’s and Malory’s outlaw knights descend from psychological soundness and chivalric society into instability and exile, reshaping their characters once they are outside the court’s protection. Each knight we have examined struggles with reframing his identity upon his being branded status as outlaw and outsider. Chaucer’s contribution to the development of this literary figure, in an age marked by respect for authority, appears in his tales of knights who defy the law in recurrently violent ways. This pattern continues in Malory’s *Le Morte*, and though written nearly a century after Chaucer’s death, the trope of outlawry appears in his romances as well. As authors employ the outlaw figure, readers can see the malleability of romance as a genre, its development over time, and its longstanding entanglement with the outlaw narrative.

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