

Malory's Launcelot and Guinevere *abed togydirs*

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In Malory's account of the ambush of Launcelot in Guinevere's chamber he obliquely denies the authority of his sources:

For, as the Freynshhe booke seyth, the quene and sir Launcelot were togydirs. And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes.¹

Both his sources put Launcelot and Guinevere *abed*,² but Malory says he prefers not to discuss the matter (*'me lyste nat thereof make no mencion'*); instead he links the lovers' activities here with the love he anatomizes, however clumsily, at the beginning of 'The Knight of the Cart' episode:

But the olde love was nat so. For men and women coude love togydirs seven yerys, and no lycoures lustis was betwyxte them, and than was love trouthe and faythefulnes. And so in lyke wyse was used such love in kynge Arthurs dayes. (p. 1120, ll. 2–6)

The benefit of Malory's reticence is twofold: he places (or attempts to place) the lovers beyond contemporary criticism, 'for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes'; and he ensures that the image of Launcelot which dominates in this episode is that of the 'noble knyght' who 'toke hys swerde undir hys arme, and so he walked in hys mantell . . . and put hymselff in grete jouparté' (p. 1165, ll. 5–7). In Malory's version of the episode we pass from this image to 'Madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'ys there here ony armour within you that myght cover my body wythall?' (p. 1165, ll. 24–25), without the intervening image of a naked man hastily leaving a shared bed:

Euyr Agrawayne and syr mordred
Callyd hym Recreante fals knyght,
Bad hym Ryse oute of hys bedde,
For he moste nedis with them fyght;
In hys Robe than he hym cled,
Thoughe he none Armoure gete myght.³

¹*The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, edited by Eugène Vinaver, 3 vols, second edition (Oxford, 1967; reprinted with corrections and additions, 1973), p. 1165, ll. 10–13. Further references to this edition are given in the text by page and line number. Italics in quotations are my own.

²*La Mort le Roi Artu, roman du XIIIe siècle*, edited by Jean Frappier (Paris, 1936), hereafter referred to as *Mort Artu*; *Le Morte Arthur*, edited by J. D. Bruce, EETS, e.s. 88 (1903).

³*Le Morte Arthur*, ll. 1832–37; *Mort Artu*: 'Lors saillent sus ambedoi del lit et s'apareillent au miex qu'il pueent', p. 92.

Malory does, however, show Launcelot *abed* three times. Twice Launcelot is mistaken in his belief that he is with Guinevere, but each time Malory refers to the pleasures of the experience: 'And so he wente that mayden Elayne had bene quene Gwenvyver. And wyte you well that sir Launcelot was glad' (p. 795, ll. 10–12); 'Now leve we them kyssynge and clyppynge, as was a kyndely thyng' (p.804, l. 36 – p. 805, l. 1); '. . . sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde, but toke hys plesaunce and hys lykyng untyll hit was the dawnyng of the day; for wyte you well he slept nat, but wacched' (p. 1131, ll. 28–32).

If Malory had followed his sources faithfully in the ordering of the episodes, the encounter of Launcelot and Guinevere at Sir Mellyagaunt's castle would have taken place in his Tale 3, 'A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake'. The most likely explanation of his re-ordering of events is that such an episode had no part in his conception of the early adventures of Launcelot. A similar reworking of his material occurs in Tale 2, 'The Tale of the Noble King Arthur that was Emperor himself through Dignity of his Hands', when Launcelot is cast as a very young hero, a new-made knight (p. 213, l. 34), although the source, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, deals with the last days of Arthur and therefore with a Launcelot at the end of his career. Launcelot is not an important figure in the poem and has a relatively minor role in Tale 2.

It is therefore by Malory's choice that 'The Knight of the Cart' episode has been given a place in the chronology of the last days of Arthur's reign, and the passage of love between Launcelot and Guinevere is obviously an event of great significance. First, it is the only time that Malory writes about the physical love-making of Launcelot and Guinevere. Secondly, it is related to that extraordinary preamble on the nature of love which introduces the whole episode (p. 1119, l. 1 – p. 1120, l. 13) and which concludes with praise for Guinevere as a 'trew lover' and with the flat statement that her 'good ende' was deserved because of her fidelity in love.

This passage has attracted much critical attention because it seems to promise a key to Malory's attitudes to love, and especially his attitude to the love between Launcelot and Guinevere. Its incoherence, however, has usually left interpreters teased and baffled. Lambert calls it 'illogical and very moving': 'It doesn't make sense; its unity, its poignancy, come from the earnestness of purpose which somehow shows through the murk.'⁴ It does not provide a simple key to Malory's attitudes to love and the lovers, but its incoherence does usefully suggest that

⁴Mark Lambert, *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur* (New Haven and London, 1975), p. 207.

Malory did not have a coherent, unified set of opinions about love, as he certainly did about chivalric behaviour.

The love-making of Launcelot and Guinevere is given a frame of extreme danger. The eventual consequences of the lovers' imprudence, the destruction of Arthur and the noble fellowship of the Round Table, are known to Malory's audience. Malory reminds us of those consequences and the agent of discovery, Aggravayne, at the beginning of 'Launcelot and Guinevere'; all the successes of this Tale are read with the knowledge of imminent disaster.

Launcelot and Guinevere have each provoked the other to anger in the course of this Tale by expressing the need for circumspection. In the elaborate explanation of his behaviour which Launcelot gives the Queen at the beginning of 'The Poisoned Apple', he includes the admonitory 'wyte you well, madam, the boldnesse of you and me woll brynge us to shame and sclaudir' (p. 1046, ll. 25–26). Guinevere, however, expresses her sense of grievance here by ignoring Launcelot's arguments and reacting with storms of tears and unjust accusations. At the beginning of 'The Fair Maid of Astolat' she in turn warns Launcelot not to stay away from the Winchester tournament for fear of causing exactly the kind of 'sclawndir and noyse' (p. 1045, l. 28) he said he was trying to avoid. Launcelot's reaction is sharp: the ironic commendation of her wisdom and the exceptionally critical 'Hit ys of late com syn ye were woxen so wyse!' (p. 1066, l. 6).

The tone of Launcelot's apparently spur-of-the-moment decision to fight against Arthur's fellowship at the tournament (p. 1066, ll. 10–12) is cued in this speech by Malory's repeated indication of the speaker and the receiver of the message: 'But wytte you well,' seyde sir Launcelot unto the quene, 'at that justys I woll be ayenste the kyng and ayenst all hys felyship.'⁵ Guinevere has turned his counsel of prudence from the earlier passage back on him, to wound and annoy, and he reacts with bitterness, even petulance. Malory relates Launcelot's reaction here to his later acceptance of Elayne's red sleeve as a disguise, so that his irritation with Guinevere is incorporated into the tragic pattern of Elayne's death.

The danger, the rashness, the intensity of their love, and the volatility of the lovers: these things form a framework for the love scene of 'The Knight of the Cart'. But the episode itself can be read as a rapturous re-affirmation of their love after the quarrels of the earlier parts of 'Launcelot and Guinevere'.

It can, however, be read in quite a different way. For several commentators the scene in Guinevere's chamber cannot be considered as a passage different in

⁵Catherine La Farge, 'Conversation in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Medium Ævum*, 56 (1987), 227–28, comments on Malory's habit of punctuating 'a change of tone or motivation, readable as a pause, by the simple narratorial "and than he seyde" in the course of a speech', and by the repetition of the speaker's name and that of the interlocutor's.

tone from its narrative environment of dishonour and degradation. Muriel Whitaker calls 'The Knight of the Cart' 'a consistent record of dishonourable behaviour' and sees all the narrative elements, without distinction —

the attack on Lancelot's horse, the killing of the carter, the hero's ignominious arrival in a cart, the usual bickering between Lancelot and Guenevere, Meleagant's intrusion into the bedroom and throwing back of the curtains, the bloody sheets and pillow, the accusations of adultery and the shame felt by the wounded knights at the sight of the blood, the use of the trap-door to take Lancelot prisoner⁶ —

as contributing to the impression of a degraded chivalric society and a perverted chivalric adventure. The love scene itself she characterizes as an apparently unromantic 'coupling' (Whitaker, p. 101).

Irene Joynt analyzes the whole of 'Launcelot and Guinevere' in terms of Malory's moral response to his material and his adaptation of it to show 'the disintegration of chivalric values and loyalties'⁷ and the degeneration of the love of Launcelot and Guinevere into 'a tormenting and destructive force'.⁸ In particular, she sees 'The Knight of the Cart' as a condemnation of both Launcelot's chivalric behaviour and the love between Launcelot and Guinevere:

'The Knight of the Cart' illustrates Malory's critical attitude towards the love of Lancelot and Guenevere, and does much to mitigate any tendency to see the introductory May passage as an exaltation of the love. (Joynt, p. 109)

The exchange between the lovers in the inner court of Mellyagaunt's castle is seen by Joynt as continuing the tone and spirit of their previous quarrels. Finding that Guinevere has accorded with Mellyagaunt, 'Lancelot . . . is angry at having been cheated of his fight with Mellyagaunt and proceeds to take it out on Guenevere' (Joynt, p. 107). Launcelot is 'peevish'; and the dialogue here, she says, 'reveals the joylessness of the relationship at this stage and also implies the worthlessness of the whole venture' (Joynt, p. 107).

Not all commentators find Malory's attitude towards the lovers as harsh as this. Janet Jesmok sees the episode as 'a tribute to the Queen's reformation'⁹ after the change of heart which follows upon the death of Elayne of Ascolat. Guinevere shows 'maturity', 'prudence' (Jesmok, p. 217), loving respect for Launcelot, 'fine perceptions and strength of character' (Jesmok, p. 219). The expression of their

⁶Muriel Whitaker, *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 100.

⁷Irene Joynt, 'Vengeance and Love in "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere"', *Arthurian Literature III*, edited by Richard Barber (Cambridge, 1983), p. 92.

⁸Joynt, 'Vengeance and Love', p. 94, referring specifically to the opening passage of 'The Poisoned Apple'.

⁹Janet M. Jesmok, *Malory's Women* (University of Wisconsin, Ph.D. dissertation, 1979), p. 215.

mutual love (Malory, p. 1131, ll. 11–20) she interprets as a sign 'of Malory's approval of Guenevere's return to her conventional role as supporter of chivalry' (Jesmok, p. 220). As for the love scene itself, 'as a symbol of their renewed devotion, of their loving unity, Malory, this once only, shows us their intimacy' (Jesmok, p. 221).

Catherine La Farge finds humour in the episode, in part arising from similarities in the dialogue Malory assigns to Guinevere in her exchanges with the cowering Mellyagaunt and the furious Launcelot;¹⁰ and P. J. C. Field identifies a certain playfulness in the Queen's speeches to Launcelot, as well as admiration and affection:

This sequence of speeches [p. 1128, l. 22 – p. 1129, l. 21] shows Guenivere unable to stop herself concealing her real gratitude and admiration for Lancelot and using her power over him, in this case to tease him.¹¹

The more sympathetic interpretations seem to me to be expressing a reaction to the text according to the stage-by-stage development of the narrative. Taken as a single unit, 'The Knight of the Cart' is, as Stephen Knight says, 'a sordid story',¹² especially in its conclusion. Launcelot's dubious moral position in his combat with Mellyagaunt, like his lying later in defence of the Queen, is troubling for modern readers. In that later passage, however, the lies about Guinevere's faithfulness to Arthur are given a context of noble sentiments and the grief of the court at Launcelot's departure. Here what we recall most strongly are the surreptitious signals between Launcelot and the Queen:

So sir Launcelot loked upon the quene, gyff he myght aspye by ony sygne or countenance what she wolde have done. And anone the quene wagged hir hede uppon sir Launcelot, as ho seyth 'sle hym'. And full well knew sir Launcelot by her sygnys that she wolde have hym dede. (p. 1138, l. 29 – p. 1139, l. 3)

and the devalued image of the greatest knight of the world luring his opponent on to death by showing him 'opynly hys bare hede and the bare lyffte syde' (p. 1139, ll. 31–32).

However, in spite of the 'sordid' elements of the episode, or the evidence of degeneration or deviation from chivalric ideals, or our foreknowledge of the

¹⁰La Farge, 'Conversation in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', p. 232: 'Much of the humour depends upon the simultaneity and similarity of Guinevere's handling of the obsequious coward offering her (with treacherous insincerity) all the comforts of "thys poure castel" and Lancelot raging in the inner court'.

¹¹Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: The Seventh and Eighth Tales*, edited by P. J. C. Field (London, 1978), p. 260, note on line 2114.

¹²Stephen Knight, *The Structure of Sir Thomas Malory's Arthurian* (Sydney, 1969), p. 69.

destruction the love of Launcelot and Guinevere will cause, nothing in Malory's treatment of the love scene suggests that the love itself should be condemned as sordid, degraded, or wrong.

Guinevere's role in the first part of the episode, from the abduction by Mellyagaunt to her reception of Launcelot in Mellyagaunt's castle, reminds us that Arthur was attracted to her in the first place because she was 'moste valyaunte' (p. 97, l. 20) as well as beautiful. The nobility and the courage Malory gives to her here seem at least partly designed as a preparation for her role in the last Tale, which will again show her as most valiant in her parting from Launcelot during Aggravayne's ambush and most valiant in her defiance of Sir Mordred. Launcelot's motivation in rushing to Guinevere's rescue is also presented in the noblest terms, not, to borrow a phrase from 'The Dolorous Death and Departing', 'for ony rejoysing of synne' (p. 1256, l. 28), but as the highest chivalric obligation: 'Alas,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'now am I shamed for ever, onles that I may rescow that noble lady frome dishonour!' (p. 1124, ll. 30–31).

When Launcelot finally arrives at Mellyagaunt's castle he is passionately angry. Malory conveys very well the accumulation of outrages which fuel his anger — the shameful ambush, the encumbering armour, the troublesome carters, the poor horse treading 'hys guttis and hys paunche undir hys feete' (p. 1127, ll. 10–11). The castle rings with his shouted summoning of 'thou false traytoure sir Mellyagaunte' (p. 1127, l. 24), the gates are borne open, the porter is dispatched.

The scene evoked is physically vivid, with the sound of shouting, the simultaneous settings (outside in the courtyard and within the chambers of the castle), movement ('Whan sir Mellyagaunce harde that sir Launcelot was comyn he ranne unto the queene and felle uppon hys kne', p. 1127, ll. 30–32), uproar, disorder. Then Malory provides Guinevere with dialogue which appears to be coolly dispassionate. Our imagination, always eager to interpret Malory's dialogue as providing clues to character and motivation,¹³ is likely to take this not as an inappropriate response in the circumstances but as coolness assumed for effect, courageous restraint, the claiming and preserving of the superiority of a queen over an erring subject who has just declined from a threat to a nuisance:

'What ayles you now?' seyde queene Gwennyver. 'Pardé, I myght well wete that some good knyght wolde revenge me, thoughe my lorde kynge Arthure knew nat of thys your worke.' (p. 1128, ll. 3–5)

We hear Guinevere allowing herself to be persuaded by Mellyagaunt to 'rule'

¹³This phenomenon is explored by Peter R. Schroeder, in 'Hidden Depths: Dialogue and Characterization in Chaucer and Malory', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 98 (1983), 374–87.

Sir Launcelot, as if making a judicious choice between any number of possible courses of action: 'Ye sey well,' seyde the quene, 'and bettir ys pees than evermore warre, and the lesse noyse the more ys my worshyp.' (p. 1128, ll. 16–17). Having established this calm and collected tone for the Queen, Malory brings her, with her company of ladies, to the inner court where Launcelot waits, 'wood wrothe oute of mesure' (p. 1128, l. 19), to ask him, apparently in the same tone she has used to Mellyagaunt, why he is so 'amoved' (p. 1128, l. 23). Launcelot's reaction to this is plausible in the context; it accords with the characterization Malory has established for him, and it relates to what we perceive as a normal response: he is so taken aback by her apparent failure to see the obvious that he is jolted out of his concentrated fury and begins to focus on something other than killing Mellyagaunt. Guinevere asks for reasons and he, rather disjointedly, offers some explanation of his anger while casting about for the reason why she has failed to comprehend something too obvious to need explanation:

'A! madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'why aske ye me that questyon? For mesemyth ye oughte to be more wrother than I am, for ye have the hurte and the dishonour. For wyte you well, madame, my hurte ys but lytyll in regard for the sleynge of a marys sonne, but the despite grevyth me much more than all my hurte.' (p. 1128, ll. 24–29)

This is not 'the usual bickering'; Guinevere gracefully and gently talks Launcelot down from his uncontrolled rage, diverting him, throwing him off-balance by the unexpectedness of her words and tone. Her thanks are absurdly conventional, 'but hartely I thanke you' (p. 1128, ll. 30–31); the terms she uses for Mellyagaunt's crimes are absurdly mild, 'thys mysadventure that ys befallyn hym' (p. 1128, l. 34).

Launcelot retreats to the high ground of wounded dignity and then attempts sarcasm:

'Madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'syth hit ys so that ye be accorded with hym, as for me I may nat agaynesay hit, howbehit sir Mellyagaunte hath done full shamefully to me and cowardly. And, madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'and I had wyste that ye wolde have bene so lyghtly accorded with hym I wolde nat a made such haste unto you.' (p. 1129, ll. 1–6)

But the Queen does not retaliate; instead, as Field says, she teases him — 'Do ye forthynke youreself of youre good dedis?' (p. 1129, ll. 7–8) — and then, having deflected his anger, she begins to guide him: 'Wyte you well,' seyde the quene, 'I accorded never with hym for no favoure nor love that I had unto hym, but of every

shamefull noyse of wysedom to lay adoune' (p. 1129, ll. 8–11).¹⁴ We understand that the words Malory gives her here, *favoure*, *love*, *shamefull noyse*, and *wysedom*, are chosen to penetrate Launcelot's rage. He has her favour and love; he also has wisdom enough to know what *shamefull noyse* will cost them. We hear Launcelot sobering rapidly and beginning to accept her guidance: 'Madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'ye undirstonde full well I was never wyllynge nor glad of shamefull sclaudir nor noyse.' (p. 1129, ll. 12–14). To show his rage being brought under control, Malory has Launcelot acknowledge who the Queen is, by linking her power over him with Arthur's:

'And there ys nother kyng, quene ne knyght that beryth the lyffe, excepte my lorde kyng Arthur and you, madame, that shulde lette me but I shulde make sir Mellyagaunte harte full colde or ever I departed frome hense.' (p. 1129, ll. 14–17)

We hear Launcelot becoming more rational. Now Guinevere flatteringly surrenders all the controlling power she has (and has shown that she has) to him: 'That wote I well,' seyde the quene, 'but what woll ye more? Ye shall have all thyng ruled as ye lyst to have hit' (p. 1129, ll. 18–19). By the end of this exchange, Launcelot is focussing on the Queen as his beloved: 'Madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'so ye be pleased! As for my parte, ye shall sone please me' (p. 1129, ll. 20–21).

Then Guinevere takes Launcelot 'by the bare honde' (p. 1129, l. 22).¹⁵ Malory draws our attention to the gesture by adding a clause of explanation: 'for he had put of hys gauntelot' (p. 1129, l. 23). This dreadful gauntlet has killed two men (p. 1126, ll. 23–25 and p. 1127, ll. 29–30). Its removal and the joining of their hands signals the end of one passage of action and the beginning of the next. Malory structures the episode so that the love scene arises out of the encounter between the lovers in the very busy, very public inner court of Mellyagaunt's castle. Elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur* Launcelot and Guinevere have been shown communicating on a private level while under the restraint of public utterance, especially at the end of 'The Fair Maid of Astolat' (p. 1097, ll. 14–24). The scene in the inner court is a more intense example of such communication, and the excitement generated by the combination of factors Malory presents here — danger, fury, frustration, imposed restraint, reluctant acceptance — is translated into erotic

¹⁴Field, *Le Morte Darthur*, comments on this passage, 'This scene shows people who have loved one another for a long time: they know how to hurt and how to heal', p. 261, note on lines 2132–33.

¹⁵In the French, the Queen takes Launcelot 'entre ses bras et li demande comment li est' (*Lancelot: Roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, edited by Alexandre Micha, II (Geneva, 1978), 73), but the scene is prepared for and developed differently, and the embrace seems cordial and customary and lacks the shock of the erotic conveyed by the touching of hands in Malory's version.

excitement.

Malory deals very briefly with the scene of the lovers *abed*, introducing his one-sentence account of it with 'So, to passe uppon thys tale . . .' (p. 1131, l. 28). The whole scene, however, from Launcelot's approach to the window of the Queen's chamber to his departure at dawn, has enough of the elements of the *alba* to evoke the appropriate associations. Among the characteristics of the conventional *alba* noted by Jonathan Saville, in *The Medieval Erotic Alba*,¹⁶ the passage here has, for example, the element of danger for the lovers and the implicit contrast between their self-created value system and the judgment of society and God:

This contrast of two worlds of value, which reappears at all levels of meaning in the *alba*, is shown in its most concrete form in what we may call the topography of the situation. We see a universe divided physically into two distinct parts, an enclosed chamber, an *inside*, in which everything of value is to be found, surrounded by a hostile *outside* of much lower value, composed explicitly or by implication of the lady's husband; the watchman; all of society with the exception of the two lovers; all of nature . . . ; the Catholic Church, with the moral law it administers; and in a certain sense even God Himself. (p. 20)

The inner world of these lovers is the curtained bed; the chamber itself is dangerously *outside* because of the wounded knights who were 'layde inwyth draughtes by hir chambir' (p. 1130, ll. 25–26): 'Make ye no noyse,' seyde the quene, 'for my wounded knyghtes lye here fast by me' (p. 1131, ll. 26–27). The husband is absent, but Mellyyagaunt paradoxically takes the role of the *gilos*, discovering not the lover but the evidence of his presence: 'A ha, madame!' seyde sir Mellyyagaunte, 'now I have founde you a false traytouras unto my lorde Arthur' (p. 1132, ll. 15–16). There is no watchman to warn the lovers of the approaching day,¹⁷ but Launcelot himself is awake when the dawn comes and he sees that it is time 'that he myght tary no lenger' (p. 1131, ll. 32–33). The 'wacched' of line 32 is ambiguous: 'for wyte you well he slept nat, but wacched'. It may mean only that he stayed awake, taking 'hys plesaunce and hys lykyng', but the association with 'untyll hit was the dawnyng of the day' suggests that his wakefulness was also wary.

Another element of the *alba* noted by Saville is the equality of the lovers, in contrast to the relationship found in the *chanson*, where the lady is superior to the lover and usually disdainful (pp. 216–17). This equality is tenderly expressed by Launcelot and Guinevere:

¹⁶*The Medieval Erotic Alba: structure as meaning* (New York and London, 1972).

¹⁷In the episode of Aggravayne's ambush of the lovers, Bors fulfils in some ways the role of the watchman, warning Launcelot of danger beforehand (p. 1164, l. 18 – p. 1165, l. 4) and anxiously waiting for his return home (p. 1169, ll. 4–5).

And than they made their complayntes to othir of many dyverce thyngis, and then sir Launcelot wysshed that he myght have comyn in to her.

'Wyte you well,' seyde the quene, 'I wolde as fayne as ye that ye myght com in to me.' (p. 1131, ll. 11-15)

At the conclusion of this part of the Tale, 'all of society' breaks in upon the inner world of the lovers' values, first the knights who 'all loked and were sore ashamed' when they saw the bloodstains left by Launcelot's cut hand on the Queen's sheets and pillow (p. 1133, l. 1), and later the king and all the court, who see Guinevere 'brought tyll a fyre to be brente' (p. 1137, ll. 6-7). The focus of the narrative changes from the lovers to Launcelot as the best knight of the world, best in terms of his prowess in arms in defending Guinevere and then, in the following chapter, as the healer of Sir Urry. Guinevere has only one speech after the discovery of the bloodstained bed (p. 1132, ll. 23-24), a brief denial of Mellyagaunt's accusation. The last image we have of her in this part of the book is of a woman urging her lover to kill a man who is a danger to them.

But the love scene should be read as an exemplification of the relationship Malory's 'true' lovers valued above everything else in this world. At their final parting, Launcelot says, 'For I take recorde of God, in you I have had myn erthly joye' (p. 1253, ll. 19-20). Guinevere uses the memory of that love to command Launcelot's last obedience:

'And there[fore], sir Launcelot, I requyre the and beseche the hartily, for all the lo[v]e that ever was betwyxt us, that thou never se me no more in the visayge.' (p. 1252, ll. 17-20)

This is the love whose worth Malory validates when he shows the lovers *abed togydirs*.