



Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur

Dorsey Armstrong

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"A lively and thought-provoking study of gender in the Arthurian community. It is at once theoretically sophisticated and highly readable, full of insightful close readings yet conscious of larger patterns of analysis."--Laurie Finke, Kenyon College

Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur reveals, for the first time in a book-length study, how Thomas Malory's unique approach to gender identity in his revisions of earlier Arthurian works produces a text entirely unlike others in the canon of medieval romance. Armstrong argues that issues of masculine and feminine gender identity play more critical, central roles in Le Morte d'Arthur than they do in Malory's sources or other chivalric literature. Effectively merging contemporary gender and feminist criticism with careful analysis of Malory's sources, Armstrong uncovers how gender ideals established in the early pages of the text subsequently inspire and mediate the action of the narrative; moreover, her analysis shows how such ideals become progressively more divisive and destructive as Le Morte d'Arthur moves toward its inevitable conclusion.

Recent articles and essays have shed much-needed light on various individual aspects of gender in Malory's text. However, only a sustained, book-length analysis like Armstrong's can fully articulate the relationships of gender to other chivalric ideals, such as mercy and martial prowess, that become increasingly complex as the narrative progresses. This study examines not only the most frequently read portions of the Morte but also those sections that often are regarded as extraneous to the primary narrative, such as the Tristram, Gareth, and Roman War episodes. By showing how gender operates in both the well-known and the less-appreciated portions of Malory's work, Gender and the Chivalric Community demonstrates that his text possesses far more narrative unity than previously thought.

Armstrong provides a sophisticated yet accessible approach to the study of gender and its relation to other chivalric ideals in Le Morte d'Arthur, offering important insights for scholars and students of medieval romance, Malory, Arthurian literature, and gender and feminist criticism.

Dorsey Armstrong is assistant professor of medieval literature at Purdue University. Her work has most recently appeared in *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* and *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Honor of Maureen Fries*.

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