ENGLISH LITERARY RESPONSE TO FRENCH ARTHURIAN CYCLIC ROMANCE:

CONTEXTS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR READING MALORY

by

Catherine Jeanne Batt

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ENGLISH LITERARY RESPONSE TO FRENCH ARTHURIAN CYCLIC ROMANCE: CONTEXTS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR READING MALORY

This thesis asks how Malory is to be aligned with English and French perspectives on the Matter of Britain, and thus seeks to determine a position for the Works in relation both to the French sources, and to other English literary responses to French Arthurian material. The romances of the French Vulgate Cycle, and later French prose narratives, declare themselves part of an authoritative body of Arthurian writings. They are locatable within a predetermined context which assigns a specific value to their form and content. Chapter One considers how English remaniements of the French texts are neither uniform nor easily classifiable. But a brief examination of an early text, Of Arthour and Of Merlin, and a later work, Lancelot of the Laik, shows English authors drawing on more varied contextualisations of Arthurian material, and willing to experiment with literary form. English works may therefore be characterised by an attitude to literary continuity fundamentally different from that inscribed in the French Arthurian texts.

Chapter Two examines the style of the English Prose Merlin, a c.1450 translation of the Vulgate Merlin, to establish a prose against which Malory's work can be evaluated. While the English Prose Merlin uses stylistic techniques drawn from both English and French, to local effect, Malory is more selective in the choices he makes, and uses different styles to structure his narratives. A similar selectivity is in evidence in the way Malory inscribes the relation between text, translator, and reader: this has the effect not of determining our reading of the Works, but of opening up the text to a multiplicity of possible readings.

The French Arthurian texts are predicated upon the stability of the written. English remaniements, however, have to construct their own contexts for the material. Chapter Three finds relevant to an understanding of the English Prose Merlin fifteenth-century literary discussions, in historical and legal writings, and in advice literature, of rhetorical means of encoding stability, especially in relation to questions of social order. Such writings are aware both of the written as a means to stability, and of one's apprehension of social order as incomplete, and the written encoding it as unstable. The English Prose Merlin accommodates these diverse aspects of writing by locating fixity of value and meaning through the ambivalent Merlin.

In Chapter Four, we see how Malory has a more radical reading of Merlin's function, in that he presents him, as he does the character of Dynadan, as an optional reference-point, rather than a fixed counter, against which to read narrative event. Merlin is part of Malory's strategy by means of which the narrative indicates, but is unable either to account for, or contain, the multifarious aspects of human experience. In Chapter Five, I consider Micheau Gonnot's Arthuriad, MS Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 112, and suggest the differences between Gonnot and Malory as compilers are more significant than their similarities. Gonnot, firmly set in the French tradition, presents his text as definitive. Malory's Works are offered as a series of different readings; the text is provisional, rather than complete.

In conclusion, I argue that Malory's Works represent a critical reading of the French texts which exploits fully the kinds of response to be traced in English remaniements: Malory gives a structural importance to the act of translation, to one's reception of the text, and to the concept of the written as unstable.
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Primary Texts studied in some detail in this thesis are referred to by the following short titles, and using the editions listed below, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Full details of editions are given in the Bibliography. References to Malory's works are by volume, page, and line number. References to other texts are by volume (where appropriate) and page number.

- **Malory, Works**

- **EPM**

- **Estoire**

- **Merlin**
  - The Vulgate Estoire de Merlin, ed. from B.L. MS Additional 10 292, by H.O. Sommer (Washington, 1908).

- **Lancelot**

- **Queste**

- **Mort**

- **Suite**
Cil doi chevalier...portoient cascuns une meisme devise de une bleue dame ouvrée de broudure ou ray d'un soleil sus le senestre brach...monsignore Jehan de Clermont... se arresta...devant (Chandos) et li dist: "Chandos... Depuis quant avés-vous empris à porter ma devise?" - "Et vous la mienne, ce respondi messires Jehans Chandos, car otant bien est-elle mienne comme elle est vostre." - "Je le vous devée", dist messires Jehans de Clermont, et se ne fust la souffrance qui est entre les vostres et les nostres, je le vous montrasse tantost que vous n'avés nulle cause dou porter." - "Ha! ce respondi messires Jehans Chandos, car otant bien est-elle mienne comme elle est vostre"...et dist encore messires Jehans de Clermont... "Chandos, Chandos, ce sont bien des posnées de vos Englés qui ne scevent aviser riens de nouvel; més quanqu'il / voient, leur est biel." Il n'i eut adont plus fait, ne plus dit: cescuns s'en retourna devers ses gens, et demora la cose en cel estat.

(Jean Froissart, Chroniques, V, 418-19)

...eche of theym bare one maner of devyce, a blewe lady enbraudred in a sone beame above on their apayrell. Than the lorde Cleremont sayd, Chandos, howe long have ye taken on you to bere my devyce? Nay, ye bere myne, sayd Chandos, for it is as well myne as yours. I deny that, sayd Cleremont, but and it were nat for the truse this day bytwene us, I shulde make it good on you incontynent that ye have no right to bere my devyce. A sir, sayd Chandos, ye shall fynde me to morowe redy to defend you and to prove by feate of armes that it is as well myne as yours. Than Cleremont sayd, Chandos, these be well the wordes of you Englysshmen, for ye can devyce nothyng of newe, but all that ye se is good and fayre. So they departed without any more doyng, and eche of them returned to their hoost.

(Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berners, The Cronycle of Syr John Froissart, I, 368)
A debate over literary claims to Arthur between fifteenth-century English and French representatives of their respective cultures would have proved as contentious, and probably as inconclusive, as the altercation between Chandos and Clermont over the origins of their heraldic device, which Froissart records as taking place a century earlier. A French critic, in the light of the esteem accorded the Arthurian prose romance in France, could claim Arthurian literature as primarily a French preserve, and, viewing the plethora of translations in general from French into English, might accuse English authors of a lack of originality and an over-reliance on Continental literature. Reciprocally, an English apologist could reclaim Arthur for Britain, and charge the French with appropriating another country's national hero. Just as the Chandos / Clermont banner is common to both knights, so Arthurian writings have an important place in both English and French literature. This thesis is concerned with the nature of English literary responses to a major form in French medieval literature, the Arthurian cyclic prose romances and their continuations; its main purpose is more clearly to locate and evaluate Malory's Works, and their methodology, against a background offered by English remaniements of the French romances, and the attitudes that inform them.

Determining a position for the Works, in relation both to French sources and to English writings, involves gauging how English perspectives on the material may be distinguished from the French, and in what sense one can define an English tradition within which Malory is working. Chapter One therefore explores aspects of English reception. The French romances present themselves as part of an authoritative canon of
Arthurian texts: they are locatable within a predetermined context which assigns a specific value to their form and content. The status of the French texts is established both by their proclaimed relation to other works, and by their use of what I shall call commemorative writing, which endorses the stability and enduring value of the written English remaniements, by contrast, do not convey a sense of belonging to an homogeneous body of writings. They evade any easy classification as a group, but this anomalousness constitutes an important aspect of their nature. For the English authors already have rich resources of Arthurian material to hand, and in their reworkings of cyclic romance they draw on a far wider range of contextualisations for their material than do the original French texts. An awareness of a number of possible emphases and contexts for the material is in evidence both thematically and structurally in the English texts. Of Arthur and Of Merlin, an early adaptation of the French Vulgate Merlin, demonstrates an interest both in the nationalistic importance of the Arthur legend, and in the nature of the social order. The late fifteenth-century Lancelot of the Laik, using material from the Prose Lancelot, shows a willingness to experiment with literary form, while posing generally the question of the status of Arthurian literature. In the French texts the stability of writing is a given; each English reworking, owing to the diversity of its literary inheritance, is obliged to define the nature and value of the Arthurian context for the present work. English works can therefore be characterised by an attitude to literary continuity fundamentally different from that inscribed in the French texts.

Chapter Two looks more closely at questions of translation, and examines the style of the English Prose Merlin, a mid fifteenth-century reworking of the Vulgate Merlin, to establish a prose as a context for
Malory. It will be seen from a study of battle descriptions and seasons topoi that while the English Prose Merlin draws on both English and French stylistic techniques to local effect, Malory uses familiar stylistic devices to structure his narratives as a whole. He also inscribes intermittently in his text a number of selective statements on the relation between text, translator, and reader. This has the effect not of directing us to a single reading of the Works, but of making us aware of the multiplicity of possible readings of the material. Where the French texts emphasise the autonomy of the written and the passive nature of the reader as consumer of received wisdom, the Works promotes an attitude to reading as the active reception of the text.

Chapter One notes an interest in experimental, rather than fixed, forms, as part of the English attitude informing treatments of Arthurian material. Chapter Three extends the parameters of the inquiry into English attitudes to stability and the written, so as to construct a more general fifteenth-century context for the English Prose Merlin and for Malory. That a special concern with the interplay of system and anomaly is part of an English cast of mind is suggested by a brief survey of English writings on law. Historical and advice writings (the chronicles, texts such as Mum and the Sothsegger, and Hoccleve's Regement of Princes) similarly encode a concern with how stability, both in writing, and in relation to the social order, may be achieved and maintained by rhetorical means. Such writings convey a sense of the written as a means to stability, of one's grasp of social order as fragmentary at best, and of the written description of that order as itself unstable. The English Prose Merlin emerges as important within the terms of this discussion because it accommodates these different aspects of writing by locating fixity of value and meaning through the
ambivalent Merlin.

In Chapter Four, Merlin's function in Malory's Works is shown to be more radical than the portrait presented in the English Prose Merlin, for where the latter text uses Merlin as a reference-point, Malory's Merlin is dislocated from the framework within which he may be so understood. Instead, he is placed in a largely pragmatic society where his wisdom is only sporadically acknowledged or acted upon. Merlin is then an 'optional' reference-point, against which one may read narrative event. He is part of Malory's strategy by means of which the narrative indicates, but is unable to account for, or contain, the multifarious aspects of human experience. Merlin is not the only character deployed in this way; Dynadan complements Merlin as another optional point of reference by which the reader can plot the co-ordinates of the text and mark its boundaries, while appreciating (through Dynadan's presence) the possibility of further narrative development which is, however, outside the scope of the story to hand. Similarly, the madnesses of Lancelot and Tristram, in the Book of Sir Tristram, are examined as points of breakdown, both for the hero and the narrative, signalling issues and problems not containable in the present narrative's terms.

This kind of character-function in the Works illuminates a mode of narrative very different from the French texts. It is also part of the way the Works suggest their own incompleteness, their provisionality. Chapter Five looks at Micheau Gonnot's Arthuriad (now MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, 112), the Continental text contemporaneous with Malory, and concludes that the differences between the two authors are more significant than their similarities. An examination of the organisation of Gonnot's text, his inscribed attitude to his work, and his presentation of the central theme of bonne
chevalerie, shows him to be a compiler who, firmly in the tradition of French commemorative writing, seeks to produce a comprehensive and definitive Arthurian text, predicated upon a faith in the written. Returning to a discussion of Malory, we find that the Works, conversely, emerge as a series of different readings; the text is provisional and partial (in both senses) rather than complete.

In conclusion, I argue that Malory's Works are presented as critical readings of the French texts; Malory draws on his own situation as a reader of the French works, and on aspects of the responses to be traced generally in English remaniements, to structure his own narratives. Issues such as the act of translation, the reader's reception of the text, and the concept of the written as unstable, inform the Works as a whole, and Malory can be seen as synthesising English responses to a specific branch of literature, and thus identifying particular concepts of the written which belong to an emergent English literary culture.
José Luis Borges, in a short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the* *Quixote*, has the narrator tell of how a twentieth-century writer comes to re-construct, word for word, and without reference to the original, a fragmentary version of Cervantes' novel, by the expedient of re-creating for himself the experience of the earlier author, and following his methodology as closely as possible. The result exactly replicates the *Quixote*, but is, as the narrator, rapt at the grandeur and sterility of his friend's enterprise, observes, 'infinitely richer' in its implications than is the first masterpiece, for it boldly challenges all expectations of the literature a modern writer should produce. The narrator is lost in awe at this new technique his friend has developed, and which he terms 'that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution' (p.71).

The wit of Borges' parable of reading as, inevitably, an act which involves a degree of re-writing, depends on our perception of difference between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries' literary milieux, on the paradox of having a French Symbolist 'dedicate his scruples and his sleepless nights to repeating an already extant book in an alien tongue' (p.70). While 'erroneous attribution' has a rather different relevance in the context of medieval reception of literature, the anecdote raises


2. Rudolph Hirsch, in *Printing, Selling and Reading, 1450-1550* (Wiesbaden, 1967), sees a close relation between an author and her/his work as specifically a product of Humanism (pp.7-9). The inscribed authors of the Vulgate Cycle, on the other hand, as we shall see later, exist to ratify the narrative rather than to evoke a set of possibly ironic co-ordinates against which the text may be read.
an issue apposite to a study of certain late medieval works. The appearance of the English Prose Merlin in the mid-fifteenth century, a 'direct' translation (though this is nowhere indicated) of a French text written in the first half of the thirteenth century, might initially be considered as of a piece with Menard's madness; and if the work is not an anachronism, how is it to be accounted for in literary terms? How can one recover, with any confidence, the distinction between early French and late English medieval receptions of what is substantially the same material?

This study of Middle English texts drawn from French Arthurian cyclic romance and focussing particularly on the English Prose Merlin and Malory's Works, began as an interest in how 'translations' may be regarded as creative literary acts rather than simply derivative, how they constitute sophisticated responses to the narrative form and thematic content of their 'originals'. Locating the status of these English works with any precision is complicated by the special linguistic and cultural relation of the English and French languages in England during the medieval period, by the position French occupied as part of an international culture, and by the wealth of associations evoked by the Arthurian theme itself. It is not simply that the subject matter is treated in historical writings, vaticinatory literature, and political writings as well as romance. If the material, as is often claimed, is

of special value in English literature because Arthur is a national hero, no less do the French texts find a serious historical meaning in the Matter of Britain, and the point is emphasised in the Arthurian romances by a homogeneity of style absent from English accounts of the legend. We need then to distinguish more clearly in what sense English and French treatments of the topic may be said to differ, before we assess how English authors use French texts.

The relationship between French and English in Britain from the Conquest to the close of the fifteenth century is a complex one;¹ that aristocratic and court circles are enthusiastic in their response to Continental literary fashion, from the twelfth century to the rise to cultural prominence of the Burgundian court in the fifteenth, is a donné of literary history.² In addition, Anglo-Norman works are produced in England. Rosalind Field's research on the tradition behind English alliterative romance emphasises the continuity of a bilingual audience which would have enjoyed literature in both Anglo-Norman and English.³


In this context, as we shall see, French appears to be regarded as a specific cultural and generic register, and the English works are written more in response to the possibilities thus afforded by their material, than as passive receptions of a dominant mode of literary expression.

French Arthurian prose texts quickly evolve into cyclic forms which provide an individual romance with a ready frame of reference. The Vulgate Cycle (c. 1215-1235) seems to have been the most popular of these groupings of texts, its form apparently inspired by the early thirteenth-century verse cycle attributed to Robert de Boron, which recounted the story of the Grail from Joseph of Arimathea's day to the time of Arthur, of Merlin and Perceval. The complete cycle in verse does not survive, but the prose version of de Boron's Merlin was popular, and the cycle served as the basis for the first two parts of the Vulgate Cycle, the Estoire del Saint Graal and the Vulgate Merlin. These romances were written as retrospective complements to the Prose Lancelot, La Queste del Saint Graal, and La Mort le Roi Artu, although they precede them in the finished sequence. The slightly later cycle, to which Fanni Bogdanow gives the name Le Roman du Graal (c. 1230-1240), is on the same model as the


Vulgate, if its emphases are different, incorporating versions of the
Estoire del Saint Graal, a continuation of de Boron's Merlin known as
the Suite du Merlin, pieces from the Vulgate Lancelot, the First Version
of the Prose Tristan, and Post-Vulgate versions of the Queste and the
Mort.¹ Later French prose narrative treatments of the Arthurian legend,
such as Guiron le Courtois, and the Second Version of the Prose Tristan,
are informed by and build on, the historical and epistemological frame-
work supplied by the Vulgate Cycle.

This is not to say French authors are totally inflexible with regard
to recontextualisation of, and experimentation with, their material, but
the individual romances have an extratextual referent which places them
in an identifiable body of writings, while literary echoes in the English
texts do not make for the same kind of homogeneity. An emphasis on what
I shall call the commemorative value of writing (a value suggested in
the Vulgate)² is an important aspect of the means by which the French
Arthurian romances maintain a uniformity, although they may vary in the
space they give to secular and spiritual concerns, and to different
heroes and aspects of the chivalric ethic. The French texts combine
respect for 'li contes', that is, the narrative before us, with
references to the 'estoire' from which they claim to derive their
material; this conveys the impression of a recoverable 'whole book'
containing in encyclopaedic detail every event and character in Arthurian

   and Genesis of a Thirteenth-century Arthurian Prose Romance
   (Manchester, 1966), introduction and passim.

2. Robert W. Hanning discusses the status of the book in the prose
   romances as part of a stratagem of 'redeeming vernacular narrative
   from its perceived (and dangerous) fictiveness' in 'Arthurian
   Evangelists: The Language of Truth in Thirteenth-century French
   Hanning observes this mode is diametrically opposed to the kind of
   authorial self-inscription one finds in Chrétien de Troyes (p.361).
Within this declared context, the romances themselves can continue, while keeping faith with past works, to accrete adventures to the central Arthurian corpus. At the same time, the respect for the written in this branch of literature gives rise to the production of compilations such as the Arthuriad contemporaneous with Malory, the great work made for Jacques d'Armagnac, duc de Nemours, which is now known as MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, 112.

The diversity in treatment of the subject-matter among English makers, both in remaniements of French texts, and in works drawing on indigenous traditions, stands in marked contrast to the methodology employed by the French romancers. What defines these English texts? There is a preference for Gawain as hero in many extant romances, but this does not account for their nature. The works are not confined to any one form, but range from the 'epic' style of the alliterative Morte Arthure, whose affinities are apparently with 'historical' accounts of Arthur as represented by such as Layamon's Brut, to the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur (adapted from La Mort le Roi Artu), which seems to owe allegiance primarily to 'romance'. But it is evidently too reductive to set 'epic' 'English' against 'romance' 'French' styles to explain the composite nature of the continuity to be traced in English Arthurian writings. Furthermore, a distinction between English and French treatments of the theme based on contrasting an interest in action (in English works) with

1. Elspeth Kennedy, 'Études sur le Lancelot en prose.I: Les allusions au conte Lancelot et à d'autres contes dans le Lancelot en prose. II: Le roi Arthur dans le Lancelot en prose', Romania, 105 (1984), 34-62, notes how the romances develop from a promised to an actual inclusiveness, as they become part of larger cycles (p.46: 'Le conte n'est plus présenté comme un fragment de la "réalité arthurienn", mais cherche plutôt à contenir en lui-même tous les plus grands thèmes du monde arthurien.'),

2. R.W. Ackerman says of the 'English Rimed and Prose Romances' he examines in Arthurian Literature, pp.480-519, that the twenty-three texts are 'susceptible of no generalization' (p.519).
concern with courtoisie (in the French\textsuperscript{1}) is belied by a text such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which has a sophisticated awareness of the courtois.\textsuperscript{2}

Is it feasible to speak in terms of a 'typical' English response to Arthurian subject matter? And is that response one coloured principally by the nationalistic and dynastic aspects of Arthur's rule as King of Britain? Certainly the English translators do not appear to be engaged in random and haphazard literary exercises, and W.R.J. Barron, for one, argues against an evaluation of the romances as 'shattered fragments of a foreign tradition', promoting the view that English writers generally are working within the context of a heightened awareness of Arthur's dynastic importance.\textsuperscript{3} One might also point out a marked interest in modes of social order and arbitration in the English texts. This would support J.M. Ganim's argument that where early French romance is concerned with the individual, early English works stress the importance of society.\textsuperscript{4} It is perhaps significant that there are several English

1. Sandra Ness Ihle, 'English Arthurian Literature (Medieval)', in The Arthurian Encyclopedia, pp.152-56: 'English romance relies...on action, adventure, and direct speech to produce straightforward narrative about knightly conflicts and values' (p.156).

2. Marjory Rigby proposes that this English text is itself inspired primarily by episodes in the Vulgate Lancelot, in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Vulgate Lancelot', Modern Language Review, 78 (1983), pp.257-66. Of course the author is not incorporating into his work elements he only half understands, but treating with some subtlety the themes he finds.

3. 'Arthurian Romance: Traces of an English Tradition', English Studies, 61 (1980), 2-23. Rosalind Field, 'The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Romance', p.69, concurs with this view of Arthur's national importance, but her statement that the Arthurian legend 'had an inescapable historical relevance [for English, but not for Continental, audiences], which runs counter to the exotic distancing required by romance', needs some qualification in the light of the 'historical' complexion the French prose romances accord their subject.

4. Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative (Princeton, 1983), Chapter One, 'Community and Consciousness in Early Middle English Romance', pp.16-54.
remaniements of French texts featuring Merlin, chief organiser of Arthurian society. The Vulgate Merlin is the basis of the thirteenth-century Of Arthour and Of Merlin, and the fifteenth-century English Prose Merlin, as well as Lovelich's Merlin, and Malory's text draws also on the Suite du Merlin. As we shall see in Chapters Three and Four, approaches to the figure of Merlin in the English Prose Merlin and Malory's Works raise interesting issues with regard to the attainment of social stability and literary means of encoding that stability.

In terms of style, a sense of difference between English and French romances in general is often established by defining English as a clumsy and inferior means of expression, with those who use it constrained, by an unsophisticated audience and insufficiency of language, to tease out the more 'straightforward' and easily comprehensible features of highly-evolved French narrative, when adapting from a Continental work.1 When insular texts are not seen as 'fragments' they tend to be described (in not very useful terms) as 'self-contained', possessed of a certain sense of 'unity', in contrast to the more 'diffuse' nature of the French texts.2 This modern view of English re-workings as initially crude, but evolving into tightly-structured units, is not necessarily reflected in extant English works. We need to recognise how English remaniements

1. L.C. Ramsey, Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England (Bloomington, Indiana, 1983), characterises English romances as at worst 'the hastiest sorts of translation or crude popularizations', and lacking in 'grace' and 'sophistication' (p.10).  

2. Typical is R.W. Ackerman's assessment of the author of The Gest of Sir Gawain, in 'English Rimed and Prose Romances', p.500, as 'consciously altering his original in order to write a short romance with a well-defined conclusion'. Eugène Vinaver's Commentary to Malory's Works, III, 1275, similarly observes that 'to (Malory) any story was above all a well-circumscribed set of incidents'. An interest in the 'single, autonomous episode' is, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan argues, the central concern of the Welsh author of Y Seint Greal; 'The Peniarth 15 Fragment of Y Seint Greal: Arthurian Tradition in the Late Fifteenth Century', Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, 27 (1978), 73-82 (p.82).
are, in varying degrees, to be characterised by their elaborate play
with different registers and grammars available to them, both by virtue
of an indigenous tradition, and by the stylistic and lexical opportun-
ities offered by the individual foreign texts from which they are
adapting.

Where do we place Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in relation to French
and English Arthurian texts? Recent studies emphasise Malory's debt,
in both stylistic and thematic terms, to English literature in general.¹
At the same time, Malory's *Works* would seem to be the closest equivalent
in English to a text of the length and scope (in the sense of the amount
of Arthurian material treated of, rather than how it is written about)
of the Continental cycles. But discussions of the *Works* in relation to
other texts tend to be either reductive from the literary point of view²
or to align them with the intentions of Continental romance, even though
it is acknowledged that the *Works* are different in structure from these
tales.³ I will argue that Malory's work is more profitably examined as a

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1. Edward D. Kennedy, 'Malory and His English Sources', in *Aspects of
Malory*, edited by T. Takamiya and D.S. Brewer (Cambridge, 1981),
pp.27-55. Lister M. Matheson, 'The Arthurian Stories of Lambeth
Palace Library MS 84', in *Arthurian Literature V*, edited by Richard
Barber (Cambridge, 1985), pp.70-91).

2. Maureen Fries, 'Tragic Pattern in Malory's *Morte Darthur*: Medieval
Narrative as Literary Myth', in *The Early Renaissance, Acta V*, edited
by A.S. Bernardo (Binghamton, New York State, 1979), pp.81-99, claims
the *Morte D'Arthur* is important principally because it 'reveals the
tragic pattern of Arthurian story' (p.90).

3. Hence Judson Boyce Allen's reading of the *Works* as primarily
sententious, and on a par with Continental perspectives on the
material, in 'The Medieval Unity of Malory's *Morte Darthur*',
*Medievalia*, 6 (1980), 279-309. For Allen, the *Morte D'Arthur* is a
discursive treatment of the Arthurian theme, proceeding as a series
of glosses on 'the constant interplay of three themes - personal
virtue, the love of woman, and the civic order symbolized by the
society of the Round Table and the nation for whose order that
society is responsible' (p.291). The *Works* seem less concerned
with setting up moral distinctions, however, than with the patterns
of behaviour resultant from having made such distinctions.
shrewd response to the cyclic form and the commemorative view of writing it promotes, than in conformity with it, and that in the Works' structure he exploits attitudes to writing that have more in common with English literary casts of mind than with French.

Before I define more closely what might be called English emphases on the material and the means of presenting it, I want to establish a context for English Arthurian remaniements by looking at the status of the French works in England. I will also map out the practical possibilities of English literary responses to such works by assessing something of the existence, provenance, knowledge, ownership and circulation of manuscripts of French cyclic romance in England, from its first production, until the late fifteenth century. Larry D. Benson has remarked that English knowledge of French cyclic romance was in all probability fragmentary at best. While manuscript evidence must needs be treated with some caution, the indications are that French Arthurian literature enjoyed a consistent popularity among the European nobility and the French-speaking English, and English access to French texts was not necessarily limited.

The French romances themselves view Englishness as an authenticating device for the tales being recounted. The Vulgate Cycle names Walter Map as one of its authors, writing at the command of Henry of England. Rusticiano da Pisa claims the source of his Compilation, written in the late thirteenth century, was a book owned by Edward I of England, which Rusticiano translated 'en cellui temps que (le roi) passa oultre la mer ou service nostre seigneur Dame Dieu'. Luces de Gast, declared author

1. Malory's 'Morte Darthur' (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976), p.8: '...it must have been a rare reader indeed who was able to know the whole of any one of these cycles.'

of the Prose Tristan, says in the prologue to his work that his personal enthusiasm for the subject is greater than his skill in recounting it, 'enz apartient plus ma langue et ma parole a la maniere d'Angleterre que a cele de France'. But his nationality is also a recommendation for one who is writing about the Matter of Britain. As the English knight he claims to be, 'chevaliers et sires del Chastel del Gat, voisin prochien de Salesbieres' (p.39), he has topographical associations with both the location of the Last Battle, and the locus of the written testament of the Grail as commissioned by Arthur. The manner in which Luces recommends himself as a reliable source of information finds analogy in the way Benoit de Ste-Maure, in the Roman de Troie, privileges Dares' account over that of Homer, because, among other qualifications,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Icist Daires dont ci oëz} \\
\text{Fu de Troie norriz e nez.}
\end{align*}
\]

Luces' prologue emphasises that French is the apposite register for this material translated from a Latin source. Although French texts were possibly written in England by Frenchmen, there is nothing to link English authors historically with the production of the Arthurian corpus in French.


2. Le Roman de Troie, edited by Léopold Constans, 6 vols (Paris, 1904-12), I, 6, 11.93-94. Dares' reliability as witness is also based on his having lived in Troy during the events recounted. His impartiality is reflected in the fact that, although a Trojan, he has written his account in Greek (I, 7, 11.110-16).

3. On the Perlesvaus having been written at Glastonbury by an author of French-Picard origin, see the introduction to Le Haut Livre du Graal, Perlesvaus, edited by W.A. Nitze, T.A. Jenkins, and others, 2 vols (Chicago, 1932-37, reprinted New York, 1972), II.

What is evident is that French works cite English readers and writers for Arthurian texts for the purpose of validating their material, and the consistency with which this is effected has no counterpart in the corpus of English Arthurian works.

What of the actual historical reception of these French texts? If the French romances make mention of royal patrons and 'les plus prisiez dangleterre', it is more to frame a response with regard to the historicity and seriousness of the text than to demarcate the social boundaries of its audience. Rusticiano's compilation calls for the attention of everyone who loves romance, from 'Seigneurs empereurs et princes' to 'bourgois' (Le Roman en prose de Tristan, p.423). In England as in France, the evidence suggests that romance was consumed by all literate social groups; the popularity, in the fifteenth century, of printed editions of Arthurian romance, on both sides of the Channel, does not indicate a progressive embourgeoisement of the genre as much as

1. This quotation is from the prologue to a late fifteenth-century version of Guiron le Courtois, MSS B.N. f.fr. 358-63, MS 359, fol. 2d. See also the prologue to the Palamède (closely linked with Guiron) which, in the version in MS B.N. f.fr. 338, has the 'author' say: 'je vois et connois que li plus sage et plus proisié d'Engleterre et de la riche court sont ardant et desirant d'escouter les miens dis, et á monseigneur le roy Henry plaist que je die encore avant...' (transcribed by A.P. Paris, Les Manuscrits français de la Bibliothèque du Roi, leur histoire et celle des textes allemands, anglois, hollandois, italiens, espagnols de la même collection, 7 vols (Paris, 1836-48), II, 346-51 (p.349)).


demonstrate the ready market for this kind of literature. We need, however, to determine whether we can speak in terms of an English awareness and full knowledge of, French cyclic forms.

From allusions in other texts, and from external evidence, it is relatively easy to establish a general knowledge of things Arthurian among royal and aristocratic circles in England, from the end of the twelfth century onwards. Eleanor of Aquitaine, for example, clearly encouraged the production of books in the vernacular,¹ and Laȝamon claims Wace's Brut was written for 'pare aeðelen Alienor'.² As R.S. Loomis has pointed out, the Arthurian legend was firmly enough established for Edward I to be able to exploit it for his own political purposes.³ Retrieving information about wide knowledge of specific texts is more difficult, but from the evidence, it seems that it is English record-keeping that is piecemeal, rather than knowledge of cyclic romance.

On the Continent, the detailed inventories of libraries such as that of Charles V of France bear witness to a lively interest in the genre.⁴ Throughout the fourteenth century, the tastes of the English court appear to differ little from those of the French. For example, Isabella, Queen to Edward II and daughter of Philip IV of France, acquired copies of a Lancelot and a Sang Real (possibly a version of the Queste) in 1357.⁵

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1. For the suggestion, on the strength of her patronage of other poets, that Chrétien de Troyes also wrote for Eleanor, see W.F. Schirmer and U. Broich, Studien zum literarischen Patronat im England des 12. Jahrhunderts (Cologne and Opladen, 1962), p.199.
4. The inventories are reproduced in L. Delisle, Recherches sur la librairie de Charles V, 3 vols (Paris, 1907); I and II, passim. On the evidence the inventories give for royal owners borrowing books of romance, and for books being loaned to others, see C.E. Pickford, 'Fiction and the Reading Public', pp.426-27.
Among the 'Libri Romanizati' listed among her possessions at her death in 1358, is a book 'de gestis Arthuri', a book on Tristan and Isolde, and a book 'de perceual & Gauwayn'. It is possible that the 'magnus liber coopertus cum corio albo de gestis Arthuri' was a copy of the Vulgate.

Edith Rickert concludes from such evidence that Richard II's court was thus 'thoroughly French in its reading' ('King Richard II's Books', p.147). Richard Firth Green corrects this view by pointing out that the books considered by Rickert were not bought by Richard, and that they had probably already been sold early in Richard's reign. Green also considers that as Richard's court was a centre of excellence for English literature, financial considerations rather than lack of interest probably account for the poverty of the royal library as compared with that of Charles V ('King Richard II's Books Revisited', p.239). On the basis of this argument, it seems as likely that the French manuscripts were sold because they were valuable, as that they were dispensed with, as Green suggests, because they were thought out-of-date. From the records it would seem that royal interest in French romance early in the fifteenth century is slight, for neither Henry V nor Henry VI is recorded as having owned or commissioned copies of French Arthurian romance, and only with the influence of the Burgundian court on Edward IV is the royal library once more stocked with French romances, apparently on the model

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1. The relevant portion of the Public Record Office document, E/101/393/4, is reproduced by Edith Rickert, 'King Richard II's Books', The Library, fourth series, 13 (1933), 144-47 (p.145).

2. 'King Richard II's Books Revisited', The Library, fifth series, 31 (1976), 235-39. See also V.J. Scattergood, 'Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II', in English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages, pp.29-43 (pp.32-34).

3. '...it is probable that Richard and his courtiers would have regarded this collection of Arthurian romances and chansons de geste as very old-fashioned and hardly worth keeping' ('King Richard II's Books Revisited', p.239).
of the Burgundian library. But at the same time there seems to be little to substantiate the idea that in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century literary scene such works were considered old-fashioned or irrelevant. French Arthurian romances probably maintained their proclaimed status as a precisely-authenticated and valuable literature, for documentation of aristocratic book ownership gives a picture of a more consistent interest in French romance.

Earlier in the fourteenth century, in 1305, Guy de Beauchamp's bequest of books to Bordesley Abbey (the collection to be left there in perpetuity) included copies of 'le premer livere de Launcelot' 'un Volum del Romaunce Iosep ab Arimathie, e deu Seint Grael', and 'Un volum de la Mort ly Roy Arthur, e de Mordret'. \(^2\) Inventories of goods seized from Simon de Burley in 1388, \(^3\) and from Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, in 1397, \(^4\) reveal a similar interest in French romance. Among Gloucester's eighty-four listed books, only three - a bible and two books of gospels - were in English, and his French texts included 'un gros livre Fraunceys de Merlyn', 'un large livre rouge del Tretiz du Roy Arthur', and 'un large livre en fraunceis appellez le Romance de Launcelot'. This last item could have been a copy of the Vulgate. The list of Simon de Burley's books mentions a 'Romans du Roy Arthur', a 'liure de les propheties de merlyn', and a 'liuret de bruyt', but it is impossible

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2. Madeleine Blaess, 'L'Abbaye de Bordesley et les livres de Guy de Beauchamp', Romania, 78 (1957), 511-18 (pp.512, 513).
to determine whether his library therefore contained Arthurian material in both French and English.¹

Interest in Arthurian matter is also in evidence among the clergy, who seem to have had the same kind of access to the texts as other classes of society. Libraries of religious foundations were enriched throughout the medieval period by donations by clerics of books of romance as well as other texts.² In the late fourteenth century, Nicholas of Hereford, Prior of Evesham Abbey, Worcestershire, gave to the priory of Penwortham in Lancashire, a 'Mort de Arthur, cum Sankreal in eodem volumine', among other books, and a fifteenth-century catalogue for St. Augustine's, Canterbury, mentions a 'Liber in gallico', a 'Liber de launcelet in gallico', and a 'liber qui vocatur Graal in gallico'.³ Books of Arthurian subject-matter in an historical context were also read. In 1331, Henry Eastry, Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, made a bequest of eighty books to the library, among which was a volume described as 'Historia Trojanorum', now MS B.L. Additional 45 103, which

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1. V.J. Scattergood, 'Two Medieval Book Lists', p.237, observes de Burley 'had what must have been a representative courtier's tastes in literature'; Scattergood identifies the book of Merlin's prophecies as a vaticinatory work, but the entry may also have indicated the thirteenth-century romance Les Prophecies de Merlin, a text unconnected with the British tradition of prophecy, which intercalates romance material with political comment (Les Prophecies de Merlin, edited by Lucy Allen Paton, 2 vols (New York, 1926-27). H.L.D. Ward, Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, vols I and II (London, 1883, 1893, reprinted 1961), I, 371-74, describes two thirteenth-century manuscripts of this text in the collection. The 'bruyt' could have been an Anglo-Norman text, as the list appears to specify texts written in English and Latin (as with items 18 and 19, for example), but there is no means of identifying the list's contents with absolute certainty (was item 3 a book of French Arthurian prose romance, for instance?).


contains, as well as a version of Dares Phrygius' *De Excidio Troiae Historia*, a copy of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and a French version of the prophecies of Merlin as they appear in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. 1

Although a complete copy of the Vulgate Cycle cannot, from the extant records, be unequivocally assigned to an English family or individual of the period, this seems to be primarily a fault in documentation. A mention of 'my book called "Romaunce"' or 'one French book' in a will, for example, gives only the vaguest idea of what the volume may contain. 2 The book described by Richard Roos in the will made in March 1482 as 'my grete booke called saint Grall bounde in boordes couerde with rede leder and plated with plates of laten', can be identified as a short version of the Vulgate, an imperfect copy of the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and *La Mort le Roi Artu*, only because it is extant as MS B.L. Royal 14.e.iii. 3

Information on manuscript production, on the other hand, shows that if the English were geographically apart from the Continent, they were not unable to obtain the de-luxe editions of romance produced by French and Italian ateliers throughout the medieval period, any more than the English court was ignorant of foreign cultural and literary developments. 4

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2. Cavanagh gives several examples, 'A Study of Books Privately Owned in England'; on p.61, Bartholomew Bacon, a Suffolk knight, mentions a 'Romance' in his will, which is dated 1389. Maud, Countess of Arundel, leaves a 'French book' to her daughter in 1436 (p.52). References to French books and 'romaunce' are not infrequent, but whether the latter term describes language or genre is not always clear.


4. R.S. Loomis and Laura Hibbard Loomis give an account of manuscript production in France, Italy and the Low Countries, in *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (London and New York, 1938), pp.89-130.
The English workshops produced no luxury copies of French romance themselves, and the number of French manuscripts in England is evidence of a flourishing book-trade between the Continent and Britain. The Paris bookshop-owner Reynault de Montet had clients on both sides of the Channel. In 1402, he supplied the duc de Berry with a complete version of the Vulgate Cycle (now MSS B.N. f.fr. 117-120) for 300 crowns. In 1414, he sold a copy of a Tristan to Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich, for 151 crowns. While the lavishly-produced volumes seem to have been the preserve of the Continental workshops, the market for such texts was international.

The fifteenth century witnesses a huge increase in the production of manuscripts in the vernacular. H.S. Bennett observes that a large proportion of English romances in general, written between 1100 and 1500, survive only in fifteenth-century manuscripts. This does not mean that French texts were as a consequence no longer read. Carol Meale's recent article on manuscripts and readers in fifteenth-century England draws together available evidence for an argument that the English audience for French romance was wider in the later Middle Ages than


2. 'The Production and Dissemination of Vernacular Manuscripts in the Fifteenth Century', The Library, fifth series, I (1946-47), 167-78 (pp.171-72). Bennett estimates some sixty-five of the eighty-four extant romances are so preserved. Derek Pearsall's study of English verse romance counts ninety-five romances, and concludes sixty-five were extant in fifteenth-century manuscripts, 'The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century', Essays and Studies, 29 (1976), 56-83 (p.58).

3. On both sides of the Channel, fifteenth-century men and women owned MSS of the romances which appear to have been read, rather than simply kept as valuable artefacts: Louis Malet, Sire de Graville, owned a (c. 1475) paper copy of Tristan, now MS B.L. Egerton, 989, described in Ward, Catalogue of Romances, I, 362-64. A fifteenth-century Tristan, now MS B.L. Harley 49 (Ward, Catalogue of Romances, I, 358-59), although on vellum, has no ornamentation other than initials in blue, flourished in red, and bears the signatures of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and of Elizabeth of York.
earlier studies have supposed. She points out, for example, that Richard R. Griffith's identification of the Morte D'Arthur's author as Thomas Malory of Papworth St Agnes does not have a firm enough foundation if it rests primarily on the idea that Malory's patron, Anthony Wydville, would have given him access to the French royal library, inherited from John, Duke of Bedford, who had acquired it some forty years previously. Meale shows that this library probably did not survive intact for very long, and suggests that Malory could have consulted his necessary source-material by means other than through the good offices of a rich book-owning benefactor.

The emergent picture is of a culture cognisant of French romance as part of the international literary scene. If there is a lack of concrete evidence for the widespread ownership in Britain of manuscripts of whole cycles, there exist many manuscripts which, although incomplete, contain enough material to convey the sense of the cyclic form. By this I mean the placing of the individual romance against the larger purview of specific epistemological and historical patterns, established primarily by the Vulgate Cycle (which will be considered in Chapter Three, pp.95-102). This 'locating' of the romance is not necessarily consonant with the kinds of intertextuality the English authors would claim for their own Arthurian texts. The cyclic romances and, more obviously, the long

2. 'The Authorship Question Reconsidered', in Aspects of Malory, pp.159-77.
3. Brian Woledge, Bibliographie des romans et nouvelles, pp.72-79, gives a listing of extant MSS of the Vulgate Cycle: the manuscript evidence suggests particular groupings (such as that of the latter portion of the Lancelot with the last two books in the Cycle, or the first two books of the Cycle and part of the Lancelot) were not unusual, but at the same time this does not point conclusively to the general unavailability of the Vulgate in its complete form. In many cases we cannot know in what period manuscripts were split up, or what proportion of text in a volume or series of volumes might have been lost.
prose narratives that grew out of them, use Arthur as a specific reference-point. The Arthurian world is at once an image of mutability, and the background for the playing-out of chevalerie. English re-workings of the romances tend not to be interested in reproducing the structure of, for example, the Vulgate. Even while, in the fifteenth century, Henry Lovelich versifies the first book of the Vulgate, and a substantial part of the second, in his Holy Grail and Merlin, his alignment of the texts with English tail-rhyme romance already suggests new co-ordinates for the material. Just as English adaptations may differ structurally from their French originals, so the whole Arthurian theme, because it has various connotations and is not 'contained' by a particular mode of writing, can be as much a means to experimentation as a way of placing one's subject-matter.

English remaniements explore the possibilities suggested by the meeting of French source-material with insular attitudes. I want briefly to look at one of the earliest adaptations of part of the Vulgate Merlin, the thirteenth-century Of Arthour and Of Merlin (which will also be referred to as AM), versions of which are still being

1. Lovelich's Merlin is incomplete. If, as R.W. Ackerman conjectures, Lovelich intended to make a series out of translations of the Estoire del Saint Graal, Merlin, and the Queste del Saint Graal, ('English Rimed and Prose Romances', pp.486-87), he would have chosen an (as far as we can tell) unusual variation on Vulgate romance groupings. The History of the Holy Grail is edited by F.J. Furnivall, EETS, extra series, 20, 24, 28, 30 (London, 1874, 1875, 1877, 1878), and Merlin is edited by E.A. Kock, EETS, extra series, 93, 112, original series, 185 (London, 1904, 1913, 1932).

copied in the fifteenth century,\(^1\) at the *Awntyrs Off Arthure*, an early fifteenth-century piece, and at one of the latest medieval adaptations from the Vulgate, *Lancelot of the Laik*. AM shows that English interest in Arthur could take a primarily nationalistic form, but as I intend to show, English texts also display other concerns, such as a preoccupation (more involved than in the French works) with the bases on which society is organised, and an interest in juxtaposing different, and sometimes anomalous, literary forms and modes.

The main source of *Of Arthour* and *Of Merlin* is provided by the Vulgate *Merlin*. In drawing from the material an account of British history from the death of King Constans to the defeat of King Rion at the hands of Arthur, Constans' grandson, the poem demonstrates an interest above all in national event.\(^2\) In keeping with this emphasis, much of the material concerning Merlin is excised,\(^3\) but there is a sharp focus on the Prophet's political importance. Certainly the text declares itself to be within an historiographical tradition; we are

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3. On the poet's selectivity in this regard, see Macrae-Gibson's introduction to the text, *AM*, II, 34.
often referred to 'pe brut' for corroborative evidence, and the use of a linear paratactic structure is accounted for by the text's presenting itself as historical writing rather than, as Larry D. Benson claims, because of the oral transmission of the romance, and because of the English audience's lack of familiarity with the material. Benson's assumptions about the production of early English romance both ignore that English readers and writers might have had access to other Arthurian works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia or Lajamon's Brut, and admit no overlap between audiences for English and French romance (or indeed, for historical material in English and Anglo-Norman). The text itself, however, does not give the impression of English authors working in a cultural vacuum, catering for a simple and largely ignorant audience; it seems rather that both the material, and the way it is presented, are the result of a deliberate aesthetic choice.

AM's narrative itself corroborates M.T. Clanchy's assessment of the linguistic situation in thirteenth-century England, where Latin and French have a place, as well as English. The introductory section of the poem accounts for the text on practical terms - not everyone can speak French (1.25-26); but as much weight is given to the suitability

1. Of Arthur and Of Merlin, 1.538: 'So it is writen in pe brout', and 1.3675: '...in pe brut ich it lerne'. The term 'brut' would seem to refer to an authoritative account which validates AM, rather than to a specific work. The author also refers to 'pe gest' (1.8679) and 'pis romaunce' (1.626). It is uncertain what kinds of connotation these terms would have had for the audience, other than their designation of 'the story', but it is perhaps significant that the author refers to a French source as 'pe romaunce' (1.8908).

2. Malory's 'Morte Darthur', p.52. Benson's alignment of the AM author's methodology as an adapter/translator with that of Malory suggests that 'Englishing' is equivalent to drastic cutting of anything 'irrelevant to the main plot', but this general observation is not particularly useful in application.

3. From Memory to Written Record: especially pertinent are Clanchy's remarks concerning Walter of Bibbesworth's rhyming French vocabulary, produced in the mid-thirteenth century (pp.151-56).
of conveying the Matter of Britain to an English audience in the English language, as to the apparent ignorance of a large number of Englishmen: 'Ri3t is āt Inglische vnderstond / āt was born in Ingland' (11.21-22).

While the prestige of knowing French and Latin is acknowledged (11.17-18), the poem demonstrates their use in social contexts. Latin is the language of diplomacy (11.8559-64) and of the erudite (11.1566-70). French features as the language of courtliness (1.3607, 11.6545-46). The impression conveyed is not of an English audience cut off from an appreciation of languages other than English, although their knowledge may be only partial.\(^2\)

Of Arthour and Of Merlin 'Englishes' the narrative on both a local level - in having Merlin's mother's trial conducted in accordance with English law, for example\(^3\) - and on a broad thematic plane. Thus the introduction acknowledges the prescriptive value of the written, in that those who study will be vouchsafed knowledge to keep them 'Fram sinne and fram warldes care' (1.14), but this form of writing is harnessed specifically to an understanding of conditions in the England depicted. The text provides its own gloss, a sententiousness contributing to a self-confessedly didactic function. Moreover, the view of history it presents

1. French is also a source of vocabulary for insults. At 1.8998, Rion addresses Bohort as "Fiz a putain". This use of French appears again in the alliterative Morte Arthure, when the Duke of Lorrayne cries "ffy a debles!" to his deserters (Morte Arthure, edited by Edmund Brock, EETS, original series, 8 (London, 1871), 1.2934.

2. The casual references to Lancelot (1.8906), and to the Grail (1.2750, 1.8902, 11.2220-22) appear to assume a knowledge of other branches of the legend on the part of the audience. Familiarity with the Grail story could have been via a Latin source, although R.H. Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles, does not list any early histories making mention of the Grail, but the aside on Lancelot suggests at least a passing acquaintance with French romance. (See too the mention in Beues Of Hamtoun (c. 1300), to 'sire Launcelot de Lake', The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun, edited by E. Kölbing, EETS, extra series, 46, 48, 65 (London, 1885, 1886, 1894), p.122, 11.2603-04).

is one in which lineage is the main guarantor of stability. Thus AM opens not (as in Merlin) with an account of the Prophet's birth, but with the state of the English monarchy, and how Fortiger disrupts the line through his wickedness. Fortiger has corrupted the nation by allowing inter-marriage of Christian with Heathen (ll.477-88), and the text stresses that he will be punished for his abuse of the 'ri3tful' system by defeat at the hand of Uther:

> Pus ended sir Fortiger
> Pat misbileued a fewe 3er-
> Pei he wer strong of mi3t
> To nou3t him brou3t his vnri3t. (ll.1899-1902)

Against this background, Merlin is important as one who helps to restore the line, a guardian of legitimacy. As he declares, his function is political: "...icham a ferly sond / Born to gode to al pis lond" (ll.1119-20). As Merlin is discussed in relation to the history of England, the French material is re-organised and adapted to highlight this role. The tale of Grisandole and the Emperor of Rome, for example, (Merlin, pp.281-92) is made into an account of a woman in disguise in Fortiger's own household (ll.1345-1436). This episode has the Enchanter correcting 'wrongful dom'. Ironically for the King, Merlin's restoration of right order extends beyond domestic concerns, to the whole country. Merlin's explanation of the red and white dragons who disturb the foundations of Fortiger's castle (ll.1634-80) emphasises the wrongful claim of Fortiger's "wicke stren" (l.1667) and how his sin will bring about the ruin of Britain. Merlin promises that a "gret conseyle" (l.1674) of good men will hold with the legitimate heirs to the English throne. It is Merlin's own task to maintain this unanimity of agreement

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1. The fifteenth-century Lincoln'n Inn MS, on the other hand, immediately promises the romance will tell of 'How Merlyn was geten and bore' (AM, I, 4, 1.6), but whether this means of catching attention reflects an increase in the popularity in the later Middle Ages of material concerning the Prophet, is difficult to establish.
among the worthy by means of "gode conseyl" (in terms of 'advice') and "wise rede" (1.2630).

AM conveys a sense of historicity by maintaining a linear narrative that makes more obvious the relation between volition and deed. It also re-organises the material to establish more clearly the royal lines of the British Kings. The tale opens with King Constans. In a passage which, as Macrae-Gibson has noted (AM, II, 102-03), represents a substantial amount of pruning and re-arranging on the English author's part, the quadruple marriage, between Uther and Ygerne, and between Ygerne's daughters and the Kings Nanters, Lot and Vriens, is recounted in one episode (11.2593-2626). The concern with the royal line links AM with historical texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia and the Brut, which trace history's chronology in terms of ruling kings. Furthermore, where the French text may use Merlin's prophecies proleptically with regard to events in later romances, AM is much vaguer about its connections with other texts, but uses Merlin to involve the reader in the same historical world as that described in the narrative. Merlin's prophecies are given an historical (rather than an 'historio-literary') context, by the observation:

Sum fel now late also
And sum bep nouzt 3ete ago (11.1703-04)

1. See Macrae-Gibson's notes on the re-ordering into single sequences of accounts of young knights intending to join Arthur, setting out, and fighting for him, introduction to AM, II, 14-15.

2. In Merlin, P.207, Merlin speaks of the "merueilleus liepart qui del roialme de benoyc istra", retrospectively identifiable as Lancelot.

3. The Vulgate Merlin has no reference to prophecy at this point in the narrative (p.35). In AM, the idea of a link between 'time then' and 'time now' is reiterated, when Merlin tells Blase later of '...propecies and oper ping / Pat sum beth passed and sum coming' (11.8575-76). The parallel passage in Merlin (pp.206-07) has Merlin fortell his own end, and mentions other events in the future of the narrative.
In terms of AM's style, it is difficult to determine what, outside the features of alliterative verse, might be said to constitute a 'traditional' English mode in this early work, as distinct from the preference of the individual author, and from French stylistic tendencies.\(^1\) The AM author uses some startling war imagery; arrows fly 'Also picke.../ In sonnebem so dop pe moten' (11.9159-60). The chaotic detritus of battle is compared to a crow's nest:

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Heueden fet and armes per
Lay strewed eueriwher
Vnder stede fet so picke
In crowes nest so dop pe sticke.  (11.9171-74)
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These additions in AM might as well be developments of the imaginative imagery also to be found in the French Merlin,\(^2\) as inspired by a native style such as the transformational imagery of Lazamon.\(^3\) Although the ultimate origin of certain aspects of a literary form may, however, be obscure, what can be established is that Of Arthour and Of Merlin, by virtue of its style and its form, is clearly related to other English tail-rhyme romances. It may not be feasible to trace in AM a line of influence direct from Lazamon, to the exclusion of other literature, trying to find in the AM poet's work -

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2. AM, 11.6043-44, describes Arthur and his men striking the enemy, 'And hewen on wip gret powers / On schides so dop pis carpenters'. The image corresponds to an observation in Merlin, 'la ot tel brait & tel marteleis & tel noise comme se che fuissent carpentier qui carpentassent el bos' (p.147).

3. An example is the famous 'steel fish' episode in the Brut, II, 11.10638-10645:

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...Baldulf.../ Auene bi-haldeð.
hu ligeð i pan straeme. stelene fisces.
mid sweorde bi-georede. heore sund is awemmed...
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(Per was) Schaft tobroken and swerd ydrawe
Mani noble kniØt yslave

(11.1853-54) -

an echo of the Brut author's more richly alliterative style:

Cnihtes gunnen riden. gaeres gunnen gliden.
breken braede speren brusleden sceldes.

(II, 11.9755-56)

But there is an identifiable similarity in style between AM and other early romances. The battle-description at 11.5754-58, for example -

Per was meting of men o main
Wip spere and wip sharp sword
Per les mani man his lord
Per was sched so michel blod
Pat it ran as a flod -

finds analogy in Havelok, where the battle-field so fills with blood, 'pat pe strem ran intil pe hul', and in The Erle of Tolous, where in combat

So moche blode there was spylte
That the felde was ouyr-hylte,
As hyt were a flode.2

AM is recognisably aligned with a body of English works, and with a certain mode of writing.

We have a similar problem with affiliations of style in what the editor calls 'head-pieces', seasonal topoi serving as short introductory passages, describing months and seasonal activities associated with them. Some have a parallel in Merlin (p.134, 11.28-33 corresponds to AM, 11.4675-80, for example) and others are independent interpolations. Of the ten such passages, some are consonant in mood with the narrative (thus the love between Arthur and Guinevere is preceded in the text by a description of June as a time for love, 11.8657-62), and others stand in

ironical relation to it - the evocation of April, 11.259-64, is at odds with the action, which shows Fortiger taking over the land. This same irony is incidentally in evidence in Merlin - for example, in an episode where the Saxons are victims of a savage surprise attack by the Christians, '& la nuit estoit bele & clere & faisoit moult seri car auril estoit entres' (Merlin, p.166). AM differs in using the head-piece with greater frequency, which has the effect of marking these 'lyrical interludes' out as constituting a different grammar. The use of head-pieces in AM might seem something of an aberration - in contrast to their use in the 'sister-romance', Kyng Alisaunder, where the head-pieces, sententious asides and proverbs appear as so many grotesque marginalia, playing out a range of possibilities and contradictions around the central text. In AM, one has more of a sense not of a space having been set aside for a whole set of diverse elements, but of a hinting at a register not adopted in the main body of the work.

Of Arthour and Of Merlin does no more than glance at what becomes of structural importance in the early fifteenth-century Awntyrs Off Arthure - the relation between alternative conceptual systems and an interest in the anomalous. The Awntyrs does not derive from French prose romance, but I want briefly to mention it here as a text that exploits the idea that various contextualising choices are available to the English author of Arthurian material. The Awntyrs uses the Arthurian court to look at the inter-relation of structures of behaviour, and at how one establishes links between romance narrative and other

1. Together, these interpolations bear out the assertion with which the poem opens, I, 11.1-2: 'Djuers is pis myddellerde / To lewed men and to lerede'.

models. Drawing on both romance-motif and the exemplum tradition,¹
The Awntyrs sets up moral co-ordinates, at the same time appearing more interested in playing one mode off against the other than in making morality the central issue. Ralph Hanna III believes the appearance of Guinevere's mother to her, and her warnings to her about the future of the Round Table, expose how 'the romance world has reached a point where it can no longer be fulfilling in and of its own right, where it must derive its sanction totally from nonchivalric materials'.² But The Awntyrs, whose allegiance seems principally to such works as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the alliterative Morte Arthure, is less concerned with the judgemental than with setting up narrative possibilities, possibilities which it does not feel obliged to follow through - although, for example, Guinevere's generosity in the second part of the poem may be read as directly contingent on the ghost's admonitions to her in the first section. We are presented with a series of ritualised activities - hunting, tournament, the code of courtoisie, religious observation - which are left open-ended, rather than resolved.

This interest in diversity is also in evidence in the late fifteenth-century Scottish Lancelot of the Laik, which bases itself, so the prologue tells us, on a part of the Prose Lancelot recounting the wars between Arthur and Galeholt, and how Lancelot's chivalry both helps


to bring about peace, and wins him the Queen's favour\(^1\) (this sequence corresponds to *Lancelot*, VII, 434–VIII, 128). The poem is incomplete, and preserved in only one manuscript, MS Cambridge University Library Kk.I.5 which, apart from *Lancelot of the Laik*, contains only religious and moral pieces.\(^2\) The manuscript context thus suggests the most significant aspect of the poem to be where it expands the episode in the French source which has Arthur being instructed in his duties as a king. The little critical attention this poem has received is directed mainly at this section (11.1274–2143), and its apparent incongruity with the rest of the text. Walter Scheps reads the whole as a critique of chivalric mores,\(^3\) while Bertram Vogel thinks the poet's inspiration is historical, the inclusion of the advice section dictated by the difficulties of James III's reign.\(^4\)

The French source-material is, however, also contextualised by the poet's dream-vision, which is described in the prologue to the Arthurian tale. Writing the poem is itself, we are told, of therapeutic value to the love-stricken poet, a 'litil occupatioune' (1.168) dedicated to his lady. In the poem there is an implicit comment on different modes of


2. See the description of 'parts vi-vii' of the MS (listed together because they are by the same scribe, and appear to have formed one MS originally), in Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*, pp.103-05. The moral and advice texts of part vi of the MS are edited by J. Rawson Lumby, *Ratis Raving and Other Moral and Religious Pieces, in Prose and Verse*, EETS, original series, 43 (London, 1870).

3. 'The Thematic Unity of Lancelot of the Laik', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 5 (1967-68), 167-75. Scheps believes the poem to be 'an attempt to come to grips with the Arthurian legend in the context of Christian orthodoxy' (p.175), while the advice section is specifically concerned with how one may reconcile the image of King Arthur as Romance character and as medieval Christian King.

behaviour and their value, in the juxtaposition of private and public obligations and actions, in the poet's desire and his act of writing, in Arthur's responsibility as king and in Lancelot's love for Guinevere, and his sense of duty as a knight. But questions of the status of the written, and the parameters of literary control, are also raised, by the form in which these different activities and concerns are encoded.

The narrative opens with the poet at odds with his environment. At 'the kalendis of May' (1.112), when all is under Love's governance, the narrator finds himself in a locus amoenus of green meadows and bird-song, to which lovers may be expected to react with joy, but which to him in his 'thochtful' state is only distracting. He falls into a rapture, and in this dream-like mood has a vision of a little creature who synthesises the elements in the landscape, 'A birde, yat was as ony lawrare gren' (1.82). The bird is a messenger from the God of Love, come to chastise the poet for his despair and his lack of self-reliance, his refusal to find his "awn remede" for his troubles:

'He suffir harme, that to redress his wo
Previdith not; for long ore he be sonde,
Holl of his leich, that schewith not his vound.'

(11.104-06)

As it is his love for his lady that causes him such pain, he would be well-advised to write something that will bring him to her attention. Waking from his trance, the poet decides on a theme which is apposite in some ways to his own situation. Having been told to banish melancholy, the poet chooses to tell of the knight who has conquered 'the sorowful castell' (1.259). Lancelot and the writer are both in love's bonds (at the opening of the tale, Lancelot is also literally a prisoner), and that Lancelot's deeds of arms will win him Guinevere's love (hopefully) pre-figures the poet's own success in love on completion of the poem. The poet suffers 'The derdful suerd of lowis hot dissire' (1.29), and
Lancelot too feels 'the sword of double peine and wo' (1.700). But Lancelot makes literal and thus transcends love's metaphors, in action:

The red knyght, byrnyng in loues fyre,
Goith to o knyght, als swift as ony vyre,
The wich he persit throuche and throuche the hart.

(11.1090-92)

Lancelot's chivalry both brings him emotional fulfilment, in that it wins him Guinevere, and reaffirms his public status as a good knight, bringing about a reconciliation between Arthur and his adversary.

But in context, the Lancelot episodes represent more than ingenuous wish-fulfilment for poet-persona and reader. The juxtaposition of Lancelot's experience with the declared situation of the poet provides an ironic alignment of different manifestations of amorous solipsism, that of the fictitious character, and of the inscribed self-fictionalising poet. Furthermore, this irony is only one aspect of the poem's literary self-consciousness. The central referent in the work is literature rather than emotional sympathy. From the beginning, the prologue, with its evocation of spring, signals affinity with a certain kind of literature. Lancelot is a subject, 'Of quhois fame.../ Clerkis in to diuerse bukis redis' (11.203-04). At the end of the prologue, the narrator defers, not to his lady, but to the 'Flour of poyetis' (1.320).

This 'literariness' is further inscribed in the sequence in which Amytans advises Arthur. In the French text, the advice from 'uns preudons plains de grant savoir' (Lancelot, VIII, 12), stresses both Arthur's responsibility to his people, and the necessity of good relations with God and with the Church. Arthur is especially guilty of responsibility for the death of Ban and the ruin of Ban's family, which he forgets on first making his confession, and his adviser has to send him back to the chapel to confess again, before the counselling session can
continue (VIII, 16). Lancelot of the Laik refers us to the 'holl romans' (I.1436), for further details at this point, not because the source is over-long or complex, but as a means of signalling a difference in interest from the French text. Where Lancelot emphasises societal obligations, the adaptation assigns importance as much to the form of counsel-giving as to the importance of social reciprocity. Amytans conducts his argument with the help of borrowings from advice literature, warning against flatterers (II.1918-96), and invoking Alexander the Great as exemplum (II.1835-53). We are directed to an awareness of a literary, as well as an ethical, context.

The poem poses generally the question of which register one privileges. The copyist of the extant manuscript evidently sees the 'advice section' as the most important (as do later readers), although the poet makes no mention of it in the brief résumé of the action given in the prologue (II.300-13). Lancelot of the Laik does not make explicit where priorities should ultimately lie, if not with the fact of the written itself, but demonstrates how a frame must needs be constructed for the presentation of the Arthurian theme, and raises the issue of how Arthurian literature stands in relation to other literatures.

The French prose narratives have a specific value and are already locatable within a given precise framework. English literary response does not recognise an authoritative canon of Arthurian writings as do the French works. In the French, the narrative has its own status preassigned it; it comes to the reader already neatly-packaged, its value fixed. The English re-workings encode a rather different attitude: the authors select from a large quantity of material, and the status claimed for the individual text is in part a defence of the choices made. The remaniement is to be defined against a multiplicity of possible contexts for the Arthurian material used. Furthermore, there is
potential for the author–text relationship inscribed in the poem to be more fluid than in the French tales, as happens in Lancelot of the Laik. This is not to say that French writings universally insist only on their commemorator value, or that English literature has no cognisance of writing as commemoration, but that the Arthurian prose narratives in French are imbued with a meaning and a value that already delineate the parameters of the text as literary enterprise, while in the English adaptations there is an emphasis on choice and flexibility.

English remaniements, then, choose their own elaborations for their material, instead of using a received framework. Because these works construct their status on an individual basis – with reference to a selective context as well as by their own form – they can also be seen to partake in a concern with how literature achieves stability, a concern one can trace across the range of literary styles. There is a continuing debate as to how the written may assure stability, and also how it may destabilise the foundations of knowledge, and these issues are very much of concern in the fifteenth century. The French Arthurian texts that base themselves on the earlier prose cycles locate stability in the written. The English authors who, as translators, are particularly acute readers, are implicitly involved with the issues raised by the active reception of the written.

Where does Malory stand in relation to these concerns? If the very bulk of his Works aligns him with the Continental tradition, the special construction of the 'hoole book' suggests rather that he be read carefully within the parameters of, and against, both English treatments of the material, and the French tradition. Furthermore, we need to establish how Malory responds to the intellectual climate of his day, and what kinds of concern are indicated by his use of different styles. A long prose work such as the English Prose Merlin provides a useful
'normative' text, as we shall see in Chapters Two and Three, against which to measure the nature of Malory's achievement, but we have also to appreciate the general background of fifteenth-century translation.

As Louis Kelly has observed, the translated work in the target language has a value independent of the original in the source language: 'Just as features of an utterance reveal purpose and expressive needs, so do those of a translated text. The essential variable is what the translator sees in the original, and what he wishes to pass on.'\(^1\) It is interesting that Kelly should invoke the analogy of the spoken word to describe the nature of translation, for Malory also presents his 'translations' as having a value in time more usually applicable to the 'time now' of the spoken, than to the written. Recent studies have moved away from the idea of fifteenth-century prose as necessarily parasitic upon Continental models, both for literary innovation, and for variety of texture.\(^2\) Translations from French to English are an opportunity for renewal of those texts, by means of new emphases and contexts, and Janel Mueller's work on Middle English prose shows that English authors, while always willing to incorporate another literature's styles, are not wholly dependent on another language for literary refinements.\(^3\)

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Translation is a literary discipline rather than a confused and hurried exercise. Rita Copeland's valuable discussion of translation with regard to Middle English religious texts stresses the existence of a variety of translation styles and practices, all deployed to a specific purpose, and her concluding remarks on Charles d'Orléans' poetry suggest fundamental differences in the literary use of English and French. Comparing the poem 'Mon cueur est devenu hermite' with its English counterpart, 'My poore hert bicomen is hermyte' ('Translation and Literary Style', pp.318-20), Copeland shows how 'Mon cueur' is a lyric finely-tuned to a whole system of similar allegorical poetry, and thus suggests by allusion what needs to be made explicit in the English version. Copeland intimates that it is the nature of the English 'tradition' that necessitates the change in style in the English version: 'the fund of allegorical usage inherited in English from Chaucer and Gower, who in turn derive theirs from the earlier French tradition, can supply only a limited vocabulary towards the specialized expressive system of Charles' verse' (p.318). While the poems evidently reflect different literary contexts, I would suggest that it is not an 'insufficient tradition' that accounts for the English poem's style, as much as a different attitude towards literary precedents.

The later medieval Arthurian prose narratives in French work from premises already found in the Vulgate: because the material, and the way it is written, have a clear value, these texts have only to declare themselves part of an already 'known' system. English works do not limit themselves to (or insure themselves against charges of, say, frivolity, by means of) adherence to a particular system. Their

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contexts are far more various. Malory presents us with a series of texts like the Vulgate Cycle in that they (albeit not in strict chronological order) chart the rise and fall of Arthurian society. But they are within an English tradition, and a more radical example of that tradition, in that they can be read as individual responses to the French, encoding different emphases, and yet they also have a cumulative significance when read as a 'whole book'. The Anglicised French Malory on occasion employs demonstrates the double cultural origin of his works: \(^1\) stylistically and thematically, he processes the concerns of French romance, of the English Arthurian tradition, and of the fifteenth century. Malory does more than simply juxtapose slightly different perspectives, however; he indicates the greater openness of interpretation available to the English authors, not only on account of the diversity of their literary antecedents, but by virtue of their subsequently complex engagement with the act of translation.

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1. For a different view, see Margaret Muir and P.J.C. Field, 'French Words and Phrases in Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur', Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 72 (1971), 483-500, who conclude from the evidence that 'Malory knew French very much less well than he wanted his readers to believe' (p.500).
CHAPTER TWO

THE ENGLISH PROSE MERLIN,

MALORY, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSLATION

There is...many wordes that haue dyverse vnderstondynges, & some tyme they ar taken in one wyse, some tyme in an other, and som tyme they may be taken in dyuerse wyse in one reson or clause. Dyuerse wordes also in dyuerse scryptures: ar set & vnderstonde some tyme other wyse then auctoures of gramer tell or speke of. Oure language is/also so dyuerse in yt selfe, that the commen maner of spekyng in Englysshe of some contre can skante be vnderstonde in some other contre of the same londe.¹

The author of the fifteenth-century Myroure of oure Ladye, discussing the difficulties of translating from Latin into English, explains modifications of meaning in Latin vocabulary in terms of grammar and syntax. But he perceives English to be lamentably deficient as a vehicle for expression - 'there ys many wordes in Latyn that we haue no propre englyssh accordyne therto' (p.7). The moral implications of the vernacular's 'instability' are made explicit later in the century by Caxton in the preface to his translation of Eneydos -

And certaynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne. For we englysshe men ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone, whiche is neuer stedfaste but euer wauerynge.²

Such observations would appear to endorse N.F. Blake's argument for 'a lack of tradition and a lack of precision' in the English Language of the late medieval period,³ had not the translator's ambivalent attitude to

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3. N.F. Blake, The English Language in Medieval Literature (London, 1977), p.168 and passim. The problem with Blake's argument seems to be that it accords consciousness of a 'tradition' of kinds to writers, but not to readers, on one hand indicating a literary context, on the other intimating the recovery of that context to be impossible.
the target language as much a religious orthodox, as a linguistic, basis. While Blake accords Latin (unlike English) a fixed and recoverable 'tradition', the Myroure author observes how the meaning of even a Latin word may be modified by its context. Deprecation of English here is bound up with the religious nature of the subject-matter - a translation of offices and masses of Our Lady for the use of the sisters of Syon Abbey - and the necessary pre-eminence of Latin in this area, and hence with the translator's apologia in the face of possible detractors. Deficient English may be, but it is also the means of bringing the unlearned in the community from ignorance to understanding 'to the gostly conforte and profyte of youre soules' (p.2). (At the same time, the English is not to take the place of the Latin text.)

The 'diversity' found in Latin and English, both written and spoken, the passage suggests, is endemic to all human communication. Most significant in the translator's brief discussion of technical problems is the awareness shown of vocabulary's possible (and various) associative and collocative meanings. This chapter is concerned with how the English Prose Merlin and Malory's Works demonstrate and use this awareness, the EPM to produce a variously-textured prose, and Malory more explicitly to show how different styles effect different meanings.

As French furnishes English with many loan-words during the medieval period, a wide lexical range becomes available to the author translating from French to English; the possibility of incorporating more words from the source language to the target language makes for a literature potentially rich in verbal resonances. The strength of the translation

1. The Myroure of oure Ladye, p.71:

This lokeyng on the englyshe whyle the latyn ys redde. ys to be vnderstonde of them that haue sayde theyre mattyns or redde their legende before. For else I wolde not counsell them to leue the herynge of the latyn. for entendaunce of the englysshe.
lies in its ability to maximise these resources. The mid-fifteenth-century English Prose Merlin is important in a study of Malory, because as a close translation of the Vulgate Merlin, it provides the context of a 'normative' prose style for the Works, a frame of reference within which Malory's emphases and interests may more readily be gauged. Mark Lambert's study sets Malory's style within the general parameters of fifteenth-century prose. Here I want to show how assessing both difference and similarity in Malory's and the EPM's treatment of subject-matter can offer a fuller description of Malory's technique. The nature and importance of battle-description and seasons topoi in the EPM and in Malory will be examined, in order to ask to what extent the writers are conscious of working within a specific tradition, and are aware of the stylistic choices available.

It is also important, as a background to Malory's method, to look at declared attitudes to translation in the fifteenth century. Caxton, in the preface to Eneydos, gives account of himself as a 'transparent' translator; he is the means of access to a foreign text for the English reader, but he wishes his avowedly neutral style to interfere as little as possible with the text itself:

...bytwene playn rude & curyous (terms), I stande abasshed... Therfor in a meane bytwene bothe, I haue reduced & translated this sayd booke in to our englysshe, not ouer rude ne curyous, but in suche termes as shall be vnderstanden, by god dys grace, accordynge to my copye.../ ...For I haue but folowed my copye in frenshe as nygh as me is possyble.

(Eneydos, pp.3-4)

The EPM, in its close adherence to the Vulgate Merlin, appears to share something of the quality Caxton claims for his work, but offers no explicit statement of its procedure. The last part of this section

will examine why the EPM is not presented specifically as a translation, while Malory, by continual reference to the French (and on one occasion the English) context for his work, uses the concept of text as translation to modify the relation between text, authorial voice, and reader.

Jonathan Culler has pointed out how necessary the sense of 'intertext' is in literary criticism, and acknowledges at the same time the difficulties one faces in considering 'the relationship between a text and the languages or discursive practices of a culture and its relationship to those particular texts which, for the text in question, articulate that culture and its possibilities'.

Recovering literary associations in fifteenth-century translation is especially problematic; it is difficult to establish groupings of English words and French loanwords as significantly different registers, or to attribute a specific moral meaning to the use of one word in preference to another. When, for example, Merlin, having fallen in love with Nimiane, considers the consequences of enjoying 'the deduyt of a mayden' (EPM, II, 308), there is nothing to indicate that the French word is especially loaded, employed contrastively against the English terms 'witte and...connynge', which are used to describe Merlin's attributes.

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1. 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', Modern Language Notes, 91 (1976), 1380-96 (p.1383). One of the wittiest demonstrations of the importance of intertext, in modern literature, is in Russell Hoban, Riddley Walker (London, 1982), where, in the twilight post-apocalyptic world, fragmented recovery of an earlier civilisation's artefacts leads one of the characters to interpret a pamphlet on a late-medieval wall-painting of the Eustace legend as a description of nuclear fission (pp.118-25).

2. The term 'deduyt' occurs in EPM, II, 307, in the context of Dionas' love of hunting, 'the deduyt of the wode and the river', and again at II, 454, in mention of the marriage celebrations for Arthur and Gonnore; 'where-to sholde I yow devise the ioye and the deduyt that thei hadden, ffor the fourthe part cowde I not telle'. The figure of 'Deduiz' in the Roman de la Rose is translated in The Romaunt of the Rose as 'Myrthe' (The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F.N. Robinson, second edition (London, 1957), p.572, l.703),
his actions will lead him to 'lese and / displese' (EPM, II, 308-09) God; the choice of doublet here seems to owe more to the translator's sense of rhythm than to a desire to balance English with French vocabulary. By close attention to the rhetorical strategies individual texts themselves set up, and by recognising echoes from comparable literature, however, one may determine how English and French are more sophisticatedly integrated.

The corpus of English and French writing offers a number of stylistic possibilities to an author; the incidence of formulae - according to Milman Parry's famous definition\(^1\) - and of the 'formulaic', in the sense of expressions that recall, if they do not exactly reproduce, aspects of similar literature, acts as a useful shorthand for indicating context.\(^2\) The alliterative lines evoking battle-scenes in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women,\(^3\) and in the Knight's Tale, both refer us to alliterative battle poetry in general, and alert us to a specific descriptive mode:

---In gooth the sharpe spore into the syde...
Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke;
He feeleth thurgh the herte-spoon the prikke.
Up spryngen speres twenty foot on highte;
Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte;

---With grysely soun out goth the grete gonne,
And heterly they hurtelen al atones...

---In gooth the sharpe spore into the syde...
Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke;
He feeleth thurgh the herte-spoon the prikke.
Up spryngen speres twenty foot on highte;
Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte;

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Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke;
He feeleth thurgh the herte-spoon the prikke.
Up spryngen speres twenty foot on highte;
Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte;

---With grysely soun out goth the grete gonne,
And heterly they hurtelen al atones...

---In gooth the sharpe spore into the syde...
Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke;
He feeleth thurgh the herte-spoon the prikke.
Up spryngen speres twenty foot on highte;
Out goon the swerdes as the silver brighte;

---With grysely soun out goth the grete gonne,
And heterly they hurtelen al atones...

1. 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style', Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, 41 (1930), 73-147 (p.80): a formula is 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given, essential idea'.

2. See also Carol Fewster, 'Narrative Transformations of Past and Present in Middle English Romance: Guy of Warwick, Amis and Amiloun and The Squyr of Lowe Degre' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1984, forthcoming in book form (Cambridge, 1986)), pp. 13-26, on formulae as generic 'reading-signals', setting up a particular response on the part of the reader.

3. The Complete Works, pp.496-97, 11.635-55:
The helmes they tohewen and toshrede;
Out brest the blood with stierne stremes rede;...
Ther stomblen steedes stronge, and doun gooth al;...  

David Lawton's research into battle-description in Middle English literature leads him to conclude that there is a 'decorum' attached to a poet's use of strong alliteration in scenes of warfare, while the variety of the descriptions shows that poets are by no means limited to a small stock of set phrases. Lawton also believes that 'the poetic battle-sequences in whatever metrical form are closer to one another than to any prose sequences'. Prose is not, however, wholly uninfluenced by the alliterative mode. The English Prose Merlin makes use of it, as does (more spectacularly) Malory, as the Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius witnesses. But where the EPM author employs the alliterative mode for local (albeit purposeful) effect, Malory also uses alliteration in a sustained form, fully exploiting the resonances offered by the mode.

I want to examine how the EPM author employs certain stylistic features locally, while Malory develops those features more fully, and gives them a structural importance. As with alliterative collocations, this happens on a small, as well as on a large, scale. As an example, we may take the use of the expression 'body for body'. In the English Prose Merlin, battles are made intelligible as part of a working-through of destiny; they have their place within the historiographical model with which the text presents us (as we shall see in the Historiography section of Chapter Three). Arthur's defiance of the Emperor of Rome


emphasises that the head of state embodies (literally) the claims and
the power of his people:

'(Gawain), ...bidde (the Emperour) returne hom a-gein,
and leve the londe, for it is myn, and yef he will not
so, lete hym come to bateile, and prove whiche of vs
hath right, ffor while I live I shall it diffende
a-gein the Romaynes, and conquered [sic] it by bateile,
and prove it a-gein hym body for body, whiche of vs two
shall it haue of right.'

(EPM, II, 651)

The phrase 'body for body' is also used, however, to stress individual
valour. The encounter between Bohors and Amaunt, for example (EPM, II,
364-70), is glossed by neither Merlin nor the authorial voice in terms
of its relevance to the historical process.

Bohors, on his way to join Arthur at Bredigan, is challenged to his
right to the castle of Charroye by Amaunt, who refuses to give Arthur
allegiance. The two lords determine to avoid excessive bloodshed by
engaging in single combat rather than endanger their men. Thus Amaunt
proposes to Bohors:

'Ye be here for the right of kynge Arthur that ye holde
for lorde; now lete vs than fight to-geder body for
body, by this couenaunt: that yef ye me conquere the
Castell to be youre quyte,...and yef it be so that I
yow conquere, yele me the Castell and go yowre-self
quyte,...and thus may ye eschewe alle periles and
stintyn alle strives.'

(EPM, II, 365)

Throughout the encounter, it is the equality in martial prowess of the
combatants that is stressed. Each is lauded for his chivalric qualities.

1. See also Rion's challenge to Arthur, EPM, II, 627: "...we shall make
oure peple with-drawe on bothe parties a-rowme, and thow and I shall
fight to-geder body for body..." This translates Merlin, p.417;
"si faisons no gent traire arriere & nous combatons moi & toi cors a
cors?". As the Additional MS transcribed by Sommer is not the exact
source of EPM, one has to be wary of making judgements on the basis
of a single word or phrase.

2. Merlin, p.247: "...vous estes ci por le droit le roy artu que vous
tenes a seignor, si nous combatons moi & vous cors a cors par tel
conuenant se vous me conqueres que li chastiaus soit uostre
quitement..."
Amaunt is no 'rank rebel' to Arthur, but characterised as 'a goode knight and a trewe'. Bohors eventually kills Amaunt - accidentally, for he had 'made semblaunt to smyte ther as he wolde not' (EPM, II, 368) - but the final emphasis is not on how Bohors' victory vindicates Arthur's just claim, but on the act of combat itself:

(Amaunt's men) tolde all the trouthe how the kynge Amaunt...and...the kynge Bohors...foughten body for body, and how/the kynge Amaunt was deed, and tolde (Arthur) all theire traueyle, that nothinge lefte thei vn-tolde that thei cowde on thenke.

(EPM, II, 369-70)\(^1\)

The English in the above passages translates the French expression 'cors a cors' not, I think, because the translator lacks imagination, but because the significance of the phrase is recognised. (Lovelich, on the other hand, in his re-working of Merlin, avoids the term, although he calls the warriors 'bothen ful worthy Bodyes', and instead has Amaunt's men describe how the men 'fowhten hand be hand',\(^2\) which seems to have been a more typically English expression.)\(^3\)

In the Bohors and Amaunt episode the EPM comes closest in tone to what Jill Mann identifies as of primary importance in Malory, the concept of combat as 'sacramental', a means of affirming the fellowship obtaining between two knights of like integrity. The language detailing Bohors'

\(^1\) Merlin, p.250: 'si li content toute lauenture...comment il se combatirent entrelz .ij. cors a cors. & comment (amans) fu mors.'

\(^2\) Lovelich's Merlin, edited by E.A. Kock, EETS, extra series, 93, 112, original series, 185 (London, 1904, 1913, 1932), part 3, p.677, l.25493. Earlier, p.670, l.25247, the term 'cors a cors' is translated as "we tweyne to-gyderis al a-lone".

\(^3\) See the Middle English Dictionary, edited by Hans Kurath, S.M. Kuhn and others (Ann Arbor, 1954- ); 'body for body' is cited, Part B 4, p.1008, as occurring only as a French legal phrase, outside EPM and Malory, in the London Chronicle (?1435): 'And the Erle off Kent... meymprised the same Erle body ffor body.' But the M.E.D. cites lines from La3amon's Brut - 'Hond wið honde fuhten þa þeȝe men' - and from Lydgate's Troy Book; 'Knyȝtly bope þei fouȝten hond of hond' (Part H 4, p.895).
and Amaunt's encounter points to a value in combat transcendent of their political allegiances. Jill Mann observes that the term 'body' in Middle English carries with it a sense of a more than physical being, and suggests that Malory employs the word to place 'an emphasis on the corporeal as that within which/the non-corporeal person mysteriously resides'. Malory appears, however, to use expressions of corporeality taken from both French and English, with some precision. The matching of 'body for body' has a specific meaning in the Works, and hands figure as part of the articulation of the individual knight's sense of self.

Although in general terms, characters appear to be described interchangeably as "good men of her handes" (I, 20; 14), and "passynge good... of...body" (I, 55; 14), there are distinctions made in more specific locutions. A knight will swear "by the feythe of my body" (I, 144; 4-5, and I, 39; 30-31, for example), which effectively foregrounds his integrity. Upon undertaking an enterprise, the outcome of which may not be certain, a knight is said to "aventure his body" (I, 47; 1-2). Mention of hands, however, tends to carry with it a heightened sense of the individual's own volition and control, and of ability realised in action. Thus Tristram proffers to "make good with my hondys" the assertion that Isode is beautiful (I, 414; 21), and Arthur proposes "lette us redresse oure ryghtes with oure handis" (I, 206; 12-13).

The EPM, as we have seen, employs the term 'body for body' to express the conditions of single combat, and through it suggests a more personal aspect to battle. In Malory, the phrase appears more strictly limited


2. For an idea of the frequency and the different contexts in which expressions including mention of 'hand' and 'body' are used, see Tomomi Kato, A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory (Tokyo, 1974), pp.236, 484, 573-75.
to a legal terminology, employed of judicial combat, and generally designates one knight's obligation to fight another, while to fight 'hand for hand' (as, for example, Galahalt suggests to Tristram, I, 416; 11), stresses the individual's choice in the matter. Sir Outlake, in The Tale of King Arthur, challenges Sir Damas, or any other knight willing to fight on his behalf, to meet 'body for body' for the right to his lands (I, 138; 23-37). Similarly, Elyas asks Mark to find 'a knyght that wolde fyght with hym body for body' to settle the question of his claim to Cornwall (II, 622; 30 - 623; 2). A note on Arthurian law with regard to murder explains:

...the custom was suche tho dayes that and ony man were appealed of ony treson othir of murthure he sholde fyght body for body, other ellys to fynde another knyght for hym.

(Works, I, 405; 2-4)

The combatant's identity is less important than the observance of due legal process. Thus when Gawain, enraged at his brother's death, tells Lancelot:

'...if hit were nat for the Popis commaundement...I shulde do batayle with the myne owne hondis, body for body, and preve hit uppon the that thou haste ben...false',

(Works, III, 1201; 1-4)

the phrases he uses are not mere intensifiers. Gawain is both asserting his belief that there is legal provision for settling the 'debate' between himself and Sir Lancelot, and declaring his personal interest in venturing his integrity in the field of judicial combat.1 How Malory creates a context across the Works for this particular imaging of integrity needs some investigation.

1. Mador de la Porte similarly signals his personal involvement in the matter when he accuses Guinevere of treason in being responsible for his cousin's death: "and unto myne othe I woll preve hit with my body, honde for hande, who that woll sey the contrary" (II, 1055; 18-20).
In the fourteenth-century alliterative *Morte Arthure*, power is often signalled by mention of hands: "...thow salle dye this day, thurghe dynt of my handez!"\(^1\) Arthur promises the giant of St. Michael's Mount. Gawain is also seen to kill many "be dynt of his hondes" (1.3024), while the Pope is to crown Arthur 'kyndly with krysomede hondes' (1.3185). Phrases such as these are both re-produced and reiterated by Malory in the *Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*. Malory's Arthur also tells the giant, "thou shalt dye this day thorow the dynte of my hondis." ([Works], I, 202; 24-5), and his men hope to achieve victory 'thorow wyghtnesse of hondys' (I, 227; 29-30). Not only does Malory retain the reference to the Pope crowning Arthur 'with crysemed hondys' ([Works], I, 244; 20), but that this detail of the ceremony is repeated (I, 245; 7), emphasises it as an important ratification of Arthur's power. The authority invested in Arthur himself, meanwhile, is evidenced when he rewards the young Priamus, whom he 'lyghtly lete dubbe...a deuke with his hondys' ([Works], I, 241; 8-11), and the closing lines of the Tale again highlight the importance of the image: 'HERE ENDYTH THE TALE OF THE NOBLE KYNGE ARTHURE THAT WAS EMPEROURE HYMSELF THOROW DYGYNTÉ OF HIS HONDYS' (I, 247; 3-5).\(^2\)

In the *Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*, 'proues of... hondis' is the physical manifestation of an authority and power which is based on more than the fact of physical strength. In the *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*, the hero's pseudonym helps to foreground the question of identity which is central to the narrative. Gareth is possessed of 'the fayreste handis that ever man sye' (I, 293; 31). In calling the

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2. Vinaver's use of capitalisation does not always appear necessary in the text, but has been retained, here and elsewhere, for the sake of consistency.
unknown "Beawmaynes, that is to say Fayre Handys" (I, 295; 4-5), Kay reads the physical attribute as symbol of a quality he does not believe the young man has. But as Lancelot warns him, he may have named him only too well, for "in playne batayle hande for hande," (Works, I, 337; 3-4), Beawmaynes sets about realising his potential and carving out his identity. His hands (physically and figuratively) are part of his inheritance as a son of Orkney; his own volition decides whether they are to remain an aberration in a 'kychyn knave'\'s physique, or whether they indicate true nobility.

The use of hands to figure individual integrity features with reference to Lancelot, who sustains two literal wounds to the hand at points in the narrative where his integrity appears at issue. In the Book of Sir Tristram, the mad chained Lancelot breaks his bonds to go to the aid of Sir Blyaunate, whose adversaries he attacks 'wyth his bare hondys' (II, 820; 14). But in escaping, Lancelot has 'hurte hys hondys sore': the injury to his hands intimates his lack of 'wholeness', for in this episode Lancelot only partially apprehends his knightly role, and is to remain insane for another eighteen months.

Lancelot's integrity is again at issue when he makes a tryst with Guinevere at Mellyagaunce\'s castle; attempting to gain access to the Queen's chamber through the window, he tears its iron bars from the stone, 'And therewithall one of the barres of iron kutte the brawne of his hondys thorowwoute to the bone' (III, 1131; 23-5). This is the one episode in which the author is direct about the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere:

1. Apart from Urry and, in the Book of the Sankgreal, Evelake\'s man, Lancelot is the only knight in the Works mentioned as receiving a wound to the hand (although Sir Gylberthe (I, 281; 13) and Sir Bartelot (II, 820; 21-22) are recorded as suffering the loss of a hand).
...sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde, but toke his plesaunce and hys lykynge...

(III, 1131; 28-30)

Lancelot tries to ignore/obliterate the physical evidence and political consequences of his action, endeavouring, as he leaves, to 'put... togydир...agayne' the broken window, and careless of the wound which leaves on the sheets testimony of his loss of 'wholeness'. Lavayne bandages the hand and gloves it, 'that hit sholde nat be aspyed'. Lancelot promises to prove "with my hondys" that the Queen is innocent of the crime of which she stands accused. In the subsequent combat with Mellyagaunсe (III,1138-40), Lancelot re-asserts his 'worship', and reclaims Guinevere's position at court, but the question of his own culpability is ambivalently figured. Does the circumstance of his victory - against the odds, with one hand tied behind his back - emphasise the justness of his cause, or point out that his integrity is nonetheless in question, that he is not 'whole'?

The link between wounds to the hand and Lancelot's sense of self makes all the more poignant the details of the healing of Urry in the episode following Lancelot's defence of Guinevere's good name. The miracle of Urry's cure recalls the episode in the Book of the Sankgreal, in which Joseph of Arimathea heals Evelake's man, by virtue of the image of Christ crucified;

'And as sone as that man had towched the crosse with hys honde hit was as hole as ever hit was tofore.'

(II, 880; 12-14)

Lambert's analysis of the passage (Malory: Style and Vision, pp.55-56) draws out the means by which Urry's 'wholeness' can be seen as emblematic of the wholeness of the Round Table. While the Urry episode has to do with the Arthurian court's perception of itself, in the light of earlier imagery, the wound to Urry's hand specifies the issue of Lancelot's
integrity, and its healing is the manifestation of a Divine Grace extended both to the Round Table and to its 'beste knight', who has offered himself as God's instrument in all humility:

...he hylde up hys hondys and loked unto the este...
And than the laste of all he serched (Urry's) honde, and anone hit fayre healed.  
(Works, III, 1152; 18-32)

There is an exactness about Malory's use of terminology, and his language exploits possibilities offered by both English and French usage. When we turn to the topic of language used of battle, we find in both the English Prose Merlin and Malory the interaction of English and French locutions (as with the example of 'cors a cors', discussed above). We will see that while for the EPM, the stylistic choice made available is largely a local matter, Malory sees in different styles new possibilities for the structuring of the narrative. Mark Lambert's discussion of fifteenth-century prose is valuable insofar as it establishes a stylistics for the late-medieval English prose author, but in the conclusions he draws from his taxonomy, he does not allow space for the modification in meaning which can result from the literary context of a certain descriptive or stylistic technique. In battle-description, Lambert distinguishes between what he identifies as traditional, formulaic detail, such as comparisons between warriors and wild animals, establishing a 'standard comparison (which) implies normative chivalry' (Malory: Style and Vision, p.43), and the 'blueprint detail'. The blueprint detail refers only to specific events in combat - who struck whom, for instance - and is neither transferable to other situations, nor climactic or emphatic in function. Its variety, Lambert proposes, is evidence of the author's wishing to convey a careful historicity (Malory: Style and Vision, p.49). We shall see that in both the EPM and the Works, these stylistic devices have a wider literary application than Lambert would claim for them.
As a translator, the EPM author most often remains faithful to the French text, but the narrative is also reproduced in a different idiom, and to particular effect. In terms of vocabulary, the author is innovative in using, for example, the words 'pesaunt' to mean 'heavy' (EPM, II, 628) and 'briaunt', meaning 'in a fiery or noisy manner', (EPM, I, 117), words borrowed directly from the French source. The same tendency has been noted in Malory, and P.J.C. Field has suggested that neologisms are less evidence of happy invention than of over-dependence on source-material. It seems rather that fifteenth-century authors are alive to, and willing to exploit, the possibilities inherent in an extension of lexis. For the EPM author, such vocabulary contributes to the stock already available for describing warfare. At times the reproduction of the French may seem unimaginative. If one compares a passage from the Battle of Bredigan episode with the corresponding part of the Additional manuscript of the Vulgate Merlin, the heavy dependence of the English on the French text for terms of prowess

1. EPM, II, 628, where Arthur and Rion 'smyte pesaunt strokes at discouert', corresponds to Merlin, p.418', sentrefferent grans cops & pesans a descouert' EPM, I, 117, '(Arthur) than smote the horse with the spores, that it ran so faste and so briaunt, that alle hadden merveile that it be-helden', corresponds to Merlin, p.94: 'li rois artus...fierit le cheual des esperons & li court sus si tost & si bruant que tout li baron en ont meruelles cil qui aler le ueoient'. The same passage (EPM, I, 117) contains the expression 'prime barbe', in description of the young King Ventres, which appears to be a French borrowing, although there is no equivalent at this point in the Additional MS of Merlin, p.93, where Ventres is simply 'boins cheualiers & fort a meruelles'. The M.E.D. cites only the EPM as using this term (Part B2, p.644).

2. Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style (London, 1971), Appendix 1, 'Some possible Neologisms in Malory', pp.160-61. He replies to R.N. Rioux's article, 'Sir Thomas Malory créateur verbal', Études Anglaises, 12 (1959), 193-97, on p.61: 'If Malory were the first to write down some [words in the 'intermediate' stage between French and their acceptance in proper English usage] he is more likely to have done so with a sense that they came from a socially acceptable part of his own language than with a feeling that they were linguistic innovations from another.'
and physical description is evident:

Lors auint que li rois artus troua le roy ban tout a piet car il auoient son cheual ochis & il se desfent si bien que nus nose alui uenir & il estoit grans cheualiers & / fors a desmesure si lor corut sus parmi la grant prese & il li font uoie si len laisent aler . car tant redoutent ses colps quil ni a si hardi qui a colp lost atendre . Et quant li rois artus le vit si len vait cele part lespee el polg soillie de sanc dommes & de cheuaus car merueilles fairoit darmes . & il ataint .j . cheualier qui moult richement estoit armes & montes . & li rois artus le fiert parmi le hiaume si grant colp que tout le porfent iusquas dens & cil chiet a terre mort puis prent le cheual par le resne si le maine au roy ban si li dist . tenes li miens amis si montes car en mal iour sont entre li nostre anemi car ia lor uerres guerpir plache

(Merlin, pp.120-21)

Than fill it that the kynge Arthur fonde the kynge ban on fote, in myddell of the presse, his swerde in his fiste, that hym dejfended so vigerously that noon ne durst hym a-proche. And he was a moche knyght, and a stronge oute of mesure. And he lepe vpon hem thourgh the presse; and whan he neyghed ner thei made hym wey, for so thei douted his strokes / that ther was noon so hardy that durst hem a-byde. Ther-with com the kynge Arthur, brekynge the presse, gripyng his swerde, all be-soyled with blode of men and of horse, for he didi many merveiles of armes with his body. And when he saugh the kynge Ban at so grete myschef, he wax wode for Ire. Than he rode to a knyght that richely horsed; and Arthur lifte yp the swerde, and smote hym thourgh the helme soche a stroke that he slyt hym to the teth, and he fill to grounde. Than he toke the horse be the reynes, and ledde it to kynge ban, and seide, "Frende, lepe on lightly, for in euell tyme ben oure enmyes entred; anoon shall ye se hem for-sake the felde."

(EPM, I, 164-65)

Ban, for example, is 'fors a desmesure', 'stronge oute of measure'.

Arthur performs 'merveiles...darmes', 'merveiles of armes'. But the passage also recalls the beginning of the battle as described a few pages earlier, where Arthur is said to perform 'many merveiles in armes'
(EPM, I, 157),¹ and the enemy avoid him, just as they avoid Ban in the passage quoted above, because 'they ne durste not of hym a-byde a stroke'. The EPM incorporates the French phrases here so as to establish a standard by means of which Ban and Arthur are shown as equal in prowess.

When, in comparison with this method, we turn to part of Malory's account of the same battle, we see valour expressed in different terms:

When, in comparison with this method, we turn to part of Malory's account of the same battle, we see valour expressed in different terms:

\[\text{Be that tyme com into the prees kynge Arthure and founde kynge Ban stondyng amonge the dede men and dede horse, fyghtyng on foote as a wood lyon, that there / com none nyghe hym as farre as he myght reche with hys swerde but he caught a grevous buffette; whereof kynge Arthure had grete pité. And kynge Arthure was so blody that by hys shylde there myght no man know hym, for all was blode and brayne that stake on his swerde and on hys shylde. And as kynge Arthure loked besyde hym he sawe a knyght that was passyngely well horsed. And therewith kynge Arthure ran to hym and smote hym on the helme, that hys swerde wente unto his teeth, and the knyght sanke downe to the erthe dede. And anone kynge Arthure toke hys horse by the rayne and ladde hym unto kynge Ban and seyde,}\\
\begin{quote}
'Fayre brothir, have ye thys horse, for ye have grete myster thereof, and me repentys sore of youre grete damage.'\\

'Hit shall be sone revenged,' seyde kynge Ban, 'for I truste in God myne hurte ys none suche but som of them may sore repente thys.'\\

'I woll welle,' seyde kynge Arthure, 'for I se youre dedys full actuall; nevertheles I myght nat com to you at that tyme.'
\end{quote}\]

(Works, I, 33; 33 - 34; 19)

The image likening Ban to an enraged lion has been used earlier of Arthur, who 'fared woode as a lyon' in the fight.² But the recurrent use of limited animal imagery does not so much point to a standard, as locate

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1. This corresponds to Merlin, p.116: 'Illuec fist li rois artus merueilles de son cors si le connurent en poi de tans cil qui onques mais ne lauoint ueu si li faisoient place tout li plus hardi car il nel osoient a cop attendre.'

2. Works, I, 30; 29. At I, 29; 6, 'Arthure as a lyon ran unto kynge Cradiment'. Ban is also described as 'ferse as a lyon', I, 32; 32.
the combatants in a particular relation to battle. In the above passage, Malory's interest is primarily in the physical details of warfare, in the 'dede men and dede horse', the unrecognisability of Arthur, 'for all was blode and brayne that stake on his swerde and on hys shylde'. These details, and the dialogue between Ban and Arthur, direct us to consider the engagement at an immediate, human level, rather than as an event to be grouped with other, similar events. The description of the Last Battle (III, 1235-37), and the events surrounding it, is characterised by a stark simplicity of detail - witness Mordred and Arthur's last combat (III, 1237; 12-22), or Lucan's death (III, 1238; 15-21) - and the most moving effects are achieved by a literal account of event, occasionally heightened by reiteration:

And thus they fought all the longe day, and never stynted tylle the noble knyghtes were layde to the colde erthe. And ever they fought stylle tylle hit was nere nyght, and by then was there an hondred thousand leyde dede uppon the erthe.¹

(III, 1236; 6-10)

A strongly alliterative style employed at times in the EPM shows that the author has called upon English resources in translating the French text. A comparison of a passage, from the account of the battle against the Saxons, and its French source, demonstrates to what extent the text in the target language departs from its source:

1. La Mort le Roi Artu similarly avoids the use of battle imagery in favour of literal description, when recounting the Last Battle (pp. 230-47), but achieves an effect different from that conveyed by the Works, through its use of apostrophe to God - "Ha! Dex, por quoi me lessiez vos tant abessier de proesce terriene?" (p.245) - and meditation on Fortune: "Fortune, qui m'a esté mere jusque ci, et or m'est devenue marrastre, me fet user le remenant de ma vie en douleur et en corrouz et en tristesce" (p.247). The Mort thus emphasises the place in the universal order of the events described, and the apprehension of those events' significance, by the characters in the narrative. The explicitness of references to Fortune in the French text contrasts with the suggestiveness of the image in Arthur's dream in the Works, III, 1233; 11-22.

Ther-with assembled the Bateiles on bothe two sides, ther was many a grete growen spere frusshed a-sonder, and many a gone to the grounde glode in a stounde; but as soone as the kynge Ban, and the kynge Bohors, and the kynge de Cent Chiualers were come with the seconde bateile, and saugh the seconde bateile of the saisnes meve; than thei ronne to-geder fiercely. and ther myght a man haue sein many a helme hurled on an hepe, and many a shafte and sheldes frayen to-geder. and many hauberke rente of double mayle; grete and hidyouse was the bateile. and the slaughter grete on bothe sides.

The expressions the EPM uses here both recall language featuring else-where in the narrative.¹ and echo similar phrases in alliterative battle-poetry such as the Morte Arthure and The Siege of Jerusalem.² The construction 'many a' is a feature of Malory's description of the Last Battle (Works, III, 1235; 32-33), and the aim appears to be the same as

1. At EPM, II, 628, it is recounted how 'the speres splindered in splyntes', and knights 'to hewen the sheldes and hauberkes', 'slitte helmes and to-rente hauberkes'. II, 390, mentions 'a grete growen spere of aissh with a sharpe heede of stiell'.

2. Thorowe scheldys they schotte, and scherde thorowe mailes,... Hittes one hellmes fulle hertelyche dynttys, Hewes appone hawberkes with fulle harde wapyns!

   (alliterative Morte Arthure, 11.2545-52)

Schafetes schedred wer sone & scheldes yprell, And many schalke thurghe schotte withe pe scharpe ende, Brunyes & brîst wede blody by-runne...

in EPM; to evoke mortal combat economically yet forcefully. It is interesting to note also that the rhyme 'grounde' and 'stounde' is commonly found in English tail-rhyme romances of the period, including the Lincoln's Inn manuscript version of Of Arthour and Of Merlin (produced c. 1450); thus a baron complains to Pendragon:

"Kyling Fortager and kyng Aungys
Wip mony a Sarsyn of gret pris
Schal ows heue doun to grounde
Bote 3e helpe ows in pis stounde."

The English author makes use of the 'decorum' of alliteration, as Lawton calls it, to evoke a general, panoramic view of the battle-field, instead of relaying exact details. The alliteration also has the effect of modifying the dynamic of battle-description, by accelerating and intensifying the action.

While the EPM draws on alliteration for a stylistic purpose which is limited to local scenes of warfare, Malory's use of the technique in The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius gives it a much wider application. The alliterative element is not 'accidental' here; the


"Tel me child 3ef pow can
Why my castel in pis stounde
Ys euery ny3t falle to grounde" (ll.1532-34)

and the Auchinleck version, which we looked at in Chapter One, also uses the rhyme, at ll.1839-40;

"(Fortiger and Angys) penke hem sle to grounde 3ef pou duellest ani stounde."

2. P.J.C. Field, Romance and Chronicle, sees Malory as 'overcome' (p.67) by the alliterative Morte Arthure: 'By the time he is again using an English poem as his direct source, in the "Morte", he has enough independence in matter and manner to write in his own way.' As Malory probably had access to at least one other version of the Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius (see R.H. Wilson, 'Malory's Early Knowledge of Arthurian Romance', University of Texas Studies in English, 29 (1950), 33-50, on Malory's familiarity with the Vulgate Merlin), there is no reason to suppose that his choice and treatment of the English source here is the result of anything other than a conscious decision.
incidence of a recognisably English literary register may be said to foreground the nationalistic and historical importance of the Matter of Britain. Vinaver proposes that the Tale is the result of an anxiety to propagandise: Elizabeth Pochoda sees it as a 'mirror for princes', with Arthur as exemplary king. These readings draw on aspects of the historicising perspective the style of the Tale promotes. But the Tale is also 'placed' in relation to the other books in the Works, which offer different means of evaluating the narrative.

When, in the Tale, Arthur sets out on campaign, he leaves two of his men in guardianship of the kingdom, one Baudwen of Bretayne, the other

sir Cadore son of Cornuayle, that was at the tyme called sir Constantyne, that aftir was kynge aftir Arthurs dayes. And there in the presence of all the lordis the kynge reayned all the rule unto thes two lordis and quene Gwenyvere. And sir Trystrams at that tyme beleft with kynge Marke of Cornuayle for the love of La Beale Isode, wherefore sir Launcelot was passyng wrothe.

(Works, I, 195; 3-10)

Vinaver has dismissed as unnecessary Malory's interpolation concerning Tristram here, and at the beginning of the Tale. Yet Malory is by this

1. Rosalind Field makes some valuable observations on the kind of milieu in which the alliterative Morte Arthure was produced, and on northern English reception of the text as informed by a view of Arthur as 'symbol of royal power', in 'The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Romance', in Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background, edited by David Lawton (Cambridge, 1982), pp.54-69, (pp.67-69). On the historicity of Malory's source text, see Lee W. Patterson, 'The Historiography of Romance and the Alliterative Morte Arthure', Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 13 (1983), 1-32.

2. Commentary, Works, III, 1368: '...Malory altered his source so as to make Arthur's journey across the Continent resemble Henry V's itineray, and...this simple change turned the whole story into a tribute to the victor of Agincourt.'


4. Commentary, III, 1372: 'The reference to Tristram (at I, 185; 1-7) is irrelevant, for he plays no part in the story of Arthur's war against Rome.'
means invoking both an historical era - where one places Arthur in the line of British kings - and the 'time' (in the sense of both chronology and era) of the Works as a whole. The organisation of the Works is as important as one's sense of the diachronic time-scale of events. In the Tale, Arthur has an awareness, largely absent from the opening tales, of the past as informing present action:

"For this muche have I founde in the cronycles of this londe, that...we (have) evydence inowghe to the empyre of holé Rome."

(Works, I, 188; 5-14)¹

The Tale itself demonstrates one perspective, arrived at stylistically as much as in terms of narrative, on how one recuperates, reads, and uses the past.

Caxton, as Sally Shaw has noted, excises much of the alliterative element in the Tale in order to align its style more closely with that of the rest of the Works.² He thus paraphrases and edits at points in battle-description where alliteration is most concentrated (see, for example, the glossing of the account of Chastalyne's death and its avenging, Works, I, 239-40). Alliterative dialogue also tends to be omitted or modified, as a comparison of the Caxton text and the Winchester manuscript in Works, I, 227 and 229, demonstrates. To Shaw's mind, Caxton 'has made a coherent whole from his somewhat unsophisticated original' ('Caxton and Malory', pp.142-43). Such a judgement ignores the thematic importance the alliterative mode has here; it is as much a signal of national

1. This appears to be the only point in the Works in which a character refers to a written historical record as a basis for action, though Lancelot worries, in the last books, about what will be 'chronicled' of him when he in turn becomes part of that written past; "And that ys to me grete hevynes, for ever I feare aftir my dayes that men shall cronycle uppon me that I was fleamed oute of thys londe" (III, 1203; 4-6).

identity as are the references to Arthurian chivalry as 'our knights', references Caxton retains.¹

Evidently, a previous knowledge of the alliterative Morte Arthure will colour a reading of the Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius, but what seems significant is not that the moral questions put forward by the alliterative Morte are not confronted, or that Malory introduces an 'epic' Arthur as opposed to a 'romance' Arthur,² but that he is employing a style perceived as English, to experiment with a certain mode of historicity. The language of the Tale promotes the image of Arthur as conqueror. His actions in the present assert past claims and fulfil premonitions of the future as encoded in dreams. The detailed description of the 'dreadful dragon' in Arthur's dream (I, 196; 8-187; 23), in contrast to the briefer sketch of the bear, and this creature's passivity in the ensuing fight, serve to aggrandize the king.

¹ Caxton seems anxious also to point up a difference between Christian and Heathen; thus Gawain counsels (though not in the Winchester MS version), 'make vs redy to mete with these sarasyns and mysbyleuyng men and wyth the helpe of god we shal overthowe them' (Works, I, 235; (Caxton, Book V) 6-7). The flavour is similar (as is the style) to Caxton's translation of Godeffroy of Bolyne (printed in 1481), edited by M. Noyes Colvin, EETS, extra series, 64 (London, 1893), which, for example, describes, pp.154-55, how 'our peple' are helped by God against the Turks, and how the Christians in Jerusalem pray that God 'wold deliuer (his peple) fro this peryll, ne suffre that the cyte and holy places...wold...be...habandouned...in the desloyalte of the heten men' (p.293).

² The distinction between 'epic' and 'romance' is not, I think, one that Malory would make. Malory only twice mentions a source in the Tale, and on both occasions refers to it as a 'romance' (I, 245; 6-7, and I, 216; 10). In this he follows the alliterative Morte Arthure, which mentions both 'romance' (1.3200, 1.3440), and 'cronycles' (1.3218) as source material, and speaks too of the 'Bruytte' (1.4346). While The Laud Troy Book (edited by J.E. Wilting, EETS, original series, 121, 122 (London, 1902, 1903, reprinted as one volume, New York, 1975), seems to equate 'romance' with 'fiction' (Dares and Dicte, we are told, write 'With-oute lesyng or variaunce/ In siker proses and no romaunce' (11.6357-58), Malory and the alliterative poet seem not to distinguish between romance and chronicle in terms of the authoritative weight each might have.
and the Round Table, while intimating the relative unimportance of threats to them as yet unknown ("some tyraunte that turmentis thy peple" (I, 197; 19-20)). Arthur's might is a given. At the beginning of the Tale he has already 'venquyshed the moste party of his enemyes' (Works, I, 185; 3-4); his future success is contingent only upon his own volition.

Once crowned Emperor, Arthur calls a halt to his campaign, in an idiom uncharacteristic of the Tale's general timbre:

'...inowghe is as good as a feste, for to attemte God overmuche I holde hit not wysedom.'

(Works, I, 246; 11-13)

The alliterative mode demarcates a particular type of action; there is no tension between word and deed. Causative links between past, present, and future are intelligible in that Arthur's volition is unproblematically made concrete. But this is not the only historical view of Arthur vouchsafed us in the Works. In the later books, the author introduces another perspective on the historical connotations of Arthur's world, when he calls on English readers to apply a sense of national identity in their connection of past event as related in the text, to the 'time now' of the moment of reading:

Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was [when the people abandon Arthur for Mordred]?... Lo thus was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme.

(Works, III, 1229; 6-14)

This particular appraisal of the past is interpolated to demonstrate above all how the authorial voice mediates between reader and book, and the consequences of this will be examined a little later in the chapter.

The English Prose Merlin has very few interpolations on the part of the narratorial voice, but directs one's responses by its use of locus
and deployment of seasons topoi. While the landscape Malory uses is largely indeterminate, the EPM employs landscape within its schema of battle; moreover, the transformational imagery employed as part of an imaginative heightening of battle-scenes exposes the dehumanizing effects of war and shows it at the same time divorced from and grotesquely parodic of nature. In this it not only follows the source, but is in the tradition of Of Arthour and Of Merlin, the imagery of which we looked at in Chapter One, and of texts such as The Laud Troy Book, where Hector, for example, is shown in the midst of battle:

Ther lay aboute him hondes & knokeles.
As thikke as any honysocles,
That In somer stondes In grene medes.  (11.5381-83)

In the EPM, men are metamorphosed into animals, or so hacked about as to be unrecognisable as creatures. Ban, fighting against Claudas' forces, such slaughter that 'the hepes lay in the feilde as it hadde be dede swyne or shepe' (EPM, I, 125). The knights of the Round Table 'made soche lardure thourgh the felde [of battle] as it hadde ben shepe strangeled with wolves' (EPM, II, 337). When Rion and Ban's forces meet, 'Ther was dolerouse fight, and the mortalite so grete, that ther ran stremes of blode as a rennynge river thourgh the felde' (EPM, II, 337).

The relation between the natural and the human as a means of informing a transformational view of warfare is most tellingly exploited in the description of Brangore's battle against the Saxons:

1. The EPM translates Merlin, p.98: '...les monchiaus en gisoient par les chans ausi comme ce fuissent berbis ou porcel'.
2. Merlin, p.229: 'comme berbis estrangles des lous'. The Laud Troy Book also describes how Hector 'sclow...bothe jonge and olde,/ As wolues don schep that ben In folde' (11.6333-34).
3. Merlin, pp.228-29: 'Iluec fu..l'ochision &la mortalite si grans que 11/ sans courut a grans ruissiaus 'parmi le champ'.

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Merlin, pp. 228-29: 'Iluec fu..l'ochision &la mortalite si grans que 11/ sans courut a grans ruissiaus 'parmi le champ'.
Ther was gret noise and crakkyng of speres, and many oon throwe to grounde bothe horse and man, and that dured longe till that thei come to the brigge, that many fill in to the water, and many a tronchon of speres and sheldes that the sharpe streme bar down the ryver, and it was not fully the houre of pryme.

The booke seith that the river ran down be-fore Strangore that the kynge Carados helde in his baile, and he was lenyng oute at the wyndowes of the paleise a-bowe, and be-heilde the medowes and the river, and the gardins that were grene florisshed, and saugh the water that was clier and sharp rennyng brought down sheldes and speres fletynge grete foyson; and he loked that wey that he saugh it come fro, and saugh the aire all troble of the fire and duste, and upon the watir fletynge the harneys of knyghtes and of horse that were deed and drowned, and dought a-noon how the kynge Brangore faught with the / saisnes. Than he lepe hastely vpon his feet, and cried to his men, 'Now as armes, gentill knyghtes, ffor he that is not hardy at this nede is not worthi to be a knyght'.

(EPM, II, 248-49)

This passage also appears in the Vulgate Merlin,¹ but it is further refined in the English version, where the additional details of the 'gardins that were grene florisshed' foregrounds the disjunction between location and action. The description is intensified by the incorporation of French alliterative phrases - thus the spears 'fletynge grete foyson' reproduces 'floter a grant foyson' - and the use of new phrases, such as the doublet 'dede and drowned' to translate 'noiet'.

Battle, figured in terms of a fantastic landscape, takes over the natural landscape, which is peripheral to the battle-field. There appears to be initially some sympathy between man and nature. Brangore is described as 'wep(ing) watir with his eyen'² in the face of his

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¹ Merlin, p.172: 'Illuec ot grant froseis de lances & grant abateis dommes & de cheuaus & grant merteleis de makes & despees...'. The formula 'The booke seith' does not appear in the Additional MS, and may be either consciously used by the EPM author to foreground the point, or already in another MS of Merlin. See notes 1 and 2, p.65.

helplessness at the slaughter of his men; it is the 'watir that was
cleir' which then carries to Carados the physical witness of Brangore's
loss, alerting him to his ally's predicament, and thus providing
Brangore with the means to his salvation. The shock of the description
depends, as the English translator has recognised, on the incongruity of
having the peaceful locus described being invaded by instruments of war
dissociated from their usual context. The river is first witness, then
recorder of, the acts of men, for by evening, it carries the evidence of
Carados' success:

...the river of arson be-com all reade of the blode
and of the brayn that was ther sheed of (Saxon) men
and of horse.

(EPM, II, 250)

The inter-relation of man and environment, and of man's re-shaping of his
surroundings, heightens the significance of warfare in the narrative, and
the EPM, in the modifications it makes, complements the tone of the
French text. For Malory, large-scale battles do not feature as
structurally important in the same way as in the EPM, and only rarely is
a simile drawn from nature to describe martial prowess; thus, while
the EPM provides a good account of the modes of expression available to
the prose-writer describing battle, it also shows to what extent Malory's
method is selective rather than comprehensive on the stylistic level.

In Chapter One, we noted a heightened awareness of seasons topoi on
the part of the Of Arthour and Of Merlin author. The EPM translator
does not interpolate extra seasons-descriptions, but is alive to the
implications of those in the source. Sometimes the season is made note
of simply as a marker of chronological time, much as Pentecost or Lammas-

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1. An example is the pun in the Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney, where the
Damsel addresses the Green Knight: "Alas! hit is shame/ that evir
ye were made knyght to se suche a lad to macche you as the wede
growyth over the corne." (Works, III, 305; 38 - 306; 2).
tide may be mentioned, part of the detail allowing one to read the text as a well-documented 'historical' narrative (not that the EPM, or the French Merlin itself, ultimately keeps faith with this reading). Thus Arthur pitches his tent in inclement weather while on campaign, 'for, as the boke seith, it was in the moneth of Janever, viij dayes before Candelmesse' (EPM, I, 150).\(^1\) The season may also be invoked to reinforce a particular atmosphere. So 'feire wedir and clere' (EPM, I, 132) graces the festivities at Logres after Arthur's coronation. Description of this kind may also be used to disquieting effect; one episode gives an account of the Christian attack on a Saxon encampment:

...the cristin were yet viij MI, and of the saisnes ne were but ii3 MI, and alle vn-armed, as thei that were sette at soper, and wende not to haue hadde no drede. And the nyght was feire and clere, and a soft weder in the myddill of Aprill. And the saisnes were so hewen and martired in shorte tyme that of the ii3 MI ascaped not xi, and that ne were slain with speres, and swerdes, and axes...

(EPM, II, 240)\(^2\)

The curtness of the reference to April weather, its context, the savagery of the Christians, the strategic disadvantage of the unarmed Saxons, all contribute to an unease in the reader as to where one's sympathies ought to lie. Moreover, as if to compound the difficulty of this passage, April is invoked again two pages later in an amplification after the manner recommended by Matthew of Vendôme.\(^3\) And while the traditional

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1. Merlin, p.112: '...si faisoit moult froit car cestoit el mois de lienuier'. There is no mention of 'the boke' in the Additional MS.

2. EPM follows Merlin, pp.166-67: here it is the Additional MS that refers to a source; 'auril estoit entres si comme li contes dist'.

associations of the season are affirmed, 'in the tyme that these erbes and trees be-gynne to florissh, and the briddes singen with ther voys for the swetnesse of the newe mery seson,' (EPM, II, 242), a messenger brings to King Ventres news to both gladden and distress him.

In brief evocations of the seasons, then, the author may exploit the expectations he sets up, in order to achieve particular effects. But in the English Prose Merlin, season-description may also be deployed in such a way as to inform thematic concerns. The topos may be used in the ubi sunt tradition to encourage remembrance, especially of love. On various occasions Arthurian knights, on their way to do battle, are shown moving through terrain that has all the appearance of a locus amoenus. The details of birdsong, of weather 'fayre and delitable', of a 'plesaunte lande', act as a trigger to the memory and lead the young men to recall 'their armours whiche / thei were wonte to haue the presence' (EPM, II, 384-85). The knights do not, however, fall foul of luxuriousness; arms and love are not in conflict one with the other. Rather, the prowess of a knight is further validated by his gentillesse in love.

May-time is bound up with remembrance of love, but evocations of spring also signal new movements in the narrative. For example, a third of the way through the narrative, Lot's sons, together with their cousin Galeshyn, in spite of parental opposition, decide to go and join Arthur, "the moste worthi knyght of the worlde":

Now, seith the boke, that a-boute the entre of may, in the tyme when these briddes synghith with clier voys and all thynge reioyseth, and than these wodes and medowes beth florished grene, and these medowes full of newe tendir erbys and entermedled with dyuerse colours that swote be of odoures, and these Amerouse yonge lusty peple reioyse be-cause of the lusty seson, it be-fill that Gawein and Agrauayn and Caharet and

1. Merlin, p.168, has simply: 'Lors auint .j. ioedi au soir en auril que vns messages...vint..'
Gaheries and Galashyn, and thei that be-come in here companye, ben risen erly, for the heete that dide hem grete anoye on the day, as they that wolde ride in the cole of the mornynge that was feire and stille and a softe weder, and thei were yonge and tender to suffre grete trauayle, and thei were wele armed, and hadde on hattes of stile as squyres vsed in tho dayes, and theire swerdes hangynge at the pomell of theire sadeles be-fore, for the contrey was not sure for the saisnes that rode and ronne through the contrey for vitaile and for to robbe and distrye the londe that was so plentenouse and riche er the mysbelevynge peple were entred, wherof was grete pite that so goode a londe sholde be distroyed for synne and for myslyvinge, [as god hath ofte sithes chastysed diuerse remes.]

(EPM, II, 191)

(Calling to mind spring-time, when all is 'florished grene', sets up a correlation between the renewal of nature and the mood of 'these amerouse yonge lusty peple'; the tone of vigour and optimism extends to the future of the untried squires, 'yonge and tender' as they are. The whole amalgamates the familiar and the historically distant. The demonstrative pronouns referring us to 'these briddes', 'these wodes', 'these medowes', 'these...yonge peple', intimate the event of this recurrent cycle as a shared experience between reader and text. The brothers seem remote in time - the passage moves from the present to the past tense when it describes their progress. They are not in modern dress, but 'hadde on hattes of stile as squyres vsed in tho dayes'. Only incidental detail makes the scene unfamiliar. As the reader is encouraged to recognise the associations of May-time, so he/she is made

1. Merlin, p.134; the Additional MS carries an extra detail in invoking spring, '& ces douces aigues reuient en lor canel', and mentions 'valles &...puceles' rather than 'yonge...peple'. The phrase describing the squires wearing steel helmets 'comme seriant' (where EPM has 'of stile as squyres vsed in tho dayes') poses a problem of translation. Does the French mean simply that they were well-armed? ('seriant' from 'seri', defined in one sense by Frédéric Godefroy, Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française (Paris, 1881-1902), Vol. VII (Paris, 1892), p.389, as 'bien fourni, bien muni'?))
aware of the historical pattern of which this episode is a component. The historical and seasonal cycles are mutually informing in terms of recollection, and understanding of, the past. The English translation has the narratorial voice express sorrow at the conditions in Logres, 'the londe that was so plentenouse', while contextualising the people's misfortune as a manifestation of the Divine retribution inevitably attendant on man's recalcitrance. The country has been laid waste 'as god hath ofte sithes chastysed diverse remes'.

The squires react on a literal level to the fact of the 'entre of May'; it prescribes their setting off early, before the heat makes travelling uncomfortable. On the metaphorical level, the young men fulfil the promise with which this passage invests them, by redeeming Logres from subjection to the Saxon. They are welcomed as the instruments for the unification of the realm under Arthur; they will break the cycle of sin and despair by uniting the British forces. \(^1\) Remembrance of spring-time here is thus part of a specific patterning. The 'April' passages cited earlier can be read as contributing to the EPM's strategy of keeping more than one perspective in play - just as the narrative evokes the image of grieving women at the same instant it relates Arthur's victory \(^2\) on the battle-field - while in this longer episode, the reader is encouraged to see Logres' experience as

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1. EPM, II, 230; Merlin tells Arthur of the squires' role, saying that:

   the childeren wolde neuer be knyghtes till that he made hem knyghtes with his owne honde; "and drede yow not," quod Merlin, "of youre londe, for thei shull it well deffende in to the tyme of youre comynge."

2. EPM, I, 157: 'Than be-gan the medle right stour, and grete and mortall, wherefore many a fre moder wepte salt teeres. Ther dide kynge Arthur many merveilles in armes...' Merlin, p.116, has; '...si commenche la mellee moult grant & moult perilleuse. Illuec fist li rois artus merueilles de son cors...'
paradigmatic. The past is both recoverable, and its significance intelligible, through a reliable system of remembrance, and the topos of natural renewal is a fitting rhetorical signal for the burgeoning of national hope.

Seasons description and mention of May-time in the *Works* may at first sight appear to feature in much the same way as in the EPM. As in the earlier text, there are examples of two perspectives being kept in play by reference to the season, as when, in the *Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*, the senators report to Rome how their forces suffered at Arthur's hands: "in the moneth of May this myscheff befelle" (*Works*, I, 226; 20). As with the EPM, weather can be simply a naturalistic detail; tourneying takes place in fine weather (I, 311), one needs to stop at a fountain when the day is hot (II, 496). There are, moreover, stylistic similarities between Malory's use of the May topos in the *Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, (*Works*, III, 1119; 1-1120; 13), and its incidence in the EPM May passage discussed above. But Malory makes very different demands on the reader.

The EPM passage provides an image of the past which is easily recoverable in present time; the May passage marks a new movement in the narrative, the circumstances in which the re-unification of Britian is to become reality. (Conversely, and for reasons to do with the way the topos is employed, as we shall see, Malory places his principal May passage at the beginning of the end of the *Works*). The EPM evocation of May directs us to a particular evaluation of the whole text; it is a strategy that teaches us how to read. Malory, meanwhile, appears more concerned with the range of possibilities inherent in the reading process per se.

Malory's use of the topos is more complex than the EPM's, and set beside the latter, it seems aberrant. The identification of Easter/May
as a time of renewal is evoked as much to contrast 'olde jantylnes' with present-day mores, and through this image to intimate the difficulty of recovering the past, as to give the reader a special access to the narrative. The method of recall is pointedly artificial; for Lambert, the way the episode crystallises an image of the characters in the remoteness of time past indicates the author's self-conscious nostalgia (Malory: Style and Vision, pp.145-47), but the image thus produced may also appear simply inconsistent with the rest of the narrative. The author links contrasting aspects of Guinevere's life at the end of this passage; 'for whom I make here a lytyll mencion, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende' (III, 1120; 11-13). Why should cause and effect be explicitly invoked at this point, and with regard to a subject by no means certain, but a matter for debate? The EPM, for one, says a 'gode ende' is not necessarily contingent on previous lifestyle; as Merlin tells Uther on his death-bed,

'...and yef thow hadde don alle the wikkednesse of the worlde, and thow haddest gode ende, thow sholdest haue pardon.'

(EPM, I, 93)

Nick Davis accounts for many of the difficulties this passage presents, by reading it as a 'diegetic' episode in the context of the works as 'non-diegetic' narrative. 1 While the diegetic represents 'a reading for imaginary coherence' ('Narrative Composition', p.34), in which the reader supplies links between different parts of the narrative, in order to make sense of it linearly, the non-diegetic does not allow for the same kinds of associations. Characters in the text are, like the reader and the writer, involved in trying to recover the past (and

the present) in ways that are meaningful to them. We all, to some extent, interpret the narrative as we go along. The May passage utilises the resources of memory to create its own diegesis, but the judgement of Guinevere's character emerges as but one instance drawn from a repository of possible emphases, and that judgement is 'true' at the moment of recall/writing. It does not require to be read ironically, in the light of later events.

Davis' analysis of the May passage emphasises the importance of the topos as a trigger to the writer's / reader's / characters' memory, and how, inevitably, the act of remembering makes for exclusive choices. Especially valuable in his discussion is how the very nature of memory contributes to the sense of an ending in the text. Presumably a non-diegetic text could continue indefinitely. Closure in the final tales depends to a great extent on 'necligyence' on the part of others; stances taken up by Gawain are determined by his remembering only selectively, while Lancelot attempts to preserve a more inclusive perspective on the past to inform his understanding of the present. I would suggest the 'lytyll mencion' of Guinevere is part of the strategy by which Malory draws attention to how these choices and exclusive readings may be effected. But I also want to use Davis' analysis as a point of departure for a closer investigation of where we are to locate the reader in this process of remembering and forgetting. If Lancelot in the last tales is a repository of memory, what kind of exercise in remembrance is demanded of the reader? How are we meant to react at points of authorial comment such as we find in the May passage, and how (if at all) is the reader expected to respond to the image of her/himself as projected in the text at such moments?

In the central May passage, the reader is addressed primarily as lover, invited to participate in a response to the season's 'constraints'
in much the same way as the characters themselves; 'all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver' (III, 1120; 9-11). We are also asked to acknowledge a qualitative difference between past and present emotions; '...so faryth the love nowadayes, sone hote sone colde. Thys ys no stabylyté. But the olde love was nat so' (III, 1120; 1-3). That later events show how the characters have to confront the preservation of stability as a problem rather than as a given, retrospectively highlights the artificiality of this mode of recall. This awareness of artifice, the recognition of the topos as reading-aid, is exploited by the author a few pages later, when May-time is again invoked, only to undergo a startling reversal which mirrors the downward turn of fortune for Arthurian society:

...so thys season hit befelle in the moneth of May a grete angur and unhappe that stynted nat tylle the floure of chyvalry of alle the worlde was destroyed and slayne.

(Works, III, 1161; 6-8)

As Lambert observes, the shock-element in the second May-passage arises from the similarity of its opening lines to the tone of the first description (Malory: Style and Vision, pp.147-49). 'We are no longer in the "good place"' (p.149). But the passage also signals authorial organisation of the material, and the manipulation of our response to it. Towards the end of the last tale, another apostrophe to the reader (already mentioned above, p.61) offers a contrastive image of the relevance of past to present. The appeal to 'ye all Englysshemen' (III, 1229; 6-14) comes as a gloss on the collective 'mis-reading' of history which informs the 'comyn voyce'\'s judgement that Arthur's rule brings 'never othir lyff but warre and stryff' (III, 1229; 1), and it works according to assumptions not consonant with those underlying the May passage. It also illuminates another kind of relation with the
past, mediated through the narrator's judgement. The people's lack of loyalty to Arthur is read as a national characteristic:

Lo thus was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme.

(III, 1229; 11-14)

Narrator asks reader to approve an historical reading validated by a judgement passed on present-day mores. The exigencies of the present dictate our reading of the past. One can 'fix' the past artificially in relation to the present, and shifts in interpretation are both made possible, and legitimised by, rhetorical means - apostrophe, seasons topoi. The later revelation of instability as national trait does not ask to be read against the earlier representation of a stable past shaming an uncertain present. Malory signposts these divergent readings as readings - accurate but not exclusively definitive - and the status of the reader, alternately lover and turncoat, which is incorporated in these accounts of how the material is to be received, is part of their rhetoric. Sympathy through nostalgic evocation, and the recognition of the text as mimetic, are locally valid responses to a narrative rich in possible readings.

It is not only in the last books that Malory defines the reader in specific engagement with the text. The Book of Sir Tristram also asks the reader to adopt a particular stance. The first instance, in the opening pages of the Book, promotes an image of Tristram as hunter - 'he laboured in huntynge and in hawkynge - never jantylman more that ever we herde rede of' (I, 375; 16-17) - which competes for attention with the image of Tristram as lover¹ and locates the reader in a particular class.

1. Contrast with the definition of Tristram at I, 425; 29-31: "... there be within this londe but four lovers, and that is sir Launcelot and dame Gwenyver, and sir Trystrames and quene Isode", and the identification of Tristram and Lancelot at II, 568; 19-20, as 'two the beste knyghtes that ever were in kynge Arthurs dayes, and two of the beste lovers.'
Tristram's status as innovator in the field of hunting has a permanence which is preserved in the written - 'he began...all the termys we have yet of hawkyng and huntynge. And therefore the booke of venery...is called the booke of sir Trystrams' (I, 375; 18-22) - and through the fact that the tradition he establishes is maintained by 'all jantyllmen'. Those who use Tristram's hunting terms are, the author observes, possessed of true gentility. It is not only recommended that all 'jantyllmen that beryth olde armys' should venerate Tristram; the discussion of Tristram's contribution extends to include a general observation on 'jantilnesse': 'For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll tacchis and to folow the noble customys of jantylmen' (I, 375; 28-29). This is not elitist of Malory; he is not intimating his readership is (or should be) composed uniquely of a certain branch of the aristocracy when he mentions 'jantylmen', but drawing us into Tristram's noble world, a world carefully structured by hierarchies and a definite sense of what constitutes noble behaviour.

The Tristram-as-hunter image recurs when Arthur welcomes him as a member of his Round Table¹ (his fame as hunter has a claim on the characters' memory as well as on the reader's), and in the Joyus Garde section (II, 682; 25 - 683; 4). This latter episode is not strictly necessary in narrative terms - it simply accounts for Tristram's being often in a position to have chance encounters with other knights. The fact of his going hunting seems to be used by Malory to play on our expectations, but the narrative line, and Tristram's hunt with it, is soon diverted:

¹ Works, II, 571; 27-34: "Welcom," seyde kynge Arthur, "for one of the beste knyghtes...of the worlde...For of all maner of huntynge thou beryste the pryce, and of...all the termys of huntynge and hawkyng ye ar the begynner...Therefore, jantyll knyghte...ye are welcom to this courte."
So on a day, a lytil afore the moneth o May, sir Trystram chaced an harte passyng egirly, and so the harte passed by a fayre welle. And than sir Trystram alyght and put of his helme to drynke of that burbely welle, and ryght so he harde and sawe the questyng beste commynge towarde the welle. So...sir Trystram ...put on his helme, for he demed he sholde hyre of sir Palomydes; for that beste was hys queste.

(II, 683; 14-21)

The chance meeting develops into an adventure in which the nature of good knighthood is discussed, and the structural relevance of the author's reference to Tristram's 'termys of haukyng' becomes clear. Knighthood, like hunting, depends upon the awareness of a code; while 'worship' itself may prove, in practice, to be a variable, Tristram is never compromised by his understanding of what chivalry is (while Lancelot's sense of self, for example, is more complexly involved with definitions of 'good knighthood'). The reiterated reference to 'all maner jantylmen''s reverence for Tristram, and the Winchester manuscript's authorial interpolation, 'AMEN, SAYDE SIR THOMAS MALLEORRE'(II, 683; 4), fixes a relation between author and reader which recognises how Tristram is locatable within particular systems. At the same time, of course, this image of Tristram does not give us the key to the 'whole book'; it simply isolates one of the important components of the narrative.

These few asides by the Malorian narrator project specific images of characters. They also assume or project particular stances on the part of the reader. The way in which the reader features as a variable in the text is not unlike the structural deployment of the characters throughout the Works, as we shall see in Chapters Four and Five. The reader in the text is defined according to the function he/she is required to adopt at any given moment; for the reader of the book, these selected moments are an invitation to participate in the narrative at critical (in the sense both of 'crucial' and 'chosen') points in the tales. The
in frequency of such occasions, and their nature, suggests they are stand-points from which to view the subject-matter and its manipulation, rather than definitive judgements.

I will develop the idea of the reader's status in Malory, and how it relates to the translator's task, a little later, but first I want to return briefly to a summary of what the EPM does with translation, in comparison with Malory. The EPM (not unusually for fifteenth-century literature in English) makes no formal statement about its status as translation. Declarations about translation practice in general seem to arise principally within a discussion of circumstances surrounding a text's production, as we have seen in Caxton's case early in this chapter, or, in the case of religious texts, as the Myroure of oure Ladye shows, as part of a defence of translation as an act of piety. Drawing attention to the technique of translation is not as important as the possible literary uses the concept of a piece of literature as translation may have. The EPM hardly refers to the 'French book', though it not infrequently makes mention of what 'the book' says. Although French is used in the text as a specific register - in a love-song, as part of the ritual of tournament, and in the prophetic language in which Merlin sometimes speaks, for example - it is not in the interests of

1. S.K. Workman, Fifteenth-century Translation as an Influence on English Prose (Princeton, 1940), p.69, gives nine examples of works which only extra-textual evidence identifies as translations.

2. Osbern Bokenham's re-workings of saints' lives are preceded by accounts explaining both the system of patronage and the devotional intention underlying the production of his texts (Legendys of Hooly Wummen, edited by M.S. Serjeantson, EETS, original series, 206 (London, 1938).

3. EPM, II, 310: '...thei seiden in refrite of hir songe, "Vraiment commencent amours en icye, et fynissent en dolours."' EPM, II, 485; '...and than the heraudes be-gan for to crye, Cy est lonours darmes Ore y parra qui checum le ferra'. EPM, II, 563: Blase writes, at Merlin's command, "Cest li commenchemens et li contes des auentures de pais pur coy li merveilleux lyons fu enserees et que fitt du roy et de royne le destraindra et couenra qu'il soit chastes et le myldres cheualiers del monde".
the narrative to have it presented as a translation. As will be seen in Chapter Three, the authority of the written word is a central concern in the EPM. The text is closely related to the 'original' text as dictated to the scribe Blase by Merlin:

(Blase) wrote in his booke worde for worde like as (Merlin) him tolde; and by hym haue we the knowinge ther-of in to this tyme.

(EPM, II, 259)

Identifying the English work as a translation would set it at another remove from the text with which it claims a direct relation, and further complicate the framework of reading and writing set up in the text itself. The author intervenes only to point a moral, or briefly to explain how the text is organised. Conversely, Henry Lovelich, transforming Merlin into tail-rhyme, both identifies himself, and informs us how he will translate from French to English for our benefit, 'that 3e moun vndirstonde'.

Lovelich at one point pauses to draw breath (and, since he aligns his translation with English metrical romance, a draught of wine), to help him 'maken an ende of this processe' (1.21588). The work's parameters are dictated both by the original, and by the contract Lovelich establishes with the audience, as a proclaimed teller of romance tales. Malory's authorial voice, meanwhile, continually intimates the provisional nature of the enterprise. Malory's mention of a source-book is often interpreted as the tactic by which the writer disguises original material and thereby gives his own work authoritative weight.

1. Lovelich's Merlin, 11.10245-56 (1.10250). At this point, we are asked to pray for 'herry Louelyche'. A later authorial interpolation (11.21579-96) gives Lovelich's name in a riddle.

2. See Vinaver's Commentary to the Works, passim, and compare with Gerald L. Bruns' reading of how the narrator of Troilus and Criseyde refers to source-books and thus 'chooses to conceal his originality, which is to say the faithlessness of his own translation' ('The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture', Comparative Literature, 32 (1980), 113-29 (p.116)).
This idea of authority has a certain importance, but constant reference to a source - and not one great tome, but 'many other bookis' - makes us aware of the Works primarily as a critical selection of available material. At the close of Vinaver's Book I, it is recommended:

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WHO THAT WOLL MAKE ONY MORE LETTE HYM SEKE OTHER BOOKIS OF KYNGE ARTHURE OR OF SIR LAUNCENLOT OR SIR TRYSTRAMS
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(Works, I, 180; 19-21)

The only term Malory employs for writer is 'maker', and here the appellation extends to include the reader. Reading is a critical exercise, analogous to the author's task of 'reducing'; through the agency of the compiler, the reader is encouraged to view the reading process as a series of active choices made when confronted with the physical fact of the book.

Each of Malory's sections sets up a slightly different contract between text, author, and reader, in signalling how it may be read. In the Book of Sir Tristram, for example, the action of reading/writing (imagined simultaneously) may appear autonomous; at the end of the tale of Alexander, 'SO LETTE WE HYM PASSE AND TURNE WE TO ANOTHER TALE' (II, 648; 16). We constantly 'turn' to one subject or another, and select what interests us (II, 670; 28-31. II, 572; 26-27). In contrast, the Book of the Sankgreal has the narrative progress of its own accord. The story is continually punctuated by reminders that it is the book that is autonomous, needing to be 'auctorysed' only by its own word. Hence such links as 'HERE LEVITH THE TALE OF SIR GALAHAD AND SPEKITH OF SIR GAWAYNE' (II, 890; 12-13). On the one occasion the familiar formula is invoked, 'NOW TURNE WE TO SIR GALAHAD AND TO SIR PERCIVALL' (II, 1005; 1), it serves to emphasise how reader and writer are caught

1. M.E.D. lists no specific instance of maker meaning 'reader', but does cite the term maker up, from the Paston Letters, to designate a 'compiler of evidence' (Part M1, p.79).
up in the narrative's dynamic, as are its protagonists, for it is immediately followed by the note 'Now turnyth the tale unto sir Galahad...' (II, 1005; 2).

Different books exact different responses from the reader. In the Sankgreal section, the fact of the book is of supreme importance; it is the one occasion on which a host of witnesses give testimony of their experiences, 'And all thys was made in grete bookes and put up in almeryes at Salysbury' (II, 1036; 20-22). In the Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius, meanwhile, the reader is not a passive recipient of knowledge, but made to draw on specific literary resources (the possible associations of the alliterative mode) to inform a reading. We are reminded of the compiler's mediating role between reader and text when he (apparently ingenuously) confesses the physical difficulties he encounters:

And bycause I have loste the very mater of Shevalere de Charyot I departe frome the tale of sir Launcelot; and here I go unto the morte Arthur, and that caused sir Aggravayne.

(III, 1154; 12-15)

This constitutes not so much an admission by the author of his inadequate classifying system, as a way of exposing the artifice of his compilation process. 'Reducing' involves not only conscious decision, but is influenced by external circumstances that make the recuperation of the whole tales an impossibility.

The Works do, however, attain their own integrity in the very act of being written. The last few lines of Malory's oeuvre both represent, and resist, closure. The bias and 'favour' of makers ensure a number of possibilities for any one narrative, possibilities a compiler can demonstrate to a high degree. Yet the compilation itself claims an authority based on its use of 'auctorysed' information, and on the very existence of the volume it has become:
HERE IS THE ENDE OF THE HOOLE BOOK OF KYNG ARTHUR
AND OF HIS NOBLE KNYGHTES OF THE ROUNDE TABLE, THAT
WHAN THEY WERE HOLE TOGYDERS THERE WAS EVER AN
HONDRED AND FORTY. AND HERE IS THE ENDE OF The Deth
of Arthur.

(III, 1260; 16-19)

The integral image of the Arthurian court at its 'most plenoure'
complements the concept of Malory's work as a 'whole book' in its own
right.

What kind of 'wholeness', then, may the reader her/himself be said
to attain through the accumulation of reading-signals and directions for
interpretation? In Chapter One, we saw how English authors have
available to them a wide choice regarding the form their remaniements of
French Arthurian texts might take. I would argue that Malory projects,
in the reader and her/his inscribed role, an image of his adopted stance
as translator/ compiler. In the Works, the translator is confronted by
a huge mass of material, to which he gives form and coherence on his own
terms, sometimes apparently by happenstance, sometimes by means of
judicious selection. Above all, the narrator stresses the element of
choice in his procedure. Translation is not constrained by the
exigencies of the source text, but can determine a status for itself
apart from that of the French work (just as the author can also re-
present English texts), although, as the translator reminds us, he is
not completely autonomous. In like manner, the reader is directed to
a certain kind of engagement with the text throughout, while at the same
time the selected images of the reader's position do not locate the
reader absolutely, as much as alert her/him to the multiple readings of
the material which are possible, and of which the physical book presents
only a few. For reader as for translator, then, the accent is on the
active reception of the material. The importance of reading and
translation in the Works is an issue which will be returned to in
Chapter Five. In the next chapter, we shall look at fifteenth-century English literary contexts as a way of informing a reading of the **English Prose Merlin**, which also has implications for reading Malory.
CHAPTER THREE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTS FOR THE ENGLISH PROSE MERLIN:
THE VULGATE CYCLE, HISTORIOGRAPHY, LAW AND ADVICE LITERATURE,
AND LIMINALITY AND COUNSEL IN THE ENGLISH PROSE MERLIN

This chapter aims to map out some conceptual and literary areas of particular interest to English writers during the late medieval period, as a means of recovering a context for the production of the English Prose Merlin, and to establish a background in terms of which, and against which, Malory's Works may also be read. We will first consider how the Vulgate Cycle is structured, and how the extrapolation of the Vulgate Merlin from its cyclical context - as is the case with the English Prose Merlin - constitutes a specific critical response. It is a response informed by particular interests in the thematic and structural issues raised in Merlin, notably those of social organisation, and the status of the written. The EPM, concerned with the basis of authority and the ordering of experience in a social context, needs thematically to be read alongside historiographical material and other texts discussing social concerns, such as advice literature. As a separate unit, the English Prose Merlin offers a far more open-ended examination of society's workings than does the source-text in its original context, and this open-endedness is replicated in the EPM's form. In choosing to concentrate on Merlin, the English author engages with the more experimental aspects of the Cycle.

The EPM author's interest in the structurally anomalous finds analogy in the attitudes informing legal process in England, as distinct from Continental models of law. Any operation of law is necessarily based on a belief in the existence of an absolute justice and its
recoverability, but where Continental law appears to work more exclusively from theory, medieval English law generally seeks to arrive at a judgment by the adoption of a set of procedures established pragmatically, over generations of legal practice. This does not mean that the English are ignorant of international law codes constituted on a body of theory, such as Canon law, but that English jurists are conscious of a multiplicity of procedures to which one may have recourse in English law. Where Continental law works from a theoretical basis, English law tends more naturally to appreciate law as an evolving process, and stresses the points of difficulty arising from using a plurality of systems.

As the texts looked at in Chapter One indicate, English literary works show an interest in different modes of narrative organisation. Just as English law is highly aware of pragmatic ways of arriving at a judgement, so English responses to French cyclic romance appear as more obviously heuristic enterprises than their sources. This is not to propose a distinction between English and French legal procedure as the means of accounting for literary difference in the two cultures, nor to assert that one should identify the English tradition uniquely with the experimental, and the French with a conservative stance. I want rather to suggest that the attitude to law, and to narrative form with regard to Arthurian material, manifest certain common tendencies, and that English writings on law can be illuminating insofar as they reflect a mental cast which also informs the structure of literary investigations of more broadly-based social questions.

Concern with the status of human law and its operation, the concept of law as process, and as a series of (not always consonant) systems, is of course most imaginatively deployed in Piers Plowman. Manuscripts of Piers circulate widely in the later Middle Ages, and this has been treated as an example of fifteenth-century parasitism on earlier
literature. But the situation may also be considered positively, as evidence of a continuing interest in the issues Piers raises, while later literature itself seeks less to imitate Langland, than to produce something which is qualitatively different because it ascribes a different value to its rhetorical strategies.

For, where the French texts express a faith in the stability of the written, how the written may encode stability is of prime concern in the fifteenth century. Historical, prophetic, and advice literature derive their internal validation by recourse to particular forms established by generic tradition; the presentation of material in a particular way guarantees the recovery of a precise meaning (this literary movement being paralleled in law, when jurists such as Fortescue begin to systematise a procedure that from the point of view of Canon or Continental law, seems disorganised or ill-conceived). Advice literature especially works from the premise of one's being able to gain insight into a meaningful and applicable precept for behaviour by the due observance of traditionally established and acknowledged rhetorical forms. Simultaneous with this project of attaining stability by observing form is an emphasis on counsel as unstable in its essence. This has implications for the extent to which language, itself potentially unstable, may be used to convey counsel's quality.

The literature I will be discussing sets up a relation between the known and the uncertain as a means of locating fixity of value and meaning. There is an interest in these texts in the role of the apparently liminal and the marginal, which become a focus of attention


   The readers of the fifteenth century / fed off the authors of the fourteenth. There was no patronage for a new movement here, no stimulus for authors to try and express the changing ideals of the time.
in an investigation of the nature of counsel and humankind's purchase on it. Merlin's role in the EPM is especially important in this regard, and examining his function as a liminal character (with reference to the methodology of historical and advice writings), will both show how the EPM solves the problem of fixing meaning, and will serve as a base for assessing how Malory places (and displaces) the character of Prophet and Enchanter in the Works.

THE VULGATE MERLIN

Read as a whole, the Vulgate Cycle of Arthurian romances presents us with a sequence of narratives working according to a specific epistemology. The temporal cycle of Arthurian society's establishment, growth, and decline is placed within the parameters of the promise and fulfilment of spiritual history in time; its teleology is first set out in the opening romance, the Estoire del Saint Graal, which introduces the Grail and tells of how Christianity was brought to Britain, while the penultimate work in the series, the Queste del Saint Graal, demonstrates the transcendence of the earthly by the spiritual. The Queste has been regarded as devaluing the chivalric ethos of the earlier books in the cycle, such as the Lancelot, but the claims of the spiritual here are not simply a yard-stick against which the interests of secular knighthood are measured and found wanting. As Jean Frappier reminds us, chivalry retains its value, although the Queste section redirects it.

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1. Pauline Matarasso, for example, terms the Queste as 'anti-romance' which completely over-turns chivalric values. See the Introduction to her translation of the Queste, The Quest of the Holy Grail (Harmondsworth, 1969, reprinted 1982), especially pp.15-16.

2. In 'Le Graal et la chevalerie', Romania, 75 (1954), 165-210, he points out that although in the Cycle chevalerie 'terrienne' and chevalerie 'celestielle' are opposed, 'Les erreurs de la chevalerie 'terrienne' sont condamnées et non la chevalerie elle-même' (p.197).
There is a play of intention between lay chivalric and religious concerns in the Vulgate which is subtler than the negation of the secular by the spiritual, and each element in the cycle has an important part in the overall design.

Recent criticism has paid careful attention to modes of narrative organisation in French medieval romance, concentrating especially on the characteristic technique of interlace which has been shown to have both structural and thematic importance in, for example, the Prose Lancelot. Although a critical vocabulary is being evolved to discuss what is happening in narrative on a local level, we need to work out more precisely how the Vulgate is organised as a cycle. How, for example, is one meant to view different perspectives on the same subject, in combination? Sandra Ness Ihle describes the structure of the Vulgate by taking up the building metaphor Geoffrey of Vinsauf uses to discuss writing, and extending it with reference to the terminology Paul Frankl evolved to characterise the principles underlying Gothic architecture. Thus Ihle finds aspects of narrative structure analogous to what Frankl identifies in building as 'the principles of spatial division, the smooth

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1. Carol J. Chase offers a résumé of opinion on the subject of interlace, from Ferdinand Lot, who gave the term currency in modern criticism, to Amelia Rutledge, who seeks to establish the principles governing the method, in an article 'Sur la théorie de l'entrelacement: Ordre et désordre dans le Lancelot en prose', Modern Philology, 80 (1983), 227-41. See also Sandra Ness Ihle's observations on how the use of interlace is central in determining Lancelot's status and function in different parts of the Vulgate Cycle, in Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance (Madison, Wisconsin, 1983), pp.102-03.

2. The 'Poetria Nova' and its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine, edited and translated by Ernest Gallo (The Hague, 1971), pp.16-17:

If anyone is to lay the foundation of a house, his impetuous hand does not leap into action: the inner design of the heart measures out the work beforehand...so that the work exists first as a mental model rather than as a tangible thing... Prudently ponder the entire work within the breast, and let it be in the breast before it is in the mouth.
flow of forces, and a predominance of diagonal views', which makes for a Gothic 'style of partiality' in sharp contrast to the Romanesque 'style of totality', based on the principles of 'spatial addition, opposition of forces, and a predominance of frontal views'.

Ihle argues that, just as one only sees a fragment of a Gothic cathedral's structure from any one viewpoint, so the Vulgate romances cannot but reflect a partial world where simple and unified explanations are unnecessary, and indeed impossible...the 'unity' of the Vulgate Cycle...is a unity of partiality, of the one stylistic concept that remains constant.

('The Style of Partiality', p.384)

The nature of Gothic architecture, however, does not necessarily deny one at least the intimation of being able to appreciate the whole from an examination of the part, and the analogy with literature is ultimately unhelpful when one considers the complexity of the intertext of the Vulgate romances, both actual and declared, and the number of ways in which they may accordingly be read. We might read the Vulgate in the light of the comparison between Gothic architecture and literary aesthetics made by Robert Jordan, who stresses the image of the Gothic cathedral as a 'visible embodiment of divine order', tending 'toward clarifying the nature of things in terms of the structural relationships of independent, constituent parts'.

Thus individual elements of the


Like the High Scholastic Summa, the High Gothic cathedral aimed, first of all, at 'totality' and therefore tended to approximate, by synthesis as well as elimination, one perfect and final solution.
Cycle continually refer us to branches, subdivisions and histories germane to the material in hand, making the reader aware of the larger structure of which they are a part. Yet they also partake of another area of intertextuality, that of their immediate context of part or the whole of, the Vulgate Cycle.

It is important then to have a clear idea of the kind of general overview the Vulgate promotes. Valerie Lagorio's work on the 'Apocalyptic mode' of the Vulgate Cycle convincingly argues for a central and all-pervasive theme in the Cycle as a whole. She shows how the narrative draws on features of apocalyptic writings in recounting Arthurian history, from the hermit's testimony of a vision, with which the Estoire begins, to the prophecies identifying Arthur as Last World Emperor (in the Sibylline tradition), and presenting Mordred as Antichrist:

As the purpose of history is to instruct men, the Vulgate history presents its sententia in the combined form of an Arthurian de casibus and providential history.¹

Lagorio's exposition is a corrective to the prevailing view of the Cycle as essentially incoherent; Fanni Bogdanow, conversely, considering the later redaction of the Cycle which she calls the Roman du Graal, claims virtues for this sequence which she finds lacking in the earlier series. Although Bogdanow identifies 'courtly love, religious mysticism and pseudo-history' among the Vulgate's general themes, she claims

...there is no unifying idea running through all the branches (of the Vulgate Cycle) and the whole lacks organic or 'epic unity'.²

Apart from leaving unclear what is meant by a text's 'unity', this reading is unsatisfactory in that it suggests redactions and reorderings of parts of the Vulgate to be the outcome of discontent with an inadequate extant ordering, rather than a recognised area of literary activity. Later re-workings of material from the Vulgate Cycle seem less to constitute a statement of discontent with the original sequence than to demonstrate a particular attitude to narrative and narrative organisation. The Vulgate has a firm eschatological theme, but its material is also rich in other possibilities; in re-organising elements of the Cycle one can release new meanings and emphases. I want to look briefly at how the Vulgate explains its accommodation of sometimes contradictory material, before turning to how the Vulgate context modifies Merlin.

Douglas Kelly explains the diffuse structure of the Cycle by emphasising how cohesiveness depends on the degree of importance assigned to the Holy Grail. Concentrating primarily on the image of Solomon's boat, Kelly observes how the Vulgate sets up a series of typologies which relate Arthurian history to biblical history, and things earthly to things heavenly. The disparate elements in the narrative are given a coherence by virtue of their presentation as part of the Divine Plan, which resolves all apparent contradictions. Our acceptance of the whole as an entity is therefore ultimately an act of faith:

> Seule la foi est susceptible de rendre compréhensible la multiplicité des inventions divergentes dans l'architecture des romans en prose.!

The Grail is the manifestation of grace and, as such, is the impulse behind the narrative, and behind the proliferation of narrative:

Inépuisable comme la foi, la grâce rend le graal inépuisable en aventures, irréductible, finalement inexplicable en langue de bouche.

('L'Invention', p.135)

While the Grail is obviously important to the Vulgate, I would claim that the central act of faith for which Kelly argues belongs as much to the fact of the literary enterprise itself as to the Grail, the nature of which the texts seek intermittently to illuminate. Throughout the Vulgate, 'li contes' claims an authority for itself apart from its status as vehicle for the exposition of the Grail mysteries. The Cycle contains diverse models of reading and writing; in terms of story-line, the books are interdependent, but each competes for attention on its own terms, and in each the material of other books is partially re-written in accordance with the exigencies and interests of the present narrative. We will now consider the Vulgate Merlin's position in this light.

Merlin both challenges and complements the other texts in the Vulgate corpus. Chronologically, it supplies the gap between the Estoire's account of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail, and the flowering of Arthurian chivalry recounted in the Prose Lancelot, with Merlin as a link between the secular world and the Grail story's spiritual interests. Merlin has a central role, not least through his association with writing, as we shall see later, and he proves to be a problematic nucleus of interpretation in the text that bears his name. The Prophet's ambivalence is reflected in Merlin's structure, but this largely experimental form has no purchase on the 'hoole book': the Estoire, in emphasising events and individuals as meaningful specifically in relation to the Divine Plan, provides a means of fixing Merlin's identity and function. The other romances also subsume Merlin into the Vulgate's larger plan. An examination of how the Estoire, in contrast to Merlin's methodology, presents itself as Divinely-ordained literature, of how the
Round Table is regarded in Merlin and elsewhere, and the part played by Merlin in the romances apart from in his eponymous text, will give some impression of how the Vulgate context modifies both Merlin and its Prophet.¹

As a retrospective sequel to the Queste, the Estoire lays the foundation for a reading of Arthurian history which will appreciate the intersection of human and sacred history in the person of Galahad. The whole of this first book declares itself a piece of Divine revelation; 'la plus haute estoire qui soit' has been transcribed, the narrator claims, by one who, with all due humility, 'se tient iuge au plus petit & au plus peceor du monde' (Estoire, p.3). Understanding in spiritual matters, and comfort, are available to both reader and author/scribe, but they are contingent upon the recipient's accepting the words of the book in an act of faith:

Et quant (le Christ) mot bailliet (le livre) si me dist quill mot baillie en cel liure si grant merueille que nus cuers mortels ne porroit grignor penser ne sauoir. Ne ia ne seras en doutance de cose nule que tu nen soies adrecies par cest liure. & si i sont mi secre que nus hom ne doit veoir sil nest avant espurgies par vraie confession. Car iou meismes lecris de ma main.

(Estoiere, p.5)

For Claude Roussel, ascribing the text to God is part of a strategy by which the Vulgate underscores the inadequacy of what is written by man.²

1. I do not want here to suggest that the Estoire, together with the Queste, prescribes the only possible interpretation of the rest of the Cycle, but that as part of the Cycle, Merlin will inter-act in different ways with the material with which it is juxtaposed. This applies to every part of the Cycle. See, for example, Alfred Adler on the difference in philosophy between the Queste and La Mort le Roi Artu, 'Problems of Aesthetic versus Historical Criticism in La Mort le Roi Artu', PMLA, 65 (1950), 930-43.

Attitudes to writing in the Vulgate will be further discussed in Chapter Five. Here I want to stress how the *Estoire* provides a writing model contrastive to that of *Merlin*.

That the humble scribe of the *Estoire* should also be a priest is as essential to the writing of the book as is his faith. The author / scribe draws on spiritual traditions in specifying Easter-tide as the time of revelation, when he is given a book in Christ's own hand.¹ The Word Incarnate, Christ, and the Word of God represented by the book, are explicitly linked. On Good Friday, the treasure is placed 'el lieu ou corpus domini estoit' (*Estoire*, p.8), only to have disappeared on Easter morning. Led by a composite creature 'diuerse seur toutes autres bestes' (a physical manifestation of the alterity of his experience),² the man of God sets out on a fantastic journey to regain the book. His adventures combine reassuringly orthodox instances of how he fulfils his role as priest, together with bizarre phenomena in a surrealistic landscape, the bearing of which on the plot is not made clear. The scribe's

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¹ Compare the conditions under which Joachim di Fiore is vouchsafed Divine revelation; at Easter and Pentecost, key points in the liturgical calendar. See Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969), *passim*. A later analogy is provided by Dante, whose experiences described in the *Inferno* begin on the evening of Maundy Thursday.


² This is not the Beste Glatissant of later narratives, although Claude Roussel, in *Le Jeu des formes et des couleurs: observations sur 'la beste glatissant'*, *Romania*, 104 (1983), 49-82, suggests it inspired the portrayal of the Beste. Roussel (pp.59-60) thinks the creature to be another creature in the marvellous landscape, but the beast seems more closely aligned with the nature of the inscribed author's experience of that environment.
engagement with event is active on the spiritual plane and passive in other respects. As an image of his literary enterprise, the priest’s journey intimates the nature of the tale he is to recount, and in what way the scribe will mediate between the original text (supplied by Christ) and the reader.

When he places himself in the narrative, the author uses Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s image of narrative organisation as a pathway (The 'Poetria Nova', p.19), and adapts his observation on the use of metaphor:

Such a metaphorical use of words serves you like a mirror, for you can see yourself in it, and recognize your own sheep in a strange field.

(Poetria Nova, p.57)

The hermit’s preliminary adventure is an introduction to how the subject-matter is to be treated; the Estoire will convey known spiritual and theological truths through the legendary history of Joseph of Arimathea. The narrative shows how these adventures may be seen as miraculous, and how experience may be understood as Divinely-ordained. The eternal structures the temporal, as the protagonists are guided by phenomena such as heaven-sent messages and inscriptions, and by spiritual guides who explain them. Both experience and the means of recording it are ordained by God. As priest, the hermit is guardian of the sacramental, by means of which one may experience the Divine on earth. But as scribe his role is humbler, as the text (save for the human errors inevitable in its transmission) is primarily the word of God.

In the Vulgate Merlin, the Prophet is closely associated with another model of writing and memory, in a situation far more problematic than that of the Estoire’s copyist. R. Howard Bloch’s penetrating study of Merlin in the context of his thesis on the connections between Old French Literature and medieval perspectives on grammar and on family structure, associates the magician’s 'invisible and ubiquitous power' with the
stand-point of the author, and accords him a central epistemological role: 'Merlin is as powerful an image of the writer as the Middle Ages produced'.¹ In Merlin, it is the ambivalent prophet who mediates between God and Man and institutes writing as a commemorative instrument. Blase the hermit faithfully records Merlin's words in a book from which, we are assured, the present romance derives.² There exists too a collection of prophecies made by Merlin, 'oscures paroles' intelligible only to the initiated, the result of Merlin's special power as one who, though of semi-diabolical parentage, has been redeemed through the grace of God (Merlin, p.18). The importance of Merlin's two books will be discussed in this chapter's last section, with regard to the kind of knowledge the Prophet disseminates, and the community's purchase on it. For the moment, it is important that we see Merlin to be but one channel for the recovery of meaning through writing in the context of the rest of the Vulgate.

Read sequentially to the Estoire, Merlin emerges as a less prestigious work, an account of partially-revealed knowledge, indirectly retrieved, rather than a witness' testimony of revelation. Moreover, Blase's book, Merlin tells him, will make sense only in the context of


2. Merlin, p.121:

Lors li dist merlins toutes les choses que li estoient avenues puis quil sen parti de lui...Et blaise mist tout che en escrit & par lui le sauons nous encore.

The importance of commemoration of event in writing is emphasised by the iconography of MS British Library Additional 10 292; fols 80v, 137v, 163v, 188r, for example, all have miniatures showing Merlin dictating events to Blase.
another book; like the Estoire's copyist, Blase must make a physical journey, at the end of which he will find the keepers of the Grail:

'...& atous iors mais sera ta paine & tes liures retraits & volentiers ois en tous lieus mais il ne sera pas en auctorite. & por ce que tu ne pues estre des aposteles car il ne misent onques rien en escrit de nostre seignor quil/neussent ueu. & oï & tu ni mes riens que tu aies ueu ne oï se ce non que iou te di. & ausi comme ie serai oscurs... ensi sera tes liures celes.'

(Merlin, pp.19-20)

The book will make a comprehensible whole when "sera li liures ioseph adiouste au tien" (Merlin, p.20). Thus the Cycle 'auctorises' itself and its procedure. (The EPM, however, omits this episode, and retains the passage in which Nascien the hermit's book, the Estoire, is subordinated to its sequel, Merlin.¹ Having the author of the Estoire as one of Arthur's company, who retires from the world and writes a text which 'he anexed to the booke that Blase wrote...by the techinge of Merlin' (II, 327), makes for chronological confusion across the Vulgate, but ensures the pre-eminence of Merlin's books, both in the EPM and in Merlin.)

In the Vulgate, Merlin is not the only repository of knowledge. The Cycle not only privileges Divine revelation above Merlin as the highest authority for the written, but mentions others who are prophets. In the Lancelot, the four scribes who record 'lez proeches des compagnons de la maison le roy Artu' (Lancelot, VIII, 488), may be seen as continuing a practice initiated by Merlin, but the episode in which Lancelot's companion Galehalt seeks advice about a troubling dream (Lancelot, I, 47-71) demonstrates that Merlin, although held in great

¹. This may not be a deliberate piece of editing on the part of the English author, as not all the extant French MSS include this passage, but it seems significant that the extant French MSS noted in Merlin, p.19, note 4 (MSS B.N. 105 and 9123), which omit these details, contain the Estoire as well as Merlin.
esteem, is not sole guardian of the written. Maistres Helie le Tolosans, 'qui plus estoit sages de tos les mestres' (Lancelot, I, 48), in the role of adviser, cites Merlin as an authority - "Et si nos dist Merlins qui encore ne nos a menti de rien" (Lancelot, I, 67) - and shows him to be part of the complex network offering access to wisdom. But Merlin remains only one means of access: the mysterious book Helie possesses, for example, (Lancelot, I, 67) constitutes a source of knowledge alternative and supplementary to the earlier Prophet's words.

Merlin's wisdom is relativised in other ways, as is evident from his relation to the Round Table. E.J. Burns, examining the motif of imprisonment in the Lancelot section of the Vulgate Cycle, draws attention to how the romances use 'associational patterned images whose coherence is not logical but analogical'.

Effects are achieved by the use of echo and parallel; we are granted 'a kind of unity through multiplicity in which associative resonance replaces logical cohesion'. ('Of Arthurian Bondage', p.174.) The motifs recurring across the Cycle direct the reader towards a particular reading of the text as a whole, and the image of the Round Table is a valuable focus for cohesiveness of meaning. The Arthurian Round Table is a replication of a replication. In the Estoire, the Grail Table, made in imitation of the table used at the Last Supper, is instituted by Joseph of Arimathea at Christ's request. The table symbolises the unity of the faithful, but one place is to remain empty:

'Car bien sacies que cis lieus mismes senefie le lieu ou nostres sires sassist al iour de la chaine & la sainte table ou il manga auoce ses apostres. si est ausi cis lieus comme cil atendist son maistre ihesu crist ou celui qui il i enuoiera.'

(Estoiere, p.247)

Joseph both establishes the table as symbol, and anticipates the final transcending of the terrestrial by the spiritual, by means of Galahad. Moyse is the voice of dissent, and when he violates the prohibition, he is spirited away by seven flaming hands for his presumption, to suffer until such time as 'li boins cheualiers uendra qui metera a fin les auentures de la grant bertaigne' (Estoire, p.261). This act of 'orgueil et presumption', a profane attempt at the premature completion of sacred history, is re-enacted in Merlin and the Lancelot, at the Round Table, instituted at Merlin's advice, in the kingdom of Logres.

In the Lancelot, Moyse' disobedience finds a parallel in Brumant l'Orguilloux' act of folly in attempting the siege perilous (Lancelot, VI, 23). In Merlin, the violation of the Prophet's prohibition by one of Uter's company is another part of the patterning linking the tables. In Merlin, however, the Round Table also has a function, social and political, different from the significance it is made to have in the rest of the Cycle. Merlin has promised Uterpendragon "grant bien & grant honor en arme & en cors" (Merlin, p.54) if he establishes a table in imitation of those used by Christ and Joseph. Together, they will mirror the Trinity. While evoking a specifically religious context for the institution of the Round Table, Merlin significantly explains the empty seat as the result of Judas' absence rather than that of Christ.1

Merlin dwells on the possible ambivalence of the table used at the Last

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1. Merlin, p.54:

'a cele table ot toudis .j. lieu uuit qui senefie le lieu ou iudas seoit a la chaine...& il sen fu partis de la compagnie ihesu crist. & ses lieus fu mis hors tant que nostre sires i asist .j. autre homme...'

Although there is no mention of Judas in the Estoire, there is a precedent for explaining the empty seat at table by his absence, in Robert de Boron's original verse romance. At Joseph of Arimathea's table, an empty place, 'le liu Judas', is destined for the offspring of Enygeus and Hebron (Le Roman de L'Estoire dou Graal, edited by W.A. Nitze (Paris, 1927), 11.2527-36).
Supper, and reveals the table at Uther's court to be as much marked by disunity as by fellowship. At first a force for unity - those who gather there decide never to leave Uther's company - the table and its empty seat are exploited by those who, jealous of Merlin, seek to test his power. The control the Prophet exercises over the table and its significance is not wholly explained. Uther is advised not to inquire too deeply into the fate of the knight who, in defiance of Merlin, takes his place at the Siege and disappears before his eyes:

'il ne tient mi a toi a enquerre ne riens ne te uaudroit se tu la sauioies mais pense de ceaus qui i sient & de maintenir / ce que vous aues comenchiet'.

(Merlin, pp.57-58)

Merlin foretells the Round Table's function in the Grail Quest, as one of the first stages in the achievement of the Grail (Merlin, p.56), but he also observes that this aspect of it has little relevance for Uther - "il ne sera mie acomplis a ton tans". The Table is most significant in Merlin as a tool for exploring the possibilities of unity and breakdown within a secular political system.

In the Queste del Saint Graal, Merlin is important only for his function in corroborating the view of the Round Table put forward here. When Perceval's aunt explains the significance of the Round Table, the image is re-accommodated (as elsewhere in the Queste) to a schema in which it represents more nearly a symbol of potential wholeness, its fulfilment by Galahad pre-figuring his taking a place at Joseph's table,

1. Merlin, p.55: 'nous nauons nul talent que nous nous departons jamais de ci'.

2. See, for example, Nascien the Hermit's homiletic gloss on the Round Table as locus of humility:

'Et por ce que humilité ne puet estre vaincue ne pacience, i fu la Table Reonde fondee, ou la chevalerie a puis esté si fort par la dougor et par la fraternité qui est entr'ax, que elle ne pot estre vaincue' (Queste, p.156).
and signalling the narrative's shift in interest to the spiritual plane.
Perceval's aunt defines the table, "establie par le conseil Merlin" as a replication of cosmic order:

'...en ce qu'elle est appelee Table Reonde est entendue la reononde del monde et la circonstance des planetes et des elemenz el firmament; et es circonstances dou firmament voit len les estoiles et mainte autre chose...

(Queste, p.76)

She re-writes the historical background when she explains how the "propre siege" was made in order that the one who, according to Merlin's prophecy, "passera son pere autant come li lyons passe le liepart de pooir et de hardement", might be recognised. Merlin accordingly fashions the "siege...grant et merveilleus", and names it "li Sieges Perilleux" (Queste, p.78). This precise significance for the Round Table and the Siege is not central to Merlin's concerns; in this latter narrative, the partial revelation of the Round Table's numinous significance allows one to consider it as an heuristic instrument, not an image of unity which is a 'given', but one which has to be consolidated through historical experience.

The glosses in the Queste acknowledge Merlin as a 'sainte prophete' whose prescience of the events of the Grail Quest elevates him above others. Although incidental mention of him reinforces his associations with fore-knowledge and enchantment, he does not inform the structure of the rest of the Cycle as he does in Merlin itself. The other romances both present him as unambivalent, and encourage a reading of him as a 'type'; Merlin's nature is largely dependent on the needs of the text at a given time.

At the beginning of the Lancelot, the Prophet undergoes a transformation in keeping with the moral exigencies of the narrative. In this version, Merlin is the irredeemably malicious offspring of an
incubus; his conception has fabliau-like overtones. Merlin's mother is a girl who has refused to accept as her husband anyone she can see. The Devil arrives at night, declares himself "uns homs destraigne terre" and invisible, and thus wins her love. Merlin is the result of the liaison, and the ill effects of his parentage are not countered by recourse to the sacraments; 'il ne fu onques baptisiés' (Lancelot, VII, 41). His connivance in the events surrounding Arthur's conception are denounced as 'traîson':

li fu de la nature son peire deschevans et desloiaus et sot quanques cuers pooit savoir de toute perverse science. (Lancelot, VII, 41)

This particular reading of Merlin's nature precedes the account of how the Lady of the Lake instructs Lancelot in chivalry's moral virtues. The text appears to denigrate the magician principally to foreground the worth of Nimiane (who has escaped Merlin's attempted rape of her, and imprisoned him in the 'perilleux foreste') as instructor in the chivalric ethic to the young hero.

Elspeth Kennedy has shown that Merlin's vilification here is often a problem for the copyists of this romance who, recognising the inconsistency in presentation, omit the episode. But the account remains important as an example of to what extent immediate narrative interest dictates treatment of subject-matter. Kennedy makes a valuable point in tracing the scribes' editing practice to a general concern with eradicating inconsistencies in the Cycle. That more manuscripts do not omit

this passage about Merlin has perhaps to do with the authority of the written word, the implications of which, with regard to the French texts, we will look at in Chapter Five.

The Vulgate context provides a means of understanding Merlin's fate at the end of Merlin. The Prophet's bitterness - "iou fui si fols que iaim plus autrui que moi" (Merlin, p.461) - and the misogynistic remarks on the part of the author, recall the circumstances of Ypocras' story as recounted in the Estoire. Ypocras, 'li plus souerains clers del art de phisique', sets a precedent for reading Merlin as a scholar made foolish by love. The Estoire tells how Ypocras made his reputation as a doctor in Rome, where he was said to have brought Caesar's son back to life. A Gaulish woman, disbelieving his skill, set about his humiliation, which she effected with ease: 'Il n'est enging que femme ne puist decheuoir' (Estoire, p.174). Ypocras succeeded in extricating himself from the woman's control, only to be poisoned by his wife. We are reminded that deable cose et moult doutable auoit en femme car encounter son grant enging . ne puet sens dome durer. (Estoire, p.181)

The Ypocras anecdote prefigures Merlin's destiny and directs us to read him ultimately as a type, one whose significance can be contained in a simple exemplum.

To read any of the Vulgate romances out of sequence proves a different experience from reading it as part of the whole series, and the Vulgate Merlin, especially, demands to be regarded in a new light when considered in isolation. Merlin in manuscript form is most often found prefixed by the Estoire del Saint Graal,¹ and as a sequel to this

¹ See A. Micha, 'Les Manuscrits du Merlin en prose de Robert de Boron', Romania, 79 (1958), 79-94, 145-74, and Brian Woledge, Bibliographie des romans et nouvelles en prose française antérieurs à 1500 (Geneva, 1954), pp.72-75. Very few MSS contain the Vulgate Merlin as the only item (Micha, for example, lists only two, MSS B.N. fonds français 91 and 332).
latter work, Merlin can be seen as a necessary complement to its eschatology, endorsing the historical process as fundamentally teleological. Read as a single unit, however, Merlin forces us to confront problems the Cycle ignores. The question of Merlin's nature, his control over events, his prescience, are central preoccupations of the narrative; events are not fully explainable in moral terms, but tend to be problematised by any reference to a moral schema. If the text's coordinates are not less certainly defined when read outside the Vulgate context, they are more problematic, and the possibility of judgement more elusive. The complex system of reiterated motif and theme contributes to the accretion of meaning across the whole of the Cycle. Action may be understood in terms of another, similar, action. As we shall see, parts of Merlin are significantly deviant in this respect, making clear that the accumulation of similar facts does not necessarily entail our consequent deeper understanding of them. The English Prose Merlin author's choice of material demonstrates him to be attracted to this anomalous element in the Vulgate Cycle; an examination of aspects of the fifteenth-century English cultural and literary scene will suggest further reasons for his selection of subject-matter.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

A central theme of the English Prose Merlin is the rise to political power of Arthurian society, and the work therefore inevitably asks to be read against historicizing accounts of Arthur found in earlier and contemporaneous literature, in which the main interest is in the British king as a political figure. This section will discuss the bases upon which historiographical writings build, and will show how the English Prose Merlin, although not uniquely an 'historical' work, sets up and deploys a number of models for the understanding of history, and in so
doing comments on the nature and extent of humankind's purchase on wisdom and knowledge. Its investigations of history are largely mediated through Merlin as a figure of authority; while it is difficult to ascertain exactly the kind of resonance and associations mention of the Prophet would have had in the fifteenth century, he certainly has currency in more than one literary context, and the EPM exploits Merlin to question historical procedure and development. In its technique the EPM shares something with historical writing, and it now validates, now challenges, accepted historiographical modes of reading both past and future. Bringing different views of history into play is part of the text's methodology. The reading the authorial voice promotes, the way characters in the narrative interpret events in which they are involved, and how Merlin directs both reader and character to define experience, make for a complex awareness of the interplay between perception and event in the search for meaning.

Chronicles and histories, which have wide circulation in the fifteenth century, seek a purchase on past event; they promise a way of reading the past that accounts for the present and warns the prudent to provide for the future. Medieval historians claim an authenticity for their writings which derives from their turning to earlier authoritative works for their subject-matter, while the form in which the material is presented highlights its moral import. When events are described in order of chronology it may be assumed that one infers

nothing from their juxtaposition apart from their place in time. But
this assumption ignores both the way in which the simplest re-telling
will inevitably privilege one event, or one aspect of it, over another,
and how the reader may make his or her own connections of the material.
Medieval historians come to direct a particular response by packaging
their material in a well-known format. The reader will understand,
because, in Hayden White's words,

...he has been shown how the data conform to an icon
of a comprehensible finished process, a plot-structure
with which he is familiar as part of his cultural
endowment. ¹

Historians have an implicit faith in the forms they adopt in order,
in White's phrase, to 're-familiarize' us with the past. While Caxton,
for example, as we have seen in Chapter Two (p.38), appreciates the
arbitrary nature of the spoken language, he disregards the possibility
of a disjunction between knowledge, and the written as a vehicle for that
knowledge, considering the written to be a stable and steadfast witness
to the truth,² and History itself to be the surest corrective to vice:

Historye is a perpetuel conservatryce of thoos thynges
that have be doone before this presente tyme and also
a cotydyan wytnesse of bienfayttes, of malefaytes,
grete actes, and tryumphal vyctoryes of all maner
peple. And...as moder of alle philosophye moevynge
our maners to vertue, reformeth and reconcoyleth ner
hande alle thoos men whiche thurgh the infyrmyte of
oure mortal nature hath...myspended theyr tyme...'³

1. 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', The Writing of History:
   Literary Form and Historical Understanding, edited by R.H. Canary

2. In the preface of the Mirrour of the World, edited by O.H. Prior,
   EETS, extra series, 110 (London, 1913), p.5, Caxton observes 'wordes
   ben perisshyng, vayne & forgeteful, and writynges duelle & abide
   permanent'. On Caxton's attempt, principally through aureation, to
   imbue the written word with that stability he finds lacking in the
   spoken, see Janel M. Mueller, The Native Tongue and the Word:
   Developments in English Prose Style, 1380-1580 (Chicago, 1984), pp.
   147-61.

3. Preface to the Polychronicon, reproduced in N.F. Blake, Caxton's Own
The stability of the written is verified by recourse to established authority; the historian's task, as both Hardyng and Lydgate observe, is to re-discover and renew the truths found in 'olde bookes';

...these clerkis in wrytyng(
Thyng that was maad of auctours hem beforne,
Thei may off newe fynde and fantasie,...
(They) Make olde thynges for to seeme newe.  

Chroniclers show an anxiety to recover as much factual detail as possible so as to re-create a full picture of the past:

For a story which is nat pleynli told,
But constreynd vndir woordes fewe
For lak off trouthe, wher thei be newe or old,
Men bi report kan not the mater shewe...

(The Fall of Princes, Prologue, 11.92-95)

Lydgate's concern in this regard, that amplificatio should be acknowledged as the proper vehicle for historical truth, is paralleled by Caxton who, considering the 'large volumes and bookes grete plente and many' (Caxton's Own Prose, p.139) written about Arthur, intimates a connection between the volume of material available, and the moral excellence of what is recorded.

Consonant with these interests is a desire so to organise the material as to convey its full exemplary force. An historian such as Hardyng (whose chronicle dates from 1436), assumes the motive force of history to be the progressive fulfilment of God's design, a design recognisable through the apprehension of certain patternings. Within


...out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.

this scheme, meaning depends on memory, on the ability to hold in play similarities between past and present events. The reader may be encouraged to view historical events as a series of exempla illuminating the historian's central theme, as when Lydgate describes his intention in the Fall of Princes:

'How that thei fill to purte in remembraunce,
Therin to shewe Fortunys variaunce,
That othre myhte as in a merour see
In worldly worshepe may be no surete.

(The Fall of Princes, I, 11.53-56)

God ordains the world according to a certain pattern. The historian, by a judicious organising of the facts, makes that pattern recuperable and meaningful to the reader.

The English Prose Merlin appears at first to endorse the idea that the events and lessons of the past are effortlessly recuperable once one has been granted access to the appropriate written authority, mediated through the right channels. The historical narrative dictated to Blase by Merlin is apparently the more accessible of the forms which hold the knowledge of which he is master, and constitutes, the author continually affirms, the source-book for the text before us. The view of the past as detailed here, however, is provisional rather than fixed. Merlin tells Blase that the past is the Devil's domain - it is from his father that he is familiar with it. At the same time, it is God who endows his Prophet with 'memory', with the 'witte and discrescion' (EPM, II, 304) to discriminate and synthesise the information to which he has access. The EPM is interested in history as process, in how presentation of the facts is shaped by Merlin's function at any given point in the narrative. Merlin is not simply a mediator between Arthurian society and its past;

1. See also Merlin's words to the judge: "I am the sone of the enmy... I have their witte and connynge and mynde. And by this...I knowe alle thynges that be don or seyde and tho be passed" (EPM, I, 20).
as inventor of society and as historian, he creates that past, and continually offers men and women the means to interpret it.

In the work of some historians, there is a gap between the information retrieved, and what it is made to represent. John Hardyng views the past as a rich source of exempla and figurae to be glossed in moral terms. His Chronicle opens with an account of 'the xxx susters that first inhabited this lande and named it Albion'. These sisters, daughters of the King and Queen of Surray, determine, in their 'pryde and hye elacion', to kill their husbands and thus free themselves of subjugation to men. The plot discovered, the sisters are exiled, and by chance arrive at 'this ysle'. Hardyng adds a commentary to his tale:

Note that wemen desyre of al thynges soueraynte, &, to my conceypt, more in this land then in any other; for they haue it of the nature of the saied susters.

(Chronicle, p.20)

Hardyng then re-writes his narrative because, he claims, the unspecified 'booke' from which he has been working has proved unreliable. Thus in Chapter Three he tells how it is Danays, King of the Greeks, who has fifty daughters who kill their husbands, the sons of Egistus of Egypt, for which crime they are exiled and settle in Albion (so called after the eldest sister, Albina, who becomes the island's first sovereign). These changes in detail are validated by one 'Hugh de Genesis', a Roman historian, whose name aptly emphasises Hardyng's concern with the business of authenticating beginnings and origins. Thus Harding conveys the impression of paying a painstaking attention to detail, without substantially altering the story-line. The gloss concerning English-women's nature is nonetheless made logically invalid in the light of a later episode in which Brutus destroys the line of giants engendered by Albina and her sisters.
In a sense, this hiatus between tale and moral is unimportant. Characters are significant in the extent to which they provide an opportunity for sententious comment. The historian has licence to interpret his material within the parameters he has established. Thus Arthurian history is containable as a demonstration of the perfidiousness of 'Fortune, false executryse of weordes'¹ (Chronicle, p.149), who allows the 'high and noble conqueroure' to die 'without cause'. Arthur's fall is the occasion for apostrophes on the 'cursed violence / Of Merdredes pryde', and on the 'false beautie of Gwaynour'.

The EPM contains two episodes in which events seem similarly at odds with, or not wholly explained by, the interpretation given of them. These are the tales of the Emperor of Rome, and of Flualis, Emperor of Jerusalem. The first account (EPM, II, 420-37) demonstrates Merlin's ability to uncover and correct past fraud, the second (EPM, II, 631-34) shows him reading the future. The tale of the Emperor of Rome has Merlin exposing the web of deceptions operating at court, where the Empress is enjoying adulterous relations with a dozen young men disguised as women, and the steward, Grisandole, is in fact a princess. Merlin restores right relations, punishes the wicked, and re-establishes a dynasty that has the Emperor and the newly-identified princess as its head.

In glossing recent events, however, Merlin, not unlike Hardyng, makes observations not necessarily congruent with the facts. Explaining his previous vehement denunciation of Grisandole, for example, he promotes a misogynistic perspective on history, while exonerating the supposed object of his contempt from any culpability in the matter:


'...alle the wordes that I spake thei ben trewe, for by woman is many a man disceyved, and therefore I cleped hir disceyaunt for by women ben many townes sonken and brent, and many a riche londe wasted and exiled, and moche peple slayn; but I sey it not for noon euell that is in hir...'

(EPM, II, 432)

An incident witnessed by Merlin and members of the Roman court, also demands an interpretation. A squire, for no reason apparent to either himself or his master, strikes the knight he is accompanying, and the enchanter is the only one able to explain the 'be-tokenynges' (EPM, II, 433). The elucidation offered by Merlin seems independent of the actual event: "...god that is almyghty wolde haue it to be shewed in exsample that men sholde not be prowde for worldly richesse..." (EPM, II, 434). Merlin here emphasises his control as both organiser and translator of event, and demonstrates the rhetorical nature of an historian's perception.

The episode concerning Flualis of Jerusalem is a little simpler in design. Flualis has a dream which Merlin interprets for him as a prognostication of future event. The whole operates as a fable about the dissemination of the Faith - Flualis, his wife, and their offspring, will all turn to Christianity - and it offers a compact image of a movement towards Christianity in the east, complementary to Arthur's crusades against the Saxons in the West (EPM, II, 634). In both instances of his power, Merlin aligns himself firmly with the society he primarily exists to serve; he is "Merlin, ...maister counseller to kynge Arthur of the grete Breteyne" (EPM, II, 436). Of necessity, this society is the most aware of its past and its place in history (the implications of this will be examined a little later in my argument). But this account also serves to demonstrate to what extent it is through Merlin's perception that characters view their own destiny.
The function of Merlin in the EPM has a literary precedent in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, where the Prophet's role in national history is crucial. Robert Hanning sees Merlin in the *Historia* as multivalent. In the control he demonstrates, he both embodies the dynamic of history, and is a 'symbol for the artist-historian, whose insight into predetermined history gives him some control over the historical process'. Of equal, if not greater, importance in the *Historia* is the fact of Merlin's *Prophecies*, and the significance attached to them as a distinct register. (Indeed, as manuscript evidence shows, this aspect of the *Historia* so fired the medieval imagination as to take on a dynamic of its own). Merlin signals primarily the alterity of the Arthurian period, which is so privileged as to be vouchsafed revelations of the future. Furthermore, in prophecy, Merlin shapes events to come, as future generations seek to fit his prognostications to their present time. Geoffrey suggests, through Merlin and his language, how the historian may so formulate the past as to influence the future, and in this Merlin in the *Historia* shares something with the Prophet of the English Prose Merlin.

Historians view genealogy as the guarantor of stability and the means to maintain excellence. In the French texts, Merlin is consistently presented as guardian of genealogy. English historians too,

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1. Robert W. Hanning; *The Vision of History in Early Britain from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966), p.154


3. On the general attitude to prophecy as a part of history, and the structure of events past being used to inform what is to come, see Marjorie Reeves, 'History and Prophecy in Medieval Thought', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, new series, 5 (1974), 51-75.
concerned with the historical function of regnal causation, find a break in the line of rightful rulers especially worrying. Hardyng, detailing the Grail adventures, is careful that no hint of scandal touch Galahad; he is thus the product of 'very clene spousage' (Chronicle, p.131).

The Brut's account of Arthurian history laments the break in lineage at Arthur's death:

\[
\text{Kyng Arthure...to (Constantyne, pat was Cadore3 sone, erl of Cornwall, his cosyn) bitoke al his reaume,../for-asmiche as he hade none heire of his body bigeten: and grete harme was hit pat soche a noble Kyng...hade none childe of his body bigeten; but al ping pat God wil haue done, moste bene done...} 1
\]

This same insistence on the tragedy of a land without heir is found in the EPM, when Merlin, warning Arthur of the second and final battle to take place on Salisbury Plain, announces there "shall remayne the londe of the grete breteigne with-outen lorde, and with-outen heir" (EPM, II, 579). 2

In the EPM, Merlin is committed to establishing right relations by whatever means. But while he is seen to arrange some unions - such as that between Arthur and Lysanor (EPM, I, 171) and between Ban and Agravadain's daughter (EPM, II, 607-12), - other conceptions are outside his jurisdiction. Nor is Merlin unproblematically the instrument of Divine ordinance. Although his prime function is to assert Arthur's legitimacy, Merlin interprets his role as the boy's guardian as the expiation of sin: "Vlfyn is som-what a-quytte of the synne that he


2. The EPM departs from the Vulgate at this point (Merlin, p.385), in order to emphasise, by repetition, the seriousness of the situation:

\[
\text{Whan the kynge herde Merlin so speke, that in the same place the fader sholde sle the sone, and the sone sle the fader, and the londe of the grete breteigne a-bide with-outen heir and lordles, he hym prayed...to telle a partye of that more clerly to his vndirstondinge...} 2
\]

(EPM, II, 579. Emphasis added)
hadde in the love makinge, but I am not yet a-quyt of that" (EPM, I, 87).
The King's insouciant response both abnegates moral responsibility, and
assumes Merlin to be in complete control: "Ye be so gode and so wise
that ye can yow wele in this a-quyten". Thus other characters respond
to sexuality on a pragmatic level, and illicit relations and their
results are not generally made the object of moral scrutiny.¹

A case in point is the conception of Mordred (EPM, I, 179-81); the
author is anxious to present the full facts of the case, and is also
careful to reserve judgement, 'for moche peple it preyse the lesse that
knowe not the trouthe' (EPM, I, 180). Similarly, there is no condemna-
ation of Leodegan's rape of Cleodalis' wife, by which the false Gonnore
is conceived (EPM, II, 213-14). While in the Suite du Merlin, Arthur's
adultery is denounced,² Arthur here is not held directly responsible for
those events contingent on Mordred's existence. And while the text
holds 'Mordred and Agravain' to blame for the Last Battle (EPM, I, 147),
Lot's wife's love of Arthur is a significant factor in Lot's sons seeking
Arthur's lordship, and helping in the country's reunification (EPM, I,
181-83). The non-judgemental attitudes to 'mis-conceptions' foregrounds
how the pragmatics of existence may account for as much as does Divine
Providence perceived as intervening directly in human affairs.

¹. Hence there is no comment passed on the nature of Lancelot's relation-
ship with Gonnore: 'of alle these maters we shull cesse at this tyme
till that the mater falle ther-to here-after that it shall clerly be
expounded' (EPM, II, 393). Conversely, Agravain's self-interested
lust is clearly censured, and the venereal disease from which he
later suffers interpreted as a judgement on his 'vilonye' (EPM, II,
527).

². Suite du Merlin, I, 54:
"Artus, tu as fait si tres grant desloialute que tu as geu
carnelment a ta serour germainne que tes peres engenra et
ta mere porta, si i as engenre un fil qui iert teuls comme
Dieus set bien, car par lui verra moult grant mal en
terre."
The evolution of Arthurian society comes to be measured by its ability to know its past, and by the astuteness with which individuals are able to read the signs of their environment correctly. By means of the guide-lines offered intermittently by an ambivalent instructor, the characters in the EPM attempt an understanding of event in 'moral-historical' terms (in tandem with a more pragmatic attitude in other areas); finding one's moral co-ordinates through Merlin as point of reference and as arbiter, is often commensurate with the practical working-out of one's place in history. 'Morality' becomes a way of determining cause and effect, and this attitude finds currency with the authorial voice, and with Merlin himself.

The idea that individual moral worth and national destiny are interrelated is endorsed by John Capgrave in his Abbreuiacion of Cronicles (1462-3), in which events are dictated by 'pe plesauns of God'. Asides made by the EPM author assume the reader understands the narrative within a similar schema. Thus as we have noted in Chapter Two (pp.67-68), when the sons of Lot set out on campaign, the Saxons are said to have been allowed by God to destroy the land 'for synne and for myslyvinge' of the inhabitants, 'as god hath ofte sithes chastysed diuerse remes' (EPM, II, 191). The earlier explanation of why the Bloy Bretaigne is so called corroborates this interpretation of events:

And so it fell after [the Last Battle] that there was a grete pestelence and slaughter of barouns and of the mene peple,2

---


2. This is consonant with the famine and pestilence in Britain described in the closing pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia (edited by Acton Griscom (London, 1929), pp.530-32). An apocalyptic ending is a useful means of closure to historical narratives, which are inherently open-ended. The Brut similarly has intimations of doom, II, 603-04, detailing Edward's loss of men through venereal disease (constituting a serious break in lineage), sundry horrific diseases, and the decimation of the population:

   & aftyr pat, cam a gret dethe of Pestilence, pat lastyd iiij. yer; & peple dyed myhtely in euery place, man, woman & chylde: on whois soulys, God haue mercy! Amen! (p.604)
and for that the losse was so grete, the mene peple
cleped it the bloy breaigne, ffor that her hertes
and her thoughtes were so bloy and so blake for theire
frendes, that thei hade so loste for myschaunce of
synne.¹

(EPM, I, 147)

Within the narrative, the rebel king Ydiers thinks vnhappe is Divine retribution, the wages of his recalcitrance concerning Arthur:

'...ffor by the synne...that we have done a-gein hym
falleth to vs all these myschaunces'.

(EPM, II, 282)

King Aguysanx offers a contrasting response to the Saxon invasion, but the difference in approach is accounted for in that he is here spokesman for a Christian community, rather than a rebel against Arthur:

'...paraventure it...plesith (God) that we shull suffre
this martire for to enhaunce his lawes, and therfore
hath he sent thise saisnes in to this londe...therfore
while that we may lyve lete vs avenge oure dethes...

(EPM, II, 235)

Individuals attempt to understand event by recourse to the exigencies of Providence, of which they have only a limited awareness. Merlin re-enforces the popular equation between sin and 'mischance' when he assures Arthur "while ye be in godes purpus shull ye haue the victorie of your enmyes" (EPM, II, 578). Merlin does more, however, than utter apparent platitudes. In the Arthurian world, he offers the only possibility of a synthesis of experience, and in the Dragon-banner he creates, we are given an image richer in connotations than the cause-and-effect equations formulated elsewhere in the text, an image which tells us more about historical process and one's grasp of it.

The Dragon is originally a sign granted miraculously to Uther and his brother Pendragon to notify them when time is right for battle. It is Merlin who interprets its significance: "Whan ye se a dragon all

¹. Merlin, p.110, also mentions 'leurs amis que il auoient ainsi perdu par mescheance et par pechie'.
reade fleynge vp in the ayre, than boldly fight with hem, for ye shall have the vyctorye" (EPM, I, 56). It is also Merlin who, after the battle, suggests a dragon-emblem be made in commemoration of Pendragon's bravery, and in acknowledgement to Providence: "and for love of the dragon that appered in the ayre, make a dragon of goolde of the same semblaunce" (EPM, I, 57). Hardyng's Chronicle assigns to Uther the heraldic arms of his ancestor Brutus (Chronicle, p.117). Merlin does more than interpret the totem; he creates it. The Dragon becomes Uther's standard, and it is carried into every battle.

When Merlin helps Arthur in his first full-scale encounter against the rebels, he gives him a banner,

> wher-in was grete / significacion, for ther-in was a dragon, which he made sette on a spere, and be semblaunce he caste oute of his mouth fire and flame...
> This dragon no man cowde wit where Merlin it hadde...

(EPM, I, 115-16. Emphasis added)

That society should already have forgotten the earlier dragon-image is indicative of how each generation has to forge its historical awareness anew. While it represents the rightful dominion of Uther Pendragon's house, Merlin's banner becomes more exactly associated with Arthur himself. Present at every encounter of Arthur's forces with the Saxons' it reminds us of each battle's significance within an historical framework. It is an image of past victory, and present strength: 'it be-tokened the kynge Arthur and his power' (EPM, II, 393). It is also a prophetic sign, foretelling the final catastrophe on Salisbury Plain, and the author, in explicating it, gives a précis of Arthurian history

1. Contrast with Merlin, p.52:

> Lors dist merlins & conta la senefiance del dragon & dist que li dragons estoit venus senefier la mort pandragon & le saluement vter & que il fu mesauenu al roy por la mort de lui & por la senifiance de la bataille.

There is no mention of a banner being made at this point in the Additional MS which Sommer edits, and he notes no MS variations.
and accounts for its end:

...and the flame of fire that com oute of the throte be-token the grete martire of peple that sholde be in his tyme, and the taile that was so tortuous be-token the grete treson of the peple, be whom he was after be-traied.

(EPM, II, 393)

This historical image is also designed as a fire-breathing, dust-raising agent of destruction, a figuring of the kind of battle-strategy Merlin employs,¹ and a metonym for warfare in general. The sight of it strikes fear into the heart of the enemy, who regard it as a marvel:

Merlin...bar the dragon in his hande that yaf thourgh his throte so grete braundon of fier that the eir that was blakke of the duste and powder be com all reade; and thei that neuer hadde it sein be-fore seide it shewde well that oure lorde was wroth with hem whan he made soche a signe to a-pere, and than gan the chaunce to chaunge fro hem that hadde the better...

(EPM, II, 406)

Merlin's organising presence on the battle-field, and his banner, make him a reference-point for martial procedure; Arthurian society's strength lies not only in the military power which gains it advantage over the 'fortune of werre' (EPM, I, 184), but also in an historical consciousness of its role.

Against the synthesising image of the dragon-banner is set the cruder historical model instituted by the Pagan King Rion. His cloak of beards, trophies from those he has defeated, is mentioned just prior to Merlin's revealing the dragon-banner to Arthur:

'...he hath conquered by force xxti kynges crowned, fro whom he hath taken alle their berdes by force and in dispite, and sette hem in a mantell...and he

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¹ See, for example, EPM, I, 116, where, after the description of the dragon-banner, Merlin sets fire to the enemy's tents, and EPM, II, 207, where Merlin creates a dust-storm to confound the enemy.
hath sworn that he shall neuer finysshe till he haue conquereth xxxti kynges.'  

(EPM, I, 115)¹

For Rion, the past is significant only insofar as it is the register of his personal success, and extends no further than his own career as a warrior. History for him is immediate action, and success contingent only upon physical strength. When the beard-cloak is mentioned again, it is as the main element in a letter of defiance sent by Rion to Arthur, in which he demands the latter's beard to adorn his mantel, which is complete except that it lacks tassels:

'...and for the tassels faile I haue herde tidinges of thy grete renoun that is spredde though the worlde, I will that it be honoured more than eny of the other kinges, and therfore I comaunde the that thow sende me thy beerde with all the skynne, and I shall hit sette on the tassels of my mantell for the love of the...'

(EPM, II, 620)

Thus Rion moulds his future by reference to his past, and the completion of his cloak is to mark the fulfilment of his ambition. Merlin's response to this demonstration of ignorance is, by means of a sequence of disguises (EPM, II, 615, 621-23), to remind the reader of the dragon-emblem as image of Arthur's rule. Arthur's reaction to the blind harper who asks to carry the banner into battle is at first one of incomprehension. Merlin as blind musician (seer, creator, commemorator, who harps 'a lay of Breteigne' (EPM, II, 615)) reminds the court both of his function and of the importance of the court's own awareness. Only in his second disguise, that of a little child, is Merlin recognised by Arthur, who has learnt to read the significance of things.

1. The second time the beard-cloak is mentioned (EPM, II, 619-20), the number of conquered kings is set at nine. Is the narrative, by means of this discrepancy, indicating the cloak's insufficiency as accurate historical record?
While the dragon banner is the present pragmatic image of an historical role, Arthur and his men are also able to justify present action, in the later stages of the narrative, by reference to a dynastic past, as when, asked for tribute by the Emperor of Rome, Arthur asserts his own right on the grounds that his ancestors conquered Rome:

'Romayns haue hadde trewage of vs, and my parentes haue hadde trewage of theym. Thei clayme Bretaigne for theiers, and I clayme Rome for myn...'

(EPM, II, 642)

Arthur's proposed campaign against Rome is supported, the barons remind him, by the 'prophesie of Sibile' (EPM, II, 642). Merlin has no part in the decision to fight Luces (although his help is soon required again); Arthur is allowed to some extent to determine his own role.

Amos Funkenstein, discussing medieval and Renaissance historians and the structures with which they work, concludes that they recognise a degree of freedom in human affairs, yet cannot regard man as wholly autonomous:

Because the middle ages lacked [an] emphasis on the total freedom of man in history, because it regarded, even in its more subtle examples of historical reasoning, the historical world as a given much more than made - it could not achieve, even where it came most near to it, a definite and all-encompassing concept of historical contexts.¹

The English Prose Merlin establishes the Prophet as one who promotes an historical perspective on the world, as a means to understanding and shaping that world. At the same time we see how insufficient are the modes of comprehension made available through historical writings, and other historiographical models. Merlin provides the text with its possibility of a synoptic vision, but in his ultimately inscrutable alterity he also images that lack of completeness endemic to any overview attempted by humankind.

The EPM is relevant in the context of late medieval historiographical modes of organising material. Gregory Wilkin's study of the Vulgate Merlin has lead him to conclude that the narrative was written with the education of Knights Templar in mind. The EPM does not have the same specificity with regard to its audience that Wilkin claims for Merlin, but as a consideration of governance and society, it has a direct bearing on concerns current in the fifteenth century. The French romance is not then a curiosity for its late-medieval readership, but in English translation it reflects preoccupations of the time, and Merlin himself is central to the book's appeal in this context.

Prior to a more detailed examination of how Merlin promises stability, I want to consider some aspects of advice literature which, as a branch of historiographical writing, emphasises the importance of form in the recovery of meaning, but which addresses itself especially to the question of the origins and dissemination of wisdom, and how one guarantees the means to translate counsel into action within a political framework. As a preliminary to this study, we will look at how attitudes to law feed into the idea of the need for form in advice writings.

**LAW**

English writings on law are a useful point of departure for considering attitudes to governance and justice in other literary contexts. English and Continental law-makers agree on orthodox theories of law as voiced by Thomas Aquinas in the Law and Political Theory section of his

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Summa Theologiae (la2ae, 90-97), but they differ in opinion as to how law is to be implemented. Aquinas endorses the notion of a determining relation between Divine and human law, but leaves us ultimately uncertain as to the authority and efficacy of man-made law, which, while mirroring the Divine, is of its nature the mutable product of imperfect reasoning. Aquinas' solution to the problem is to invest the community's highest authority with the duty of exercising justice, which he defines as an objective measure by which man, guided by the higher principles of Divine law, is directed to maintain balance and order in human affairs (Qu. 90, 1; p.7). Thus there is a concern, reflected in literature, with the person of the monarch as representative of a transcendent justice, and a preoccupation with preserving and supplementing the king's innate sense of equity with a wealth of non-prescriptive advice and good counsel; for if the integrity of the monarch's office is not safeguarded, the basis of authority upon which the law rests may be called into question.

Aquinas also raises the question of how law is to be promulgated, and points to the recording of law as an essential aspect of its nature; accordingly Isidore etymologizes, 'law (lex) gets its name from reading (legendo), because it is written down'.

(Qu. 90, 4; p.17)


2. For Aquinas, human law is a manifestation of one's movement towards the good, rather than an institution necessary to restrain human excess, as it is for Augustine. See the latter's De Libero Arbitrio, translated by R.P. Russell as The Free Choice of the Will, in Saint Augustine: The Teacher. The Free Choice of the Will. Grace and Free Will. The Fathers of the Church, volume 59 (Washington, D.C., 1968), pp.102-05.

3. Aquinas, Law and Political Theory, Qu. 92, 2; p.47: 'Giving advice is not the proper office of law, for it can be done by a private person who has no business to lay down a law'.
He also recognises the extent to which the authority of human law depends on customary practice, but the debate between 'the good old custom' and the claims of theoretically-based law, are not the main focus of his investigation. His concern is primarily with the schema of human law as feasible within the Divine framework; it is in the legal practice of England and the Continent that we see how the questions he touches upon theoretically - the role of equity, the nature of justice, the function of human mediators of that justice which mirrors the Divine, - are approached and dealt with in diverse ways.

Continental jurists seem particularly anxious to recover, and disseminate in a readily-accessible legal form, those principles Thomas observes should be the foundation of all law. Their English counterparts, meanwhile, appear to emphasise the importance of legal procedure in structuring law itself. The systematisation of a substantive law based on clearly-defined (and stated) principles is less important than the development of a system from responses to individual cases. The Continent self-consciously establishes criteria for judgement within the tradition of Roman law as advocated by such as Justinian, while it is a commonplace of the legal history books to observe systematisation and codification to be alien to the English judicial system. The special situation of English law owes much to historical accident, but that it may in some ways be viewed as anomalous encourages a more inquiring


3. There is also an argument for the importance of the ethnological element in legal development, on which see R. Pound, Interpretations of Legal History (Cambridge, 1923), pp.78ff.
stance on the part of English authors with regard to questions of legality, authority, morality and justice.

Medieval English law recognises a plurality of arbitral systems as a means of obtaining justice, and of them the Common Law system is more obviously the result of a gradually-evolving process than the systematic working-out of basic legal theory. With the advent of the Norman administration, an already well-established Anglo-Saxon judicial system has superimposed on it a parallel mode of legal procedure, in the form of a new feudal courts, and in the post-Conquest years, England emerges as a testing-ground for the implementation of experimental forms of legal procedure, not all of them felicitous. The Common Law courts were the means of sorting out the resultant confusion, but they in turn generated problems inevitable when one formalises what is originally the exercise of pragmatic arbitration. This necessitated the setting up of courts of Equity as a complement to the Common Law courts' work. These developments owe much to the authority accorded to procedure at the expense of an emphasis on theory.

Medieval theoretical text-books of English law are, not surprisingly, something of an exception. The appearance, in the thirteenth century,

1. See van Caenegem's distinction, The Birth of the English Common Law, p.88:

'English law prefers precedent as a basis for judgements, and moves empirically from case to case, from one reality to another. Continental Law tends to move more theoretically by deductive reasoning, basing judgements on abstract principles; it is more conceptual, more scholastic and works more with definitions and distinctions.'


3. A.W.B. Simpson, 'The Legal Treatise and Legal Theory', Law, Litigants and the Legal Profession: Papers presented to the Fourth British Legal History Conference at the University of Birmingham, 10-13 July, 1979, edited by E.W. Ives and A.H. Manchester (London, 1983), pp.11-29, draws a parallel between the situation in England and that obtaining in Ancient Rome, and notes the lack of legal treatises to be part of an attitude which 'laid stress mainly on case law and problems [and] was only very mildly interested in system and abstraction' (p.11).
of Bracton's *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, which draws on a knowledge of Gratian and of Justinian's *Institutes*, so as to systematise English law, is a-typical. The twelfth-century work known as *Glanvill*, (generally agreed to be the first exercise in producing a comprehensive book of English law), which contains a defence of the customary basis for a law that remains largely unwritten, is more representative of English concerns:

> Although the laws of England are not written, it does not seem absurd to call them laws...For if, merely for lack of writing, they were not deemed to be laws, then surely writing would seem to supply to written laws a force of greater authority than either the justice of him who decrees them or the reason of him who establishes them.

The *Mirror of Justices*, a late thirteenth-century text surviving only in MS Corpus Christi Cambridge 258, highlights the problems endemic to English law and simultaneously exposes the disjunction between different traditions of interpreting events. Ostensibly it is an attack on legal corruption and was at one time accepted as an authentic representation of early medieval statutes. Indeed, the *Mirror* was described by Maitland as an inaccurate eccentricity, for it both relies heavily on Bracton, and displays the author's lack of lawyerly skill and his propensity to error and contradiction. The author declares himself the 'scourge of justices', and indicates that their denunciation is to be his central theme, but he is equally concerned with how the

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1. Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England: translated, with revisions and notes by Samuel E. Thorne, 4 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968-77). Bracton's avowed intention (Vol. II, Chapter One) is to classify the laws of the kingdom in order to make them more accessible to others, and to eradicate error.


arbitrariness endemic to an unwritten code of practice facilitates the abuse of law.

In the introduction, the author tells how, using Scripture as a guide-line, he has compiled his 'petite summe de la lei',

\[ \text{solum ceo qe jeo trovai les vertues e les substaunces embulleees e puis le temps le Roi Arthur usez par seinz usages accordaunce a riules avandtites.} \]  

(p.3)

The writer's attitude to ancient customary laws in this passage is interesting in the light of later statements made about the special status of custom in English law, and its consequent lack of regulation:

\[ \text{Plusours sunt que dient qe coment qe autres reaumes use lei escrite soule Engleterre neqedent use ses custumes e ses usages pur lei.} \]  

(p.155)

English law is not in itself corrupt, but the very fact that 'usage' is arbitrary makes law particularly vulnerable. Recording custom in 'lei escrist', writing it down, is therefore proposed as a further means of safeguarding 'dreit usage':

\[ \text{Abusion est qe les leis ne les usagez del Reaume ovesque lur enchesons ne sunt mie escrit par quoi il soient connus issi qil pussent estre seuz de tuz.} \]  

(p.156)

Whether or not the author is conscious of it, the gross errors pointed out by Maitland in the Mirror's citing of specific aspects of English law\(^1\) offer telling evidence for the text's assertions of the uncertainty of the unwritten.

The Mirror's argument is also victim of the rhetoric by which it seeks to interpret history. If the invocation of Arthur's times is evidence of the writer's painstaking research and a respect for ancient law, it is also at odds with the assertion that the Britons were deprived

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1. Introduction to The Mirror of Justices, pp.xliii-xlv. Maitland concludes that the author is not a serious legal historian, but merely 'enjoying himself' (p.xlv),
of their land because 'plus usserent force ce droit', (p.6), and that it is the God-fearing Saxons, 'prises plus humbles e simples de tuz pais Joygnauntz', who institute good laws and ensure the stability of the community by demanding certain assurances on the part of their leader:

Al corouement le firent jurer quil maintendrait la seinte foi criestiene a tut son poer, e son poeple guieroit par droit sanz regard a nule persone, e serreit obeissant a seinte eglise e justisiable a suffrir droit com autre de son poeple.

(p.6)

This subject is taken up in Book V of the Mirror, in a section on the abuses of law which criticises specific areas of legislation, but is initially concerned in general terms with the position of the King in the context of the realm's best interests:

La premere e la soverein abusion est ce li Roi est outre la lei, ou il dust estre subject, sicom est contenu en son serement.

(Mirror, p.155)

Aquinas has noted the primary role played by the monarch as maintainer of justice;¹ the Mirror reflects the concern, manifested throughout the medieval period, with the inter-relation between the King and the authority of justice and law of which he is the instrument. That the monarch's integrity be maintained is essential, and the writer attacks those who flatter their lord for their own gain, which makes for rules founded on the individual's volition rather than on right, to the detriment of the community (p.156). Emphasising the issue of the King's position, society's demands and the interests of the Commonalty, is made part of the drive towards reforming injustice by resorting to

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¹ 'A king...should realize that he has assumed the duty of being to his kingdom what God is to the universe... [He is] appointed to administer justice throughout his realm in the name of God.' De Regimine Principum, translated as On Princely Government by J.G. Dawson, in Aquinas: Selected Political Writings, edited with an introduction by A.P. D'Entrèves (Oxford, 1959, eighth impression, 1981), 2-42 (p.34).
a moral order, the guide-lines for which are readily available in Scripture.

At the root of the Mirror is a plea for order, for clarity of vision in legal matters, which inevitably involves the claims of morality and conscience, and for justice based on the requirements of the community. In bringing to the fore several issues germane to discussing English law's peculiarity, the Mirror does little more than expose, whether intentionally or not, the instability of a particular system, and the uncomfortable accommodation of different agreed modes of understanding. Its partial solution is to use the written to stabilise the customary, but it is itself a testament to error and anomaly.

In the fourteenth century, Piers Plowman, in its wide-ranging investigation of social and moral order, confronts head-on the problems endemic to finding a fit between diverse ways of organising material, and thus comprehending it. The B-text Visio is clearly pre-occupied with the question of law, and in what way human law may relate to the Divine. The constant revisions of the text itself, leading to new juxtapositions of subject-matter, indicate a desire for a structural mode which will facilitate the recovery of meaning. The importance of human law is a major point for discussion in Piers.¹ It is part of the order devised 'for profit of al the peple'.² The King, the Angel of the Prologue reminds us, is defined according to his ability to operate as a tool of justice:

'Dum 'rex' a 'regere' dicatur nomen habere Nomen habet sine re nisi studet iura tenere.'

(p.6, 11.141-2)

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Justice is the chief attribute of both the King of Heaven and the earthly ruler, and it informs the poem's understanding of spiritual matters. Will hopes to understand the Divine by recourse to how human law functions.

There is, however, a problem in that human mediation of law makes it corrupt and unstable. Earlier authors had complained that confusion in the law interfered with the smooth running of the courts;¹ Langland makes such confusion the basis of his investigation into humankind's grasp of the rational and the spiritual. Myra Stokes observes that for Langland, 'Society is only in good order when the rules and the laws it professes are realities and really enforced' (Justice and Mercy, p.278). But apart from the question of the gap between precept and action, the poem also inquires into how law is to be defined and promulgated in human terms when the self-declared upholders of that law are open to moral corruption.

In the Prologue, Langland recounts a popular fable both to provide an image of society, and to demonstrate a structural breakdown in the writing. The exemplum of how the mice and the rats, hard-pressed by a tyrannical and capricious cat, cannot summon up the courage to attach a bell to it and so be forewarned of its coming, had been recently applied to the contemporary English parliament.² But in Langland's extension of the fable, a mouse recommends to the rats that they leave the cat be, for fear of worse governance, "For bettre is a litel los than a long

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1. The author of the twelfth-century Leges Henrici (quoted by van Caenegem, The Birth of the English Common Law, p.17) complains that, in the confusion, 'the definite truth of the law can seldom be found'.

sorwe" (p.8, 1.191), and even claims the cat is necessary to prevent a state of total disorder: "For may no renk ther reste have for ratons by nyghte" (1.197). The mouse withholding his consent to the belling of the cat, and diverts attention from the whole problem of social order by counselling that one cease to consider the needs of the community first - "Forthi ech a wis wight I warne wite wel his owene!" (1.208). In refusing to draw a moral, Langland denies any easy solution to social problems, and exposes the insufficiency of the parable's form as a means to finding that solution.¹ The poem becomes an exposition of structure-seeking; modes of control and arbitration are acknowledged as necessary, and there are attempts both to define and to implement them, but the questions posed in the Prologue are not, at this point, resolved by the shape of the poem. The processes at work here are very different from the more schematic organisation of fifteenth-century works on wisdom and authority. Langland makes the uncertainty pertaining to systems a foundation of his inquiry, whereas the later works I will examine find a certainty in a specific kind of codification, and instability is otherwise inscribed.

The fifteenth century approaches the problem of social ordering from a different literary perspective. There is a narrowing of scope; the grounds of good government are often assumed to be a given, and there is an increasing trust in the authority of rhetorical formulae as a means of maintaining the notion of the ideal as possible in practical reality. Legal treatises during this period seek firmly to establish the credentials of the English monarch, a concern reflected in advice

¹ Myra Stokes, Justice and Mercy, pp.74-75, has a different reading of the parable:
The moral Langland draws, then, is that any law, any authority, however vicious its representatives, / is better than none. The human will requires government and rule; it cannot rule itself.
literature. Elizabeth Pochoda has identified the interest in kingship with the development of a nationalism intent on preserving a sense of continuity and order. But the overriding interest seems to be in the nature and function of the monarch within the framework of justice, essential to a defence of the English judicial system's legitimacy. How the English system allows the monarch to operate most efficiently as dispenser of justice is one of Sir John Fortescue's prime concerns.

The general lack of treatises is, as we have seen, endemic to English legal procedure. But in the fifteenth century there is also evidence of codification in order to clarify law and politics, and Fortescue's work respects the value of the customary by using already-extant process to inform newly-important political and constitutional subjects. Thus in his Governance of England, the jurist adapts rules from property succession to explain the principles of royal succession.

1. Arthurian Propaganda: 'Le Morte Darthur' as an Historical Ideal of Life (Chapel Hill, 1971), pp.35-60.

2. Fifteenth-century thought endorses John of Salisbury's opinion in the Policraticus that the prince's authority depends on the authority of justice and law, and that 'The prince...is the minister of the common interest and the bond-servant of equity'. The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury: Being the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books, and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books, of the 'Policraticus', translated by J. Dickinson (New York, 1963), pp.6-8 (p.7).

3. An example is Littleton's Tenures, a treatise on land law, which, according to Stein (quoted by Simpson, 'The Legal Treatise and Legal Theory', p.17) represents 'the first exposition of English land law based on principles instead of as a number of disconnected formulae concerning the procedure of real actions'.

4. E.F. Jacob, 'Sir John Fortescue and the Law of Nature', Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 18 (1934), 359-76, discusses how Fortescue comes to terms with the lack of clear principles of public law on the question of succession; see also S.B. Chrimes, 'Sir John Fortescue and his Theory of Dominion', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fourth series, 17 (1934), 117-47, on how Fortescue 'reconcile(s) the proprietary right of the king to rule with the proprietary rights of his subjects to possess' (p.129).
In the De Laudibus Legum Angliae, written from 1468-1471, to educate the young Prince Edward as England's future legislator, Fortescue argues for the authority of English customary law on the basis of its long usage:

[No other laws] are so rooted in antiquity. Hence there is no gainsaying nor legitimate doubt but that the customs of the English are not only good but the best.¹

Furthermore, Fortescue demonstrates that English society is so constructed as to make justice available to all classes. While conditions on the Continent facilitate a tyranny based on self-interest, the English king is aware that he is part of the machinery of justice. The economic and social climate in England as a whole allows also for the maintenance of reliable juries (again, unlike in states abroad, where the lower orders are kept in poverty and ignorance (p.71)). Thus the community contributes to the operation of justice in a society more advanced than its European neighbours.

If England is potentially the best-governed country in Europe, and this largely because of the unique evolution of its legal system from experimental procedure, Fortescue recognises the need to promote the importance of 'consuetudines', customs, when he considers what are, for English jurists, the bases of law. He identifies 'maxims' as being at the root of English law, 'principles...not known by force of argument nor by logical demonstrations, but...acquired...by induction through the senses and the memory' (De Laudibus, p.21), and the customary has a major part in their formation. The tendency towards codification (which continues into the sixteenth century) is accompanied by a defence

of custom as its own authority and the surest ground of law.  

Fortescue's position is partly dictated by political and historical circumstance, but in consciously invoking difference from Continental institutions to describe the English situation, Fortescue's defence of English law, and the constitution developing from it (made largely on the basis of its peculiarly arrived at nature), aligns him with an English tradition which asserts the value of a pragmatic procedure which has become systematised. Fortescue's arguments illuminate a conceptual attitude towards how one effects judicious government, an attitude which also informs literary texts similarly concerned with the recuperation of wisdom. Fortescue examines the monarchy in terms of what is most expedient for the commonalty. Advice literature, sharing Fortescue's confidence in the state as potentially perfect, is more precisely interested in how one recovers and makes operative good rule within the commonwealth. This emphasis leads advice literature to regard the bases of authority somewhat differently from mainstream historical literature.

The historian vouches for the authority of his/her writings by asserting the truth of the source-material and the validity of the way the subject-matter is interpreted. Advice literature also to some

1. An example of this is Christopher St Germain's Doctor and Student, edited by T.F.T. Plucknett and J.L. Barton, Selden Society, 91 (1974), first published 1523. St Germain adopts Fortescue's idiom in treating of maxims as those principles of law not founded on any statute, but for which 'the olde custome of the realme' is 'suffycyent auctorytie' (p.57). At the same time, St Germain is rather vague about defining what precisely these maxims are: 'many of the customs & maxymes of the lawes of Englande can be knowen by the vse and custome of the realme so apparantly that it nedeth not to haue any lawe wrytten therof' (p.69).

2. Compare the claim made in the prologue to John Barbour's Bruce (written in 1375), edited by W.W. Skeat, 2 vols, EETS, extra series, 11, 21, 29, 55 (London, 1870, 1889, 1874, 1877), I, 1; 11.1-5:

Storyss to rede ar delitabill,
Supposs that thai be nocht bot fabill;
Than suld storyss that suthfast wer,
And thai wer said on gud maner,
Hawe doubill plesance in heryng.
extent looks to the past for authoritative examples and formulations of how to live well. But it has a more empirical tendency, as is revealed by what it identifies as the channels of wisdom. In the texts I will be discussing, Mum and the Sothsegger, and Hoccleve’s Regement of Princes, a disorientated narrator discovers, experientially, the basic tenets of good rule; these tenets, experience crystallised into precept, are made easily recognisable by virtue of their being expressed in terms of the orthodoxy proverbial, or by means of obvious metaphor, and in this 'known' form are re-presented as both familiar and newly re-available to the reader. But the texts also encode the 'unknown' in the form of ostensibly liminal characters, who are gradually revealed as moral guides and dispensers of wisdom.

The nature and status of counsellors is therefore of central importance in advice literature, as we shall see, and the attitudes voiced in these fifteenth-century texts establishes a background against which to read and interpret Merlin's role as advice-giver in the EPM, a work particularly pertinent to the contemporary interest in the nature of counsel and humankind's getting of wisdom.

ADVICE LITERATURE

I have suggested that advice literature is primarily concerned with the smooth running of society. Its aim is corrective rather than revolutionary, for it seeks not to undermine the status quo by questioning the bases upon which established rulers lay claim to power, but to offer guidance to heads of state from a political viewpoint commensurate with their own. At the same time, advice writings may reflect the
interests of the rising middle and professional classes,¹ and this section of society (manuscript evidence suggests)² also forms an enthusiastic audience for this kind of literature.

Richard Firth Green believes the principal reason for the popularity of works of advice literature in the later Medieval period to be their use in court circles as hand-books of political instruction and practical government, a use which bears witness to the respect accorded literary authority. Green argues that the exigencies of conservative aristocratic taste dictate the form as well as the content of advice literature, constraining the author to forego individuality or originality and become the 'servant of a tradition' in the interests of earning a livelihood.³ This 'conventional' aspect of advice literature is, however, essential to its status as authoritative; it is an integral structural element as much as a response to audience taste. The employment of set formulae and the use of the proverbial are designed to give the impression of a timeless wisdom, with which the author dutifully re-familiarises the patron that he/she may translate it into action.

If Glanvill questions the superiority of written law over customary law, in this form of literature, the value and prestige of the recorded word

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¹ See Dan Embree, "The King's Ignorance": A Topos for Evil Times', Medium Aevum, 54 (1985), 121-26, on texts from the Ricardian period onwards, voicing a concern with the monarch's being ill-advised by those around him. Embree sees in these complaints proposals for a new relation between King and Commons, 'one which would save the concept of medieval kingship while providing a theoretical channel of communication from the middle levels of medieval society direct to the very top' (p.125).


³ Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages (Toronto, 1980), pp.135-67 and passim.
is foregrounded. It is the means to the preservation of the counsel articulated by the anomalous characters in the text.

The EPM is to some extent a comment on how advice literature seeks to present counsel. It endorses the need for counsel as part of a network of social relations; exchanges of knowledge and advice are integral to the well-being of the community at large, an element in the collective ordering of experience. But the EPM also emphasises problems which a text such as the Regiment by-passes by virtue of its methodology. In the person of Merlin the EPM explores the question of the liminal, while advice literature, through the use of the marginal, only suggests that the origins of counsel may be obscure.

Hoccleve's Regiment of Princes is a highly sophisticated example of advice literature and was, as manuscript evidence shows, among the most popular of fifteenth-century works in the tradition. Richard Firth Green's research into extant manuscripts suggests that at least one London bookshop prepared copies of the English Prose Merlin and the Regiment for the same market. Hoccleve's exploration of the relationship of author to text in the light of the author-in-the-text's traditional claim to be a mediator between a store of recoverable wisdom and those who would most profit by it, exposes advice literature's strategies, and complements the EPM's approach to the recuperation of wisdom.


Before I discuss the Regement in depth, I want to look at what the earlier text Mum and the Sothsegger reveals of the way advice literature operates. Mum owes at least its form to the dream-vision, but shares many of the preoccupations of other advice literature. It assumes, for example, that the legal and social mechanism would allow for the exercise of good governance; unfortunately, the greed and rapacity of a minority ensures that the flatterers (who, as their name implies, make all things equal and encourage a lack of moral discrimination) are in control of the language current at court, while the truth-teller is simply associated with indecorousness:

He can not speke in termes ne in tyme nother,
But bablith fourth bustusely as barn vn-y-lerid;

(Mum, Fragment M, p.28, 11.49-50)

Mum is about finding an appropriate register for good advice and creating the ideal 'good place' for its articulation, a 'place' which is first described as a rhetorical locus, and is ultimately defined as the book the author has produced.

In moving from a description of contemporary unrest in social reality to a vision of good government, Mum asserts the validity of truth-telling in written form; the recorded word is at once the means to promulgate truth, and part of a reservoir of authority having an existence separate from the author's personality: '...blame not pe berne pat pe book made' (Prologue, p.3, 1.86). By having recourse to the written, the Mum author solves the problem of the social permissibility of 'councell' in an imperfect world.

The first part of Mum establishes the narrator's sense of moral obligation to give advice when he sees all too clearly the abuses of

1. Mum and the Sothsegger, edited by Mabel Day and Robert Steele, EETS, original series, 199 (London, 1936). In their introduction (p.xxiv), Day and Steele estimate the date of composition (from political allusion) as 1403-06.
Richard's reign. Wisdom, it is later made clear, needs a specific frame to make it accessible, for idle speculation may prove fatal:

Yit is pere a poyn of prophecie how pe peuple construeth
And museth on pe meruailles pat Merlyn dide deuyse...
Thus pay muse on pe mase on mone and on sterres
Til heedes been hewe of and hoppe on pe grene...

(fragment M, p.77, ll.1723-32)

Comment has to be explicit. Earlier in the text, the author's own description of the political situation, his criticism of Richard and his extolling of Bolingbroke, is transparent because although he uses beast imagery familiar from vaticinatory literature, this also has meaning for the reader as heraldic emblems of political figures.

This political comment is part of a more general concern with allowing Sothsegger a prominent voice in society. Fragment M has as its central concern how 'pe coroune' (p.27, l.1) - in the sense both of the office of kingship and the kingdom itself - must be rescued by Sothsegger from those greedy individuals in the service of Mum who threaten its integrity. Truth may be encoded in literature, but a 'semely sage' (p.37, l.354) explains to the narrator that Mum's influence is brought to bear when men turn from the text of truth to the "glose" (with a pun on 'flattery') and translate the dicta of truth into "plaisance of wordes" and worldly wisdom.

In his search for a resolution to the problem, the narrator is puzzled to find no textual reference to the 'matiere of Mum', nor any academic endorsement of its operation. Although it has no place in the authoritative rhetorical canon (p.37, ll.340-41), an unidentified 'doctour' asserts that in practice, the "glose" is prized above the text, and thus the truth is lost. Enraged and disappointed at the abuse of authority (made possible by the abuse of the written) that he witnesses, the narrator falls asleep.
The subsequent vision (authorised by another written text; 'for dreme is no dwele by Danyel-is wordes', p.52, 1.874) has the dreamer move from a wilderness to a clearly-defined locus, a well-kept garden, tended by an 'olde auncyen man' (p.55, 1.956). In his care of the garden, the franklin is an image of perfect governance ensuring good order within the state. This order is replicated in the behaviour of his bees, organised "by reason and by right-ful domes" (p.57, 1.1036). Yet even this society, founded on "comune profit", has to be helped by the judicious gardener, continually exercising a clear-sighted judgement, if it is not to be over-run by the self-interested drones.

Myra Stokes, discussing Mum in relation to Langland, thinks the author politically naïve to figure society's parasites as easily eradicable drones (Justice and Mercy, p.202). But the author is not naïve, as much as working with a different model of what literature can do. He suggests what may obtain in an ideal state where Sothsegger, and his dicta as encoded in writings, are respected. The self-evident moral of the encounter is not expounded, because truths need no distorting glosses. The text does not share Langland's anxiety about the practical application of good rule in an imperfect society because it assumes the ideal state will follow naturally if advice literature's precepts are taken to heart.

The franklin, aligning truth-telling and conscience - "Yn man-is herte (sothsegger's) hovsing is" (p.62, 1.1224) - goes on to analyse Sothsegger's moral significance. The poem itself is made the vehicle of these revealed truths; "Loke þou write wisely my wordes echone" (p.64, 1.1268) the dreamer is admonished. When he awakes, the perfect place has vanished, but he has precepts enough, ('ful wise.../And... nedeful and notable for pis newe worlde'), and the means to their dissemination, a treasure-trove of writings 'to cunseille pe King of pe
comune wele' (p.75, l.1660). Mum and the Sothsegger thus authenticates its own procedure in coming to the conclusion that books have a prescriptive potential. Writing is the strongest force for reform.

But while the precepts of advice literature appear absolute in their authority, the origins of such wisdom as recounted in individual texts, may be problematised. The franklin is initially invested with authority on account of his age, but there is a sense in which an anomalous character is always a potential source of wisdom. The Regement too uses an apparently chance encounter, but with an individual more obviously on the margins of the society from which the narrator comes, as a determining factor in the direction the poem takes. Rather than a locus amoenus, Hoccleve uses an indeterminate area of open country as the place for revelation. The locating of authority in anomalous characters intimates that counsel itself is not of such a quality as to be reduced to a sequence of aphorisms. But advice literature, by translating the idea of counsel into specific precept, and accommodating the marginal in the very process of translation, does not confront this issue.

The Regement anatomises advice literature's methodology. In particular, it examines counsel as consolation to the individual, and provider of stability for the state. The poet's despair at the beginning of the Regement derives from a personal sense of restlessness, insecurity, and isolation in a world itself unstable:

\[ Mvsyng vpon the restles bisynesse \\
Which that this troubly world hath ay on honde... \\
Thought me bereft of sleep with force and myght. \]

The problem - of both the text and the writer-persona within it - is a

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social one; how is good counsel to be recognised and allowed to operate as a cohesive force, harmonising disparate elements within this unstable society? The narrator's intellectual confusion, in the face of what he initially considers to be a personal dilemma, cannot be relieved by inner debate: 'poght, my crewel fo' (p.4, l.73) musing Boethius-fashion on Fortune's inexorability,¹ countenances only a melancholy passivity.

The impasse the narrator has reached is ultimately to be unblocked only by the intervention of another party, which forces the former to see the importance of counsel as a concatenation of exchanges tending to harmony. Furthermore, the Regement, ostensibly seeking the accommodation between the experiential, and the prescriptive means of regulating experience as recoverable from written testament and record, investigates the status of the writer vis-à-vis the advice he dispenses, and the role of writing itself.

Access (or, at least, the promise of it) to the specific kind of 'konnynge' which counsel constitutes is provided by an apparently fortuitous meeting with a 'poore olde horé' man (p.5, l.122). This individual has something of the quality of advice and advice-giving. A liminal character, he comments on the world from the seemingly more objective viewpoint of an impartial outsider, and is only partially 'knowable', as a recognisable literary exemplum (one who in his old age regrets the folly of his youth). His aim is to emphasise the importance of the right reading of both experience and literature. Thus he is

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1. Compare the narrator's lamentations in Chaucer's translation of the Consolation of Philosophy, Boece, Metrum 1, 11.26-32:

...for Fortune cloudy hath chaunged hir deceyvable chere to me-ward, myn unpietous lif draweth along unagreable duellynges. O ye, my freendes, what, or wherto avaunted ye me to be weleful? For he that hath fallen stood noght in stedefast degre.

(The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, pp.319-84 (p.321) )
seen, for example, to transform the narrator's perception of poverty as wretchedness "in elde, and out of court" (p.31, l.836), by demonstrating how the histories of others, and his own experience, have proved lack of material wealth to be a source of spiritual strength. 'Right reading' is the necessary prelude to an appreciation of good counsel as the dialectic between quantifiable and recoverable written precept and the 'experiential', which is less easily definable or reducible to fixed terms.

The Old Man has first to make the narrator receptive to the counsel he has to offer, just as the Prologue, in turn, has to engage the sympathies of the Royal patron to whom the work is addressed. The analogy implicit between the Old Man and 'Hoccleve', and the narrator and the Prince of Wales, as givers and takers of advice, is only one element in a network of 'mirrors' and 'models' set up by the text in order to examine counsel as operative within certain parameters, and available through recourse to specific literary forms. The process by which the Old Man wins his listener's confidence is an instance of practical advice-giving which resolves the poet's problem by constituting the Prologue to, and encouraging the production of, the Regement of Princes. The Prologue pre-figures the method of the Regement proper, and anticipates much of its material. The Prologue serves then to focus attention on particular aspects of counsel while exposing and accounting for the difficulties inherent in advice literature's given form.

Advice literature assumes the written to be a vessel of truth. The literate not only have access to a treasure-house of information about wisdom, they also have the "discrecioun" (p.7, l.155) to tell folly from wisdom. The Old Man, hearing that the poet is a scholar, is therefore optimistic that he will be able to help him, but he is met
with disbelief: "ya, pow arte a fayre leche! / Cur€ pi self, pat
tremblest as pou gost" (p.7, 11.162-63). The would-be 'physician''s
inability to help himself is, however, irrelevant in the context of
advice-giving, for counsel is efficacious as a continual process of
transmission and action.

The poet is promised an end to his distress by the Old Man, who
makes explicit the link between his lack of direction and his loneliness:

'O bing seye I, if pou go fe#rlees,
Al solytarie, & counsel lakke, & rede,...
pou likly art to bere a dotyd heed.'

(p.8, 11.197-200)

This observation on the social nature of advice is later crystallised
into a precept of social behaviour, in the section of the Regement
concerned with Justice:

Of councell & of helpe we be dettoures
Eche to other, by right of bretherhede;
For whan a man y-falle in-to errour is,
His brother ought hym to councel & rede
To correcte & amende his wikked dede.

(p.90, 11.2486-90)

The author's experience in the Prologue validates the substance of that
part of the Regement addressed to Henry.

As advice literature, the Regement operates within strict parameters.
The Old Man's authority does not extend to spiritual matters, with regard
to which he pleads "vnkonyng". He states only that faith is beyond
reason (p.13, 1.332), that we must not inquire into God's mysteries ("He
wole his konnynge hydde be, & nat wyste" (p.13, 1.350)), and he illus-
trates the horrors of heterodoxy by a brief account of the Lollard
Badby's heresy (pp.11-13). This section has been read as evidence of
Hoccleve's religious orthodoxy and his reactionary nature. 1 But more

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1. A.C. Reeves, 'The World of Thomas Hoccleve', Fifteenth-Century Studies,
2 (1979), 187-201 (p.190): 'Hoccleve was comfortably wrapped in the
cloak of traditional theology and piety, and did not wish to be
disturbed'.

important for the purposes of the poem is the way it establishes the limits of the text's concerns. While Divine retribution is assumed to manifest itself in the affairs of men (the Old Man attributes his present condition to God's judgement on his "outragéous iniquitee"), God's ways do not interfere with human-devised modes of ordering the world for the 'common profit'. Rather, the concept of an all-just, albeit ultimately unknowable, God, regulating mankind's behaviour from above, is a necessary part of a world-view in which arbitration of what constitutes proper conduct is made possible.

The affirmation of conservative theological doctrine in the recounting of the Badby case proclaims the reliability of both the Old Man and the soon-to-be adviser to the Prince, as guardians of a traditional wisdom. In its praise of Henry for trying to recall Badby from his heresy, the poem confirms his worth as one receptive to good advice, guided as he is by 'charity'. The good faith of the parties thus confirmed, the Old Man focusses on how counsel may be made the foundation of a good society, and inform a pragmatic response to the vicissitudes of experience. The guiding principle is to be that of 'measure', which stabilises the system by ensuring the kind of behaviour on the part of the individual that will guarantee "pe good and profet vniversel" (p.20, 1.523).

The Old Man explains how in his profligate youth he had no perception of truth - "Conceytës yongë ben ful derke & blynde" (p.24, 1.658) - but the experience of poverty has been the path to prudence and spiritual enlightenment, "pe glas and pe merour / In whiche I se my god" (11.690-91). The speaker also conforms to a literary precedent. His roles of erstwhile wastrel and present penitent fix him in the tradition of the Youth and Age debate,¹ while in the figure of Job he appreciates the

¹. See J.A. Burrow, The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought (Oxford, 1986), on the roles traditionally assigned the different stages in man's lifespan.
'mirror' of his own case, and hopes Job's history sets the pattern for his own future; "And after-ward, god al his heuynesse / Torned to ioye; and so may he do myne" (p.27, 11.733-34). The exempla to which the Old Man refers set out regulations for conduct against which experience may be read as conforming to the literary norm. Experience once recounted adds to the store of literature claiming to offer 'good counsel', and so continually justifies the system by which it is understood. The written is a repository of retrievable fact, a synthetic and direct means to the recuperation of wisdom.

The Old Man serves as a metonym for the concept of the attaining of wisdom through experience. Further to endorse the authority of literature, Hoccleve turns to the figure of Chaucer, whom he addresses reverentially, as he does the Old Man, as 'fadir'. The 'firsté fyndere of oure faire langâge' is celebrated as the 'Mirour of fructuous entendément' (p.71, 1.1963), from whom the author obtains the 'consail' for his enterprise. Towards the end of the Regement, Hoccleve re-enforces this specification of authority with a literal portrait of the master, intended, the text declares, to 'putte othir men in rémembraunce / Of his perséone' (p.180, 11.4994-95). The Old Man's wisdom is continually available; the author has only to find him at church - "I euery day heere at pe Carmes messe" (p.73, 1.2007). Similarly, Chaucer's counsel is recoverable, through reading and through emulation. Hoccleve's re-statement of these forms of wisdom through writing is the means of keeping faith with both his authorities.

Like Mum, the Regement reminds us, with the same pun on gloss/glose, that the threat to systems of good counsel comes from flatterers;

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1. On folio 88r of MS B.L. Harley 4866, Chaucer's own hand serves as the index to emphasise these lines. This use of iconography to trigger memory is an important aspect of fifteenth-century attitudes to the pictorial. See Pamela de Wit, 'The Visual Experience of Fifteenth-century Readers' (unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford, 1977).
'Al in pe glosè folk labour and swete' (p.70, l.1928). Flattery is false image-making, a mis-representation (by neglect) of those incidents in the past valuable to the present as 'ensaumple & mirror' of conduct and precept;

But fauel naght reportith tho scripturis;
His lordês soulê salue, he from hym hydith;
He besieth hym so in sly portraituris,
Pat homly trouthê naght with hym abidith...

(p.160, ll.4439-42)

It is the author's task to confound Favel through the re-presentation of traditional encodings of wisdom. Having established his central authorities of experience and writing, Hoccleve names the sources (well-established texts in the advice literature tradition) from which he has taken material, Aegidius de Columna's _De Regimine Principum_, the Pseudo-Aristotle's _Secreta Secretorum_, and Jacobus de Cessolis' _De Ludo Scaccorum_. Although the framework used is directly borrowed from Aegidius, the author also chooses to be selective, taking information as he needs it, he tells us, from 'here & there, as that my litell witte / Afforthê may...' (p.77, ll.2113-14). Hoccleve divides his work into fifteen sections, dealing consecutively with royal dignity, the coronation oath, justice, the due observance of law, piety, mercy, patience, chastity, magnanimity, the unreliability of riches, generosity, avarice, prudence, good counsel, and peace.

Seymour, commenting on the section on Mercy, points out the variety of Hoccleve's sources ranging from Scripture to the _Proverbs of Solomon_ and accounts of recent history, and suggests the _Regement_ to be rather light-weight by comparison with contemporary advice literature.¹ But

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¹ M.C. Seymour, in the introduction to _Selections from Hoccleve_ (Oxford 1981), finds Trevisa's prose translation of Aegidius 'repellently heavy' (p.xxviii), while Hoccleve's method has about it 'an endearing naïveté and lightness...which is remote from the normal prolixity of medieval moralizing and which makes the _Regiment_ seem almost a / _jeu d'esprit_ beside its weightier sources' (pp.xxvii-viii).
Hoccleve appears less to be indulging a taste for careless eclecticism than employing a combination of disparate sources of knowledge so as to validate those sources as mutually-informing. The text both cites previously-used exempla and glosses recent history in order to produce new 'mirrors':

Take hede, excellent prince, of your graunt-syre,  
How in his werkës he was merciable.¹

(p.121, ll.3347-48)

At the end of the Regement, the poet moves from writing contemporarily-known personalities into the tradition, to using the precepts of the written to guide response to the present political situation, most importantly with regard to the threat of war, both internally and abroad (p.191, ll.5287-89).

The closing stanzas of the poem call for judicious action based on a synthesis of good governance gleaned from advice literature, of precept learnt through experience, and of a pragmatic approach to the vicissitudes and transitoriness of earthly existence (an attitude the Poet himself has been seen to learn in the course of the narrative). The Regement stresses that the course of wisdom promulgated by advice literature is translatable into action:

...whan good counsail is yeuen yow,  
What ye do wol#, kepe it close y-now  
Til þat yow lykë pårforme it in dede.

(p.175, ll.4871-73)

¹. The Prologue also cites John of Gaunt as an example of moderation, pp.19-20, ll.517-20:

'...al knyghtly prowesse  
Was to hym girt...  
His garnamentês weren noght ful wyde  
And yit þei hym becam wonderly wel.'

Seymour's observation that such praise is 'unhistorical' (Selections from Hoccleve, p.xxvii), shows to what extent advice literature re-writes the past to suit its own purposes.
The author himself fuses the elements of written counsel and experiential wisdom by presenting the activity of writing as his central experience. He emphasises above all the physical aspect of a text's production; this proves to be both a harmonising of the body's faculties, demanding full concentration and attention - 'in (Mynde, ee, and hand) mot be ioyn continuance' (p.37, ll.997-98) - and, at the same time, a physically debilitating enterprise:

I dar wel seyn it smerteth hym ful sore
In euere veyne and place of his body;
And yen moost it greeueth trewely...

(p.38, ll.1025-77)

The Old Man learnt his wisdom through deprivation; the writer sacrifices physical well-being to produce wisdom for others in a readily-accessible form, as well as to extricate himself from his own difficult position, to turn his 'sorowe' into 'gladnesse' (p.68, ll.1874-76). Hoccleve's own situation as presented in the poem is an example of the need for the operation of 'counsel' where established rule proves insufficient to judge the merits of his case. There is no legal justification for re-assessing his financial situation, but the written word will, hopefully, move Henry, acting on this basis and out of 'prudence' and 'fre grace', to reward his servant for his pains.

Hoccleve's work demonstrates again how each piece of advice literature, as has been observed, keeps faith with its authority of similar literature, by reproducing and re-stating its precepts and formulations. It must also continually re-affirm the validity of the process it thus endorses by feeding the tradition with new examples consonant with established modes of discriminating. As a result, wisdom as a pragmatic response risks getting trapped in a situation in which it is impossible to translate theoretical advice to enactment. The Regement avoids a confrontation between advice as a conceptual system irreducible to set
precept, and a set of laws promising the absolute recoverability of wisdom; it does so by setting up an ideal model by which it is possible to see 'counsel' as operative in the process of the poem, while it is ostensibly structured by literary precept.

Advice literature succeeds in convincing the reader of the power of its wisdom by employing a discourse within a schema the bases of which have already been established as a given. It thus concentrates on a single plane of 'knowing'.

It promulgates a method for reading the 'fikkil world', but does not recognise the implications of counsel as a conceptual system itself unstable, ultimately resisting comprehensive definition in the terms advice literature conventionally sets up. For the Regement, the determinants for the regulation of social behaviour already exist. Once the status of law as 'bothē lokke and key / Of suērtē' (p.100, ll.2777-78) has been stated, its enforcement and observance, rather than the validity of the legal process as a system, becomes the focus of attention.

Reginald Pecock, writing later in the fifteenth century, also conveys in his works the difficulty of trying to formulate a way of 'knowing' adequate to a concept for which there is no convenient language. In the Donet and the Folewer to the Donet, ¹ he promises us a system of morality, while admitting both the limitations of man's knowledge of 'treuþes', and the insufficiency of the religious instructor's tools: '3itt...neuerþeles bettir it is a man leerne (trouþis) so þan to lack all' (Donet, p.6). Pecock attempts to release the 'spirit' from the 'letter' of the law by discarding the Ten Commandments as redundant, and substituting a formulation of Four Tables, recommending active virtue

rather than mere avoidance of vice, and deriving from Christ's counsel
to "loue pi lord god aboue al ping, and pi nei3bore as pi silf" (Donet,
p.25).

Thus Pecock seeks to redefine rules for conduct through what he
regards as an orthodox adaptation of New Testament teaching. His
tables, he insists, are not immutable 'sure troupis', but open to comment
and debate. So he tries to systematise the customary and still retain
a certain flexibility, essential in the light of his Augustinian view of
language, where meaning depends on contract:

...alle wordis mowe signifie as men at her owne lust
wole haue hem to signifie, and specialy in nede,
whanne þere is 'not so greet plente of names but pat
þer is lack of propre names to summe propre þingis...

(Donet, p.44)

The grounds of knowledge may be rational, but the language at one's
command is at best ambivalent (witness, for example, Pecock's discussion
of 'wisdom' which, depending on context, can signify anything from a
particular artisanal skill to extensive learning in the highest spiritual
truths (Folewer, pp.54-61)). Anxiety over lexical precision is part of
a general concern for finding secure ways of ordering experience, while
acknowledging aspects of existence to be themselves unstable.

Fifteenth-century advice literature, together with other forms of
writing that seek stability, establishes fixity of meaning rhetorically,
and incorporates in its strategies an element of the obverse, a lack of

1. See De Doctrina Christiana, translated as On Christian Doctrine by
D.W. Robertson Jr (Indianapolis, 1958), pp.34-37:

Among signs, some are natural and others are conventional...
Conventional signs are those which living creatures show
to one another for the purpose of conveying.../...something
...they have...understood. / [Words are such signs] / But
many and varied obscurities and ambiguities deceive those
who read casually, understanding one thing instead of
another...
certainty. The written, in advice and historical literature, has a particular value. At the same time, advice literature places its advice-givers on the margins of society, and they become integrated as they dispense advice. The English Prose Merlin problematises the issue of liminality by having Merlin the counsellor as the originator of society, and constructor of counsel as system, while also the source of wisdom within society, and the text is accordingly more complexly involved with the nature of counsel and the parameters of the written.

THE ENGLISH PROSE MERLIN: LIMINALITY AND COUNSEL

We saw in the Historiography section how, in the English Prose Merlin, Merlin defines himself in terms of the society he serves, as "maister counsellor to kynge Arthur" (II, 436). Merlin also forms society's historical consciousness. Historical writing promises that wisdom is readily recuperable, and yet the latter is constrained by those forms in which it is conveyed. In the EPM, counsel operates pragmatically as well as within an awareness of historical process, and the problem of translating knowledge into action is made more complex by the fact that Merlin figures the very anomalousness and impenetrability of counsel, even as he organises society.

Merlin provides us with formulae for stability, but his many disguises continually enact and define his relation to society, and emphasise that he and his wisdom are available only on his own terms. We are made aware of Merlin's marginal nature together with his acts of advice-giving, and thus counsel as retrievable and counsel as unknowable, co-exist. The written structures our perception of event, and so forms of writing are of central importance to an understanding of how counsel operates. Merlin is positioned, like counsel, between the written as
codified, and writing as a means of transcending the codified, and this is reflected in the structure both of the EPM and the books within it.

Merlin also stresses the pragmatics of good counsel, and demonstrates the importance to society of that reciprocity which is the translation of good advice into action. Thus in the EPM, unworthiness as a social being comes to be figured as disobedience to, or deviation from, Merlin's advice, and the Prophet finally sets the parameters of 'wisdom' and 'foly', training Arthurian society to judge itself in ways consonant with his concept of good counsel.

Society's members recognise that Merlin's advice is both necessary, and a 'merveil'. In accepting Merlin's word one also accepts the limitations of human perception in the face of his unknowableness. As Ban makes clear, one obeys Merlin as an act of faith:

'I wote neuer...what I shall sey, for ye beth more wyser than we alle, and a-gein me I will do that ye counseile, seth it is so as ye haue seide ther is no more, but lete vs gon...'

(EPM, I, 142)

Characters in the text articulate their experience through a vocabulary and through literary procedures that have been vouchsafed them by Merlin, but their knowledge remains partial.

R. Howard Bloch's analysis of Merlin's role in the French texts takes in the whole sweep of early medieval French literature, by identifying Merlin as a paradigm of writing and its status. Thus while Merlin's presence in the Suite du Merlin shows that romance is more

seriously involved with questions of social order than may have been assumed (Etymologies, pp.159-97), the two books Merlin bequeathes society also have an extra-textual significance. In the 'historical' narrative recorded by Blase, and the ahistorical prophecies, the 'oscures paroles', we have representations of the two principal - and opposed - poetic modes of Old French literature, the epic and the lyric (Etymologies, p.215). While recognising the suggestiveness of Bloch's reading with regard to literature in general, I would set the parameters of inquiry more narrowly, and argue that in the EPM, where the organisation of society is of prime importance, and counsel is seen as a reciprocal agreement, the written operates as part of the system of counsel. The contrasting books show how counsel works as a system of reciprocity, and insofar as they deal with writing, stress the importance of the reception of writing, as well as its dissemination.

Merlin has a synthetic function in narrative and epistemological terms, and embodies a determining counsel. He is our guide to reading, and, as someone who stands outside time, he guarantees the possibility, in time, of relating these disparate encodings of the past and of the future. Both books attempt to 'read' Merlin; in the historical narrative, Merlin's acts of counsel are incorporated into an idiom which Arthurian society can use to shape its future response to event. The book exploits writing's fixed, commemorative, value. The other book results from the desire of others to fix the meaning of that which remains unknown, Merlin and the future of which he has cognisance. In attempting to stabilise fragmentary knowledge, this book foregrounds the importance of right reading. In recording Merlin's 'derk' sayings, the community preserves a code it cannot unlock: 'And so be-gan the boke of prophesies of Merlin, that spake of the kynges that sholde be in
Engelonde' (EPM, I, 53).¹ The omnivalent language of prophecy is packed with meaning, but the counsel it offers is divorced from time and place. Blase's book shows Merlin to be the text's central writer: this collection privileges the Prophet as the most competent reader, providing the discriminating sense necessary to make prophecy intelligible. In the narrative, Merlin both creates the **locus** of advice, and determines the moment most opportune for its promulgation. Equally importantly, society must be actively receptive to that advice.

The historical and prophetic books seeking to 'contain' Merlin simultaneously demonstrate his superior control, and Merlin's marginality and oral counsel further emphasise that aspect of his nature (and of advice-giving), which is irreducible to set terms. Yet the commemorative and prescriptive qualities of writing are harnessed to a comprehension of Merlin, and it is on this basis that characters' response to Merlin, and the reader's response to the text, is constructed. The EPM employs a formulaic vocabulary and draws on different genres, which offer the reader a framework within which and against which to understand event. The shifts in thematic interest and structure comment on the value of literary forms as cognitive models, while in the person of Merlin, who stands at the interstices of the known and the unknown, the text examines the complexities of literary production, together with its relation to social order.

The opening lines of the EPM provide us with a dualistic overview of the world - the forces of evil pitted against those of good in the

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¹ EPM emphasises that this record of Merlin's words is not of the same calibre as Blase's work:

Blase axed Merlin yef thei / sholde make soche a-nother boke as he dide. And he seide, 'Nay; for they shull write not elles but soche thinges as no man shall vndirstonde till it be fallen and passed.' (EPM, I, 53-54)
projected threat of Antichrist, a plan which the circumstances of
Merlin's birth serve to frustrate. The case of Merlin, and the course
of the narrative from then on, emphasises the difficulty of trying to
read experience against moral absolutes. The Devils' Antichrist plan
is based on precedent -

'for (a man of oure kynde) myght moche helpe us to
be-gile (God's) pepill, like as the prophets
be-giled us, and tolden that we trowe neuer myght
haue ben.'

(EPM, I, 2)

Merlin upsets rules of precedent, and exposes as self-interest the
'Iustice of the lawe' that seeks to punish his innocent mother. Only
indirectly is the woman saved by her moral virtue. She is not
believed, but her precocious offspring denounces the judge's mother
under the law by which his own mother stands accused of sexual activity
outside marriage. Merlin establishes co-ordinates of wisdom and folly
as guidelines for behaviour more pragmatic than distinctions between
good and evil. While 'folly' is not always without connotations of
sinfulness,¹ it is in the main appropriated in the EPM to denote any
ill-advised heuristic enterprise.²

1. See the entry in the Middle English Dictionary, edited by H. Kurath,
S.M. Kuhn and others (Ann Arbor, 1954-), Part F3, pp.681-82: 'foly'
may express both 'stupidity' and 'sin' (especially lust). In this
latter definition, folly is part of Merlin's own dilemma, when he
considers his relationship with Nimiane:

he...thought that a moche fole were he, yef he slepte so
in his synne to lese his witte and his connynge for to
haue the deduyt of a mayden, and hym-self shamed, and god
to lese and/ displese.

(EPM, II, 308-09)

2. This may be in relation to actions that are strategically unwise
(EPM, II, 357: 'the Geauntes...seide that a grete fole were he that
wolde suffre to be slaine', or EPM, II, 650, where Arthur sends word
to Luce that 'he was folily come vpon his londe'), but 'foly' most
often denotes an action against Merlin's precepts, as Merlin himself
tells his charges: "...the more that I am with yow a-queynted, the
more foles I fynde yow" (EPM, I, 52).
The need for 'good counsel' to instruct the king, that he may thus
determine the politically expedient, is emphasised early on in the EPM.
In the early history of Britain, Vortiger's career is an example of mis-
management, the dislocation of counsel and rule brought about by his
violation of the social order for, once steward to the king of Britain,
this man, accounted 'worthy and wise' (EPM, I, 24), has taken the throne
for himself. The people's revolt against him - "for thow art not oure
lorde be right, ne the londe is not thyn, but that thow haste a-geyn all
reson" (EPM, I, 26) - does not persuade Vortiger to change his policies,
nor is he able to read the significance of his continually-crumbling
tower (EPM, I, 27) as imaging the temporary nature of his power.

Vortiger is finally granted explicit revelation of future events,
when Merlin explains what the two dragons disturbing the castle's
foundations signify:

'...the reade Dragon signifieth the, in that he was so
grete and hidouse, be-tokeneth the, and thy grete power.
And the white / dragon be-tokeneth the two childeren
that be fledde for drede of the...And that the white
dragon brente the redde dragon, betokeneth that the two
brethren shall brenne the with theire power.'

(EPM, I, 40-41)

But this knowledge comes too late to be strategically useful. The fore-
seen is already in the process of becoming actual event. The early
stages of the narrative make it clear that the stability of the realm
will only be assured by the dependence on Merlin's organisational and
cognitive skills.

Pendragon's peremptory defeat of Vortiger is therefore less
important to the narrative than the means by which Merlin, "the beste
devynour that is, saf god oonly" (EPM, I, 42), takes control. In
winning Pendragon's confidence, Merlin has recourse to shape-changing,
which emphasises his command of event, and of others' perception of him.
"There is no man that can at alle tymes knowe his semblaunce" (EPM, I,
The further implications of Merlin's disguises will be discussed later. Especially significant here is that Pendragon is convinced of his new adviser's good faith; "I can not sei what he is, but wele he semed a wise man, and theryfore I yaf to his counseile credence" (EPM, I, 47) he tells his brother. As Merlin observes to Blase, the two brothers "be yonge men and Iolye, and have grete nede of counseile" (EPM, I, 47). Pendragon, in the EPM, reiterates their need of Merlin's advice:

'...I wolde hertely pray hym to be with vs of oure counseile; and by hym shall we be rulid of alle oure gouernaunce, for, truly, brother, we haue grete nede thereto, and it were his plesier.' (EPM, I, 48)

Merlin has recourse to disguise, forcefully to remind Arthur of the contractual nature of advice. Earlier (EPM, I, 150), Merlin has told Arthur of the whereabouts of buried treasure, but after the battle of Bredigan, the spoils of war are divided, and the treasure is still in the ground. Merlin returns in the guise of a 'cherll (who)...semed to be crewell and fell' (EPM, I, 168) to warn the king to act upon counsel vouchsafed him, and to show, through the example of the treasure, how giving credence to Merlin is commensurate with good kingship:

'I ne knowe nought of the kynge that loueth tresoure, and is regrater and a wyssher, that dar not make a pore man riche that myght hym do gode seruyse...(for) ye haue not the herte for to yeve the thirde parte of youre gode that in the erthe doth rote er ye haue it vp-taken, and that is nether youre profite ne worship.' (EPM, I, 168)

1. This last phrase does not feature in the Additional MS of the Vulgate Merlin, p.41; 'Et merlins li dist il sont ione & ioli . si ne les poroie en nule maniere si bien traire a amor comme par dire vne partie de lor volonte...'

2. This passage has no correspondence in the Additional MS Merlin, p.43; 'Et uter ( ) reaspon (a Pendragon) sire sil li plaisoit cis homs nos auroit bien mestier.'
Counsel given must needs be translated into action. Merlin's fore-knowledge and political acumen recommend him to the British kings, but individuals also come to appreciate his prescriptive advice, drawing on him for a proverbial wisdom that will help them to regulate their conduct. The parable of the foolish baron who tries to out-wit Merlin is retrospectively glossed by witnesses as a warning to them: "A grete fole he is that will not leve that Merlyn seith" (EPM, I, 53).

Resorting to proverb is one way in which individuals record and use Merlin's wisdom. When Utherpendragon suffers reversals in war, Merlin encourages him to read the experience as exemplum; "Now maist thow se that peple ne a-vaile not in bataile with-oute a gode lorde" (EPM, I, 92).

When Merlin defends Arthur's right to the throne to the disbelieving barons, he cites the sword in the stone as an instance of God's grace made manifest to the people, the witness to Arthur's legitimacy:

'I se well that god doth not for-yete his seruaunte, thow he haue be a synner, yef so be that he will be repentaunte, and hym serue with gode werkes.'

(EPM, I, 112)

This dictum is adapted by characters elsewhere in the text to inform their experience, as when Aguysanx, trying to rationalise the cause of the Saxon invasion, observes "Oure lorde that is so gracious, ne foryeteth neuer his seruaunt in what he be" (EPM, II, 235), or when

1. Merlin is similarly sententious at Uther's death-bed where he delivers his homily on 'gode endyng' (EPM, I, 92-93). For the proverb on battle, compare George Ashby, The Active Policy of a Prince, in George Ashby's Poems, edited by Mary Bateson, EETS, extra series, 76 (London, 1899), pp.12-41:

Right so if ye go youre selfe to batail
All folk woll folowe you in youre helpyng. (11.283-84)

2. The Vulgate does not have a verbal echo at this point. The correlative to EPM, I, 112 is Merlin, p.90; "nostre sires noublie mie le pcecor por tant quill le voel le seruir de boin cuer." The equivalent to EPM, II, 235 is Merlin, p.163; "nostre sire dieu qui tant est dous & deboinaires noubliera ia les siens amis ou que il soient."
Arthur, before the first battle of Salisbury, expresses his trust in God:

'...oure lorde foryeteth not his Synner; and he hath shewed me yet hidyr-to that he hath me not for-yeten, and yet I truste to his mercy he will shewe me better than he hath don yet...'

\[EPM, II, 578\]

There are penalties for not acting upon Merlin's prescriptive advice. At the battle before Trebes, Arthur's forces are soon in disarray, not least because the leaders (against Merlin's specific direction to Uther) are not at the head of the attack, but have arranged themselves in an ambush position, so that 'thei of the reame of logres... saugh not hem that sholde hem gouerne' \[EPM, II, 404\]. Merlin's fury is not abated by Ban's protestations of good intent:

'Trewly, sir,' seide the kynge Ban, 'we ne did it but for good.' Quod Merlin, 'How-so-euer ye do, euell haue ye wrought...'

\[EPM, II, 405\]

It is Merlin's task to redeem the situation, taking up the banner he had earlier entrusted to Kay, and re-establishing dominance for Arthur's troops on the field; thanks to his ordinance, Arthur and his knights go on to perform some of their noblest deeds of war \[EPM, II, 406-10\].

The tournament at Logres \[EPM, II, 484-502\] demonstrates what happens when the ordering principle, in the person of Merlin, is absent. Undertaken at Kay's suggestion, the tournament has a precedent in the contest organised at Toraise, at which Gawain, having distinguished himself, is made a fellow of the Round Table. At Toraise, Merlin had ensured the combat remained amicable:

...and thei be-gonne ther a stour grete and perilouse that grete myschef ther sholde haue ben hasteley, yef Merlin ne hadde cleped the kynge Ban, and the kynge Bohors his brother, and badde hem departe the turnement, for it was high tyme...

\[EPM, II, 460\]
Merlin is not present at the later tournament. Although Arthur begs his nephew to avoid "debate...wrath", and "maltelente" (EPM, II, 485), good faith is not maintained during the encounter, itself morally questionable, between the King's and the Queen's forces at court. The accepted ritual of tournament soon cedes to the calculating battle-strategy of 'mortall werre' (488).

Resolution of the problem is finally effected by imitating Merlin's conciliatory role. Nascien questions the wisdom of Gawain's aggressiveness, and attempts to end the proceedings: "...hit is go folyly hiderto, and hit were tyme that it were left yef it yow plesen" (EPM, II, 492), but the plea simply initiates a new engagement, leading to more bloodshed, and Hervy has occasion to comment on the sin resultant on folly (EPM, II, 497). The Queen, with a fine sense of courteous speech, at last manages to calm Gawain, ask that her advice be followed, and, rationalising the event, points out the lack of wisdom in thus wasting resources on internal strife when the nation is under attack from the Saxons:

'Nevew, be not so wroth...Nowe (yeve credence to my wordes), and do that I praye yow (at this tyme),... ffor it is youre honour and youre profite, and ye knowe well that this londe is in sorowe and turment of the saisnes, and ye here be but a small peple, and I shall telle yow what ye shull thinke and do, ye shull love eche other and helpe a-gein alle peple...'

(EPM, II, 500)

(Parentheses indicate where EPM departs from Additional MS.)

The Queen's use of Merlin's register appears to depend on remembered forms of spoken wisdom rather than on the written, although characters in the text insist on the written as index of control, from Nimiane and Morgana, who record, in ink and parchment, skills they learn from

1. Merlin says to the barons, EPM, I, 109: "I shall telle yow what ye shull do: ye shall sende to the kynge Arthur..."
Merlin, to Gonnore, who tells Gawain of her plan to employ four clerks

'that shull do nothinge elles but write the a-ventures
that falle to yow and youre felowes, so that after
youre deth it may be remembred the high prowesse of
the worthi men hereynne.'

(EPM, II, 483)

If the community thinks of Merlin's special powers as mediated largely through the written, it is also locally successful in ordering event by imitating his sayings. Merlin occupies the space between the unwritten and the written in the narrative, as well as that between the accessible and the inaccessible written, and thus the issue of stability, which the court regards as attainable through commemorative writing, is further complicated. Memory may exist independently of the written. The written, to be properly understood, needs an aware reader.

Merlin emerges as our point of synthesis, his presence a social necessity, focussing different modes of perception, helping to 'read' the environment and social situations, as well as the written. We have seen how his dragon-banner replicates the features of the battlefield. Merlin creates loci as means of commemoration and as signals to readers. For Nimiane, he creates a locus amoenus, 'a vergier, where-ynne was all maner of fruyt and alle maner of flowres, that yaf...
grete swetnesse of flavour...' (EPM, II, 310) as expression of his love. (Ironically, Nimiane later turns to her own advantage a locus of love in transforming a 'bussh...of white hawthorne full of floures' (EPM, II, 681) into Merlin's place of imprisonment.) Writing, and creation of landscape, merge when Merlin literally prepares the way for

1. See EPM, II, 312: '(Nimiane) wrote the wordes [of enchantments] in perchemyn soche as (Merlin) hir devised, and she it cowde full well bring it to ende.' The Suite has an interesting variation on the equation of writing as power, when Merlin gives Morgana a book revealing details of Arthur and Gawain's deaths. But the letter killeth: "bien sachis que ja feme n'i regardera qui maintenant ne muire..." (II, 228).
those whose adventures he will not witness:

...and Merlin seide (to Blase), 'Write soche lettres as I shall yow devise'...and these lettres that Blase wrote Merlin sette by alle the weyes where the aventure were, and ne myght never be taken a-wey, but by theym that sholde hem acheve...

(EPM, II, 563)

Bloch considers writing to assert its centrality through Merlin, but in the EPM at least, Merlin's relation to the written seems more complex. Writing itself may be unstable; counsel may not be reducible to the written. That Merlin as counsellor cannot be contained in set terms is emphasised by the disguises he adopts when others have need of his skill. In his preliminary meetings with Pendragon, he makes the ruler receptive to his advice by means of a programme of gradual familiarisation; he first appears as a beggar (EPM, I, 42) who declares Merlin is only to be found deep in the forest (EPM, I, 43), then as a herdsman, reminiscent of the grotesque encountered by Chrétien's Calogrenanz, before ultimately meeting the court in his own 'semblaunce'. Merlin continually takes on the apparel of those outside society's jurisdiction, such as 'the wilde man', or the helpless, like the blind cripple (EPM, I, 73) in order to emphasise how through him the unknown becomes known and therefore usable.

The Grisandole episode (EPM, II, 420-37) provides the most detailed example of how Merlin constantly re-familiarises himself with those characters to whom he relates in an environment largely his own creation. He first enters the Emperor of Rome's palace (to which he is to restore right order) in the guise of a chaos-wreaking hart -

...and than he ran thourgh the / tables a bandon
and tombled mete and drynke all on an hepe, and
be-gan ther-in a grete trouble of pottis and diishes...

(EPM, II, 422-23)

This strange creature promises the Emperor that "a man that is sauage"
will explain his disturbing dream. When Grisandole goes into the
forest to find this marvel, the hart returns with advice on how to tame
the wildman, and make him amenable to her will:

'Purchese flessh newe and salt, and mylke and hony,
and hoot breed newe bake, and bringe with the...a
boy to turne the spite till it be I-nough rosted, and
com in to this foreste by the moste vn-couthe weyes
that thow canste fynde, and sette a table by the fier,
and the breed, and the mylke, and the hony vpon the
table,/ ...and doute the nought that the sauage man
will come.'

(EPM, II, 423-24)

This mixture of the raw and the cooked, of the trappings of civil-
isation, and wildness, (tables in forests), perfectly expresses Merlin's
ambivalence, while the rest of the episode demonstrates him to have
charge of the transition from the liminal to the central and dominant. ¹

Merlin's disguises may be seen as images of writing's alterity, or
rather, that aspect of writing which is unknowable, but figured in the
person of Merlin. Through the disguises that emphasise his liminal

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1. It is especially significant that the EPM should figure the transitional area between nature and civilisation in terms of cooking food, in the light of Claude Lévi-Strauss' work on its preparation:

Since it corresponds to the demands of the body, and is
determined in each of its modes by the particular way in
which, in various contexts, man fits into the world,
cooking, being situated between nature and culture, has
as its function to ensure their articulation one with the
other. It belongs to both domains, and reflects this
duality in each of its manifestations.

(L'Origine des manières de la table (Paris, 1968), translated as
The Origin of Table Manners by J. and D. Weightman (London, 1978),
p.489). The items of food the EPM mentions correspond to the
specific categories Lévi-Strauss discovers as determining the scale
from the raw to the cooked; see for example the definition of honey
as 'more-than-raw', and the discussion of roasting as opposed to
boiling, Table Manners, pp.479-86.
nature, Merlin reasserts his special contract with society and with the text.

Merlin's shape-changing finds a correlative in the narrative's shifting concerns, which broaden our horizons as readers. The EPM opens with the Harrowing of Hell, and evokes Merlin's enfances in ways similar to apocryphal tales of Christ. Of course the text soon moves from the polarities of good and evil by representing Merlin as a paradigm of ambivalent human nature writ large, for God has granted him free will:

...he yaf hym fre choys to do what he wolde, for yef he wolde he myght yelde god his parte, en to the feende his also.  

(EPM, I, 14)

The reference-point ceases to be such works as Adso's Libellus de Antichristo, and turns instead to how Merlin's power will help to construct a society, for "all (his) grete trauveill" is to be for Arthur (EPM, I, 32).

Subsequent events can be traced along a recognizable time-scale, as Arthur concentrates first on the unification of his kingdom, and then on the crusade against the heathen. There is a concern for historical accuracy, evident in such asides as: '...to the kynge vrien com a feire a-venture that ought not to be for-yeten in the tale' (EPM, II, 239). Consonant with a collective sense of nationalism is an awareness of the


importance of individual worth within a group. The knights of the younger generation who join Arthur engage with experience as individuals as well as collectively. The more identifiably 'historical' aspect of the EPM may be abruptly terminated, as when Merlin deflects attention from Arthur's Roman campaign to the marvel of the cat of Lausanne (EPM, II, 664-69). With the imprisonment of Merlin, who has surrendered his power in yielding to Nimiane's magic "shette in prison, ne noon may me oute bringe" (EPM, II, 694), the EPM takes a different direction. With the central ordering principle gone, other controls (such as the 'testing' of the court by the dwarf-knight and the maiden, EPM, II, 635-39) will come into play.

The time-scale then gets vaguer; Gawain looks for Merlin for 'a year and a day', and there is less concern with fact: '...in (Sagremor's) quest be-fill many feire a-uentures wher-of this storie maketh no mencion' (EPM, II, 687). With the Prophet eradicated from the text, the knights are left with a prescriptive model of behaviour (for instance, 'in tho dayes gentilmen were so trewe, that thei wolde rather lese theire lif than be for-sworn', EPM, II, 687) as the co-ordinate in their heuristic experience of the unknown. Characters have been given enough information to 'read' events and their significance; readers are shown the limitations of trying to interpret according to only one generic model, although the text's formulations have set up particular expectations, and the whole becomes a testimony to the possibilities of literary enterprise.

Louise Fradenburg, in her article on the Scottish Chaucerians, comments on how fifteenth-century authors are concerned to re-create

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earlier texts as part of their own literary endeavour, 'decomposing' and 'recomposing' their source-texts in order to understand their dynamic, and anxious to establish a 'fit' between past and present literature. Fradenburg identifies the idea of Chaucer as an authority as central to this concern with creating something fresh in the context of a specific tradition. The situation Fradenburg describes appears as part of a general fifteenth-century concern with ideas of continuity and stability. Advice literature solves the problem of keeping faith with the past by restating what it presents as traditional formulae; stability is therefore guaranteed, there is no gap between past and present. In the Regement, the author, in the process of writing, synthesises the lessons of past literature and present experience. Provision for the anomalous, the uncertain, is made by allocating authoritative power to the margins of society, but the liminal becomes accommodated as the author, taking 'good counsel', writes himself into a recognised tradition.

In the English Prose Merlin, counsel's anomalousness and indefinability are not 'accommodated' as much as acknowledged as an aspect of human perception and social interaction, and the possible alterity of writing is similarly recognised. Although Merlin is located in an area beyond human control, the text intimates that a full knowledge resides in him. The EPM encodes the unknown in its programme for stability. Writing makes particular claims on our perceptions, yet writing is also not necessarily 'fixed'. Counsel is theoretically definable in set terms, but its operation also involves pragmatic response. Merlin trains the characters in the text, and the reader. He offers a provisional hold on experience, and on the text; in creating, glossing, and synthesising events, he is both writer and reader. Instability is acknowledged in the way EPM locates fixity of meaning through the ambivalent Merlin.
Malory, meanwhile, offers us a more radical conception of the pragmatics of behaviour. The perspective on society in the Works is more asystematic and ahistorical than in the EPM. The Merlin of the EPM carves for himself a unique place in the social order, while in the act of defining that order. Malory's Merlin, identifying aspects of, rather than creating, a social order, remains to a large extent unknown; he is not, as in the EPM, a fixed counter against and in relation to whom the social processes he initiates may be judged and regulated (although this is not to say that characters do not read their actions against him as a point of reference). The Works are concerned with social process as is the EPM, but Malory's portrayal of Merlin denies us the assurance of stability through the Prophet, or rather, more disturbingly, it acknowledges Merlin's power only erratically, within its broad model of pragmatic social interchange which denies Merlin the means systematically to perform the same function as in the EPM.
CHAPTER FOUR

WEAVING THE SOCIAL FABRIC:
MERLIN, MADNESS AND DYNADAN IN THE WORKS

MERLIN

An episode in the Huth Suite du Merlin (II, 122-24) recounts how, towards the close of a sequence of adventures, Pellinor and the Damsel accompanying him overhear a dialogue between two knights, in which the details of a plot against Arthur's life are revealed. One horseman, persuaded of the "fole emprise" of resistance to the King's rule, counsels prudence, but the knight carrying the poison will not be dissuaded from his treason:

'Ne vous espoentés...car nous en ouverrons si sagement que nus n'en savra ja riens devant que il sera fait.'

(II, 123)

On learning of the plan, the Damsel thinks it would be best to reach Camelot before the next meal-time, but a moment's reflection reminds her companion of the presence at court of Merlin, "li sages prophetes", who will assuredly protect Arthur. The Lady agrees: "Merlins set canques on fait et dedens et dehors" (II, 124), thus there is no need for alarm. Anxious concern gives way to insouciance, and the couple settle down for a night's rest before continuing their journey to court. The incident highlights the extent to which Merlin is trusted as guarantor of the King's safety and the realm's stability.

Malory's reading of the event (Works, I, 118; 4-30) makes it redundant in terms of the narrative's immediate interests. The witnesses' reaction to the scene is not recorded,¹ nor is it mentioned

¹ Unlike their French counterparts, Pellinor and his Lady immediately make for Camelot on hearing the news (I, 118; 29-30), but their motive for so doing is not made explicit.
later, when Pellinor is called upon to 'telle the trouthe of hys queste' (I, 119; 20-21). But here, as elsewhere, local modification of source-material has wider implications. In the French text the focus is on the status of Arthur and Merlin, but the language of Malory's version stresses the importance of Arthur's court as paradigm of social cohesion:

'*...there ys such a felyship that they may never be brokyn, and well-nyghe all the world holdith with Arthure...And now...am I rydyng...to telleoure chyfftaynes of the felyship that ys withholdyn with kynge Arthure.'*

(I, 118; 13-18)

The only mention made of Merlin is to remind us of his ambivalence, as one who "knowith all thynges by the devylles craffte" (I, 118; 26). The most troubling aspect of the passage is its intimation of a social system of reciprocal relations, on the same model as that proposed by Merlin at the beginning of the Works, but in direct conflict with Arthurian society:

'I have brought a remedy with me that ys the grettist poysen that ever ye herde speke off...for we have a frende ryght nyghe the kynge, well cherished, that shall poysen kynge Arthur, for so hath he promysed oure chyfftaynes, and receyved grete gyfftis for to do hit.'

(I, 118; 19-24)

Not only is there a neat irony in the antithetical notion of poison as cure, but the very term 'remedy' has only been used previously in the text in relation to Merlin.¹ The envoy voices the claims of a rival order for whom Arthur's reign is inimical to stability and he intimates the court itself to be unstable, for while the Suite du Merlin assumes Arthur is well-protected against the dissenting minority within his court,

¹. Ulfius promises the love-sick Uther: "Merlyn...shalle do yow remedy, that youre herte shal be pleasyd" (I, 8; 13-14). The term 'remedy' occurs only fourteen times in all. See Tomomi Kato, A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory (Tokyo, 1974), pp.1644, 990.
the English text holds in suspension the unsettling question of how a tightly-knit 'felyship' may permit the existence of a "well cherished" traitor.

This piece of political intrigue in Malory has no function in terms of plot, but its appearance suggests a possible topic for the storyline; at any time in the narrative a number of factors is in play, any of which could, notionally, have precedence. By retaining the episode while giving it no causative function, Malory intimates the possibility of narrative choice, but the treatment of the source also 'displaces' Merlin himself, by making unclear the status he enjoys, and concentrating instead on the court as social organisation.

Malory dislocates Merlin from his traditional image as conveyed by vaticinatory literature, historical and romance texts, in a way that does not devalue Merlin so much as propose different avenues for processing experience. In the reaction to Merlin by others, a field of authority is implicitly demarcated for the Prophet, but the parameters of his wisdom are not absolute. This is because Malory is less interested in the recuperation of a particular model of social behaviour through Merlin, than in the interplay of individuals in social situations, and in the configurations of different systems interacting one with another. It is therefore necessary to look not only at how Merlin in the Works differs qualitatively from other representations of him, but at what Merlin's function, as perceived in Malory, reveals of attitudes towards understanding and determining experience, and directing and containing human experience within a social context.

This interest in how society works is further in evidence, in different formulation, in the Book of Sir Tristram. Where the early books are concerned with how social codes are established, these later tales consider how the human will may be operative within the social
framework, where questions of arbitration and judgement are prominent. The difficulties of making acts of arbitration both socially and personally acceptable, and morally sound, are expressed in terms of the madness of Lancelot and Tristram. For both heroes, insanity results from the impossibility of resolving conflicting claims on the self; there is a consequent breakdown in the established social and narrative order. The narrative is organised in such a way that the episodes describing the temporary alienation of Tristram and Lancelot act as a frame for the appearance in the text of Dynadan, who restates the claims of 'felyship' as regards a knight's sense of self.¹

Dynadan's case is analogous to Merlin's in that he too has a unique definition vis-à-vis society - that of japer - which is not always valorised or, more accurately, can be modified, by the society in which he exists. Merlin and Dynadan's particular significance may be established, but not necessarily endorsed, and the exigencies of pragmatic social interaction cannot be contained by any one explicatory factor. Thus although, as we shall see, Merlin's perspective and Dynadan's comedy offer the reader an interpretative hold on the text, they are incrementally shown to be to one side of Malory's investigation of the nature of social process.

Examining Merlin's function raises questions of some complexity in Malory; his presentation points up the difficulty of determining causation, of finding moral co-ordinates, of establishing bases of authority. In the French texts - specifically in Robert de Boron's Merlin and its Suite and Vulgate continuations - Merlin is an inventor of society, through whom certain modes of apprehending event and regulating human conduct are made available. He ensures right

governance, and social and moral equilibrium, as the lament at his absence from court in MS B.N. fonds français 112 emphasises:

Moult est le roy doulens et coroucies de la mort Merlin, et moult en est la cour tout troublee, car ilz auoient si grant fiance en luy quil ne cuidoient pas que le royaume de Logres peust iames auoir deshonueur, tant comme Merlin vesquist.¹

The English Prose Merlin, while stressing the pragmatics of the social system, similarly uses its eponymous protagonist as an innovative reorganiser of society. The EPM accommodates itself to the concept of Merlin's legacy of 'counsel' as an (albeit imperfect) ordering device, which offers the possibility of a synthesis of experience. Merlin's 'unknowableness', figured in his liminality, exposes society's inability to assimilate all aspects of his wisdom. His alterity is in this sense essential to his authority. Society is defined, then, in relation to Merlin, and to the means of access he provides to interpreting event. The analogy set up between writer and Prophet, most pointedly in the Huth Suite du Merlin, further authenticates Merlin's position. In the Works, Merlin appears as marginal because it is he who is defined in relation to society's needs, but the nature of his links with others is neither clear nor consistent; society is not necessarily receptive to his advice, nor equipped to work through the implications of his omniscience.

Advice literature's concern with counsel as socially remedial, a central means to attaining stability, both for the state and for the individual, usefully informs a reading of Merlin in the EPM. In Malory, a concern with the provisional nature of stability influences the way

¹. Die Abenteuer Gawains Ywains und Le Morholts mit den drei Jungfrauen aus der Trilogie (Demanda) des Pseudo-Robert de Borron. Die Fortsetzung des Huth-Merlin, nach der allein bekannten HS. Nr. 112 der Pariser National Bibliothek herausgegeben, edited by H.O. Sommer (Halle, 1913), p.89. I cite B.N. 112 here because the manuscript may be regarded as the culmination of the French tradition.
Merlin is deployed. Most of the other characters appear to identify him principally as an adviser, but there is no authorial fixing of Merlin's role. Merlin's marginality may also be read as belonging to the concern with the instability of counsel and the difficulty of bringing it to bear as a causative model on a world in which event and judgement are in no clear relation one to the other. In the Tale of King Arthur, judgement may be said to exist apart from event. Event may contain so many meanings as to make judgement at best problematic and at times irrelevant. The personality of Merlin is a focus for such considerations, yet he also demonstrates, by his very existence, the desire for (rather than the actuality of) synthesis, where the consonance of event and judgement cannot be guaranteed.

Only a selective reading such as Caxton's can re-align Malory's Merlin with the Prophet/Enchanter of the French texts. Caxton's prefaces urge the reader to discriminate between the 'vertuous' and the 'vycious' in writing. The prologue to his edition of Charles the Grete, for example, supports a view of the text as worthy insofar as it is 'wryton to our doctrine'; 'hystoryes' are instruments of didacticism, tracts 'for to lyve wel', and Caxton's task as translator and editor involves organising these 'hystoryes dysjoyned withoute ordre', as he has found them, into a form which makes their 'moral' immediately recoverable.


2. N.F. Blake, Caxton's Own Prose (London, 1973) observes: '(Caxton) was more concerned with the tone and moral implications of his books than with their specific narrative details' (p.45). As we shall see, attention to narrative detail is inevitably linked to the kind of 'moral implications' with which Caxton is concerned, but he tends to apply a morality to the text rather than understanding it on its own terms.

The same methodology is followed in editing Malory, as the prologue (Works, I, cxliii-vii) makes clear:

> But al is wryton for our doctrine, and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne syyn, but t'exersysye and folowe vertu, by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renommé in thys lyf...

(I, cxlvi; 11-15)

The chapter headings supplied by Caxton for the opening books (I, 5-6; 59-60; 95; 123; 135; 155) constitute an ordering of narrative line which both facilitates reading (in the sense of finding one's way through the text) and makes for a clearer perception of causation; hence we learn from the synopses that Merlin's intervention makes possible the conception of Arthur. It is Merlin who 'coungeyled King Arthur' on battle strategy, who puts a stop to the battle of Bedigrayne, who 'saved Arthurs lyf', and who is the means by which Arthur obtains Excalibur.

The résumés of the action by-pass its more worrying aspects; by ignoring, for example, the moral question of the Massacre of the Innocents, one can begin to think of the text as apportioned between 'good' and 'evil' actions.

This kind of reading ignores too the extent to which Merlin's advice-giving is frequently to the side of the Arthurian milieu's immediate preoccupations. Caxton concentrates in his chapter headings on Merlin as advice-giver, while in the synopsis in the preface he is chiefly memorable as one who falls prey to his desire, a paradigm of

1. See Caxton's rubric 27, Works, I, 6: 'How al the chyldren were sente fore that were borne on May day, and how Mordred was saved.'

2. Pamela Gradon's analysis of Malory in Form and Style in Early English Literature (London, 1971), pp.259-72, which traces in the narrative a modification of the French sources towards a more 'exemplary' form, appears to be in this sense more an analysis of Caxton's Malory than of the Works proper; 'I believe that Malory's intention in the presentation of his characters is not the analysis of character but the presentation of a theme... The characters... above all...illustrate for Malory the virtues of an ideal past' (p.269).
the sage made foolish by love.\textsuperscript{1} But Merlin in the \textit{Works} cannot be contained by such a reductive description. The authorial voice asserts Merlin's influence - '...the moste party dayes of hys lyff [Arthur] was ruled by the councelie of Merlyon' (I, 97; 6-7) - but this declared prestige co-exists with situations in which such 'councelie' may be perverted or taken no account of.

The French texts assert a particular status for Merlin which is ratified by commentators on vaticinatory literature, who relate the validity of a prophecy to the moral standing of the prophet as an index of the legitimacy of their own activity. 'Alanus de Insulis'\textsuperscript{'s} late twelfth-century commentary on Geoffrey of Monmouth's \textit{Book of Merlin} devotes three of its seven chapters to the rehabilitation of Merlin's character.\textsuperscript{2} There is an historical continuity in this need to authenticate the prophetic voice. Jehan de Waurin, writing in 1455, aligns the interests of prophet and commentator, in showing the multifarious operations of prophecy in time. His \textit{Recueil des croniques et anciennes istoires de la Grant Bretaigne} includes a translation of, and commentary on, Geoffrey's \textit{Historia}. The truth of Merlin's prophecy to Vortiger is corroborated by historical event (Uther reclaims his rightful heritage), and de Waurin in turn uses Merlin's prophecies to authorise his own critique of contemporary mores:

\begin{quote}
...je ne voy aujourd'huy en ce present royaulme synon desolation et desconfort, rapines, calamitez; justice y est morte...rayson dort, nulz ne cure ne ne pense du bien public, que lors a le exterminer et destruire par
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1} This is of course one of the images of Merlin promoted in the Vulgate Cycle. In the fabliau tradition, it finds a correlation in Henril d'Andelii's \textit{Lai d'Aristote}, edited by Robert Harrison in \textit{Gallic Salt: Eighteen Fabliaux Translated from the Old French} (Berkeley, 1974), pp.257-89.

\textsuperscript{2} The first chapter, for example, affirms Merlin's Christianity, the second argues he is specifically God's agent to predict the future, and the third dismisses as fantasy the tale recounting Merlin's being fathered by an incubus. See R. Taylor, \textit{The Political Prophecy in England} (New York, 1911, reprinted 1967), p.88.
Robert de Boron's text similarly locates the prophet within a specific moral universe (as do the Vulgate and Suite versions of the story). The tale of Merlin begins with what it is not; instead of the advent of Antichrist, we witness how the Devil's attempt to damn humanity is frustrated. The polarities of Good and Evil thereafter provide the co-ordinates for establishing - both for character and reader - how the text means. The narrator defines Merlin explicitly in relation to this framework:

"...il puet randre as deables lor droit et a Nostre Seingnor le suen: car plus n'a deables en lui formet que le cors, et Nostre Sire met en touz les cors son esperit et por voir et por o'yr et por entendre, a chascun selonc ce que il li preste memoire. Et il a a cestui plus doné que a autre por ce que graindre mestiers li estoit, si savra ou bien au quiel il se devra tenir."

Merlin is, reassuringly, aware of his career in terms of spiritual duty; "Il me covent a rendre Jhesu Crist le servise dont il m'a doné pooir" (Robert de Boron's Merlin, p.102). The 'devil's part' in his make-up is circumscribed by a beneficent force for the good, and as the Vulgate and Suite continuations make clear, Merlin's powers of prescience are specifically a "grasce [que] Dieus (m'a) otroie la soiei mierchi" (Suite, I, 161).

This expression of duty towards one's creator foregrounds the feudal relationship between God and Man. This relation is also,

3. See also the Vulgate Merlin, p.28,
of course, the model on which human society is based, and characters continually refer to its prescriptions in considering, and attempting to rationalise, their actions. Hence Uther's sense of guilt, in the Suite, when he falls in love with Ygerne, because this constitutes a breach of faith with his subject, and he interprets Merlin's absence from court as the confirmation of his sin:

'. . . je sai bien que Merlins set bien ma destrete, si ocriem que je l'aie courechié de che que li lieus vuis de la table reonde fu assailés, qu'il i a moult grant pieche qu'il ne fu en lieu ou je fuisse; ou espoir qu'il li poise quant je aim la feme de mon houme, mais certes je n'en puis mais, car mes cuers ne s'en puet partir.'

(Suite, I, 107)

The person of Merlin, then, encourages a sense of moral responsibility which informs the characters' perception of themselves throughout the Vulgate Cycle.

In Chapter Three, I noted how, in the Vulgate, Merlin is made one of several authorities able to explicate and anticipate event. This kind of collaboration occurs on the epistemological level in the Queste del Saint Graal, and also works on a political level when it heralds the climax of La Mort le Roi Artu, the Last Battle, on Salisbury Plain. The evening before the encounter the Archbishop and Arthur come upon a plaque on which is written:

EN CESTE PLAINGNE DOIT ESTRE LA BATAILLE MORTEL
PAR QUOI LI ROIAUMES DE LOGRES REMEINDRA ORFELINS.

(Mort, p.228)

The Archbishop both asserts the authenticity of these words - "Merlins meÝsmes escrist ces letres" (p.229) - and glosses the text as a prognostication of the death of Arthur in the event of his meeting with Mordred's forces on the morrow. Arthur's response is to express his faith in a Divine power who arbitrates according to the moral worth of His subjects;
'Mes or soit Jhesucrist en nostre aide, car ge n'en partirai jamés jusques a tant que Nostre Sires en ait donnee enueur a moi ou a Mordret; et se il m'en meschiet, ce sera par mon pechié et par mon outrage...'  

(Mort, p.229)

The Merlin of the Vulgate thus operates in a context in which event and judgement are placed in clear, mutually validatory, relation to each other. The actions and prophecies of Merlin, the opinions of the King and the Archbishop, as God's representatives on earth (secular and spiritual), narrative event itself, all concur in a vision of the world in which human society is aware of a Divine order; furthermore, it is a society bound to be judged in terms of that higher order, according to a set of moral absolutes. Merlin is then an authoritative anchor in a text where event is important for the extent to which it confirms judgement.

In the French Merlin texts, as in the English Prose Merlin, a relation is set up between author and Prophet by means of the symbolic language that constitutes Merlin's vatic discourse. This special register is impenetrable to the uninitiated, but in narrative terms it may be understood retrospectively by the reader when he/she is familiar with the rest of the Cycle (as when, for example, Merlin makes veiled references to Lancelot and Galahad). The symbolism of prophecy represents as much an aspect of the narrator/writer's control as evidence of Merlin's knowledge. For the reader, it foregrounds areas of significance in the narrative, the true import of which will be revealed later in the text. With the appropriate imaginative engagement with the future, and with the text, one can unlock this symbolic code. Prophetic language is a link between writer and Prophet which

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1. EPM, II, 304, has Merlin speak of "the merveillouse leopart" from "the reame of Benoyk", and of "the grete lyon...for whos look the heuene shall open".
gives authoritative weight to their procedure.

The way Prophet and author direct the future and the text establishes another link between them. The connection is made most explicit in the *Suite du Merlin* (II, 57-60) when, after the Dolorous Stroke episode and Balyn's death, Merlin commemorates the knight's career with an inscription on his tomb. He also sets up 'enchantements assés diviers' at this location, among them a bed which induces forgetfulness in the sleeper, a reminder that Merlin controls the past as well as the future. The enchanter maps out a series of fixed points in the landscape through which others are to travel; thus the Island of Marvels and the bridge giving access to it have a certain significance, as does the sword destined for Lancelot and his son.

This account of Merlin arranging the future through magic is interrupted by a declaration of authorial intention explaining why material relating to Lancelot will not be related here not because it is not germane to the story

*mais pour chou qu'il couvient que les trois parties de mon livre soient ingaus, l'une aussi grant coume l'autre, et se je ajoutaisse cele grant ystore la molene partie de mon livre fust au tresble plus grant que les autres deus.*

(II, 57)

This sense of order and decorum similarly informs the author's mentioning only a few of the marvels, 'car bien vous seront ramenteues el conte quant tans et lieus en sera' (II, 58). Merlin's careful organising of others' experience is consonant with the author's organising of the text before us, and how we read it.

The opening chapters of the *Works* offer no such analogy between Merlin's creativity and the writing process. *The Tale of King Arthur*, moreover, begins not with Merlin centre stage, in a consideration of origins, but *in medias res*, with the uneasy peace obtaining between
periods of war. We are shown a world in which the exigencies of present event take precedence over an awareness of diachronic processes; this is the level on which Merlin as advice-giver is understood. While Merlin perceives the future as well as the present, the characters who inhabit the 'time now' of the text do not depend on him as their guide for what will happen in the distant future, but acknowledge him only in pragmatic terms. Because the image of Merlin is formed largely from these diverse reactions to him, his engagement with the narrative appears at times as heuristic as the experience of the knights who set out to define themselves through adventure. Emphasis is primarily on Merlin's usefulness to a society which does not regard itself uniquely in the Prophet's terms.

Initially, The Tale of King Arthur is concerned with the self-regulation of society, and the possibilities of its being able both to contain and countenance forms of excess. An expression of volition independent of moral considerations - Uther's love and anger 'oute of measure' - replaces the reaction of cosmic evil to cosmic good, in setting the opening sequence of events in motion. The reconciliation effected between king and subject in the opening lines is broken when Ygrayne refuses to cede to Uther's desire. Uther's 'pryvy councelle' legitimises, rather than examines or restrains, the King's destructive tendency:

'...yf [the Duke of Tyntagyll] wille not come at your somons...thenne have ye cause to make mygnty warre upon hym.'

(I, 7; 26-28)

In their advice-giving, the counsellors simply affirm the letter of the law, and a bloody stalemate results.

The 'noble knyght' Ulfius finally solves the problem by seeking out Merlin, an individual who enjoys his full confidence, but of whose
history or identity no details are given. Ulfius meets Merlin 'by
adventure' (I, 8; 15). Every act so far in the story has clearly
resulted from a certain deliberation, but here it is not clear whether
Merlin's volition, Ulfius' zeal, or pure happenstance, is responsible
for the meeting. Merlin's distinctive 'begar's aray' signals his
difference from those who seek his advice, but his appearance is not
exploited in narrative terms,¹ nor made the occasion for sententious
comment.

Instead, Merlin at once defines the terms of his relation with
Uther. Identifying the root of the King's distress as frustrated
'desyre', he proposes to balance Uther's excess of emotion with a
'desyre' of his own, within a schema of reciprocity which is shown, in
future events, to serve as the basis of social relations:

'So ye wil be sworn unto me, as ye be a true kynge
enoynted, to fulfille my desyre, ye shal have your
desyre.'

(I, 8; 37-39)²

The term 'desire' as employed by Malory is most frequently used to
denote volition (anything from a simple request to desperate longing),³

¹. This contrasts with the French text, where Merlin appears first as
an old man, and then as a cripple, in order to test Urfins' good
faith, before presenting himself to the King 'en sa droite samblance'
(Suite, I, 107-09). The King acknowledges the play with disguise
as marker of Merlin's superior control:

'...c'est Merlins qui ensi se gabe de nous. Et quant il
vaurra parler a nous, il nous fera bien savoir.'

(I, 109)

². This reiteration of the term desire - see also "yf kynge Uther
wille...fulfille my desyre, that shall be his honour and profite
more than myn, for I shalle cause hym to have all his desyre" (I, 8;
20-22) - constitutes a departure from the sources. Contrast the
Suite du Merlin I, 109: "Se li rois...me donroit un don tel que je
li demanderoie sauve s'ounour, je li aideroie a avoir l'amour
d'Ygerne."

³. See Kato's Concordance, pp.332-33. Rarely is desire defined in a
moral framework, though Lancelot, on the quest of the Sankgreal,
judges his 'worldely desyres' against a spiritual scale of values
(Works, II, 896; 1-7).
and interest focusses on the means whereby desires may be gratified. Merlin's role appears to be to facilitate the situation for Uther, rather than to initiate a new form of social relations. In Book I, he intervenes to allow for the transformation of emotional energy through reciprocity; he makes Uther's lack of 'mesure' into the means of establishing the possibility of 'mesure' in the person of Arthur (and in this act he reads across the time-scale as well as within the scheme of reciprocity). Merlin gains a status in Arthurian society by pointing up the necessity of giving and receiving, but within this system he ironically falls prey to his own lack of 'mesure' when he becomes infatuated with Nenyve.

Arthur's conception depends upon a 'collaboration' strategic as well as sexual; but there is little sense of its resulting from the intervention of the Divine will in human affairs. In the French texts Merlin acts as a means to fixing moral and social co-ordinates. In assessing how Merlin functions in the Works, we have not only to take into account the nature and power of human volition, which in part determines the extent of Merlin's control, but to appreciate also the effect of Merlin's vaguely-defined relation to the Divine. A text such as the Suite identifies the Prophet as God's agent, but the Works tell us nothing about Merlin's origins apart from his being 'a devyls son' (I, 126; 20). Malory's Merlin, on the rare occasions when he invokes the Deity, does so more to authorise his own pronouncements than because he is a mouthpiece for God's wisdom (though we shall see a little later the implications of Merlin's incidentally appropriating this latter role to himself).

1. Merlin also offers a parody of obligations attached to giving and receiving when he appears to Arthur disguised as a 'chorle' and asks "woll ye geff me a gyffte?", before revealing that they are standing on the site of buried treasure (I, 38; 3-26).
In the events leading up to Arthur's coronation, the focus is not on Merlin as an instrument of Destiny, nor are his motives accounted for; his main role is to engineer the ratification of Arthur's action of drawing the sword from the stone. Uther unquestioningly accords Merlin guardianship of his child - "As thou wolt...be it" (I, 10; 35) - and the rest of the court similarly look to him for 'counseill'; when their leader lies dying, Merlin promises to demonstrate his power:

'There nys none other remedye,' said Merlyn, 'but God wil have His wille. But loke ye al barons be biforn kynge Uther to-morne, and God and I shalle make hym to speke.'

(I, 11; 36-38)

These words have been seen by Thomas Wright as evidence for Malory's breaking down distinction between Merlin and God, in order to show 'Arthur's reign itself as a destiny ordained by God and established through Merlin, an event distinct in its own promise'. Yet Merlin here seems to be employing reference to God's will as a convenient shorthand to signal his own prescience, using another authority to validate his own. As significant as statements about the future is how the human will is involved in verifying them; Uther must be seen to sanction Arthur's kingship:

'Syre, shall your sone Arthur be kyng after your dayes of this realme with all the appertenaunce?'

(I, 12; 1-2)

1. In the EPM, I, 94, Merlin's words do not carry the same suggestion of his own control: "Yef god will he shall speke; now, come, and ye shall heir hym speke."


3. Contrast with the EPM where Merlin tells Uther; '...thi sone Arthur shall be kynge nexe of thy reame after the, be the vertu of Ihesu criste, and shall a-complisshe the rounde table that thow haste be-gonne.' (I, 95).
The King's acceptance of the future is of equal importance with God's ordinance:

'I gyve hym Gods blissyng and myne, and byd hym pray for my soule, and righteuously and worshipfully that he clayme the croune upon forfeiture of my blessyng.'

(I, 12; 5-7)

The 'myracle' whereby the 'rightwys kynge' is revealed, and Uther's decree, are thus mutually confirming. Uther's death in the Works results in a period of instability in which many contemplate seizing power. In the EPM, the people are comforted by the presence of Merlin as adviser. Here, Merlin's independent action in advising the Archbishop of Canterbury to assemble the nobility in London conveys a sense that it is specifically he who co-ordinates the circumstances around the event of Arthur's election. The Archbishop, as representative of institutionalised religion, reacts to the miracle of the sword in the stone with an act of faith - '...the Archebisshop trusted that God wold make hym knowe that shold wynne the swerd' (I, 13; 15-17) - and directs others to do the same. 'Goddes wille' is for him made manifest in a specific directive. Yet the Archbishop does not offer a more detailed commentary on the sign,¹ and the Christmas gathering does not see an end

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¹ In contrast, see the Archbishop's discourse on justice in EPM, I, 99-100. In general, the Archbishop is invested with an authority in the EPM and in the French texts which he is not accorded in the Works, and Malory's Merlin even seems to pick up locutions original to the Archbishop (and the narrator) in the earlier text. See for example Merlin's words to Lot (identified by T. Wright, "The Tale of King Arthur", p.25, as 'a sourceless and quite arbitrary prophecy of Arthur's ascendency'):

'And, who saith nay, (Arthur) shal be kyng and overcome alle his enemyes, and or he deye he shalle be long kynge of all Englond and have under his obeyssuance Walys, Yrland, and Scotland, and moo reames than I will now reherce.' (Works, I, 18; 5-8)

...many other repreves and vilonyes (the barouns) seide that I will not reherse. And the archebisshop seide he sholde be kyng and haue the reame of logres, who-so-ever ther-to wolde contrarye, seth that it was godes will, for he wolde hym helpe...

(EPM, I, 112)
to the political unrest in the realm. When Arthur finally draws the sword the event has for him been divorced from its original significance, for it takes place in another, no less carefully-emphasised context, that of his sense of duty to Kay. His question to Ector, on being told of his election — "Wherfore I?...and for what cause?" — posits a problem of causation which Ector (I, 14; 20), the 'comyns' (I, 16; 12-15), and Arthur himself (I, 15; 8-10) can only explain in terms of the working of a Divine Providence, not to be comprehended rationally, but to be accepted.

When Merlin explains the situation to the rebel kings, however, the 'cause' he invokes is that of Arthur's legitimacy (I, 18; 2-5). The new king must be seen to have the blessing of the Church, and the Archbishop anoints Arthur because he fulfils the necessary conditions laid down on the stone, but Arthur's opponents are reluctant to accept the event as Divine revelation. In Robert de Boron's version, those who object to Arthur on the grounds of his youth and apparent rank are castigated by the Archbishop:

'Dont n'estes vos pas bon crestien, se vos voulez aler contre la volenté Nostre Sauveor Jhesu Crist.'

(Robert de Boron, Merlin, p.283)¹

In the Works, not only does Merlin's declaration of Arthur's rise to power get a mixed reception —

Some of the kynges...demed well that it shold be as he said, and som of hem lough hym to scorne...and mo other called hym a wytche

(I, 18; 9-12)

— but the most important objection to Arthur, that he is a child unsuited

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¹. See also the Vulgate Merlin, p.85, and the Suite, I, 141.
to the demands of kingship, has a scriptural origin not explicitly overruled in the text. There are, it would appear, various ways of applying God's wisdom to human situations. Each side can claim that a higher authority endorses its attitude.

Mention of God's name at other times serves less to 'correct' modes of behaviour than to draw attention to a standard that adds another dimension to how an event may be perceived. At the battle against the eleven kings, for example, Merlin puts an end to the 'grete slaughter' on the field by warning Arthur of the consequences attendant on the loss of God's grace:

'Thou hast never done. Hast thou nat done inow? ...hit ys tyme to sey "Who!" for God ys wroth with the for thou wolle nevyr have done. For yondir a eleven kynges at thys tyme woll nat be overthrowyn, but and thou tary on them ony lenger thy fortune woll turne and they shall encrees.'

(I, 36; 26-32)

In this instance, the warning forms part of a corpus of usefully prescriptive advice offered by Merlin and accepted by Arthur and his allies: "...as thou haste devised so shall hit be done" (I, 37; 20-21).

Significantly, emphasis is not on the concept of causation encoded in

1. '...ther were many lordes wroth, and saide it was grete shame unto them all and the reame to be overgovernyd with a boye of no hyghe blood borne.' (I, 15; 22-25). The question is raised again a little later when the kings refuse to receive gifts from Arthur, because he is 'a berdles boye that was come of lowe blood' (I, 17; 22-23).


3. The Vulgate Merlin (p.121) and the EPM do not at this point introduce a moral perspective in the form of an admonition on God's behalf:

And than com Merlin and seide, 'Kynge Arthure, what wilt thou do? haste thou overcome thyn enmyes? / Go in to thi londe, and lede with the thy frendes that thou haste brought with the'.

(EPM, I, 165-66)
Merlin's reference to God's anger, but on the fact of Arthur's prowess against redoubtable enemies, and that those who have fought for him deserve reward. The moral framework is less important than the system of social reciprocity necessitated by the fact of battle.

Integral to the plot of the Huth Suite du Merlin is that both Arthur and Merlin should act in terms of a moral engagement with the future. Merlin shames Arthur into humility by showing how his act of incest constitutes a crime against God, making him "anemis Jhesucrist et li plus desloiaus chevaliers de ceste contree" (I, 154). Merlin himself invokes the importance of his own salvation when he explains to the King why he will not participate in Arthur's plan to kill Mordret in the interest of political expediency; "Car je i perderoie l'ame de moi" (I, 159). In the Works, Merlin similarly reveals to Arthur God's displeasure with him,

'...for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme.'

(I, 44; 17-19)

But Arthur seems to have been taking part in a completely different dialogue; "...I mervayle muche of thy wordis that I mou dye in batayle" (I, 44; 24-25). Merlin on one hand warns Arthur to expect God's vengeance:

'...hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be punysshed for your fowle dedis.'

(I, 44; 26-27)

Yet at the same time the sage glosses his and Arthur's fate as examples of shame and worship:

'I shall dye a shamefull dethe, to be putte in the erthe quycke; and ye shall dey a worshipfull dethe.'

(I, 44; 28-30)

If Merlin in his prescience reads moral retribution as the determining factor of one's destiny (as his own ignominious end (I, 126; 15-27)
demonstrates), he here shows his facility for using more than one frame of reference.

In the Suite du Merlin, characters can measure their actions against a codification of sin and moral offence which Merlin elucidates. In Malory, the individual evolves his or her own sense of what Divine intervention or ordinance may mean. 'Adventure' may, for example, be understood in a purely secular context, as when Merlin declares that not to pursue a certain course of action is "disworshyp" (I, 103; 14-15).

Balyn, meanwhile, sees his enterprise specifically as God-directed:

'I shall take the aventure,' seyde Balyn, 'that God woll ordayne for me.' 1

(I, 64; 12-13)

Balyn's oath to 'God and Knyghthode' assumes the complementary nature of systems human and Divine.

Pellinor's reaction to Merlin's prophecy that his past deeds should determine his fate -

'And that penaunce God hath ordayned you for that dede, that he that ye sholde truste moste on...he shall leve you there ye shall be slayne'

(I, 120; 5-8)

- reveals a somewhat different attitude. Pellinor dissociates God from the future event that, according to Merlin, defines His nature in relation to the knight's world:

'Me forthynkith hit,' seyde kynge Pellynor, 'that thus shall me betyde, but God may well fordo desteny.'

(I, 120; 9-10)

In action, the vision of God becomes fragmented; between Balyn's view of contingency, and Pellinor's Providentialist concept of God's will, Merlin affirms that a morally retributive God will exact penalties from the guilty. But in the narrative, event is more important for what it

1. Balan also equates enterprise with Divine directive; "ye must take the adventure that God woll ordayne you" (I, 70; 19-20).
reveals of human interaction than for how it endorses a particular world-view.

Society acknowledges Merlin's importance as a repository of 'good counsel',¹ and identifies him principally by this function:

...seyde Merlion, '...I can telle you wherefore ye ryde thys way...But hit woll nat avayle you withoute ye have my counceyle.' 'A,' seyde Balyn, 'ye ar Merlion. We woll be ruled by youre counceyle.'

(I, 73; 21-26)

In some cases, Merlin's advice appears rigidly prescriptive (as when he dictates a plan of action to Arthur, Ban, and Bors (I, 27; 14-24); but while in the EPM we observed how, through using the appropriate sententious language, the Prophet's counsel could have an application wider than to the present moment (pp.156-57), the Works lacks this sense that Merlin's advice is useful for solving anything other than an immediate need. Furthermore, the Arthurian court has its own concept of 'counsel' as the social means of working through various possibilities of action; witness the description of Arthur's war-council (I, 24), in which after long deliberation about the best plan to follow, a decision is communally arrived-at, rather than being dictated by Merlin.²

Merlin's advice feeds into an already-operative system, and is regarded with some subjectivity. His 'counsel' is only recognised as such when it can at once be translated into action, and is most coherently put to work when he takes charge of Arthur's first campaign against the rebel kings. But at the battle of Bedigayne, it is not

1. 'Soo Merlyn was sente for and fair desyred of al the barons to gyve them best counceil' (I, 20; 2-3).

2. Contrast this with an analogous episode in EPM (I, 141-43), where Ban cedes to Merlin: "for ye beth more wyser than we alle" (I, 142), and Merlin's control is total: "I pray yow do as I shall yow counsell, and knowe it well that it shall be the beste counseile that I may yow yeve" (I, 141).
Merlin's counsel that is significant so much as the fact that, by having Merlin absent from the field, Malory divorces counsel from the act of combat and thus exposes the two factors of central importance in the dynamics of warfare. Shifting strategic considerations onto the figure of Merlin allows one to recognise more clearly how physical engagement is the necessary concomitant of sound martial advice, and how important is the valour of individual knights. Merlin's anxiety that Lot should not reach the battle (I, 76; 14-16) acknowledges that the fact of the men's physical prowess on the field is indispensable. As we shall see, the act of battle takes precedence over any commemoration of Merlin's advice.

If Merlin is distinguished by his ability to dispense advice, he is not the only resource of a society seeking models of behaviour (while not always operating according to them), and these other resources also prove somewhat problematic in practice. For example, in a passage unique to Malory, Arthur swears at his coronation

unto his lordes and the comyns for to be a true kyng, to stand with true justyce fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf.

(I, 16; 21-23)

The Middle English translation of Christine de Pisan's Corps de Policie, the Body of Polycye, follows Aristotle in defining 'justice' as 'a

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1. In the EPM, by contrast, Merlin is in the vanguard of Arthur's troops:

   And so rode forth a softe pas kepynge clos, as Merlin dide hem guyde,whiche rode before vpon a grete courser.

   (I, 151)

2. Thomas Wright, '"The Tale of King Arthur"', has a different reading of the battle of Bedigrayne in which he argues Malory's intention is to present a more clearly-structured narrative with Merlin at its centre (p.27). But this both assumes Merlin is performing the same function in the Works as in the French texts, and involves an over-selective reading of the sources to prove Wright's point. The ambush led by Ban and Bors (I, 31-32), for example, identified by Wright as unique to the Works, and foregrounding Merlin's control (pp.28-30) finds its analogue with the same emphasis on the indispensability of Merlin in EPM, I, 154-65.
 mesure that yeldeth to every man his right'. For the Body of Polycye
 author, as for other commentators on the constitution, 'mesure'
 operates as part of the social contract. But actions and emotions
 'oute of mesure' feature more prominently in the Works than does mention
 of justice. The consequences of the interaction of excess, endemic
 to the human condition, with the possibility of the stabilising effect
 afforded by a concept such as justice, seems more attractive to Malory
 than a demonstration of how human activity may be circumscribed by the
 implementation of law.

 By the same token, the Pentecostal Oath to which Arthur has his
 knights swear (I, 120; 15-25), appears not as a theoretical statement,
 but as a distillation of ideas of duty and socially acceptable behaviour,
 drawn from experience as well as from Merlin's occasional directives.
 The Oath has analogues in numerous handbooks of chivalry and texts such
 as the Devise des Armes des Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, which supplies
 a full text of the knights' 'serement'. But whereas the Devise is
 part of a tradition which seeks to recreate a whole milieu by a set of
directives for both outer appearance and inner motivation, Malory's Vow

1. The Middle English Translation of Christine de Pisan's 'Livre du
 Corps de Policie', edited by Diane Bornstein from MS C.U.L. KK.
 T.5. (Heidelberg, 1977), p.84. See also Stephen Scrope's
definition in The Epistle of Othea (c. 1440), edited by C.F. Bühler,
EETS,original series,264 (London, 1970), pp.13-14: Justice is 'a
mesure / that God hath sette in erthe for to lymyte there-bi
thinges ri3twislye'.

2. The word 'justice' is rarely used in the Works (see Kato's
Concordance, p.677), though Arthur is twice petitioned for 'justyse'
in his office as King (see II, 1050; 32-34, and III, 1137; 7-10).
The phrase 'oute of mesure' occurs nearly fifty times (see the
Concordance, p.816).

3. For a text of the Devise, see E. Sandoz' transcriptions from
manuscripts in the Hofer Collection, Harvard, and the Morgan
Library, New York, in 'Tourneys in the Arthurian Tradition',
Speculum, 19 (1944), 389-420 (pp.401-02).
is a point of departure for the Round Table knights, opening up the possibilities for chivalric adventure, rather than defining or accounting for it.¹

That roles may be determined experientially is foregrounded by some of Arthur's early adventures prior to the period of the Pentecostal Oath (I, 47-56), which constitutes a dissection of the modes of operation afforded the King. In the corresponding section of the Suite du Merlin (I, 179-212), interest centres on the relation of Merlin the counsellor to Arthur, whose quest for his sword is in effect a search for the emblem of his kingship, set against threats to his kingdom, both internal and external. Merlin educates Arthur, helps him to attain his prize, and also remedies the disastrous situation effected by the young king when he tries to root out the seed of future calamity in his realm by ridding it of all children born in May. The sequence of adventures re-enforces Merlin's role as diplomat and as marker of humankind's moral boundaries.

Malory seems less intent on consolidating images of Arthur as King and Merlin as advice-giver than on pointing up disjunctions between cause and effect in the action. Malory emphasises that the bond between Merlin and Arthur is necessary, but not without tension. At one point, Arthur saves Merlin (who, for an undisclosed reason, is being pursued by 'thre chorlys'),² from death, and claims:

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¹. The Oath appears just prior to a major division in the Winchester MS of Malory's Works, at fol. 44v. See The Winchester Malory, A Facsimile, with an Introduction by N.R. Ker, EETS, supplementary series,⁴ (London, 1976). See also Murray J. Evans, 'The Explicits and Narrative Division in the Winchester MS: A Critique of Vinaver's Malory', Philological Quarterly, 58 (1979), 263-81. That the Oath constitutes a 'beginning' as much as a 'summing up' is corroborated by Evans' evidence for the way the explicits are used in the MS.

². The Suite (I, 187) explains that the men are angry with Merlin because he has predicted their deaths.
'...here haddist thou be slayne for all thy crafitis, had nat I bene.'

(I, 49; 5-6)

This draws from Merlin a statement, curious in its context, Arthur's reaction to which is not recorded; "...thou arte more nere thy deth than I am, for thou goste to thy dethe warde and God be nat thy frende" (I, 49; 8-10). Arthur appears to have no means of using the knowledge offered him by Merlin in this form. A little later, the Enchanter shows how Arthur, reciprocally, has need of him: "Now here had ye be slayne had I nat bene" (I, 51; 27-28). The verbal echo suggests the interdependence of Merlin and Arthur, but the narrative itself exposes a lack of consistent collaboration between them.

Modes of conduct and ideologies treated of in the Works are not necessarily dependent on any one individual; characters have meaning specifically within their social and narrative context at any given time. Similarly, abstract concepts of honour and 'worship' are continually being defined in the parameters of the text. Furthermore, we are constantly made aware that the text encodes a number of possibilities for action which, as alert readers, we have to keep in play. Some events have consequences for the story-line. Arthur's defiance of the Roman Emperor, for example - "...on a fayre fylde I shall yelde hym my trwage..." (I, 48; 22-24) - lucidly signals the narrative possibilities inherent in the alliterative style that later characterises the Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius. The change in idiom in these lines is significant, but other possibly important incidents - such as the poisoning plot we touched on at the beginning of this chapter - have no further narrative development.

1. The Suite is less precise at these points. At I, 186, Arthur tells Merlin: "...vous estiés près de mort se Dieus ne m'eust a che point amené seur vous." At I, 195, Merlin tells Arthur: "Ore pues tu veoir que mieux te vaut mes sens que ta proueche."
The young King Arthur makes decisions, based on the exigencies of the moment, which control his perspective on event, while Merlin emphasises other possibilities and frames of reference for action. Thus Arthur and Pellinor's encounter (I, 49-51) evolves a concept of worship based on their faith in "Knyghthode" and ratified by physical bonding (I, 50; 24-25), against which Merlin's attempt to save the King can only be read by Arthur as inimical to his honour:

'Alas!...Hast thou slayne thys good knyght by thy craufftis? For there lyvith nat so worshipffull a knyght as he was.'

(I, 51; 21-23)

Merlin's skill becomes alarming because it suggests an autonomous system which, while here at Arthur's service, is not contained within the bounds of 'worship'.

Arthur here deals with one factor at a time, as when, a little later, his desire for vengeance on Pellinor (I, 53; 22-23) both disregards Merlin's observation that the knight is destined to do him "goode servyse" (I, 51; 30), and, as Merlin reminds him, the code of 'worship' (I, 53; 24-26). The plurality Merlin brings to bear on event is one the reader too must needs appreciate. Arthur here simply makes one exclusive decision. Merlin's argument succeeds in deflecting him from his purpose (I, 53; 24-33), but on other occasions his advice is part of the body of material disregarded in the decision-making process.

In the interaction of Merlin and Arthur, we see how the narrative moves forward by a series of exclusive choices, while the text itself simultaneously offers alternatives one could take up and act upon.

I mentioned earlier Malory's use of alliteration as a signal to the reader. Merlin in Malory has no special vaticinatory language

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1. The episode in which the Lady of the Lake gives Arthur his sword (I, 52-53) conveys the same sense of magic as apparently subservient to the King's interests, and yet sinisterly 'other'.
alerting others in the text to the significance of his words. There is no definitive system within which signs about the future may be recognised and interpreted, no way in which Merlin's 'reading ahead' by warning of the Last Battle (I, 79; 3-6) or the Lancelot-Guinevere affair (I, 97; 30-31) may have a purchase on characters' actions in the present. As a prophet, Merlin is a disturbing presence, "a boysteous man and an unlyckly, to telle of suche dedis", as Mark has it (I, 72; 13-14), one who is as likely to provoke indifference or an angry reaction (as at I, 44; 3-4)\(^1\) as to inspire confidence. Merlin is never called a Prophet,\(^2\) and the term 'prophecy' is not used with precision; it both describes the inconsequential story-telling Merlin uses as a delaying tactic to prevent Lot from going into battle (I, 75; 26-28) and in the case of the Questing Beast, intimates significance while setting up barriers to understanding (II, 717; 15-17).

The inability of characters to make proper use of Merlin's prognostications\(^3\) is most shockingly realised in Arthur's one attempt to alter the future. The massacre he organises because of Merlin's

1. In the Suite, it is Merlin who feigns anger at not being believed:

Merlins...fait samblant que il soit moult courechiés et se part erraument dou roi et se met tantost en la foriest...

(I, 157)

Emphasis is more on Merlin's control than on others' reaction to him.


3. Elizabeth Pochoda's assertion that Arthurian society is implicitly condemned in the Works for its refusal to see prophecy as part of an imaginative moral engagement with the past, more aptly describes the French source-texts than Malory's account. (See Arthurian Propaganda: 'Le Morte Darthur' as an Historical Ideal of Life (Chapel Hill, 1971), pp.105-06.)
prophecy that the destroyer of the realm will be born on May-Day (I, 55) is wholly unnecessary; Merlin has already revealed that "youre owne son" will wreak chaos (I, 52; 2). In the Suite, Merlin so engineers matters that the children are ultimately restored to their parents (I, 207-12). The offspring of the 'displeased' parents in the Works have no such good fortune, and the accord arrived at is an uneasy one:

...and many putte the/ wyght on Merlion more than on Arthure. So what for drede and for love, they helde their pece.

(I, 55; 35 - 56; 02)

The catastrophe that makes Merlin the object of displaced anger and resentment holds in suspension the question of how one is meant to react to prescience. The failure of Arthur's extreme measure also suggests Merlin's reading of time future cannot be 'un-read'.

For the reader, then, Merlin is a trustworthy repository of fact, but for those in the text his prophecies once uttered are often beyond retrieval; thus Tristram will propose to meet Palomides "in the medowe by the ryver of Camelot, where Merlyon sette the perowne" (II, 562; 10-11), but none remembers the sage's words regarding the encounter there between Lancelot and Tristram (I, 72; 5-8). Neither prophecy nor the past is codified in the Tale of King Arthur in the manner of the French tradition, where Merlin is intimately connected with the act of writing. There are commemorative monuments, such as Balyn and Balan's tomb (I, 91; 5-11), and the war-memorial devised by Arthur (I, 78; 1-8)² but of the assiduous record-keeping in the sources Malory

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1. Again, it is Merlin's control that is stressed;

Ensi acorda Merlins le roi as ses barons, si em peust grant mal estre avenu ou pals, si Merlins n'i eust mise ceste acorde.

(I, 212)

2. The memorial seems to be of Arthur's own devising, dependent on Merlin's 'craufte' (I, 78; 8) only for its execution.
retains only one mention of how Merlin dictates the action to his scribe. This occurs after the battle of Bedigrayne, and the recounting emphasises event rather than causation:

And there he tolde how Arthure and the two kynges had spede at the grete batayle, and how hyt was endyd,... And so Bloyse wrote the batayle worde by worde as Merlion tolde hym,... And all the batayles that were done in Arthurs dayes, Merlion dud hys mayster / Bloyse wryte them. Also he dud wryte all the batayles that every worthy knyght ded of Arthurs courte.

(I, 37; 28 - 38; 02)

The court (at Merlin's prompting) willingly hears oral testaments of the recent past (I, 113; 34-36), but there is no concern to produce a comprehensive written history. Only at the conclusion to the quest of the Sankgreal are the services of court-based clerks called upon:

And whan they had etyn the kynge made grete clerkes to com before hym, for cause they shulde cronycle of the hygh adventures of the good knyghtes.

(II, 1036; 13-16)

For the Grail promises a point of synthesis transcending uncertainties; in the Tale of King Arthur, it is the crucial event at the beginning of the Book of the Sankgreal to which the author refers when he makes his only link between Merlin's enterprises and the fact of his book. This occurs in conclusion to the curious manifestations of Merlin's 'suttelyté', subsequent to the deaths of Balyn and Balan, and culminating in his setting Balyn's sword in a stone on the water, and sending it down-river:

...and so Galaad...encheved the swerde...And on Whytsonday he enchevyd the swerde, as hit ys rehersed in THE BOOKE OF THE SANKGREALL.

(I, 92; 3-7)

A recognition of the importance of recording the past, an association between the activity of the prophet, and the written as revealing the consequences of that activity; the Grail Book intimates the possibility
for all things to move towards the same end while, partly through Merlin, we also see that the world of the early books has no such consonance.

With the Grail Quest comes the need for an awareness of one's role in human history as part of the fulfilment in time of spiritual concerns which also transcend time, as Elaine's glad obedience acknowledges: "I have obeyde me unto the prophesye that my fadir tolde me" (II, 796; 19-20). The Sankgreal promises the recoverability of meaning, and characters show a willingness actively to seek meaning; thus they become receptive to good advice; "I pray you counciile me" (II, 929; 26) Lancelot requests of the hermits he meets. Gawain is, of course, the exception, resisting all claims made upon him other than those compatible with his own model of 'worship' and 'felyship':

'Sir,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'and I had leyser I wolde speke with you, but my felow sir Ector ys gone and abithe me yondir bynethe the hylle.'
'Well,' seyde the good man, 'thou were better to be councelyed.'

(II, 949; 10-14)

Merlin's own 'little mention' in the Sankgreal (the last in the Works) comes in the history recounted by Percival's aunt, of how the Syge Perelous was established at the Round Table. The French Queste makes the Syge a marvel which owes its existence to the Divine Plan, to which the Prophet who makes it is subordinate. The Sankgreal emphasises more precisely the community's pragmatic institution of a special sign, upon hearing Merlin's prophecy:

"Sitthyn / there shall be such a knyght [who will achieve the Holy Grail], thou sholdyst ordayne by thy craufftes a syge, that no man shold sytte in hit but he all only that shold passe all other knyghtes."
Than Merlyon answerd that he wold so do, and than he made the Syge Perelous..."

(II, 906; 36 - 907; 5)
Merlin's reification of human volition is stressed here, together with a demonstration of the extent to which his function depends on human interaction. At times he may - partly as a result of the exigencies of social intercourse, partly because his depiction in the narrative is fragmented - stand in ambiguous relation to those values and concerns he is traditionally expected to represent. But in the Syge Perelous episode, society is both active in, and obedient to, the realisation of the spiritual in time.

Caxton leaves Merlin in his 'dotage', dying in his rock-prison (I, 123; 1-3), but we last hear of him in the early tales a few pages later, when Bagdemagus finds him by chance (I, 132; 18-26). Merlin is discovered soon after the knight has come upon the 'holy herbe that was the signe of the Sancgreall', which marks Bagdemagus as 'a good lyver'. Whether or not we are to infer from the juxtaposition that encountering Merlin is a similar mark of grace, is left open. This open-endedness makes available more than one reading of an event's significance. In the Tale of King Arthur, experience is recounted in a series of units, and in determining relations between them, one may arrive at several interpretations. The question of causation, and how one finds one's moral co-ordinates, are not therefore important in the same way as in the French texts. Characters in the Works, chiefly absorbed in the overwhelming demands of the present, tend to move from episode to episode rather than considering events within a larger framework. Thus Merlin's prescriptions, stemming from a purview that takes in the future as well as the present, are often at one remove from the narrative's preoccupations. The fact of Merlin's presence is then, like the Pentecostal Oath, a point of departure rather than a means of definition.
Where then are we to 'place' Merlin, if we understand him to be a point of departure for the reader? His discourse does not locate him in the narrative, as much as indicate what the narrative is not. In the English Prose Merlin, we saw how Merlin serves as a means of access to modes of perceiving event, and understanding that event, within a certain time-scale. He is a 'known quantity', in that his past is well-chronicled, and although his future is indeterminate, held in suspension, his prescriptions for the future of others carry an authoritative weight, and promise the community a control over historical process. His liminality demarcates the boundaries of human knowledge. He is a reference point both for the characters in the text and the reader.

In Malory, Merlin is a marker of disparateness for the reader, his liminality a sign of the unknown, rather than of what may ultimately be knowable. In a book in which Arthurian society is introduced, Merlin offers a controlling perspective, but from a position of indefinability. He is an historicising character, one who inhabits more than one time-zone, in a text that, unlike the EPM, is only incidentally interested in commemoration, and views his counsel as having validity in the present rather than the future. Thus Merlin tells us what the narrative is not - morally and historically aware in any consistent and codifiable way, for instance. In the judgements he makes, he operates as an optional reference-point for the reader, intimating the possibility of synthesis and stability (a stability realised only in relation to the Grail), against which one may read character and event.

Merlin is distinctive because he suggests an interpretative control. Yet he is also identified as 'other', and this alien aspect of his nature in part accounts for the lack of fit between Merlin's explications and what is taken to be explained. He also defines the system of
reciprocity as part of the emergent social order. Merlin has no family ties or allegiances other than those he maps out for himself within this system of reciprocity. But his attempt at intimacy with Nenyve results in his disappearance from the narrative. In trying to interact with the system he identifies, he forfeits the indeterminate space he inhabited, and is ultimately locatable only in an enchanted locus belonging neither to his world nor to Arthur's.

At the end of Chapter Two, I discussed how Malory intermittently defines the reader in specific relation to the text, not to 'fix' that relationship, but to point to how rich the text is in possible meanings. The narrator/translator stresses the element of selectivity with regard to the subject-matter; this same choice is vouchsafed the reader, in the way the tale is related. Merlin, involved in more than one collocation of event, illuminates this choice. Furthermore, the range of configurations and exfoliations of system revealed in the Works is extended by the different emphases structuring the sections that go to make up the complete volume.

What has been said about Merlin as 'optional reference-point' has implications for how we consider the Book of Sir Tristram, which is packed with more events than a reader's memory can comfortably cope with. While creating a normative perspective on knightly behaviour, the Book also exposes the fissures in the theory and operation of the chivalric register. The Book itself apparently encourages one to read it as a series of antitheses; thus the Mark-Isode-Tristram relationship asks to be compared and contrasted with the Lancelot-Guinevere-Arthur triangle. The heroes' actions invite our judgement, both against one another, and in terms of the 'good knighthood' and 'worship' affirmed throughout the tales. But at the same time, we are not afforded a grouping of neat equivalences and contrasts.
The 'fixing' of the Arthurian and Markovian courts, between which the characters oscillate, as loci of honour and shame respectively, is not always presented as a useful index to understanding the story in respect of finding its moral centre. If the Book resists any easy definition of its procedure, it is because it alternates instances of the 'known' and 'controllable' - Mark's nature is to be malicious, a hierarchy of knights exists and is maintained, one must observe the tournament's strict code - and episodes of a random and arbitrary nature, such as chance meetings by well-sides and action peripheral to the tournament proper that comes to have more importance than the tournament itself. Such alternation, together with reiteration of motif, does not serve only to illuminate one issue, or to endorse one absolute interpretation; the Book instead challenges us to engage critically in it, to recover a meaningful patterning from what has been termed its 'redundancy of incident and episode'.

Lancelot and Tristram are figures carefully deployed within this structure. Earlier I touched on how important social context is for defining Malorian character; but we need also to see how Malory uses the notion of interiority to structure his narrative, and to examine too how we perceive the self. With Dynadan, Malory will shift the focus of interest back to social intercourse; in the episodes of Tristram and Lancelot's madness, the author demonstrates the boundaries of the individual's ability to contain excessive and contrary pressures, and in doing so also indicates something of the limitations of his own medium.

MADNESS

The romance is primarily an aristocratic genre and the romantic hero who goes mad is socially unreasonable, hence, morally irrational, long before he is ever pronounced mad.¹ In her dissertation, Judith Neaman argues that medieval romances endorse contemporary religious and medical opinion in viewing insanity as a moral question, but they also insist on the social culpability of the madman.² The loss of the rational faculties constitutes a punishment for any form of excess which blinds the individual to legal and moral obligation; there is a correlation between social unacceptability and alienation from morality. But this assessment is rather too reductive to be usefully applied in literature. Malory for one does not demonstrate any easy 'fit' between social decorum and morality,³ and madness proves more complex than an index of moral guilt.

In the Book of Sir Tristram, madness is not easily glossed on the moral plane, but has more to do with the irreconcilability of conflicting claims made upon the private/public self which leads to the temporary

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2. 'The Distracted Knight', p.277:

From religion as well as medicine, (medieval romance) took the notion that the madman was a sinful man, but, in the romances, because they were aristocratic in origin, the sin was a social sin and the shame a social shame.

On the question of moral culpability, see Lilian Feder's sweeping statement, in Madness in Literature (Princeton, 1980), p.101, that 'English imaginative literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries generally reflects the assumption that madness, a sign of inner corruption, is inspired sometimes by God and more commonly by the devil'.

3. Witness the presentation of the episode of Tristram and Mark's love for Segwarydes' wife, Works, I, 393-403, the cause of the 'jolesy and...unkyndenesse' between uncle and nephew.
forfeiture of both social hierarchic identity and the rational faculties. The insanity of Tristram and Lancelot forms a diptych interesting for its marking of difference in the treatment of the two heroes. Tristram's madness is the result of his being unable to square personal feeling with the social judgement the situation, as he perceives it, invites. Lancelot's insanity stems from his having been judged, in personal terms, by others. Madness per se is in no sense therapeutic; but while in the Tristram episode the concentration is on the nature of human emotion and its social channelling, Lancelot's madness makes possible a manifestation of the Grail as transcendental Divine mercy, and raises the issue of the individual's place in the wider scheme of things.

Tristram, just prior to his period of insanity, is shown to be displaced from society. Yet his escape from Cornish 'justice' (I, 431-32), and his subsequent clandestine residence at court, are not linked morally to his madness. The concern is with the excess of human feeling, and Tristram's estrangement from normal life simply stresses how the hero is in a position where social exigencies have ceased to apply. At Mark's court, Tristram's only links are with Isode and Keyhydys, whom the situation demands he trust implicitly:

*And to telle the joyes that were betwyxte La Beall Isode and sir Trystramys, there ys no maker can make hit, nothir no harte can thynke hit, nother no penne can wryte hit, nother no mowth can speke hit.*

(Works, II, 493; 2-6)

The ineffability accorded human feeling here, and to a lesser degree elsewhere, is matched in Malory only by the mystery of the Grail -

1. Note the earlier comment, I, 411; 14-16: '...the joy that La Bealle Isode made of sir Trystrames there myght no tunge telle, for of all men erno thely she loved hym moste'; and the later encounter between Lancelot and Galahad, II, 1012; 15-21: 'And so he kneled downe and askyd hym hys blyssynge. And aftir that toke of hys helme and kyssed hym, and there was grete joy betwyxte them, for no tunge can telle what joy was betwyxte them.' The same topos appears in the French Prose Tristan, but it seems to be more random in its application. See Lyn Pemberton, 'Authorial Interventions in the Tristan en Prose', *Neophilologus*, 68 (1984), 481-97. A few examples are cited p.490.
Lancelot tells his companions during the quest of the Sankgreal, II, 1017; 11-12: "I have sene...grete mervayles (of secretnesse) that no tungue may telle, and more than ony herte can thynke." While the experience of the Grail carries the participant to another, deeply spiritual, plane of existence, human love pertains to a private sphere upon which narrative has no purchase. The love described here is all-in-all sufficient, and divorced from narrative movement. Narrative event has at this point coincided with emotional feeling; Tristram is at court only to love Isode, not to demonstrate love through action. The love experienced is a lyric moment that is devoid of vocabulary, and the story is held in suspension.

Keyhydysn's love intrudes on the world of the lovers, and Tristram, in his jealousy, drags emotion into a social construct in order to act on his feeling. So as to make sense of Keyhydysn's 'letrirs and baladis' written 'for very pure love', and the reciprocal letters sent by a compassionate Isode, Tristram imposes on the situation an irrelevant mode of arbitration; he chooses an inappropriate register for an inappropriate action. Earlier, Tristram, caught in the act of adultery with Isode, has been accused by Andret of treason to the state: "false traytur thou arte with thyne advauntage!" (I, 431; 23-24). Now he denounces Isode as a "traytouras unto me", and Keyhydysn as guilty of "falshed and treson", the more heinous as he is bound to him by a history of obligation.

The story-line, starting from the false premise of treason, now offers a series of episodes pointing to possibilities for narrative development, which are nonetheless 'blocked', and the effect is disorientating and disjunctive. Keyhydysn's escape from Tristram's wrath involves him in a ludicrous tableau with King Mark, incongruously positioned with his chess-game, just beneath the window of the room.
where Tristram is supposedly in hiding from him (II, 494; 9-19).
Mark's complacent acceptance of Keyhydyns' lame excuse that he has fallen out of the window in his sleep, and the unexpected dissolution of any external threat to Tristram, who has armed himself in anticipation of an attack from the King's forces - 'Trystram...rode forth oute of the castell opynly' (II, 494; 24-26) - highlight a narrative generated by Tristram, which is at odds with itself. Tristram himself now suffers a loss of integrity evidenced in the debasement of his nature and his subsequent inability to act in social terms.

Tristram's madness is made apparent in his loss of memory; he who has always been the most fastidious and eloquent recorder of his own knightly deeds does not remember the locus of his fight with Palomides, which he passes by (II, 495; 30-32). His adventures in 'the wyldirnes' constitute an oscillation between an unknowing self, abased, alone, and without social definition, and forms of social and narrative rehabilitation. His social integration is re-established by degrees, by means of action. When he associates with 'herdemen and shyperdis', the lowest of the social hierarchy, they call him an idiot (II, 496; 23-24). But Tristram's subsequent defence of the shepherds who feed him is based on the re-awakening in him of a sense of duty, although his instinctive ability to wield a weapon does not restore to him a sense of control:

And so sir Trystramys toke his way with the awerde in hys honde, rennyng as he had bene wyld woode.

(II, 498; 20-21)
The hermit who finds Tristram takes away the sword and replaces it with food (II, 499; 27-29); the encounter with this man of God does not prove to be a turning-point for Tristram's awareness. Nor does the

1. At I, 431; 14-22, for example, Tristram calls to common memory his deeds of valour in an act of self-justification: "Fayre lordis! Remembr what I have done for the contrey of Cornwayle, and what jouparté I have bene in for the wele of you all..."
hermit offer a moral perspective on his condition. Madness is not seen as an instance of Divine retribution. The hermit's act simply results in Tristram's return to the obscurity of the forest.

The civilising process for Tristram is effected when, having killed Tauleas the giant, he is finally re-linked with the court (II, 500-01). When his identity is revealed, the narrative returns to the earlier episode of Tristram's capture, and Mark demands the hero be judged 'to the dethe' (II, 502; 34-35). The story has come full circle in order to re-locate Tristram in a legitimate relationship with the Cornish court, and to correct the previous act of false arbitration, for this time he is not made a fugitive from justice, but by the assent of the majority of courtiers, he is banished from Cornwall for ten years. The parallel with the hero's earlier dilemma is made explicit in his catalogue of feats of valour, uttered at his banishment, in which, in his ironic play on the 'reward' he has received for his deeds, he reminds the court of their bad faith in failing to maintain the bargain of reciprocity:

'...well am I rewarded for the fyghtyng with sir Marhalt, and deylyverd all hys contrey from servayge. /And many othir dedys have I done for (Mark), and now have I my waryson!'

(II, 503; 26 - 504; 08)

The period of madness has thus foregrounded a structural problem, how to legitimise and validate Tristram's position; insanity has lead to neither reappraisal or transformation - although it incidentally removes the problem of Keyhydyns' conflict with Tristram, as the former

1. The earlier miscarriage of justice was brought about 'by the assent of kyngge Marke and of sir Andret and of som of the barownes' (I, 431; 8-9). The whole of the second instance of the judgement of Tristram recalls the first.
is mentioned only once more in the text\(^1\) after he leaves for Brittany (II, 498; 7-8), having been banished by Isode. As love is ineffable in narrative terms, Tristram has only a public definition, a definition dependent on a certain form of social arbitration, and this is of primary importance.

Tristram's madness signals primarily a breakdown in the narrative: the episode of Lancelot's insanity raises more complex issues, especially with regard to the hero's control. In Tristram's case, for example, his lineage serves to 'place' him in the Book. He is both the worthy son of his father, the good king Melyodas, and to be defined against his malicious uncle and the cowardly Cornish. In relation to Lancelot, genealogy is co-opted into another system, that of the Grail, and the extent of the hero's self-determination becomes more problematic. Unlike Tristram, Lancelot is ashamed at his madness, but the exact nature of the guilt he feels is not clear, though Lancelot's kin assume his major 'trespas' to be infidelity to Guinevere.\(^2\) In his love for the Queen, Lancelot is caught in the paradox that makes his act of 'synne' a necessary precondition for the temporal realisation of

\(^{1}\) At II, 781; 5-8, where he is an emblem for Palomides of the hopelessness of his love for Isode: "I love her abovyn all other ladyes in this worlde, and well I wote hit shall befalle by me as for her love as befelle on the noble knyght sir Kayhydyns that dyed for the love of La Beall Isode."

\(^{2}\) Works,II, 833; 3-5: 'But all sir Launcelottys kynnesmen knew for whom he wente oute of hys mynde.' The French Prose Lancelot is from the first more explicit about the cause of Lancelot's madness; thus it describes his reaction at being banished by the Queen:

Quant Lanceloz fu hors de Kamaalot, et il li souvint de sa dame et des granz joies qu'il en ot eues maintes foiz, ...si veissiez home courocié et faire duel mervillez et erracher ses chevex qui tant estoient biaux... Et ceste chose li met tel duel en son cuer que il voldroit bien estre morz...

(Lancelot, VI, 176)
spiritual perfection, in the person of Galahad. The revelation of 'spyrytuall maters' is made possible through Lancelot though he is himself barred from perfect knowledge. Lancelot's madness, resulting from conflicting claims made upon him, is itself made an occasion for the manifestation of the Grail's power.

When Elaine invites Lancelot to her bed, she does so in the full knowledge of past and future event, and of her own role in history. In a text where, as we have seen, prophecy and its import tend to be forgotten, Pelles and his daughter are unusual for their awareness of the need for the perfect consonance of time, obligation, and trust, and Elaine accepts with equanimity her engagement with larger, and scarcely fathomable, processes, in a way Lancelot does not:

"...as thou arte renownmed the moste noble knyght of the worlde, sle me nat, for I have in my wombe bygetyn of the that shall be the moste nobelyste knyght of the worlde...for I have obeyde me unto the prophesye that my fadir tolde me. And by hys commaundemente to fullfyll this prophecie I have gyvyn the the grettyst ryches and the fayryst floure that ever I had, and that is my maydynhode that I shall never have agayne.'

(II, 795; 33 - 796; 23)

Conversely, Lancelot's reaction to his night with Elaine is a complex one, based on an idea of sexual fidelity to Guinevere, of public morality, and of inner integrity. He first sees it as an independent act of treason, demanding specific arbitration and immediate punishment: "Thou traytoures!...Thou shalt dye ryght here of myne hondys!" (II, 795; 27-28). This impetuosity augments Lancelot's shame which later

1. At Corbyn, Lancelot comes upon the written testimony of his destiny on the dragon's tomb, (II, 793; 3-6): 'HERE SHALL COM A LYBARDE OF KYNGES BLOOD AND HE SHALL SLE THIS SERPENTE. AND THIS LYBARDE SHALL ENGENDIR A LYON...' But even after he has killed the monster, there is no explicit statement concerning his reaction, nor does he recall the words after his night with Elaine. The sign is remembered not by Lancelot but by the reader.
precludes natural relations between himself and Elaine (witness his embarrassment, II, 803; 14-18). Furthermore, the 'kyndely' love of Elaine for Lancelot cannot compete with Lancelot's loyalty to Guinevere; when Lancelot falls victim to madness, Elaine gives a valid enough moral assessment of the situation in judging Guinevere to "have done grete synne and...grete dyshonoure" (II, 806; 16) in banishing Lancelot. But the comfortable image of stability envisaged by Elaine is only to be briefly and unsatisfactorily realised, and Lancelot's fall from Guinevere's grace is part of the paradox of his situation. The narrative demands his divorce from the hierarchy of normative society, so that the Grail may confirm his worth; as Brusen prophesies; "...he shall be welle holpyn and but by myracle" (II, 807; 32-33).

Georgianna Ziegler reads the period of Lancelot's insanity as a demonstration of Divine displeasure, and the hunting-scene within it, in which the hero is wounded in the thigh during a fight with a boar (II, 821), as an explicit statement that his transgression is sexual in nature. While such an interpretation may be warranted by Malory's suggestive vocabulary, it is significant that the opportunity for 'spiritual chastisement' in the same episode is by-passed. Indeed, the hermit is incapable of providing bodily nourishment, much less spiritual counsel, to the madman: '...for defaute of sustenaunce he waxed more wooder than he was aforetyme' (II, 822; 16-18).

More important than Lancelot's 'synne' is that he is the object of Divine Mercy revealed through the Grail. Lancelot has first seen the 'vesell of golde' at the castle of Case (II, 793), but he is then ignorant of its significance. Through Bors' experience, however, the

2. This is in contrast to Pelles' knowledge of the Grail, its 'enchevement', and the role of Lancelot in its history, as expressly stated, II, 794; 1-8.
reader is afforded an understanding of the Grail as proposing a transcending criterion of judgement by which a new spiritual hierarchy is established, in which Lancelot is not pre-eminent (II, 801; 25-33). In the context of this, and of the Grail's miraculous cure of Percival and Ector (II, 816-17), we appreciate more keenly that the healing of Lancelot demonstrates how mercy passes human understanding.

The knight's recuperation is gradual. For Tristram, the restoration of his outward form suffices to give him back his rational faculties (II, 501; 6-10); when, however, Lancelot is taken to Blyaunte's home, he regains his normal physical aspect, but 'in hys wytte they cowde nat brynge hym, nother to know hymselff' (II, 819; 27-28). Only after a grave relapse, and through Elaine's intervention, is complete recovery possible:

And before that holy vessell (of the Sankgreall) sir Launcelot was layde. And there cam an holy man and unhylled that vessell, and so by myracle and by vertu of that holy vessell sir Launcelot was heled and recoverde.

(II, 824; 23-27)

Lancelot's shame upon coming to his senses is not spiritual or moral, but social (II, 825; 10). Madness does not serve to 'educate' Lancelot in this sense: "I have be myssefortuned" (II, 825; 15). Lancelot's concern is not with the deeper significance of the Grail, but with his social rehabilitation, which he largely engineers.

Like Tristram, Lancelot reclams his identity through action, but he plays a more active role in setting up events that will prove his worth. He emphasises his divorce from his proper milieu with a public declaration of his fault: "...my name ys Le Shyvalere Ill Mafeete, that ys to sey 'the knyght that hath trespassed'" (II, 826; 22-23), but in the three-day tournament he organises (II, 827) he is at least able to reassert his knighthood. Integrity and integration, however, depend
on Lancelot's return to court; the Joyous Ile on which he establishes himself and seeks to re-gain his reputation is, ironically, a locus only of sorrow:

...he wolde onys every day loke towarde the realme of Logrys, where kyng Arthure and quene Gwenyver was, and than wolde he falle uppon a wepyng as hys harte shulde to-braste.

(II, 827; 11-14)

In the Prose Lancelot, it is love for Guinevere, we are told, that gives Lancelot such pain; Malory here gives equal weight to Lancelot's regret at his distance from Arthur, and all he represents.

If Lancelot's attitude ignores the idea of madness as Divine censure, no more does the Arthurian court see it as anything but the result of an overspill of emotion. Lancelot himself pre-empted any extended discussion of the affair: "...yn I ded ony foly I have that I sought" (II, 833; 1-2). The whole question of love for Guinevere as the 'cause' of madness does not go unnoticed, but Arthur's conclusion (and that of "many othir") that all was "for the love of fayre Elayne" (II, 832; 32) is equally valid in that Elayne's active pursuit of love has made unreciprocable claims on Lancelot. Arthur's last words on the subject mention Galahad as one who "shall do many mervaylouse thyngys" (II, 832; 35). If Lancelot's madness is to remain something of a mystery, there is some comfort in the hope that his son will be more than a credit to his high birth.

Elaine's last words to Lancelot concerning her son fix his identity in relation to his father, and thus re-establish, if only temporarily, her lover's superiority: "...he shall preve the beste man of hys kynne except one" (II, 832; 12-13). Bors' first vision of the Grail has

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1. Et chascun jor...Lanceloz...aloit...au chief de l'ille par devers le reaume de Logres et resgardoit vers le païs ou ses cuers traioit dou tout...cele paimne et cil travaux...il (soufroït) por amor. (Lancelot, VI, 232)
intimated a new and different hierarchy, one of meritocracy, in which Lancelot is to be surpassed in spiritual matters, but genealogy remains as an index of spiritual election where God's mysteries are inevitably beyond human comprehension. Thus the 'Launcelot and Elaine' section of the Book of Sir Tristram reasserts the importance of lineage and kinship, in order to valorise Lancelot's role as father to Galahad. Arthur, for example, regards Percival's knightliness as simply fulfilling natural expectations: "He muste nedys preve a good knyght, for hys fadir and hys bretherne were noble knyghtes all" (II, 815; 9-11). Bors' young son Helyne is given a place at the Round Table purely on account of his lineage (II, 831; 8-12).

This emphasis on familial relations and their worth provides a reassuring continuity in a portion of the text full of difficulties with regard to an interpretation of the partially-revealed Grail. In fathering Galahad, Lancelot is instrument of Divine volition. In being cured of madness, he becomes the object of Its mercy. Yet he does not appear to recognise such supernatural forces at work within the sphere of his own experience; madness is indicative of Lancelot's disorientation, not a signal for him to repent of any of his deeds. The stress on lineage, presenting Galahad as significant within the established system rather than herald of the new order, allows Lancelot to be re-integrated, taking up his position at the head of a hierarchy validated by the rest of the Book of Sir Tristram. Lineage is the means by which earthly values are transcended in the person of Galahad; but it also re-enforces Lancelot's position.

In the French Prose Tristan, genealogy is important as a context for the eponymous hero's adventures, in which his deeds continually validate his high birth. We are given a detailed account of Tristan's ancestry, and the facts of his lineage suggest some of the work's
thematic concerns, and co-ordinates for a reading of it. Malory both omits this preliminary matter and (in contrast to the Prose Tristan) avoids supplying a full chronology - witness the explicit denial of closure: 'BUT HERE YS NO REHERSALL OF THE THIRDE BOOKE' (II, 845; 31). In the Book of Sir Tristram, genealogy's claims are not a structuring device, but a means of perceiving the action, and they have a special function in re-habilitating Lancelot in the period subsequent to his madness.

Reference to genealogy is one way of fixing a knight's identity. Assessing his response to the claims of 'felyship' is another means of locating him with respect to his peers. We will look at the character of Dynadan as one who is specifically aligned with 'felyship' rather than kindred, and as such promises some illumination of the nature of social interaction. I have concentrated on the two episodes of insanity in the Book of Sir Tristram, because each represents a breakdown for the narrative and for the hero, and at the same time reveals something of how the narrative operates. Dynadan himself precipitates a similar 'levelling', a breakdown, on a social scale rather than on a private level, by reason of his comedy, and most notably at the tournament of Surluse. By investigating the assumptions underlying this last event, as well as the general representation of Dynadan, I

1. The tale is, for example, given a specifically secular context by the fact that it begins with the adventures of Sadoc who, alone among the sons of Brun, refuses to marry according to the advice of Joseph of Arimathea, who has been sent by God to colonise Britain. The author also plays on the limitations of his romance text when he mentions that, much as he would like to give details of Saint Augustine's explanation of King Apollo's dream, such material, the church authorities have informed him, has no place in a 'livre de deduit et de cortoisie'. See Eilert Løseth, Le Roman en Prose de Tristan; le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise: analyse critique d'après les manuscrits de Paris (Paris, 1890, reprinted Geneva, 1974), pp.3-17. All future references to the Tristan in this chapter are to this 'analyse critique', by editor and page number.
hope to demonstrate further how Malory directs attention to those problems which are not ignored, so much as not containable in his narrative’s terms.

**DYNADAN**

'And I may curse the tyme that ever I s(e)ye you, for in all the worlde ar nat such two knyghtes that ar so wood as ys sir Launcelot and ye, sir Trystram! For onys I felle in the felyshyp of sir Launcelot as I have done now with you, and he sette me so a worke that a quarter of a yere I kept my bedde. Jesus defende me', seye sir Dynadan, 'frome such two knyghtys, and specially frome youre felyshyp.'

(II, 508; 3-10)

When the put-upon knight denounces the Book’s principal heroes as insane when they are socially at their most lucid, we are given both a joke at Dynadan’s expense, and a serious enough enquiry as to whether the excesses of supposedly heroic action are not better avoided. Such an outburst also suggests that, as Vinaver contends, the Dynadan of the Works is scarcely to be differentiated from his namesake in French romance.¹ Indeed, Vinaver considers Dynadan’s residual cynicism to bear witness to the uneasy accommodation of Malory’s intention, and the intractable source-material before him.² I want here to establish how Dinadan (who first appears in 'Luce de Gast'’s Tristan, but who features more in the Second Version by 'Helie de Boron') functions in the French, as it is important to see how Malory differs from the French book, not just in local detail, but in methodology.

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1. 'Dinadan is still very much the same in Malory as he is in the French' (Commentary, Works, III, 1448).
2. '...much as (Malory) resented Dinadan’s criticisms of chivalry he was unable to make them innocuous' (Commentary, Works, III, 1448).
The image of Dinadan as 'outsider' seems particularly attractive to writers on French romance.\(^1\) Vinaver claims a unique position for the French character, as the dissenting voice against the chivalric world's stability. His appeal lies in the considered reasoning behind his critical attitude to knightly behaviour, and in his declared alienation from his environment:

\[\text{'Je suis un chevalier errant qui chascun jor voiz aventures querant et le sens du monde; mais point n'en puis trouver, ne point n'en puis a mon oes retenir.'}^{12}\]

For Vinaver, Dinadan's quarrel with socially 'acceptable' behavioural patterns contributes to the 'jeu fascinant de contrastes' which constitutes the Prose Tristan, and is an example of the pervasiveness of dialectic in medieval secular texts.

Keith Busby's more recent study also takes into account the question of dialectic,\(^3\) but provides a less sentimental reading of Dinadan himself, concentrating on his function as 'entertainer' rather than on his feelings of alienation. Busby sees Dinadan as important as a 'helper' figure who allows the reader to find his or her

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1. See for example E. Vinaver, 'Un chevalier errant à la recherche du sens du monde: Quelques remarques sur le caractère de Dinadan dans le Tristan en prose', in Mélanges de linguistique romane et de philologie médiévale offerts à Maurice Delbouille, edited by J. Renson and M. Tyssens, 2 vols (Gembloux, 1964), II, 667-86. Alfred Adler, 'Dinadan, inquiétant ou rassurant?' in Mélanges offerts à Rita Lejeune, 2 vols (Gembloux, 1969), II, 935-43, thinks of Dinadan as the 'enfant terrible' of Arthurian society, a paradoxically disturbing, and at the same time reassuring, presence.

2. MS B.N. f.fr. 334, fol. 334 r.b; cited by Vinaver, 'Un chevalier errant', p.679. See also Löseth, pp.174-75.

3. In 'The Likes of Dinadan: The Rôle of the Misfit in Arthurian Literature', Neophilologus, 67 (1983), 161-74, Busby refers the reader to Tony Hunt's seminal article 'Aristotle, Dialectic, and Courtly Literature', Viator, 10 (1979), 95-129, a discussion of dialectic as an integral element of French secular writing, and of structural importance to it, and uses this as the starting-point for his own argument on romance.
bearings,¹ but he locates Dinadan's value primarily in the way he challenges adherence to convention (p.166). Both Busby and Vinaver recognise how the characters in the French romances can be interpreted as 'known quantities', counters moving within specific co-ordinates, part of the narrative's dialectic. Dinadan in the later Prose Tristan is most significant as an exponent of 'mesure'. Customs and tradition, in arms as in love, he considers more as obstacles to a rational perspective than as a useful modus vivendi. Thus he questions that the obligations of love and chivalry should provide motives for action, and argues for his own position as one based on the need for survival, both physical and emotional. He provides a control of 'mesure', and, by extension, delineates the nature of literary and social decorum, and their interaction in the narrative. But as we shall see, Dinadan's ethos does not escape irony.

Dinadan is recognisably a 'good knight';² his refusal to engage in armed combat on request arises not from a cowardly instinct for self-preservation, but from a distaste of excess. In one episode (Löseth, pp.174-75), asked to come to the aid of a knight who has proved unequal to his opponent, Dinadan replies that he has enough to do to defend himself (Löseth, p.174). Denounced as "failli et recreant" for such words, the philosopher replies in a form calculated to give licence to his behaviour in terms of decorum - he is, he argues, only following his 'nature' - and indicative of his desire to find an appropriate register

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¹. '...a contrast between the hero and a number of accessory figures often helps the audience evaluate and interpret a romance', 'The Likes of Dinadan', p.166. Busby goes on to equate the reaction of the reader of the romance and the reaction of the audience in the text, at those points where 'Dinadan's performance attains the status of an after-dinner entertainment' (p.167). As will be seen, the relation of reader and audience-in-the-text in Malory's version is not so clear-cut.

². Marc, for example, is genuinely in fear of his ability as a fighter, Löseth, p.161.
for the expression of sincerity, in a world obsessed with the 'fixing' of identity:

'...le couart fet sa couardise, et le hardi fet sa prouesce; mès je vos di que mon cuer pensse.'

(Löseth, p.174)

Nevertheless, Dinadan proves more than capable of defending Brehus, although he does not pursue his opponent, for which he is called to account by Agravain. "Ma couardise me fait vivre", he reasons, "et votre courage vous a réduit à être maintenant à pied" he answers the knight who has been unhorsed by Brehus. When, however, Dinadan names himself to Dalam, the knight he has defended, the latter accuses him of the murder of his father, and Agravain and Mordret, knowing Dinadan to be a friend to their mortal enemy, Lamorat, take up Dalam's cause. Dinadan warns Agravain against nurturing hatred for Lamorat, for it can only be to his shame; in the ensuing encounter, Dinadan defeats both Agravain and Mordret, but because he is so 'amesurez', he forbears killing them outright. Ironically, his sense of honour and control 'si li tourna puis a domage' (Löseth, p.175); these are the men who will eventually kill Dinadan 'assez vileinement'. The pursuit of 'mesure' in confrontation with 'démesure' is demonstrably not always the way of wisdom.

Dinadan is not then ruled by cowardice. He is not simply 'tolerated' by the worthy on account of his ability as a jester. The comic element in his nature, his 'gaberie', is in his expression of a perspective often corrective of excessive posturing. Hence his commonsense questioning of the 'courtoisie' of the challenge of one errant knight to another, "a jouster vos convient". On one occasion,

1. Vinaver's Commentary to the Works (III, 1491-92) cites the incident as it appears in MS B.N. f.fr. 334, as typical of Dinadan's behaviour; he here exposes the incidental foolishness of chivalric custom. At the same time, Vinaver criticises Malory's version of the passage as an instance of the English author's obscuring the text's original intentions (III, 1491). The episode as it appears in the Book of Sir Tristram will be examined later.
Gaheriet unhorses him and proposes a sword-fight, not out of malice, but on the contrary, "mie par haïne que je a vous eûsse". Dinadan complains that the language employed by knights in these instances is totally at variance with actuality:

'Certes...grant amour y avés vous voirement; je m'en suis bien apperced: de la grant joie que vous eûstes de ma venue me portastes vous si durement a terre que encore m'en deulent les os'.

(Løseth, p.268)

Some of Dinadan's most interesting critiques of language are in passages concerned with the literary articulation of love, and one's relation to it. For him, the posturings of such as Palamède are indicative of a 'démesure' which can only have an adverse effect on a knight's honour. Dinadan's counter to Palamède plays on the latter's register of love (Løseth, p.161). For Dinadan, love's demands must remain within the bounds of the healthy and the possible. Adopting the metaphor of the heart relinquished to the loved one as evidence of one's commitment, Dinadan both points out the physical inseparability of himself from this vital organ - "ne onques, voir, sanz mon cuer je ne fui" (Løseth, p.161), and declares love does not overturn social rules, but emphasises the exigencies of actual rank and degree. If what Palamède says is true, Iseut has "tant de cuers dedans son ventre", those of Tristan and Marc as well as Palamède's, that they are sure to argue, and Tristan's heart will soon banish the others. Palamède declares such talk confounds "mon droit sens"; Dinadan sees such 'love' as incompatible with 'sens'.

MS B.N. f.fr. 99 reproduces a conversation between Guinevere and Dinadan which begins with the knight's denial of the Queen's suggestion that he fights for love of a lady:
The ensuing dialogue is not so much a 'long disquisition on love' (as Vinaver terms it), as a discourse on proper conduct and individual worth, and the irrelevance of love-debate as a way of discussing relationships. Dinadan denies that love could ever so inspire him to achieve the same feats as Lancelot, and invokes Kahedins' sad case as the more likely fate of the unfortunate lover. This last example convinces Dinadan there is no advantage to be gained by love; "je vueil fere mon fait sans amour". Most importantly, Dinadan refuses to see any virtue in the formal love-debate the Queen tries to initiate for his entertainment. Although much of the comedy he generates depends on play with words,² Dinadan will not respond to discourse as game on this occasion; word-play for him is an index of control, and as he will not recognise its rules, love-debate is accordingly a nonsense.

Dinadan's sense of irony, and his literary self-consciousness, are at their most acute when, on behalf of Lancelot, he replies to a letter from Marc, sent to the Queen, which openly discusses her relationship with Lancelot. Marc has used a lyric form, in the hope of embarrassing Guinevere with the thought that her adultery has been openly advertised (Löseth, pp.178-80). But Dinadan reciprocates by having recourse to the same tactic as Marc in using the form of the lay to dishonour the King. The reply both answers the original letter on its own terms, and constitutes a departure from the traditional function of the lay as eulogistic:

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1. The passage is printed in Vinaver's Commentary, III, 1511-13, and most of it is excised by Malory.

2. See for example the banter between Galehault and Dinadan at the feasts after the tournaments at Surluse, in B.N. f.fr. 99 (Löseth, 195-201, passim), and Dinadan's dialogue with Guinevere at the same event, of which Vinaver's Commentary gives an account, Works, III, 1505-06.
Car les autres qui a celui temps avoient trouvé maint lay avoient parlé et chanté de bonté et de courtoisie(e), pour ce que il savoient a courtois et a bons ceuls de qui il fesoient diz.  

(Løseth, p.179)

The song also imitates Tristan's style. Dinadan's adaptation of Tristan's own idiom registers in formal terms the consonance of his perspective with that of the main protagonist.

This Lai voir disant of Dinadan's is sung before Marc by Heliot the harper, and to escape physical violence at the King's hands, the bard has recourse to a Dinadanesque plea that his nature will not permit him to do otherwise:

'Sire, qui fait les grans folies de cest monde fors que li fol tant seulement?'  

(Løseth, p.185)

In like manner, Dinadan's reputation as a man of 'mesure' saves him, for Marc cannot believe him capable of such malice, and instead directs his wrath against Tristan. Dinadan's literary interpretation of Marc's character serves to crystallise an image of the King as 'felon' and a traitor, an image corroborated by events in the rest of the narrative.

Dinadan's use of the lay is both indecorous, and fitting in terms of the story's need to expose Marc. The later account of Dinadan's lament for the dead Tristan, as it appears in MS B.N. f.fr. 24400 (Løseth, pp.407-09) is both aesthetically appropriate to the narrative - the hero must be mourned in the grand manner - and marks a peripety in the presentation of Dinadan. The shock of having Dinadan lamenting 'a démesure', highlights chivalric society's sense of loss. It also undercuts Dinadan's previous counselling of emotional moderation.

Bohort finds Dinadan pale and clad in black, displaying all outward signs of mourning. Dinadan's chivalric identity has been bound up with his famous moderation; his reaction at Tristan's death is a sense of having lost his integrity:
'je suis déshonoré et...plus honit, plus failit, plus recreant et plus mauvais que ne fut onque chevalier',

(Łoşeth, p.408)

Bohort asks him to speak "plus courtoisement", which leads Dinadan to reflect cynically on his previous manipulation of language:

'...bien savoie gaibeir sant doute a folz a saige, mais desormaix est li mient fait a ce venus que li gaibeir est gabeit plus que nul autre, car j'ai été gabé par celui contre qui je ne saurais me défendre'

(Łoşeth, p.408)

Dinadan's blasphemy, coupled with his desire for revenge, further emphasises the turnabout in his character. His anger at having been 'tricked' by a higher power is an expression of his disgust at the limitation of both his language and his volition. In MS B.N. 24400, Dinadan's personal idealism is necessarily absorbed as he comes to endorse and articulate the narrative's overriding concern with a particular chivalric perspective. Dialectic may have its part to play, but dissent is inevitably compromised.¹

The narrative thus finally accommodates Dinadan's dissenting voice. The knight does not oppose the institution of chivalry with a challenging set of values; he advocates 'mesure' as morally and socially prescriptive, but 'mesure' is no guarantee of survival in a practical sense, in a world lacking, as Dinadan has noted earlier, the 'sens' necessary to its operation. He seeks to rationalise his universe, to locate its wisdom, by describing its activity in a discourse proper only to the (largely irrelevant) perspective of 'mesure'. So he has accounted Tristan the

¹. Although this lament for Tristan occurs only in B.N. f.fr. 24400, all the cyclic versions of the Prose Tristan, while not recounting Dinadan's death, fortell it in mentioning how he falls foul of Agravain and Mordret. Thus the B.N. f.fr. 24400's author's continuation is a refinement of the idea that the proponent of 'mesure' is ultimately defeated by 'démesure'. 
most 'fols' in a world of fools. Dinadan's sense of moderation is (paradoxically) outraged at 'démesure' in others, notably Marc, and, in one version at least, breaks down in the face of overwhelming grief at Tristan's death. His own physical annihilation results indirectly from his earlier act of generosity. This knight's career demonstrates the moral complexity of the chivalric environment, while posing questions as to the extent of the individual's control, and how that control is to be articulated in word and action. Displacing Dynadan from his identifi-
cation with 'mesure' is for Malory a departure from the source effected by the way the English author structures his narrative.

Vinaver has pointed out that the name Dinadan, unlike those of other Arthurian characters, has no known etymology. This seems particularly apt for the Dynadan who appears in the Book of Sir Tristram, for Malory divorces him from any obligating family ties, although he is

1. See the portions of dialogue reproduced from MS B.N. f.fr. 99 in Vinaver's Commentary, Works, III, 1514, 1519, where Dinadan calls Tristan's behaviour and code a 'folie' contaminating those who join him: "...nulx ne vendroit aveques vous si sages qu'il ne devenist fol: telle est bien la vostre aventure que tous sages y deviennent folz.'

2. 'Un chevalier errant', p.678:
(Il) porte un nom dont les plus fervents partisans des origines lointaines de la légende arthurienne n'ont pu jusqu'ici établir la provenance.

The name could be vaguely onomatopoeic of Dinadan's chatter; the Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch edited by A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch (Berlin, 1915-43, reprint in progress, Wiesbaden 1955- ) does not list anything similar to the name, but the Dictionnaire historique de l'ancien langage français, edited by J.-B. de La Curne de Sainte Palaye (Paris, 1875-82), has the entry 'dindan; le son des cloches'. Otherwise, Dinadan defies etymology.

3. Dinadan in the Prose Tristan is identified as the son of the 'bon chevalier sans peur', King of Estrangorre, and as brother to Brunor à la Cote Mal Taillée (Løseth, p.348). It is at the latter's suggestion that he first goes to seek Tristan (Løseth, p.88). In the Book of Sir Tristram, Dynadan's relation to La Cote is not mentioned, and elsewhere in Malory (specifically in the Tale of Sir Gareth, I, 344; 15-16, and I, 347; 36- 348; 1), that Dynadan and La Cote are brothers features only as part of an evocation of the Arthurian court at its 'most plenoure'. 
'placed' in society proper as one of the 'good knights' of the Round Table. In this context, the social bonds Dynadan forms with others are particularly important. He first rides into the tale looking for Tristram (II, 503; 9-11), and is last seen in Lancelot's company (II, 779; 19-21). This constant movement between the two heroes replicates the shifting focus of the narrative, as well as defining Dynadan in social terms ('...I love all tho that bene of worship', as he says, II, 618; 2-3). Yet Dynadan's presence is more than an index of his companion's 'worship'; although the fact that (as with Merlin) other characters are defined by their response to him promises a means of 'fixing' social and moral judgements made upon others, the narratorial voice also impresses on the reader a special quality of Dynadan's:

...sir Dynadan...was a grete skoffer and a gaper, and the meryste knyght amonge felyship that was that tyme lyvyng... (Works, II, 665; 7-9)

It is significant that we are asked to remember the timbre rather than the specific locutions, of Dynadan's speech-acts. (Malory is not interested, for example, in reproducing Dinadan's wordplay.) His speech is most important as a marker of difference, and this 'otherness' is the means by which he evades the judgements passed on others, as well as being taken up as a co-ordinating factor in the narrative which (like the mode of distinguishing between Arthur and Mark's courts) may problematise as much as elucidate. For the term 'japer', most often applied to Dynadan, is at best ambivalent, as is the laughter such game provokes. 'Japing' carries with it connotations of frivolity, of play.

1. Everyone else also divides attention between Tristram and Lancelot, looking on occasion for one or the other, or even both at once; see II, 537; 25-31, where Lancelot swears to look for Tristram, and II, 587; 1-2, where Gryfflet is asked for news of 'sir Launcelot other sir Trystram'.

2. On the Renaissance theorist Joubert's remarks on the ambivalence of laughter, in the Traité du Ris (written c.1552), see Gregory de Rocher, Rabelais's Laughers and Joubert's 'Traité du Ris' (Alabama, 1979), passim.
without consequence, of fraudulence and deceit.\(^1\) Society accommodates Dynadan by regarding his behaviour and language as 'japing', and thus according him a certain licence, but this freezes an image of the questions Dynadan's existence poses, rather than resolves them.

We saw how madness constitutes a suspension of orthodox linear narrative development which is mediated through the individual. The *Book of Sir Tristram* also uses comedy and Dynadan, to provide us at certain points with a suspension of narrative and the social order, which is mediated through society; humour, as Freud reminds us, is a social affair.\(^2\) Comedy's 'levelling' effect is expressed as a literal fall by those participating in it:

And than was sir Dynadan brought in amonge them all, and whan quene Gwenyver sawe sir Dynadan ibrought in so / amonge them all, than she lowghe, that she fell downe; and so dede all that there was.\(^3\)

(II, 669; 35 – 670; 02)

Malory does not here propound a theory of comedy (any more than, in Merlin's case, we are given a detailed exposition of prophecy). Nor is it that the discrepancies and inadequacies of the chivalric system are

1. See the entry in the Middle English Dictionary, edited by Hans Kurath, S.M. Kuhn, and others (Ann Arbor, 1954-), Part J1, pp.372-75, where instances of the term used in the sense of magical or diabolical delusion, and in the sense of a depraved act, are also cited. The constant assertion of Dynadan's being a 'good knight' as well as a 'japer' and its incidental use elsewhere (Lamerok judges Lancelot, who is fighting in disguise, to be a "noble knyght and no japer", I, 448; 21-22), suggest Malory's full awareness of the term's many connotations.

2. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, translated from the German and edited by James Strachey (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.238: A joke...is the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure. It often calls for three persons and its completion requires the participation of someone else in the mental process it starts.

3. Characters in the Prose Tristan, by contrast, tend to lose consciousness rather than fall down, in reaction to Dinadan - see for example Løseth's résumé of MS B.N. f.fr. 99's account of the Sorelois tournament (pp.195-201) which ends with the presentation of Dinadan in a dress before Guinevere, 'qui, comme les autres, rit au point de soi pasmer' (Løseth, p.201).
voiced in the eccentric person of Dynadan, only to be refuted in his public and good-natured shaming at the end of the tournament at Surluse (from which episode the above quotation is taken). Rather, by invoking comedy, Malory creates another notional space within which to expose the anomalous and dissect components of action and narrative. Dynadan has to be read within the narrative contexts in which he appears; he is both part of the social system, and allowed on occasion to behave with impunity; thus his presence makes for further play on narrative expectation and the exigencies of system.

The minor characters provide continuity of background, contrast of character, historical authenticity, and enhance the stature of Lancelot.¹ If P.J.C. Field acknowledges that 'psychological consistency' is not Malory's aim, his discussion of character in terms of this taxonomy of functions is also limiting as an approach and, in Dynadan's case at least, inaccurate.² Outside the Book of Sir Tristram, Dynadan's rare appearances illuminate difference between the tone of the Books rather than provide 'continuity' either chronological or thematic. In the Tale of Sir Gareth, he appears with his brother La Cote Mal Tayle, as a member of the Arthurian court unhorsed at the Assumption Day tournament, by the young knight (I, 347; 35 - 348; 1). In the episode of the 'Healing of Sir Urry', Dynadan's name (III; 1148; 13-14) is part of the nostalgic and emotive summoning-forth of the splendid fellowship, "holé

2. E. Olefsky, 'Chronology, Factual Consistency, and the Problem of Unity in Malory', Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 68 (1969), 57-73, provides a useful corrective to Field's view, pointing out that ultimately, factual consistencies and inconsistencies are irrelevant to an argument for or against the concept of 'unity' in Malory.
togydur", whose disintegration Arthur has so feared.¹

In their discussion of the Book of Sir Tristram as a tripartite structure, N.H. Owen and J.L. Owen offer a more useful approach to the presentation of the minor characters, whom they see as reflecting dominant concerns in the Book.² In the first section, dealing with the young Tristram (up to II, 572), Dynadan is therefore a loyal friend who recognises the young knight's worth, and in the final section, he is 'largely a comic character' ('The Structure...of the Tristram', p.15), a mirroring of the happiness obtaining between Tristram and Isode at Joyus Garde. While this analysis relies too heavily on the idea that minor characters serve only to illuminate one's impression of the hero, the 'placing' of Dynadan, in the middle section, as satirist of Mark (with whose villainy, according to Owen and Owen, the central portion of the Book is mainly concerned) comes nearer to defining Dynadan's function. For while Dynadan is part of the social process, and as such is more than simply an adjunct to Tristram, his satirising of Mark is important because it shows the extent to which his register is made useful to society's prevailing opinion.

Why is Mark vilified? In the Book of Sir Tristram, the reputation of Arthur and Mark's courts owe as much to accepted wisdom as to actuality. Lamerok takes the famous horn to Cornwall, not because the ladies there are any less virtuous than those at Camelot, but because "the honour of bothe courtes be nat lyke" (I, 443; 33-34). The justice of such an attitude is not at issue; all we need know is that Mark is a

¹. Technically, Malory is guilty of an oversight in mentioning Dynadan here, as he has been killed on the quest of the Sankgreal (II, 615; 5-8), but this example serves to show that chronological accuracy is not his concern at this point.

villain, and that his malice manifests itself in his split between 'fayre speche' and action (as at II, 609, where he promises friendship to Tristram), and in his persistence in making cowardly acts revelatory of a nature actively transgressive of both social bonds and blood-ties.

Dynadan exposes the hypocrite by continually placing him in situations demonstrative of his cowardice and weakness. He wrongly identifies knights to the King, leading him to over-reach himself, thus incurring mockery and pity (II, 609), and at one point, when Mark has been tricked into believing that Dagonet is Lancelot, the Round Table knights enjoy the spectacle of the King of Cornwall fleeing Arthur's fool (II, 587-88).

Dynadan also engineers the most spectacular verbal shaming of Mark when (near the mid-point of the Book) he writes 'the worste lay that ever harper songe with harpe or with ony other instrument' (II, 618; 18-19): 'the moste vylany by kynge Marke and of his treson that ever man herde' (II, 626; 34-35) is thus commemorated in easily-communicable form. Significantly, the musician's explanation to the enraged Mark is not, as with his French counterpart, to plead insanity, but to declare himself constrained by patronage: "I muste do as I am commaunded of thos lordis that I beare the armys of" (II, 627; 4-5). Dynadan himself is remembered for this public display of Mark's shame (II, 692; 24-25).

Dynadan denounces other characters, and equally openly:

For sir Dynadan had suche a custom that he loved all good knyghtes that were valyaunte, and he hated all tho that were destroyers of good knyghtes. And there was none that hated sir Dynadan but tho that ever were called murtherers.

(II, 614; 27-31)

Those defined against Dynadan, such as Mordred and Agravain are, like Mark, examples of how reputation and action are mutually re-enforcing. Experience reaffirms, rather than moulds, their natures. They are
guilty of breaking the social contract, and Dynadan is one of the most forceful in exposing their bad faith. But if Dynadan has a clear social definition, his actual nature is difficult to pin down, for he is not presented with any congruence. He operates now in defiance of, now directed by, social decorum. Yet in Dynadan's inconsistencies, we do not have the hypocrisy of a Mark, but the result of a certain mode of character representation.

Dynadan affects to scorn chivalric custom (II, 604-05), yet he also acts within its strictures and condemns those who do not (see his encounter with Tristram, II, 695). He says he will not endanger his life unnecessarily for a woman (II, 694; 15-18), but nevertheless undertakes a combat for the "honoure of all women" (II, 553; 15-16).¹ He acts as a recapitulatory device for the narrative, (at II, 595; 34 - 596; 7, for example, where he tells of the Lancelot/Tristram combat), but his own history is more confused. Sometimes his actions seem unimportant in the wider scheme of things - yet his generosity towards Mordred and Agravain is indirectly fatal to him (II, 615; 5-8). His act of cowardice in not helping Kay (II, 566; 1-11), his occasional lack of social importance,² the randomness of his appearances (Tristram at one point leaves him to recover from his wounds at an abbey (II, 509) and he arrives back on the scene apparently only to deliver a sententious gloss on the action (II, 516; 3-6)); all this does not build up a clear picture of what Dynadan is, but shows how his behaviour is dictated by the differing exigencies of the narrative. In his very anomalousness, the gap

¹. This passage is less important as evidence of Dynadan's gallantry than as one of a series of Brewyns Saunz Pité's appearances as an 'unjantyl' knight; Dynadan's experience replicates that of Lancelot a few pages earlier, II, 538; 10-26, and Palomides' account, II, 562; 14-28.

². See II, 506; 19-26, and II, 552; 1-36, where, although Dynadan is present, only Tristram is asked to identify himself.
between the space the narratorial voice allots him, and where narrative interests lie, Dynadan is a focus for the concern with knightly identity as the relation of self to the expression of self in social terms (hence his involvement with acts of display). Furthermore, in his social interaction he foregrounds areas which make conflicting claims on knighthood.

Dynadan's first set of adventures with Tristram, for example (II, 504-09), is comic because it represents a clash between pragmatics writ large (in the person of Dynadan) and the notion that only in strict adherence to custom can one avoid shame, embodied in Tristram. Both principles are important in the exercise of knighthood. Dynadan continually refuses to attempt anything foolhardy (as he says later to Mark: "hit is ever worship to a knyght to refuse that thynge that he may nat attayne" (II, 581; 24-26)). Warned of an ambush, Dynadan takes the only reasonable option: "Hit ys nat for us to fyght with thirty knyghtes, and wyte you well I woll nat thereoff!" (II, 505; 21-22).

Nonetheless, for all his protestations, he acquits himself well (II, 506; 16-17). The 'custom' of the castle at which the two knights seek lodging similarly has no appeal for Dynadan ("Lodge where ye woll, for I woll nat lodge there", II, 507; 1-2), but Tristram again invokes shame, and he does his part. When Tristram carries his sense of duty so far as to defend the custom of the castle against newcomers, Dynadan expresses his exasperation at the obligations of 'felyshyp' and Tristram's inexhaustible energy (II, 508; 1-10). Ironically, the 'felyship' Dynadan falls into is not one he can easily escape (II, 508; 28-35).

If Dynadan is here the voice of moderation, a similar reasonableness seems to lie behind his cutting short a challenge from an 'arraunte knyghte' later in the Book (II, 604-05). As Vinaver has pointed out,
Dynadan's behaviour appears to contravene the usual rules of chivalry. He declines the challenge on the grounds "I have no wyll to juste", and jokes about the kind of 'love' that allows one to maim one's fellow. But at the same time he proposes they joust at Arthur's court; after telling his adversary his name, Dynadan, the matter settled, goes on to court. Vinaver sees the problem in this passage as endemic to Malory's unwillingness to allow Dynadan's critical voice its full strength, so as to protect the ideal of knighthood from too forceful an attack:

Les paroles de Dinadan sont sans motif ici, comme partout ailleurs chez Malory: une justification complète du rôle assumé par ce chevalier dans la deuxième version française du roman en prose aurait brisé l'harmonie des coutumes chevaleresques...

But here it is not that the logic of the story is sacrificed in order to safeguard chivalry's code, but that we are presented with an apparent narrative non-sequitur, which Dynadan, as japer, can effect with impunity, and which works ironically in the context of other social encounters.

For in a later episode, Dynadan is seen to challenge first Tristram, then Eponygrys, in a way that belies his previous courtesy and moderation (II, 688-90). The whole episode vindicates Tristram's tenet that lovers are better fighters than those who, like Dynadan, refuse to love. This assertion is only made possible by compromising Dynadan. Dynadan is again manipulated by Tristram a little later, when the latter teasingly adopts his idiom - "why ar ye so wrothe? I am nat disposid to fyght at this tyme!" (II, 695; 10-11), in order, ultimately, to assert his own valour. Dynadan's dissident nature is denied, so as to foreground Tristram's valour.

1. Vinaver, Commentary to the Works, III, 1491, considers Dynadan's taking the initiative in closing the matter - "Than shall here be no justys...betwyxte us" (II, 605; 13-14) - to be against all known codes.
Similarly, the ménage at Joyus Garde does not consider Dynadan's disregard of love as a challenge to way of life, but as an opportunity for play. Isode is promised the company of "the myrryeste knyght... and the maddyst talker"(II, 693; 6-8), and she is not disappointed. But while Dynadan's indignation makes for amusing after-dinner talk ("the joy of love is to shorte, and the sorow thereof and what cometh thereof is duras over longe", II, 693; 33-35), his is also a voice in a discourse on the love-chivalry relation which we see unfolded in the narrative, in the experience of such as Palomides, as well as of Tristram and Lancelot. The French Dinadan perceives a 'conventionalised' love as a betrayal of an individual's integrity. Malory's Dynadan is more pragmatic in his objections; while the action of the story dwells especially on Tristram and Lancelot's respective amours (without giving us an adequate system by means of which we may correlate or judge them), Dynadan expresses justified and justifiable misgivings about love in the process of demonstrating its irrelevance to his situation.

Tristram and Isode, like the rest of society, seek to make Dynadan an integrated part of their own discourse; simultaneously, Dynadan suggests to the reader a broader, less exclusive vision of experience. Dynadan represents, to some extent, the desire for the social containment of 'japing'. His jokes themselves are not as important as the fact that, in the person of Dynadan, misgivings are somehow under control in social terms. The tournament provides an analogous instance of 'containment which isn't', for its peripheral concerns are often as important as the events taking place within its boundaries, and the tournament of Surluse is the locus of a major instance of Dynadan's dissent, and society's response to it. The tourney offers us a microcosm of society's prevalent interests, though its terms are somewhat less complex than those of wider experience. Although tournaments are
initially presented as the opposition of two warring factions, it is ultimately the individual who is assessed within a hierarchy of valour.¹

At the tournament of Surluse, Dynadan interrupts - and not with impunity - the flow of feasting and fighting that regulates the social event. His first appearance is as a legitimate fighter; in disguise he 'ded many grete dedis of armys' (II, 653; 29). His knighthood is not in question. But he also calls a premature halt to his first encounter with Galahalt, and refuses a second bout with him (II, 657; 27-28). Galahalt's annoyance at Dynadan's escape has its roots in his fear of his "mokkis and his japys", but the latter's sense of fun is a source of amusement for the rest of the community: 'all knyghtes lowghe at hym, for he was a fyne japer and lovyng unto all good knyghtes' (II, 660; 1-2).

On the fifth day, however, Dynadan's success is countered by Lancelot, on Galahalt's orders. If Dynadan is allowed to jape, he also provides society with its own safety-valve, for in this episode, the usual criteria with regard to assessing honour and shame do not apply to him. Lancelot's defeat of Dynadan is greeted with such laughter by the court 'that they myght nat stonde' (II, 665; 21-22), and the victim accepts his situation with equanimity:

'Well,' seyde sir Dynadan, 'yet have I no shame, for the olde shrew sir Launcelot smote me downe.'

(II, 665; 23-24)

If there is here a suspension of the norm, Dynadan's later absurd ridiculing of Galahalt for his dislike of fish, and his justifiable complaint to Lancelot - "what devyll do ye in this contrey? For here may no meane knyghtes wynne no worship for the" (II, 668; 17-19) -

1. Robert Hellenga, 'The Tournaments in Malory's Morte Darthur', Forum for Modern Language Studies, 10 (1974), 67-78, notes that tournaments are won by individuals, not sides, and that individual loyalties eventually prevail over obligation's to one's side.
results in the most unorthodox forms of retaliation on the part of Lancelot and the court.

On the morning of the sixth day, Dynadan prepared to joust with some apprehension, but Galahalt and Lancelot assure him they will have no part in the action: "...ye may se how we sytte here as jouges with oure shyldis..." (II, 669; 12-13). Because he has already promised Dynadan, albeit in jest, that he will not meet him on the field again, Lancelot appears disguised as a woman. When he unhorses his opponent, he has him similarly dressed: 'they dispoyled hym unto his sherte and put uppon hym a womans garmente'(II, 669; 30-32). Dynadan, who first appears at Surluse in disguise through his own volition, now has disguise thrust upon him. His transvestism provides a striking image of absurdity, one appreciated by the court, which abandons hierarchy (II, 669; 35 - 670; 02) the more to enjoy the comedy of the moment.¹

Dynadan's denunciation of Lancelot - "...thou arte so false that I can never beware of the" (II, 670; 3-4) - is acceptable in the context of the jape, for Lancelot, far from 'sitting in judgement', as he had promised, has participated fully in a nonsensical act in which arbitration is irrelevant and motive unquestioned.² Arthurian society constructs a frame of reference for Dynadan that does not assimilate him into a common value-system, as much as freeze an image of the ridiculous. The


2. See Freud's observation, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, p.148: '...it is most doubtful whether a person who gives free play to a joke must necessarily know its precise intention.'
act constitutes not a refutation, by comic means, of what Dynadan stands for, but an engagement in the comic for comedy's sake. Moreover, like Merlin, what exactly Dynadan should stand for is open to debate. He is not the mouthpiece of a restraining wisdom (just as Merlin may be said to be so only incidentally), but the voice of certain objections to the system, while being obviously moulded by the narrative constructed from that system.

Merlin and his magic stand in uneasy relation to the problems of both society and narrative. Society's laughter may express the sense of a common cultural identity, but the reader has the option of defining society itself against the objections Dynadan raises. Dynadan is made, more completely than is Merlin, part of society's frame of reference; in sinister vein, it might be said that his questioning of the hierarchy motivates Galahalt and Bagdemagus' calling a tournament in the next section. More generally, in the comedy he produces, we come to acknowledge that individuals are judged by others in the social framework, that the mediation of society is necessary to the expression and definition of the self, but that ultimately the system itself is unjudged and unjudgeable. That judgement should appear necessary but insufficient is typical of Malory's strategy.

This section opened with a tirade from Dynadan apparently similar in tone to the French Dinadan's outburst; but where the French character is concerned with moderation, Dynadan's focus is on the implications for 'felyship' of another's 'mad' behaviour. 'Felyship' is important for Dynadan because he is largely defined by its manifestation within

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1. And there was cryed...a grete turnemente...and all was done by...Galahalt...and kynge Bagdemagus to the entente to sle syr Launcelot other ellys uttirly to destroy hym and shame hym, bycause sir Launcelot had evermore the hygher degré.

(II, 675; 1-7)
narrative process and 'felyship' ultimately takes precedence. The
tournament at Surluse brings a phase of the action to an end, but the
final emphasis subordinates the comedy of Surluse to general concern
at Lamerok's leaving 'all the felyship' of the Round Table (II, 670;
10-27).

What, then, is Dynadan doing in the space between Tristram and
Lancelot's points of breakdown (apart from initiating a minor breakdown
of his own)? And in what sense does he inherit Merlin's situation?
We have seen how, like Merlin, his discourse, and the problems it seizes
on, are not of central concern to the narrative. He is a "japer", but
where for the French Dinadan, this status implies a specific kind of
control, for Dynadan it is part of his plural significance. 'Japing'
is a 'self-contained' activity, in which event and interpretation are
reconciled, in which action ultimately is without consequence. But
Dynadan is also someone in reference to whom others declare their
identities and allegiances, and his own identity becomes of necessity
bound up with process.

Thus, again like Merlin, Dynadan is a special reference-point for
the reader. He occupies that area where we as readers (and the
narratorial voice as reader) try to fill the gap between action and
interpretation. The text offers us Arthur and Mark as polarities.
Dynadan's presence gives us a further hold on the narrative in the way
it distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' knights. In aligning himself
with the 'good' knights, Dynadan offers a way through an over-packed
story-line. Moreover, he illuminates the operation of a social trans-
actional ethic which is not dependent on other codifications. The
judgements made according to an apparently uncomplicated morality (Mark
is bad, Arthur is good) have meaning only with reference to the system
of social exchanges in the Book.
Merlin, with an authority the basis of which is uncertain, and an ambivalent social identity, identifies reciprocity in the social system. Dynadan may be said to define that reciprocity in action, a being whose value is fixed by formulations others make about him, and the paths he travels between different characters. Like Merlin, Dynadan has no kin. With no blood-ties, and no sexual loyalties, he has been located by means of that system which comes complete with its own closure, 'japing'. But he is inevitably 'fixed' by others. Merlin is betrayed by the association he tries to form with Nenyve. For Dynadan, the apparently random recall of one of his many affiliations seals his fate (Agravain and Mordred 'hated hym oute of mesure bycause of sir Lameroke', Works II, 614; 26-27). But Dynadan's death is anticipated in the Book; he is finally caught in the weave of the social fabric, but our last glimpse of him is in the company of a 'good' knight, having just quitted the company of another 'good' knight, constantly moving between them.

Arthur's 'massacre of the innocents' and Dynadan's shaming are connected in that both point to problems outside the story's purview. The narrative by-passes the questions these events raise (with regard, for example, to modes of engaging with the future, and how society is organised). At the same time, their inclusion in the text indicates concerns beyond immediate narrative pre-occupations. This isolating of issues which claim, but are not accorded, further narrative space, complements the way the Works are constructed on the larger scale. The Works are linked by subject-matter, but the Books themselves emerge stylistically as a series of narrative possibilities. ¹ The presence

1. On the subject of the explicits in the Winchester MS as marking points of 'transition' rather than 'separation', see Murray J. Evans, 'The Two Scribes in the Winchester MS: The Ninth Explicit and Malory's "Hoole Book"', Manuscripta, 27 (1983), 38-44.
of a Merlin or a Dynadan, I have argued, is part of the delineation of each narrative's boundaries, while also suggesting further ways of interpreting those narratives in which they feature. This contrasts with a French text such as the Prose Tristan, where the text's organisation, more than the characters within it, may suggest the possibility of breakdown within what Vinaver has called 'the narrow boundaries of the "adventurous kingdom"'. How Malory's compilation may compare with, and differ structurally from, Micheau Gonnot's contemporaneous Arthuriad, and the traditions within which each is working, is the subject of the next chapter.

1. 'The Prose Tristan', In Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, edited by R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959, reprinted 1974), pp.339-47 (p.340). Vinaver speaks of the 'disintegration' of the interlace technique - 'Loose threads are scattered everywhere' (p.345) - as evidence of the author's losing a grip on the material. But this 'unravelling' may also constitute the formal expression of a challenge to the state of things from the uncertainties of human experience.
CHAPTER FIVE

'UNE OEUVRE BELLE ET DÉLITABLE À OIR': MICHEAU GONNOT'S ARTHURIAD; ITS RELATION TO A CONTINENTAL ARTHURIAN TRADITION, ITS THEMATIC INTERESTS, AND A COMPARISON WITH MALORY.

According to the last folio of MS Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, 112, Micheau Gonnot finished his vast anthology of Arthurian romances on 4 July 1470. Because B.N. 112 treats of the same subject as Malory, and is the only text contemporaneous with the Works comparable to it in scope, critical opinion tends to align the French work with the English, and to assume they have specific literary intentions in common. Larry D. Benson, for example, notes 'similarities in spirit and tone' between the two texts, and sees this likeness extending to their formal organisation, with both narratives 'marked by far less interweaving than in the older cycles'. Thomas Wright, in proposing the source for the Tale of Sir Gareth to be a tale of Gaheriet from B.N. 112 (II, fols 43-57), considers

1. The inscription was later altered;

Au jourduy IIIe jour de jullet lan
mil CCC soixante dix a este escript
ce dernier livre par Micheau Gantelet
prestre demeurant en la ville de Tournay (IV, fol. 233a)

For a discussion of the politics behind the change of name, see Cedric E. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du moyen âge (Paris, 1960), pp.19-24. Pickford gives a synopsis of the manuscript's contents in Appendix I, pp.297-319. All references to MS B.N. fonds français 112 follow Pickford's practice, and are by volume, folio number, and column. Transcriptions are diplomatic, although I have expanded abbreviations. Where there are discrepancies between transcriptions of B.N. 112 made by others in books and articles, and my own, I have noted them, but I am unfortunately not in a position to re-check the MS. I am grateful to the staff at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, for allowing me to consult B.N. 112 and other MSS in the collection.

2. In Malory's 'Morte Darthur' (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976), p.26. W. Matthews, The Ill-Framed Knight (Berkeley, 1966), pp.146-47, briefly discusses Gonnot's objective, 'to encompass the whole body of Arthurian romance within one frame which had its own individuality' (p.146). He thinks Gonnot similar to Malory, but observes the English author is 'more drastic' in his methods.
Malory's Tale as a refinement of the French rather than a work different in perspective or purpose. Inevitably, B.N. 112 emerges as inferior to Malory when judged on terms established to understand the latter. This section will look at some of the processes operative in B.N. 112, and will argue that the differences between Gonnot and Malory are more significant than their apparent similarities. Although the French and English writers both produce what may be described as compilations of Arthurian tales, they are working according to different models of inclusiveness.

We have then to construct a more precise critical framework for understanding Gonnot's methodology. An examination of the prologues and epilogues in B.N. 112 will reveal something of the text's affiliations with a self-conscious and carefully self-defining Continental Arthurian tradition and Gonnot's conception of its place within that corpus. Gonnot emphasises above all literature's commemorative function, and this stress influences the way the central heroes Lancelot and Tristan, and minor characters such as Brunor, are described, and deployed structurally. Having established some of B.N. 112's essential features, I will return to Malory's Works to compare it with B.N. 112 in terms of compilation, and to discuss, with reference to A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake, the English author's use of the idea of how a written tradition informs his own re-telling. In conclusion, we will see how the use of the Beste Glatissant (Malory's Questing Beast) in each of the texts illuminates the narrative strategies of Gonnot and Malory, and shows each to be distinctive.

1. 'On the Genesis of Malory's Gareth', Speculum, 57 (1982), 569-82. For Wright, the story of Gaheriet is the closest analogue to Gareth's concern with 'the testing of the novice knight, the insistence on blood ties and friendship, the recognition and recovery of the strayed brother' (p.580).
First, however, we need to establish the literary status to be claimed for B.N. 112 and the kind of enterprise it represents.

Compilation and amplification of Arthurian romances in French is a valued literary activity throughout the Middle Ages, as extant manuscripts bear witness; such compilations represent, in secular terms, that kind of 'book-making' which is given academic definition by Bonaventure:

...quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena addendo, sed non de suo; et iste compilator dicitur.¹

The compiler, no less than the commentator and the author (Bonaventure's categories for writers who are, to a lesser and greater extent, producing their own material), works within a recognised discipline. The compilation's 'originality' lies in the way the material is juxtaposed, re-set, or illuminated by means of a modifying framework, and not in a radical re-writing of the subject-matter.

In the prologue to Book IV of B.N. 112, Gonnot thus declares what will be included in his text:

...je nay entencion de y mettre riens ne adiouster qui ne soit veritable et que je naye leu et visite en plusieurs liures anciens.

(IV, fol. 1a-b)

C.E. Pickford, who has made the most thorough study of B.N. 112, reads this avowal as more a rhetorical flourish than a statement of literary practice.² Fanni Bogdanow, whose more recent work on the Turin University Library manuscripts of Guiron le Courtois uncovered source-


2. C.E. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, p.24; 'Il est clair que le compilateur nous trompe un peu'.
material for Gonnot's compilation that Pickford had not traced, warns against crediting the French writer, in our ignorance of the full manuscript background, with originality of composition: 'Micheau Gonnot's contribution to Arthurian romance is less than has been assumed'.

Both of these assessments of B.N. 112 are based on a criterion for literary merit inapplicable in Gonnot's case, for he does not pretend to be anything other than a compiler/commentator. His 'originality' is not at issue.

Indeed, the idea that Gonnot should be using only 'authorised' texts is important to our understanding of his work. Respect for what is already written is a means of keeping faith with the literary past.

Gonnot's art lies in bringing together different parts of the Arthurian corpus so as to produce an encyclopaedic piece of literature. Within the compilation, the material is presented to show the diversity of traditions evident in the Arthurian romances, while emphasising the cohesive capacity both of commemorative writing, and of the *bonne chevalerie* which is B.N. 112's central theme. Gonnot's *Arthuriad* has to be considered within a specific literary tradition evolving from tendencies which, in part, inform the Vulgate's structure, and which account for the plethora of Arthurian prose romances which followed that first great collection.

What then of the cultural milieu in which B.N. 112 was written, and what it reveals of how such literature was regarded? From extant manuscript evidence, we can construct a good picture of Gonnot's literary

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1. 'Part III of the Turin Version of Guiron le Courtois: A Hitherto Unknown Source of MS.B.N. fr. 112', in *Medieval Miscellany presented to Eugène Vinaver*, edited by F. Whitehead, A.H. Diverres, and F.E. Sutcliffe (Manchester, 1965), pp.45-64 (p.60). Bogdanow postulates a common source for 112 and for the Turin manuscript. Although it is known that the latter was also produced for the duc de Nemours, (see Paul Durrieu, 'Les manuscrits à peintures de la bibliothèque incendiée de Turin', *Revue archéologique*, 4e série, 3 (1904), 394-406 (p.403)), the date of its production is uncertain.
activity for the duc de Nemours. Extant texts show him as primarily a copyist, one of several scribes known to have produced volumes for Jacques d'Armagnac's library; he worked for his patron from at least 1463, and possibly up until the time of the latter's death in 1477. He produced books of romance apart from B.N. 112. In 1463, he completed a copy of the Prose Tristan (now MS B.N. f.fr. 99); in 1466, a copy of a romance, Marquès de Rome (MS B.N. f.fr. 93) was finished, and anthologies of pious works in French (now MSS B.N. f.fr. 916 and Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 5121) were also commissioned from him by the duke. Jacques d'Armagnac is known to have owned several copies of the same romance, some new, some inherited or bought second-hand. He had inherited a copy of the Vulgate Cycle (MSS B.N. f.fr. 117-120) from Jean de France, duc de Berry, and had another made for him (MSS B.N. f.fr. 113-116). Apart from the Tristan Gonnot copied, Jacques d'Armagnac owned a thirteenth-century manuscript of the same text (MS B.N. nouvelles acquisitions françaises 6579), and a fifteenth-century manuscript now in the National Library in Vienna (MS 2542). Pickford suggests a fourth copy made by


2. Pickford mentions Barthélemy Cousinet and Gilles Gassien, for example, in 'A Fifteenth-century Copyist and His Patron', passim.


4. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.274-76. Pickford describes another MS owned by the duc, B.N. f.fr. 122, as a copy of the Vulgate (p.276), but it contains only the second part of the Cycle, from the 'Conte de la Charette' episode of the Lancelot onwards. See the entry in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Manuscrits, catalogue des manuscrits français, tome premier, anciens fonds (Paris, 1868), p.8.
one of d'Armagnac's scribes (MSS Chantilly 315-317), and almost identical
to MS B.N. f.fr. 99, was also originally made for the duke. A
thirteenth-century manuscript of Palamède (now MS Arsenal 3325) carries
his ex libris, and Jacques also commissioned a new copy of another
version of Palamède, Guiron le Courtois (MSS University of Turin Library,
L I. 7-8-9).  

Jacques d'Armagnac was not alone in owning multiple copies - the
library of Charles VI, for example, contained several copies of the
Vulgate Cycle, and other romances were also represented in duplicate. The
nature of the library is partly explained by practical exigency; the
duke had two residences, at Carlat and at Castres, and two libraries were
therefore convenient. But the attitude towards manuscripts of Arthurian
texts in aristocratic libraries such as the duc de Nemours' is in a sense
analogous to the way the texts themselves are regarded. The books
preserve a literature whose function is commemorative. Old copies are
not destroyed, as they form a physical link with the past. But re-
copying a work is also necessary to its survival. The multiplication
of physical books on the same subject imparts an extra authoritativeness
to their contents. Pickford has suggested we think of B.N. 112 as a
'library...of Arthurian prose romances'. It is the culmination of a
form of literature in which the presence of one text bears witness to the
authority of another; the physical reality of the book impresses upon us
the commemorative value of the text.

This emphasis on writing's value finds expression in the Vulgate,

1. C.E. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.276-78.

2. C.E. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.281-82, gives a
brief catalogue. See also L. Delisle, Le cabinet des manuscrits, I,
18-54 and III, 114-50, and L. Delisle, Recherches sur la librairie

3. 'A Fifteenth-century Copyist and His Patron', p.251.
where the act of writing, and the written, are rich in possibilities. As we saw in Chapter Three, the Cycle is populated by a plurality of writers, scribes and readers; heaven-sent missives, Blase's book, the records of court clerks, all the 'anciens liures' and authoritative dicta have a commemoratory function in the text which makes possible the retrieval of knowledge for future generations. Named scribes, such as 'Walter Map' may intervene between the original 'book of adventures' and the text as presented to the reader. With its sometimes paradoxical declarations of multiple authorship, the Cycle can produce the literary equivalent of two-dimensional drawings of objects it is impossible to construct in three dimensions. One may become unsure of who exactly is writing, and when.\(^1\) Contradictions are resolved in the eternal present of the text itself; 'li contes' directs its own subject-matter, as we shall see more specifically a little later, in a comparison with Malory.

But later prose narratives, such as the Prose Tristan and Guiron le Courtois, streamline this concept of multiple authorities and sources for the written, in order to establish for the book a clearer genealogy, which complements the interest in the lineage of those heroes whose adventures the book describes. To this end, prologues and epilogues detail the relation of the romance in which they appear, to other texts; the reader is referred to a body of generically similar literature as a frame for the work he/she is actually reading.

Gonnot punctuates his own Arthuriad with prologues and epilogues, some drawn from older texts in the Arthurian corpus, others stating themes

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1. Alexandre Leupin, 'Qui Parle? Narrateurs et scripteurs dans la 'Vulgate Arthuriennes', Digraphe, 20 (1979), 81-109, notes, for example, the paradox of having Nascien from Arthur's court named in Merlin as author of the Estoire del Saint Graal (p.94). Leupin takes a deconstructionalist view of the way so many writers are named in the Cycle (p.109), but the plethora of authors may equally be seen as claiming a status for each part of the Cycle, while ultimately the final authority is seen to rest with the 'contes' itself.
important to this particular compilation. B.N. 112's initial prologue has been lost along with the first volume of text. The four remaining prologues (reproduced in the appendix to this chapter) preface, at II, fol. 1a-c, material pertaining, among other things, to Lancelot and Tristan's early years; at III, fol. 1a-b, the section of the *Lancelot* known as the 'Conte de la Charette', and more adventures from the Prose *Lancelot*, *Tristan*, and a version of *Palamède*: at IV, fol. 1a-c, Gonnot's version of the *Queste del Saint Graal*; and at IV, fol. 182a-b, *La Mort le Roi Artu*. A brief survey of concerns in prologues attached to contemporary and anterior Arthurian texts will reveal to what extent B.N. 112's prologues signal allegiance to a tradition, and direct attention to new emphases on the material.

Robert de Boron, in his *Joseph d'Arimathie*, gives authoritative weight to his work by disclosing his source to be a 'livre...Qu'en numme le Graal', written by 'granz clers'.1 A little later, the Vulgate Cycle adopts his name as an authorising device.2 Although, as Claude Roussel has argued, the *Estoire del Saint Graal* has a neo-Platonist bias (the text we have is an imperfect copy of that written by Christ),3 other

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2. In the *Estoire*, p.280, his name is invoked to validate a statement about Pierre's career: 'Car messires robers de borron qui ceste estoire translata de latin en franchois & la uraie estoire le tesmoigne car sans faille chis le translata', and at p.296, when Merlin is to be introduced; 'Et commencer messires robers en tel maniere...'. See also mentions in MSS British Library Additional 32 125, and B.N. f.fr. 747, quoted in *Merlin*, p.20, p.86, and p.88.


    Dieu n'est écrivain que par métaphore et le filtre des lectures qui s'interposent entre le modèle et ses dérivés justifie par avance et la pureté des intentions divines et les compromissions de l'écriture.

But this reading ignores the final autonomy of the written, and how the multiplicity of readers and writers in the Vulgate explores the potential of the written.
books in the Cycle celebrate the human intervention that makes possible
the existence of the text as commemorative instrument. The story of the
Grail quest, we are told, is taken from an accurate record of human
experience; the end of the Vulgate Queste tells how

le roy fist venir les clers qui mettoient en escript
les aventures du saint graal telles comme on les
auoit veues et furent mises en escript et gardees en
labbaye de salebieres dont maistre gaultiers map
traist a faire son livre du saint graal pour lamour
du roy henry son seigneur qui fist listoire translater
de latin en francois

(B.N. f.fr. 116, fol. 673b).

Arthur has asked for an account, which is, thanks to later patronage and
literary skill, made newly-available to the reader.

Writers of prologues to other prose narratives use this idea of
literary renewal through human intermediaries to trace a line of descent
for their own works. While the tradition of mentioning an ancient (most
often non-vernacular) source to valorise the work is maintained (in the
prologue to the Prose Tristan, for example), named authors such as
'Luces de Gast' and 'Helye de Boron' make the tale accessible in the
present to royal patrons and all those who wish to find 'solace and
delight' in literature. In the epilogue to the Prose Tristan, 'Helye

1. Le Roman de Tristan, edited by Renée Curtis, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1985),
I, 39-40. We are referred to 'le grant livre de latin, celui qui
devise apertement l'estoire del Saint Graal' (p.39). This manuscript
prologue corresponds closely to that printed by E. Løseth, Le Roman
en prose de Tristan: le roman de Palamède et la compilation de
Rusticien de Pise (Paris, 1890, reprinted Geneva, 1974), pp.3-4, from
the Tristan MSS in the B.N. Future references to this 'analyse
critique' are to 'Løseth', by page number.

2. See for example the epilogue to the Prose Tristan in MS B.N. f.fr. 104,
transcribed by A.P. Paris, Les manuscrits français de la Bibliothèque
du Roi, leur histoire et celle des textes allemands, anglais, hollandais,
italiens, espagnols de la même collection, 7 vols (Paris, 1836-48),
I, 137-40. The MS is listed as 'No. 6776, Fonds Colbert anc. No.
2996'. This passage has the author declare he has included 'Biaus
dis et plaisans et delitaubles' in his work, 'por les gentix homes /
soulacier et deduire' (pp.137-38), and he says his patron is 'li rois
qui est ores sires de cestui país' (p.139).
de Boron' both declares he has finished the work begun by Luces de Gast, and promises us a new book which will complement those by 'Gautier Maup' and 'mon seignour Robert de Berron qui est mes amis et mes parens charnex'. The prologue to the Palamède claims it to be that encyclopaedic work.

Jehan Vaillant adapts this latter prologue to introduce the main part of his own late fourteenth-century compilation, Guiron le Courtois, which survives in a late fifteenth-century copy, MSS B.N. f.fr. 358-63. (The prologue itself is in MS B.N. f.fr. 359, fol. 1a-c). Here, 'Helye' names Henry of England ('Walter Map''s patron) as the king who commissioned his 'riche ouurage', promises to supply gaps in extant accounts of the Arthurian world, and, as a recommendation of his own worth, mentions his connection with 'Robert de Boron': 'compaignons darmes fumes longuement' (fol. 1d).

'Helye' announces that his material will be exemplary, concerning those 'dont je scay la vye les grans merueilles et les fais quilz furent en lancien temps' (fol. 3a). As courtoisie is his main theme, 'Helye''s central character will be Guiron le Courtois who exemplifies this virtue.

1. Reciprocally, the Suite du Merlin 'author', 'Robert de Boron', invites 'mon signeur Helye, qui a esté mes compains a armes', to supplement his own writings with the 'conte del brait' (II, 57-58). See also II, 198, where there is mention of 'la branke meesmes del brait... dont maistre Helies fait son livre'. References to this 'Brait' are vague (see Pickford, L'Evolution du roman arthurien, pp.66-77), but in real terms may signal the use of material from a source other than the copyist's main text. In MS B.N. f.fr. 343, for example, the interpolation of the account of the Beste Glatissant's death in what is otherwise a copy of the Queste del Saint Graal is said to belong to the 'contes del brait' (fol. 101a).


3. The author is insistent on this point, MS B.N. f.fr. 359, fol. 3b-c:

   Autre proposement je nay fors a parler de courtoisie
   Et...Il seroit bien raison...que de guiron le courtois
   (encommencasse ma matiere) pour ce que si courtois
   chevalier ne fut au temps du roy artus...
and whose career intersects Arthurian history. This text is typical of later medieval French re-workings of Arthurian material; by building a narrative around an exemplary minor character, the author can claim to fill a gap in Arthurian chronology, and emphasise the importance of an aspect of chivalry. In B.N. 112, Gonnot, though he does not use new material, similarly invokes bonne chevalerie as the co-ordinating factor of the compilation, and the central theme of his work.

These prose authors thus declare themselves to be engaged in a process of commemoration and completion; their activity is made legitimate by the genealogy they establish for themselves (in the case of 'Helye', for example), and for their texts. The reference to a Latin source, originally used to authenticate the vernacular, comes to indicate the existence of a seemingly inexhaustible stock of material on which an author (with the right credentials) can draw. The references to other authors create a sense of continuity and homogeneity for the romances, while maintaining their links with a literary past. The prologues also demand that the reader identify with the sentiments expressed¹ and appreciate the seriousness of the form, while delighting in a narrative well-told.² Thus the authors use prologues to pinpoint the concerns and define the boundaries of their literature.

In Gonnot's B.N. 112, the prologues keep faith very obviously with this account of a part-created, part-real literary precedence, while specifying the compiler's particular intentions. It is logical, given

1. In the Prose Tristan edited by Renée Curtis, for example, 'Luces de Gast' intimates in the prologue that, as 'chevaliers amoreus et envoisiez' (I, 39), he is well-suited to tell the tale of Tristan. Later, at the point in the narrative where Tristan's birth is recounted, a contract of courtois sentiment is established between reader and author with the latter's appeal to 'tuit gentil home qui aiment por amors' (Le Roman de Tristan, I, 126).

2. 'Helye' promises us, in the prologue to the Palamède/Guiron le Courtois, as in the epilogue to Tristan, 'des dis plaisans et delictables'.
the tradition, that the rubric to the second volume of the compilation should accredit the book to 'Robert de borron', and name Henry as his patron, as it is that the last lines of volume III, fol. 301b, should declare 'helye de bourron' the author, and that the 'Walter Map' epilogues to the Queste del Saint Graal (IV, fol. 182a), and to La Mort le Roi Artu (IV, fol. 233a) should be retained. In the prologue proper, the author emphasises the need to accomplish the task in hand, and presents himself as worthy of the enterprise. Evidently the importance of bonne chevalerie is to be established through the actions of its exponents, the good knights Lancelot and Tristan, the compilation's principal protagonists. But this prologue stresses the book's origins, and the genealogy of its two main heroes; good lineage guarantees good knighthood, as the book continually illustrates. The text's own ancestry assures us of its truth.

The prologue to Book III (also original to B.N. 112) places greater emphasis on the definition through action of the 'bon chevalier'. In this section the compiler links his own enterprise with that of the knight; 'les grans faitz darmes' are to be chronicled because not to do so would be reprehensible on the author's part:

Lancelot...fist de plus granz faitz doresennauant que fait nauoit en toute sa vie et trop seraye mauvais de le laisser.

(III, fol. 1a)

Lancelot himself is praised for the 'grans cheualeries quil mena afin' (III, fol. 1b). The language used by the compiler here is the same as that used by Galahad when he determines to follow the Beste Glatissant:

'Or seroye je mauvais si je jamais laissoye ceste chasce a mon pouuoir deuant que je leusse menee affin'.

(IV, fol. 147a)

We find this image of the compiler engaged, like the knight errant, on completing what he has begun, finishing his quest, throughout B.N. 112.
What does the prologue to the fourth section of B.N. 112 tell us of the position the *Queste del Saint Graal* material will occupy in the compilation? Douglas Kelly believes not only that the *Queste* has a central role in the Vulgate, correcting our perceptions of the rest of the Cycle, but that the Grail, itself ultimately ineffable, is responsible for the proliferation of the French Arthurian prose narratives, 'l'origine et la source romanesque des aventures de Logres' ('L'Invention', p.135). I would argue, however, that the Vulgate itself synthesises then extant traditions concerning the Matter of Britain, and that the later prose romances owe more to the Vulgate Cycle's narrative richness than to the co-ordinating and cohesive capacities of the Grail. Although the *Queste* may claim spiritual pre-eminence in the Vulgate, the Cycle creates space for later French authors primarily by its use of historical time, which serves as an ordering device within which biographies of individual knights may be multiplied (as is the case with such as Palamède, Guiron, or Tristan). In B.N. 112, as the prologue at IV, 1a-c intimates, the attainment of the Grail is another adventure within the general context of bonne chevalerie.

The Vulgate's eschatology requires that a balance be maintained between events in historical time, and their intersection and completion by spiritual claims. But each constituent element of the Cycle, as we have seen in Chapter Three, in the case of *Merlin*, makes a bid for consideration on its own terms, and aspects of the historical schema may be accorded an authority independent of its possible associations with

1. Le graal finit par révéler comme caducs l'amour et la prouesse traditionnels dans le roman arthurien. L'échec de la haute quéte du graal et l'autodestruction de la chevalerie de la Table Ronde sur les plaines de Salesbierres en sont la preuve définitive.

the Grail material. This is not to suggest that later authors and compilers deliberately devalue or suppress the Queste, but that various parts of the Vulgate can potentially be extrapolated and given their own narrative development. Furthermore, prose romances, such as the Tristan, may try to maintain a simultaneous focus on the earthly and the heavenly, respecting every part of the tradition the Vulgate engenders. In this impulse towards compendiousness, the Queste may emerge as one source among many, even as an account of the Grail, rather than as a privileged text.¹

In B.N. 112, the conscientious compiler reproduces the Vulgate Queste in full,² interwoven with a large amount of material from other versions. We are given the 'whole book' of the Grail story as far as it can be retrieved from written sources. But the compilation's comprehensiveness extends in this section to narrative elements (such as parts of the Prose Tristan)³ that have a value outside the Grail's concerns. I do not want to claim that as a result the Grail story loses its importance, but that when it is set in the context of other events, the Grail quest, regarded as another means for a knight to attain 'perfection', becomes conflated

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1. Malory appears unusual among later authors treating of the Grail, in using only the Vulgate version for his Book of the Sankgreal. In doing so, he explicitly respects the Queste del Saint Graal's integrity as 'A TALE CRONYCED FOR ONE OF THE TREWYST AND OF THE HOLYEST THAT YS IN THYS WORLDE' (Works, II, 1037; 9-11). Fanni Bogdanow lists some twenty-six MSS that intercalate material from different versions of the Grail story - found in the Tristan and Post-Vulgate Questes as well as the Vulgate Queste. See The Romance of the Grail: A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-century Arthurian Prose Romance (Manchester, 1966), pp. 273-86. These later romances do not use the Grail alone as a base for the proliferation of adventures.

2. See Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.80-85.

3. Pickford's résumé of the action in B.N. 112 IV, fols 1-182, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.312-19, details the sources for the different episodes in the narrative.
with the values of bonne chevalerie. In the prologue to the Grail section (IV, fol. 1a-c), the author calls on Divine inspiration to help him in his task, but he also defers to those 'bons et vrais hystoriens' who have superior knowledge of his subject. How is the mixed nature of Gonnot's compilation to be differentiated from the Vulgate's diverse treatment of its material?

B.N. 112 might appear to do little more than expand the list of Arthurian knights' adventures, while maintaining the structure of the Cycle. The evidence suggests that the work began with material from the Estoire, and it ends with a text of the Vulgate Mort. But although Gonnot might observe the Vulgate's outward form, his text does not follow its thematic divisions. Read as a whole, the Vulgate has precise eschatological and historiographical frames of reference. In isolation, its component parts suggest different modes of interpretation. We are both directed to a reading, and made aware of other readings.

B.N. 112 does not offer these viewpoints as distinctly as the Vulgate, but owes its nature to the tendency to view any written account as part of the authoritative canon on the Matter of Britain. As a harvesting of romance texts, it seeks to present everything on the same plane, and while different perspectives may be given space, we are continually brought back to bonne chevalerie as the central reference-point. B.N. 112 is concerned with completeness, with the 'fulfilment' both of adventures, and the book recounting them, and through multiplicity

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1. The concluding lines of the compilation (apart from the post-script by Gonnot) are also taken from the Mort (IV, fol. 233a, reproduced in the appendix to this chapter). Compare with La Mort le Roi Artu, p.263:

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\text{Si se test ore atant mestre Gautiers Map de l'Estoire de Lancelot, car bien a tout mené a fin selonc les choses qui en avindrent, et fenist ci son livre si outreement que après ce n'en porroit nus riens conter qui n'en mentist de toutes choses.}
\]
it affirms what is already known. The more narrative extolling chevalerie, the greater the concept's cumulative force. The more adventures recounted, the greater the authority of the book. And within this scheme, an individual knight's valour may to some degree be measured by the amount of narrative space accorded his deeds.

While 'worship' in Malory emerges as heuristic rather than stable, determined and constrained by immediate social and personal exigency, in B.N. 112, bonne chevalerie is more of a fixed point, and the heroes exist to exemplify it. Gonnot shows chevalerie to be self-redemptive, self-validating and self-perpetuating. Arthurian society is able to accommodate a certain amount of surface diversity, but its members remain bound by a common ethic. This is evident in the tale of an individual knight such as Brunor, who features mainly in Book II, fols 179a-83d: the great tournament at Sorelois, recounted in detail after the Brunor story (II, fols 183d-97d) celebrates chevalerie on a larger and more public scale.

Brunor is part of the history of normative chivalry against which the achievement of other knights may be measured. He is one of those whose exploits so delight Lancelot when a vavasour with whom he is lodging tells him of the 'grandes cheualeries' of Uther's time: 'si est Lancelot moult attentif a oýr les paroles du preudomme' (III, fol. 110b). When, soon after, Lancelot fights Tristan at the Perron Merlin, Brunor is again invoked as a standard of excellence (III, fol. 112b).

1. This enumeration of chivalric deeds appears unique to B.N. 112 (see Pickford's synopsis of the action, L'Évolution du roman arthurienn, p.306) though the Guiron Bogdanow has examined ('Part III of the Turin Version', pp.50-51) has an analogue in that Lancelot is given a book by Licanor which lists deeds of knights (including Brunor).

2. For the battle between Brunor and Danain le Roux and that between Meliadus and Arelant de Sansonne, invoked by the onlooker Mangy at this point, see Löseth, pp.446, 444.
chevalerie is thus kept in memory\textsuperscript{1} and his status as worthy of emulation is further vindicated by his son, Brunor la Cotte Mal Taillée.

The story of Brunor's insanity while held captive by his enemy, his release, rehabilitation into Arthurian society, and death at the hands of traitors, is found in only one other manuscript, the Turin version of Guiron le Courtois.\textsuperscript{2} The imprisoned Brunor goes mad because he is divorced from the chivalric world. The tale stresses that in his wretched state he is unrecognisable, 'si machie et si deffait et si descoloure quil nestoit homme qui leust veu par avant qui jamais leust recogneu' (II, fol. 179a). That loss of identity is figured by appearance shows how value is imaged primarily in surface detail. Brunor retains a residual instinct for combat, but has lost his sense of discrimination: 'Car il aloit batans gens et bestes et tout quant quil trouvoit deuant soy' (II, fol. 179a).

When he is finally released, Brunor, in the home of a compassionate vavasour, is restored to his former appearance, but the trigger to his regaining his reason is contact with the Arthurian world; Baucillas, erstwhile physician to Uther and Arthur, asks the madman if he has ever been to court:

Quand le cheualier oit parler de la table ronde si commenca a crier Sire chevalier a jouster vous convient Si commença a penser moult fort.

(II, fol. 180d)

A week after this sudden access of lucidity, Brunor has recovered his wits, and with them, his sense of shame. The chance phrase he

\textsuperscript{1} Brunor's death at the hands of traitors (II, fols 182d-183d) is recalled, and serves as a contrast to Marc's ignominious behaviour when he meets his death (IV, fols 162b-163a). Both kings are attacked while out hunting (Marc by the sons of Dynas, whom he has wrongfully killed). But while Brunor defends himself bravely, Marc is too cowardly to fight, and is left in the forest to be devoured by wild animals.

\textsuperscript{2} See F. Bogdanow, 'Part III of the Turin Version', p.58.
recalls on hearing Arthur's name evokes a whole order, within which the
means of self-definition through action are precisely mapped out. If
Brunor remembers his own name - "je suis cellu quon souloit appeller le
bon cheualier sans paour" (II, fol. 180b) - others must identify him by
his actions (the doctor, notably, does not know who he is). He thus
sets out with new armour and the green colours of an untried knight,
to reassert his status, and reclaim his land, in a series of jousts,
tourneys, and 'de moult belles cheualeries et de grans proesses' (II,
fol. 181b).

Only when Brunor has fully recovered his identity are we given a
detailed portrait of the hero, a handsome man in late middle age who
conforms to the physical type of the Good Knight, in that he is a
combination of the 'courtois' and the 'fors':

la bouche (avoit) petite et rougete et belle a
merueilles les espaules droictes et larges les bras
longs et gros...

(II, fol. 182b)

Brunor's character is serious and single-minded. His worth resides
principally in his ability to fulfil all expectations of him, as a knight
('il prenoit son auenture la ou il la pouoit trouuer') and as king,
Estrangorre being Arthur's gift to him as reward for his good knighthood:

non mye quil ne suiuit tousiours les armes comme
chevalier errant doit faire et ...Tant de merueilles
fist en son temps que tout le siecle en parlera a
tous iours mais

(II, fol. 182c)

Brunor the younger is of similarly fine appearance:

il fu...si auenant de toutes choses et si bien taillie
de tous membres que nul de son aage ne pouoit mieulx
estre Et (estoit) adroit et cortoiz.

(II, fol. 182b)

Difference in physical features here makes for superficial variation
without distracting attention from the general impression of good
knighthood. In presenting characters as types of good knights, the compilation effects in narrative terms the interest in setting knights in a definable hierarchy while apportioning to each a specific surface value, which we find in a text such as the *Devise des Armes des Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*. This is a 'directory' of Round Table knights which claims to draw on a comprehensive and authoritative body of Arthurian literature for its details of heroes' physical aspects, characteristics, and heraldic devices.¹ The implication in B.N. 112, which we find explicit in the *Devise*, is that a quantifiable knighthliness, described according to certain terms, can be given a value even when removed from the narrative context (although, as the *Devise* makes clear, mention of that context is essential to the authentication of this list of Good Knights).

If Brunor the elder is representative of bonne chevalerie, his family shows something of the diversity among knights; his son Brunor shares his name and (as is recounted in Book III) determines to avenge his father's death. But Brunor is also father to Dinadan, to whose career he reacts with a mixture of incredulity and displeasure. When he learns that Dinadan has been made one of the Round Table knights, he is overjoyed, 'liez amerueilles' (II, fol. 181b), but while Brunor is his pride and joy, 'toute sa joye et son soulaz', his response to Dinadan is somewhat different: 'moult estoit corrousse de dinadan son autre filz quil nen pouoit oir nouuelles' (II, fol. 182c). In the Prose *Tristan* (especially in the version of B.N. f.fr. 24400 which contains the account

¹. The *Devise* claims it has culled the descriptions from all the best authorities - 'maistre robert de bourrons...maistre helyes son frere ...et messire luces du glat et tous ceulx cy qui en ont parle selon la vraie hystoyre' (MS B.N. f.fr. 12597, fol. lv). Galahad's status is highest, 'le meilleur chevalier du monde' (fol. 20v), as one who brings to perfection earthly chivalry while being spiritually exalted: 'Si/ sainct estoit en tous ses faictz que les anges parloient souuent a luy et feist moult de miracles en son viuant' (fols 19v-20r).
of his death) Dinadan is, I have argued (pp. 213-21), the voice of a certain mesure. Here, Brunor's reaction suggests he regards his son as anti-chivalric, and some of Dinadan's pronouncements might certainly be taken as such:

'Or puis je bien dire que oncque ne vy je plus folle gent que sont les chevaliers errans du royaume de Logres, qui tous les jours se vont battant et occiant pour neant, et pour neant sont repaisés.'

(III, fol. 121d)

But does Brunor object to his son's scorn, or to the fact that his anti-conformist tendency manifests itself frequently in the substitution of verbal play for physical encounter, and thereby suggests an alternative means of self-definition?

Placing the Brunor story immediately prior to the account of the pageantry of the Sorelois tournament re-enforces the compilation's thesis that the individual chevalier's worship is the strength of the Arthurian world, while the composition of the Brunor family reflects the sense of inclusiveness in the compilation as a whole. The tournament itself testifies to how that diversity is part of rather than threatening to the system. The account of the tournament (II, fols 183d-97d) is framed by the tales of Brunor and of Alixandre l'Orphelin, episodes linked together by a similarity of motif; Brunor's son, le Chevalier a la Cotte Mal Taillee, and Alixandre both intend to avenge their fathers'

1. The transcription is Pickford's, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, p.51.

2. The Brunor story in fact interrupts the description of the Sorelois tournament, which begins at II, fol. 178d:

...les tornoiz de Sorelois...furent bien les plus grans qui eussent jamais este en la grant breaigne...Mais auant vous vueil compter un pou dune autre matiere Cest comment le bon chevalier sans paour saillit du val de seruage...

Only at fol. 183d does the author return to his primary subject-matter, with a rubric announcing 'Comment le hault prince galehault et messire Lanceolot du lac entreprendrent le tournoyement qui fut fait en Sorelois...'
deaths. It might seem that Gonnot is here (and later, with the adventures of La Cotte) aiming for an effect similar to that in the Book of Sir Tristram, where the tales of La Cote (Works, II, 455-76) and of Alexander (II, 629-49) invite comparison.¹

In Malory's version, however, the two young heroes' adventures are set in the context of the Round Table operating as protectorate, and a discussion of how it may be seen as a locus of honour - that Alexander 'had never grace ne fortune to come to kynge Arturs courte' (Works, II, 648; 11-12), possibly to the detriment of his knighthood, is especially remarked upon by Malory. In B.N. 112, the accounts of Brunor le Bon Chevalier and of Alixandre are part of an exposition of knighthood at a time when the main locus of chevalerie has been displaced, for Arthur has fallen victim to the false Guinevere, and repudiated his legitimate wife. As the rubric explains (and this reason is unique to 112), Galehault and Lancelot organise the tournament at Sorelois, 'pour conforter la royne genieure qui estoit auecques eulx qui estoit moult merrie de ce que le roy artus son mary lauoit laissee' (II, fol. 183d). The chevalerie located in the individual is not diminished when Arthur temporarily forfeits the integrity of his court.

The tournament at Sorelois is a paradigm of the chivalric world portrayed in B.N. 112, and like other tournaments in the compilation it has a prominent place in the manuscript's iconography.² The rubrics and

1. Malory also makes an explicit connection between Alexander and Tristram (Works, II, 648; 8-10): '...this false kyng Marko slew bothe sir Trtyram and sir Alysaundir falsely and felonlys.' In B.N. 112, Alixandre is killed by Hélin le Roux. See Pickford's précis, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, p.303.

2. Pickford describes this aspect of the manuscript, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.14-16. Of the four large illustrations in Book II, two represent tournaments (the Château de la Lande (fol. 76r), and Sorelois, (fol. 184r)). One shows the war between Arthur's forces and the Saxons and Irish (fol. 151r) and one the fight between Lancelot and the Bon Chevalier de Norgales (207r). Book III is scarcely illuminated, but the blanks left for the artist indicate that all the large pictures would have been scenes of combat. In Book IV, the apparition of the Grail (fol. 5r) the birth of the Beste Glatissant (fol. 152r) and the introduction to the Mort section (fol. 182r) are the only subjects of the ten large miniatures that are not war or fight scenes.
the miniatures, together with the splendid illustration of the tournament which covers a third of II, fol. 184a-b, stress the fact that significance is located primarily in action. The knights are shown to operate within a well-defined code, in which hierarchies of prowess are established and acknowledged, and love of chevalerie is a powerful motivating force.¹

At the same time, Galehault, presiding over the jousts, ensures that a degree of mesure is maintained, and conflicts are quickly resolved or overcome.² B.N. 112 is unique in detailing fully every day of the tournament in sequence.³ Each day celebrates a hero's achievements, and reveals another dimension of the chivalric ethic, while Dinadan's verbal agon within the confines of the banqueting-hall, and on the field, confirms his own special control, rather than challenges the status quo.

The adventures of Lamorat and of Palamède at the tournament are significant for what they reveal of the complexion of Arthurian society and how it functions. Lamorat's case highlights the nature of relations existing between good knights. In the course of the second day, Lamorat is taken prisoner by Lancelot (II, fol. 185c), and he feels himself so

1. Typically, Dinadan's motive is presented as more frivolous; on the third day of the tournament, he decides to fight Galehault 'pour ce quil se pensoit que sil le pouoit mectre a oultrance quil len gaberoit menu et souuent' (II, fol. 187a).

2. Meleagant's treachery in attempting to attack the disguised Lancelot out of turn, for example, (II, fol. 184c) is quickly frustrated by the intervention of others (although of course his disloyalty surfaces again in the 'Conte de la Charette' episode which opens Book III).

3. The account of Sorelois derives ultimately from the Prophécies de Merlin. H.O. Sommer prints the version of the tournament as it appears in the MS British Library Additional 25434, a late thirteenth-century manuscript of the Prophécies de Merlin, in his edition, Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory, 3 vols (London, 1889-91), III, 313-33. The account of the tournament in this version is interrupted after the fourth day by one of Perceval's adventures (88d-91b). The events of the second day appear only in B.N. 112. The version Sommer prints (although the Additional MS is supplemented by an account in MS B.L. Harley 1629) is incomplete. Løsseth gives a summary of the tournament as it appears in the B.N. 99 Prose Tristan, pp.195-201.
severely compromised ('Car onques ce ne luy advint', II, fol. 185c) that he declares he will not fight any more. As he tells Lancelot:

'si preudomme que vous estes ne sauroit que dire Maiz en quelque lieu que vous soyes Il est force que votre courtoisie se moustre. Mais bien vous dy que jamais ne me trouueray contre vous que je vous cognoisse Et si ne porteray dun an armes' 1

(II, fol. 186a)

The problem of restoring Lamorat's self-respect is solved by an appeal to his sense of fellowship, made by Guinevere, who is adept at forms of courtesy, and by Galehault and Dinadan, as well as by Lancelot:

Si prirent...tant lamorat quil fut contens de porter armes et sacollarent et baisARENT lamorat et lancelot en signe de plus grant amour que deuant.

(II, fol. 186a)

This sentimental solution to a technical problem demonstrates how claims to fellow-feeling temper strict justice; as we shall see later, in the contention between Lancelot and Tristan, a reliance on the emotional is at once the great strength and the weakness of the Round Table.

Palamède's role at Sorelois further demonstrates knighthood's diversity. His Paganism gives him a superficial exoticism, but his 'faiz darmes' - most importantly his defeat in this episode of Corsabrin le Payen (II, fol. 195a)2 - align him with Christianity. At this

1. Lamorat's avowal is not just an expression of peevishness. He could legally be banned from carrying arms for a year. Compare the case of two knights in the tale of Alixandre that follows, who explain to Morgana that they may not bear arms because they have been defeated in a tournament (Alixandre l'Orphelin: A Prose Tale of the Fifteenth Century, edited by C.E. Pickford (Manchester, 1951), p.13). (The regulations for the conduct of 'Arthurian' tournaments as transcribed by E. Sandoz, 'Tourneys in the Arthurian Tradition', Speculum, 19 (1944), 389-420, makes no mention of penalties incurred by the defeated, except to say that a knight taken prisoner must ask his captor's permission before he may return to the field.)

2. In his shame, Corsabrin kills himself:

Et -i- diable emporta lame par deuant tous de la place non pas quilz veissent le diable ne lame de lui Maiz ilz virent vne si grant fumeey noyre et puant que bien leur fut aduis que ce fussent deables qui emportassent lame du corps corsabrin. (II, fol. 195a)

This image of the unregenerate Pagan provides a graphic contrast to Palamède's condition.
tournament he begins a process of integration with a chivalric system which he sees as closely allied with a Christian code (he refuses to ask for "le saint baptesme" (II, fol. 190c) until he has encountered all the Round Table knights). As we shall see, Palemède ultimately finds both earthly and heavenly perfection through good knighthood.

In Chapter Four I argued that in Malory's version of the Tournament at Surluse, Dynadan disrupts the feasting and tourneying, and his nature is never quite contained by the parameters of his social function. At B.N. 112's Sorelois, where the description of his japing is so much more detailed, the after-dinner exchanges of wit are as much a part of the formal arrangement of the tournament as the jousting itself. At Malory's Surluse, the final trick played by Lancelot on Dynadan, whereby he appears in woman's clothing before the Queen, removes control from the japer and reduces the court to a helpless laughter the quality of which is uncertain. It is difficult to gauge the tone in which Dynadan's final words to Lancelot - "...thou arte so false that I can never beware of the" (Works, II, 670; 4-5) - are delivered.

At Sorelois, Dinadan is not left in an ambivalent position, but deftly reclaims the initiative after having suffered the indignity of a forced transvestism. He returns to the pavilion to find Guinevere, declaring his changed nature matter-of-factly, - "jay este jusques a huy dinadan si pouez veoir que je suis vne dame" (II, fol. 197c) - and continuing to insult his fellow-guests in the same cheerful mood as before (II, fol. 197c-d). For Gonnot, everything has a place in the scheme of things, and Dinadan's role is as strongly and permanently defined as that of the other protagonists. He is fully integrated in a system that admits a plurality of modes of definition.

Where, within this kaleidoscopic vision of chivalry offered by Gonnot do we locate the experience of Tristan in relation to the Lancelot/
Galahad plot? In having two main heroes, Gonnot faces a structural problem only partly resolved by apportioning to each his distinctive register (Tristan as lover, Lancelot as one who is made to see his earthly attachments in the light of higher and universal values).

Malory limits almost exclusively to one Book his use of the Tristram material, and subject-matter concerning the Tristram/Lancelot relationship, and deploys both characters in an exploration of social order and modes of arbitration, both public and private (as we saw in Chapter Four). Thus Malory's use of madness differentiates the two heroes; Tristram's experience belongs to his private world, Lancelot's period of insanity makes him both the object of judgement by others and reveals to him the transcending force of the Grail. When Malory cuts short Tristram's story, he avoids having to 'place' him in relation to Lancelot's later career, but in terms of the Works there is no need for further 'rehearsall' of Tristram's tale, for factual compendiousness is not the English author's aim.

Gonnot, however, seeks both to be comprehensive, and to recount everything on the same plane of chevalerie. This directly affects Tristan and Lancelot's presentation. In the prologue to Book II, (fol. 1a-b), the good knights are (as is the case with other knights) distinguished by their appearance - Lancelot is 'trespreux', Tristan 'tres beau' - but in the matter of bonne chevalerie, Lancelot is quantitatively superior to his fellows. Ultimately it is 'Lancelot's book', 'le liure de messire lancelot du lac' as the rubric in B.N. 112 (II, fol. 1a) has

1. This seems especially pointed by the Prose Tristan's use of lyric (for a discussion of which, see Emanuèle Baumgartner, Le 'Tristan en prose'. Essai d'interprétation d'un roman médiéval (Geneva, 1975), pp.298-328), which is incorporated into Book IV of B.N. 112.
it, because this hero is afforded most narrative space. We need to establish how Tristan and Lancelot, as paragons of secular chivalry, function in relation to each other, and whether the values of the Grail affect our perception of them.

Tristan does not appear in the non-cyclic and cyclic versions of the Prose Lancelot (with one exception, where his case is invoked as an exemplum). The Prose Tristan, meanwhile, based in part on the earlier romance, accords Lancelot a major role; as Emanuèle Baumgartner points out, the relation established between the careers of Tristan and Lancelot is part of the author's strategy to place the Tristan story within the larger framework of Arthurian romance, and to promote its eponymous hero's image. But Gonnot seeks to do more than simply fix Tristan's status, using Lancelot as reference for both narrative and hero. In B.N. 112, he has to give as much space as possible to both heroes, without allowing us to forget Lancelot's pre-eminence.

The extant books of B.N. 112 do not proclaim divergent thematic interests, but Book II's structure differs from that of Book III in that

1. B.N. 112 here follows the practice of manuscripts of the Vulgate; MS B.N. f.fr. 113 begins:
   Cy commence le premier liure de messire lancelot du lac fils au Roy ban de benoic qui fut en son temps le meilleur cheualier du monde fors galaad qui fut son fils. (fol. 1a)

2. In La Mort le Roi Artu, Bohort's reprimand of Guinevere for her treatment of Lancelot invokes Tristan as a contemporary example of a man destroyed by love:
   'Et a nostre tens meïsmes, n'a pas encore cinc anz que Tristans en morut, li niës au roi Marc, qui si loiaument ama Yseut la Blonde que onques en son vivant n'avoit mespris vers lui.' (p.71)

3. E. Baumgartner, Le 'Tristan en prose', p.25: '...l'auteur multiplie les précisions chronologiques et les rappels à des épisodes célèbres du Lancelot en Prose pour établir un parallèle entre...Tristan et... Lancelot, entre le monde encore limité de Tristan et l'univers arthurien.' Baumgartner prints an appendix, pp.130-32, listing allusions made by the Tristan to the Lancelot proper, the Queste, and the Mort le Roi Artu.
the two principal protagonists do not meet. Instead, the details of their early careers are recounted in parallel, which makes each character distinct yet also like his fellow. The Prose Tristan aligns Tristan's early career with that of the Arthurian court, but Book II of B.N. 112 synchronises the early years, and the first adventures of these 'cheualiers de haulte proesse':

Et ce propre jour lancelot quon disoit le cheualier aux blanches armes qui conquist la doloreuse garde messire tristan de lenois le tresbon cheualier octra par force darmes le bon morholt dirlande en lisle sanson en cornoaille...

(II, fol. 65a)

The two are established (both in arms and in respective amours) before their paths cross. Malory, in his treatment of Lancelot and Tristan's madness, points out a central difference between their narrative worlds; in B.N. 112, the heroes' likeness is stressed as a prelude to their being matched as warriors in Book III.

Tristan and Lancelot are both present, and distinguish themselves at, the tournament of the Chateau des Pucelles (III, fols 105d-108a), but their first great encounter is at the Perron Merlin (which takes

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1. The Prose Tristan gives the time of Tristan's victory over Morholt as not long after Arthur's coronation ('Artus n'avoit pas granment de tens qu'il avoit esté coronez', Le Roman de Tristan en Prose, I, 147), and he is in Ireland at the time of Lancelot's knighting (I, 162).

2. The two knights' enfances, for example, are told consecutively, at II, fols 1c-8a, and 8a-9d. Fanni Bogdanow has noted the same parallel recounting of the heroes' early careers in the Turin version of Guiron ('Part III of the Turin Version', pp.49-51), but whether Guiron has the same specificity with regard to chronology is not clear.

3. Compare Malory's treatment of the madness motif with its occurrence in B.N. 112, where the account of Tristan's madness and his being sent into exile is limited to some thirty lines of text (III, fol. 99b-c), and does not invite comparison/contrast with the full account of Lancelot's insanity which is given later (III, fols 240a-254b).
place, if one assumes Book I to have been equal in length to each of
the other volumes, a short space after the mid-point of the compilation),
III, fols 113a-116a. This encounter, both in the source and in B.N.
112, is the spectacular means by which Tristan is integrated into the
company of the Round Table, for after the combat, he accompanies Lancelot
to Arthur's court, where Morholt's empty seat awaits him. Gonnot
presents the fight as the concrete realisation of bonne chevalerie,
thinking on which has so preoccupied Lancelot as he makes his way through
the forest to the Perron Merlin. The passage also shows how, in B.N.
112, a knight's valour may be measured by the amount of prose describing
it.

The fight is recounted in detail, and hyperbolically, as is the
distress of the onlookers. The account repeatedly stresses the unique-
ness of the encounter; 'Si commence la bataille si merueilleuse et si
cruelle que onques pareille nen fut veue' (III, fol. 114a). Anatomisation
conveys the violence of the battle:

Ilz ont si decoppes leurs escus que les couppeaux en
gisent sur lerre vert et a paines leur en est il demeure
quilz en puissent leurs bras couvrir ne soutenir les
grans cops qui de hault a la force des bras ilz
amassent.../...ilz ont ja tant perdu de sang que quatre
hommes en deussent etre mors Et ils nen font semblant
ains que se fussent roses

(III, fol. 114a-b)

At the same time, the onlookers continually invoke earlier fights
as a means of assessing Lancelot and Tristan's meeting. Chevalerie has
a documented history which serves as a ready context for every knightly
deed. Malory's version of the same episode (Works, II, 568-70)
concentrates on the present moment, and conveys the essence of the
encounter by having Governal and Lancelot's man summarise the action,

in the manner of heralds, while evoking the pity of the situation by tersely and vividly observing the blood on the grass, and how the men's 'swerdys (were) overcoverde with bloode of there bodyes'. This stylistic economy runs counter to B.N. 112, where the painstaking reconstruction of every stage in a fight-sequence is both testimony to the worth of what is being described, and to the calibre of the author as historian.

Reconciliation is made possible by the gentilesse of the combatants when, at the high point in the encounter, each knight names himself:

Que vous en diray je Ils ostent leurs heaulmes et sentrebaissent comme ceulx qui moult saimoyent Ilz donnent lonneur de la bataille lun a lautre et se font la greigneur joye quilz onques peuuent.

(III, fol. 115d)

Tristan goes to Arthur's court, where he takes his place at the Round Table. The re-allocation of a vacant place can only add to the company's prestige; 'onques siege ne fut octroyes a cheualier se il ne fut meilleur cheualier de lui qui devant lui y auoit fis' (fol. 116c). As part of his inaugural vow, Tristan promises to increase the Round Table's honour to the best of his ability, and never to fight against any of its members (fol. 116d). The Round Table, it seems, can only go from strength to strength.

In stark contrast to their first meeting, the major encounter between Lancelot and Tristan in Book IV, fols 71d-84d, shows how good will is lost and the serement violated. Yet the episode eventually emphasises the cohesive force of chevalerie and the institution which

1. 'A, lorde Jesu!' seyde Governayle, 'I mervayle gretely of the grete strokis my maystir hath yevyn to youre maystir.' 'Be my hede,' seyde sir Launcelottis servaunte, 'youre maystir hath not yevyn hym so many, but your maystir hath resseyvede so many or more.'

Works, II, 569; 3-7)
lives according to the knightly ethic. The fight between Lancelot and Tristan takes place at a time when the Round Table knights have sworn to engage in the quest for the Holy Grail, and Lancelot has already been made to acknowledge his sinfulness. The whole incident may be read against the higher ideals the Grail inspires, but at the same time, the narrative shows how the contention between Lancelot and Tristan is solved by recourse to purely secular modes of arbitration.

The Kings of Norgalles and of Ireland act legally in calling on their kinsmen for aid in settling a dispute over the ownership of a castle (IV, fol. 71d), but when Tristan and Lancelot, on opposing sides, agree to single combat, they violate their oath. The champions' motives are personal as well as political; they have already shown themselves to be bitter enemies, in a preliminary encounter between Norgalles' and Ireland's forces: 'la grant amour quilz heurent jadis entreulx ii est... tournee en haine mortelle' (IV, fol. 73a).

Preparations for the battle are meticulous (IV, fol. 73a), and its intensity is signalled by the inclusion of verbal agon as well as physical encounter. The notion of verbal contest is incorporated in the description of the dynamics of combat:

1. The Queste material prior to the Tristan-Lancelot encounter in B.N. 112 (IV, 7d-28d) corresponds to La Queste del Saint Graal, pp.1-115.
2. The enmity between the two heroes has arisen primarily from Tristan's suspicion that Lancelot has broken the rules of courtoisie. See Løseth, p.343.
3. The MS closest to B.N. 112 in its extended description of the combat is MS B.N. f.fr. 99 (the Tristan copied by Gonnot in 1463). See Løseth, pp.345-46, for a summary of the action.
4. This is made explicit by the rubric:

Et auoient delibere les deux bons cheualiers chacun de son parti dauoir lonneur de la bataille durant laquelle eurent moult de parolles ensemble en reprenant leurs alaines.

(IV, fol. 71d)
Et quen diroye je trop fiert lun a lautre et trop endure chacun deulx grant merueillez est comment ilz peuvent tant souffrir...il ne leur souuient orendroit se de ferir non et de mailler lun sur lautre tu fiers je fiers tu fiers sur moy et moy sur toy tu ne me va pas epargnant ne je ne tespargneray pas Se tu trais de mon corps le sang je tray de ton corps le sang Se tu me veulx mettre a la mort je y mectray toy tout premierement se onques je puis Tu me veulx oster de lonneur de la haulte renommee ou jay longuement este et pour ce que amoy le veulx faire le veulx je premierement faire a toy...ainsi vont entreulx ii jouant du jeu trop felon et trop dur...ly vngs na pitie de lautre

(IV, fol. 74c)

The idea of the engagement as means of legal arbitration is almost immediately lost sight of as the narrative concentrates on each knight's personal interests. Palamède cursorily draws attention to the new order when he calls Lancelot and Tristan "deux les meilleurs cheualiers que je veisse oncques fors galaad seulement" (IV, fol. 75c). But while those values Galahad embodies may give the reader an unfavourable perspective on the knights' behaviour, Gawain, sent by Arthur to put an end to the confrontation, employs only a conciliatory vocabulary, and appeals to the social sense of honour of those involved, rather than to their Christian sensibilities.

Gawain has recourse to a certain verbal dexterity in calming Lancelot, who has accused him of lack of courtoisie; "ce que jen ay fait je lay fait en bonne entencion et non pas pour faire nul deshonneur a nul de vous ii" (IV, fol. 80a). He has also to impress on the kings the gravity of their transgression:

'Si auez eu peu de regart a lonneur et au bien du roy artus et a cellui de la table ronde de qui ces ii cheualiers sont principaux piliers'.

(IV, fol. 78b)

Arthur arrives shortly after his emissary, shocked that his knights should so violate their oath, and sets up an enquiry, taking as his chief adviser Palamède, who, not yet a Christian nor a Round Table knight, can
be trusted to hold a viewpoint based on the exigencies of bonne chevalerie. Arthur's prime concern is that his best knights may have set a dangerous precedent:

"Et si tous les autres cheualiers de la table ronde qui principalment a vous sattendent et selon voz meurs se rengent les plus pres qu'ilz peuent ainsi le font que voz ii lauies encommence a faire je voy en peu de temps la table ronde perdue qui ne sera pas petit dommage/en ce monde.'

(IV, fols 81d-82a)

If this course of events exposes the Round Table as particularly susceptible to the selfishness of its members, the solution to the problem also shows how every individual ultimately knows himself responsible for the well-being of the community. Lancelot and Tristan cling to their declared principles of 'devoir' and 'honneur' which dictate that an enterprise once undertaken must be brought to completion, but they are finally persuaded to a reconciliation by Arthur's appeal to the allegiance and love they owe him (IV, fol. 84b). Lancelot and Tristan in turn then sue for peace between Arthur and his two subject kings, whose 'maltalent' he finds difficult to forgive. The episode eventually stresses not Tristan and Lancelot's differences, but the cohesive nature of those values they hold in common. In the compilation as a whole, the presentation of Lancelot and Tristan provides a cumulatively powerful exposition of chevalerie.

The incident's aftermath assures us that the chivalric code can regulate and resolve problems engendered when the social means of channelling violence is abused. Set against this are the Grail adventures, exposing failures in individual knights that are symptomatic of secular chivalry's spiritually restricted vision. This double emphasis allows for the tragedy of the final book, the Mort le Roi Artu, to be as much endemic to the human condition, as Gonnot observes in his
introduction - 'selon lordre et cours de nature (la mort) est vne chose dont nul ne peut eschapper' (IV, fol. 1b) - as necessary to its original eschatological intentions. The placing of Lancelot and Tristan's confrontation highlights the contradictoriness of the tradition Gonnot inherits. While the final choice of emphasis is made for us, the wealth of material used suggests other possible readings.

This implicit availability of choice is relevant to the presentation of Tristan in the last volume of B.N. 112, where he is variously shown as adulterer, perfect lover, and one of chivalry's elect. The Grail section includes an episode of Lancelot's experience at the hermitage of the Olivier Vermeil, where he has a vision of Tristan and Iseut, who explain that they must suffer in hell for their sin (IV, fols 97d-100c). But this is counterpointed with an image of Tristan as lover - 'ains amoit (messire tristan) si enterinement que nul chevalier a son temps ne deuant ne apres nayma onques mieulx' (IV, fol. 160b) - and a touching description of Tristan and Iseut's death: 'bras a bras et bouche a bouche morurent les ii amans' (IV, fol. 145b). The last mention of Tristan, some twenty folios before the end of the Grail section (IV, fols 160a-62a), is as 'bon chevalier'. It is a retrospective account of how Tristan won his shield, and it offers an analogy to Galahad's claim of the 'Siege perilleux' in detailing how Tristan acquires the shield Merlin had destined for him: "Ia cest escu ne pendra a col de chevalier juques atant que la fleur de leonnoys le pendra au sien" (fol. 160d).

1. The Olivier Vermeil tale is from a version of the Grail story later than the Queste. See Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp. 102, 108-09. In MS B.N. f.fr. 116, a short account of Tristan's career (including the encounter with Lancelot at the Perron Merlin) is appended to the Vulgate Queste, and concludes with Lancelot's vision at the hermitage of the Olivier Vermeil (fol. 676c). But in the context of B.N. f.fr. 116, Tristan functions primarily as a warning to Lancelot of the consequences of his love of vainglory and his sin, his "fole enprinse de la royne genieure" (fol. 676c).
The portrait of Tristan reflects the treatment of the subject-matter in the compilation at large; a number of perspectives competes for the reader's attention, and makes equal claims on the memory. Gonnot wants his text to be inclusive, complete; he takes into account every detail in the tradition and seeks to gather them into a definitive exposition of bonne chevalerie operative in the chivalric world. In this he differs from Malory, whose tendency is to play with the ways in which different literary structures effect perspectives on the material. Gonnot's concern is with accreting 'factual' detail as a way of authorising his text. Because of his allegiance, both declared and actual, to the literary tradition, and the nature of that tradition, he does not employ the same range of registers as does Malory, but relies on a style ultimately derived from the Vulgate which values, above all, what the Perlesvaus calls 'L'autoritez de l'escriture'.

Respect for the written accounts for the length of B.N. 112; but although we are guided towards a certain reading, the richness of detail inevitably makes demands on the reader to select, in some degree, what he/she finds most significant. Malory does not, in his text, use the prologues that align B.N. 112 with other writings, because he seems more interested generally in this process of reading than in the commemorative value and mutual validation of a certain body of writings. As we have already seen in Chapter Two, it is an awareness of the reader's need to make critical choices when confronted with an almost overwhelming amount of material that informs the structure of the Works.

Larry D. Benson's remarks on B.N. 112's structure, cited at the beginning of this chapter, associate the French text with Malory because

each, on occasion, produces short narrative episodes within the 
compilation, and the assumption is that literary merit may be assessed 
by estimating the incidence of interlace (taken as a sign of old-
 fashionedness) against that of short self-contained units (thought of as 
a healthy indication of modernity). The short tale/interlace opposition 
is ultimately unhelpful, not only because its application blurs the 
distinctions between Malory and Gonnot's styles, but because there is 
little to indicate that to abandon interlace was considered in any way 
avant-garde in the later Middle Ages, and distinguishing between shorter 
and longer tales does not leave us with a very clear impression of how 
these texts might have been read.

The lay-out of manuscripts, conversely, conveys by the use of rubric, 
miniature, and illumination, a sharper picture of what would, for the 
medieval reader, have constituted a significant 'unit' in a narrative. 
Attitudes to how a romance should be divided may, on this evidence, 
change very little between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. 
There is no evidence, for example, that readers felt constrained by an 
obligation to follow a long narrative to its conclusion. They may, like 
Chaucer's Criseyde, halt at the rubric, \(^1\) though the story is not complete. 
The illuminator of B.N. 112, like the illuminator of B.L. Additional 
10292-94, selects central moments in the narrative rather than 
conscientiously reproducing a scene from each story. What structurally 
differentiates B.N. 112 from the Vulgate is not its use of shorter

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1. 'This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede; 
And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde, 
Thorough Edippus his sone, and al that dede; 
And here we stynten at thise lettres rede, 
How the bisshop, as the book kan telle, 
Amphiorax, fil thorugh the grounde to helle.'

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus & Criseyde*, edited by B.A. Windeatt (London, 
narrative units,¹ but the fact that its commemorative style overrides the distinctions in perspective most evident in each of the Vulgate romances when read out of sequence. In anthologising, Gonnot neutralises the contradictoriness of his material, subsumed in the authority of 'li contes' itself. The divisions in the Winchester manuscript, meanwhile, are like the divisions between the main elements of the Vulgate Cycle insofar as they indicate changes in perspective as well as subject-matter, reflected in Malory's more extreme shifts of style.

Gonnot not only produces a definitive Arthuriad in B.N. 112, but he provides it with its own bibliography. He refers the reader to specific texts for more information on the subject-matter.² Judson Boyce Allen overstates his case in arguing that B.N. 112 should be read primarily within the context offered by the books on good government, such as Aegidius Romanus' De Regimine Principum, to be found in Jacques d'Armagnac's library;³ but there is a sense in which Gonnot's work fits well with text-books of knighthood, such as Christine de Pisan's Livre de Faits d'Armes, that emphasise the system behind chivalry. For Gonnot, affirming the written Arthurian prose romance tradition (as he

¹ The tale of the Cat of Lausanne, for example, in the Vulgate Merlin (Merlin, pp.441-44) might be considered as much a 'self-contained' episode as is the tale of Alixandre in B.N. 112.

² In the tale of Brunor, for example, Brunor was 'en son temps...le meilleur chevalier du monde ainsi que la grant histoire de tristan le deuide' (II, fol. 182b), and Brunor the younger, in avenging his father, performs deeds 'ainsi que listoire de messire luce du lac le deuide en son liure' (II, fol. 183c). Fanni Bogdanow, 'Part III of the Turin Version', pp.57-58, traces clear references to Guiron le Courtois. At II, fol. 182c, there is also mention of events 'comme deuide listoire de lancelot'. The compiler, if not being exact in his references, is specific in the kinds of text with which the reader is to align B.N. 112.

does in his prologues and his methodology) is integral to fixing the meaning and value of the chivalry he describes. For Malory, just as the text-books of chivalry would, I think, appear to him as more interesting for what they reveal of systems of thought than for the individual laws they encode,¹ so the idea of the 'French book' as signifying a tradition is more attractive than the enumeration of actual source-texts.

In Chapter Two, I argued for Malory's particular selectivity in respect of the linguistic choices open to him. I will now concentrate on *A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake* to show how the same tendency towards exclusive choice informs Malory's treatment of larger narrative units. One cannot, however, assume that the difference between Gonnot and Malory is the claim to inclusiveness as against exclusiveness.

That the *Works* abbreviate known source-texts rather than expanding them is a commonplace of Malory criticism, from Caxton onwards. Sandra Ness Ihle believes the *Works* - and in particular the *Book of the Sankgreal* - are structured by *abbreviatio* (rather than the *amplificatio* characteristic of the *Vulgate* romances) primarily for reasons of lucidity.² But Geoffrey of Vinsauf's definition of *abbreviatio* does not fully describe the processes operating in the *Works*, which by use of, for example, *occupatio* (which belongs properly to *amplificatio*) signal their own selectivity. Caxton's account of Malory's achievement - a book 'whyche copye syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe

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1. For this reason I find ultimately unsatisfactory the kind of approach to Malory which identifies a 'typology of knighthood' in the *Works* against which event and character may be read; for such a thesis, see Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the 'Morte Darthur'* (Cambridge, 1985) and, for a more cautious appraisal of Malory on the same lines, see T.J. Ray, 'The Book of Knights Erring', *Forum* (Houston), I (1969), 17-23.

and reduced it into Englysshe' (Works, I, cxlv) - echoes the author's own avowal that he drew the material 'breffly...oute of Freynshe' (II, 1037; 8); Malory's textual strategies will show how important it is to be as aware of the unwritten material as of the text before us; his aim here is not that of Gonnot when in B.N. 112 he specifies his sources.

Criticism has already dealt at length with the relationship between Malory's text and its recoverable sources. This section does not aim at duplicating such source-studies (though it will not disregard them), but tries instead to establish what kind of textual reference the reader is meant to understand by the mention of source-texts, and how this modifies one's engagement with the material book to hand. If the authorial interpolations are meant to alert us to a specific strategy, how is the 'subtext' of unspecified sources deployed? Both Malory and his first editor insist on the fact of the English 'copye' owing its existence to other books. We need then to investigate how the phenomenological emphasis on 'the book' colours our reading of the Works, and ask which book we are in fact reading, and how the translator stands in relation to text and reader.

Umberto Eco tells us that in the act of novel-writing he came to realise the extent to which 'books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told'. ¹ Malory insists on a written background to his tales in a way different from the French source-texts. The Vulgate romances validate themselves with reference to themselves alone; later prose romances are shown to 'complete' extant texts in the corpus. B.N. 112 offers us that corpus in essence, while Malory's work emerges more exactly as a gloss on other works, a commentary undertaken by both reader and writer. All these attitudes

depend in part on ideas of books as phenomena. Donald R. Howard's discussion of how Chaucer regards and uses the concept of the book is suggestive in considering how Malory in turn manipulates the image as part of his reading of his sources.

In The Idea of the Canterbury Tales, Howard ascribes to medieval books a 'bookness', by which he signifies their rarity and value as physical objects, and their function of preserving ancient authorities, but they also possess 'voiceness', for 'the book recorded the language of the spoken voice, so that it could be spoken again, "rehearsed".' The book is therefore enduring, permanent, and yet able to yield, in temporal performance, a variety of meanings. To these possible attributes of a book, Howard adds a third, that of 'paperness'; the availability of paper (more so than the invention of the printing-press) cuts the cost of book-production, and makes possible reading as a silent and lonely activity rather than a social one. 'The solitary reader can, more than ever before, select passages, bring his private thoughts to the book, pick thoughts from it, and neglect what he wishes.'

Howard's main aim is to show how The Canterbury Tales exploits all these qualities which the text, as book, possesses, but one can also apply the general observation on books as physical entities to the French

1. D.R. Howard, The Idea of the Canterbury Tales (Berkeley, 1976), p.65. It is interesting in the light of these remarks that the Winchester MS is on paper, while B.N. 112 is on parchment, and that B.N. 112 uses rubrics at regular intervals with a precedent in the way the source-texts are organised, while the Winchester scribes use marginalia in a more random fashion. Although some of their insertions comment conventionally on significant events (at fol. 349v, for example: 'here Galahad was made knyght', or fol. 351v 'how sir Galahad sate in siege Perelous'), the asides on fol. 300v, next to the account of Lonezep ('how sir Trystram had a falle / how sir palomydes had a fal / how sir gareth had a fal / how sir dynadan had a fal') seem to represent a passing interest in the heraldic. While B.N. 112 rubrics direct us to a conventional reading, the Winchester marginalia constitute one individual reading. (See The Winchester Malory, A Facsimile, with an Introduction by N.R. Ker, EETS,Supplementary Series,4 (Oxford, 1976).
texts and to Malory, while not applying Howard's categories too rigidly. Manuscript evidence has shown how obviously attractive was 'bookness' to the duc de Nemours and his circle; the de-luxe copy is a marker of the esteem in which this literature is held, and also adds to its authority. In 'rehearsal', the book itself anticipates the human voice. In the Vulgate Lancelot, as in other French romances, it is the 'story' itself which speaks directly to us, decides what portion of the tale to focus on next, and determines its own organisation: 'Chi dist li contes' is a commonplace mode of introducing subject-matter, as 'che endroit laisse ore li contes' signals a switch in story-line. Thus the French text can appropriate to itself features Howard defines as properly belonging to performance. There is also a degree of overlap in Howard's terms as applied to French romance in that the rubrics and organisation of a large compilation like B.N. 112 encourage the reader to make choices in a way not dissimilar from the kind of reading 'paperness' encourages. The French texts 'direct' the reader partly by incorporating into their very structure attributes associated with oral delivery and the organisation of the written word. This has the effect of 'fixing' the nature of actual 'rehearsal', performance by a human speaker. In Malory, the book does not arrive with the same assurances of stability.

In a later study, D.R. Howard examines the nature of the 'tidings' featuring in the House of Fame, and concludes that Chaucer considers writing as an element of (rather than wholly responsible for) poetic tradition, which is in itself ephemeral:

Chaucer's idea of a literary idea included the recognition that a work of literature is only one of the many things in this world, that it lives in an inner world of ideas and sententiae and memories which alone give duration and authenticity to tidings, and that this inner world too will vanish in the end.1

If Chaucer sees poetic tradition as transitory, the recovery of material dependent on happenstance, in both oral and written contexts, Malory locates the recoverability of his tales firmly within the realm of the written (as the French sources proclaim). While the poet in the House of Fame is at the mercy of arbitrarily-delivered tidings, Malory's author has to admit the problems of book-hunting. The compiler of these romances is both a silent reader, and an audience:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynté of hys dethe harde I never rede...

(Works, III, 1242; 3-5)

Malory is appreciative of both 'bookness' and 'voiceness', but his own text he presents as a 'reading' rather than another authority to add to the corpus, and it is a reading in which the actual reader of the Works is invited explicitly to participate.

Mention of 'the French book' is not a means of claiming for the English work an authority it does not in fact possess; nor does it necessarily signify 'Malory's particular source at the moment of writing';¹ it asks us to keep in mind the existence of an 'original'. Murray J. Evans' work on the Winchester Manuscript shows how an explicit can indicate the end of one of Malory's sources rather than a 'major structural break' in the Works.² This aspect of the manuscript's organisation contributes to the same effect as does talk of the French book; it predicates a treasury of literary resources on which the Works draw, and which is continually in evidence. Reference to the French book signals both the opening and the closure of the account of Lancelot's

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adventures in Malory, to which Vinaver gives the name The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake (I, 249-87), but which the Winchester manuscript does not accord the definite article. We are promised 'many noble talys of Sir launcelot de lake', (fol. 96r), and at the end of the narrative, 'Explicit a noble tale of Sir Launcelot du lake' (fol. 113r); the 'many tales' have been selected and rearranged so as to form one continuous text on paper, but the result is not the definitive tale of Lancelot. Instead, we must view the reading of the text before us as an activity in the present which allows us partial access to the past as encoded in the written word. We have seen how in the French tales, the text 'speaks' for itself; the following mode of changing the subject-matter is typical:

Chi endroit ne parole plus li contes de (Lancelot)...
ains retourne a parler de mon segnor Ywain et de ses aventures qui li avindrent.  

(Lancelot, III, 135)

In Lancelot's tale as re-read and re-told by Malory, it is 'we' who, after having briefly followed another's fortunes, re-direct our attentions to the central hero. The reader/writer collaboration in 'turning' to another aspect of the tale is made a specifically oral exercise:

Now leve we thes knyghtes presoners, and speke we of sir Launcelot de Lake that lyeth undir the appil-tre slepyng.  

(Works, I, 256; 17-18)

Translator and reader together 'rehearse' the text; in our reading we participate in the translator's reading of the un-named source.

Malory's Sir Lancelot justifies its existence and its position in the Works both on grounds of chronological ordering, for Lancelot becomes prominent at court after Arthur's war with Lucius, and because the French source is similarly organised;
So this sir Launcelot encresed so mervaylously in worship and honoure; therefore he is the fyrst knyght that the Freynsh booke makyth mencion of aftir kynge Arthure com frome Rome.

(I, 253; 12-15)

The intention is, however, to read rather than to copy, and the Tale is more about new directions for the material than a direct critical comment on French romance. Modern studies of the Tale tend to assume Malory's purpose to be qualitatively (if very obviously not quantitatively) that of his sources. What attracts most attention is how in this section Lancelot is presented as a morally-upright Good Knight, to what extent Malory reduces the Prose Lancelot (the main source) to its essence, to produce the same text, as it were, in miniature, and the effect of what is said in this Tale for the rest of the Works. In comparative studies there is, paradoxically, a danger of minimising what is original about Malory: his sequence of Lancelot adventures seems to operate according to a concept of time, a mode of character representation, and a kind of narrative organisation very different from the Vulgate or any of the later French compilations, such as B.N. 112. To regard Malory as engaging primarily in a tightening of his source's narrative line obscures his actual achievement.

As has been mentioned above, the Prose Lancelot as text exists in its own time: 'Or dit li contes...ensi comme vous avés oï' (III, 166). The text assumes the reader is a passive recipient of revealed knowledge, rather than engaged actively with the narrative; the narrative itself promises, in marked contrast to Malory, an encyclopaedic inclusiveness with regard to adventures, and has a confident sense of its organisation, as well as its pacing, as it makes clear from the beginning, where we are told the reason for Lancelot's being so called will be revealed later: 'che devisera bien li contes cha avant, car li liex n'i est ore mie ne la raisons, anchois tient li contes sa droite voie...' (Lancelot,
VII, 1). Alexandre Micha thinks the way the Vulgate Lancelot's author enumerates as many events as possible is part of the way the text conveys a sense of the passage of time, for Lancelot has to grow from childhood to full adulthood in the course of the action. It is also important that the audience appreciate Arthurian time in a moral sense. References to Joseph of Arimathea, for example, emphasise the importance of time past for time present, and its implications for time future.

For the Vulgate, 'le temps est nécessaire à la formation et à l'épanouissement de ces héros à l'inégal destin' Micha reminds us ('Sur la Composition', p. 425).

In the Vulgate, complementing this sense of the fulfilment of an individual's role in time, is the deployment of motifs, of 'events which occur in slightly varied forms at random intervals', as defined and pointed out by E.J. Burns. She shows how images of imprisonment, wounding, and deliverance encourage one to make connections across the text, linking events analogously, while at the same time acknowledging cause and effect in the chronological narrative. The accretion of adventures in time valorises the text's concerns; a worthy knight is one who has many adventures. Burns shows how those adventures are significant in the light of others' adventures. Motifs deployed and reiterated, as Burns demonstrates, make for an 'associational web of latent meanings' ('Of Arthurian Bondage', p. 171), against which later instances of similar events may be read. In this way, a locus may come to have both an abstract and a concrete significance. The 'web' also allows us to see how Lancelot as liberator pre-figures Galahad as

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spiritual redeemer.

In the Vulgate then, it might be said that much of the reading is already accomplished for us. The narrative re-tells on behalf of the reader; new meanings are revealed as a wealth of thematic detail accumulates, and the principal connections are made for us. Malory's preoccupations, conversely, are with the non-confirmatory aspect of narrative in his Noble Tale; he seems more concerned with the dispersal of narrative issues than with their mutual endorsement. In the apparent circularity of the Noble Tale one might find an argument to support Vinaver's claim that we have here a reasonably self-contained tale (Works, I, lxxi-ii); Lancelot's honour is emphasised, both, as we have just seen, in the opening sequence (Works, I, 253; 12-13), and in the concluding sentence: 'And so at that tyme sir Launcelot had the grettyste name of ony knyght of the worlde, and moste he was honoured of hyghe and lowe' (Works, I, 287; 24-26). A.E. Hartung's source-study of a Noble Tale notes how carefully Malory detaches each of the episodes he selects from the context of its source.¹ The court itself is the central fixed point around which events in the Tale are structured. Lancelot sets out from court, and returns to it. Everything gravitates towards Arthur's court as a locus of honour (it is where Lancelot gains his reputation), of justice and reparation (Belleus is made knight of the Round Table), of arbitration (Pedyvere is sent to Guinevere for judgement), and of commemoration (Lancelot's valour is recorded at Camelot). Furthermore, the Tale's events do not implicate events in the rest of the Works. This is not endorse Vinaver's proposal that we read the Works as distinct tales, but to suggest Malory is using a homogeneous framework within whose subdivisions diverse perspectives are offered on the subject-matter.

For Malory, while recounting instances of Lancelot's falling victim to, and ultimately overcoming, acts of 'treson other inchaunte ment' that do not link directly with thematic interests later in the Works (the Chapel Perelus episode, for example, is not part of the Grail mystery), implicitly offers us the possibility of choice with regard to how we read the text. The first page refers to an episode for the details of which we have to wait several hundred pages:

\[\text{and so (Lancelot) loved the quene...aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff, and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her frome the fyre thorow his noble chevalry.}\]

(Works, I, 253; 16-19)

Whether one keeps this remark in memory until the tale is told in full, or even, as Lumiansky does, uses the last Books to gloss retrospectively the presentation of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship in this early tale,\(^1\) seems to be part of the range of meanings offered by the narrative at this point, but not insisted upon. In the Noble Tale itself there is a glance-back to past event, in the mention of Tintagyll's history (I, 272; 26-29) which is both intelligible in itself and calls to mind, for the reader, the opening Book in the compilation.

There is thus intimated an 'openness' in terms of meaning and reference, an openness endorsed by the narrative's structuring. A series of tableaux is presented illustrative of Lancelot's ability. The episodes originate in Vulgate accounts of Tarquyn's excesses against the Round Table knights, of Morgana's capture of Lancelot, of the resourcefulness of Bagdemagus' daughter and of how Lancelot participates in a tournament at her request, and of Lancelot's generosity towards Kay. The Chapel Perelus episode, and the rescue of Meliot, are adapted from

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the Perlesvaus. There is a pleasing symmetry in having Lancelot, once a prisoner himself, release from captivity the knights-prisoner of Tarquyn's castle, and the gentlewomen of Tintagyll. The defeat of Perys show Lancelot to be a universal champion, as the damsel of the white palfrey observes,

''for lyke as Terquyn wacched to dystresse good knyghtes, so dud this knyght attende to destroy and dystresse ladyes, damesels, and jantyllwomen'.

(I, 270; 9-12)

Vinaver's praise for the Tale as having 'a beginning, a middle, and an end' as a piece of 'continuous narrative' (I, lxxi-ii) nevertheless fails to describe adequately what is going on. With regard to the hero himself, Malory seems less intent on giving us an insight into Lancelot's behaviour (though the last two episodes in the Tale are certainly important for what they reveal about Lancelot-as-knight and his powers of arbitration) than a sequence of readings of Lancelot - by the hero himself as well as by other characters. Lancelot is to a large extent the subject of his Tale by virtue of being the object of others' interest.

The spatial and temporal co-ordinates for the Tale are roughly sketched; Lancelot departs from court to seek adventures in 'many stronge contreyes' (I, 272; 34), and, in accordance with the Round Table oath, has to be back at court for Pentecost. Within this schema, the narrative is directed, not primarily by Lancelot's volition, but by others' perception of his function or value. Tarquyn interprets Lancelot as enemy, and acts uniquely on the grounds of his hatred. For the damsel of the white palfrey, and for Bagdemagus' daughter, Lancelot is a means to redressing wrong and recovering honour. If Guinevere is

1. Larry D. Benson, in Malory's 'Morte Darthur' discusses this parallelism in terms of Lancelot's skill in arms, and his courtoisie (p.85).

2. Lancelot himself sees his function in this way, referring his adversaries to Guinevere for ultimate arbitration (see Works, I, 274 and I, 285, for example).
in part responsible for Lancelot's initial setting out from court, the
other women in the text 'place' him both ethically and physically,
directing his movements and encouraging him to articulate his moral
position - as when the four queens make clear their sexual interest in
him (I, 257-58). The concept of Lancelot as object is most graphically
realised in the alienating landscape of the Chapel Perelus adventure
and in Hallewes' fantasising:

'...I have loved the this seven yere, but there may
no woman have thy love but quene Gwenyver; and sytthen
I myght nat rejoysse the nother thy body on lyve, I had
kepte no more joy in this worlde but to have thy body
dede. Than wolde I have bawmed hit and sered hit, and
so to have kepte hit my lyve dayes...' (Works, I, 281; 14-19)

Hallewes' voiced intention demonstrates in extreme form the
sterility of Lancelot's being made the preserve of one individual. In
the Tale in general, the claims made by various women do not anatomise
female desire, as much as represent attempts to arrest Lancelot's course
of action. 1 His famous rejection of wives and paramours (Works, 270-71)
is as much an account of narrative process in the Tale as an avowal of
personal feeling. The passage highlights too how the idea of Lancelot,
and of Lancelot's condition, may create a reality for others divergent
from actuality as perceived by Lancelot himself: "I may nat warne peple
to speke of me what hit pleasyth hem" (I, 270; 28-29). The Tale is
formed from a succession of re-tellings of what Lancelot is, realised as
narrative.

The Tale opens with others' views of the hero, which initiate
narrative event. It draws to a close with the return of initiative to

1. For a reading of the text as primarily a study of a sexually-
inexperienced knight troubled by aggressive and anti-chivalric
women, see Janet Jesmok, "A knyght wyveles": The Young Lancelot in
Malory's Morte Darthur', Modern Language Quarterly (Washington), 42
Lancelot (the turning-point being the encounter with Hallewes). He successfully overcomes Hallewes' 'inchauntelement', and Phelot, whose 'treson' is self-evident, and is able to delegate the problem of Pedyvere's case to a higher authority, without loss of 'worship' on his side. Lancelot as sign and emblem of chivalry gives way to a Lancelot called upon increasingly to determine his own course of action. In the Tale, the perpetrators of treason and enchantment are neatly labelled. There is no demand made upon Lancelot to confront divided loyalties. In the Book of Sir Tristram, conflicting desires and responsibilities, not so easily divisible on a moral plane into instances of treasonable and worshipful behaviour, become unbearable for Lancelot, as we have seen. This does not mean that, when read against the Book of Sir Tristram the Noble Tale must be considered naïve, but that each has different parameters, and different concerns.

Malory's Works are not, then, about compilation as a continuum (as is B.N. 112), but about different ways of reading. In the Tale, narrative is shown as a reading-process. Narrative closure is achieved by having objective account-giving and witness replace subjectivity; those involved in the adventures 'bare recorde' and tell 'all the trouth' of Lancelot's deeds. Lancelot is the subject of diverse readings, some of them exclusive (as when Hallewes professes interest only in his sexuality). The characters read Lancelot as we read the 'book'; the sum of these perspectives is not an exhaustive study either of the 'book' or of Lancelot, but a series of perceptions. Malory's characters are not wholly 'knowable', nor is there any reason why they should be. Similarly, the book before us is an accessible artefact, though self-confessedly incomplete. What Malory as translator impresses upon us, through his references, implicit and explicit, to the sub-text
of other works, is the infinity of the tale, both as it is read and as it is written, but there is also a sense in which apprehension of its totality is neither desirable nor relevant.

By way of conclusion, I want to return to a comparison of Malory with Gonnot, by examining how each employs the motif of the Questing Beast/Beste Glatissant. The way this image is used reveals attitudes to narrative and source material which further mark the Works and B.N. 112 as distinct kinds of literary enterprise.

The prologues to B.N. 112's parts express a concern with bringing narrative to a fitting conclusion, and encourage one to read knightly adventure in the context of ordering events on a moral plane. The knight's worthiness ensures a satisfactory end to the quest. As the prologues intimate, chivalric perfection and formal literary perfection are analogous. A knight's valour is largely commensurate with the amount of prose describing it. Inclusiveness is the mark of a good compilation. Gonnot's story of the Beste Glatissant, drawing on accounts in the Prose Tristan, the Palamède, and a version of the Queste del Saint Graal, makes for a conflation of traditions and values evident elsewhere in B.N. 112. The Beste illuminates the text's epistemology, what quests mean to those engaged on them, and reflects how a motif may be assimilated into a recognisable overall design in the narrative. In contrast, Malory's Questing Beast points out the anomalous in knightly procedure and literary composition; it also poses a problem to the reader as to what it may represent, its presence never fully explained. But its examination further illuminates Malory's method of translation.

In B.N. 112, the Beste is multivalent, but its role is carefully explicated - as it is in earlier texts in which it features, such as the
Perlesvaus.\(^1\) Anatomically, it is both familiar and abhorrently alien, a beast 'la plus diverse qui onques fust veue',\(^2\) a grotesque composite whose recognisable elements - a leopard's body, a serpent's head, a lion's thighs and tail\(^3\) - are assembled into a nightmarish whole. Its internal workings are no less disconcerting than its outward appearance; 'dedans son ventre auoit les faons qui glatissoient' (B.N. 112, IV, fol. 85a).\(^4\) This detail makes the Beste an extraordinary compound of the quarry and the animals traditionally trained to hunt it. Its inherent contradictoriness is reflected in its narrative function: the creature seems a bizarre self-contained image, yet in its pursuit the knight is given access to ways of knowing that condition his sense

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1. Lynette Muir, 'The Questing Beast: Its Origins and Development', *Orpheus*, 4 (1957), 24-32 (p.25) observes that in the Perlesvaus the beast is explained as symbolising Christ torn to pieces by the twelve tribes of Israel. On the religious significance of the beast, assigned it by various authors, see W.A. Nitze, 'The Beste Glatissant in Arthurian Romance', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, 56 (1936), 409-18. Claude Roussel, 'Le Jeu des formes et des couleurs: observations sur "la beste glatissant"', *Romania*, 104 (1983), 49-82, argues for the 'symbolisme totalisant' of the Beste, which nevertheless retains an air of the unknown: '...à une totalité qui s'élève vers la transparence s'oppose irréductiblement l'image d'un univers foisonnant, chatoyant d'une inquiétante obscurité multicolore' (p.81).

2. Suite du Merlin, I, 149. We learn here only that the Beste is 'estraingne de cors et de faiture, et non mie tant defors comme dedans son cors', but the detail of the hounds in the belly, lacking here from the Huth MS may well be, as the editors suggest (note 1, I, 149), an MS lacuna rather than a deliberate omission.

3. This description is in the Prose Tristan (Löseth, pp.56-58). Iconography appears rather careless with regard to the Beste (there is nothing to distinguish the animal in the miniature on fol. 147a of B.N. 112, IV, from any other dragon-like monster), but MS B.N. f.fr. 99, the Prose Tristan, does attempt an image closer to the text's description, at fol. 143. Michel Pastoureau reproduces the picture as plate 10 in his *Armorial des chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (Paris, 1983).

4. It is not always clear, in some versions, whether the Beste actually contains the animals or not. Compare the passage in MS B.N. f.fr. 772, printed by Löseth, pp.289-90, in which it is observed: 'quant ele aloit, il issoit de son ventre ,I. si très grant glatissement comme s'ele efist dedenz lui trusqu'a .XX. brachez' (p.290).
of identity. The Beste also has a universal importance as an embodiment of evil. Scarcely definable, it nonetheless comes to be interpreted within a precise moral order, and thus reflects what happens on a larger scale in the compilation itself, where diverse traditions are containable within one physical book.

B.N. 112's first volume possibly contained an account of the Beste similar to that in the Suite (I, 149-60), for the last book has Galahad sighting 'la beste diverse que le roy pellinor auoit ja chassee si longtemps Celle que le roy artus auoit veue quant il pensait a la fontaine' (IV, fol. 85a). Gonnot's Arthuriad may then, in its original form, have used the Beste as a 'frame' specifying the context of knightly adventure. An individual's progress is partially defined and determined by the creature, but experience is also set within a more rigorous teleological structure which figures the Beste as evil born of subversion, and ultimately defeated by the assertion of a legitimacy both moral and genealogical.

In the Suite, the Beste Glatissant is first introduced to Arthur as one of a sequence of 'merveilles' which has begun with his troubling dream of the destruction of Logres, and culminates with his parentage being revealed to him. Pellinor sees his hunt of the beast as a means of self-definition; as the best knight of his lineage, it is said, will kill the animal, Pellinor seeks through it to know "la verité de moi meesmes" (I, 151). If the beast has only a personal meaning for Pellinor, Merlin promises that his son, Perceval, will be able to explicate its importance as "une des aventures dou graal" (I, 160).

1. In the Suite recounting, the beast is a concretisation of one of the 'grans dragons et mout grans plenté de griffons' (I, 148) who feature in Arthur's nightmare.

2. The Suite du Merlin sacrifices the concept of Merlin's omniscience in order to emphasise the importance of the Grail and its difference from the 'aventure' directed by Merlin.
Genealogy thus links the two meanings - spiritual and chivalric - of the Beste. We find the same linking in the extant volumes of the Arthuriad.

In Volume II of B.N. 112, it is Palamède who is linked with the monster, motivated by a desire to avenge his family, for whose death it is responsible: 'et si lappelloit len le chevalier a la beste glatissant' (II, fol. 58c). But his first sighting of the creature leads him instead into another adventure in which he shows to what extent he conforms to the description of him as 'vng des bons chevaliers du monde' (II, fol. 58c).¹ Palamède's first close (and unexpected) encounter with the Beste takes place while he is looking for Tristan:

Si voit quelle a teste et col de serpent barbellee et renfraigne les yeulx luisans comme charboncle la bouche ardent quil semble que feu en saille les oreilles droites comme un leurier Corps et queue de lyon sur le dos auproes des espaules avoit unes voilles reflambissans comme rayz de souleil et sur le faiz de la crouppe pareillent. jambes avoit et pies de cerf le pomel estoit de diverses manieres tache car toutes les couleurs du monde y estoient. Le regart de ses yeulx estoit quil semblast que ce feussent ii torches. Les dens estoient plus grans que dun grant sengler

(II, fol. 175b)

The Prose Tristan has emphasised the beast's grotesquely composite appearance;² B.N. 112 supplements this image with more extraordinary and closely-observed details. The Beste's carbuncle eyes, multi-coloured body, and huge teeth, make it more vividly and frighteningly alien. Its unpredictability is figured not only in its unexpected appearances, but in the speed at which it travels - 'si sen va fuyant

1. Pickford gives an account of this episode in L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.115-17.
2. See the description in Løseth, pp.289-90, from MS B.N. f.fr. 772:

...le col avoit ele d'une beste que l'en apele Douce... en son langage, et le cors avoit ele d'une beste que l'en apele liepart, et les piez avoit ele d'une beste que l'en apele cerf...
que oncques oysel nala si tost' (II, fol. 175c).

The Beste engenders a narrative which reflects the structure of larger units in the compilation; a number of motifs are deployed to slightly different effect. In Book II, the Beste is primarily a way of locating Palamède: at Sorelois, he even adopts the creature as his emblem. In Book II, Palamède tells of how his brothers met their deaths at a burning lake while attempting to destroy the animal:

'Si enuironnerent le mares pour la cuider prendre lung deuix luy getta son glaive si lataint et incontinent elle gucta -i- si grant cry que merueilles estoit Et leur sembla que tout estoit en feu si cheurent mes xi freres mors...'

(II, fol. 176c)

This event is, however, paralleled later: in Book IV, a knight-turned-hermit tells of how his sons were killed in similar circumstances (IV, fol. 87d), and the incident also anticipates the way the beast is finally surrounded and killed. Reiteration of motif highlights the widening terms of reference as the Beste's more universal significance is revealed, and more knights are implicated in the adventure, which ceases to be uniquely Palamède's quest.

The link of the beast with a personal sense of identity is maintained in the Grail section where minor characters such as Yvain (IV, fol. 88a) and an anonymous knight (IV, fol. 88c) lay claim to it. But

1. At Sorelois, the Damsel in need of a champion had been told that Palamède was following the Beste Glatissant; the detail is retained in the Works, II, 655; 23-24, where the Damsel is advised to seek help from "that knyght (that) folowyth the questynge beeste".

2. II, fol. 186c:

   Et palamides auoit changees ses armes Et les portoit toutes neufez Et si auoit en son escu fait pourtraire la beste glatissant et autressi auoit il a son heaume et a sa couverture...

3. This is where B.N. 112 uses material from the Post-Vulgate Queste; see Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, pp.96-109.
it is Palamède, accompanied by Galahad and Perceval, who is destined to slay the Beste (IV, fol. 147c-d). It is typical that Gonnot should adopt the version of the Beste's death that conflates all the traditions surrounding it - that it should die at the hands of one of Pellinor's kin / of the Good Pagan / of Galahad - by having all three present at the kill. Palamède's career intersects Galahad's. Like him, he is defined by the quest he is destined to achieve. His defeat of that which has destroyed his line is also a defeat of evil and a necessary preliminary to Galahad's attainment of the Ultimate Good. Again like Galahad, Palamède does not long survive the fulfilment of his chief function; his goal achieved, he is killed "sanz reson" by Agravain and Gawain's treachery (IV, fol. 149c).

The intersection of Galahad's and Palamède's careers is an instance of the conflation of types of bonne chevalerie. We have mentioned the importance of genealogy in guaranteeing good knighthood. Here Palamède is the secular chevalier whose knightly identity has become part of (rather than overtaken by) a larger epistemological pattern. His baptism (IV, fol. 147d) is all that is lacking to make him a perfect knight, and once this is achieved he is, in narrative terms, redundant. Before he commits suicide in grief at his son's death, his father Esclabor commands that Palamède's epitaph be written in his own blood.¹ The possibilities of self-definition through action exhausted, this gruesome commemorative gesture transfers the fact of lineage from the actually and active human, to its remembrance through the written, and ratifies the romance author's own activity.

Finally, the Beste becomes more fully part of Galahad's story. At his hermitage, King Pellehan tells Galahad of how King Ypomenes' daughter, 're BaNe 12, "LV, Lol. 150b:, The episode derives from the Prose Tristan - see the résumé in Løseth, pp.398-400.

¹ B.N. 112, IV, fol. 150b. The episode derives from the Prose Tristan - see the résumé in Løseth, pp.398-400.
skilled in necromancy, fell in love with, and was rejected by, her saintly brother (IV, fols 150c-52c).\(^1\) A devil, promising to help her in her desire to subvert familial relations, slept with her "tout ainsi/ comme fist le pere merlin a la mere merlin" (IV, fol. 151c-d). Soon pregnant, the girl accused her brother of rape, and the prince was thrown to starving dogs. His last words warn of God's vengeance, for his sister's child is the Devil's: "ennemy lengendra et ennemy le conceupt et ennemy en istra en semblance dune beste la plus diuerse qui oncques fut veue" (IV, fol. 152b). The beast will both incarnate evil, and bear witness to the prince's innocence, for dogs in its body "yront glatissant en memoire et en reproche des bestes a qui tu me faiz liurer" (IV, fol. 152b). The saint prophesies that the thing will survive "deuant que le bon cheualier qui sera appelle galaad aussi comme je suis la finra par cellui et par sa venue morra la doloureuse porteure de ton ventre" (IV, fol. 152b).\(^2\)

In B.N. 112, the account of the Beste's origins is the culmination of a narrative concerned with right lineage and election. An image of narrative potential, the Beste, in its early literary manifestations, is to some extent mysterious and unknown. Gonnot, by drawing together the traditions concerning the Beste, gives it a particular narrative role; following it, as the narrative progresses, the individual knight brings

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1. A version of the Prose Tristan has Pellehan's tale recounted to Lancelot, as one of the 'marvels' of the Grail quest (see Løseth's synopsis of this part of MS B.N. f.fr. 24400, p.420), but it is divorced from its function as a prelude to the achievement of the Grail itself.

2. This is also the case in MS B.N. f.fr. 343, the only other extant French MS to contain an account of the Beste's death, and the adventure is singled out for special mention (there are others, we are told, fol. 101a, 'dont cil de beron ne parle mie, car trop eust a faire se il uoscist a ce point raconter toutes les merueilles del Grahal'. See Fanni Bogdanow's résumé, The Romance of the Grail, pp.125-26. The illustration of the prince's death and the Beste's birth, B.N. 112, IV, fol. 152 a/b, is reproduced on plate 2, facing p.125.
his potential to a realised 'perfection'. By finally aligning the Beste's history with that of Galahad, Gonnot intimates the possibility of understanding 'merveil' in terms of a universal order, an order in which the Good is finally vindicated (for the Beste's mother is made to suffer a death more terrible than that of her brother (II, fol. 152b), when his prophecy becomes reality), and in which typologies and replication of motif are part of the means to making sense of the world, and of how the narrative operates. For Gonnot, the Beste is a key to identity; "savoir la verité de li" is consonant with "savoir la verité de [s]oi meemeses". As the knight follows his quest to its end, so the writer fulfils his function by bringing his tale to a fitting conclusion.

By comparison, Malory's Noisy Beast remains a nonsense, the riddle the original Beste's appearance poses, a series of signifiers without the ultimate satisfaction of recovering an intelligible meaning. 'Englishing' the French provides Malory with a useful pun, for the 'queste' may be defined in Middle English both as 'a knightly enterprise', and as 'a searching after game', and 'the baying of hounds'.¹ The Questing Beast, by virtue of its name, promises some kind of self-contained interpretation of the act of questing, as well as conveying a sense of the extraordinary sound it makes. The reader is teased with the possibility of meaning attached to the Beast, but finds only that one unknown is elucidated by being referred to another:

the beste glatysaunte...was a full wondirfull beyste
and a grete sygnyfycasion; for Merlyon propheseyd
muche of that byeste.

(Works, II, 717; 15-17)

¹. See the entry in the Middle English Dictionary, edited by Hans Kurath, S.M. Kuhn and others (Ann Arbor, 1954- ), Definition 4 and Definition 6, Part Q, p.67. In Part G2, pp.151-52, only Malory is cited as using the terms 'glatissaunt' and 'glatissing' (from French 'glatin') to signify 'barking'.

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Throughout, the Beast stands in metonymic relation to the rest of the action, intimating the possibility of a purchase on the text which is never realised. In the *Works*, our 'reading' of the inscribed 'French book' can never be other than selective and partial, because the sheer volume of material exceeds our ability to read and process it completely. The Beast is unmanageable in a different way. We have only a partial grasp of its meaning because it appears and disappears at random; in contrast to its French counterpart, it has no cumulative significance.

The Beast's first appearance (*Works*, I, 42-43) derives from the account in the *Suite du Merlin*, in which Arthur is so amazed at the creature 'que il ne savoit se il dormoit ou se il veilloit' (I, 150). Malory figures the dream-like aspect of the experience by having the King literally fall asleep (I, 42; 17-18), only to be roused again by Pellinor asking for news of the "stronge beeste" of this "Knyght full of thought and slepy" (I, 42; 20-21). Apart from its 'difference' and the noise it makes being likened to 'the questyng of thirty coupyl houndes' (I, 42; 13-14), the beast is not described. The late résumé of its aspect is, by comparison with 112, very matter-of-fact: 'in shap lyke a serpentis hede and a body lyke a lybud, buttokked lyke a lyon and footed lyke an harte' (I, 484; 4-6).

Reaction to the Beast is more important than surface detail. In the *Suite*, Pellinor's contention for Arthur's horse to enable him to continue his quest turns into a lesson in chivalric behaviour; Arthur is railed at for wanting to undertake his quest, his wishes denounced by Pellinor as the "vilounie" of a "mauvais chevaliers" (I, 152); "vous n'estes pas chevaliers qui de si haut affaire se doive entremetre".

1. Vinaver's Commentary to the *Works*, III, 1298, observes: 'In F Pellinor uses more polite language', but the difference between the texts appears to lie in the registers used rather than the quantitative representation of courtoisie. F's Pellinor is concerned as much with courtesy as with the quest.
For Malory's Pellinor, Arthur's interest in following the quest himself is simply an instance of folly in the face of destiny; "hit ys in vayne thy desire, for hit shall never be encheved but by me other by my nexte kynne" (I, 43; 7-9). Pellinor's confidence in determinism has already been undercut by Malory's earlier parenthesis telling how 'Kynge Pellynor ...folowed the questynge beste, and afftir hys dethe sir Palomydes folowed hit' (I, 43; 1-3).

What is of genealogical importance in the Suite becomes in this episode the witness to Pellinor's tenacity - "I have folowed this queste thys twelve-monthe" (I, 42; 29) - and the 'blood' of kinship is transformed into the life-blood of the individual: "othir I shall encheve hym othir blede of the beste bloode / in my body" (I, 42; 30 - 43; 01). In the Suite the prophet guarantees that the mystery will be resolved in time. In Malory we are left with a contrast between Arthur and Pellinor's response to the demands of lineage, while the Beast, apparently no more than the narrative apparatus that makes possible the confrontation between Pellinor and Arthur, disappears.

Just as the 'sygnyfycasion' of the beast is never revealed, so we are never given the background to Palomides' involvement with it, or why Pellinor's house should have abandoned claims to it; 'And thys beste evermore sir Palomydes folowed, for hit was called hys queste' (Works, II, 484; 9-10). When Tristram first sights the Beast with Palomides in pursuit of it, the encounter results in narrative disruption, and some confusion: 'to breff thys mater', Palomides defeats both Tristan and Lamerok, and continues on his way2 'wherefore thes two knyghtes were

1. See also Pellinor's reluctance to believe Merlin's prophecy of his destiny (I, 120; 9-10). Pellinor's fanatical pursuit of the Beast replicates his attitude to quests in general (see Works, I, 119; 24-28).

2. In the source (Löseth, pp.57-58) Tristan sends Lamorat in pursuit of Palamède, to propose they joust again in four days' time.
passyng wrothe that sir Palomydes wold nat fyght with hem on foote'
(Works, II, 484; 11-17). This break in accepted procedure calls for
some glossing, an aside on anomaly that also draws attention to the way
the text functions:

Here men may undirstonde that bene men of worship that
man was never fourmed that all tymes myght attayne,
but somtyme he was put to the worse by malefortune and
at some tyme the wayker knyght put the bygger knyght
to a rebuke.

(II, 484; 18-22)

Hereafter in the Works, Palomides' association with the Questing
Beast is part of the Arthurian landscape, but while this may make for
ease of identification, it is no means of explication (just as local
references to the French sources may only tangentially illuminate what
is going on in the text before us). Thus Palomides' announcing of
himself, and the accompanying gloss on his words, do not elucidate
meaning;

'I am the knyght that folowyth the Glatysaunte Beste.'
(That is in Englysh to sey, the questynge beste, for
the beste...quested in the bealy with suche a noyse as
hit had bene a thirty couple of howndis.)

(II, 590; 17-21)

B.N. 112 expresses the alien by means of extra detail, but Malory conveys
strangeness by omission. The Beast for him has no beginning and no
ending, apparently an exercise in maintaining a narrative line with no
motive (other than that it is the action in which one finds oneself
engaged at the present moment) and no result. Brewnys' challenge of
Palomides - "as well may I...folow that beste as ye" (II, 684; 19-20) -
emphasises the arbitrariness of the identification of Palomides with

1. See Works, II, 656; 8, where Palomides has the Questing Beast on his
shield,'and in all his trapours'. At II, 683; 19-21, Tristram
interprets the Questing Beast as synecdochal of Palomides: 'So whan
sir Trystram saw that beste he put on his helme, for he demed he
sholde hyre of sir Palomydes; for that beste was hys queste.'
this quest, but the motive for their combat is lost sight of as the story develops into an account of Brewnys' treachery.

Ultimately, even the purpose Palomides has accorded his quest is denied it. We are told the knight has vowed he will not be baptised until he has achieved his quest (II, 717; 13-15), yet at the end of the Book of Sir Tristram, Palomides, to the joy of the court, is christened, 'And than sir Trystram returned unto Joyus Garde, and sir Palomydes folowed aftir the questynge beste.' (II, 845; 25-26).

Everything designated a 'sign' or 'token' in Malory's text is given a specific meaning,1 with the exception of Palomides' raging at Tristram's frustration of his amorous and chivalric endeavours,2 and the Questing Beast. In his selective use of this latter motif, Malory appears deliberately to be drawing attention to his editing procedure, pointing out the limits of his one reading of the 'French book'. But the Beast is not a conundrum to be 'solved' by recourse to tracing the full accounts as they appear in the source-texts. Instead, the

1. See the entries in A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory, edited by Tomomi Kato (Tokyo, 1974), pp.1078, 1185. As one might expect, most events and signs said to have 'sygnyficasion' are found in the Book of the Sankgreal (at II, 1025; 12-14, for example, where Mordrayns tells Galahad: "thou arte a clene virgyne...as the floure of the lyly in whom virginite is signified". 'Signification' may also be used in the sense of 'meaning', as in Arthur's question I, 53; 14, "What signifieth yondir pavilion?". (Kato seems to have overlooked the explicit to the Book of Sir Tristram, II, 845; 32-846; 2: 'BUT HERE FOLOWYTH THE NOBLE TALE OFF THE SANKEGREALL, WHYCHE CALLED YS THE HOLY VESSELL AND THE / SYGNYFYCACION OF BLYSSED BLOODE OFF OURE LORDE JESU CRYSTE...')

2. Works, II, 528; 31-35:

'Alas!' () seyde (Palomides), 'why lyve I so longe?' And than he gate his swerde in hys honde and made many strange sygnes and tokyns, and so thorow the rageynge he threw hys swerd in that fountayne.

Just as, in the Works, human love is ineffable, so it is beyond the scope of the narrative fully to express the manifestations of Palomides' distress.
creature's inscrutability emphasises that the strategies employed by Malory are not those of his sources.

In B.N. 112, the Beste Glatissant conlates images of bonne chevalerie, with which the text is primarily concerned, linking Pagan with perfect Christian. Bonne chevalerie is ensured by lineage, and made manifest in action. Events in linear narrative have a cumulative significance, as the Beste Glatissant itself demonstrates, for its meaning is revealed through action, as the story unfolds. Malory's Beast denies us the satisfaction of making the same links between identity and action as we find in B.N. 112. The Beast, appearing in discrete episodes, resists being assigned the cumulative importance the Beste Glatissant has, just as so much of the Works asks to be read for the moment, although that moment is underpinned by the perceived possibility of a number of future and backward references to the rest of the text. Malory's Beast finally expresses a form of writing which is about the dissection of narrative rather than the fulfilment of narrative expectations.
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

MS B.N. 112 : PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES

II, fol. 1a-b: Rubric

Cy comance le prologue du premer liure de messire lancelot du lac lequel fut en son temps le meilleur cheualier du monde selon listoire de maistre Robert deborron qui le translata de latin en francois / par le commandement de tres puissant prince le roy Henry dangleterre Et commance ce dit segond liure a la naissance de tres noble et vaillant cheualier messire lancelot du lac qui parlera de plussieurs autres bons cheualiers.

II, fol. 1a-c: Prologue

Moult seroit chose desplaisant se dit maistre Robert de borron qui commenceroit une oeuvre belle et delitable a oir especialement aux jeunes cheualiers et escuiers voire aux jeunes dames et damoiselles qui la lairoit imparfaicte Car toute chose imparfaite desire auenir a quelque utille et prouffitable perfection. Et pour euiter au bruit de non acheuer et parfaire les choses par moy encommencees veulx venir a la perfection et a lacheuement de ce segond mien liure Et pour ce que jay entencion de y mettre choses aucunes honnourables a tous cueurs amoureux qui ont vouloir de toutallement a oir racompter aucuns beaux grans et notables fais des cheualeries grandes et merueilleuses Et pour ce quil veust des vaillants cheualiers et moult espers en armes que / dire ne racompter ne sauroye Mais touste la verite et la vraye histoire je racompteray si commenceroye ce second liure a la naissance du tresuaillant trespreux et le meilleur du monde ne qui fut a son temps

1. Pickford, L'Evolution du roman arthurien, p.209, has 'meurs'.
C'est assauoir de messire lancelot du lac filz au roy ban de benoic quon lui nommoit le roy mort de duel qui fut extrait de la ligne de dauid ainsi que la vraye histoire le tesmoigne Et si parleray du tresuaillant tres beau cheualier messire tristan de leonnoys filz au bon roy melaides lequel messire tristan fut le meilleur cheualier du monde fors seulement messire lancelot du lac Ces deux furent sans faille si bons et si parfaits que en leur temps ne furent point de meilleurs / pour ce commenceray en ceste maniere...

III, fol. 1a-b: Brief rubric, too damaged to be legible, apart from the words 'liure de...'

III, fol. 1a-b: Prologue

Raison est ce dit ly comptes que pour parvenir a sauoir les grans faitz darmes que ouy auez en mon premier et second liures que faisoient les cheualiers errans et compagnons de la table roonde Et especially de messire lancelot du lac et de messire tristan de leonnois Mais plus expressement vous parleray des faitz de messire lancelot du lac pour ce que ce fut le meilleur cheualier du monde et qui fist de plus granz faitz doresennauant que fait nauoit en toute sa vie et trop seraye mauuais de le laisser Car si messire lancelot commenca bien sa cheualerie Il la continua bien et encore la finist mieulx tant qu'il ot pouoir de porter armes Et aussi que nous lauons laisse en nostre segond livre malade saillant / hors de Sorelois Si vous dirons en ce tiers Liure comment il guerit et des grans cheualeries quil mena afin Et commenceray mon tiers liure en ceste maniere...

1. A.P. Paris, _Les manuscrits françois_, I, 149, has 'surnommoit'.
III, fol. 301b: Closing lines of vol. III;
Mais atant finist cy maistre helye de bourron\(^1\) son liure de lancelot
Et commence a parler du saint graal

Sensuit le liure du saint graal

Amen deo gratias

IV, fol. 1a: Rubric
Cy commence le prologue du dernier liure de messire lancelot du lac qui parle de la grant queste du saint graal et des vaillans cheualiers qui y furent et des grans proesses quilz firent

IV, fol. 1a-c: Prologue
O glorieuse trinite le pere le fils et le benoist sainct esperit Et toy glorieuse vierge marie excellente mere et fille de dieu creator de toutes creatures Et vous tous sains et sainctes de paradis de tresbenigne et humble cueur vous supplie que me soies aidables a acomplir ceste mienne derniere petit oeuvre Car je nay entencion de y mettre riens ne adiouster qui ne soit veritable et que je naye leu et visite en plusieurs liures anciens Et pour ce que dernier liure se nomme du sang graal vous ai je tant racompte que suis venu atans pour vous racompter la fin de la grant queste du sang graal Et les grans et merueilles faiz que furent faiz en icelle queste par les tresuaillans cheualiers de la table ronde Et en (?) finement vous racompteray la mort de ceulx cheualiers dont ce fu dommaiges Mais selon lordre et cours de nature cest vne chose dont nul ne peut eschapper Mais ainsi que dit vng philosophes Il ne fait riens qui commence et ne fine Et pour ce est il necessite de finer leuure par moy commences Mais aux

1. Written over an erasure.
bons et vrais / hystoriens prie de bon cueur que silz y treuuent faul
te ne prolixite de langaige leur plaise que par doulces et amyables paroles
le veulent amender et corriger Car selon mon petit entendement les
jeunes cheualiers et escuriers y pourront aprendre moult de beaux faitz
darmes et quant Ilz trouveront chose villaine ne de reprouche je leur
conseille qu'z ne le facent mye car les choses malfaictes sont
escriptes aux liures pour les fouir et euyter Et les bonnes pour les
ensuyure et les accomplir chacun\textsuperscript{1} de bon voloir Si commencerons
desoresmais nostre euure ainsi...

IV, fol. 182a-b: Rubric
Cy commence la branche du liure des mors qui traictera comment se mit
discencion entre le roy artus et du roy Ban de Benoic a cause de la
royne genieure et de messire lancelot du lac dont il morut plusieurs des
meilleurs cheualiers de la table ronde Et aussi deuisera de la grant
guerre et trayson que mordret fit au roy artus, dont ilz morurent tous
deux en une Bataille qui fut moult cruelle et tant quil ny demoura que\textsuperscript{2}
deux ou trois personnages dont ce fut moult grant dommage des deux
costez pour les gens de bien qui y morurent

IV, fol. 182a-b: Prologue
Apres ce que maistre gaultier map ot traitie des auentures du saint
graal assez souffizanment si comme il fut aduis au roy henry son
seigneur que ce qu'il auoit fait nen deuoit pas soufrire sil ne racomptoit
la fin de ceulx dont il auoit fait deuant mencion comment ilz morurent
de qui il auoit les prouesses amenteues en son liure et pour ce

\begin{footnotes}
1. J.B. Allen, 'The Medieval Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur', p.284, has 'chaque homme'.
2. Pickford, L'Évolution du roman arthurien, p.169, has 'fors'.
\end{footnotes}
commenca / ceste derniere partie et il lot mise ensemble si l'appella la mort au roy artus pour que vers la fin est escript comment le roy artus fut naures es plaines de salebieres Et comment il se partit de girflet qui tant luy fist compaignie que apres luy ne fut nulz homs quil lez veist vivant Si commence maistre gaultier ceste derniere partie

IV, fol. 233a: **Closing lines of vol. IV;**

Cy se taist ores ly comptes maistre gaultier moap de listoire de lancelot du lac car tout a bien mene a fin selon les choses quil en aduindrent et define\(^1\) cy son liure si outreemment que apres ce nen pourroit nul racompter autre chose quil ne mentist

---

1. Pickford, *L’Évolution du roman arthurien*, p.112, has 'devise'.
CONCLUSION

And somme Englysshe bookes maken mencyon that they wente never oute of Englond after the deth of syr Launcelot - but that was but favour of makers. For the Frensshe book maketh mencyon - and is auctorysed - that syr Bors, syr Ector, syr Blamour and syr Bleoberis wente into the Holy Lande, thereas Jesu Cryst was quycke and deed...

(Works, III, 1260; 5-10)

It is typical that in the concluding paragraphs of Malory's Works, the written word should be referred to as both the authoritative repository of truth, and as something tending towards bias and distortion, while we have only the author's own reading as the means of discerning to which camp a piece of literature belongs. This is also the only time Malory acknowledges the existence of a body of English writings on Arthur. On the premises of this thesis, I would argue that in identifying English texts with 'favour' and French texts with authority, Malory is making a shrewd observation on the difference between native and Continental models of Arthurian literature. Is this contrast between English and French Arthurian texts a peculiarity of literary history, or are aspects of English remaniements part of a more general attitude to writing and, as I briefly suggested in Chapter One, p.36, with regard to Charles d'Orléan's poems, to tradition, an attitude that can be defined as belonging to a specifically English literary consciousness?

We have seen how the French texts establish a predetermined context within which they are to be evaluated. The idea of a definable tradition for such writings is central to their structure, and to how one interprets them. This is not to say, of course, that a reverence for the written prohibits further literary enterprise: Elspeth Kennedy's
recent work on the Prose Lancelot shows how French texts undergo their own transformations. Taking as an example an episode in the Prose Lancelot, in its cyclic and non-cyclic versions, Kennedy demonstrates how a different kind of emphasis may be made, without one word of the text itself being altered. In demonstrating how juxtaposition has a central role in determining meaning in this form of narrative composition, Kennedy highlights a crucial aspect of French treatment of cyclic form, which we noted, in respect of larger narrative units, in Chapter Three.

One may then recontextualise the Vulgate romances, but they, and the literature that develops from them, retain their emphasis on the written as commemorative. When the authors declare they are translating from a great Latin book, they are not indicating the provisional nature of their enterprise, but using the notion of an original in a prestigious source-language in order to claim a certain status for their own work. The large prose compilation, near-exhaustive in detail, and encyclopaedic in its evocation of the Arthurian world, (and best exemplified by B.N. 112), is physical witness to the existence of the Latin Book, a 'rehearsall' of the original, and 'auctorysed' by it, while 'li contes' as written word ultimately guarantees the authority of both the 'Latin' and French texts. The 'translator' claims for the vernacular the same status as the 'Latin' text, in order to renew and re-present past tradition in the present.

Chapter Five mentioned the importance of the romances as possessions of the duc de Nemours. Although (as we saw in Chapter One) this does not necessarily indicate that these works were uniquely the preserve of the landed aristocracy, their appeal to the nobility certainly lies in

the way they use the idea of continuity (in lineage, in writing itself) to structure the narrative. Moreover, this literature can be read alongside other modes of codifying experience in a chivalric context, such as the handbooks on knighthood. The status of the French material, and how it is to be read, is clearly encoded in the text, and ratified extra-textually, and the prose narratives are infinitely extendable within the co-ordinates they observe.

We saw in Chapter One how English *remaniements* of cyclic material do not necessarily keep faith with ideas of the commemorative; the Arthurian subject does not predicate a particular stylistic approach, but rather initiates greater experimentation with form and treatment of material. The status of Arthurian literature is explored by individual texts, rather than taken as fixed in advance. This study has made use to some extent of the 'rezeptionsgeschichtliche Methode' proposed by Jauss, whereby one recovers the meaning of a work at a given point in history, by examining its reception by the reader, and its relation to other, similar, literature.¹ So I have argued that a preoccupation with the stable and the unstable is characteristic of the fifteenth-century English literary scene, and have discussed the *English Prose Merlin* in terms of a contemporaneous literary discussion of rhetorical ways of encoding stability. The French texts use the idea of translation to authorise the vernacular. In England, historical circumstances dictate that several available vernaculars co-exist in a fluid relation that contrasts with the clearly demarcated and hierarchic relation between Latin and the vernacular that exists on the Continent. This special linguistic situation perhaps in part accounts

¹. 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', translated by E. Benzinger, in *New Directions in Literary History*, edited by Ralph Cohen (Baltimore, 1974), pp.11-41.
for the tendency of English writings to explore possibilities in material, rather than to systematise. For the English remaniements of French texts seem implicitly to recognise the possibilities of betrayal, partiality, and subjectivity inherent in the act of translation. Translation can be seen as a further complicating factor in attempting to establish continuities, as a betrayer, rather than a guarantor, of tradition. How concern with instability informs attitudes to tradition and the treatment of literary precedents, and influences the quality of English Renaissance literature, must needs be the subject of another study. Here I want only to establish that Malory recognises and uses aspects of English literary response in his own 'rehersall'.

Working with both English and French models, Malory exploits the idea of instability through the attitude he displays to writing. While the Vulgate Cycle sets up various models of writing, later compilations, assiduously filling in lacunae and what they consider to be gaps in its chronology, by-pass the question of which Vulgate model should have precedence, by simply asserting the authority of the written (which is how the Vulgate as a whole resolves its internal contradictions). Malory, with an eye to the Vulgate, assigns commemorative value to the language of his 'holiest' book, the Sankgreal, and makes of the others a series of complex investigations into modes of encoding meaning. The Works take into account how form structures response, on the part of both characters and readers. Thus Malory broadens the bases on which we interpret the material.

The abundance of subject-matter in B.N. 112 implicitly leaves the reader to select (along certain guide-lines) what is important. Malory makes that implicit choice part of his strategy of writing, and uses it to promote the reader's role in the narrative, imagining reading
and writing as happening simultaneously. Malory also uses the idea of translation, much as Chaucer's narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* invokes Lollius, to suggest that an 'ur' text, a complete work telling the 'whole story', actually exists, but elsewhere. While Gonnot's is the 'definitive' version, Malory (going beyond the kind of awareness that *Rezeptionsgeschichte* explains) presents us with a 'reading' of the material, incomplete, ever-renewable and re-readable in the present of a new reader, and as full of 'favour' as the work of other English makers.
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