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The Downfall of Chivalry: Tudor Disregard for Medieval Courtly Literature

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**THE DOWNFALL OF CHIVALRY:
TUDOR DISREGARD FOR MEDIEVAL COURTLY LITERATURE**

by

Jessica G. Downie

Submitted to the Honors Council

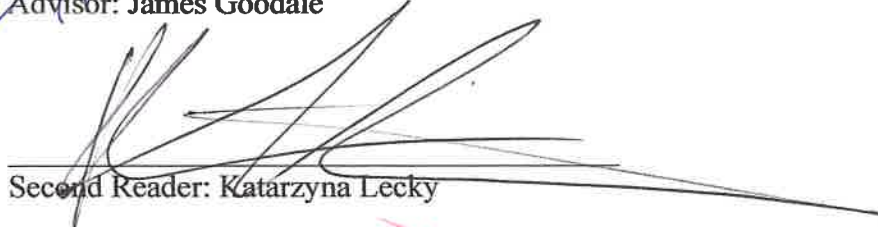
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Abstract

In this thesis, I have examined the notion of the gradual demise of chivalric ideals throughout the late-Middle Ages and culminating in the sixteenth century, analyzing how and why the developments of the sixteenth century both enabled and required the English monarchy and the aristocracy to redefine social identities and values, public responsibilities, political duties, and national and religious power. This thesis addresses why the Tudor monarchs appear to have disregarded the examples of chivalric behavior championed by late-medieval writers like Sir Thomas Malory and Jean Froissart, and instead, relied on new works of literature that were more relevant forms of guidance, and could serve as national propaganda. Unlike late-medieval monarchs such as Edward III or Henry V, who lived in accordance to the social doctrine of chivalry, the Tudor monarchs employed a new variant of chivalry that acted as nothing more than a façade to mask political ambitions and to enhance the image of royal authority and national power. This thesis examines how the transformations of religion, the evolving social identities and responsibilities of the aristocracy and the monarchy, coupled with developments in European politics and warfare during the Tudor period, exposed the vulnerability and rigidity of late-medieval chivalry, enabled the Tudor monarchs to employ a façade of chivalry to suit the motives of England as a Renaissance state.

Introduction

In our modern western society, the word chivalry is associated with courtesy and respect towards women among other gentlemanly behaviors. Many often think of chivalry when a man holds the door for a woman, when he gives her his jacket when she is cold, or when he pulls her chair out for her at the table. Actions such as these are frequently followed by statements like, “and they said chivalry was dead.” Notions of chivalry today exist as physical actions and are appreciated by many for its rarity. Notions of chivalry today also exist in a highly gendered form. It is the man who must hold the door for the woman. Women are never considered chivalrous, and they frequently regarded as the ones who argue that “chivalry is dead.” We also often associate chivalry with a highly romanticized and glamorized version of a knight. He wears shining silver armor and rides on a magnificent white horse. He fights the dragon and rescues the damsel in distress. This image of chivalry seems unattainable in today’s world, yet there are actions and behaviors that we consider “chivalrous.”

For us, “chivalry” evokes an archaic, exotic and romantic set of behaviors, knights in suits of armor and damsels in distress. Though clichés, these images represent the legacy of medieval chivalric literature, but these texts are often removed from the historical context of the time and place they were written. The elimination of historical elements, as well as cultural, political and religious content, has the effect of immortalizing a chivalric ideal. At what point did society acknowledge that indeed “chivalry is dead”? How did the seemingly permanent chivalric code change and take on different meanings?

Today, the concept of chivalry is far from the social and moral code that it once was. Over time, notions of chivalry have been molded and adapted to coincide with the demands of

changing societies. Certain elements of chivalry proved to last longer than others, establishing a legacy that consisted of an idealized, romanticized, and a physicalized form of chivalry.

The English publisher, William Caxton's, original preface to the 1485 printed edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* declares the intention of the published work to serve as a guide and set forth exemplary models of chivalry. He writes:

And I, according to my copy, have done set in imprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour; and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies... that shall see and read this book and work, that they take the good honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same, wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalries... Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown.

King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, with the tales of their heroic deeds, feats-of-arms, and the honorable and moral code of chivalry, became figures to be admired and emulated for the future nobles and rulers of times to come. Works of late-medieval courtly literature like that of Sir Thomas Malory, Jean Froissart, and Geoffroi de Charny are primary sources through which historians can understand the ideals, virtues and values of an era engulfed in constant external and internal wars, struggles for the crown and claim over lands, and death and disease. This literature reached its audience in the courts of Europe with the intention of praising those who represent the true "Flower of Chivalry," and to put forth the precedence of the most virtuous, pious and honorable nobility.

Different historians have argued that several different periods indicate transitions towards the decline of martial-based forms of chivalry that were common in the Middle Ages. Many argue that the sixteenth century marks one of the most pronounced shifts from traditional late-medieval

chivalric virtues. For example, Nigel Saul argues that, during the sixteenth century and most of all during Henry VIII's reign, what were valued as chivalric morals in England in the late Middle Ages noticeably became irrelevant. Instead there was a more hierarchical set of values that placed the king at the center of all service and of all honor.¹ Saul also argues, however, that late-medieval notions of chivalry experienced a decline by the sixteenth century with the deterioration prolonged over a period starting as early as the late thirteenth century.

The definitions and interpretations of what constituted chivalry at different periods of time reveal the fluidity of the term "chivalry." My research has expanded on the notion of the gradual demise of chivalric ideals throughout the late-Middle Ages and culminating in the sixteenth century. I have sought to understand why the Tudor monarchs appear to have disregarded the late-medieval precedents and values that constituted the chivalric doctrine and that were transcribed in popular court literature, such as the writings of Malory and Froissart. In my research I have analyzed how and why the developments of the sixteenth century both enabled and required the English monarchy and the aristocracy to redefine social identities and values, public responsibilities, political duties, and national and religious power. As a result of these transformations, new works of literature became more pertinent forms of guidance as well as texts that served a larger function as national propaganda.

These new works of literature were necessary to give more relevant insight to the monarchs and were more adequate for the specific needs of a Renaissance court, an early-modern sovereignty, and a transforming relationship with the church. Sixteenth-century literature, such as works by William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser, demonstrate the shifting values of the English Renaissance state, away from intimate expressions of late-medieval chivalry and towards

¹ Nigel Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*. (First Harvard University Press edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 363.

a collective English nation supported by strong royal authority and public obedience. The English Reformation, the changing nature of warfare, and the new sense of nationalism are three of the developments in the sixteenth century that affected Tudor mentalities. Medieval chivalric virtues such as piety, largesse, martial prowess, and honor, as well as courtly etiquette were praised and highlighted in late-medieval romances and chivalric treatises. According to Maurice Keen, kings and knights understood the ethical codes of conduct that placed honorable restraints on the innate violence of the noble classes. Keen also states that chivalry was a way of life that, in the Middle Ages, primarily fixated on the facets of the military, the religious, and the noble.² But, since the early fifteenth century, new technologies, the success of the infantry and archers, and battle strategies eliminated the necessity of the mounted knight, and in turn the aristocratic code of honor associated with face-to-face combat by knights on horseback. The growing sense of unity and English nationalism erupted during the Tudor period as well. As more members of the nobility became loyal servants to a less-feudal king, there was less of a sense of self-sufficiency and individual interests of knights would ideally be subordinated to make way for the collective goals of the nation.

Through this paper I have analyzed the reasons why the late-medieval representations and personifications of chivalry, as depicted in the works of Froissart and Malory, molded the expectations and identities of not only kings but also the noble class. Within the framework of the historical developments of the sixteenth century, I have identified the downward trajectory of late-medieval chivalric ideals and their relevance to various religious, social, and political situations. The examples chivalric knights championed in the late-medieval period, like King Arthur or Edward III, seemed to become mere characters in a theater of “chivalry” during the sixteenth

² Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 17.

century. Instead of using these figures as models for chivalric behavior, the Tudor monarchs chose to represent themselves differently, through their actions, and appointments, as well as through their use of propaganda and art. Chivalry proved to be a malleable concept. During the Tudor period, chivalry did not seem to continue to define and regulate the lives of the monarchy or the aristocracy. Instead, chivalry acted as nothing more than a façade to mask political ambitions and to enhance the image of royal authority and national power. Thus, the Tudors employed a new variant of chivalry that appeared to embrace late-medieval chivalric legends, but in reality, lacked the underlying sense of moral obligation felt by late-medieval monarchs.

My thesis relies heavily on works of literature from the late-medieval period and from the sixteenth century. Through using such sources, I have attempted to understand the different facets of late-medieval and sixteenth-century culture. My research is as an interdisciplinary study focused on the value of literature as a primary document for historians. Many interdisciplinary scholars have focused on the relationship between medieval ideas and Renaissance literature, but I have chosen to follow a primarily more historical approach. I have focused on the historical context of the works from both periods to serve as evidence that explains how and why we can identify the changes in English society and thus the changes in the significance of chivalry from the late-medieval period to the end of the sixteenth century.

For my analysis of late-medieval chivalry, I have chosen to focus exclusively on two texts, *Chronicles* by Jean Froissart, and *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory. Froissart's *Chronicles* is regarded as one of the first accounts of contemporary journalism, serving as a valuable primary source for the events in England and France from 1326 to around 1400. As a historical chronicler during the Hundred Years' War, Froissart uses the lives and events of contemporary kings and lords such as Count Gaston III of Foix, Edward III, and King John of

Bohemia to prove the importance of maintaining chivalry even – or especially – in times of disarray. Likewise, I chose to focus on *Le Morte D'Arthur* because Malory's text represents a late-medieval English interpretation of Arthurian legend, as opposed to a French version. King Arthur is perhaps one of the most famous kings of Britain. Malory's text portrays Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as examples of the ideal moral and physical behavior of knights. Malory's representation of Arthur is important in comparisons between late-medieval uses of Arthurian legend and the use of the historical Arthur in the sixteenth century.

For my analysis of sixteenth-century literature, I specifically chose *Henry IV, Part I* and *Henry IV, Part II* and *Henry V* by William Shakespeare to examine how one sixteenth-century writer depicted the major battles and the actions of the English monarchs around the time of Froissart's *Chronicles*. Shakespeare's plays offer a unique perspective of English history while at the same time reflect the social realities of the late sixteenth century, such as the rise of English nationalism and the evolving position of the aristocracy. Another work from the sixteenth century I used in my analysis was Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*; however, I did not rely on this work as heavily as I did on Froissart, Malory and Shakespeare. While the quest of Prince Arthur and the Faerie Queen resembles a late-medieval chivalric romance, Spenser's text serves as an allegory of Queen Elizabeth's fight to protect Protestantism and the English people. The religious context and nationalistic symbolism of this text serve as an important example of a change in values and in the significance of chivalry in the sixteenth century.

The first chapter entitled "Pre-Tudor Notions of Piety: The Evolving Relationship of the Knight to the Church and its Treatment in Late-Medieval Literature," addresses the tensions between the military function of secular nobility and the doctrine of the medieval Catholic Church. The chapter analyzes why late-medieval chivalric literature used the virtue of piety and

religious subject matter, like the Holy Grail, to mediate the differences between violence and Christianity. The chapter also analyzes how the late-medieval knight's and king's relationship to the Church was completely transformed during the sixteenth century as a result of the actions of Henry VIII, drastically altering the ways in which worship in England was practiced. Such developments rendered chivalry's religious functionality no longer necessary and almost entirely inappropriate.

Chapter two, "The Influence of Martial Prowess on the Identity of Pre-Tudor Knights," analyzes the impact of martial prowess as an essential virtue of late-medieval chivalry on the duties and social identities of knights. This chapter shows why the transformations in aristocratic and noble identity, from knight to civil servant and scholar, reveal changing attitudes on the importance of martial prowess in the sixteenth century. This chapter also analyzes the impact of prowess on notions of masculinity. This late-medieval emphasis on linking masculinity with chivalry provides yet another reason to explain the evident decline in chivalry during the sixteenth century. The short reign of Edward VI also conflicted with the medieval notions of masculinity, as he was a young and physically ill king. And yet another challenge to notions of chivalric leadership arose, as two of the Tudor monarchs, Mary I and Elizabeth I, were women. Though, in this paper I will focus on Elizabeth, almost to the full exclusion of Mary I, because important works relating to the chivalric tradition and court culture were written during Elizabeth's significantly longer reign. For example, influential works by William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser were written for Elizabeth I.

The third chapter, "Chivalry: From Bloody Battlefield to a Façade at the English Renaissance Court," analyses why patriotism and the politics of the sixteenth century dramatically redistributed power and authority for the English monarchs and how this affected the

responsibilities of the aristocracy. The Hundred Years' War revealed vulnerabilities in the stability of late-medieval chivalry as a social doctrine. The developments throughout the sixteenth century also challenged the relevance of these late-medieval ideals as new political, intellectual and social ideals became more important to the Tudor monarchs. This chapter serves to demonstrate how the Tudors no longer utilized the secular doctrine of chivalry in their daily lives to the extent that monarchs in the late-medieval period did. Rather, this chapter stresses the appropriation of chivalry, by various Tudor monarchs, as propaganda and as a theatrical façade for the enhancement of national image and political ambitions and public policies. Finally, in my conclusion, after briefly summarizing my three chapters, I offer some suggestions as to why I think my research on chivalry as a form of ideology and the use of literature as guideposts has relevance in our modern society.

Chapter 1:

Pre-Tudor Notions of Piety: The Evolving Relationship of the Knight to the Church and its Treatment in Late-Medieval Literature

During the late medieval period tensions and conflicting interests existed between the secular and the religious sectors of society. Knighthood and the Church were two parallel pillars that held up the medieval society. The Church was inseparable from many aspects of daily life and was a major influence over political and state power. It provided spiritual guidance for people of all classes who sought salvation through faith and good deeds, instituting a sense of religious morality and the ideal of life without sin. However, for knights, adherence to Christian doctrine was difficult to follow and the goal of salvation seemed doubtful because their function was inherently violent and gruesome. The ambiguous relationship between the institutional force of the medieval Church and the violent nature of the knightly occupation left both groups searching for a middle ground. How was a knight able to reconcile the inevitable violence of warfare with medieval Christian doctrine?

The virtue of piety acted as a cross-link between knighthood and the Church, the two pillars of medieval Western society. By emphasizing the piety of knights and kings, elites attempted to reconcile the violent nature of knighthood by associating martial function with Christian duty. Knights were not only meant to keep the peace and protect those who could not defend themselves; they were also expected to fight to protect the Christian faith. Because of this important role, piety was a chivalric virtue that all kings and knights needed to possess. Pious knights and nobles, both historical and mythical, were glorified in late-medieval chivalric literature. Thus, chivalric literature acted, significantly, as an intermediary between the real-world tensions within the relationship of the secular and the religious.

Earlier medieval Christianity in the West had suffered from ecclesiastical tensions between those who argued for pacifism and those who saw militancy as inevitable. Initially the Church was openly critical of the warrior class whose vocation consisted of waging war and protecting against intruders. Keen has noted the contrasts between the *militia christi*, the monks who fought with their prayers, and the *militia secularis*, those who fought battles in the violent reality of the world outside the cloister.³ The monastic desire for peace influenced clerical views on militancy, reading the commandment, “thou shalt not kill” literally.⁴ Monastic tradition valued withdrawal from the world, but the conflicts and concerns of medieval society, such as the attacks on the Holy Lands by Muslims, exposed the Church to the idea that warfare was necessary for protecting Christianity. As early as the ninth century, the Holy Church was threatened by the growing power of non-Christians, the Saracens, the most immediate threat to Catholicism.⁵

At this point, the institution of the Church and a chivalrous knighthood were not harmoniously intertwined. By the tenth and eleventh centuries, church officials became more aware of martial ability and of the limitations that were placed on knights by the Church itself, such as the Peace and Truth of God. Clerical treatises promoting the purpose of Christian knighthood, liturgical rituals for blessings of swords and the cults of the military saints, mark a transition in the evolving relationship between the church and warfare. By the eleventh century, these new clerical outlooks on combat and the reality of the Church’s dependence on knights for security had established a justification of war for the protection of the Christian faith.

³ Keen, *Chivalry*. 46.

⁴ Saul, *Chivalry in Medieval England*. 198.

⁵ Keen, *Chivalry*. 46-47.

If the problem was how to reconcile Christian behavior with violence, the Crusades proposed both a solution and a challenge. The threat of an attack on the Christian Church in the west and the Muslim conquest of the Holy Lands drove Pope Urban II to initiate the first crusade in 1095.⁶ For the protection of the faith, the slaying of pagans and Saracens was sanctified, without need of repentance. Crusaders were pardoned of any sin caused by killing because they were ridding the world of enemies of Christianity. The enemy would only be saved if they were to convert to Christianity. With violence against non-Christians sanctioned by the Church, crusader knights were placed under institutional control because, in a religiously justified war, their duty was to act as the defensive right arm of the Church.

Crusading became a quasi-chivalric adventure. The knights did not try to kill with impunity, but the Crusades allowed otherwise Christians to function under the contradiction that they were allowed to be Christian and kill at the same time. Crusading was adopted into elements of the chivalric lifestyle. It was a way in which a young knight could prove his prowess, by the grace of God. Keen notes the thirteenth century poet, Baudouin de Condé, who emphasized the glory of tournaments, also wrote that “if he would be considered a perfect knight the time must come to take leave of the tourney and take the cross, for none can call himself a true *preudhomme* [virtuous knight] until his sword has struck a blow against God’s enemies.”⁷ The tournament was a place for military training and practice and was often used by kings as a way to recruit knights to join them in a crusade. The Crusades were one way that violence was justified under Christianity. Chivalric notions of demonstrating prowess and gaining honor through battle

⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*. 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

allowed crusading to take a place alongside other religiously approved martial ventures such as the execution of heretics.

Using knights to their advantage, the Church offered an attempt at reconciling the disparity between violence and good Christian behavior. Crusades legitimized warfare and awarded salvation for those who protected the faith. Although there were direct links between knighthood and the clergy, as demonstrated with the Christian military orders of the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitallers, not all knights were crusaders. Though crusading was encouraged by the clergy, it was not mandated for all knights to participate in the Holy Wars.

By the late medieval period not all battles that occurred were battles against heathens or the Saracens. A step toward the reconciliation between the nature of the knight and Christian behavior had been during the crusades, when the Church maintained that violence was justified when it was against non-Christians. But a problem of medieval knighthood remained. How could a knight be saved when the violence was directed toward another Christian? Power conflicts and political tensions grew between different kingdoms, becoming issues on a national scale. Defense and retaliation would prove difficult to overcome, and the buildup of tensions derived from discrepancies of dynastic sovereignty and ownership exploded into aggressive conflicts.

The outbreak of Hundred Years' War between France and England in 1337 placed Christian against Christian in a war of secular origins. The English and French kings throughout the lengthy war sought divine approval for their dynastic claims. Furthermore, the international or "universal" power of the Church was compromised by The Great Schism of 1378, which complicated matters even more when a sense of nationalism separated much of Europe's clergy from the pope. The dispute between the two rival popes, one in Avignon and the other in Rome,

escalated the diplomatic crisis. At this point in the Hundred Years' War, France and its allies supported the pope in Avignon, while England and its allies supported the pope in Rome.

Another issue for the Church were knights who operated outside of loyalty to a nation, such as the mercenary knights of the Free Companies. These knights were driven to search for war because of economic motivations and necessities. After the English captured King John II at Poitiers, the Three Estates were formed to govern France in the absence of a royal leader. Froissart attributes the rise of the Free Companies in France to the failures of the Three Estates to keep the order. The Free Companies proved to be a powerful political and military force that consisted of multinational, lawless and self-profiting knights.⁸ With no particular loyalty to any side and championing the idea of a self-made knight, the growing presence of mercenary knights was another source of tension between the military function of knights and the Catholic Church. After a group of knights under the control of Sir Regnault de Cervoles realized their pay had been terminated, they plundered villages towards Avignon. The pope, under threat, had been forced to open negotiations with the threatening group of knights.⁹ Knights were meant to protect the faith and the church, but in this case the Free Companies threatened the Church with violence for economic purposes. This account in Froissart's *Chronicles* serves as a historical source that warns against the dangers presented by self-profiting, self-motivated knights who operated outside the code of chivalry and thwarted the Church's attempts at controlling illicit violence. In this case, the immediate changes in society and in the government following the capture of the King of France foreshadow the developments of the sixteenth century when the late-medieval chivalric code became more obsolete.

⁸ Terry Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 17.

⁹ Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*. (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 148.

In terms of waging war against other nations, it appeared that the knights and kings didn't consider themselves completely bound by the religious constraints of the Catholic Church. Chivalry was an intimate part of a knight's identity; therefore, it operated in ways and championed notions that were separate from the church's values. The worship of martial prowess motivated individuals to seek honor and elevate their status and reputation. Thus, the pope and clergy disapproved of tournaments because of the unnecessary violence they perpetuated. Early forms of the tournament prior to the fourteenth century were often comparable to the chaos of an actual battle. Even with new regulations and safety measures placed on tourneys, many men who had died in the mock wars of the tournament were denied a Christian burial or were excommunicated by the pope.¹⁰ Because chivalric knighthood evolved in such a way as to place much emphasis on martial competency and honor, their role as Christian knights became secondary to their worship of prowess. Thus, the concept of chivalry was anything but static. Even before the Renaissance or Reformation in England, there were already changes in chivalric notions that affected the relationship between knights and the Church.

Although the secular notions of chivalry and violence often appeared to overpower the Church's restrictions, fear and uncertainty about salvation and sin were not completely ignored by the late-medieval knight. In a medieval society that continued to erupt in warfare and violence, knights and monarchs needed to reconcile how a knight who kills could still be saved. Expression of chivalric piety through action seemed to offer another attempt at reconciling this discrepancy. Knights and monarchs demonstrated piety through acts of good works, attending mass, confession, communion and devotion to the cults of various saints. The popularity of military saints increased by the fourteenth century. Saint George was adopted as the patron saint

¹⁰ Alan R. Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Sheridan House, 1987), 12.

of England and the royal family. The veneration of Saint George can be seen in the portrait of Henry VII and his family who are depicted with an angel praying underneath the triumphant Saint George fighting the dragon (figure 1). Knights and kings attributed their achievements, particularly martial prowess, to the grace of God. Knights understood that honor and glory in this world was the source of salvation in the next. By asserting that their actions, especially violent actions, complied with the will of God, they were able to reconcile Christian behavior with killing others.

Late-medieval chivalric literature reflected these not fully-resolved social anxieties and concerns of the courtly audience. The authors of chivalric literature were familiar with the aristocratic lifestyle and were able to relate contemporary situations to historical chronicles, romances and treatises. It is within chivalric literature that we see an attempt at mediating the tensions between the secular knights and the church. By emphasizing the virtue of piety and championing knights and rulers who performed pious deeds, chivalric literature offered a middle ground between Christian Crusades and violent militancy. Within the context and contents of chivalric literature there is also a sense that it was practical and more realistic to attain spiritual satisfaction by conceiving of chivalry as a practiced form of religion.¹¹ Chivalry absorbed different aspects of the Christian doctrine that complemented and, in some sense, veiled the disparities between violence and Christian behaviors. Within the notions of chivalry itself there seemed to be a more intimate and personal form of religious worship.

Contemporary accounts, like Froissart's, emphasize the pious nature of monarchs and members of the nobility who fought in wars. Froissart's *Chronicles* is a historical narrative that can serve as a more direct source for understanding late-medieval ideas about the relationship

¹¹ Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50.

between chivalry and Christianity. Froissart describes King Edward III of England during the campaign of Crécy:

He knelt before his altar, devoutly praying to God to grant that, if he fought the next day, he should come through the business with honour. He rose fairly early in the morning and heard mass with his son the Prince of Wales. They took communion and most of their men also confessed and put themselves in a state of grace.¹²

Here, Froissart affirms the medieval notion of the direct link between knightly honor and religious devotion. Throughout Froissart's *Chronicles*, chivalrous knights are described as taking communion and partaking in confession in preparation for battle. Froissart often stressed the pious nature of the monarchs and nobles whom he saw upholding chivalric virtues. He contrasted pious knights with murderous, excessively violent and seemingly godless knights and peasant soldiers to reveal the dangers of violence without Christian morals. The pious knights and monarchs that Froissart highlighted, like Edward III, served as the exemplars of Christian chivalry for Froissart's courtly audience.

Secular chivalric treatises that were written by knights incorporate Christian themes and emphasize the late-medieval virtue of piety as well. The religious elements in these texts are essential to consider because as a knight himself, the author would have experienced first-hand the struggle in reconciling warfare and violence with Christian beliefs. The fourteenth-century chivalric treatise, *Livre de chevalerie*, written by Sir Geoffroi de Charny, transcribes the virtues and ethics that a knight should have.

Christian values and teachings unmistakably influence De Charny's text. In the introduction to his book, De Charny includes a prayer to God in which he announces that he can do justice to Him in writing the treatise. De Charny declares, "no one will be able to say that in

¹² Froissart, *Chronicles*. 83.

what is written there is anything other than the good and the true; otherwise it would not be right to tell of it.” He continues to say that he wishes to not speak ill of any man-at-arms, “where there is no reproach, there can be no evil but only good. For this reason I pray to God may grant me that I do justice to my subject as far as both manner and matter are concerned.”¹³ This is a common element that prefaces late-medieval texts and not just those written by knights. The prologue of Froissart’s *Chronicles* and the preface to *Le Morte D’Arthur* also contain a prayer acknowledging God. Froissart beseeches God to provide him with knowledge and understanding so that he may finish his book “so that all who see it, read it or hear it read may delight and pleasure in it, and that I may earn their regard.” To write the chronicles, Froissart claims that he “first trust[ed] in the grace of God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary from whom all consolation and advancement come.” The devotional element of these texts reflected medieval theological ideas. Late-medieval mainstream scholastic theology argues that there was no contradiction between faith and reason. God fostered the truth of the world, and human reason was the acceptance of God’s will. The blessings and praise that medieval authors bestowed on the Holy Trinity and the Virgin for providing them with knowledge and understanding is the author’s claim and evidence of truth.

The rhetoric used in the chivalric treatises written by knights connected chivalric notions with Christian devotional behavior. *Livre de chevalerie* and its textual predecessor, *l’Ordene de chevalerie*, written between 1274 and 1276,¹⁴ served as guides to the knight’s understanding of what it meant to be both a Christian and a knight. The chivalric virtues of prowess and honor were considered gifts from God. God helps those who are worthy attain glory. Thus, those who

¹³ Richard W. Kaeuper, Elspeth Kennedy, and Geoffroi de Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi De Charny: Text, Context, and Translation*. (Middle Ages Series, Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 85.

¹⁴ *L’Ordene de chevalerie* (c. 1274-1276) written by Ramon Lull.

are worthy are pious in nature, they attend mass regularly, use confession to repent for their sins, and pray to the cult of saints and the Virgin. Phrases such as “God by His grace,” “God grants,” and “Our Lord has in his mercy,” fill the chivalric texts. De Charny explicitly states his opinion on the position of knights under God: “therefore the position and way of life of these men-at-arms should above all be devoted to serving with all their hearts Our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mary in return for the good comfort and honorable escape from death which Our Lord has granted them from day to day.”¹⁵ As mentioned previously, good Christian behavior was placed second to martial prowess and excellence. Devotional rhetoric in these secular texts creates an intersection with chivalry and religion. The revered virtue of prowess and its reward of honor was seen as a gift from God. Because violence was linked with martial prowess, perhaps implying that one’s prowess was a gift from God was a way to overlook the contradiction between violence and passive Christianity.

Chivalric romances detailing quasi-historical figures and legendary events also contained religious undertones. The glorious adventures of King Arthur and his knights in *Le Morte D’Arthur* were effective models of pious, Christian behavior and, conversely, of sinful behavior, for the courtly audience of the late-medieval era. William Caxton was a prominent publisher and printer in England during the fifteenth century. Caxton was responsible for the translation and publication of various texts including Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*. In his preface to Malory’s text, Caxton states that his intention of printing such a work was for readers to take heed of Malory’s chivalric examples. He states, “we fall not to vice nor sin, but to exercise and follow virtue, by which we may come and attain to good from and renown in this life, and after this short and transitory life, to come unto everlasting bliss in heaven, the which He grant us that

¹⁵ Kaeuper, Kennedy, and De Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi De Charny*. 185.

reigneth in heaven, the blessed Trinity. Amen.”¹⁶ Here, Caxton refers to salvation. Possessing the virtues that Malory praised is evidently considered by Caxton as what would transcend into heaven.

Attributing acts of military prowess and the attainment of honor and glory in battle as either gifts from God or evidence of God’s approval placed Christian values alongside the secular knight’s desire to fight in combat. In *Le Morte D’Arthur*, Arthur pulled the sword from the stone and revealed that he was the true king. In book I chapter IX “Of the first war that King Arthur had and how he won on the field,” Arthur’s mastery in his deeds of arms, despite being knocked off his horse, are allotted to the miraculous workings of God. When Arthur drew the sword, Excalibur, that he “had by miracle,” a light shined so brightly it blinded his enemies.¹⁷ This blinding light that allowed Arthur to defeat his enemies was a symbol of God’s heavenly power, granted to Arthur because of his pious and virtuous nature. This physical manifestation of divine approval positioned Arthur on a pedestal. This must have been an important message, because several late-medieval English kings adopted Arthur as their ancestor using symbolism to equate their right to the throne with that of Arthur’s.

Malory’s text contains multiple mentions of attending mass, confession and rituals as well as references to events occurring on church holidays such as Pentecost, Christmas, and Easter, all evidence of the religious nature of King Arthur and his knights. The fact that celebrations and seemingly secular events occurred on high religious holidays indicates the importance of these events. These instances further strengthen the ties between chivalry and Christianity. The Quest of the Holy Grail and most notably the vows of Sir Gawain and the

¹⁶ Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D’Arthur Volume I and II*. (London: Penguin Books London: Penguin Books, 1969), 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

adventures of Sir Lancelot are some of the most reverent acts of chivalry within Malory's text. The knights who spent their days searching for the Holy Grail demonstrate the uniquely intimate relationship that a knight had with God and Christ as represented by the Eucharist. Thus, in book XIII of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the gathering of the Round Table fellowship in the meadow at Winchester becomes reminiscent of the Last Supper in the garden of Gethsemane. The fellowship vows to search for the Sangrail, the grail used by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper, the symbol of the Holy Eucharist. Arthur knows that this will be the last time they will all be together, for the quest will take the lives of many. During the feast of Pentecost, the image of a covered Grail appeared.

Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder... In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clearer than seven times than ever they saw day, and all were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost... They entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but none might see it, nor who bare it. And there the hall fulfilled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world. And when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed...¹⁸

With the revelation of the holiest of vessels Sir Gawain avowed, "I shall labour in the quest of the Sangrail... and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more openly than it hath been see here."¹⁹ To the medieval reader, there could be no more spiritual act than to devote one's life to the search of such a holy object. Malory does not, however, suggest that in order to be an honorable and worthy knight in the eyes of God one must search for a seemingly mythical relic. The valorization of Sir Gawain and the Knights of the Round Table

¹⁸ Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur Volume II*. 248.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

confirms that Malory places considerable emphasis on pious acts as an essential virtue of chivalry.

The Grail legends articulated not just the quest for the Grail but also the attainment of Eucharist, communion in ecstasy and the mythical union with the divine. The medieval audience admired this quest and sought to retain a similar personal relationship with God through communion. Quests for the Holy Grail were independent of the institutional church. The Knights of the Round Table demonstrate an idealized form of knight-errantry, the pursuit of a heightened connection with the divine while simultaneously attaining honor and glory through performing feats-of-arms. The act of taking the Holy Communion places the transubstantiated body and blood of Christ within one's person. Perhaps the sacred act of putting Christ inside one's body generated the desire for an intimate union between knight and Christ – a union that was more gratifying than any other mundane action.

Late-medieval literature appears to embody an amalgamation of the chivalric code and certain Christian beliefs. The knights and adventures detailed in *Le Morte D'Arthur* reflect this characteristic blending of strong warriors with pious men-at-arms. Similar to Froissart, Malory encouraged a “learn by example” interpretation for his readers. The legendary King Arthur is one of the three Christian kings of the Nine Worthies, the historical kings who were the most authentic models of chivalry. Centuries of Arthurian legends predate Malory's stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, which first appeared in 1485. Malory's text thus reflects an accumulation of late-medieval chivalric ideals and virtues that were developed over time in different areas. Historian Richard Kaeuper makes an important point in this regard, arguing that medieval knights, kings, and the authors of various chivalric texts merged the

“demigod” of prowess with Christianity to create a sort of “quasi-religion of honor.”²⁰ Kaeuper suggests this appropriation of Christian values, an assimilation of what he considered valuable, reveals the knight’s intimate relationship with God, a relationship that alluded to the potential for bypassing the need for clerics.²¹

Malory’s ideal knight-errant promotes a rather isolated aspect of chivalry and its relationship with Christianity. The Christian God to whom knights prayed was a different version of the Christian God to whom clerics prayed. Thus, the selective merger of Christian values with the chivalric code coupled with a more personal communication with God allowed knights to negotiate and reconcile with the contradiction of violence and Christianity.

The examples of piety described in chivalric literature serve as important models for the reader and acted to mediate tensions between the values of the Christian church and the militaristic often violent nature of knighthood. Several themes within Christian knighthood indicate a highly individualized spiritual connection with God that did not require assistance from a priest or the pope, such as the Holy Grail quests, divine approval, and the God-given gifts of prowess and honor. Another recurring theme in romances was the spiritual conversion of a knight who retired to become a hermit who then guides young knights morally and spiritually.

Perhaps the pan-European power of the medieval Catholic church created a distance between the pope and clergy on the one hand, with the late-medieval kings and noblemen on the other. Paradoxically, this distance was a factor in fueling the tensions between secular violence and Christian behavior that both the Church and the gentry attempted to reconcile. Eventually the tensions between the secular and religious escalated with the developments of various aspects of society into the sixteenth century. The way late-medieval chivalric literature used notions of

²⁰ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. 47.

²¹ *Ibid.* 51.

piety to mediate tensions of the period was not as applicable for the Tudor monarchs, who faced new challenges with the relationship between the church and the state.

Developments throughout Europe of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries transposed new meaning to the notions of chivalry. During the sixteenth century, the Tudor dynasty reacted to political, social, technological and religious developments which contributed to the undermining and gradual decline of late-medieval chivalric ideals. The late-medieval relationship between a knight or king and the institution of the Church as well as actions of medieval Christian piety no longer existed to the manner or degree that they once did.

I am not suggesting that the Tudor monarchs were not pious rulers. There are a multitude of ways that the Tudors showed their devotion to God. However, I argue that the notion of piety, and in particular the chivalric virtue of piety and the individual relationship of the knight and God, was viewed as significantly different during the Tudor dynasty. In the medieval period, Christianity was a pan-European phenomenon. Good works and repentance of sins could grant one salvation through the assistance of a priest and icons of saints and angels acted as the intermediaries of God and Jesus Christ. The Protestant faith rejected nearly all of this. The establishment of the Church of England by Henry VIII in 1534 was responsible for a majority of the changes in sixteenth-century piety in England. However, even before Luther's Reformation had reached England, Catholics in England had adopted an individual national identity that separated them further away from the "universal" power of the papacy in Rome. Although Henry VII and the young Henry VIII (prior to the Reformation), shared the same faith as the knights and the kings of decades and centuries prior, they responded to chivalric ideals differently.

As we saw during the Hundred Years' War, nationalism and loyalty to the sovereign took precedence over the Church's disapproval of violence against other Christians. The War of

the Roses created a major strain on England as a nation. Henry VII ended the conflict by asserting his divine right as king, restoring unity and peace throughout England. This concept of national identity and power through national unity became an important aspect of English society especially during the Henrician period.

The English Reformation constituted a new national identity for England, an Anglican identity. National *and* religious loyalty was to the king, the head of the church and the state. Religious and political acts were essentially inseparable under Henry VIII's new position. The sixteenth century marks a shift in the relationship between the individual, the state and the church. For late-medieval knights, religion was experienced with guidance from the church and through a personal connection with God, one often mediated through the church and its clergy. In the sixteenth century, however, understandings of nationalism, devotion and loyalty to a political figure – and not always or necessarily the reigning monarch – were merged in a way that distinguished these more modern forms of commitment from those generally held in medieval times. Even when England experienced the Counter-Reformation during the reign of Mary I, Catholicism was mandated as the national religion, yet the new knightly commitments of national loyalty were still intact. On his death bed, Edward VI and his Protestant advisors named Lady Jane Grey and her male heirs as Edward's successor, effectively removing Mary and Elizabeth from the line of succession. Lady Jane Grey was queen for nine days when Mary and her many supporters reclaimed the crown. In this case, national allegiance to the Tudor family proved to be a greater force than the protection of Protestant beliefs. This return to Catholicism did not also reverse the changing notions of chivalry, medieval chivalry was becoming irrelevant and out of place in a society where the subject placed itself second to the monarch.

Perhaps one of the most obvious developments during the sixteenth century was Luther's Reformation. Martin Luther's ideas spread to England and sparked the interest of Henry VIII, at the time when he desired an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Eventually Henry turned, in turn, against his conservative Catholic advisors, Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas More for varied reasons, and took up actions against the clergy. Henry was surrounded by his pro-Protestant advisors and companions, such as, Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Cranmer, and Anne Boleyn.

The English Reformation created a divided English state split between Catholic and Protestant, and between the Pope and Henry VIII as Supreme Head of the Church. Medieval Christian values expressed in chivalric literature were not entirely applicable to Henry's national conversion to Protestantism. Late-medieval literature demonstrated the attempt to reconcile knightly violence and good Christian behavior. The clergy and the pope had expressed their distaste for illicit violence, yet a knight's function was to serve in combat. Now that the king was placed as the Supreme Head of the Church and the state, it seems that patriotism and loyalty to the sovereign dismissed any moral and spiritual conflicts that violence against other Christians produced. The king was considered the voice of heaven on earth so it was understood by a loyal subject that the king's will was ultimately a reflection of God's will.

Given these changes for the sixteenth-century reader, chivalric romances written in late-medieval times existed more as forms of entertainment and not necessarily as the models of piety they once were. Works of medieval chivalric literature existed in the possessions of members of court, but there were few new titles or reissues of what can be deemed medieval chivalric romances in distribution, and by 1530 they seemed to have stopped almost entirely. In its place

were newer humanist “Italian” style romances and the sentimental or allegorical romance.²² Since Henry VII took the throne at the end of the fifteenth century, the Tudor monarchs had attempted to imitate the grandeur and power of places such as Italy and Burgundy. The Italian Renaissance produced even higher standards for nations throughout Europe. England attempted to emulate aspects of Renaissance culture to assert its place among other powerful wealthy kingdoms. The Tudor monarchs and, concurrently, members of their court, did not use historical and mythical narratives found in chivalric literature as models for their own behavior; rather, the characters of the romance became symbolic characters of power and legacy. This change was in part due to new Humanist distrust of neo-chivalric literature during the English Renaissance.²³ Humanists returned to works of antiquity and the Christian Gospels. They believed the medieval romances were corrupt with Catholic sentiment and monkish ideals.

During the Renaissance, literature focusing on providing advice to educate the perfect courtier persisted. Writers took it upon themselves to give good counsel to their patrons, though political and religious advice was persuaded by different motivations than before. Greg Walker notices an explicit association between Henrician dramas and religious instruction, particularly in the early work of playwright John Heywood. Following the Renaissance idea of scholar and artist as a moral tutor, Heywood sought to counsel Henry VIII on religious policies in the form of moral instruction within his play.²⁴ In several plays, such as “Witty and Witles,” written sometime during the mid-1520s or 1530s, Heywood offers the court a highly orthodox account of Christian wisdom, calling the attention of King Henry toward good works. Walker also notes

²² Edward Wilson Lee, “Romance and Resistance: Narratives of Chivalry in mid-Tudor England.” In *Renaissance Studies*. (Vol. 24, No. 4. 482-95. 2010), 482.

²³ Norman Council, “Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones, and the Transformation of Tudor Chivalry.” *ELH*. (Vol. 47, no. 2: 259–275. 1980), 261.

²⁴ Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73.

that Heywood appears to persuade Henry, “as an impartial father to his people” to practice tolerance during the times of trouble (the early Reformation).²⁵ Heywood’s dramas attempted to sway Henry VIII towards the continuation of the old conservative order during the initial stages of the Reformation.²⁶ Heywood’s religious affiliation and the continued production of his oppositional dramas against Henry VIII would ultimately send him into exile during the later years of Henry VIII’s reign. Of course, offering guidance to a reader, whether a member of the gentry or a king, was not a new invention in the sixteenth century. Heywood’s drama presents his opinions and advice on conservative Catholicism in a more direct manner to his audience (Henry VIII) than Malory did to express religious sentiments, which were not nearly as controversial, within his own text.

Henry VIII declared himself as the Head of the Church of England, linking politics with religion. After the Reformation in England, piety was no longer practiced or championed the way it was in the late-medieval period. Good works in return for salvation, acts of confession and patronage of monastic orders were no longer believed and were rejected by the Protestant faith. Henry VIII and his successor Edward VI went to great lengths to dissolve the remnants of medieval Catholicism across England, destroying monasteries, works of art and icons, burning books and condemning heretics. Henry’s actions had lasting effects. Historians still debate whether Mary’s Counter-Reformation would have been able to return England to the Catholic state it was before.

After years of turmoil and religious back-and-forth, it is in the Elizabethan era literature that the tensions between Catholics and Protestants are most reflected. In the same manner that we can understand late-medieval notions of the chivalric piety acting as mediators between the

²⁵ Ibid., 80.

²⁶ Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*. 76.

religious and secular nature of ideal chivalry, Elizabethan literature acted as a mediator and moral guide between “true” faith, Protestantism, and the “false” religion, Catholicism.

The chivalric notions of piety during the late-medieval period championed Catholic worship. After the Reformation, notions of piety clearly shifted to reflect Protestant beliefs. Protestant English monarchs were now to protect the true faith against the corruption of the Catholic church. Edmund Spenser’s epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, describes the allegorical journey of a knight throughout a mystical land. The fairy land is symbolic of England, the Faerie Queene is associated with Queen Elizabeth, and the Catholic Church is represented as the villain whom the Christ-like knight fights throughout the poem. Although Spenser’s poem includes elements similar to those used in late-medieval romances, such as King Arthur, magic and fighting against vices with virtues, the purpose of Spenser’s poem, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I, was less morally instructive and more politically and religiously charged than that of works written by Malory or Froissart. Spenser’s poem did not act as a mediator between the tensions of the English monarch and the church. The tensions that existed were not that of violence and Christian behavior, but, rather, were tensions between competing power and theology. This work takes a distinct side, allegorically demonstrating the nature of good (Protestants) versus evil (Catholics).

The Protestant Reformation in England marks the distinct shift in the religious values of chivalry. Under Henry VIII the official religion of England was Protestantism. No longer did the medieval ideas of Catholic piety apply to sixteenth-century kingship and knighthood. Chivalric literature in the late-medieval period acted to mediate tensions between the religious and secular realms of chivalry, tensions that frequently stood in contradiction to each other. Ecclesiastical and secular writings alike attempted to reconcile this difficult contradiction. By championing

piety and pious chivalric heroes, knights and kings were intertwined under devotion to God. But it seems that there could never have been a perfect solution for both members of the church and the mounted nobility.

As the interactions among the kingdoms of Europe increased, power dynamics, dynastic disputes and economic crises generated a need for national unity and loyalty. The developments of the sixteenth century, such as changing technologies and strategies of war, the rise of nation states, intellectual and philosophical revolutions, the rise of the nobles of the robe, and the religious conflicts across Europe, called into question the effectiveness of medieval chivalry. If chivalry were to survive, it had to adapt. But the continuous stream of changes and challenges in Renaissance England altered society too broadly and too rapidly. The sixteenth century demanded a new identity for monarchs and the noble class of knights. This new identity paired with contemporary issues faced by the Tudors was far beyond any moral or spiritual guidance medieval chivalric literature could provide.

Chapter 2:

The Influence of Martial Prowess on the Identity of Pre-Tudor Knights

The martial duty of the medieval knight was widely regarded as the knight's primary function. Knights battled enemies of the land and engaged in personal combat to protect those who could not protect themselves and to defend the Christian faith. The status of the knight was elevated by the revered concept of martial prowess, one's ability in combat. As illustrated in the chivalric texts throughout the medieval period, prowess was rewarded with honor, glory, and personal reputation. Richard Kaeuper has argued that prowess was the primary constituent of chivalry, and the virtue of extreme veneration, through which came the rewards of other chivalric virtues.²⁷ The desire to attain military prowess proved to be a catalyst for the medieval knight, influencing moral behavior and physical actions. Prowess was written into the chivalric code as a foundational virtue and many other chivalric virtues correlated back to the demonstration of martial prowess.

The expression of martial prowess through combat, in war and tournaments, was an essential component of a medieval knight's identity. The nature of warfare and violence in the high medieval and late-medieval world shaped societal understanding and expectations of manhood and manliness. Over time these expectations developed into certain behaviors and ideals that were essential to the chivalric world. Medieval gender constructs situated males and females in different societal roles in which men were superior. Perceptions of gendered expectations were illustrated in the chivalric literature, reflecting the importance of knightly martial prowess. These works of literature also influenced the mindsets of aristocratic readers by

²⁷ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. 126.

dramatizing the feats of exceptional men-at-arms, highlighting masculine perceptions and characteristics, exploring the nature of fellowship and relationships between man and woman, and between men.

Prowess was an influential aspect of chivalry that affected the lives and identities of medieval knights and monarchs. Prowess inspired certain moral behaviors and actions in battle, it was rewarded with honor and reputation, and it provided an avenue for social mobility. The medieval worship of prowess provided some level of control over the illicit violence of knights and facilitated the sanctioning of the brutality of warfare and tournaments. Prowess also encouraged a fellowship among knights while not completely limiting the notion of knight-errantry. Masculine behavior and identity, as well as the social relationships between men, were also greatly influenced by the value of martial prowess in the medieval chivalric society.

In the sixteenth century, the late-medieval chivalric ideals became less and less applicable to a steadily evolving English society. The developing English nation began to embrace Renaissance ideas; society was changing, religion experienced reform, and the nature of warfare was transforming. Though themes of chivalry would experience a nostalgic and ever-so romantic revival, this “chivalry” was moving farther away from its original practice, into a world of fantastical imagination. The once-venerated value of martial prowess, the primary military function and identity of the aristocracy and the concept of the warrior king were ultimately replaced with more appropriate ideas and positions on the nobility, ones better suited for the dramatic developments of the English nation under the Tudor dynasty.

The aristocratic knights of the sixteenth century adopted the duties of a civil servant for the monarch. Noblemen had the opportunity to be enforcers of justice, advisors, and scholars. They were no longer limited to only militaristic duty, and this resulted in the decline of

importance of martial prowess. The notion that martial prowess was an essential virtue for a ruler was further challenged by the physical limitations of the aging Henry VIII, the poor health of Edward VI, and the gender of Mary I and Elizabeth I. The presence and power of the Tudor queens, Mary I, and even more so, Elizabeth I, also altered perceived gender relations and characteristics. Renaissance discoveries provided new discussions on manliness compared to womanliness, and because Humanist thought often clashed with or completely ignored late-medieval chivalric prowess, the aristocracy of the sixteenth century seemed to suffer a crisis of masculinity. During this time, people from outside the aristocracy began entering into the arena of literature and playwriting. The variety of themes, opinions, and motives of the authors reflected the changes occurring in England and moved society further away from relying on late-medieval chivalric ideals, like martial prowess.

The late-medieval notion of prowess and the value of military skills that was demanded of knights and monarchs were no longer as applicable or as necessary for the sixteenth-century nobility. Influential Renaissance and Humanist ideas had spread throughout England. The role of the knight adapted to meet the demands of a Renaissance nation-state. The purpose and practice of tournaments became tools of national aggrandizement rather than a training ground for war. The social status and titles of knights in the sixteenth century was almost entirely inherited which limited opportunities for social mobility. The physical and emotional limitations of the Tudor monarchs presented themselves to the court and the public in unprecedented ways. These developments of the sixteenth century challenged the importance of prowess as it was expressed in late-medieval chivalric literature. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the English gentry and the Tudor monarchs recognized that many of the late-medieval chivalric ideals no longer applied to their societal roles.

The association of the word chivalry with fighting and knighthood comes from the origins of the word itself, *chevalier*, which in French means horsemen or mounted warrior. Keen suggests that around the twelfth century social and cultural themes, like new military techniques of the cavalry, vocabularies of status, and literary topics, welcomed the figure of the knight and the beginnings of the chivalric way of life.²⁸ Being skilled in the art of combat in the saddle elevated the status of the knight. The demonstration of martial prowess and the reward of honor and glory had a mutually complementary relationship; prowess was rewarded with honor, and that reward would be the incentive for further demonstration of prowess. This relationship was persistent in a knightly obligation where “chivalry involves a constant quest to improve on achievement and cannot rest satisfied.”²⁹

The overwhelming presence of martial prowess in chivalric literature, particularly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicates the extreme to which prowess was valued among the ranks of knighthood and the princes and monarchs. The first section of Geoffroi De Charny’s, *Livre de Chevalerie*, is devoted entirely to the scale of prowess for men-at-arms. De Charny demonstrates through his treatise the notion that different forms of combat or feats-of-arms have different values. De Charny states, “I maintain that there are no small feats of arms, but only good and great ones, although some feats of arms are of greater worth than others. Therefore, I say that he does more is of greater worth.”³⁰ He places the deeds of men in tournaments below those of men who participated in local wars, and places those below the deeds of soldiers of foreign wars. It was on this scale of prowess that young knights sought to climb. A certain level of competition inspired knights to pursue personal endeavors to prove

²⁸ Keen, *Chivalry*. 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15

³⁰ Kaeuper, Kennedy, and De Charny, *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi De Charny*. 85.

themselves among their comrades. A knight-errant sought adventures and challenges across the land to engage in competitive exchanges of honor and reputations.

In the late-medieval period, martial prowess was a means for a knight to distinguish himself and receive the prizes of honor and an enhanced reputation among comrades. Popular chivalric romances and historic chronicles illustrated the rewards of martial prowess. Froissart describes a moment of distinguished prowess during the campaign of Crecy in *Chronicles*. He describes the skillful fighting of numerous knights who distinguished themselves alongside the Black Prince, referring to them as “all the flower[s] of English knighthood.” King Edward III refused to send them assistance so that his son would “win his spurs.” The king wished “the day to be his and the honour to go to him and to those in whose charge I have placed.” This honor wished onto them by Edward III served as an incentive to the prince and his knights because, as Froissart explains, “they fought better than ever and must have performed great feats of arms, for they remained in possession of the ground with honour.”³¹ In some instances, though very rare, promotions in the field of battle served as both incentives and rewards for martial prowess.³² The virtues of prowess and honor inspired each other in a continuous loop with the medieval knight aspiring to achieve more.

In the quest to achieve honor and reputation through the demonstration of prowess, knight-errantry was an idealized form of aspirational knighthood. The adventures described in Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*, recall hundreds of feats-of-arms performed by numerous knights. Great displays of prowess were often rewarded by King Arthur who made the actor a Knight of the Round Table. Sir Launcelot is one of the most revered knights in Malory’s *Le Morte*

³¹ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 91-92.

³² Keen, *Chivalry*. 167-168. Keen mentions an instance during the Battle of Najera described by Froissart, where Sir John of Chandos was promoted by the Black Prince.

D'Arthur. Following a series of adventures and personal combat victories in Book VI, Launcelot returns to King Arthur's court to recall his noble feats. Malory writes following the recount of the knight's deeds, "And so that time Sir Launcelot had the greatest name of any knight of the world, and most he was honoured of high and low."³³ Medieval knights, like those described in the chivalric romances, sought ways to attain titles of valor and distinction among peers in recognition for their epic feats-of-arms.

During the medieval period, the pursuit of prowess was a fundamental constituent of the chivalric way of life; and the primary duty of a knight was to fight. By the end of the sixteenth century in Tudor England, fighting was no longer a knight's primary duty. New technologies had been introduced that were gradually changing the nature of warfare. During the Hundred Years' War, during the campaign of Crecy in 1349, the French had recruited thousands of Genoese archers using crossbows along with thousands of other men on horse and on foot. The English army had fewer soldiers, but English archers with longbows delivered a remarkable amount of damage to the French. Within the ranks of the English army were what Froissart called "pillagers and irregulars, Welsh and Cornishmen armed with long knives" who killed without mercy.³⁴ As early as the mid-fourteenth century, kings realized the effectiveness of a large, expendable infantry and the nature of war became more ruthless. Additionally, the use of the longbow and eventually, firearms put warring armies at greater distances from each other. The use of dishonorable battle tactics increased as common infantrymen and archers participated in more battles than mounted knights. This shift away from the position of the nobility as a warrior class was indicative of a growing rift in the chivalric order.

³³ Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. 229-230.

³⁴ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 93.

The value of martial prowess in medieval chivalric society was in many ways linked to the potential for social mobility among men. As I have indicated, prowess was rewarded with honor and reputation. In theory, this potential for reward and status was not limited to members of the elite aristocracy. Geoffroi De Charny wrote to all men-at-arms, believing that the chivalric ethos extended to more than formal knights. De Charny's stance most likely was a reaction to the reduction in the number of actual knights during the fourteenth century. The attribute of prowess in relation to status and reputation resulted in tensions between the notion of achievement of knighthood solely through a reward for prowess and the inherited lineage of aristocratic knights.

From the mid-thirteenth century there was less emphasis on the initiation into knighthood (we can infer that this would have been granted through a display of prowess) and more emphasis on eligibility granted by noble lineage.³⁵ Knights predominantly came from high-ranking noble families that were wealthy enough to sustain and receive the status of knighthood. This shift towards knighthood by way of lineage and wealth evidently created a separation between high-ranking and low-ranking nobles, as well as resentment toward those who were awarded status of nobility by the king for their worthy service.³⁶ A precedent for such royal largesse or patronage is found in stories about King Arthur and Alexander the Great³⁷, both credited in literature for giving prizes to poor knights who demonstrated prowess. Through the later medieval period, the wealth of nobility and knightly class was challenged by the expanding wealth of successful non-nobles, such as merchants, who could afford to pay the fees of tournaments, proper equipment, and a horse. In some cases, merchants were becoming wealthier than some members of the gentry.

³⁵ Keen, *Chivalry*. 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145. Keen notes that by the end of the thirteenth century the conferring of royal or princely letters of nobility to someone not of noble status would become more common.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

In many ways, the exclusivity of tournaments in the late-medieval period reflected a closing of noble ranks and an attempt to keep knighthood and the order of chivalry encapsulated within the realm of the court. In courtly literature, we see this exclusivity as well. In chivalric romances, the non-aristocratic young men who earn the status of knight by demonstrating martial prowess, are subsequently revealed to be of noble or royal birth. For example, when Arthur pulled the sword from the stone, it was not known by most that he was, in fact, the son of King Uther Pendragon. Another knight, Sir Gareth, kept his true identity hidden by using the name Beaumains. In this instance, Sir Gareth's disguise as Beaumains represented a knight born outside the nobility who was worthy of honor and praise for his feats-of-arms. However, it is evident that many instances of social mobility were affirmed by the revelation of true identity and noble blood. The emphasis on the inheritance of knightly status placed new limitations on the avenue for social mobility. For the most part in the late-medieval period, prowess alone would not grant knighthood, inherited titles, coats-of-arms, fortunes and land ownership began to take precedent over martial prowess.

The amount of actual initiated knights had been decreasing since the start of the fourteenth century. Noblemen inherited the status of knighthood but did not go through the expense and formal ceremony.³⁸ The nature of warfare had been evolving away from personal combat between mounted knights who followed the chivalric code. It shifted toward the use of a large, relatively unskilled infantry, archers, and the increased use of guns and artillery, and naval warfare. The world of warfare was becoming less fitting for aristocratic knights. The chivalrous nature of war and the worship of prowess of the late-medieval period seemed rather inconsequential. This is not to suggest that the aristocracy did not serve as knights during the

³⁸ Keen, *Chivalry*. 143-144.

sixteenth century. However, even during the fifteenth century, the private medieval persona of the knight-errant searching for personal honor was being pushed aside, traded for a disciplined military force devoted to the king and the state.³⁹ The aristocracy of the sixteenth century was searching for a new identity that embraced new societal realities and values.

Renaissance ideas and developments made a significant impact on English society. Henry VII and Henry VIII embraced the possibilities of Renaissance sovereignty. Henry VII had seized the throne after a vicious civil war that thoroughly unraveled the remaining threads of medieval chivalry that loosely attached the aristocracy. Throughout his reign, he managed to build a robust dynastic foundation for his successor. Henry VII's reign saw the trickling in of Renaissance values into English culture. The English Renaissance and humanism and the English Reformation all blossomed in England during the reign of Henry VIII. By the end of Elizabeth I's reign, the English nation had become a dominant European power, and the English culture and society experienced significant intellectual, religious and political transformations.

Renaissance and humanist ideas effectively broadened the functions and opportunities for the English gentry. Humanism offered a new sample of secular values that was distinct from the medieval order of chivalry. Humanism encouraged the study and imitation of classical works from antiquity and the Gospel. Humanists pointed out that chivalry had borrowed themes from antiquity, but in many cases, humanists in England completely disregarded any connection with medieval chivalry.⁴⁰ Chivalric romances were written under the influence of Catholicism; Protestant reformers and true humanist scholars regarded the contents of the texts as "monkish" and backward.⁴¹ However, in the sixteenth century, there were attempts to reclaim the genre.

³⁹ Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. (Folger Books. Washington D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1986), 40.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁴¹ Wilson-Lee, "Romance and Resistance." 484.

Continued debate on book learning and the education of a knight had existed during the late medieval period. Should knights be educated in book learning as well as excellence in martial function? Alternatively, should knights focus the majority of their attention on the duties of knighthood and let the clerks be clerks? The neo-chivalric identity of the scholar-knight was created during the reign of Elizabeth I based on the influence of humanism. Sir Philip Sidney was the epitome of the Elizabethan scholar-knight. Sidney was a militant Protestant, poet, and scholar.⁴² He also enjoyed the grandeur and imaginative mystique of the knight-errant, which had reemerged under Elizabeth's revival. The open-ended nature of Renaissance virtues allowed courtiers to explore broader aspirations outside of traditional martial duties.

Changes in the political climate of the Machiavellian world had made it necessary for the knightly aristocracy to enter into the realm of civil service. Since the late 1400s, knights were expected to serve the king to address issues of foreign diplomacy, governance at home, and rising commercial interests.⁴³ Knighthood was further taken out of the private sphere once Henry VIII was declared the King the Head of the Church and the state. Under Henry VIII, a knight owed all duty to the king, and all honor and achievement were awarded as a gift from the king. The chivalric idea of the late-medieval knight, whose purpose was to fight, who had achieved feats-of-arms and earned distinction through prowess, was seemingly insignificant in a nation of growing political and economic complexities.

An analysis of the effects of developments that occurred in the sixteenth century on the roles of the English gentry suggests that the gentry was acquiring new positions within the ruling class and knighthood and combat was no longer their principal function. Although the division of roles within the aristocracy removed a collective experience of knighthood such as existed

⁴² Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

during the medieval chivalric period, a concept of martial prowess still existed inside the tournament grounds. It could be argued that the tournaments of the Tudor monarchs were the last bits of late-medieval chivalry that existed in sixteenth-century England. However, while chivalric themes and motifs persisted in the pageantry and celebrations that surrounded the tournaments, the motives behind the Tudor tournaments were not necessarily based on martial prowess or individual glory.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the concept of the tournament experienced many changes. Early evidence of tournaments indicates the thin line of distinction between the events of a tournament and actual warfare in terms of both physical risks and the manner of combat. The chaos of the early unregulated tournament was undoubtedly a cause of unnecessary bloodshed, often a disguise for feudal war,⁴⁴ and also, fostered a cult of violence. The tournament in the nature of mock-war served as great practice and training for legitimate wars. The chaotic tournaments described in *Le Morte D'Arthur* reflect those of the early medieval period. The pages of *Le Morte D'Arthur* are filled with the willing participation of Malory's knights in tournaments and jousts. Many of the tournaments described in Malory's text reflect the conditions of the early medieval tournaments where there was little distinction between the demonstration of chivalric prowess and chaotic, bloody combat. The language of Malory contributes to the problematic distinction between the two. When describing a great tournament in which many valiant knights were in attendance, Malory uses the same descriptive tendencies as he does with recalling the feats of skilled knights in battle. The chapter rubrics also interchange between referring to the event as a tournament or as a battle.⁴⁵ The similarities in the language that described tournaments and war also indicate the ability of both events to reward

⁴⁴ Alan R. Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Sheridan House, 1987), 12.

⁴⁵ Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. 280-293. Book VIII, chapters 26-31.

skilled and courageous knights for their prowess with honor and elevated reputation. Though, as de Charny noted, prowess in war was more significant than prowess in the tournament.

The late-medieval tournament had formalized the chivalric notion of martial prowess. The exclusive aristocratic circle of the court, with its appreciation of popular chivalric romances, transformed the tournament from a military training ground into an elaborate celebration of chivalry. An argument has been made that chivalry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries lost touch with “traditional” ideals and focused on primarily externalizing its themes. Keen argued, however, that this criticized frivolity was a natural by-product, that “formalising and imitative tendencies need no longer be interpreted as signs of loss of contact with ideals, but rather as signs of the growing consciousness of the richness of chivalry’s secular tradition.”⁴⁶ In this sense, the narrative reenactments and costumes of tournament pageantry in the late-medieval period was not just solely a form of entertainment. Chivalric romances had a profound influence on court culture, inspiration for martial prowess and success in tournaments was generated even more through the practice of the physical embodiment of chivalric heroes.

Not only did rulers and knights of the late-medieval period model their actions and virtues on legendary and historical figures of great chivalric prowess, they also physically dressed like them. Perhaps the physical imitation of an honored knight of a romance would further provoke and inspire that knight’s constant quest to improve his achievement. The emulation of the heroes in chivalric romances, who were from a “golden age” that existed in a fantastical yet quasi-historic time, expanded the theatricality and material displays within courtly pageantry. This theatricality was an apparent concern for William Caxton when he published Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* at the end of the fifteenth century, urging readers to refresh their

⁴⁶ Keen, *Chivalry*. 201.

minds with the essential ideals of chivalry and to learn by example.⁴⁷ As the tournament grounds evolved from a practice battlefield to a theatrical performance space, the emphasis on prowess and actual martial skill was not as critical as it had been before the end of the fifteenth century.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the tournament transformed into a performance of artful horsemanship, combat techniques and, theatricality. The tournament also became a social diversion that was open to the public. Tournament grounds were built specifically for the viewing of the public and pageant parades that marched through the city gates garbed in Arthurian dress. Processions and Arthurian costumes had been relatively popular during the reign of Edward III. Henry VII and Henry VIII were both influenced by the extravagant tournaments held by the Duke of Burgundy who demonstrated his success and wealth through lavish festivities and tournaments.⁴⁸ The Tudor monarchs realized that tournaments were public spectacles that could be used as propaganda, a way to show the wealth, success and magnificence of the monarchy and the nation to its subjects and the powers of Europe. In this sense, the images and allegories of chivalry that existed as part of pageants and tournaments were used as elaborate fronts to a larger political purpose.

As mentioned previously, tournaments of the medieval period were, for the most part, were intended to serve as practice for war and as a place where knights could compete to demonstrate martial prowess and earn honor and personal glory. Over time the spectacle and theatricality developed under the influence of the chivalric romance tradition. Tournaments that occurred under the Tudor dynasty transformed a practice of honor-seeking prowess into an athletic sport and entertaining art form.

⁴⁷Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. 3-7.

⁴⁸ Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. 20-22.

Like the many kings before him, Henry VIII was a chief participant in tourneys while he was a young man. He was known for his athletic prowess and skill of arms and intellectual qualities. With the firm foundation of kingship established by his father, Henry used his personal athleticism to impress foreign ambassadors as part of his foreign policy.⁴⁹ The elaborate event in 1520 known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold was a grand attempt by Henry VIII to use his athletic prowess and wealth to impress Francis I in the spirit of chivalric brotherhood. The painting that commemorates this event depicts Henry VIII and his procession arriving at the tournament grounds (figure 2). The large tents and the tiltyard where Henry and his knights would have competed are visible in the background. Henry VIII is not painted as a knight in shimmering armor flanked by a steward bearing his coat-of-arms, but rather, he is depicted astride a white horse, dressed in red and gold robes and his signature ostrich feather hat. The depiction of the king wearing these extravagant robes rather than a suit of armor in this chivalric setting reveals Henry VIII's motives to present himself and England as wealthy and powerful in addition to showing off the athleticism and martial skill of himself and his knights.

After Henry VIII retired from participating, no other Tudor monarch took to the tiltyard. As Henry had gotten older, it became more difficult for him to perform at the same level as he once did. The tiltyard still retained its dangers even with the implementation of safety precautions; Henry had received a near life-threatening injury competing in a joust. His position as sovereign was far more critical than the need to demonstrate martial prowess. Henry VIII's successors also faced physical limitations that prohibited them from participating in displays of prowess and athleticism. His only son Edward VI was only nine years old when he became king in 1547. His weak and sickly composition and untimely death at the age of fifteen cut short any

⁴⁹ Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. 26.

possibility of Edward VI becoming a talented jousting knight like his father. Mary and Elizabeth were excluded from physically participating in tournaments because they were women. Elizabeth was a supporter of tournaments and as the queen, inspired many young knights to compete to win her affection. The physical limitations of the Tudor monarchs displaced the sovereign's relationship to martial prowess and contrasted the medieval notion of a warrior king, which in turn rendered the emphasis on prowess in late-medieval chivalric literature as irrelevant to these monarchs.

The chivalric virtue of prowess as a commonality between knights and a monarch also inspired a notion of fellowship among their martial equals. In 1348, Edward III of England founded a chivalric order of knights called the Order of the Garter. The order consisted of King Edward III and his sons, "the bravest and noblest in England" and the other members were "chosen from among the most gallant of them all."⁵⁰ The motto of the order was, "shame on him who thinks evil of it" which refers to Edward's claim to the French throne. This prestigious order of knights was meant to establish a firm sense of fellowship and install loyalty to England. Instituting loyalty to the king and forming a group of knightly allies in a time when individuality was so important, was beneficial for Edward during the Hundred Years' War.

When Edward III founded the Order of the Garter in 1348, he was familiar with the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Froissart connects King Edward's idea, which he claimed to have conceived at the castle of Windsor, with a famous legend of Froissart's time that Arthur had built the castle and there established the Round Table. It is evident that Edward III was inspired by notions of honor as well as the fellowship embedded in the popular Arthurian legends. Not only did he create his order of chivalry based on exemplary prowess and knighthood, but by doing so, he elevated the status of the members of the order by

⁵⁰ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 66.

creating a close resemblance to the prestigious fellowship of the most venerated knights of prowess in the medieval mind.

The developments of the sixteenth century presented new challenges to the chivalric ideal of fellowship that was encouraged during the late-medieval period. At times, oppositional values and political or religious opinions strained the assumed loyal relationship between a monarch and their trusted advisors and allies. The notion of fellowship in the sixteenth century was not based on a commonality of martial prowess and owed loyalty to a king in times of war. Instead, a fellowship comprised noblemen, with various duties and positions, who were all united under their commitment to the sovereign and all their beliefs. The backstabbing and accusations that occurred amongst Henry VIII's trusted advisors and companions, such as Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell, was not in lines with a chivalric fellowship.

The medieval construct of maleness and masculinity was intrinsically connected to the existence of the knight and the chivalric worship of martial prowess. Idealized masculinity had developed within the chivalric world as knights were seeking the same worship of prowess that heroes of literature had earned. In the medieval period, gender was defined under social conditions as well as aspects of physical difference. Male superiority was confirmed to the medieval audience in many ways. The societal "ranking" of male positions placed them over female positions.

In referring to renowned gender theorist, Judith Butler,⁵¹ Derek G. Neal argues that in the medieval world, in particular, the meanings of gender are not only "social." For historical analysis, one needs to consider the physical body in the attempt to understand gender as well as social constructs. Neal argues, "the male body helped define masculinity, first, through its

⁵¹ Judith Butler is an influential American philosopher and gender theorist.

appearance, which medieval theory attributed to what went on inside it. Form and appearance commented further on the character of the man; physiology implied personality... The body conveyed masculinity also, both to society and to the self, through its function".⁵² The institutionalization of martial prowess under the chivalric code and the knight's essential role in war and the tournament conditioned a masculine identity and established characteristics of manliness like physical attractiveness and strength. These notions of male identity also significantly affected the different relationships and among knights and noblemen during the late-medieval period.

The worship of prowess and consequently those who attained prowess, in reality, and literature, shaped the ideals of manhood of the late-medieval period in England. The semi-rigid societal boundaries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries firmly connected nobility with knighthood. Nobles associated their status with virtue. Martial prowess and physical beauty and attractiveness became linked, and in some ways nearly synonymous. Feats-of-arms demonstrated a knight's courage, honor, and strength. Men of prowess collected the marks and scars from weapons of other men of prowess, and these became bodily markers of a man's ability.⁵³ The admiration of these chivalric virtues and the social status of the nobility placed knights in a position that was above and more beautiful than the rest. As Neal stated, the physical appearance of the body implied personality. Those who were attractive and well-proportioned suggested good nature and honorable character.

Medieval literature draws on perceived binaries, good versus evil, attractive versus ugly, strong versus weak, or honorable versus dishonorable, to highlight exemplary knights possessing

⁵² Derek G. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). 125.

⁵³ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*. 181.

chivalric virtues like prowess. In *Chronicles*, Froissart mentions a knight, Sir Robert Salle, who defended himself bravely and honorably during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Sir Robert Salle is an example of a non-noble born knight who earned his status through prowess. Froissart's description of Salle reinforces the connection between beauty and prowess. Froissart writes, "in appearance, reputation and face he was a brave and experienced fighting-man. King Edward had knighted him for his sterling worth and physically he was the best-built and strongest man in all England."⁵⁴ Sir Robert Salle's prowess and loyalty to England was proven during the tumultuous and lethal fight against the revolting peasants.

Another example that confirms the association of great men with beauty and virtue is Count Gaston of Foix. Count Gaston of Foix was, in Froissart's eyes, a man "so accomplished in every way that it would be impossible to praise him too highly." Truly the type of man he encouraged his readers to emulate. Froissart described Gaston of Foix as, "so finely built, with better-portioned limbs and body or so handsome a face, cheerful and smiling, with eyes which sparkled amiably... he was a shrewd nobleman, bold in action and sound in judgement ... took great pleasure in arms and love."⁵⁵ For Froissart's readers, these examples highlighted the connection between male bodily appearance and the virtue of martial prowess, which most likely related to an idealized version of masculinity.

Like physical beauty, sexual virility was also tied to prowess. This notion continued into the sixteenth century and was utilized by Henry VIII to foster a powerful dynastic image. Portraits of Henry VIII reflect masculine characteristics that were considered attractive during the mid-sixteenth century (figure 3). Henry is shown in a wide, firm stance, wearing tights to reveal his muscular calves and protruding codpiece. This protruding codpiece, which accentuated

⁵⁴ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 222.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

the genital area, could have been both a sixteenth-century fashion choice and a display of Henry's sexual prowess.⁵⁶ In this manner, Henry VIII used the associations of prowess and strength with male beauty and sexual virility that were established in the late-medieval period, as a mode of propaganda to promote his image in pioneering ways.

Rage was another expression of masculinity that was propagated by the medieval worship of martial prowess. The inherently violent nature of a knight in the medieval world supported gendered emotions. Rage inspired bravery and prowess in battle, but a knight or king needed to balance rage with reason, or else battle could result in merciless bloodshed. The code of chivalry harnessed the destructive power of rage by enforcing a mutual code of conduct in battle. Anger and aggression as natural expressions of male violence are then called to order under the institutionalization of prowess and honor. Chivalric literature harbors examples of those who can balance rage with reason, and those who cannot.

In the sixteenth century, rage was not necessarily an appropriate emotion for Tudor monarchs or knights. Renaissance and humanist ideas promoted the practice of self-discipline and restraint. Sixteenth-century historical awareness also contributed to the control of human emotions and desires to set the "civilized" society apart from archaic disorder and barbarism. For the female Tudor monarchs, Mary I and Elizabeth I, rage was an undesirable emotion. Those who were against Elizabeth as queen described the queen as having an unruly temper and being irrational. Supporters of Elizabeth, on the other hand, described her as reasonable and always composed. Because rage was a masculine emotion, it was unnatural and concerning when women

⁵⁶ Grace Q. Vicary, "Visual Art As Social Data: The Renaissance Codpiece." In *Cultural Anthropology* (vol. 4, no. 1: 3-25, 1989). 18-19. Vicary suggests the possibility that Henry VIII could have had syphilis because around the same time codpieces were fashionable there was a widespread outbreak of syphilis.

expressed the sentiment. Thus, it was not socially appropriate for the Tudor queens to model their behavior on the complementary actions of rage and reason described in late-medieval literature.

The medieval understanding of manhood supported the differences between male and female and built a sense of male identity around what was inherently not male. For example, the growing of a beard was indicative of maturity, the production of semen and sexual virility, which thereby rendered him masculine.⁵⁷ In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the dwarf character that accompanies Sir Gareth of Orkney (initially referred to as Beaumains) acts as an opposite yet complimentary figure next to the prowess and chivalry of Beaumains.⁵⁸ Throughout Beaumains' adventures, the dwarf acts as an agent to promote Beaumains' prowess. Beaumains and the dwarf are also accompanied by the damsel Lyonesse whose existence in the narrative represents a binary to establish Sir Gareth's masculinity through the existence of her femaleness. The valorized knights in chivalric literature created a masculine figure who possessed the physical characteristics of manliness established through a sense of what was masculine and what was not. Idealized masculinity found in the examples of literature also reflected a sense of male identity and self-awareness.

An argument made by Kathleen Coyne Kelly serves an interesting point to this idea of masculine self-awareness and what occurs subconsciously when men fight men. She argues that Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* threatens and disrupts a construct of masculinity that was supposed to be "whole and inviolate."⁵⁹ Kelly explains:

While masculinity – or rather masculinity... is not defined by the presence or absence of violence alone, the *Morte Darthur* relentlessly returns us to those moments when identity (i.e., honor, reputation, prowess, bravery) is to be decided through combat. Yet within this narrative space... certain strategies for *representing* violence are often foregrounded while itself is put under erasure... I

⁵⁷ Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*. 128.

⁵⁸ Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Book VII, 231-302.

⁵⁹ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, "Malory's Body Chivalric." In *Arthuriana* 6 (no. 4: 52-71. 1996), 45.

choose to gender this absence in order to illustrate the ‘usefulness’ of the feminine (a narrative strategy) as a cover for a story of violence against male bodies. In other words, at the precise moment that we expect the male body to be revealed most fully, that body is transformed and feminized.⁶⁰

The masculine construct that supposes itself relatively indestructible has a place for a weak or lesser version of itself. The weaker is therefore not masculine; it is feminine. Within Malory’s text, positions of two men fighting in combat switch from either the position of the subject (masculine) or object (feminine). As noted previously, it was the social order of knights that determined status via prowess. This status was not stagnant. Knights constantly aimed to improve their achievements and reputations. If gender identities were embedded in social rank, then if a man were to lose “rank” to another man it could be conceived as emasculation, or as feminization.

There is another more complex and internal relationship between men in chivalric literature. In correspondence with Kelly’s analysis, it is possible to suggest that in the late-medieval period, the violent act of penetrating the body with the sword was necessary to assert any sense of male dominance, for the knight’s primary function threatened the masculine identity of knighthood. If this is the dilemma of masculinity during the late-medieval period, it is carried over into the early-modern period.

As we have seen, the status and position of the English gentry and the knightly class procured new expectations that were significantly different from those in the late-medieval period. Aristocratic identities were transforming, “knight” would be replaced by “gentleman.”⁶¹ Self-awareness seemed to be a growing concept during the early-modern period; ideas about the relation to space and understanding the idea of history, personal identity and gender differences

⁶⁰ Kelly, "Malory's Body Chivalric." 53.

⁶¹ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 58.

appear to be taking shape. Similar to late-medieval literature, the literature of the sixteenth century offers insight into the early-modern understanding of masculinity and male identity.

Early-modern knowledge of gender and sexuality were still prominently based on medieval ideas with the addition of new science and theories. The argument I have mentioned made by Kathleen Coyle Kelly is similar to the argument Jennifer A. Low has made when she writes, “the association between conquest and effeminization suggest masculinity may be understood as a sign not only of sexual difference but of sexual maturity.”⁶² It is interesting to see that a constructed gendered relationship between men in situations of combat or conquest is essentially the same. This relationship cannot be concluded precisely because, unlike some literature from the sixteenth century, we do not know for sure if Malory purposely wrote *Le Morte D’Arthur* with this sense of masculinity in mind, or if he or any medieval mind, would have recognized this association.

Low claims that the conquered body determined sexual status and demonstration of masculinity in combat. The conquered body was passive, permeable. Thus, it was female, and as Low highlights, the conquered body was the immature male. The male body should be impermeable. An attack on the male body and the penetration of the body in some way would be to dominate physically. The idea of involuntary bleeding from a wound was associated with female menstruation. However, these wounds were different from those given in war.

The relationship between the mature male and the immature boy within roles of combat or violence as well as the maturation process are illustrated in works by Shakespeare. In *Henry IV Part I and Part II*, Shakespeare rewrites history to place the historical characters of Prince Hal and Hotspur as young adults fighting in fictional combat. Shakespeare’s modified history depicts

⁶² Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*. (1st ed. Early Modern Cultural Studies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 71.

combat between the young neophyte and a more experienced adult male. *Henry IV Part I and Part II* conveys the sexual maturation of a boy into a man through conflict and conquest.

Through this rite of passage, the boy earns his place among the community of men. In the late sixteenth century, the duel of honor had become popular amongst the noble class. These duels, however, were often initiated out of personal vengeance; with the goal to defeat their opponent and regain their stolen honor. The popularity of the duel is often associated with the changes in the social identity of the elite. It seems there was a “crisis of noble masculinity.”⁶³ Courtiers searched for a way to appropriate the impressive masculinity of the medieval knight centered around prowess. The identity of the sixteenth-century nobleman was no longer defined as the military elite, and thus their expression of masculinity through feats-of-arms was extremely limited.

The social, political and cultural developments of the sixteenth century that occurred in England significantly altered the duty and identity of the nobility. The character of the medieval knight was ingrained with the virtue of martial prowess, the chivalric virtue that contributed to all other attributes. Prowess in the late-medieval period served as an inspiration for chivalrous behavior and ignited a knight’s individual quest for eternal honor and glory. Social mobility through impressive feats-of-arms was possible, though the desired exclusivity of the gentry limited mobility outside the noble class. The medieval tournament acted as a sanctioned arena for displays of prowess. Here, knights could distinguish their abilities and form a connection and foster a sense of fellowship between other knights. Late-medieval chivalric literature perpetuated notions of the ideal chivalrous knight and in turn firmly established a distinct sense of knightly masculinity.

⁶³ Low, *Manhood and the Duel*. 3.

Changes in the nature of war and exposure to Renaissance and humanist thought required the sixteenth-century gentry to accept new public duties and forced them to create a new identity that encompassed and accommodated new social conditions. The position of the warrior-king and the importance of prowess over other virtues as emphasized in late-medieval chivalric literature, were not appropriate conditions for the sixteenth-century Tudor monarchs. The late-medieval chivalric ideals did not carry over into the sixteenth century with the same importance. Martial prowess was a highly individualized virtue, and in sixteenth-century England, the individual desire for honor through combat was not compatible with the nobility's duty as a loyal civil servant to the sovereign and the English nation during the Tudor dynasty.

Chapter 3:

Chivalry: from Bloody Battlefield to a Façade at the English Renaissance Court

Several generations of Englishmen endured the realities and consequences of the Hundred Years' War. During the 116 years between 1337 and 1453, the power of the government, the authority of English kingship, and the relationship between nobles, commoners, and the monarchy was refashioned in ways that slowly began to unravel and redefine the notions of English chivalry. The war left a lasting imprint on English national identity as the population at large was invested in the national enterprise and the defense of the nation against the enemy. The outcome of the war was humiliating and disgraceful. England was left fragile and disunified, enabling the social and political conditions that triggered the civil war.

Henry Tudor (Henry VII) seized the English crown from Richard III in 1485, ending the War of the Roses and initiating the development of a new English state. Henry VII's efforts to establish the legitimacy of the Tudor monarchy coupled with the accumulation of wealth that his reign brought to the English treasury provided Henry VIII with the unprecedented freedom that he experienced at the start of his reign.

The lengthy war with France and the internal strife and bastard feudalism during the late-medieval period exposed new challenges for those living by the code of chivalry. Military strategy and organization were revolutionized during the Hundred Years' War. An organized professional infantry affected the brutal and seemingly merciless nature of the war and led to accentuate the decline of the chivalrous cavalry. A key point I wish to stress in this chapter is that chivalric notions and the ideal behaviors of knights and kings were subtly redefined to justify certain military actions and political motives in the name of defending the nation. As we

have seen, chivalry was eroded but did not fall into an absolute decline immediately following the war. The weaknesses of the chivalric ideal exposed during the Hundred Years' War were aggravated further in the sixteenth century.

The political climate in Europe during the sixteenth century coupled with a newly intensified sense of English nationalism that had been ignited by the policies of Henry VIII contributed to the disintegration of late-medieval chivalric ideals. The duty and social identity of the aristocratic knight were altered significantly as the aristocracy moved gradually but steadily into the role of a public civil servant. The Tudor monarchs also redefined notions of English kingship and strengthened royal authority and power. Henry VIII declared England an empire, with the king as the Supreme Head of the Church and state. Loyalty to the nation equaled loyalty to the monarch. By the Elizabethan period, English identity, national purpose, and national security were associated with the Protestant faith.

It is important to notice that in the sixteenth century, the medieval chivalric tradition became a façade for Henry VIII's political ambitions and a mode of propaganda to depict courtly magnificence and power. By Elizabeth's reign, notions of chivalry, as they were in the late-medieval period, were transformed from an aristocratic way of life to gaudy displays and forms of public entertainment. Renaissance and Humanist ideas popularized classical heroic figures and virtues which both combined and overshadowed the previous heroes of medieval chivalry. The conditions and demands of the blossoming Renaissance state urged monarchs and their court to seek new subjects in literature and advice in intellectual and political texts. These developments of the sixteenth century made the traditional use of late-medieval chivalric literature, as moral and behavioral guides, inappropriate and irrelevant for the Tudor monarchs.

Medieval notions of a universal idealized code of chivalry became vulnerable as a result of the altered strategies of warfare, and continuous decades of destructive fighting during the Hundred Years' War. Long existing tensions between English and French claimants to the French crown escalated when Charles IV of France died without an immediate heir. Edward III of England believed that he was the rightful the French crown through his mother, Isabella, the sister of Charles IV. However, Salic law in France prohibited the maternal inheritance of the crown; therefore, Philip VI of France, cousin to Charles IV, was the next in line. Alongside issues of succession, tensions increased over the concerns of English fiefs in France and the Franco-Scottish alliance. Generations of English kings would continue to claim the French crown for the next 116 years.

Several years before the commencement of the war in 1337, fighting against the Scottish army of Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn revealed the vulnerability of the mounted knight when opposed by the collective action of a disciplined infantry.⁶⁴ The failures of the cavalry and the military elite in Scotland tarnished the image and reputation of English chivalry. Over the course of the war, military tactics became more strategic and organized. The battlefield shifted away from an arena for the demonstration of individual prowess among chivalric knights.

Major English victories on the battlefield can be attributed to new forms of combat which made the chivalric knight obsolete, such as the large infantry of foot soldiers and longbowmen. One of the most unexpected triumphs of the war was the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 during which Henry V's troops were exhausted and severely outnumbered by the French by several thousand. Around eighty percent of the English army consisted of longbow archers placed in

⁶⁴ David Green, *The Hundred Years War: A People's History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 28.

front of the men-at-arms.⁶⁵ The English army took a defensive position, staying in place while the French men-at-arms eagerly charged forward toward their enemy only to be killed by the thousands of flying arrows. Unlike the noble men-at-arms, the ignoble archers and foot soldiers were not obligated to follow the chivalric code of conduct. Foot soldiers and archers attacked in close range with hatchets and knives; there was no place or desire for a one-to-one duel as there would have been between two knights. The English victory at Agincourt was astonishing considering the extent to which the French troops outnumbered the English. In short, the knight's role in battle increasingly became less crucial for military victories as new technologies and the organized combat of large infantries led to essential victories.

Despite the waning necessity of the cavalry, noble men-at-arms, grasping to retain their social value, focused on upholding the late-medieval notions of chivalry in combat. The code of chivalry ultimately separated the aristocratic knights from the common infantrymen. At the start of the war, knights achieved great honor through martial prowess and individual feats-of-arms on the battlefield. In earlier sections of *Chronicles*, Froissart creates a clear distinction between chivalrous knights, those who acted as the models for his audience, and the “pillagers and irregulars.”⁶⁶ The actions of King John of Bohemia and his loyal knights during the Battle of Crécy reflect a strong sense of chivalric morals and sacrifices in the name of honor. The knights displayed their prowess, loyalty, and bravery as they tied their horses together and rode with the blind king of Bohemia into battle to fulfill his last request.⁶⁷ This self-sacrifice in the name of honor and chivalry in such an extreme example indicates the importance and relevance that chivalry had on the actions of knights at the start of the Hundred Years' War.

⁶⁵ The English army consisted of approximately 7,000 archers and 1,500 men-at-arms. The French army had over 10,000 soldiers.

⁶⁶ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 93.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

Likewise, specific actions of individual knights and the different English monarchs might also appear to be unchivalrous. Given this risk, Edward III employed the ethics of chivalry to justify political ambition, using the notion of upholding justice and defending honor to support his claim to the throne. While Edward III appeared to use the same methods later utilized by the Tudors, he believed in chivalric doctrine and was merely expanding on his chivalrous duty as a king. Because of such chivalric considerations, Sir Thomas Gray wrote in *Scalacronica* (1355), that it as Edward's duty to wage war against the French and it would have been more dishonorable not to take up arms.⁶⁸ The increasingly violent and often merciless actions of knights and kings were justified for military reasons and in the name of protecting the nation and thus the claims of the king of the land. The English overlooked plundering and looting of villages and the rape of women by knights when territorial control or military victories followed such events.

In one example, Edward III's son, Edward the Black Prince was a knight championed for his martial prowess and military leadership, but he had also earned a reputation for plundering and destroying the property of peasants and taking prisoners. Chronicles, like those written by Froissart, generally ignored the lack of mercy shown by the Black Prince and his knights during the sieges of French villages based on a belief that the violence and destruction were necessary as punishment for treason. Such was the case during the sack of Limoges in 1370. The city of Limoges had been under English garrison and commanded by the Bishop of Limoges, who was a trusted friend of the Black Prince when the city surrendered to the French. This perceived act of treason prompted the Black Prince and his troops to reclaim Limoges. Before describing the sack of Limoges, Froissart explains that the Prince, "swore on the soul of his father – an oath which

⁶⁸ Green, *The Hundred Years War*. 35.

he never broke – that he would attend to no other business until he had won the city back and made the traitors pay dearly for their disloyalty.”⁶⁹ Froissart indicates to his audience that the residents of Limoges and the once trusted Bishop of Limoges were no longer innocent, making it the Prince’s duty to restore his honor and control of the city. This incident demonstrates the ambiguity of chivalry and the hypocrisy of the Black Prince’s actions as described by Froissart. While Froissart doesn’t morally agree with the actions of the Prince’s army, whose orders were to kill “indiscriminately,” he doesn’t dispute the reason for the merciless deeds. Froissart relied on royal patronage, most notably that of Phillipa of Hainault, queen consort to Edward III. This link with his patron would explain Froissart’s complicity and his minimal contempt for the Black Prince.

Froissart contrasts the Black Prince’s poor example with an instance of proper chivalric etiquette displayed in the hand-to-hand combat between three English knights, the Duke of Lancaster, the Earl of Cambridge, and the Earl of Pembroke, and three French knights, Sir Jean de Villemur, Sir Hugues de la Roche, and Roger de Beaufort. The French knights fought with honor and with great skill. They surrendered to the English and asked to be treated according to the law of arms, to which the English knights responded, “we would never dream of doing anything else. We accept you as our prisoners.”⁷⁰ The French knights, who were not residents of Limoges, had not committed treason against the Black Prince. They had fought honorably and surrendered to their worthy opponent, and in accordance with the code of chivalry, the French knights were shown mercy and taken captive rather than killed. This example of the English knights’ chivalrous behavior stands to show that the English knights were still bound by the code of chivalry when it was reciprocally appropriate. The death and destruction brought upon the city

⁶⁹ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 176.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

of Limoges by the Black Prince and his knights were not seen as ignoble or unchivalrous because they were consequences of treason. Significantly, however, the Black Prince, despite such unchivalrous behavior, was seen as a hero, and his tomb at Canterbury became a site of veneration and pilgrimage.⁷¹ Society as a whole seemed to be moving away from chivalry, admiring leadership and military success rather than condemning malicious behavior and atrocities.

Rather than a regional feudal war, the Hundred Years' War placed England against France and tested the loyalty of the military elite. Political motives justified military actions; the monarch and the aristocracy, for the most part, acted under the behavior of the chivalric code. However, the nature of the war continued to produce challenges to this medieval chivalric tradition, already weakened by the policies and notions of Edward III and the Black Prince. As we have seen at Agincourt, the ignoble infantry and archers were not bound by the same moral and military code as the military elite was. Military success also seemed reliant on the destruction of the enemy, peasants and nobles alike.

In another significant incident at Agincourt, Henry V seemed to commit a crime against chivalry when he ordered his men to slaughter the hundreds of captured prisoners, many of them high ranking nobles who could have been held for large ransoms. Henry's decision stemmed from the fear that the large number of French prisoners would realize they outnumbered their captors and revolt. Henry V threatened to hang any who disobeyed, yet this order was counter to the English knights' ransom interests and entirely anti-chivalrous, and many refused. The king's unchivalrous and merciless order tested the loyalty and obedience of the knights who were

⁷¹ David Green, *Edward the Black Prince: Power in Medieval Europe*. (The Medieval World. Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2007)

desperately clinging to old values. It was the archers who killed the prisoners, thus proving the infantry's loyalty to the king and the nation was more valuable in war than the individual motives and chivalrous conduct of the high-ranking knights. These factors suggest that even in the early fifteenth century, the notions of chivalry experienced certain vulnerabilities.

The slaughter of peasants and the destruction of villages and cities were strategic military actions that were meant to inflict economic and psychological damage on France and the Valois regime. Over the duration of the Hundred Years' War, a sense of English identity began to emerge and flourish. The long tradition of war fostered a sense of mutual hostility on both sides. Aggression toward France became a unifying characteristic for the English people. Language also began to distinguish English identity. By the end of the war, French was no longer the official language of government nor the spoken language of the nobility, as an attempt to eliminate French influences. Edward III was also successful in collaborating with the aristocracy to start forming a loyal and unified political elite who were distinctly English.⁷²

What was crucial to the creation of a national identity was the development of English borders. Over the course of the war, the English kings strengthened control over England, Wales, and Ireland. A majority of the regional boundaries within English territory in the southern part of Britain had disintegrated, while to the north, tensions with Scotland persisted. English borders also were defined as fiefs in France were lost.⁷³ By the end of the war, the English nation was on one side of the channel and France on the other. Historian David Green argues that the cause of war "had become equated with defence of the nation, and not only the defence of territorial boundaries but also the defence of language, customs and a way of life."⁷⁴ The 116 years of

⁷² Green, *The Hundred Years War*. 115.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

English nobles and peasants fighting against French to defend the King of England's claim to the French crown demonstrated the possibility of a unified English nation. All men were fighting for a national cause to defend the country against the common enemy. The French invasion of the English coast was a threatening possibility. Taxation increased to pay for new fortifications, and religious processions increased to pray for protection. Yet, as Froissart describes, many Englishmen desired the French to attack, cheerfully saying, "let them all come, those French. Not a ballock of them shall get back to France, by God."⁷⁵ Edward III and his successors used the image of Saint George to represent England, and the English people were willing to fight and die for what that image represented, the King's claim to the French crown.

The Hundred Years' War successfully united members of the aristocracy to loyally serve and protect the monarchy in England. Edward III created the Order of the Garter to create a fellowship between distinguished knights to strengthen their loyalties to the king and to force them to support his imperial ambitions. The Order of the Garter united the knights under the motto, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," "Shame on him who thinks evil of it" where "it" refers to war and Edward's motives for the war with France. The experience of the war also led commoners and peasants to be invested in the national enterprise. During the war, military success and strong monarchical power, like that enjoyed by Edward III or Henry V, brought the English people together. Military defeat weakened kingly authority; in that event, the English subjects would question a king's ability. The ineffective reign of Henry VI led to the loss of remaining French lands under the control of the English. By the end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453, the military failures and fragile mental condition of Henry VI aroused feelings of betrayal and humiliation among the English subjects. The instability of the government and the

⁷⁵ Froissart, *Chronicles*. 306-307.

king left the nation vulnerable, and tensions between rival noble families erupted into a deadly civil war. The experience of the Hundred Years' War had encouraged many people to imagine a sense of unity and nationalism within England. However, with loss of the conditions that had generated national unity and an atmosphere of defeat within the kingdom, the sense of nationalism and loyalty disintegrated. It was during the Tudor dynasty that an English identity, deeply rooted in a strong sense of patriotism and devotion to the monarchy and nation, came to exist.

The English nationalism generated throughout the sixteenth century expanded the notions of patriotism beyond that which existed several decades prior. The Tudor monarchs had new and different political motives than neither the medieval kings during the Hundred Years' War or the elites who continually struggled for power during the War of the Roses. The political and religious climates in Europe also allowed the Tudors to use those tensions to their advantage in harnessing patriotic sentiment.

Before I address specific analytical concerns, some background information on the foundation of the Tudor dynasty and the authority of the English king is required. Henry VII legitimized his claim to the throne by emphasizing his ability to end the years of civil turmoil and establish peace, primarily by marrying Elizabeth of York, between two of England's most powerful families. Henry VII also had economically successful policies that filled the treasuries leading to an era of economic prosperity. Henry VII's reign was a time of relative peace after he had worked to thwart the power, and regain the loyalty, of noble families. These policies established a new sense of unity from a foundation of peace rather than war.

The accomplishments of his father provided Henry VIII with a strong sense of political and economic security during the early years of his reign. The English Reformation and Henry's

political and religious policies dramatically altered the English national identity. The equation of “loyalty to the nation is loyalty to the king” was intensified by the newfound assertion of the supremacy of the king as the Head of the Church and the state. The development of England as a Renaissance state generated new conceptions of monarchy, loyalty, and patriotism. The notion of the “commonwealth” encompassed the English subjects, and it became the responsibility of the aristocracy to serve the commonwealth under the instruction of the king.⁷⁶ This sense of mutual obligation inspired connections between the different social classes, each of which had their civic duties but owed the same loyalty to the monarchy.

Unlike the experience of some medieval English kings, such as Edward II, Henry VI, or Richard II, who were unable to secure their position on the throne and were deposed by opposing noblemen, the Tudor monarchs were able to maintain royal authority through the use of propaganda and the façade of chivalry. The Tudors used propaganda and a chivalric veneer to strengthen their royal image and gain support for their ambitious political policies. During the late medieval period, the monarch’s position was not entirely stable. If a ruler appeared to have evil intent or was deemed ill-suited, the aristocracy felt obligated to defend the realm against tyranny.⁷⁷ Each of the late-medieval kings had to prove themselves worthy and maintain strong authority. Dynastic inheritance was no guarantee of power for medieval kings. Because loyalty to a king and his successor was not guaranteed, the medieval English monarchy was unstable and vulnerable to the opposition of high-ranking noble families who had considerable of feudal regional power. During the medieval period, military success was a crucial proponent of royal authority. Because a king was not always a soldier, the monarch’s ability to organize and mobilize troops onto the field of war was essential in the maintenance and demonstration of

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 59.

⁷⁷ Green, *The Hundred Years War*. 113.

royal power.⁷⁸ The War of the Roses proved that without the loyalty and cooperation of the aristocracy, a royal authority could easily be overthrown.

Returning to my analysis, the authority of the king in England changed dramatically during the Tudor period. The Tudor monarchs were able to expand royal power by strengthening the royal and national image, through legislation, and by using myth as propaganda. Henry VII's effort to assert and protect the legitimacy of his family on the throne enabled the Tudor dynasty to become part of English national identity. Thus, Henry VIII enjoyed freedoms no other king of England had experienced before. He often acted on his desires and personal motivations and was obsessed with his self-image and the reputation of England. Henry VIII was able to marshal anti-clerical and anti-Roman sentiment to gain support for legislation. The Act in Restraint of Appeals of 1533 declared Henry VIII as the final legal authority in all matters in England, Wales, and all English territorial possessions. The Act of Appeals prohibited the appeal to the Pope in Rome for any matter. This act declared England as an empire that recognized no external authority.⁷⁹ Support of the Reformation strengthened loyalty to the monarchy in ways inconceivable to medieval monarchs.

The Tudor monarchs used myth as propaganda to further establish an image of power and magnificence. The Tudor myth claimed they were descendants of the legendary King Arthur. Henry VII adopted the red dragon to his coat-of-arms to refer to both his Welsh ancestry and one of the symbols assigned to King Arthur. Arthurian symbolism was most popular around the 1580s when Elizabethan England, during the "Golden Age" experienced a surge of patriotism.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Green, *The Hundred Years War*. 124.

⁷⁹ Peter Marshall, "The Reformation, Lollardy, and Catholicism." In *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell: 15-26. 2010), 21.

⁸⁰ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 137.

It was not a new idea for the Tudors to claim ancestry to England's greatest historical king. What was different, however, was that rather than use Arthur as a personification of chivalry, the Tudors used him as a political hero and national symbol.

By the sixteenth century, Arthur was part of British antiquity. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur in the *History of the Kings of Britain* was widely accepted as a historical figure, and this led to a semi-demystification of the chivalrous Arthur in medieval romances, such as *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Elizabethan propaganda embraced the imperial Arthur of *British*, not English history, the Arthur who conquered most of northern Europe and nearly became Emperor of Rome. Arthur could suit the plans of numerous Tudor monarchs. Henry VII used the legacy of Arthur to enhance dynastic legitimacy, and Henry VIII and Elizabeth I used Arthur as a symbol of building the Tudor empire. Thus, Arthur as a conqueror was more relevant to the political climate of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when England was expanding its power in the colonization of the New World, trans-Atlantic trade, and engaged in a war against Spain.

The idea of conquest does not necessarily adhere to chivalric notions of protection and justified war. Malory did not ignore the fact that Arthur was a conqueror, but that is not the achievement he championed. Instead, Malory endorsed Arthur's martial prowess and highlighted the assistance he received from God through his sword Excalibur.⁸¹ Malory's Arthur was a knight before anything else, thus serving as a better model of an ideal knight than a model of a successful conqueror. The mythical characterization of the chivalrous King Arthur of late-medieval romance literature was not constructive for the political motives of the Tudor dynasty. It was the imperial Arthur of British history who became a national symbol and image employed by Tudor propaganda.

⁸¹ Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. 180-184.

Henry VIII's authority as king, his ability to stifle opposition and the general anticlerical sentiment of the population, afforded him the ability to garner public support to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. Similar factors also contributed to the acceptance of Protestantism in England. Just as the English had fought for the defense of dynastic authority against the French during the Hundred Years' War, now the English were fighting for the protection of the Protestant faith against Rome and Catholicism. Henry VIII prevented opposition by declaring treason against the king a religious crime, and religious crimes were thus treason, punishable by death. Henry harnessed anticlerical sentiment to his advantage, gaining public support by blaming England's national troubles on the corruption of the Catholic Church.⁸²

The defense of English religious identity as a patriotic act was optimized further during the reign of Elizabeth I. Elizabethan knights, like Sir Philip Sidney, saw themselves as militant Protestant activists,⁸³ utilizing the exotic appeal of chivalric knight-errantry as a display of extreme English nationalism. The Virgin Queen herself became a national symbol of England and Protestantism. Edmund Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene* in honor of Elizabeth, combining romance literature with nationalistic propaganda. The text is an allegory of Protestant England with Elizabeth and the Christ-like Prince Arthur as champions of the "true religion" fighting against the personification of Catholicism. In the fight against Catholicism, Elizabeth was represented as a future provider of truth as the monarch dispensed the word of God to her subjects. These types of symbolism, as seen in Spenser's text, emphasized the non-military aspects of the monarch's power.

⁸² Ethan H. Shagan. *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*. (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

⁸³ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 75.

Sixteenth-century literature and dramas reflect the nature of the blossoming English nationalism. Patriotic language during this period generated images of unity and brotherhood with a firm emphasis on Englishness. The Renaissance and Humanist thought sparked new interest in understanding and relating to the past. William Shakespeare returned to historical battles and the lives of medieval English kings to comment on contemporary realities in a sort of “historically based patriotism.”⁸⁴ In the final play of the Henriad tetralogy⁸⁵, *Henry V*, Shakespeare dramatized the infamous English victory at the Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years’ War to create a sense of pride and civic duty to resonate with his contemporary audience. The play also presents new conceptions of the monarchy, the idea that speech can be more powerful than weapons, and the decline of older values, as seen with the fictive Henry V’s banishment of his old friend, and subsequent death of, the knight Falstaff.

Shakespeare uses Henry V’s military campaign at Agincourt and the miraculous victory of the English to reflect on the political instability and need for public morale in the late 1590s and early 1600s. Initially, the war with Spain further united the English people under the impression of a “Protestant Crusade.”⁸⁶ Yet, the confidence that followed the victorious defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was not long-lasting. The failure of the English Armada the following year and expenses of war depleted the treasury; national pride and admiration of Elizabeth dwindled. The motivational language of patriotism and reciprocity in Shakespeare’s *Henry V* represents a beacon of hope for a miraculous victory against Spain. Referring to one of Elizabeth’s past achievements, Shakespeare also seems to pay homage to the motivational speech given by Elizabeth I at Tilbury before the attack on the Spanish Armada in 1588. In her

⁸⁴ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 124.

⁸⁵ Henriad Tetralogy: *Richard II* (c.1595), *Henry IV Part I* (c.1597), *Henry IV Part II* (c.1597-99), *Henry V* (c.1599)

⁸⁶ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 107.

remarks, Elizabeth places herself as one among many who were fighting for the defense of the realm.

But I tell you that I would not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear: I have so behaved myself that under God I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects. Wherefore I am come among you at this time but for my recreation and pleasure, being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die among you all, to lay down my for my God and for my kingdom and for my people mine honor and my blood even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too... To the which rather than any dishonor shall grow by me, I myself will venter my royal blood; I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of your virtue in the field.⁸⁷

Patriotic rhetoric in *Henry V* parallels some of the language used by Elizabeth at Tilbury. Similar to Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's Henry V importantly positions himself among his soldiers. Characteristic of Shakespeare's historical patriotism that distinguishes this sixteenth-century nationalism from medieval concepts of nationalism is the language of brotherhood that saw no division between the aristocracy and the infantry. Perhaps one of the most famous lines from *Henry V* is the fictive king's inspirational speech before the Battle of Agincourt on Saint Crispin's Day. Shakespeare's Henry V turned the harsh reality of the troops being severely outnumbered by the enemy into a situation of great honor, and it is honor, that the fictive Henry V declares he desires most.

If we are marked to die, we are enough
To do our country loss. And if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will, I pray thee wish not one man more.
[...]
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.
God's peace, I would not lose so great and honour
As one man more, methinks, would share from me (4.3.20-23;28-32)

⁸⁷ Elizabeth, Leah S Marcus, Janel M Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose, *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 325-326.

Shakespeare's Henry continues to declare that no man should fight alongside him or his fellow men if he does not wish to fight. The fictive Henry V inspired his soldiers to be victorious with the promise of remembrance and eternal glory for those who survive. The speech concludes with Henry's assertion of brotherhood among his men. Here he implies that even a man of low birth may be made noble through personal sacrifice and endeavor. Shakespeare has Henry maintain that the impending battle would be one of great importance for the nation, so much so, that any man who did not fight that day would be jealous with the realization that he was less of a man.

From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered.
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers –
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile
This day shall gentle his condition –
And gentlemen in England, now abed,
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day. (4.3.58-67)

Shakespeare presented a fictive version of the medieval king, Henry V, as a Machiavellian prince, who reconciles the qualities of good character and the often conflicting and necessary responsibilities and diplomacy of a strong leader. The fictive Henry V's motivational speeches given to his troops before the Battle of Harfleur and the Battle of Agincourt were meant to inspire his knights and soldiers to bravely fight for England as their ancestors had done in the past. Act III of *Henry V* follows the Siege of Harfleur. In his speech at Harfleur, Shakespeare's Henry V drew on notions of family legacy and honor and highlighted a specific sense of Englishness.

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,
Or close the wall up with our English dead!
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility,

But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
 Then imitate the action of the tiger:
 Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,
 Disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage.
 [...]

On, on, you noblest English.
 Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof,
 Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
 Have in these parts from morn till even fought,
 And sheathed their swords for lack of argument.
 Dishonor not your mothers. Now attest
 That those whom you called fathers did beget you.
 Be copy now to men of grosser blood
 And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
 Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
 The mettle of your pasture. Let us swear
 That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not,
 For there is none of you so mean and base
 That hath not noble luster in your eyes.
 I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
 Straining upon the start. The game's afoot.
 Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
 Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' (3.1.1-8; 17-34)

In this motivational monologue, Shakespeare's Henry V addresses his soldiers as the underdogs, whom he assures are capable of fighting like the Alexander the Great. The fictive Henry V's cry to war addresses the noblemen and the common man, the "good yeoman," leveling both groups under the united cause for England. Shakespeare has Henry V even suggest the equal ability of the common man to the nobility in the prospect of military greatness, declaring, "for there is none of you so mean and base/that hath not noble luster in your eyes" (3.1.29-30).

As Shakespeare's play demonstrates, English nationalism in the sixteenth century thrived on the celebration of past victories and exceptional English monarchs but did *not* rely on military prowess, personal honor, or chivalry. This nationalism stemmed from the evolving historical consciousness ignited as a result of the Renaissance Humanism. From the last quarter of the

sixteenth century, more intellectuals were calling on the past to address the present.⁸⁸ The sixteenth-century representation of the late-medieval period, as seen in *Henry V*, offers an interesting insight into the changing nature of works that reflected on the need for chivalry, what makes a good knight, and what characteristics are necessary for a successful monarch. The evolution of literature generates questions about what was valued in the written works, who was the intended audience, what was the purpose for both the sixteenth-century works and late-medieval works.

What was most important for Shakespeare and his audience was not the representation of actual fighting or the strategies used in the war; instead, it was the idea of what going into battle meant for the English soldiers and the importance of having national unity in times of crises. Shakespeare created *Henry V* for the public theater, dramatizing the events around the famous Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War to integrate the medieval context with sixteenth-century political and social ideals and realities. The focus on these aspects is shown in the motivational and patriotic monologues that Shakespeare's Henry V recites throughout the play. These imagined speeches aroused a sense of national pride among the audience and demonstrated the essentialism of a unified nation. This resurgence of national pride and unity was something that Shakespeare thought needed revitalization during the years of instability in the later part of the Elizabethan period.

As a late-medieval chronicler, however, Froissart emphasizes the martial achievements and chivalric acts of individual knights and monarchs during the major battles and military campaigns. While Shakespeare's play was a form of entertainment for a public audience, Froissart's *Chronicles* was written as a contemporary historical narrative, read initially by an

⁸⁸ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 126.

elite audience. Though the various patrons of Froissart's text most likely affected the representations or embellishments of certain events, Froissart claimed to have recorded the stories he heard from multiple knights, first-hand experience, or merely relaying what he believed must have happened. The pages of *Chronicles* consist of tedious descriptions of various battles and military strategy documentation. Unlike *Henry V*, there are limited descriptions of military leaders giving inspirational speeches to provoke patriotism amongst both nobles and commoners alike. In many cases, Froissart describes the personal motives that inspired a knight to fight, such as fulfilling an oath, the desire for honor and glory, and prowess. During the late medieval period, when Froissart was writing, England was only beginning to experience a unified identity. To stress a critical point, the mentality of a late-medieval knight in wartime was primarily focused on the advancement of the *individual* and not on the collective enterprise of the nation as we see in sixteenth-century attitudes. Indeed, the actions of the real Henry V were driven more by the dynastic interests of the House of Lancaster and his individual ambition for power and honor, rather than for a united national cause.

Froissart's text was not intended to serve as a successful piece of nationalistic literature for England or France, for that matter. The document provided, more effectively, historical models of leadership, piety, and chivalrous behaviors, of which the reader was encouraged to learn from. By the sixteenth century, there was a multitude of available literature for the ruling elite. Although nobles continued to read medieval chivalric literature, these works were valued more as entertainment or for historical facts, such as in the case of Froissart, than they were appreciated for guidance for moral and political actions. Sixteenth-century contemporary literature written in response to the century's new developments proved more relevant and instructional for the Tudor monarchs.

The duty of the knight and the social identity of the aristocracy was also decisively altered in the sixteenth century as the nobles of the robe became more crucial than the nobles of the sword. The Hundred Years' War signaled a significant change in military strategies and the overall professionalization of war. The success of the infantry and longbowmen decreased the need for knights of the cavalry. Furthermore, the development of the Renaissance state required members of the aristocracy to act as a civil servant. Renaissance and Humanist intellectuals emphasized the necessity of an educated governing class that served the commonwealth. In 1531, English diplomat and scholar, Thomas Elyot, melded the cardinal virtues with the idea of civil service to define a new notion of honor for the Tudor era courtier. Elyot claimed that true nobility stemmed from virtue and honor sought in service of the "public weal." The virtue Elyot speaks of was learned, and the attainment of this virtue quickened by education.⁸⁹ As a Renaissance scholar and Humanist, Elyot denounces the seeking of honor for self-aggrandizement, thus demonstrating his negative view of the chivalric honor that was sought by medieval knights.

Conceptions of knighthood and martial duty were transformed to support a national enterprise during the Tudor dynasty. The Hundred Years' War and the War of the Roses had effectively tarnished the public reputation of both knights and common soldiers. As part of their propaganda for enhancing the king's image and the position of England in Europe, Henry VII and Henry VIII worked to rehabilitate and enhance the prestige of the knight and military service in general.⁹⁰ The Tudors were able to improve this reputation by emphasizing the notion that the military was in the service of the monarchy and the defense of the commonwealth. Thus, the men

⁸⁹ Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. 63.

⁹⁰ David Grummitt, "Changing Perceptions of the Soldier in Late Medieval England." In *The Fifteenth Century X: Parliament, Personalities and Power. Papers Presented to Linda S. Clark*, ed. Kleineke Hannes, (Boydell and Brewer, 2011. 189-202), 198.

who risked their lives in service of the prince and the commonwealth were celebrated by sixteenth-century churchmen and propagandists as well as by local communities. Even as the reputation of military service was restored, the sixteenth-century knight was not the same as the medieval knight. The medieval chivalric knight acted as an individual, performing feats-of-arms, demonstrating martial prowess and seeking honor for self-aggrandizement. Medieval chivalry valued fellowship among knights; however, a sense of brotherhood was established through the notions of honor, ability, and adherence to the chivalric code. The virtues and ethics expounded by the chivalric code, however, did not correlate with the aggressive militarism and militant patriotism promoted during in the Tudor dynasty.

By the end of the fifteenth century, multi-national diplomacy and politics, global economics and the Renaissance society across Europe forced the aristocracy to reconsider their traditional late-medieval values. They acknowledged the practicality of learning and proper courtier training for the future success of their sons as counselors to the prince. Eventually, the social ideal of the aristocratic knight was replaced with the idea of the “gentleman courtier.” Noblemen and members of the gentry entered into new positions of the government as members of the Privy Council, and, as scholars. The Elizabethan “Golden Age” harbored the ideal of the “scholar-knight;” noblemen like Sidney and Spenser were skilled in the art of war and also talented intellectuals and writers. Literature by Sidney, *Arcadia*, and Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, represented Elizabethan romanticism and an attempt to integrate chivalric virtues with interests of the state. Though the subject matter of the “Golden Age” literature resembled that of chivalric romance, the texts did not have the same didacticism as late-medieval chivalric documents. Sixteenth-century literature often combined romantic chivalry with both classical virtues and figures from antiquity. The moral and behavioral guidance that late-medieval

chivalric literature provided for the ruling elite of that period was ill-fitted to address the civil responsibilities of a Tudor courtier.

The nature of late-medieval chivalry was, as we have seen, highly individualistic. Knights performed feats-of-arms to demonstrate martial prowess in a continuous cycle to achieve honor and eternal glory. The developments of the sixteenth century broadened the responsibilities of the aristocracy in their service to the state. The Tudor doctrine expanded the authority of the king and effectively institutionalized the loyalty of a knight to the king. The growing sense of English nationalism that accompanied political and religious changes and the military campaigns transformed the idealized knight of chivalry into an educated and obedient civil servant and governor of the commonwealth. This shift of the knights' social position from the private realm into the public arena rendered late-medieval chivalric literature irrelevant as tools of guidance for a Tudor monarch or Tudor courtier.

Neither did private moral virtues nor individual interests always correspond with public or political values or benefit for the state and common good. Chivalric romances, like *Le Morte D'Arthur*, idealized knight-errantry, and quests for the Holy Grail, but these individual aspirations were not appropriate in the sixteenth century. The revival of similar romantic aspirations during the Elizabethan period inspired some English courtiers, like Sir Philip Sidney, to imitate the "exotic" knight-errantry. Many, however, including Queen Elizabeth, chastised reckless actions and the inherent dangers of chivalric competition.⁹¹ The importance of chivalric virtues like martial prowess and personal glory was no longer regarded in the same level during the sixteenth century as they had been in the late medieval period. In addition to a unified military force, Renaissance England also acquired a new understanding for the necessity of

⁹¹ Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. 172.

aristocratic education, bookkeeping and banking, language and diplomacy, and service to the state none of which were important considerations during the medieval period.

The Tudor monarchs were strategic in the ways in which they used propaganda and public image to maintain royal authority and gain support from their subjects. However, unlike Edward III in the fourteenth century, if any notions of chivalry were retained, they were used as a dramatic façade. During the Tudor period, the practice of chivalry as a secular way of life was declining. Chivalric competitions had become more theatrical and extravagant making them the perfect tool for Tudor monarchs to display England's magnificence. At the same time, the Tudors used idealized chivalric notions in their foreign diplomacy, making chivalry the perfect disguise for the personal political motivations of the king.

As activities associated with chivalry became more extravagant, the Tudor monarchs embraced tournaments as a superficial form of chivalry to display a powerful dynastic image in order to compete in the European cultural and political theater which had blossomed in the late fifteenth century. The Burgundian Court of the fifteenth century was the envy of Europe, and so Henry VII modeled the Tudor court on Burgundian influences, holding celebratory tournaments, festivals, and pageants, and he collected elaborate manuscripts and other works of literature.⁹² In the eyes of the major powers of Europe, Henry VII was introverted, but within England, Henry used tournaments to achieve national unity by allowing the nobility to channel aggression in the spirit of friendly competition, masquerading as fictional knights, rather than instigating actual combat.

Henry VIII adopted elements of the chivalric tradition as a façade during the first part of his reign, thrust England into the theatrical arena of European power. Tournaments, pageants,

⁹² Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*. 22.

and festival processions, where members of the court dressed in costumes as characters from chivalric romances, became a form of propaganda to display the wealth, skill, and overall magnificence of Tudor England. Henry's closest advisor, Cardinal Wolsey, was a perpetrator of courtly extravagance; a public celebration accompanied every important political or diplomatic move he undertook. Historian Sidney Anglo notes, "never had the political situation been such to give a cardinal a position of preeminence in propagandist symbolism of pageants and political displays."⁹³

The spirit of chivalry also acted as the perfect façade for the king's political motivations at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The event was meant to increase the Anglo-French friendship in the spirit of continuing the ideal of a united Christendom established with the non-aggression pact signed by European powers in 1518. The chivalric notions of brotherhood and friendly competition at the Field of the Cloth of Gold gave the appearance of strengthened relations between the two nations when in reality the extravagance of the event was used as an opportunity for political self-endorsement.

The chivalric ideals and the romantic tradition of chivalry used by the early Tudors as propaganda lacked the moral or spiritual background asserted by late-medieval monarchs. Renaissance politics, royal authority, changes in warfare, and a growing national identity established new priorities for sixteenth-century monarchs. The long history of chivalry lingered in the court, and this classical notion, used in conjunction with Renaissance values and princely practices led to the evolution of a romanticized chivalric image which was a vital propagandist device for the Tudor monarchs.

⁹³ Sidney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*. (2nd ed. Oxford-Warburg Studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 209.

Humanism, the Renaissance and the Reformation had profound effects on every aspect of English society and Tudor politics. Overall, the position and importance of chivalry in English society fluctuated. Values of the late-medieval period were becoming less important as England transitioned into an established Renaissance nation. The Hundred Years' War had varying effects on English politics and society. The success of the infantry and the professionalization of military service diminished the role of the mounted knight exposing vulnerabilities and complexities in the medieval chivalric code. The Hundred Years' War was also responsible for an initial sense of English unity and nationalism. This national unity did not last, however. The outcome of the war resulted in internal tensions of power and succession between royal authority and the growing influence of elite families. The Tudor monarchs were able to expand the power of the English throne and, through the assistance of propaganda, they were able to create a robust national image and newfound patriotism. No Tudor monarch ruled in the same way as their predecessor. However, as the sixteenth century progressed, society moved further away from the era of chivalric glory. The radical individualism of the medieval knight was replaced by citizenship and public service, and the once-vital values of prowess and honor were less important than Machiavellian diplomacy, national unity, and royal magnificence. The sixteenth century stripped chivalry of social and moral relevance, leaving behind a superficial shell of honor and glory to be used by the Tudors to mask political ambitions.

Conclusion

To the contemporary audience, “chivalry” evokes an archaic, exotic and romantic set of behaviors, knights in suits of armor and damsels in distress. Such chivalric clichés represent the legacy of medieval chivalric literature, but these texts are often removed from the historical context of the time and place they were written. The elimination of historical elements, as well as cultural, political and religious content, has the effect of immortalizing a chivalric ideal. At what point did society acknowledge that indeed “chivalry is dead”? How did the once invincible chivalric code lose its grip on society?

My research has led me to approach the question, “is chivalry dead?” from an interdisciplinary perspective, examining the important relationship between literature, works of art, and the actions and values of the English monarchy and nobility from the late-medieval period through the sixteenth century. Historians have debated whether or not there is a distinct period or event in time that marks the downfall of chivalry. In extension to the work of notable scholars like Saul, Keen and Kaeuper, who argue that chivalric notions and practices change of the late-medieval period appear to decline most noticeably in the sixteenth century, my research has emphasized the value of an in-depth analysis of contemporary works of literature, from the late-medieval *and* the sixteenth century, to reveal why late-medieval notions of chivalry deteriorated at the intervals they did. Positioned among scholars who have recognized the connections between and influence of medieval ideas in Renaissance literature, my research has stressed the importance of historical context, acknowledging the functions of the different works as forms of literature and entertainment, as historical accounts and as the reflection of social, cultural and political realities in the late-medieval period and the sixteenth century. Throughout the late-medieval period there were instances in which chivalric notions were threatened and lost

significance. Through my research I have also discovered that elements of the chivalric tradition persisted throughout the Tudor period. However, the sixteenth century variant of “chivalry” existed as a mixture of Renaissance, Humanist, and medieval ideas and was primarily used for the purpose of royal propaganda. Through my research I have utilized the benefits of building upon traditional, standard historical analyses through the historical contextualization of literature in the hopes of revealing the type of work that may be accomplished if historians made better use of literary sources.

Although the practice of the chivalric doctrine ceased, an enduring legacy of chivalric imagery persists and has inspired sporadic appearance of romantic movements, like that in the Victorian era. However, these lingering images of chivalry are not the same as the late-medieval chivalric traditions. Instead, they are remainders of the sixteenth century, when social, religious, political and technological transformations overshadowed adherence to the medieval chivalric code.

The transformations of religion, the evolving social identities, and responsibilities of the aristocracy and the monarchy, coupled with developments in European politics and warfare during the Tudor period, exposed the vulnerability and rigidity of late-medieval chivalry, leading to its overall decline. At the same time, however, the conditions of the sixteenth century demonstrated that certain chivalric ideals were fluid enough to adapt to the needs of the sixteenth-century monarch. Conditions of the sixteenth century led society also to question the contextual relevance and functionality of late-medieval chivalric literature. For the Tudor monarchs, chivalric literature and treaties, like those written by Thomas Malory, Jean Froissart, and Geoffroi de Charny, no longer functioned as examples for moral, spiritual, and behavioral guidance; the heroes of these chivalric works were valued more for their entertaining qualities

and historical narrations. The Renaissance and Humanist intellectual movements introduced new interpretations of history and contemporary texts that had more value and were more applicable to the Tudor monarchs.

The first chapter of my thesis examined the changes in the chivalric virtue of piety and the ambiguous and at times conflicting relationship between the chivalrous knight and the institution of the Church. Chivalric literature and its admiration of piety acted as a mediator between these two pillars of medieval society. Both the clergy and the secular elite sought ways to reconcile the disparities between good Christian behavior and the violent nature of the knight. The moral and spiritual reconciliation that medieval literature provided to its contemporaries was not an appropriate or necessary function during the sixteenth century. The Protestant Reformation in England marked a distinct shift in the religious values of chivalry. The religious struggles that characterized the sixteenth century were combined with political and nationalistic motives, presenting the governing elite and the monarchy with unprecedented situations that were beyond whatever moral or spiritual guidance medieval chivalric literature could provide.

The second chapter analyzed the transformation of the aristocratic knight and the extent that the virtue of prowess influenced many aspects of a medieval knight's life. In the sixteenth century, the role of the aristocracy was not limited to a military duty; in fact, the members of the nobility and the gentry assumed positions of governance. For the sixteenth-century courtier, the medieval concept of prowess that historically constituted a preponderance of the chivalric identity was not the only measure of ability. Because prowess represented a considerable part of the social identity and conception of manliness for the aristocracy in the late-medieval period, Tudor courtiers sought fresh definitions of masculinity and characteristics consistent with their new role in the governance of the state.

The final chapter analyzed the reasons why the change in the political climate of England and the new existence of English nationalism in the sixteenth century had such pronounced effects on the responsibilities of the aristocracy and the authority and power of the Tudor monarchy. For the most part, the Tudor monarchs were able to establish a unified nation that shared a passion for promoting and protecting a collective English identity. The Tudors dramatically transformed the English nation by the end of the sixteenth century. As the feudal society evaporated, duty to the commonwealth and obedience to the monarchy encompassed the lives of the people of England. Religious reformation strengthened the authority of the king, and the exploration of the New World, colonization and, trans-Atlantic trade asserted an expanding English Empire. Medieval notions of chivalry proved to be incompatible with many of the new sixteenth-century Renaissance ideas. Medieval literature lacked essential elements of the type of patriotism needed in the sixteenth century, and there were little these texts could do to guide the Renaissance courtier and prince. The theatrical, romantic and mythical components of chivalry were appropriated into images of political propaganda or reimagined as symbols of English nationalism, serving as a façade in various ways for the Tudor monarchs. Under the guise of the chivalric tradition, the Tudor monarchs manipulated the English subjects to enhance loyalty and obedience to the crown and used notions of chivalric fellowship and honor to mask the realities behind personal motives and political ambitions in England and Europe.

The sixteenth century saw the transformation of chivalry to suit contemporary needs. And although later periods saw resurgences of romantic imagery, the chivalric code that guided medieval society never regained its historic power or importance. The continuous transformation of European society and the imperial expansions of European powers required new forms of literature to serve as guidance for people of all social classes. As the importance of education and

literacy gradually increased, more people were able to participate in the reading and writing of textual works.

Throughout history ideologies and social practices have come and gone. Yet, the lessons learned by previous people have set a precedent for our modern society. My research on the transformation of the medieval England into the sixteenth-century Renaissance state and the use of various forms of literature as moral and political guides is relevant to contemporary politics. Historical literature offers us the reasons why people have and should enter into state service and explains the roles and responsibilities of different positions and of social classes.

The process of understanding how ideologies can be transformed for different purposes is also extremely relevant in modern society. In the examination of ideologies transforming throughout history, we are alerted to the manipulations of certain ideological concepts used in ways they were not initially intended. The Tudors demonstrated that although English society was evolving, chivalric ideals that were originally intended to define individual prowess, honor, and loyalty could be reconceptualized to support royal power in ways never before intended. The open-endedness of language and the use of writing as a creative yet didactic facet promotes various interpretations and responses. However, it can be very easy for leaders to reconceptualize ideological notions for selfish and ambitious reasons. And although ideological appropriation is not always malicious, manipulation of this sort, more often than not, has led to gross abuses of power and the subjugation of various groups of people.

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Appendix – Works of Art



Figure 1. Unknown artist, *The Family of Henry VII with St George the Dragon*, 1505-1509.



Figure 2. Unknown, *Field of the Cloth of Gold*, 1520.



Figure 3. After Hans Holbein the Younger, Portrait of Henry VIII, c. 1536.