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Sir Dinadan: The Anti-Chivalric Knight of the Round Table

Submitted to the Faculty of the

University of Wales in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Celtic Studies

By Danielle Lesin

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the character of Sir Dinadan, rooted in Arthurian literature and Celtic traditions, focusing on his distinctive role as a satirical critic of the chivalric code. Although not as bright as Lancelot and Gawain, Sir Dinadan is distinguishable by his intelligent and cynical attitude, indicative of scepticism towards ideals. Within this context, by analysing key texts such as *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Malory, the *Prose Tristan*, and others of the corpus of medieval romances to contemporary texts, this paper examines how Dinadan proves judge and satirist at once through the use of humour and satire, which show the contradictions within the Arthurian world. This debate further shows how the source of Arthurian legends, through Celtic mythology, created characters like Dinadan, among others. Situating Dinadan in terms of both Arthurian and Celtic literary traditions enables one to see how this character may represent general social and cultural processes in the High Medieval Age: the dialectical relation between idealism and realism. The study traces the development of Dinadan's character through various versions and traditions representing a changing medieval perception of chivalry, gender roles, and knightly conduct. Thus, the thesis helps to illuminate the intricacies of the Arthurian legends and further cement the importance of characters like Sir Dinadan, who subvert and work against the same ideals they stand for.

Introduction

Background and Context

The legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table have passed through centuries to become an integral part of Western literary tradition. These tales have moved from their medieval sources to be taken as beacons of chivalry, honour, and the epic battle between good and evil. The Arthurian legends, so well attested to in idealised courtly life, are deeply infused with the ancient Celtic traditions from which they partially emerged. As such, myths and legends provide narratives related to heroic deeds and tend to reflect their culture and social norms from where they were produced.

The Arthurian corpus, notably the canon developed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, and Sir Thomas Malory, is a complex mixture of historical fact, folklore, and literary fabrication.¹ It was in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* of about 1136 that the character of Arthur took flight, plucked from amongst local heroes of British folklore into the standing of a renowned king of almost mythic proportions.² Geoffrey brought some elements of features like Arthur's conception at Tintagel, his magician adviser Merlin (Myrddin in Welsh), and his death at the hands of his treacherous nephew Mordred to the telling of the tale.³

But the Arthurian legends did not just emerge *ex nihilo* and then alight on Geoffrey's desk. They emerged from a body of Celtic mythology that took shape centuries before the first medieval romances were created. The earliest references to Arthur are contained in Welsh poetry and chronicles, in which he is depicted as a battle leader who fights to defend Britain against Anglo-Saxon invaders. There are few tales attached to his name here other than stories that belong to the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*, most of which feature Arthur as a king with his warriors around him. Examples of such Welsh tales are *Culhwch and Olwen* and *The Dream of*

¹ Helen Cooper, 'Afterword: Malory's Enigmatic Smiles', in *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Corinne Saunders, and Frank Brandsma (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), pp. 251–64.

² Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966).

³ Janet Jesmok, 'Comedic Preludes to Lancelot's "Unhappy" Life in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana*, 14.4 (2004), pp. 26–44.

Rhonabwy, which represent a more native, folkloric Arthur, deeply connected to the land and the mystical elements of Celtic tradition.

However, in understanding the development of the Arthurian legends, it also becomes paramount to trace Celtic mythology's influence on the creation of the characters, themes, and narratives that would become central to the Arthurian tradition—the Celtic roots twine with the latter chivalric ideals to form the basis of today's legends. Sir Dinadan is found in that rich tapestry of cultural and literary traditions—a character all too often lost behind the more famous knights such as Lancelot or Gawain but whose impact is significant in the questioning and satire of chivalric norms that have, for so long, defined the world of Arthur.

Purpose and Scope

This thesis is an effort to research Sir Dinadan's character in the context of Arthurian literature and Celtic tradition. Even if not that celebrated, his position as the anti-chivalric knight would place him in a peculiar vantage point to examine the divergences between the dictates of chivalry and the realities of knights' lives. Dinadan's wit, cynicism, and frequently mocking attitude towards the chivalric code make him a rather exciting study subject.

The greater emphasis on Sir Dinadan permits a more general claim about the content of the Arthurian legends in that they consider and reject chivalric values so rooted in medieval culture. These are best explored through an investigation of his character as a commentary on the chivalric code; these arguments are made, essentially, through a discussion of such critical texts as Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the *Prose Tristan*, among others in the Arthurian romances. This paper will also try to highlight the relation between Dinadan's character and Celtic tradition, especially that of Welsh literature, to help understand how his role in the Arthurian legends may reflect older, pre-chivalric values.

This research will also go further into the literary and cultural contexts in which the character of Dinadan was developed so that his portrayal would resonate with the medieval audience and what it reveals about the social and moral complexities of the time. In achieving this, the thesis seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the Arthurian legends, making them relevant

even today, especially concerning the characters who usually stand up for those ideals and break them themselves.

The Role of Satire in Medieval Literature

Satire is a powerful tool in medieval literature that strongly amuses and critically comments on the period's social, political, and cultural norms. In Arthurian literature, satire often undermines idealised views regarding knighthood, chivalry, or courtly love, unveiling the inherent contradictions and hypocrisies in such constructions. Characters like Sir Dinadan typify the use of humour and wit to subvert the very ideals that define the Arthurian world.

In this way, showing that Dinadan does not want to live the violent, romantic life typical of chivalry and using his sharpness of speech to comment on courtly love clearly, he exposes some of the absurdity, impracticability, and inherent tension between these ideals. Through his actions and words, Dinadan's satire functions as a form of social criticism, encouraging readers and audiences to question the values often held in such high esteem within medieval romance.

The use of satire in this manner is one way that medieval authors can address tensions between the lofty ideals of chivalry and the more complex and often contradictory realities of human behaviour. With irony, parody, and humour, the social norms of the time are endowed with sophistication and criticism; hence, it is through satire that medieval literature is said to provide a mirror for fun and reflection.

Methodology

This paper will use a multidisciplinary approach in which literary research will be combined with historical context to examine Sir Dinadan's role in the Arthurian tradition and how the larger cultural forces at work during his creation have helped shape his character. The analysis, in turn, is based upon close reading of primary texts: *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory, *Prose Tristan*, and the remaining works of Arthurian prose, with particular reference to the image of Dinadan as a satirical figure. In engaging with these texts within the context of their source

materials, the study demonstrates that Dinadan's wit is used to engage in acts of social criticism, undermining the chivalric standards by which the Arthurian world is defined.

Alongside primary texts, various secondary scholarship offers valuable critical readings related to medieval chivalry, satire, and the cultural value of Arthuriana. Works such as those by Norris J. Lacy in *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* are crucial examples of establishing some basic foundations in understanding the development that Arthurian characters and themes should take.⁴ More in-depth scholarly articles, such as the work by Joyce Coleman and Leslie C. Brook, do a great deal towards elucidating the figure of Dinadan within the narrative, especially regarding him being a vehicle for the humour used as a form of reason criticism. This statement will be particularly well paired with *Coleman's Fooling with Language: Sir Dinadan in Malory's Morte Darthur*, as she considers the functions of Dinadan's satire relating to the chivalric code.⁵

To this end, Dinadan will also be compared with other literary tricksters and tricksters' archetypes of medieval and early modern European traditions. Texts such as Andrew Lynch's study and *Malory's Book of Arms* assist in placing Dinadan within a broader context of Arthurian combat narratives.⁶ At the same time, Raluca L. Radulescu's *The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur* unveils the socio-political environment of Malory's epoch, shedding more light upon the cultural and moral implications of Dinadan's criticism of knighthood.⁷

The broader thematic elements of satire, humour, and moral commentary are further appreciated with the works *Malory's Minor Masculinities* by Matthew Dean O'Donnell⁸ and *Malory's Sense of Humor* by Arthur Wayne Glowka.⁹ In this respect, such works help establish how Dinadan's very particular sense of humour provokes a criticism of martial values and a whole way of looking at masculinity and knightly behaviour in the medieval world.

⁴ Norris J Lacy, ed., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1988).

⁵ Joyce Coleman, *Fooling with Language: Sir Dinadan in Malory's Morte Darthur*, in *Arthurian Literature* 23 (2006), 30–45.

⁶ Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

⁷ Raluca L. Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory's "Morte Darthur"* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2003).

⁸ Matthew Dean O'Donnell, 'Malory's Minor Masculinities' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 2020).

⁹ Arthur Wayne Glowka, 'Malory's Sense of Humor', *Arthurian Interpretations*, 1.1 (1986), 39–46.

The dissertation analyses Sir Dinadan's character through close reading and insight into historical and critical studies. It focuses on how his humour and scepticism work as a lens, criticising the chivalric ideals of the Arthurian world over which they sit. This methodology situates Dinadan among the general literary and cultural contexts of the Middle Ages, pointing out his value as a satirical and social criticism figure.

Prose Tristan

The earliest primary text to portray Sir Dinadan is the *Prose Tristan*, a 13th-century work. In this giant chivalric novel, Dinadan is with Tristan almost constantly but retracts from the more traditional knights of the Round Table. From the beginning, wit and a reluctance to become trapped in violent or foolish contests, together making up much of the chivalric code, characterise the role of Dinadan. It is not simply that he is comic; his humour serves to challenge the ideals that chivalry upholds over the text.

As, for example, his fellow knights are always ready to take up a challenge or regard fighting as the ultimate measure of their honour, Dinadan is usually depicted as an ambivalent character with doubts about the need and ethics of such behaviour. He expresses his doubt through open mockery towards conventions of love and the glorification of martial abilities. In this, Dinadan shows the absurdity of a system where violence and romantic idealisation are more prized than practical and humane values.¹⁰ Even Tristan acknowledges Dinadan's penchant for mockery when he says, 'Ah! Dinadan, handsome knight and friend, this is the termination of our companionship. Now, I'm being more cruelly mocked than you used to mock me. You won't be present at my death, but I know well that you'll lament me often; you'll be distressed and unhappy to hear that I'm dead.'¹¹ This suggests Dinadan's emotional depth and perhaps his disillusionment with the chivalric ideals that lead to such tragic ends.

¹⁰ Luke Sunderland, 'Responsibility to Reputation: The Prose Tristan', in *Old French Narrative Cycles: Heroism between Ethics and Morality, Gallica*, ed. (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 101–37.

¹¹ Renée L. Curtis (ed. and trans.), *The Romance of Tristan: The Thirteenth-Century Old French "Prose Tristan"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 321.

In creating the character Dinadan, *Prose Tristan* subtly and almost furtively attacks the principles of chivalry that have been accepted as the grounding of Arthurian literature by suggesting that there can be alternative views within the exact text.¹²

Tavola Ritonda

Also in the 14th century, the Italian *Tavola Ritonda* presents a slightly different Sir Dinadan again. In this characterisation, Dinadan undergoes a makeover; the *Tavola Ritonda* focuses more on his loyalty and courage—not emphasised as much in the *Prose Tristan*. Though Dinadan is humorous and satirical, the *Tavola Ritonda* gives an insight into a more genuine feeling of loyalty that the knight has towards his friends and how much he can go in terms of sticking by them when it is most difficult.

In this version, Dinadan emerges as a more complex figure who, despite his scepticism, demonstrates an unwavering commitment to chivalric ideals like loyalty and honour. His transformation is vividly seen in his interactions with other knights, where he often becomes the voice of reason, helping them recognise their impulsive and rash actions. Through these moments, the *Tavola Ritonda* portrays Dinadan as a character who, although critical of certain aspects of chivalry, ultimately upholds the core values of friendship and loyalty at the heart of the Arthurian brotherhood.

One crucial scene that showcases this transition is when Dinadan saves a fellow knight unjustly accused of treason. Even though he typically avoids combat, he steps forward to defend his friend, demonstrating that his scepticism toward certain aspects of chivalry does not diminish his commitment to its fundamental ideals. This episode highlights the internal conflict between his role as a critic and his unwavering dedication to loyalty and justice. These traits position him as a more complex figure in the portrayal of chivalry than his fellow knights.

Le Morte d'Arthur

¹² Eleonora Stoppino, "'Lo più disamorato cavaliere del mondo': Dinadano fra *Tristan en prose* e *Tavola ritonda*", *Italica*, 86.2 (2009), pp. 173–93.

In Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), Dinadan is a complex character whose relationships and behaviours provide a satirical counter to the more severe and romantic knights of the Round Table.¹³ Malory's Dinadan displays deep scepticism towards the chivalric code, especially concerning honour, combat, and courtly love. He often reveals the contradictions and folly of these ideals through his use of humour and irony, challenging the status quo.

This scepticism is most evident when Dinadan interacts with other knights, whom he constantly challenges on the worth of their quests. For instance, when other knights eagerly seek to participate in tournaments, Dinadan shows disdain for such pursuits, considering them vain and of little value. In one example, when urged to joust, he declares, '*I will not joust as at this time*,'¹⁴ highlighting his preference for peace over unnecessary conflict. His avoidance of jousting and seeking peace rather than combat separates him from his peers and underscores the absurdity of a society that glorifies violence.

Malory also characterises Dinadan as one of the most important satirists of courtly love. On one occasion, when asked if he is a lover, he responds bluntly, '*Fie on that craft!*'¹⁵ expressing his contempt for the ideals of courtly love. Furthermore, Dinadan composes a mocking ballad targeting King Mark of Cornwall, an evil figure known for his treachery and cowardice. The ballad ridicules King Mark and serves as a jab at the lofty romantic ideals prevailing around the Arthurian court. By satirising such ideals, Dinadan highlights the gap between what the chivalric code prescribes and the imperfect behaviour of its upholders, exposing their hypocrisy.

Despite his cynicism, Dinadan is not portrayed as pessimistic or vindictive; however, Malory's Dinadan is one of the most amiable characters. He is described as '*the merriest knight among fellowship*,'¹⁶ whose wit and wisdom offer a refreshing change from the other grave, idealistic knights. His ability to see through the pretensions of the chivalric code and his genuine concern for his friend's well-being makes him one of the most relatable and human characters in the Arthurian tradition.

¹³ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004)

¹⁴ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 57

¹⁵ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 56

¹⁶ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 42

Modern Adaptations

In more modern adaptations of the Arthurian legends, Sir Dinadan is a character that, at the very least, satirises and subverts traditional chivalric values. Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and Gerald Morris's *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* (2003) are examples. In this latter, Dinadan is the mouthpiece for Twain's trenchant criticism of the nonsensicality of medieval society.¹⁷ Dinadan's wit and scepticism flush the main character with modernity, enabling Twain to consider the idiocies of the chivalric system in a modern light. By narrating the story through Dinadan's eyes, Twain brings into sharp focus that the ideals of knighthood are out of place in the modern world and often silly; he is pitting humour against pathos in a struggle for social commentary.¹⁸

Gerald Morris's *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* works on a different premise: it places Dinadan centrally in a coming-of-age narrative. His wit and scepticism in this novel are critical elements of dealing with the Arthurian world.¹⁹ In those terms, Morris represents Dinadan as a more human and modern hero who upholds the ideals of friendship and loyalty but chafes against the strict demands of chivalry. This course of characterisation emphasises Dinadan's humanity, his ability to see humour in a world that often strikes one as capricious and vicious and over which he can exercise control for meaning.²⁰

Conclusion

Through these diversified portrayals, Sir Dinadan remains a character who always keeps the norms of the chivalric standards of his era on edge. In whatever piece of work Dinadan appears in—be it in the medieval *Prose Tristan* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* or modern takes—what this jester can provide through his antics is a reminder that the ideals of chivalry, while noble, are not above scrutiny. His humour, scepticism, and loyalty make him an incredibly multifaceted character whose place in the legends of King Arthur is great and everlasting.

¹⁷ Ernest Rhys, *The Lay of King Mark* (London: J. M. Dent, 1905).

¹⁸ David F Johnson, "A Grete Bourder and a Passynge Good Knyght": Sir Dinadan: "Gareth with a Twist", in *Arthurian Literature, XXXVII: Malory at 550: Old and New*, ed. by Megan G. Leitch and Kevin S. Whetter (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022), pp. 49–66.

¹⁹ Richard Barber, *Tristan the Courtier* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001).

²⁰ Gerald Morris, *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003).

Chapter 1: The Satirical Knight: Humour as Criticism

Humour in Chivalric Context

In medieval literature, humour was often a powerful tool for social commentary, offering a way to criticise societal norms without overtly challenging the status quo. Chivalric literature, with its strict ideals of honour, valour, and courtly love, provided fertile ground for such criticism s.

Aware of the contradictions within the chivalric code, authors of the time frequently used humour to expose the gap between the ideals knights professed and the reality of their actions.

The use of satire, irony, and parody allowed medieval writers to question the role of chivalry while adhering to contemporary traditions. These techniques provided a way to navigate the complex social hierarchies of medieval society, where direct criticism of the ruling classes was dangerous. Instead, humour enabled authors to highlight the absurdities of chivalric culture in an entertaining and thought-provoking way.

Dinadan's Use of Humour

In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Dinadan distinguishes himself among the other knights through his humour, wit, and skill in battle. In the depiction of Dinadan by Sir Thomas Malory, one comes across a series of instances where humour is given a central place as interludes amidst all the intense seriousness related to the chivalric world. Since his jokes were often strategically employed, the line between jest and manipulative device was thin, for by engaging the other knights in such a unique way, he pushed the story into deeper moral and emotional territory.

The most remarkable example of Dinadan's humour is his interaction with Sir Tristram. Dinadan showcases his quick wit when he deliberately insults Tristram by calling him a coward—something that Tristram had never been recognised as. Dinadan exclaims, "*Fie on thee, coward, thou shamest all knights.*"²¹ The comment, of course, is made not out of malice but rather with the deliberate intent to rouse the fighting spirit within Tristram. Later, it becomes

²¹ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 58

clear that Dinadan knew full well that by provoking Tristram, he would elicit a display of his true valour, thus securing him the prize at the tournament rather than Sir Palomides. Dinadan's humour serves as a spur to action and reveals his excellent understanding of human nature, using knights' conceit and honour to some good end.²²

Leslie C. Brook's study, *A Knight with Reservations: The Role of Dinadan in "Escanor"*, suggests that Dinadan is a necessary counterbalance to the more extreme expressions of chivalry in the Arthurian world. Brook argues that Dinadan's humour is not merely for comic relief but plays a more profound role in questioning the ideals of knighthood. This perspective is echoed by Andrew Lynch, who, in *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur*, notes that Dinadan's reluctance to engage in violence and his critique of courtly love provide a satirical lens through which readers can view the often contradictory ideals of chivalry.²³

In *The Origins of the Arthurian Legend*, Geoffrey Ashe offers a different perspective, suggesting that Dinadan's character represents a form of narrative innovation within the Arthurian tradition. According to Ashe, Dinadan's role as a critic and satirist allows for a more complex and layered narrative, where the ideals of chivalry are not presented as absolute truths but are subject to scrutiny and reinterpretation. This critical approach to Dinadan highlights his importance as a humorous figure and a crucial player in the ongoing evolution of Arthurian literature.²⁴

Moreover, Raluca L. Radulescu, in *The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*, situates Dinadan within the social and political context of Malory's time, arguing that his scepticism towards chivalry reflects broader societal concerns about the relevance and sustainability of the chivalric code. Radulescu's analysis suggests that Dinadan's character can be seen as a vehicle for exploring the tensions between traditional values and emerging modern sensibilities in late medieval England.²⁵

²² Scandrett, Julia Lathrop, 'The Character of Dinadan in Malory's "Morte Darthur" and His Sources' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1978).

²³ Leslie C. Brook, 'A Knight with Reservations: The Role of Dinadan in "Escanor"', *Studi Francesi*, 49.147 (2005), 477–85

²⁴ Geoffrey Ashe, 'The Origins of the Arthurian Legend', *Arthuriana*, 5.3 (1995), 1–24.

²⁵ Raluca L. Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory's "Morte Darthur"* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2003).

Dinadan's jests also diffuse tension where violence and hostility seem inevitable. Thus, when faced with the request of La Beale Isoud to fight three knights for her love, Dinadan mixes gallantry with comedic defiance. He praises her beauty, humorously stating that she is fairer than Queen Guenever, but in the same breath, refuses to fight for her and says, "Jesu defend me". The line from his quip that gets Isoud to laugh shows how Dinadan's humour can bring a sense of comedy into profound moments, endearing him further to characters and readers alike.

Dinadan also uses his humour to maintain his courage, especially when he becomes fearful, like when dealing with King Mark. But when King Mark inquired after his identity, Dinadan scared the king in a joke by stating that it was none but Sir Launcelot of Camelot, which would be pretty frightening to a cowardly and treacherous figure like Mark. He even provides a detailed account of Launcelot's shield because he knows Mark is cowardly and treacherous.

The humour here is double-edged: though intended to frighten King Mark, it is also humorous to the reader and other knights privy to Dinadan's deception of the king. Dinadan's pulling of King Mark's strings demonstrates how humour can be used as a weapon, but this time not of 'swords' but 'words', to exercise a more subdued control over things and people.

Dinadan's use of humour, in which he overtly excels, differentiates him from his peers and suggests that it reflects a genuinely idealistic sense of knighthood, which exemplifies grace under pressure. Meanwhile, knights such as Sir Tristram and Sir Launcelot display their strength through physical prowess, while Dinadan consistently displays his power through intellect and wit. By being able to navigate through the dangerous waters of Arthurian politics, relationships, and battles just with his humour, he shows another side of knighthood where as much importance is given to laughing and being witty as to swordsmanship or loyalty. For Dinadan, humour is a commentary on knighthood's ridiculous and contradictory nature. To him, the constant mockery of the ideals and behaviours of other knights made the faults in the chivalric code more evident. In calling Sir Tristram a coward or misleading King Mark about Sir Launcelot, Dinadan exposed the fragility of knightly pride and the ridiculousness that lay in placing so much weight on appearances and honour.

Chapter 2: The Role of Humor in Arthurian Literature

Broader Examination of Humor

Humour in Arthurian literature does not limit itself to the character of Sir Dinadan. However, he is the most transparent model for its use as a tool for social commentary. Other Arthurian characters use humour, but each uses it distinctly, reflecting a broader range of medieval attitudes towards chivalry, heroism, and morality. This understanding of humour helps reveal the complicated and multilateral nature of medieval literature, where laughter and satire work toward criticising the values of the time.

One notable example of humour in Arthurian literature comes from Sir Kay. He is often portrayed as the court jester or the acerbic knight who makes fun of others cruelly. Unlike Dinadan's more sophisticated and reflective humour, Sir Kay's jokes are often direct and biting, targeting other knights' physical appearances, social status, or perceived inadequacies. This type of humour creates tension between the ideals of chivalry—respect and courtesy—and the realities of courtly life, where competition and rivalry could lead to sharp exchanges or public embarrassment.

Though Sir Kay's humour is harsh, it serves a significant purpose in the story: It exposes the vulnerabilities of other knights and bursts the heroic bubble of chivalric gallantry by revealing human weakness behind the armour. For example, in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Kay belittles Sir Gareth by calling him "Beaumains" or "fair hands," mocking his lowly origins. While his humour can be cruel, it also highlights the rigid social structure of the Arthurian world and the struggles of those trying to rise above their station.

In contrast, Merlin's humour is more playful and cryptic. His wit often involves wordplay, riddles, and prophecies that, while humorous, also carry more profound meanings. Merlin's humour complements his wisdom and foresight, revealing the folly or shortsightedness of others. For instance, Merlin sometimes delivers his prophecies in humorous or ironic tones, adding poignancy to his character. The interplay of humour and prophecy in Merlin's character underscores the tension between fate and free will, a recurring theme in Arthurian literature.

The Lady of the Lake also uses humour, especially in more playful versions of the tales. Her humour is flirtatious and whimsical, challenging the severe tone of the chivalric code. The Lady of the Lake's playful interactions with knights, particularly Sir Lancelot, highlight the tensions between the idealised roles of women in chivalric romance and their actual influence in the narrative. Her humour exposes the power dynamics in the Arthurian world, where women, though idealised as objects of courtly love, often wield significant influence over knights.

Comparative Literature

Humour can be compared in Arthurian literature and medieval works, such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. These works use humour as a social criticism, reflecting broader literary trends and cultural contexts.²⁶

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer uses humour to expose hypocrisy, vanity, and moral failings. The tales are filled with bawdy humour, irony, and satire, targeting societal norms and institutions, including the church, marriage, and the feudal system. Chaucer's humour is often more earthy and direct than that found in Arthurian literature, reflecting the diverse social backgrounds of his characters. The Wife of Bath, for example, uses humour to challenge traditional gender roles, much like the Lady of the Lake challenges the idealisation of women in Arthurian romance.²⁷

The humour in *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio runs the gamut from slapstick to sophisticated satire.²⁸ Boccaccio's characters use humour to navigate the complexities of love, power, and social status, much like the knights and ladies of Arthurian legend. However, *The Decameron* focuses more on the follies of everyday life, and its humour often criticises human behaviour's contradictions and absurdities. While it shares common ground with Arthurian literature in its use of humour to criticise societal norms, *The Decameron* approaches these issues from a more secular and humanistic perspective.

²⁶ Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 13; Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 82.

²⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Percy MacKaye, illus. by Walter Appleton Clark (New York: Duffield, 1914).

²⁸ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. by James Macmullen Rigg, vol. 1 (London: Privately printed, n.d.).

Comparing humour in Arthurian literature to that in *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* reveals several key differences and similarities. Chaucer and Boccaccio, like the authors of Arthurian romances, use humour to challenge social norms and expose the gap between idealised behaviour and reality. However, while Arthurian humour is often criticised for its chivalric code and the idealisation of knighthood, the humour in *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* focuses on the everyday lives of ordinary people and the institutions that govern them.

One common feature is the use of humour to question the rigidity of social hierarchies. In all three literary traditions, humour challenges social structures based on class, gender, or knighthood ideals. As Dinadan's humour criticises unrealistic chivalric ideals, characters in *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* question the social and moral codes governing their lives.

Moreover, humour in these works reflects a broader medieval concern with contradictions in human nature. Whether addressing the gap between appearance and reality, personal desires and societal expectations, or idealism and pragmatism, humour helps reconcile these contradictions. In this way, humour in Arthurian literature, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *The Decameron* contribute to a richer understanding of medieval culture by revealing the complexities of human behaviour.

Conclusion

Humour in Arthurian literature is entertainment and a powerful tool for social criticism. Examining humour in characters like Sir Kay, Merlin, and the Lady of the Lake and comparing it to humour in works like *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* shows how medieval authors used humour to explore tensions between ideals and reality, societal norms and individual behaviour. This broader examination enriches our understanding of humour in medieval literature and highlights its significance in engaging with and challenging the cultural values of the time.

Chapter 3: Analysis of Sir Dinadan and Celtic Satirical Traditions

Sir Dinadan is one of the knights from the Arthurian legends who never gain centre stage because they are constantly overshadowed by the more illustrious ones like Lancelot or Gawain. Dinadan does not relate to the other knights, who represent the idea of a knight with all his chivalric courage, loyalty, and martial qualities. He is better known for his brilliance, humour, and irony towards the attributes of knighthood that he questions. This chapter examines how the tradition of presenting Dinadan within different Arthurian texts reflects the much broader tradition of medieval satire and, more specifically, the Celtic satirical traditions. As representative texts of the *Prose Tristan* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, attributed to Sir Thomas Malory, and the Celtic bardic traditions, this chapter shows Dinadan as a vehicle for social criticism in the Arthurian narrative.

Prose Tristan

In *Prose Tristan*, Sir Dinadan stands out again through his wit and irony, offering a sharp contrast to the other knights of the Round Table. Dinadan's humour criticism is the excessive seriousness and idealised chivalry that define the Arthurian world. His character functions as a voice of satire, providing a meta-commentary on the events around him, particularly the more dramatic and romantic aspects of knighthood, such as the rivalry between Tristan and Palamedes over Iseut.

One striking example of Dinadan's humour is when he mocks Tristan after his defeat by Palamedes during the tournament at Château aux Pucelles. After being unhorsed by Palamedes, Tristan is humiliated by the defeat and has to endure Dinadan's jibes, which amplifies his embarrassment. Dinadan's sarcastic remarks at Tristan's expense reflect his disdain for the obsessive focus on chivalric competition and the importance of physical victories. For Dinadan, these qualities, prized by knights like Tristan and Palamedes, are laughable, and his humour deflates their grandiosity. This scene demonstrates how Dinadan uses humour to question the exaggerated ideals of knighthood, offering a more pragmatic and realistic view of the world.

Another key instance of Dinadan's humour is the evening before the tournament's second day when Gaheriet reminds Tristan of Dinadan's sarcastic comments from the previous night. These jests motivate Tristan to take the game more seriously and perform better. Dinadan's humour here not only mocks the inflated egos of the knights but also functions as a means of spurring them into action, revealing how even witty banter can play a constructive role within the chivalric world.

In the broader narrative of *Prose Tristan*, Dinadan often pokes fun at the seriousness with which knights view their martial and romantic endeavours. His humour mainly targets the rivalry between Tristan and Palamedes, as both are vying for Iseut's attention. Dinadan's irony during moments like Tristan's disguised visit to Palamedes' tent, where he offers mock sympathy to Palamedes' complaints, further demonstrates his ability to expose the absurdity of the rivalry. By encouraging Palamedes to take revenge on Tristan, Dinadan slyly fuels the competition, all while recognising its futility. His humour emphasises how these knights are trapped in cycles of jealousy and conflict, driven by ego and pride, while he remains somewhat detached from these emotions.

Le Morte d'Arthur

One of the most remarkable examples of Dinadan's humour is his interaction with Sir Tristram, which echoes episodes from earlier sources like the *Prose Tristan*. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Dinadan showcases his quick wit when he deliberately teases Tristram by calling him a coward—something that Tristram had never been recognised as. Dinadan says, "*Thou, Sir Tristram, farest all this day as though thou hadst been asleep, and therefore I call thee coward.*"²⁹ This comment is not made out of malice but is intended to spur Tristram into demonstrating his martial prowess. Dinadan's intent becomes clear later when it is evident that he

²⁹ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 72, pp. 487

knew by provoking Tristram, he would elicit a display of his true valour, potentially securing him the prize at the tournament rather than Sir Palomides. By linking this scene to its origins in the *Prose Tristan*, where Dinadan similarly mocks Tristram to motivate him, we see how Malory drew upon earlier texts to craft his narrative. Dinadan's humour thus serves as a spur to action and reveals his excellent understanding of human nature, using knights' conceit and honour to some good end.

Dinadan's humour is also evident when he encounters King Mark, whom he refers to as the "*most horrible coward that ever bestrode horse.*"³⁰ Here, Dinadan's sharp wit functions as a tool to expose King Mark's lack of courage. When Dinadan later tricks King Mark into believing that Sir Launcelot is pursuing him, his terror and flight are treated humorously. Dinadan takes delight in frightening the cowardly king by falsely identifying Dagonet, Arthur's fool, as the mighty Launcelot. This scene, where King Mark runs in fear through the forest pursued by Dagonet, creates a comic spectacle that contrasts sharply with the otherwise severe events in the narrative. It exemplifies how Dinadan's humour often serves to mock characters who fail to live up to the chivalric ideals they claim to represent.

Another example of Dinadan's sardonic humour comes when La Beale Isoud asks him to fight for her honour. In response, Dinadan praises her beauty but flatly refuses to fight, saying, "*I will not fight for you with three knights Jesu defend me.*"³¹ This moment underscores Dinadan's rejection of the typical knightly behaviour that requires knights to take up arms in the name of a lady. Sir Dinadan values practicality and self-preservation, qualities that set him apart from the other knights, who are often eager to prove their valour, even to the point of recklessness. His humorous refusal, which makes Isoud laugh, challenges the expectations placed on knights and exposes the absurdity of some of the chivalric traditions.

³⁰ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 12, pp. 386

³¹ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 56, pp. 449

Welsh and Breton Influences

Although no early Welsh or Breton texts directly feature Dinadan, the character shares several characteristics with figures from both traditions. The Welsh literary tradition, particularly the *Mabinogion*, includes figures who act out of cleverness and guile, such as Gwydion and Taliesin, who frequently serve as agents of satire upon the social norms of their time, not entirely unlike Dinadan. For instance, in the *Mabinogi of Math*, Gwydion is a trickster who outmanoeuvres enemies with deception and intelligence, highlighting the folly of more straightforwardly heroic figures. As a poet and bard, Taliesin wields his sharp wit to criticise authority, embodying the role of the satirist in the court. Dinadan's criticism of the ideals of knighthood echoes these Celtic figures, suggesting an underlying continuity between Arthurian satire and older Celtic traditions.³²

Further connections between Dinadan's humorous critique and Breton literary tradition are made by the works of Marie de France, in particular her *Lais*. Many of Marie's *Lais*, such as *Lanval*, represent strands of satire and wittily commented remarks on courtly life.³³ In *Lanval*, a telling of the finding of a fairy mistress by one of King Arthur's knights gives way to a passage that subtly ridicules the expectations of knighthood and courtly love, similar to Dinadan's criticisms. As Judy Shoaf says in her translation of the *Lais*, Marie's wit lies in her "teasing rationality,"³⁴ which is well in tune with Dinadan's way of undermining chivalry. In her octosyllabic couplet verse form, with simple language, she stresses content rather than ornate style, through which her satire can speak. Just so does Dinadan, with his plain speech and mirth, display the folly that undercuts the Arthurian court.

Dinadan's criticism of chivalric ideals can also be compared to the challenges to authority and norms found in stories like *Culhwch and Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*.³⁵ In these stories, characters often navigate complex social and supernatural landscapes using wit and cunning,

³² *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

³³ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Judy Shoaf (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1991–96) https://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/marie_lais/ [accessed 26 September 2024].

³⁴ Judy Shoaf, 'Translator's Note', in Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Judy Shoaf (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1991–96) https://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/marie_lais/ [accessed 26 September 2024].

³⁵ Richard Barber, *Tristan and Iseult* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001).

preferring intellectual dominance over physical power, much like Dinadan.³⁶ Furthermore, the depiction of tournaments in medieval literature, such as those in the *Prose de Tristan*, underscores the competitive spirit and chivalric values of the time.³⁷

Carrying on the combined views of the Welsh Mabinogion and the Breton Lais from Marie de France, this provides a tradition of wit and satire against belittling societal norms endemic within Celtic literature.³⁸ Dinadan is but a mirror of that tradition, as he holds within him the same satirical and rational qualities found in early works. The fact that Marie's Lais was written in the same Anglo-Norman dialect and constituted part of the same general literary milieu that created so many Arthurian romances argues that these themes were part of a larger cultural conversation. Dinadan's character can thus be seen as a continuation of this satirical thread, linking him to both the Welsh and Breton literary heritages and reinforcing his role as a commentator on the chivalric ideals of his time.

Welsh Bardic Tradition

The cultural backdrop explaining Dinadan's character lies in the Welsh bardic tradition, emphasising satire and social criticism. In medieval Wales, bards were poets and social commentators. Their satire is often couched in the complex poetic form of cynghanedd, which is criticism of the powerful, using wit and poetic skill to expose societal hypocrisy. Dinadan's mockery of chivalric ideals can be seen as an extension of this bardic tradition. His refusal to engage in jousting or courtly love and his ridicule of both mirror the use of satire to question society's moral and ethical standards. By placing Dinadan within this Celtic framework, we may understand him as a jester and a moral commentator within the Arthurian court.

Irish Bardic Tradition

The Irish bardic tradition, like the Welsh, was deeply rooted in satire, often as a form of social and moral criticism. Irish bards, or filid, held a respected position within society, with their satirical verses capable of making or breaking reputations. Satire in Irish culture was a literary

³⁶ Huw Grange, 'The Versions of the *Prose Tristan*, with Particular Reference to MS 164 of the Fondation Martin Bodmer', *Medioevo Romanzo*, 39.11 (2015), pp. 321–49.

³⁷ P. E. Bennett, *The Tournaments in the Prose de Tristan*, *Medium Ævum*, 44.2 (1975), 279–91.

³⁸ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Judy Shoaf.

form and a powerful tool for upholding social norms and ensuring that leaders acted justly. Dinadan's humour, particularly his critical stance toward the chivalric code, reflects this Irish tradition of using satire for moral instruction. His character embodies the field's role within the Arthurian context, using humour to highlight the inconsistencies and flaws in the behaviour of his fellow knights. This alignment with Celtic satire suggests that Dinadan's character was shaped by these older traditions, which valued wit and intelligence as much as martial prowess.

Satire as Social Commentary in Celtic Society

Satire in Celtic society served a dual purpose: it entertained and educated. Bards and poets wielded satire as moral instruction, using humour to correct behaviour and reinforce societal values. In this context, Dinadan's role in the Arthurian legends becomes clearer. His humour is not mere entertainment but a form of social commentary that reflects the values of a society that prized wisdom, cleverness, and the ability to criticise authority. When Dinadan mocks the ideals of courtly love, he not only provides comic relief but also questions the unrealistic and often destructive nature of these ideals. In Celtic culture, where the line between heroism and folly was usually thin, such satire would have been considered a valuable form of moral instruction.

In his seminal works *The Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (1927) and *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (1963), Roger Sherman Loomis emphasises the significant influence of Celtic mythology on the development of the Arthurian legends. While Loomis does not directly address Sir Dinadan's humour in his work, his broader discussion of the integration of Celtic motifs provides a valuable framework for understanding the character's subversive wit. Loomis argues that many elements in the Arthurian tradition, including themes of challenge and subversion, are rooted in Celtic myth. Characters in Celtic stories often use wit, trickery, and satire to undermine authority and question societal norms. While Dinadan's humour may not be explicitly linked to these traditions in Loomis' work, his role as a critic of chivalric values could be seen as an extension of this Celtic influence. Dinadan's irony and lighthearted mockery of knightly ideals might reflect a continuation of the Celtic tradition of using satire to reveal the flaws in hierarchical structures, even if Loomis does not make this specific connection.³⁹

³⁹ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1927); Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963).

Synthesis: Dinadan as a Celtic-Arthurian Figure

This comparative analysis clarifies that Sir Dinadan's character bridges the Celtic and Arthurian traditions. His humour, scepticism toward the chivalric code, and role as a social critic align closely with the Celtic tradition of satire, embodied by the Welsh and Irish bards. Dinadan's portrayal in the *Prose Tristan* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* reflects these influences, positioning him as a unique figure within the Arthurian legend who challenges the ideals that define his world.

Dinadan continues the Celtic satirical tradition within the framework of medieval romance. His humour is not just a narrative device but reflects a more profound cultural criticism rooted in the bardic practices of Wales and Ireland. By recognising these influences, we gain a fuller understanding of Dinadan's role in the Arthurian narrative and how Celtic cultural elements were integrated into medieval literary tradition.

Conclusion

Sir Dinadan's character, as portrayed in the Arthurian legends, is deeply rooted in the Celtic satirical tradition. His wit and humour, far from mere comic relief, serve as a powerful tool for social criticism, challenging the chivalric ideals of his time. By examining Dinadan's portrayal across different texts and traditions and situating him within the broader context of Celtic literature, this chapter has shown how his character embodies the continuity of Celtic cultural influences within the medieval Arthurian corpus.

Dinadan is a testament to satire's enduring power as a form of social commentary in Celtic societies and the Arthurian world. His character reminds us that humour and wit, when used skillfully, can offer profound insights into the values and contradictions of any society. Dinadan remains a crucial figure for understanding the intersection of Celtic and medieval literary traditions and how these cultures used satire to navigate their complexities.

Chapter 4: Welsh Arthurian Texts and Dinadan

Sir Dinadan is a unique figure within the Arthurian legends, known for his wit, humour, and scepticism. While much of his portrayal is shaped by later medieval literature's chivalric and courtly traditions, his character also draws significantly on older Celtic influences, particularly those found in Welsh Arthurian texts. This chapter explores how Welsh texts such as the Mabinogion's *Culhwch and Olwen* may have influenced the development of characters like Dinadan in later medieval literature. Additionally, it examines the character of Kay (Cei) in Welsh tradition, who shares certain traits with Dinadan and discusses broader Celtic narrative structures that may have shaped the use of humour and satire in Arthurian tales.

Welsh Arthurian Characters in the Mabinogion and Culhwch and Olwen

Humour in *Culhwch and Olwen* often arises through exaggeration, absurdity, and playful interactions between characters. This reflects the Celtic narrative style that values wit and satire as tools for social commentary. This use of humour is vital to understanding how Celtic satire might have influenced later characters like Sir Dinadan in Arthurian tradition.

One example of humour appears when Culhwch meets Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr, Arthur's porter, at the gate. Glewlwyd boasts exaggeratedly, claiming he has served in numerous exotic places and battles. He lists them in a long, unbelievable sequence that culminates in the assertion that he has never seen anyone as impressive as Culhwch. This hyperbolic self-aggrandisement, mixed with the absurdity of the claim, injects humour into the scene. Similarly, Culhwch's exaggerated threats—promising to yell so loudly that pregnant women would miscarry—highlight the humorous tone through outlandish boasts. This kind of satire serves to mock the characters' pretensions and the societal norms that value such grandiosity.

Another instance of humour appears in Cei's interaction with Custennin's wife. When Cei places a stake between her arms as she comes to embrace them, her strength is such that she squeezes the stake until it twists. Cei's deadpan remark, "*Had you squeezed me like that, it would be*

useless for anyone else ever to make love to me",⁴⁰ is a wry and humorous comment on her overwhelming strength, blending humour with the magical and exaggerated qualities of the characters. This interplay of humour and exaggeration challenges traditional notions of heroism and strength, a theme that resonates with Dinadan's satirical view of knighthood.

The comedic exaggeration continues when the group seeks out Mabon, son of Modron, who is visiting increasingly ancient and wise animals for guidance. Each creature, from the Blackbird of Cilgwri to the Eagle of Gwernabwy, humorously describes the vast passage of time through fantastical means—for example, the blackbird wearing down an anvil with its beak—but none offer any helpful information. These exaggerated lifespans and the sheer absurdity of the creatures' long-winded speeches create humour through their over-the-top qualities. This use of absurdity to highlight the futility of certain quests parallels Dinadan's mocking of the overblown ideals of chivalry.

These instances of exaggeration, wit, and absurdity are critical elements of *Culhwch and Olwen's* humour and are reflected in later Arthurian characters like Dinadan. His satirical view of knighthood and his penchant for mocking the exaggerated ideals of chivalry share much with the humour found in Welsh texts. The exaggeration of prowess, the absurdity of situations, and the playful mockery of severe themes in *Culhwch and Olwen* lay the foundation for Dinadan's comedic commentary in later texts like *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

The Character of Kay (Cei) in Welsh Tradition

Kay (Cei in Welsh tradition) and Dinadan occupy different narrative spaces in the Arthurian legends. Yet, they share several traits that bind them together as unconventional knights who use humour, wit, and satire to challenge the more severe and idealised versions of chivalry seen in other characters. Both figures are known for their sharp tongues, biting sarcasm, and reluctance to embrace the overly romanticised ideals of knighthood, offering a refreshing counterpoint to the solemnity of figures like Launcelot and Tristram.

⁴⁰ *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 234.

In Welsh tradition, Kay is a figure of immense strength and supernatural abilities. Still, he is notorious for his sharp wit and tendency to insult others, even those closest to him. In *Culhwch and Olwen*, Kay frequently belittles the abilities of his fellow knights, often engaging in exaggerated boasts about his prowess. His tendency to poke fun at the impossibilities of specific tasks—such as uprooting forests or catching mythical creatures—aligns closely with Dinadan’s scepticism about the chivalric world in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Both characters use humour to expose their respective societies' absurdities and question the expectations placed upon knights.

Similarly, Dinadan, much like Kay, refuses to conform to the ideal of the romantic knight. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Dinadan’s scepticism about the value of jousting and courtly combat reflects Kay’s cynical outlook. When asked to fight for love or honour, Dinadan often mocks the expectation, just as Kay would laugh at the outlandish quests that Arthur assigns to his knights in Welsh texts. In both cases, humour is used to distance themselves from the gravity of knightly duty, offering a more human and critical perspective on the lives of warriors.

Where Sir Kay’s humour often turns cruel, especially in Welsh tales where his mocking insults frequently offend others, Dinadan’s humour is more lighthearted and self-deprecating. For instance, Kay mocks Beaumains (Gareth), dismissing him as a mere kitchen boy, saying, “*How liketh you, my boy of the kitchen?*” despite Gareth’s evident physical prowess when competing in games of strength. Kay’s belittling nature is apparent when he adds, “*Upon pain of my life he was fostered up in some abbey,*” poking fun at Beaumains' humble appearance and seeming lack of knighthood⁴¹. Kay's sharp, scornful words were more aimed at tearing others down, as seen in his frequent mockery of knights like Beaumains and Brewnor, which even Lancelot and Gawain found excessive.

In contrast, Dinadan uses his humour to defuse tension, often making fun of his reluctance to fight. He jokes about himself, saying, “*I will not fight for you with three knights, Jesu defend me,*” when La Beale Isoud asks him to champion her in a battle⁴². Dinadan’s refusal, which makes Isoud laugh, highlights his preference for wit over violence. His humour creates camaraderie and criticises the expectations placed on knights. While Kay seeks to undermine

⁴¹ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 2, pp. 187

⁴² Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 56, pp. 449

others, Dinadan's humour reflects on the absurdity of the chivalric code while maintaining bonds with those around him. His reluctance to engage in battle unless necessary sets him apart from Kay's bold confidence, illustrating the evolution of the satirical knight from one who rebukes others to one who uses humour to foster relationships and promote reflection on societal norms.

In essence, Kay and Dinadan are two sides of the same coin—both use wit and humour to subvert the ideals of knighthood. While Kay's biting sarcasm can border on hostility, Dinadan's playful mockery bridges humour and humility. Both characters serve as vital foils to the more earnest knights around them, reminding readers that not all heroes are without cynicism and that not all battles are fought with swords alone. Their shared traits reflect the influence of Celtic satirical traditions, where humour serves as a means of social commentary and analysis.

Celtic Narrative Structures and the Use of Humour in Arthurian Tales

The episodic structure of *Culhwch and Olwen*, in which heroes must complete a series of seemingly impossible tasks, creates ample opportunities for humour by presenting absurd challenges that require more than physical strength to overcome. This structure lends itself to moments of wit and cleverness as the heroes navigate these trials unexpectedly, which criticises the traditional notions of heroism. The emphasis on intelligence and resourcefulness over brute force reflects a Celtic narrative style that values wit and satire as essential storytelling components.

For example, in *Culhwch and Olwen*, one of the impossible tasks involves obtaining the comb and shears between the ears of the monstrous boar, Twrch Trwyth. While the task initially appears as a straightforward test of brute strength, it ultimately requires a combination of guile, teamwork, and negotiation, as the heroes have to track and outsmart the boar cleverly. This scenario mirrors the kind of clever manoeuvring that Dinadan employs in his adventures, where he often uses wit to resolve conflicts or expose the folly of others.

The humour found in both *Culhwch and Olwen* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* is akin to the use of laughter as a strategic tool in real historical contexts for the negotiation of power, in particular for Henry II's reign. Bishops Roger of Worcester and Hugh of Lincoln recorded, for example, that humour was an essential means of deflating the king's anger, whereby court jesters and well-placed jokes could mollify Henry's notorious temper and elicit the political favour of those who utilised it effectively.⁴³ This use of humour to manage power is replicated in Sir Dinadan's role within Arthurian literature. Just as the jesters deployed their humour to navigate the treacherous political landscape of Henry's court, Dinadan also uses his razor-sharp wit to deflate the pretensions of knighthood. An example that most clearly reveals this can be found in his lampooning of the love-sick knights at court, using the excesses of courtly love not only to demonstrate its intrinsic inanity but to undermine the rigidity of their chivalric codes subtly. Once, for instance, he famously mocks Sir Tristram over the latter's romantic involvements, using humour to expose the chasm that lies between the knightly ideal of love and the reality of his situation.⁴⁴

Moreover, Dinadan's humour agrees with a general cultural trend in the 12th and 13th centuries, as Horowitz and Sophia Menache claim in their work *L'humour en Chaire*. In this same period, mendicant preachers began to use humour as well in the service of moral pedagogy, crafting sermons appropriate to the growing urban and literate population.⁴⁵ Where preachers used humour to render their lessons understandable and relevant, Dinadan deploys his wit against the prevailing heroic paradigm of muscular aggression and honour, offering wit and intelligence instead as modes of heroism. His aversion to useless fighting and the use of his wit for non-violent solutions to any problem show a critique of the warrior ethos that placed brute strength above everything else. Humour, in both historical and literary contexts, serves to entertain and comment subtly on and subvert the very systems of power within which it operates.

⁴³ Sophie Menache, *Laughter and Power in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 133.

⁴⁴ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapters 24-27

⁴⁵ Horowitz and Sophia Menache, *L'humour en chaire: Le rire dans la prédication au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 45-46.

Another notable example is the encounter with the Very Black Witch, whose defeat is necessary for the heroes to obtain the blood to soften Ysbaddaden's beard. The task seems to demand pure might, yet Arthur's clever use of Carnwennan, his enchanted knife, splits the witch in two and secures victory. While highlighting heroic action, these episodes often resolve in ways that undermine the glorification of physical combat, showing that resourcefulness and intelligence are just as crucial in overcoming obstacles. This emphasis on clever solutions over sheer strength aligns with Dinadan's approach to challenges, where he often avoids unnecessary combat and instead relies on his wit.

These humorous, episodic structures challenge traditional heroic ideals in *Culhwch and Olwen* and Arthurian romances like *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The clever solutions and witty exchanges suggest intelligence and humour are as valuable as strength in a hero's journey. By incorporating humour into these episodes, the stories subtly criticise the expectations placed on knights and heroes, presenting a more nuanced view of what it means to be genuinely "heroic." This narrative approach reflects the Celtic tradition of using satire and humour as tools for social commentary, which influences the portrayal of characters like Dinadan.

Dinadan's character embodies this narrative style, as his adventures often involve humorous twists and satirical observations that challenge the conventional ideals of knighthood. His reluctance to engage in senseless combat, his mockery of the chivalric code, and his preference for cleverness over brute force all reflect the influence of Celtic narrative structures. Drawing on these traditions, Arthurian tales incorporate a layer of social commentary that adds depth to the stories and characters.

Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis: Dinadan and Other Trickster Figures

The Trickster Archetype

The trickster archetype is a pervasive motif across various mythologies and folklore, embodying characters who challenge societal norms, defy authority, and employ wit and cunning to navigate complex social landscapes.⁴⁶ These figures often embody moral ambiguity, blending creative and destructive tendencies, blurring the lines between heroism and villainy, wisdom and folly.

Tricksters frequently serve as agents of change, fostering transformation within their narratives. In Arthurian literature, Sir Dinadan exemplifies this archetype, standing out among the Knights of the Round Table through his satirical wit and scepticism towards chivalric ideals.⁴⁷ This chapter explores the trickster archetype through the lens of Sir Dinadan, comparing him to other notable trickster figures from Celtic, Norse, African, European, and Sicilian traditions, thereby illuminating the cultural and literary influences that shape his character.

Comparisons with Celtic Trickster Figures and Heroes

Sir Dinadan's role in Arthurian literature is reminiscent of various Celtic trickster figures and heroes whose humour, wit, and scepticism align with themes prevalent in Celtic mythology.⁴⁸ By examining characters such as Puck (Pwca), Manannán mac Lir, the deity Lugh, and the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill, we can discern the Celtic influences that underpin Dinadan's unique role in Arthurian narratives.

Puck, known in Welsh folklore as Pwca, is a quintessential trickster figure characterised by his playful yet subversive nature.⁴⁹ Like Dinadan, Puck employs humour and deception to challenge authority and disrupt the status quo. Puck's ability to shape-shift and mislead others in the woods mirrors Dinadan's role in guiding or misleading fellow knights through the labyrinthine chivalric ideals, often exposing their vulnerabilities and misguided priorities.⁵⁰ Manannán mac Lir, the Irish sea god, embodies similar traits. As a wise and cunning deity, Manannán uses his wit and

⁴⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 253.

⁴⁷ Joyce Coleman, "Fooling with Language: Sir Dinadan in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," in *Arthurian Literature* 23 (2006), 30–45.

⁴⁸ Richard Barber, *Tristan and Iseult* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 112.

⁴⁹ Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95.

⁵⁰ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1927), 78.

magical prowess to outmanoeuvre both gods and mortals.⁵¹ His role as a protector and mentor, providing guidance and magical tools to heroes, parallels Dinadan's function as a moral compass within Arthurian literature.⁵² This blend of humour and wisdom, manifesting through trickery, foreshadows Dinadan's satirical insights into the chivalric world.⁵³

Furthermore, deities like Lugh and heroes such as Fionn mac Cumhaill highlight the intersection of intelligence, humour, and strategic thinking in Celtic mythology.⁵⁴ Lugh, associated with the sun and light, is celebrated for his mastery of various arts and his ability to outsmart adversaries through wit and skill.⁵⁵ Similarly, Fionn mac Cumhaill, leader of the Fianna, exemplifies a balance of martial prowess, wisdom, and humour. Fionn's legendary "thumb of knowledge," which grants him profound wisdom, symbolises Dinadan's keen perception of the chivalric code's flaws—the ability to see beyond appearances to underlying truths.⁵⁶ With their blend of strength and cunning, these Celtic figures underscore the cultural appreciation for intellect and satire as tools for social critique.⁵⁷

Comparisons with Norse and African Tricksters

Moving beyond Celtic traditions, the trickster archetype is also prominent in Norse and African folklore, where figures such as Loki and Anansi embody characteristics that resonate with Sir Dinadan's role in Arthurian legends. Loki, a central figure in Norse mythology, is known for his shape-shifting abilities and chaotic tendencies.⁵⁸ Unlike Dinadan, whose trickery serves as a benign critique of chivalric ideals, Loki's actions often lead to comedic and disastrous consequences, such as the death of Balder, ultimately contributing to Ragnarök, the Norse apocalypse.⁵⁹ Despite these destructive tendencies, Loki also contributes creatively, crafting artifacts like Thor's hammer Mjölnir.⁶⁰ This dual role of destroyer and creator highlights the

⁵¹ Norris J Lacy, ed., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1988).

⁵² Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory's Morte Darthur** (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 142.

⁵³ Leslie C. Brook, "A Knight with Reservations: The Role of Dinadan in *Escanor*," *Studi Francesi* 49, no. 147 (2005), 477–85.

⁵⁴ Alan B. Garner, *Myth and Magic in the Mabinogion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 198.

⁵⁵ Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 215.

⁵⁶ John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 153.

⁵⁷ Wendy Doniger, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Folklore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 89.

⁵⁸ Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jesse Byock (Reykjavik: Penguin Classics, 2005), 322.

⁵⁹ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (London: Penguin, 1964), 178.

⁶⁰ Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda: Volume I* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), 112.

tension between order and chaos intrinsic to the trickster archetype, a complexity that Dinadan mirrors in his balance of satire and loyalty. Anansi, a trickster figure from West African folklore, particularly among the Akan people, shares significant parallels with Dinadan.⁶¹ Anansi, depicted as a spider, often outsmarts his adversaries through cunning rather than strength, emphasising intelligence over physical power. While Anansi's tricks can be deceitful and self-serving, his cleverness endears him to audiences, positioning him as a cultural hero and a symbol of knowledge.⁶² Dinadan, similarly, uses his intellect to navigate and critique the Arthurian world, though his motives are more aligned with social commentary than personal gain.⁶³ Both characters demonstrate how the trickster archetype can serve as a vehicle for revealing societal hypocrisies and imparting moral lessons through wit and ingenuity.⁶⁴

Comparisons with European and Sicilian Tricksters

Reynard, the Fox from medieval European folklore and Giufà from Sicilian tradition, further exemplify the trickster archetype's versatility and cultural significance. Reynard the Fox is renowned for his cunning and manipulation, often outsmarting more powerful opponents to survive.⁶⁵ His tales are imbued with satirical commentary on social and political structures, mirroring Dinadan's critique of Arthurian chivalry.⁶⁶ However, while Reynard is primarily driven by self-interest, Dinadan's actions focus more on exposing and questioning the chivalric values underpinning Arthurian society.⁶⁷ This distinction underscores Dinadan's role as a moral critic rather than a self-serving trickster.⁶⁸

Giufà, a beloved trickster figure in Sicilian folklore, epitomises the "fool" archetype, often outsmarting others through seemingly foolish actions that conceal his true cunning. His stories, rich in humour and subtle social critique, align closely with Dinadan's satirical approach to

⁶¹ Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 67.

⁶² Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 92.

⁶³ Gerald Morris, *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 89.

⁶⁴ Raluca L. Radulescu, 'The Gentry Context for Malory's *Morte Darthur*' (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 45.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey Ashe, *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1997), 202.

⁶⁶ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 320.

⁶⁷ James MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 190.

⁶⁸ Linda Dég, *Folktales and Society: Story-telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 117.

knighthood.⁶⁹ Giufà's harmless antics and humorous defiance of authority reflect Dinadan's use of wit to expose the absurdities of the chivalric code without causing significant harm or chaos. This similarity highlights how the trickster archetype can be adapted across different cultural contexts to serve as a tool for social commentary and critique.⁷⁰

How Dinadan Fits into the Trickster Archetype

Sir Dinadan's portrayal within the Arthurian tradition aligns seamlessly with the broader trickster archetype. His use of wit, humour, and scepticism to challenge established norms mirrors the fundamental traits of tricksters across various cultures.⁷¹ Dinadan's reluctance to engage in unnecessary combat and his satirical criticism of courtly love position him as a figure who operates outside the conventional norms of Arthurian knighthood. Unlike tricksters like Loki, whose actions often lead to significant disruption and destruction, Dinadan's trickery serves a more benign purpose, focusing on critiquing the societal values upheld by his peers.⁷² This measured approach allows Dinadan to maintain his role as a moral commentator without descending into the moral ambiguity often associated with other trickster figures.

A comparative analysis with other tricksters such as Loki, Anansi, Reynard the Fox, and Giufà reveals vital insights into Dinadan's character. Firstly, like these figures, Dinadan uses his intellect to navigate and critique an unjust or hypocritical societal framework.⁷³ However, while Loki's actions can lead to catastrophic outcomes, Dinadan's trickery is oriented towards social criticism and the exposure of chivalric contradictions. Additionally, Dinadan's humour is more aligned with the lightheartedness of Giufà, whose antics are designed to amuse and subtly undermine social norms, rather than the often harmful deceit of Loki or Reynard. This alignment emphasises Dinadan's role as a benign trickster who employs wit to foster reflection and critique within the Arthurian narrative.

Ultimately, Dinadan's placement within the Arthurian tradition as a trickster figure underscores the enduring appeal of characters who challenge the status quo through intelligence and humour.

⁶⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*

⁷⁰ Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 99.

⁷¹ James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1915), 245.

⁷² Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1921), 156.

⁷³ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 210.

His ability to critique and subvert chivalric ideals through satire and wit situates him within a long-standing tradition of tricksters who use their cunning to question and reshape the world around them.⁷⁴ By embodying the trickster archetype, Dinadan enriches the Arthurian legends, providing a multifaceted perspective highlighting the complexities and contradictions of medieval chivalric culture.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 155.

⁷⁵ Bernard Cornwell, *The Winter King* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1995), 124.

Chapter 6: Emotional Complexity and Satirical Commentary

Emotions in Arthurian Literature

With its intricate tapestry of chivalric ideals, courtly love, and heroic exploits, Arthurian literature places emotions at the heart of its narratives. Far from being passive undercurrents, emotions actively shape the actions and fates of the characters, reflecting the values and expectations of medieval society. Ideals such as restraint, honour, and the sacrifice of personal desires for the collective good are often foregrounded, but a closer look reveals a more complex emotional landscape. Characters like Sir Dinadan, who stands apart from the archetypal knight, allow for a deeper exploration of this complexity. In contrast to the stoic, honour-bound figures, Dinadan injects a sardonic humour and a sharp criticism of the ideals he is supposed to embody. His emotional range—balancing wit, scepticism, and moments of reflective melancholy—offers a fresh perspective on knightly virtue, challenging the rigid codes of conduct and revealing a more human, flawed, and relatable side to Arthurian heroes. Through Dinadan, the tension between societal expectations and individual emotional expression becomes a compelling focal point, underscoring the nuanced interplay between ideals and reality in these legendary tales.

Dinadan's Emotional Depth

Sir Dinadan's emotional depth is one of the most notable aspects of his character. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who are often portrayed as paragons of stoic chivalry, Dinadan displays a range of emotions that make him a more relatable and human figure. Though frequently used to mock the absurdities of chivalric culture, his wit and humour also serve as a defence mechanism to mask more profound disillusionment and frustration with the world around him. This emotional complexity is evident in key scenes in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and other Arthurian texts, where Dinadan's actions and words reveal a character keenly aware of the contradictions and hypocrisies of the chivalric code.

In her study of Dinadan in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Joyce Coleman argues that Dinadan's humour serves as a "rational counterbalance" to the more extreme ideals of his fellow knights. Coleman suggests Dinadan's satire is a strategy to expose the flaws within the chivalric code.⁷⁶ This perspective highlights Dinadan's role as a humorous figure and a crucial player in challenging and refining the ideals that define knighthood.

Elizabeth Edwards' approach to Malory's *Morte Darthur* centres around the symbolic and structural aspects of the text, particularly how Malory reconfigures traditional Arthurian material to reflect both the sources and his historical moment. Her work explores the inherent contradictions and shifts within the chivalric world, especially around concepts like honour, knighthood, and narrative structure. While she doesn't focus on humour, her analysis of the symbolic economy and the shifting values within the text can be applied to Dinadan's humour.

When viewed through Edwards' narrative and symbolic structuring lens, Dinadan's humour can be seen as challenging the rigid framework of chivalric honour that pervades *Morte Darthur*. His ironic detachment and mockery of the extreme ideals of knighthood introduce a space for readers to critically engage with the text, much like how Edwards argues Malory's work distorts and reconfigures traditional symbols and narratives. Dinadan's humour can be seen as destabilising the conventional codes of honour, exposing their contradictions.⁷⁷

One telling example of his complexity comes from his interactions with Sir Tristram. In a famous scene during a tournament, Dinadan humorously protests the absurdity of jousting, lamenting that Tristram's reckless bravery makes him seem "wilder" than before. Though framed in jest, Dinadan's reluctance to participate in violent combat reflects his more profound criticism of the chivalric culture, where blind adherence to valorous deeds often leads to unnecessary violence. This scene exemplifies his use of humour to navigate the dangerous, frequently senseless world of knightly battles, subtly revealing his discontent.

Another decisive moment occurs when Dinadan, known for avoiding acts of reckless courage, offers to face Sir Palomides in a duel to protect the wounded Tristram. Tristram's sudden shift

⁷⁶ Joyce Coleman, 'Fooling with Language: Sir Dinadan in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', in *Arthurian Literature*, XXIII, ed. by Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 30–45.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

toward bravery is met with his enigmatic smile, which suggests that Dinadan's courage may be unexpected, even to his closest companions. Dinadan's willingness to sacrifice himself, despite his general disdain for such heroics, unveils a more cynical side to his character—a side that, despite his pessimistic outlook, is loyal and capable of noble acts, albeit with a touch of self-awareness about the absurdity of it all.

Finally, Dinadan's ongoing criticism of King Mark—whom he openly despises for his treachery and cowardice—shows that a moral compass attuned to injustice lies beneath his humour. His sharp remarks about Mark's inadequacies are jests and barbed criticisms of leaders who fail the ideals of honour and kingship. This disillusionment with the gap between the chivalric ideal and its flawed reality forms a core part of Dinadan's character, positioning him as a voice of reason and emotional depth amidst the often exaggerated displays of heroism around him. Through these moments, Dinadan becomes a figure of both comedy and tragedy, a knight who, while outwardly mocking the culture of knighthood, is profoundly shaped by its contradictions.

Malory's Depiction of Emotions

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is renowned for its rich and subtle portrayal of emotions, particularly in characters like Dinadan, who do not conform to traditional knightly ideals. Malory's depiction of Dinadan's emotional complexity showcases his storytelling skill, blending humour, satire, and genuine emotional depth to create a character who is both relatable and thought-provoking. Through Dinadan, Malory offers a nuanced exploration of the emotional landscape of the Arthurian world, emphasising the tensions and contradictions that underlie the chivalric code.

Scholars of Malory's work often highlight the subtlety with which he portrays emotions, particularly in characters like Dinadan, who challenge societal norms. Malory's portrayal of Dinadan is marked by a delicate balance between humour and pathos, allowing readers to glimpse the deeper emotional currents driving his actions. This difference is especially evident in

scenes where Dinadan's humour gives way to moments of vulnerability, revealing a character keenly aware of the shortcomings of the chivalric ideals he criticises.

Malory's portrayal of emotions in *Le Morte d'Arthur* also deepens readers' understanding of the Arthurian world. Through characters like Dinadan, Malory invites readers to question the values and assumptions underlying the chivalric code, offering a more nuanced and critical view of honour, loyalty, and courtly love. Dinadan's emotional depth and satirical commentary provide a counter-narrative to more idealised portrayals of knighthood, highlighting the inherent contradictions and challenges of living according to such lofty ideals.

Chapter 7: Anti-Chivalric Criticism: Dinadan's Relationships

Dinadan and Tristram

The friendship between Sir Dinadan and Sir Tristram is one of the most intriguing and unconventional relationships in the Arthurian canon. In many ways, their relationship is unconventional in the settings of other bonds between knights, which usually rely on mutual heroism and devotion to chivalric ideals. The friendship between Dinadan and Tristram is characterised by mutual respect, camaraderie, and an undercurrent of criticism of exactly those ideals. This dynamic makes the friendship hold a special place; it crosses traditional notions of the knightly relationship in Arthurian literature, presenting an alternative model of male friendship that is more concerned with personal affinity and intellectual companionship than shared martial exploits. The relationship between Dinadan and Tristram is grounded upon mutual respect and comprehension, wherein Dinadan often serves as a foil to Tristram's character, which is more romantic in temperament and idealistic. While Tristram is thus poignantly involved in the trappings of courtly love and chivalric honour, Dinadan refuses to consider these as accurate and often attempts to use wit and humour to confront some of Tristram's romantic ideals. The result is a unique tension in their relationship whereby Dinadan's scepticism and Tristram's earnestness further underscore the polarised approaches to knighthood within the Arthurian world.

One of the most defining features of Dinadan's relationship with Tristram is that it contrasts sharply with other chivalric bonds commonly illustrated in Arthurian literature. While there is a friendship between knights founded on mutual participation in tournaments, battles and quests, their friendship is considered more personal and intellectual. The reluctance to fight and participate in so much of the mindless violence characterises the chivalric code that distinguishes Dinadan from other knights. It is that very reluctance which tends to attract Tristram to him. Tristram realises that Dinadan is a man after his own heart—very cynical but fully loyal and reliable. Dinadan is seen discrediting the chivalric code primarily in his conversations with Tristram. Here, Tristram is portrayed as the perfect prototype of the knight, with his ideal of

courtly love and fighting at arms, but Dinadan sticks by his disdain for such values. For instance, although Tristram does find himself involved in a series of romantic entanglements, Dinadan holds back no hesitation in pointing out the absurdity of these, often for humorous effect, to accentuate the contradictions and hypocrisies of chivalric values upon which they rest, and to which Tristram himself avows his loyalty.

So, here, the relationship between Dinadan and Tristram works as a criticism of chivalric ideals that control the Arthurian world. In Dinadan's interactions with Tristram, the novel allows the audience to challenge the authenticity of these ideals, expressing that a chivalric tradition has space for other views. The cynic and chide played by Dinadan are indispensable in Tristram's character development because they push Tristram to face his values and ideals' inadequacies and incoherence head-on. Thus, Dinadan's relation to Tristram shows diffused and complex chivalric tradition, which reveals the ideal of knighthood more accurately and critically.

Conflicts with Gawain and Agravaine

Sir Dinadan's encounters with Sir Gawain and Sir Agravaine reveal even more how he functions as a satirist of the chivalric code and underscore the conflict that emerges with a figure who does not follow his position of knighthood. He is so vital in this respect because the clashes suggest Dinadan's incredulity regarding such chivalric idealism but also because they emphasise the doggedly unbending and often oppressive nature of those ideals. Dinadan's inability to take part actively in acts of violence and bravado, the two elements that most characterise the conduct of knights like Gawain and Agravaine, make him at least peculiar among his peers and, in the end, lead to his alienation within the Arthurian world.

The contrast between Dinadan and Gawain is most telling when displayed by the following conflict. Gawain tends to be depicted as one of the most faithful and courageous knights of the Round Table, upholding the traditional chivalric values of the past: honour, loyalty, and military valour. Yet there existed also an aspect of heartlessness in Gawain's persona, which adhered to the old rules of knightly conduct, bringing him into conflict with other characters, not least Dinadan, who constantly poked fun at him for his principles. On many shows, Dinadan jests with Gawain, sometimes playing the part of a verbal joust, using his wit and humour to ridicule

Gawain's rigid adherence to the code. Thus, when Gawain tries to provoke Dinadan to joust with him, the latter answers with his usual sarcasm. He ridicules how much it is worth to exercise or display the martial spirit this way. More than a rejection of violence, Dinadan's refusal to fight is an indictment of the culture that avows such violence as the ultimate expression of honour and virtue. This contradiction in Dinadan's head, existing between ideal and reality and then played out in his conflict with Gawain, creates a microcosm of the more considerable tension between the ideals of chivalry and the realities of knightly life—drawing into sharp relief the limits and ironies of the chivalric code.

Dinadan's contention with Agravaine further accentuates this dimension of the anti-chivalric figure in him. More often than not, Agravaine is projected as a treacherous and scheming knight who embodies the dark side of chivalry, where allegiance and honour are sacrificed before personal pursuits. Dinadan interacts with Agravaine in deep distrust and hatred since Dinadan has seen through Agravaine's duplicities and has refused to be drawn into them. Not only does this bring out Dinadan's scepticism toward the ideals of chivalry, but it also brings out his moral integrity since, under the pressure of peers, he would instead not waver in his values.

Of most importance, these conflicts affect the narrative and ultimate fate of Dinadan. By refusing to abide by the conventions held among the other knights of the Round Table, Dinadan withdraws from the group in a way that might lead to his ultimate isolation and alienation. Still, isolation also helped to dignify Dinadan's position as a critic of the chivalric tradition. This system demands unquestioning loyalty and conformity but eventually leads toward the impossibility of both, for isolation highlights such inherent flaws and contradictions. In these conflicts, the character of Dinadan emerges as a poignant criticism of the chivalric ideals, giving another view—a much more nuanced and critical—into the Arthurian world.

Comparisons with Gareth

Deeper insight into his anti-chivalric argument can be realised from the countless interactions between Sir Dinadan and Sir Gareth because theirs is a mix-up of many forms of chivalry that casts certain doubt on all those conventional standards which are strictly adhered to by Agravaine and Gawain. These latter two knights stand for the chivalric order's complex,

unforgiving features. The characteristic of Gareth is his virtue of moderation and balance in this regard, especially regarding his life as a knight. Gareth is humble, compassionate, and practical, unlike the more romantic, extreme knights of the Round Table. Dinadan considers himself on an equal intellectual level as Gareth, and they both share certain sceptical attitudes toward some of the more rigid attitudes of chivalry. However, while Gareth's doubts are tempered by his commitment to loyalty and honour, Dinadan is far more overt in his scepticism, which often turns to outright criticism. This difference creates a fascinating dynamic in their relationship because, for the most part, Dinadan's cynical look at life is tempered with Gareth's more balanced and pragmatic look at knightliness.

For example, in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Dinadan and Gareth are repeatedly aligned in their non-cooperation with wanton violence and support for peaceful settlements. Yet Gareth is ever the compromiser and cooperator according to the construct of a chivalric code, whereas Dinadan remains much more sceptical and lacks flexibility. The difference between their approaches to knighthood is thus testifying to various views of which the Arthurian tradition is composed, meaning there is no single monolithic understanding of being a knight. In what they do and how they relate to one another, Dinadan and Gareth thus offer a more complex and critical perspective on the chivalric tradition, one that points out its limitations and contradictions in the ideals from which the Arthurian world is built. Through the contrasting approach of Dinadan, who would be doubtful, and Gareth's outlook, which is rather pragmatic, they serve as counterpoints to the more extreme and rigid stances taken by knights such as Gawain and Agravaine, respectively. This way, Dinadan's character alternates between critic and contributor to the tradition of the Arthurian. This embodiment jettisons the presumptions and values upon which the chivalric code is based as much as an alternative vision of being a knight.

Conclusion

Sir Dinadan's relationships with Tristram, Gawain, Agravaine, and Gareth indicate the complexities and contradictions at the centre of the chivalric system within the world of Arthur. Dinadan is developed as a strong critic of the ideals of knighthood through wit, humour, and scepticism in attacking assumptions and values that would prevail under the code of chivalry. His relations with other knights show this broad perspective in the Arthurian tradition, which

provides a more subtle and critical attitude toward those chivalric ideals that will bind and shape the discourse. In this way, the character of Dinadan is a participant and critic within the Arthurian tradition, offering an odd reflective perspective on the nature of chivalry and the ideals supporting it.

Chapter 8: Gender Dynamics and Courtly Love

Dinadan's Scepticism and Medieval Attitudes Towards Gender

Sir Dinadan's mistrust toward the conception of courtly love criticism is the romantic ideal and implies more significant medieval attitudes toward gender roles. In the chivalric code, though courtly love often raises women to pedestals to be idealised and the inspiration for knightly deeds, these pedestals often debase them into inanimate symbols rather than seeing them as individual beings with agency. But Dinadan's mockery of these conventions betrays another dimension of awareness concerning the contradictions in idealising such pro forma behaviour: His satire highlights the artificiality and impracticality of the value system for males and females that the chivalric culture imposes on them. The more it forced hyperbolic gush and absurd assertions of devotion, the more mockingly Dinadan would flay the entire concept. He mocks courtly love and thereby undermines the foundation of social standards, setting out what is correct for females. His refusal to participate in the ceremony of courtly love might be seen as undermining the gendered norms that practice implies, providing a more practical, perhaps more equal, view of relations between men and women.

Dinadan as a Lover in *La Tavola Ritonda*

Sir Dinadan is far different in his characterisation from the traditional pattern of the Italian romance *La Tavola Ritonda*, based on Arthurian legends. Considered a witty companion and sceptical of all romantic pursuits, Dinadan becomes embroiled in this story in one of the rarest and most passionate romantic relationships with Losanna of the Ancient Tower. This takes a great measure of his actions as Dinadan finds himself acting utterly contradictory to his usual manner.

At first, Dinadan acts as a set-up, unwilling to fight on behalf of a lady and looking out for his interests. For example, when Queen Isolde (Isotta) asks him to defend her, he responds ambiguously:

"E Isotta allora disse: — Dinadano, che mi rispondete voi? Voletemi voi aiutare, sì come dite che siete tenuto di fare e avete fatto per lo tempo passato? — E Dinadano

disse: — Dama, dite ch'io combatta con altri per voi e in contro a uno prò' cavaliere?
Dama, certo, delle parole egli n'è buono mercato, e 'l combattere è molto
pericoloso..." ⁷⁸

("And Isolde said, ' Dinadan, what do you say? Will you help me, as you say you are bound to do and have done in the past?' And Dinadan said: 'Lady, you ask that I fight with others for you and against a brave knight? Lady, indeed, words are cheap, and fighting is very dangerous...")

This exchange is typical of Dinadan's reluctance to engage in dangerous enterprises out of love or chivalry.

Yet, this romance with Losanna completely alters his character. His love forces Dinadan to engage his best friend Tristan in conflict and request Tessina from him, whom Tristan had rescued from execution at the Ancient Tower. He, therefore, acts in direct contrast to the nature of his character: never fighting on behalf of a lady. The following passage indicates Dinadan's uncommon hostility:

"E stando Tristano in tale maniera, quivi venne uno cavaliere e uno varvassore, lo quale disse a Tristano: — Sire cavaliere, voi siete in nostra pregione; e già mai di là entro voi non uscirete se non morto... E Tristano... s'arma e monta a cavallo, e vassene carpone su per lo ponte del ferro... Ed essendo gli due cavalieri affrontati... cominciano una crudele battaglia... E Dinadano rimane; e ciò fu per quattro ragioni: l'una, perchè alquanto si era schifato con messer Tristano per la beffa che fatta egli gli aveva; la seconda, perchè gli pareva a lui ched egli difendesse il torto a donare aiuto e scampo a colei che era stata cagione di tanto male; la terza, perch'egli avea paura di Soziano... la quarta, perchè si crede che Dinadano alquanto fosse quivi innamorato di madonna Losanna..." ⁷⁹

("And while Tristan was in this situation, there came a knight and a squire, who said to Tristan: 'Sir knight, you are our prisoner; and you will never leave from here except dead...' And Tristan... arms himself, mounts his horse, and crawls over the iron bridge... And as the two knights faced

⁷⁸ *La Tavola Ritonda: L'Istoria di Tristano*, ed. by Filippo-Luigi Polidori (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1864), p. 483.

⁷⁹ *La Tavola Ritonda*, p. 411.

each other... they began a cruel battle... Dinadan remains behind, and this for four reasons: first, because he had become somewhat estranged from Sir Tristan due to the jest he had played on him; second, because it seemed to him that Tristan was defending the wrong by aiding and rescuing her, who had been the cause of so much evil; third because he feared Soziano... fourth because it is believed that Dinadan had become somewhat enamoured with Lady Losanna...")

Opposing Tristan here was a digression from the usual Dinadan because the infatuation with Losanna made the former succumb to her whims, which were against his friend's liking.

Furthermore, Dinadan's actions are doomed to show malice and woman-hating, especially against those ladies who are somehow set in opposition to Losanna. In one place, he speaks of Queen Isolde with scorn:

"E allora Dinadano pensa uno poco, e raffigurando sì come questa era la reina Isotta, fue assai dolente; e allora si gitta interra ginocchione, dicendo alla reina: — Alla dama, deh per Dio e per misericordia, ora mi perdonate. Chò, per mia fé, già mai io non vi raffigurava; e sono certo che quello che voi avete fatto, Tristano ve l'ave fatto fare: ma bene mi vendicherà Iddio ancora di lui —." ⁸⁰

("And then Dinadan thought for a moment, and realising that this was Queen Isolde, he was very sorrowful; and then he threw himself to the ground on his knees, saying to the queen: 'Ah lady, please, for God and mercy, forgive me now. For, by my faith, I did not recognise you; and I am certain that what you have done, Tristan made you do it: but God will surely avenge me on him.'")

His bitterness extends even to Isolde, whom he blames for his public humiliation, underscoring how far he has strayed from the courtois.

Besides, Dinadan decides to get even with what he perceives as grievances when he plots against King Mark, which is uncharacteristic. First, his hostility is implied when he says:

⁸⁰ *La Tavola Ritonda*, p. 486.

"Dinadano... giura di non portare già mai amore né a dama nè a donzella, e di non difenderne giammai niuna, nò a torto nè a ragione." ⁸¹

("Dinadan... swears never again to love any lady or damsel, and never to defend any of them, whether in the wrong or the right.")

It represents a profound transformation of his attitude toward women and chivalry, influenced by his quick disillusionment from his affair with Losanna.

These actions demonstrate that his association with Losanna places Dinadan outside his familiar scepticism into a position of dishonourable behaviour. That he would set himself in opposition against friends, hold hatred for women, and relinquish his knightly service weighs upon the narrative judgment against courtly love. It explains that these liaisons of passion could turn even stout hearts from an idealised vision of chivalric love.

After his failure and the subsequent strife with Tristan, Dinadan reverts to his former sceptical self. This affair seems to cement in his mind that affairs of the heart produce nothing but futile Fuss und Hader. He re-establishes his reluctance toward love and chivalric matters, as revealed when he says:

"Dinadano sì disse: — Per la mia fé, che colesti parole mi fanno più rivenire la doglia. Ma per fermo sappiate, che se io fossi sano e allegro, io non combatterei, se io non mi vedessi uno grande vantaggio. Ma io sì mi voglio risparmiare, e non combattere con niuna persona per fino a tanto ch'io non sono al torniamento del Verzepppe; che io sì sono uno cavaliere in cui lo re Artus à maggiore speranza." ⁸²

("Dinadan then said: 'By my faith, these words make my pain return even more. But be assured that if I were healthy and happy, I would not fight unless I saw a great advantage. But I wish to spare myself and not fight with anyone until I am at the tournament of Verzepppe, for I am a knight in whom King Arthur has great hope.'")

⁸¹ *La Tavola Ritonda*, p. 410.

⁸² *La Tavola Ritonda*, p. 484.

This return to scepticism poignantly underlines the complex interaction of personal desires with socially imposed expectations in Arthurian legend.

Dinadan's adventure with Losanna in *La Tavola Ritonda* is a more subtle development of Dinadan's character. His behaviour, out of character for him, serves as a tool to comment on the code of courtly love and chivalry in a way different from Tristan, who is resentful toward women and abandons his chivalric duties. The romance here shows how even the most steadfast person can get deviated by love. Finally, Dinadan returns to his sceptical approach, underlining his conviction that romantic entanglement is folly and deepens the thematic concerns of the Arthurian legend.

Implications for Understanding the Roles of Women in the Arthurian World

Dinadan's criticism of courtly love offers insight into women's roles in the world of Arthur. While women in Arthurian legends are, by many measures, powerful, their power is often qualified by the very ideals that courtly love espouses. Characters like Guinevere and Isolde—central to courtly love narratives—are empowered and constrained by their roles as objects of male desire and devotion. The satire of Dinadan reveals the tenuous nature of this authority, showing that the elevation of women in courtly love is more skin-deep and does nothing to destabilise the undergirding gender order. His relations with women in the Arthurian texts, though fewer in number than those of others, already partake of a plain respect very different from the rest, who either possess or idolise women. This respect, however, is not born of chivalric reverence but rather of recognising women's humanity, free from the burdens of exaggerated romantic ideals. For example, when Dinadan refuses to fight for La Beale Isoud's honour, he does so not because he lacks respect for her but because he rejects the chivalric obligation to idealise and fight for women in this exaggerated, performative way. Instead, he humorously says, "*I will not fight for you with three knights; Jesu defend me,*" which makes Isoud laugh and highlights the futility of fighting to prove one's love.⁸³ Cutting through the layers of courtly love that act as a gauze by which to view women more usually, Dinadan's criticism opens up a space within which women's roles are considered without the burden of

⁸³ Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Chapter 56, pp. 449

chivalric expectations, allowing for a more finely delineated conception of gender relations within the Arthurian world.

Comparative Analysis with Other Characters: Guinevere and Isolde

Drawing a comparative analysis of Dinadan with characters such as Guinevere and Isolde, who are both profoundly enmeshed in stories of courtly love, releases the deeply gendered dynamics of Arthurian literature. She is queen and thus a lady whom Lancelot serves, thereby epitomising the passion surrounding courtly love, yet at the same time, her character is deeply conflicted.

Then, her relations with Arthur and Lancelot are governed by the strictures of courtly love—that which raises and confines her. Dinadan's irreverence towards these ideals presents another way of looking at things—one that doubts the value of such confined and idealised relationships.

Isolde is similar in that her life is ordered around by the precepts of courtly love, specifically in her relationship with Tristan. The story of Isolde is genuinely a story of love, secrecy, and, at last, tragedy—all engineered by the rules of courtly love. The scepticism of Dinadan provides the counterpoint to the story, for he will not dignify any such hopeless romance. A comparison between the way Dinadan treats these crucial female characters thus shows that his satire is not only anti-male courtly love but also highlights some of the constraints and difficulties this system creates for women idealised under its auspices.

Conclusion

The chapter thus shows that Dinadan's cynicism about courtly love is closely linked to the Arthurian gender system. Dinadan takes what is assumed to underpin the construction of traditional gender roles and parodies the very ideals, offering the reader a cynical perspective from which to view the role of women within these stories. While it might be said that Dinadan's humoristic exposé of courtly love serves to expose the insubstantiality of the power such a concept provides women, his better-behaved exchanges with female characters offer a counter-example for how gender relations might be practised—one that isn't so hemmed in by the requirements of chivalry.

Chapter 9: Legacy and Interpretation of Dinadan

Dinadan's Influence on Modern Media

Sir Dinadan, if only secondary compared to the likes of Lancelot or Gawain, has become increasingly more a man of the hour in terms of the modern gaze over stories of Arthurian legend. His wit, scepticism, and refusal to conform to traditional chivalric ideals make him a compelling figure for contemporary audiences. Over the years, Dinadan's character has been radically reinterpreted throughout many works within literature, film, and television, reflecting society's changing values while offering a voice of reason and criticism in the romanticised world of Arthurian knighthood.

Among the most detailed and modern is found in Gerald Morris's *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* of 2003. In Morris's Dinadan, he weaves into the framework of his very character a scepticism of the chivalric code. Morris writes that Dinadan is armed only with wit and a critical nature in a world where knights often fight for "foolish causes." For example, in one scene, Dinadan "realized with incredulity that the two knights were going to fight over whose lady was prettier. 'Wait half a minute,' he interjected. 'What about all that business about being a friend to all lovers and breathing the same soul and all that rot? You aren't really going to fight, are you?'" This representation makes Dinadan a figure of accessibility that condemns the contradictions and impracticalities of the chivalric ideal, an act that most readers, too, would be asking. Morris's description is in keeping with modern sympathies; thus, he makes Dinadan a voice of integrity and practicality against an age of bombastic expectations of heroism and honour.⁸⁴

Another quite different rendering of the character is found in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), wherein he uses him to parody the ridiculousness of medieval society. By this scepticism, Dinadan becomes one of Twain's devices through which he criticises the chivalric system. In the novel, the humour and scepticism of Dinadan coincide with the modern perspective of the protagonist, hence offering a platform for Mark Twain to criticise the

⁸⁴ Gerald Morris, *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), p. 52.

chivalric system. Twain humorously describes Sir Dinadan as someone who, when delivering his speech, was “worse than the minstrels, worse than the clown in the circus,” underscoring just how misplaced and laughable his character's attempt at humour is in the face of the chivalric ideal. The anachronisms of chivalry, as embodied in Dinadan, become a means through which Twain can bring out such issues and question their glorification.⁸⁵

This was a role that Dinadan would continue to fulfil on stage and screen, mirroring the romantic ideals of King Arthur's court. The 1960 Broadway show *Camelot* and its 1967 film adaptation have Dinadan, played by John Cullum and Anthony Rogers, as comic relief to the high-flying Knights of the Round Table idealism. In one of his pointed exchanges, Dinadan warns Arthur, "Arthur, you're inviting a massacre!" This statement could be viewed as far broader, as part of a series of commentaries showing how the perfect chivalric code is ill-fitted for a world shaped by conflict and human imperfection. His wit adapted these representations to cast doubt upon the glorified image of chivalry and adapt to the growing scepticism of unchallenged ideals in the mid-20th century.⁸⁶

The more recent example in the media would be how Dinadan does not appear in the BBC series *Merlin* (2008–2012). Still, his character impacts the relationship between Merlin and Arthur. These two characters' existing dynamic reflects the one between Dinadan and Sir Tristram, the best friends from Arthurian legend. Like a literary Dinadan, Merlin is portrayed as using wit to outmanoeuvre some of the more foolhardy decisions made by Arthur, and he represents a voice of sense amidst all the high-stakes heroism that propels Arthur into action. An iconic recurring moment is Arthur calling Merlin a "fool," particularly in episodes like "A Servant of Two Masters" (Season 4, Episode 6), which showcases their humorous yet deep friendship. In this comedic yet crucial role, Dinadan firmly establishes his legacy as a figure who injects a sense of pragmatism and realism into Arthurian legend.⁸⁷

The most radical reinterpretation of the character of Dinadan comes in Lev Grossman's *The Bright Sword: A Novel of King Arthur*. In this novel, Dinadan is a transgender knight who wears

⁸⁵ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (London: New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), p. 24.

⁸⁶ Alan Jay Lerner, *Camelot: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Broadway Musical* (unknown publisher, 1960), p. 50.

⁸⁷ *Merlin*, Series 4, Episode 6: *A Servant of Two Masters*, dir. Alex Pillai (BBC, 29 October 2011).

armour to hide his female body. This brash remaking of the character brings him in tune with modern issues of identity and authenticity, reflecting the adaptability of Dinadan over the eras. In this context, Grossman presents Dinadan, who is exceptional in his character; he extends the realms of the challenger of social norms from a medieval setting to a figure active in debates about personal authenticity and social roles. As Dinadan reflects, “I’d kept the secret too long, and I knew it, but I didn’t know how to let it out”. To Grossman, Dinadan is as outrageous a character as his predecessors had been, defiant, and yet simultaneously holds on to the quintessential nature of his being—a critic of stiff social institutions.⁸⁸

Dinadan’s Critical Reception and Enduring Appeal

Although in the past, Dinadan had not enjoyed the same critical acclaim in Arthurian scholarship as the more heroic or romantic figures like Lancelot or Gawain, modern critics are increasingly accepting that Dinadan is a vital role within the legend—a type of gadfly who challenges the very ideals the Arthurian knights embody. His practicality in approaching knighthood with humour is a welcome change from the solemn quests for honour and love that define many of his peers.

The very anti-chivalric position in which Dinadan has placed himself is at the core of his timelessness. Unlike Lancelot, the idealist of honour or courtly love, Dinadan is characterised precisely by his constant doubtfulness about them. Dinadan's role is to expose the dissonance between the romanticised ideals of knighthood and the harsh realities of medieval life. His wit becomes a form of resistance, challenging the narrative from within. He has found an echo in the modern reader who frequently negotiates their life to reconcile social demands with their integrity. Dinadan is a character who refuses to live up to the unrealistic standards of knighthood, starkly modern in what can often be seen as an age of phoniness.

But his ability to mock was not enough: Dinadan had to find himself as a character. Much of this appeal lies in the humour with which Dinadan interjects into otherwise grim situations. His role

⁸⁸ Lev Grossman, *The Bright Sword: A Novel of King Arthur* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2024), p. 550.

as a satirist helps to flesh out the Arthurian world further in that the readers are drawn into the legend through both intellectual and emotional channels. How Twain used Dinadan in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is an example of how humour can be a tool for social commentary. Through the character of Dinadan, Twain captures the paradoxes of medieval society and the romantically conceived ideals of chivalry that carry through to the present day.

Dinadan is universal in all these versions; he is a media memetic adaptor. However, his essential qualities—wit, scepticism, and contrarian position—are never lost, whether in a 20th-century Broadway musical, a 21st-century novel or a TV series. The character of Dinadan is flexible, remoulded by the current age's concerns, yet still retains his essential function as a critic of societal norms. Among the strongest is Lev Grossman's defining him as a transgender knight, mainly because this character could come to terms most easily with modern debates on identity, authenticity, and societal expectations.

The Timeless Legacy of Sir Dinadan

The Enduring Legacy of Sir Dinadan Although he may have little to reflect on his heritage in the Arthurian legend, it must evolve into something that will finally engender profound repercussions for the modern audience. Wit, scepticism, and refusal to comply with anything but unrealistic ideals of chivalry make him a compelling figure whose relevance has only grown as societal values shifted. Dinadan, through his portrayals in literature, film, and television, is an icon of pragmatism, humour, and criticism, which undermines both medieval and modern ideals of heroism, honour, and authenticity.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the complex character of Sir Dinadan within the Arthurian legends, emphasising his unique role as a satirical figure who challenges the chivalric ideals that define King Arthur's world. Through analysis of primary texts, including the *Prose Tristan* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and an exploration of the broader Celtic satirical tradition, this study has provided an understanding of how Dinadan's humour and scepticism serve both as social criticism and as a reflection of deeper cultural currents within medieval literature.

The findings of this research demonstrate that Sir Dinadan is far more than a peripheral character in the Arthurian corpus. His role as a satirist allows him to function as a moral commentator, using humour to expose the contradictions and excesses of the chivalric code. In both the *Prose Tristan* and *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Dinadan's character consistently undermines idealised notions of knighthood, particularly those related to martial valour and courtly love. His reluctance to engage in violence for honour and his mockery of courtly love reveal a character deeply sceptical of the values his peers hold dear. This scepticism aligns Dinadan with the Celtic tradition of satire, where wit and humour serve to entertain, instruct, and criticise.

The implications of this research are significant for our understanding of the Arthurian legends and their place within medieval literature. By highlighting the satirical elements in Dinadan's character, this study challenges the conventional view of the Arthurian tales as straightforward celebrations of chivalric ideals. Instead, it presents these stories as more nuanced and self-aware, capable of criticising the very values they appear to endorse. This perspective opens up new avenues for interpreting the Arthurian legends, suggesting that they are not merely repositories of medieval ideals but also texts that engage critically with them.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of considering the influence of Celtic traditions on the development of medieval European literature. The presence of Celtic elements in Dinadan's portrayal points to a broader cultural synthesis that occurred as the Arthurian legends were transmitted and transformed across different regions and languages. This synthesis is crucial for understanding the evolution of these legends and their enduring appeal across diverse cultural contexts.

While this study analyses Sir Dinadan's role within the Arthurian legends, areas warrant further exploration. Future research could involve a more extensive comparative survey of Dinadan with other satirical figures in medieval literature, both within and outside the Arthurian tradition. Such a study could examine how satire varies across different genres and cultural contexts and how characters like Dinadan contribute to a broader medieval tradition of social criticism.

Another potential avenue for future research could be exploring Dinadan's reception in modern adaptations of the Arthurian legends. While this study has touched on some modern portrayals of Dinadan, a more thorough investigation could reveal how contemporary authors and filmmakers reinterpret his character in light of current social and cultural concerns. This perspective could involve analysing how Dinadan's humour is adapted for modern audiences and how his role as a satirical figure is maintained or transformed in different media.

In conclusion, this dissertation has explored Sir Dinadan's multifaceted character, revealing him as a critical figure in the Arthurian legends who serves as a conduit for satire and social commentary. By situating Dinadan within the broader context of Celtic and medieval literary traditions, this study has shown that his character reflects the complexities and contradictions of the world he inhabits.

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Appendix

Timeline

Early Celtic and Arthurian Origins

- **12th–13th Century:**

The Mabinogion

A series of medieval Welsh stories, some with Arthurian content, that set a uniquely Celtic tone for King Arthur's character and court—though Sir Dinadan does not make a direct appearance. These tales are part of the more significant cultural background of Arthurian stories.

- *Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain*

Geoffrey's work provides the first popularisation of Arthurian legends and the introduction of the key figures, Merlin and King Arthur. Sir Dinadan is not introduced at this stage, but such texts are the building block for later Arthurian romance.

Introducing Sir Dinadan

- **13th Century**

Prose Tristan

At this time, Sir Dinadan made his first appearance. A sarcastic, sceptical knight, he contrasts strongly with the Arthurian world's former heroic and romantic characters,

making him a brilliant critic of chivalry's ideals. The *Prose Tristan* crystallises the Tristan story into the Arthurian cycle, which places Dinadan in a unique position within the growing legend.

Development and European Spread of Sir Dinadan

- **14th Century**

Tavola Ritonda

This prose paraphrase from the Italian adaptation of the Arthurian legends further develops the character of Sir Dinadan. He combines loyalty, humour, and scepticism toward the ideal of knighthood to show how he could remain eternally lovable in different cultures.

Consolidation in English Literature

- **15th Century**

Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur

Malory's collection of Arthur's stories secures characters like Sir Dinadan within it. Here, Dinadan's satirical comments on the absurdity of chivalry are fully realised. The realisation is seen through the comic and critical figure of Dinadan amid the idealisation of the Round Table, particularly in his interactions with knights like Sir Tristram and Sir Gawain.

Romantic and Satirical Reinterpretations

- **19th Century:**

Ernest Rhys, The Lay of King Mark

The Lay of King Mark is A retelling of the romance of Tristan and Isolde, influenced by earlier versions such as *Prose Tristan*. Sir Dinadan is not a significant character, but his role as a cynical and questioning knight remains intact.

- *Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889)*

Twain's satirical novel criticism is medieval chivalry, and Sir Dinadan's humour aligns

with Twain's style of satire. Dinadan helps expose the ridiculousness of knighthood, much like Twain's protagonist.

20th-Century Stage and Film Adaptations

- **1960s:**

Musical: Camelot (Broadway 1960, Film 1967)

In these adaptations, Sir Dinadan is a minor character with a significant impact. His sardonic humour and critical nature foil the idealism of King Arthur's court, emphasising the contrast between romanticised chivalry and Dinadan's sceptical reality.

21st Century Literary Adaptations

- **21st Century:**

Gerald Morris, The Ballad of Sir Dinadan (2003)

Morris reimagines Sir Dinadan as the protagonist, focusing on his wit, humour, and scepticism. Dinadan's internal struggles and criticism of chivalric culture make him relatable to modern readers, embodying themes of authenticity and individualism.

- *Lev Grossman, The Bright Sword: A Novel of King Arthur (2024)*

Grossman radically reinterprets Sir Dinadan as a transgender man who uses his knight's armour to conceal his female body. This portrayal touches on modern concerns of gender identity and expression while maintaining Dinadan's traditional scepticism and humour. Grossman's Dinadan offers fresh perspectives on both medieval and contemporary societal norms.

