

MALORY AND THE SUITE DU MERLIN:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE "MERLIN" IN RELATION TO THE
PARALLEL PASSAGES IN THE HUTH AND CAMBRIDGE MSS.

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- JEGP Journal of English and Germanic Philology
- MLN Modern Language Notes
- Morte The traditional title, Le Morte Darthur, has been used throughout this paper whenever reference is made to Malory's work(s).
- UTSE University of Texas Studies in English
- Works The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Oxford, 1967).

INTRODUCTION

Although Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur continued to fascinate readers during the four centuries following the publication of Caxton's edition on July 31, 1485,¹ it has been only in the last eighty years that a major concentration of scholarly research has been focused upon the author and his masterpiece.² This marked upsurge in scholarly interest has resulted largely from chance discoveries of lost manuscripts which have forced a complete reevaluation of critical attitudes towards Arthurian romance

¹Only two copies of the original have come down to us: one is in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York; the other, minus eleven leaves, is in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. Caxton's text was reprinted by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498 and again, with some verbal alterations, in 1529; by Copland in 1557; by East c.1585; and by William Stansby in 1634. All editions published prior to 1947 are based directly or indirectly upon Caxton's text, the most important of which are those of Robert Southey (1817), Thomas Wright (1856-66), Edward Strachey (1868), H.O.Sommer (1889-91), and A.W.Pollard (1900).

²G.L.Kittredge was the first to identify the author of the Morte as the Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel (c.1408-71) in a study entitled "Who Was Sir Thomas Malory?" Studies and Notes in Phil. and Lit., V (1897), 85-106. In his Sir Thomas Malory: His Turbulent Career (Cambridge, 1928), Edward Hicks pursues the trail suggested by Kittredge following the discovery of documents relating to the Warwickshire Malory's brushes with the law. A.C.Baugh, basing himself upon further documents relating to new difficulties with the courts, expands this picture in "Documenting Sir Thomas Malory," Speculum, VIII (Jan. 1933), 3-29. Some doubt is cast upon this identification by W. Matthews in The Ill-Framed Knight (Berkley, 1966) although his own claim for a Malory of Yorkshire is not very persuasive.

in general and towards Malory's redaction of the traditional material in particular.

The spark which ignited this revival was the publication in 1886 by the Société des Anciens Textes Françaises³ of a manuscript which was recognized to be a "new" version of the prose continuation of Robert de Boron's Merlin.⁴

This manuscript, which had come a few years earlier into the possession of Henry Huth, an English bibliophile, was identified by the nineteenth century medieval scholar F. J. Furnivall as part of the lost original from which Malory's Morte (Caxton's Books I-IV) "was drawn", and a work distinct from the one other known prose continuation which forms a section of the Vulgate Cycle. (This manuscript is generally referred to as the Huth Merlin.)

An even greater milestone was the discovery by W.F. Oakeshott in 1934 of a lost manuscript of the Morte in the Fellows' Library of Winchester College.⁵ A comparison of

³G. Paris and J. Ulrich, eds., Merlin: Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886).

⁴Only 502 verses of the poem survive and can be found, together with the Joseph d'Armathie (also attributed to Robert), in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Ms. fr. 20047. For a detailed account of de Boron and his writings, see W.A. Nitze's "Messire Robert de Boron: Enquiry and Summary," Speculum, XXVIII (1953), 279-296.

⁵Oakeshott describes his discovery in Essays on Malory, ed. J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford, 1963), pp. 1-6.

the Winchester manuscript with the Caxton edition made it abundantly clear that Malory's first editor had taken extensive liberties with the text, and when it became evident that both the Caxton and Winchester transcripts represented collateral versions of Malory's original text, a new light was shed upon the conception and development of the Morte.

In 1945, Eugene Vinaver unearthed a far more complete version of the Suite du Merlin in a fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman manuscript now in the Cambridge Library.⁶ Professor Vinaver's study of these recently discovered manuscripts culminated in the publication in 1947 of his monumental three-volume edition of the Morte⁷ which, in addition to presenting a critical text of Malory's work(s)⁸ based upon the Winchester transcript, also incorporates a significant body of pertinent contemporary scholarship which has acted as a catalyst in the field of Malory studies.

⁶Cambridge University Library Add. 7071.

⁷Eugene Vinaver, ed., The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1947). A revised edition with expanded introduction was published in 1967; all references in this paper are to the revised second edition, hereafter referred to as Works.

⁸Whether Malory intended to write a single work or eight separate but related works as Vinaver suggests (Works, I, xxxv-lvi) has been the subject of heated debate. The main arguments for the "unified" theory are collected in Malory's Originality, ed. R.M. Lumiansky (Baltimore, 1964). Charles Moorman's The Book of King Arthur (Kentucky, 1965) presents a carefully developed argument for artistic unity in the Morte. See also Essays on Malory.

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These three manuscripts, together with a number of fragments which help to bridge certain lacunae in both the Huth and Cambridge versions of the Suite,⁹ have provided students of Malory with new tools with which to examine the development of his art. While Gaston Paris recognized as early as 1886 that "c'est à un manuscrit analogue au nôtre que la Morte Darthure...a emprunté presque entièrement ses quatre premiers livres"¹⁰ (Caxton's Books I-IV), and while Vinaver continues to postulate that "the source of The Tale of King Arthur must have been a more authentic version of the French romance than either the Huth Merlin or the recently discovered Cambridge manuscript of the Suite du Merlin",¹¹ the fact still remains that a detailed comparison of the Morte with the extant French analogues can indicate

⁹Eduard Wechssler discovered a large fragment, missing in both the Huth and Cambridge mss., which corresponds to the final section of the Tale (B.N. ms. fr. 112). The "Siena fragment", corresponding to Huth II, 64-72, was identified by Fanni Bogdanow and was published by A. Micha in Romania, LXXVIII (1957), 37-45. Useful for cross-reference are the two Spanish versions of Demanda del Sancto Grial which are generally accepted to have been derived from a text similar to the Huth. (See the edition by A. Bonilla, Madrid, 1907).

¹⁰Paris, Merlin, p. lxx.

¹¹Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), p. 549. Vinaver details his arguments in Mélanges de Philologie romane et de Littérature Médiévale offerts à Ernest Hoepffner (Paris, 1949), pp. 295-300. See also Sally Shaw's essay in Essays on Malory, pp. 114-145.

a great deal about how Malory controlled his source materials.

It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to present a number of hypotheses as a result of such a study in the firm conviction that "comparisons of Malory's text with that of the sources he used reveal many important facets of his genius."¹² I have translated into English¹³ a large segment of the Huth manuscript which corresponds to Malory's "Merlin", the first of the four subdivisions of The Tale of King Arthur (Caxton's Book I), and have examined the uses which Malory has made of this material, cross-referenced against the Cambridge text, in order to trace important early trends in the development of his technique and style and, linked with this, the beginnings of a new sens¹⁴ that he has incorporated into the traditional matière. The

¹²Arthurian Literature, p. 546.

¹³R.L.Brengle, Arthur King of Britain (New York, 1964), p.432, points out that "no adequate translation" of the Suite has yet been made.

¹⁴Nitze's generally accepted definition of sens is in the context of "signification" or "interpretation". A second meaning, an enlargement of this definition, indicates the manner in which sens is incorporated into the matière: "Ainsi en dehors du sens évident de 'signification' ou Grundgedanken, Chrétien emploie encore sans quand il s'agit de désigner un procédé qui consiste à interpréter ou à mettre en relief l'idée qui est au fond de son oeuvre." (W.A.Nitze, "Sans et matière dans les oeuvres de Chrétien de Troyes," Romania, XLIV (1915-17), 15.

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annotated translation will serve to provide a further body of evidence, readily available to anyone who is not familiar with Old French, to reinforce the conclusions presented in the course of this thesis.

Although the portion of the "Merlin" under examination runs to approximately 5,500 words in comparison with some 22,000 words in the parallel passages of the Huth Merlin, it is clear that the outstanding difference between the two versions is not principally quantitative but rather qualitative. While the basic core of the narration is much the same in both versions in spite of this sizable reduction, the overall effects of the French and English redactions differ markedly. The "Merlin" - and, by extension, the whole of the Morte - is not the result of a haphazard selection of adventures torn from the French text and strung together in a loose series, but rather the end product of an extremely delicate melting down of the source and a reconstruction of this matter according to a new and consistent pattern, controlled by a highly personal style of narration and inspired by an original interpretation of the traditional stories. In other words, Malory's role in reworking the matière was not that of an editor liberally wielding a blue pencil but rather that of a "maker" creating a new work of art from the raw materials which he distilled from the

French Cycle.¹⁵

It is my thesis, therefore, that Malory has worked systematically to transform the Suite by integrating a new and original "signification" into his redaction of the Arthur legend such that "l'idée qui est au fond de son oeuvre" differs in substance from the sens of the French version. There is ample evidence in the excerpt under examination (as will be indicated in Chapter IV) that Malory has effected a subtle alteration in the characters of Arthur and Merlin by heightening the role of the former and correspondingly diminishing that of the latter. At the same time, he has suppressed to a significant degree the supernatural element which forms an integral part of the Suite. These major modifications indicate that Malory has shifted the emphasis of The Tale of King Arthur from the story of a great magician to that of a great king and that he is laying the groundwork for an overall change of focus in the sens of the Morte from the Grail theme to the history of a great

¹⁵This is not meant to imply that "Malory had a clearly-defined purpose in mind - to write a single, unified history of Arthur's reign" as Moorman sets out to prove in his The Book of King Arthur (p. xi).

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and tragic king.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is sufficient stylistic evidence to postulate that Malory, as narrator, has rejected the role of the omniscient observer of idealized chivalric behaviour in an imaginary fairyland called Logres for that of the objective chronicler of real events in a glorious but tragic era of England's history. To create this impression of historical realism, he has not only altered the artistic structure which he found in the Suite and developed a new method of composition to relate the adventures, but he has also employed a consistent narrative style which rejects all of the embellishments that add colour and contribute to the pictorial effects of the French redactions but which detract from the reportorial sense which he was attempting to achieve.

In his introduction to Works, Vinaver has presented persuasive arguments to support his claim that Malory has indeed altered the structure of the Suite¹⁷ and it will be shown in Chapter II that there is abundant evidence in the excerpt under examination to further substantiate this theory of a new method of composition in the Morte. However, in

¹⁶For a perceptive study of tragedy in the Morte, see: S.J.Miko, "Malory and the Chivalric Order," Medium Aevum, XXXV (1966), 211-230.

¹⁷Works, I, lxiv-lxxiii.

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spite of the many comments by a number of scholars on the excellence of Malory's style, very few of them have addressed themselves to the problem with any real substance in their analyses.¹⁸ Because there is this gap in scholarly research and because interest in style is a major pre-occupation of students of literature today, I have thought it appropriate to produce this thesis which is fundamentally an examination of Malory's style at an early stage in his development but which, nonetheless, does have implications with regard to the techniques and artistry of the Morte as a whole.

Of course, the ideal method of conducting this examination would be to undertake a thorough comparison of the whole of The Tale of King Arthur with both the Huth and Cambridge texts of the Suite and with the other extant fragments. In order to keep this thesis within manageable

¹⁸Vinaver himself speaks of the "unexpounded miracle of style" in the Morte and suggests that it "escapes analysis" (Works, I, lxxiv). In his introduction to Essays on Malory, Bennett states that "no one has yet attempted a detailed comparison of his prose with that of the French texts that were the basis of the greater part of his book." (p.vi). Since then, P.J.C.Field has published an extremely important analysis of style in the "Balin" subdivision in which he points out the predominance of narration over description in the tale ("Description and Narration in Malory," Speculum, XLIII [1968], 476-486).

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length, however, a certain arbitrary selection must be made, and I have chosen to examine that portion of the "Merlin" (Works, I, 41-56) which corresponds to folios 75-99 in the Huth manuscript. First of all, there is some justification for beginning with the "Merlin" in that The Tale of King Arthur is generally conceded to be the first work undertaken by Malory which is drawn from the French.¹⁹ If there must be some selection, a logical point of departure seems to be at that place where Malory first attempted to rework his French source. Furthermore, there is very little divergence between folios 75-99 of the Huth Merlin and the corresponding passages in the Cambridge manuscript (ff. 229-246). This eliminates the problem of deciding which version might be closer to the source used by Malory, and allows us to concentrate completely and directly upon his use of this common material. Admittedly, this means disregarding that section of the "Merlin" which is not to be found in the Huth manuscript - the episode dealing with Arthur's wars

¹⁹For a detailed analysis of the sequence of the Tales, see Works, I, li-lvi, as well as Moorman's "The Chronology of the Morte Darthur" in The Book of King Arthur. See also R.H.Wilson's "Malory's Early Knowledge of Arthurian Romance," UTSE, XXIX (1950), 33-50.

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with the kings²⁰ - but a sufficiently large portion remains from which enough evidence can be detailed to confirm trends and patterns relating to the structure, style and sens of the Morte.

Finally, it should be pointed out that this examination is undertaken with the full realization of the pitfalls and limitations inherent in any such source study.

Lumiansky is not far wrong when he says: "In effect, we are trying to follow the workings of an author's mind as he wrote; such an effort can hardly yield completely objective data...All we can do is set forth the conclusion which we find defensible on the basis of the observable facts; someone else may arrive at a wholly different conclusion from the same facts. In such a situation the burden rests squarely upon the interested reader to choose between the conflicting views."²¹ However, if we proceed upon the premise that the bulk of the alterations to be found in the Morte can be attributed to a single author (a valid premise

²⁰The account of the rebellion of the kings, which can be found in Malory and in the Cambridge ms., is omitted in both the Huth and the Spanish Demanda (Works, III, 1277-80). For the debate as to whether this sequence was a late interpolation see: R.H.Wilson, "The Rebellion of the Kings in Malory and in the Cambridge Suite du Merlin," UTSE, XXXI (1952), 13-26; and, Fanni Bogdanow, "The Rebellion of the Kings in the Cambridge Ms. of the Suite du Merlin," UTSE, XXXIV (1955), 6-17.

²¹Lumiansky, Malory's Originality, p.6.

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in the light of the consistent and developing pattern of these changes), and if we assume that this author was Malory (we cannot assume otherwise on the basis of present evidence) then a detailed comparison of the work with the available sources can, as Vinaver suggests, "place on record whatever may directly or indirectly throw light on the author's originality, on his outlook and methods, and on his attitude to the literary traditions which preceded him."²² Furthermore, as Loomis points out, "the careful and thorough investigation of sources and analogues has not only a positive value but also a negative one, almost equally important. It may and should save us from wild theorizing about the content and intent of an episode or a work."²³

²²Works, III, 1263.

²³R.S.Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (London, 1963), p. 7.

CHAPTER I

THE SUITE DU MERLIN

Before we proceed to examine how Malory "reduces" his source material and what this reduction suggests about the structure, style and sens of the Morte, perhaps a few words about the Suite du Merlin are in order. The prose continuation of Robert de Boron's Merlin survives in two distinct versions in three major manuscripts: the one, generally referred to as the Suite du Merlin, is represented by the Huth and Cambridge manuscripts, supplemented by a number of fragments;¹ the other, Lestoire de Merlin, forms a part of the Vulgate Cycle.² The one source of information about Robert de Boron is to be found in Ms. fr. 20047 in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This manuscript, as Le Gentil points out, "preserves our sole copy of a poem of 3,514 verses, known generally as the Joseph d'Armathie. This poem is followed without a break by 502 verses, presumably by the same author, which after introducing the story of Merlin are interrupted in the middle of a speech."³

¹See p. vii, n. 9.

²H.O.Sommer, ed., Lestoire de Merlin, Vol. II of The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances (Washington, 1908).

³Arthurian Literature, p. 251.

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Although there are nine specific references in the Huth manuscript to Robert de Boron which seem to intend to give the impression that the work is from his hand, it is generally conceded that Robert was not in fact the author of the Suite. Referring to de Boron, Le Gentil states: "I have said little of dates...since I do not think that any can be fixed with certainty."⁴ Paris hazarded the guess that the Suite itself was composed in the North East of France at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, but Dr. Bogdanow offers convincing evidence to fix the date of composition between 1230 and 1240.⁵ She also points out:

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Suite du Merlin forms part of a larger work, not the imaginary one postulated by Wechssler and Bruce and entitled the "pseudo-Robert de Boron" cycle, but a long romance beginning with the Estoire del Saint Graal, followed by the prose redaction of Robert de Boron's Merlin, the Suite and the Post-Vulgate versions of the Queste and Mort Artu. This composite but unified work we shall call the Roman du Graal.⁶

The Huth manuscript is made up of 229 folios, with each page divided into two columns of generally uniform

⁴Ibid., p. 262.

⁵Ibid., pp. 334-335.

⁶Ibid., pp. 331-332.

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length (37 lines).⁷ Folios 1a to the middle of 19b consist of a prose redaction of Robert's Joseph; folios 19b to the middle of 75a, a prose redaction of his Merlin. Both can be found in various other manuscripts. The Suite proper begins towards the end of folio 75a with the episode of the begetting of Mordred. This is followed by the adventure of the Questing Beast; the battles with the knight of the pavillion; the obtaining of Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake; the revelation of Arthur's parentage to the barons; the wars with Rions and Lot; the story of Balin; Arthur's marriage; the quests of Gawain, Tor and Pellinore; the story of Merlin and Nivienne; Arthur's wars with the five kings; the story of Morgan's treachery; and, the adventures of Gawain, Yvain and Morholt. The conclusion of this last set of adventures is missing in both the Huth and Cambridge manuscripts but can be found in B.N. Ms. fr. 112 fragment.⁸ It should be noted that there are no divisions in the manuscript between sections except for paragraph divisions.

⁷For the sake of consistency, I have followed the method of pagination adopted by Paris in the 1886 edition, when referring to the Huth Merlin in this paper. Paris uses the letters "a" and "b" to designate columns 1 and 2 recto, and "c" and "d" to designate columns 1 and 2 verso of each folio.

⁸See p. viii, n. 9.

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The major divergence between the Huth and Cambridge texts is in the account of the rebellion of the kings (corresponding to Works, I, 17-41) which is missing in the former but is to be found in both the Cambridge redaction and in Malory.⁹ There are two lacunae in the Huth manuscript (f. 103 and ff. 136-137) which are filled by ff. 249v-250r and ff. 270v-271v of the Cambridge, but, in general, the differences between the two texts are differences of detail, incidences of blemishes and so forth rather than of major divergences in content or in the number and order of events.

Also common to both the Huth and Cambridge manuscripts is the highly sophisticated artistic technique which underlies the Suite. Vinaver says: "The view put forward by Gaston Paris in his introduction to the Huth Merlin was that the work was nothing more than a conglomeration of disconnected incidents arranged without any semblance of plan or logic. Not only has this view until recently been shared by all critics, but it has been confidently extended to all Arthurian prose romances."¹⁰ Vinaver demonstrates that the concept of a mosaic must be discarded, as well as the mistaken idea that the Suite is "the outcome of a long process of decay and corruption" of earlier, slightly more coherent predecessors.

⁹See p. xiii, n. 18.

¹⁰Works, III, 1268.

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In his introduction to Works, Vinaver pinpoints a key feature of French Arthurian romance when he says that "none of the branches of the Cycle can be conveniently subdivided, and no subdivisions exist in the manuscript. Apart from certain interpolations which can easily be detached from the main body of the work, few of the episodes, if any, appear as self-contained units."¹¹ These various episodes or motifs are bound together by a discursive interwoven structure such that "each episode is a continuation and an anticipation of other episodes."¹²

Vinaver explains this structure as follows:

Perhaps the easiest way to discover the nature and the working of this device is to draw an analogy with the technique of tapestry. Just as in a tapestry each thread alternates with an endless variety of others, so in the early prose romances of the Arthurian group numerous seemingly independent episodes or "motifs" are interwoven in a manner which makes it possible for each episode to be set aside at any moment and resumed later. No single stretch of such a narrative can be complete in itself any more than a stitch in a woven fabric; the sequel may appear at any moment, however long the interval. But the resemblance goes no further, for unlike the finished tapestry a branch of a prose romance has as a rule no natural conclusion; when the author brings it to a close he simply cuts the threads at arbitrarily chosen points, and anyone who chooses to pick them up and

¹¹Works, I, lxvi.

¹²Works, III, 1273.

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interweave them in a similar fashion can continue the work indefinitely. Hence the "multitude of members" and the prodigious growth of the Arthurian tradition enlarged at each stage of its progress by continuations of earlier works.¹³

Thus the two basic principles of composition in the French romances are those of interweaving and of retrospective lengthening, a process which Vinaver describes as "a coherent system of echoes and anticipations."¹⁴

The various threads of the story, lengthened as it were in retrospect, alternate with one another in such a way that each appears at once as a digression from the one that immediately precedes it and as a continuation of some earlier stretch of the narrative. The result is a work resembling a woven fabric - a solid structure defying any attempt at dissection and yet irreconcilable with the straightforward "Aristotelian" notion of composition.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that the blueprint for the structure of the Suite was a highly intricate and sophisticated method of composition. Furthermore, the events are related in an ornate style of exposition in which description and pictorial effects are a key element, in which courtoisie is the guiding principle of behaviour, and in which adventure and mystery overshadow the events themselves. And, underlying the stories is the anticipation of the Grail quest which is the dominant theme of the whole Roman du Graal

¹³Works, I, lxvii.

¹⁴Works, III, 1269.

¹⁵Works, III, 1274.

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of which the Suite is an integral part.

CHAPTER II

MALORY'S REWORKING OF THE SUITE:
METHOD OF COMPOSITION

In order to recognize the extent of Malory's revision of the traditional matière and to grasp the purpose of these modifications, it is essential that one understand first of all the manner in which he restructured his source materials. In discussing The Tale of King Arthur, Vinaver points out that "when Malory began to rewrite some of these romances he reversed, or attempted to reverse, the whole process and proceeded to reshape his material in accordance with a totally different architectural design. He could not accept the view that a story, no matter how short or how long, had to be part of an indefinitely extensible whole; to him any story was above all a well-circumscribed set of incidents."¹ In this new design, "the threads of the narrative are unravelled and straightened out so as to form in each case a consistent and self-contained set of adventures. Thus a simple narrative, with each sequence of events beginning when the other is at an end, is substituted for the elaborate chain of interlocked episodes."² As a result, "Malory's most successful and historically most significant

¹Works, III, 1275.

²Works, I, lxx.

contribution to the technique of the prose tale was his attempt to substitute for the method of 'interweaving' the modern 'progressive' form of exposition."³

While this method of composition is most evident in the larger units of the Morte, nonetheless "the same process can be observed on a smaller scale in each important subdivision of the story."⁴ There is, as I shall try to demonstrate, ample evidence in the "Merlin" of early attempts by Malory to reshape the structure of the adventures along the lines elucidated by Vinaver. Not only does Malory on occasion rearrange the sequence of the episodes in order to make the tale conform to the progressive method of exposition in which no adventure is begun until the previous one has reached its logical conclusion, but he also consistently deletes the frequent prophecies and links which are scattered through the Suite and discards whole passages which, in the French redactions, interrupt the flow of individual sequences. This, I would suggest, indicates that Malory was attempting to discard the frequent "echoes and anticipations" which are an inherent part of the cyclic structure of the Suite but which do not conform with his method of composition and also to suppress the numerous "digressions" which

³Works, I, lxviii.

⁴Works, I, lxx.

which interfere with the logical progression of a specific event. In the overall scheme of the Morte this was, I would postulate, a necessary first step in Malory's plan to assume the role of a chronicler of historical events.

The Gryfflet (Gifflet) sequence is perhaps the best example in the "Merlin" of this tendency on the part of Malory to straighten out the narrative by relocating passages which, in the Suite, interrupt the flow of an episode and prevent it from developing to its logical completion. In the French text (H.174-185)⁵ Arthur succumbs to the pleading of his young friend and promises to knight him the next morning in spite of his own serious misgivings. During the night, the king takes counsel with Merlin who warns him of the grave danger which Gifflet faces in confronting the knight of the pavillion. Before proposing the plan which will save the young squire's life, Merlin makes the following prophecy:

And if Gifflet then died at this very point, it would be a very great tragedy; for if he lives to maturity he will be as good a knight or better than that one. And so I tell you something that you will see happen: he will be the knight who in this world will keep you company the longest time

⁵All references to the Suite, unless otherwise indicated, are to the Huth Merlin and the pagination is that of the Paris-Ulrich edition which can be found in the left-hand column of the translation in Chapter V.

and, after he will have left you, not by his own wish but by yours, there will be no knight who will keep you company since there will be none to see you unless it be in a dream. (H.178)

There follows a discussion between Merlin and Arthur concerning the manner in which each of them will die. The next morning, Gifflet is knighted and armed after he has promised the king "that as soon as you have jousted with the knight, whether you fare well or badly, you return without doing more, whether on foot or on horseback" (H.179). However, before this episode is allowed to proceed to the battle between Gifflet and the knight of the pavillion, the Suite recounts the incident in which the envoys from Rome arrive demanding that Arthur acknowledge the Emperor's supremacy over Logres. It is not until this new thread has been spun into the fabric of the tale that the Suite "stops speaking of the king and his company and returns to Gifflet" (H.181).

Malory pares this sequence masterfully to the pertinent dramatic facts, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter. But what concerns us here is his handling of the interruptions. In the "Merlin", the Gryfflet episode flows in one swift movement from the request for "the Order of Knyghthoode" to the acceptance of the condition attached to this and, finally, to the encounter between Gryfflet and Pellinore in the forest. Not only does Malory suppress the prophecy quoted above and the ensuing dialogue which it

provokes, but he also shifts the episode dealing with the Emperor's envoys from its position between the knighting of Gryfflet and the battle with Pellinore, recounting this incident only after the young knight has returned wounded to the court and "thorow good lechis he was heled and saved" (Works, 48).

Another example of this unravelling and straightening process can be observed in an earlier episode - the one in which Merlin appears to Arthur first in the guise of a page and then as an old man. This whole episode is marked by superb telescoping and I shall make reference to this in the next chapter. However, what is significant here is the way in which Malory suppresses digressions, echoes of former episodes and anticipations of future events, thus focusing attention upon what he obviously considered to be the pertinent facts.

Malory relates (Works, 43-44) how Merlin appears to Arthur "lyke a chylde of fourtene yere of ayge" and tells him "I know what thou arte, and who was thy fadir, and of whom thou were begotyn." When the king accuses the page of lying, Merlin departs and then returns "in the lykenesse of an olde man of four score yere of ayge." He convinces Arthur that "the chylde tolde you trouthe" and tells him "ye have done a thyng late that God ys displesed with you" and that "hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be

punysshed for your fowle dedis." Following this exchange in the "Merlin", both ride into Carlion and the sequence dealing with the revelation to the barons of Arthur's parentage begins.

These are essentially the same facts that we find in the Suite (H.153-164). However, the method of presenting these facts is markedly different. In the French version, there is not this natural, chronological revelation to Arthur; instead, the unfolding of the "secret things" is effected completely by the page and then repeated in full by the old man. Separating these two passages, we find an anticipation of future events when Merlin says:

Know that you will come to sorrow and ruin by a knight who is conceived but who is not yet born. And all this kingdom will be destroyed and the noblemen and the good knights of the kingdom of Logres will be cut to pieces and killed. And the country will remain deprived of good knights which you will see in your time. (H.158)

This prophecy in the French texts is followed by Arthur's cajoling of Merlin in order to learn the date and place of Mordred's birth during which the Suite gives a forecast of the Quest of the Grail:

It is one of the adventures of the Grail. And I cannot tell you more, for it is not fitting for me to say more: a more noble person than I will tell you...He is not yet begotten nor born but he will be begotten soon. And the knight whom you saw hunting the beast will beget him...And he will be called Percival of Wales...(H.160)

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Finally, the sequence ends with an echo of the opening passages of the Suite and the somewhat self-conscious cutting on the part of the French narrator:

After he related to him his life and how he had him nurtured with the milk with which Kay should have been nursed, and he told him fully how he was descended from Uther Pendragon and Igraine, just as the tale has already related. Sir Robert de Boron did not wish to relate what he had already, for he did not wish to enlarge his book with a great many words, but he held the right way and said...(H.162)

Malory's omission of these prophecies and links suggests that he is deliberately altering the structure of the tale and imposing upon it a new method of composition. This tendency to deliberately suppress prophecies which, in the Suite, link the adventures to future episodes is very evident in the "Merlin". Admittedly, there is one clear instance where Malory reverses this process and incorporates into his narrative a prophecy of his own invention. (One must assume it is of his own invention since it does not appear in either the Huth or Cambridge manuscripts. However, it is quite possible that he did find it in his original source.) After Arthur's battle with Pellinore, Malory has Merlin say:

And hys name ys kynge Pellinore, and he shall have two sonnes that shall be passyng good men as ony lyvyng: save one in thys worlde they shall have no felowis of prouesse and of good lyvyng, and hir namys shall be Percyvall and sir Lamorake of Walis. And he shall telle you the name of youre

owne son begotyn of youre syster, that shall be the destruction of all thys realme. (Works, 51-52)

But for this glaring exception, the general tendency in the "Merlin" is in the opposite direction.

There are seven such anticipatory links in the Suite which Malory suppresses:

1. the prophecy that Mordred will bring down the kingdom of Logres "about which you will be able to hear toward the end of the book" (H.148);
2. Merlin's explanation of the symbolism of the Questing Beast which he says is "one of the adventures of the Grail" (H.160);
3. the forecast of Morgan Le Fay's treachery (H.166);
4. Merlin's instruction to Arthur to have all his adventures set down in writing and the implications of this written record (H.175);
5. the prophecy that Gifflet will be a constant companion to Arthur until the king's death (H.177);
6. the prediction of Arthur's narrow brush with death which "the tale does not explain at this time how this could be, but waits to relate this until that time when the story explains it, how his sister Morgan stole it to give it to her lover..." (H.199);
7. the anticipation of the adventures of Acanor (Lait le Hardi) - "the story tells of many things about him

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where it deals with the quest of the Holy Grail and before" (H.209).

Not only does Malory suppress these prophecies which impede the free flow of his narrative, but he also deletes whole passages in order to keep the reader's attention focused exclusively upon one specific incident at a time. Thus, in the sequence where Arthur sets out in secret to confront the knight of the pavillion in the forest, the king encounters Merlin fleeing from the three churls. In the Suite as well as in the "Merlin", Arthur disperses the churls and tells Merlin that he has saved him from death, giving the latter the opportunity to warn the king that he himself is very close to death. In both French redactions, however, Merlin goes on to explain that Arthur is no match for the knight of the pavillion especially since "you have armour that is worthless, nor do you have a sword that you will need" (H.186), thus anticipating the episode dealing with the Lady of the Lake and Excalibur. Malory, on the other hand, fixes our attention upon the encounter between Arthur and Pellinore and suspends the comment about the sword until after the battle (Works, 52). Moreover, in one of the digressions which abound in the Suite, the encounter is delayed even longer as Merlin explains why the churls were pursuing him and what their fate was to be. Malory discards this passage and proceeds directly to the battle scene.

Later, when Arthur returns to his court with Excalibur at his side, the Suite makes mention of the wedding of Urien and Morgan and the begetting of Yvain (H.202-203) before introducing the episode dealing with the request of King Rions. Malory, as usual, suppresses this anticipatory link and goes directly to the narration of the episode at hand.

The greatest omission in terms of bulk, and one which further illustrates Malory's tendency to eliminate all interruptions and digressions wherever possible, is in the sequence dealing with the banishment of the infants at the end of the "Merlin". In fifteen lines, Malory relates how Arthur gathered together all the children of noble parentage "borne on May-day", including Mordred, and how they "were putte in a shyppe to the se" because "Merlyon tolde kynge Arthure that he that sholde destroy hym and all the londe sholde be borne on May-day" (Works, 55). He then relates how the ship was tossed up near a castle and how Mordred was found by a "goode man" who "fostird hym tylle he was fourtene yere of age, and then broughte hym to the courte..." Though altered slightly in details, these are essentially the same facts which are contained in the Suite. However, there is in the French texts an intricate intertwining of incidents and details which are to find their echoes in future episodes, such as the scarring of Mordred's brow as

he is being readied for the voyage to Logres; the finding of Mordred by a fisherman who takes him to Nabur le Derrès, father of Sagremor; the saving of the children from Logres by divine intervention and their refuge in the land of King Oriant. All of these threads have been plucked out of the fabric of the tale by Malory and thus there is a substantial alteration in the texture of the "Merlin."

To recapitulate, then, the "Merlin" provides a great deal of evidence for that fundamental alteration in the structure of The Tale of King Arthur which Vinaver describes in the introduction to Works. Malory has re-arranged episodes within the tale in order to allow it to follow the progressive method of composition which he found more suited to his needs; he has suppressed prophecies which, in the Suite, link the adventures to subsequent events; he has deleted echoes of earlier episodes; and, finally, he has discarded passages which interfere with the free flow of the narrative or which delay the unwinding of specific episodes to their logical conclusions. But, as Vinaver points out, "The Tale of King Arthur was but the first attempt in this direction, highly characteristic of Malory's attitude to his task, yet hardly comperable to his ultimate achievement."⁶

⁶Works, I, lxxi.

This straightening process is, I would suggest, one of the devices (a necessary first step) which Malory has employed to achieve that modification of narrative outlook essential in giving the Morte the illusion of a chronicle of historical events. This new and original method of composition is, moreover, one of the vehicles through which the new sens has been integrated into the traditional matière.

CHAPTER III

MALORY'S REWORKING OF THE SUITE: STYLE

Malory's reduction of the matière is closely linked with his method of composition. However, the manner in which he reduces the source material and the effects that this has upon the movement of the narrative suggest important implications with regard to his style. A number of techniques can be isolated in the "Merlin": there is an almost total suppression of description and frequent omissions of details which add colour and contribute to the pictorial effect of the Suite; there are frequent deletions of explicitly stated motivations and a noticeable restraining of the repetitions and reminders which are essential in the French cyclic structure; there is a marked suppression of aphorisms and moralizing passages which run through the French texts; there is a tendency to telescope events; and, finally, there is a stark presentation of direct quotation and dialogue in contrast to the wordy, courtly set-speeches of the French romance. The overall effect of these devices, as I shall try to demonstrate, is to produce in the "Merlin" a story which is cut to the bare bones, fast-moving and dominated by the events which take place in it - one which is carried forward by dialogue and direct speech which is stark, realistic and dramatized to a far greater extent than in the Suite. In

essence, Malory's style is closer to the reporting of a chronicler than to the piling up of effects of a word-painter. He gives ample evidence that he is rejecting the role of the omniscient observer for that of the objective recorder of historical events.

It will be necessary for the purposes of this examination to isolate the various techniques which Malory employs in reducing the source material. However, it should be kept in mind that these various devices operate in concert with one another and that the final effect is not the result of the sum total of these techniques but, as in any work of art, this effect emerges from the unified whole.

1. Description and Detail

What Field discovered in his study of the story of Balin with regard to Malory's style¹ - that, for the most part, he discards the skillful description of the French romance so that we are left with "a story dominated by narration rather than description" - is equally true of the "Merlin". There is a significant body of evidence in the

¹P.J.C.Field, "Description and Narration in Malory," Speculum, XLIII (1968), 476-486.

excerpt under examination to indicate that this is a key feature of Malory's style at this stage in his development, and numerous instances of this tendency can be cited. For example, while the Suite relates that "the king mounted a big horse adorned with a hunting robe, and left Cardolle with a great company of servants and knights" (H.148), Malory states simply, "He made hym ready with many knyghtes to ryde on huntynge" (Works, 41). Malory substitutes the bare statement of fact: "And so he spurred hys horse and rode aftir longe" (Works, 42) for the passage:

The king, who was well mounted, began to chase the hart ahead of all of his companions and made great haste to go after it so that in a short time he had outdistanced them by two leagues, so that he could not see nor know where they were. (H.149)

In the episode dealing with the begetting of Mordred, the Suite goes to some pains to describe Arthur's sister:

Thus the lady came to the court with all her children whom she loved very dearly. And she was full of such great beauty that one could hardly see nor find her equal in beauty. The king did her great honour because she was a crowned queen and of the high lineage of King Uther Pendragon. King Arthur made very great joy over the lady and greatly feasted her and her children. The king saw the lady full of great beauty... (H.147)

Malory pares most of the details and cuts the description to a bare minimum: "And she com rychely beseyne with hir four sonnes, Gawayne, Gaheris, Aggravayne and Gareth, with many other knyghtes and ladyes, for she was a passynge fayre

lady" (Works, 41).

When Merlin changes his appearance to resemble an old man following the Questing Beast episode, the Suite explains:

And then he changed the appearance that he then had and to the likeness of an old and ancient man of eighty years, so weak in appearance that he could hardly walk. And he was dressed in a grey robe. In such a habit he came before the king and had the appearance of a wise man. (H.157)

For Malory it suffices to say:

So departed Merlyon, and com ayen in the lykenesse of an olde man of four score yere of ayge, whereof the kyng was passynge glad, for he semed to be ryght wyse. (Works, 44)

Whole passages whose principal purpose in the French redactions is to provide a backdrop for the action are cut to brief statements of fact, with a minimum of sensory detail and colour. Thus, when the squire brings his wounded master to Arthur's court, the Suite paints the following picture:

One day when the feasting was great and abundant and the king was seated at dinner and he had had the first course, it happened that there came in the midst of the hall which was on the ground level a squire on horseback, and he carried in front of him a mortally wounded knight, and he was wounded full recently through the body by a lance, and he was still dressed in his hauberk and armour, but he did not have his helmet on his head.

The squire carried the knight in front of him. And when he came to the entrance of the hall, he found no one who impeded him and for this reason he came on horseback before those

who were eating. And he immediately dismounted and put his lord, who was covered with green herbs, on the ground... (H.174)

Malory states quite simply: "So on a day there com into the courte a squyre on horseback ledynge a knyght tofore hym, wounded to the dethe" (Works, 46). He goes on to report that the squire "tolde how there was a knight in the forest that had rered up a pavylon by a welle that hath slayne my mayster" (Works, 46). Compare this with the elaborate description in the Suite of the camp of the knight of the pavillion:

"...whoever wishes to go to him can find him in the forest at the entrance in a plain which is enclosed by hounds and in a pavillion set up beside a fountain. And it is the most rich and most elegant pavillion that I have ever seen. And he stays there night and day in the company of only two squires. And he has had a lance and a shield hung on a tree which is in ffront of the pavillion..." (H.175)

In a later sequence, the Suite makes some effort to describe the envoys of the Emperor of Rome who suddenly appear at Arthur's court:

...behold there entered twelve men all of whom were dressed in white samite. And all the men were old and ancient and all white from the paleness of age, and each carried in his hand an olive branch for a sign. (H.180)

Malory states quite bluntly: "Rhyght so come into the courte twelve knyghtes that were aged men, whiche com frome the Emperoure of Rome" (Works, 48).

Scores of other instances of Malory's tendency to suppress description can be found in the translation in Chapter V. Obviously, Malory is deliberately restraining the pictorial effect of the source and is providing only a bare minimum of sensory detail so that the reader's attention is directed towards the events themselves and the emphasis is made to lie in the unfolding of these events. This is not to say that his style is devoid of imagery: in the battle sequence between Arthur and Pellinore, Malory's use of an extremely apt simile - "and then they went to the batayle agayne, and so hurtled togydirs lyke too rammes" (Works, 50) - is far more effective in helping the reader to visualize the scene than the several lines of description in the Suite. But while this is not an isolated instance, it is the exception rather than the rule in the "Merlin". The overall effect of this predominance of narration over description is to give an increased tempo and a relentless simplicity to the flow of the tale so that one is left with the sense of realistic reporting of events sheared of all adornment.

This effect is further accentuated by Malory's tendency to delete details. Notice, for example, how he reduces Arthur's dream from a whole paragraph to a single sentence by paring such details:

Suite:

When the lady had returned to her country, a great adventure happened to the King Arthur such that it seemed to him in his dream that he was seated upon a throne, just as he had commanded it, and above him there was such a great multitude of birds that he marvelled from whence all of them could have come. And when he had seen this apparition, it seemed to him that there arrived flying from another place a large dragon and a very great multitude of flying griffins and they went both high and low into the kingdom of Logres. And wherever they went, they attacked all whom they encountered, and after them no castle remained without being all burnt and destroyed, and thus it completely put to ravage and destruction the kingdom of Logres. And when it had done this, it immediately returned and attacked him and all those who were with him, so that the serpent slew and put to death all who were with the king. And when it had, then there began between them a battle too sore and too cruel; it happened that the king killed the serpent but he remained sorely wounded so that it seemed necessary for him to die. (H.148)

"Merlin":

Than the kynge dremed a marvaylous dreme whereof he was sore adrad. But thus was the dreme of Arthure: hym thought there was com into hys londe gryffens and serpentis, and hym thought they brente and lowghe all the people in the londe: and than he thought he fought with them and they dud hym harme and wounded hym full sore, but at the laste he slew them. (Works, 41)

The process of paring the narrative to the bare bones of action can be observed in such instances as the preparation for the hunt after the dream (H.148; Works, 41); in the arrival of Merlin and Arthur at the court (H.164; Works, 45); in the preparation for the disclosure of Arthur's parentage

to the barons (H.165; Works, 45); in the battles between Pellinore and Gryfflet (H.165ff.; Works, 45) and between Pellinore and Arthur (H.190ff.; Works, 50); and in the sequence dealing with the banishment of the infants where the Suite provides the specific number of children who were locked in the tower (H.203) and who were cast adrift (H.208).

2. Suppression of Motivations, Repetitions and Aphorisms

The increase in tempo, which is one of the by-products of Malory's suppression of description and sensory detail, is further heightened by the omission in the "Merlin" of explicit statements of motivation, of the numerous aphorisms and sententiae which abound in the Suite, and of the many repetitions and reminders which are essential to the French redactions because of their cyclic structure. Furthermore, in refusing to comment upon events Malory is, in fact, effecting a transformation in narrative outlook from the omniscient observer to the objective recorder of the incidents. He relates the adventures not as one who sees into the minds of his characters and delves into the implications of their actions, but as an objective historian who is setting down events as they happened.

Thus, when Queen Igraine is summoned by Arthur to the court in order that the king may verify Merlin's account

of his birth, Malory states simply that "she came and she brought with hir Morgan le Fay, hir doughter" (Works, 45).

The Suite, however, explains:

When Queen Igraine heard that the king summoned her to his court, she feared that he wished to seize her land and deprive her of everything, and she asked King Lot and her daughter and all her other relatives to come to the court with her, and if the king wished to harm her in any way, they would help her in every way they could.
(H.164)

Shortly afterwards the French text informs us that Igraine "was so terrified, because she felt guilty of what she said, that she trembled a great deal from fear. And then she said a word in the manner of a woman who has great doubt..." (H.165). Malory deletes this passage.

Another striking example of this type of explicit statement of motivation which Malory suppresses can be found in the knight-of-the-pavillion sequence. While Malory sticks to the bare facts of Pellinore's attack upon Myles (Works, 46), the Suite has Merlin provide the following explanation of these strange events:

"It is true that this knight has begun those adventures of knight against knight, and since he has begun in this way, it is necessary that what he has wrongly done be made right by a knight." "Then is it necessary," said the king, "that a knight of this court go?" "That is true," said Merlin. (H.176)

It is this exchange, which does not appear in the "Merlin",

that prompts Gifflet to step forward to offer his services. In Malory's account, the squire's sudden petition to receive "the Order of Knyghthoode" lacks this explicitly-stated motivation.

The aphorisms and moralizing passages, which can be found in every episode in the Suite and which Malory consistently deletes, come very often from the mouth of Merlin. However, he is by no means the only source of this type of sententia. The cumulative effect of the following examples, all omitted by Malory, speak for themselves:

Merlin: "For you did not see anything while sleeping that will not happen in the future. So must it be for creatures of this world." (H.153)

Merlin: "For you are a consecrated king, and were surely placed in this honour and in this dignity by the grace of Jesus Christ and no other." (H.154)

Merlin: "Indeed, never, if it please God, will a creature of our lord receive harm from me. For although he be treacherous to the end, as long as he be innocent he would be disloyal who would kill him."
(H.158)

Urfin: "Her disloyal and evil heart surpasses that of every other mother, for all mothers love their children by nature."
(H.168)

Merlin: "Know that you must love and value your lord, first of all because you obtained him by the grace of our lord, and by no other; afterwards, because he is the wisest prince of his age in the kingdom

of Logres; afterwards, because he is such a noble man as one who is begotten of King Uther." (H.173)

Merlin: "So must it be that things happen as our lord ordained them...And if you die, so must everyone of us." (H.178)

Arthur: "And what I do possess I have it from God alone, who placed me in this power and in this grace, to the damnation of my soul if I do not do what I must, and to its salvation if I rule the people as a father should." (H.180)

Arthur: "When death comes, it will be necessary for me to accept it." (H.194)

-----: Thus did Mordred escape from peril and all the others perished, for so did chance go. (H.207)

The frequent repetitions in the Suite which serve as links in the cyclic pattern of the French redactions and as necessary reminders to the reader of previous threads in the romance are invariably omitted in the "Merlin". While these repetitions and reminders become extraneous as a result of Malory's progressive method of composition, their omission contributes to the smooth and rapid movement in the narration of the "Merlin". To cite but one example, we find on page 164 of the Huth the passage quoted above explaining Igraine's fears as to Arthur's reasons for summoning her to court. Two paragraphs later, after the Suite has explained how Merlin instructed Ector and Urfin in preparation for the disclosure of Arthur's identity, the following reminder

appears which, of course, Malory has suppressed:

And Queen Igraine came very richly adorned and with a great company of knights. And yet she was very greatly afraid that the king would wish to seize her land and that she would not keep under her rule as great a country as she now did, because she was a woman. (H.165)

3. Telescoping of Events

Another device which Malory employs for condensing the source material and thus streamlining the narration is his technique of telescoping events. For example, the whole exchange between Arthur and Merlin following the Questing Beast episode (H.153-164) is condensed to almost one-tenth the original length even though only two significant incidents are omitted - Arthur's attempt to extract from Merlin the date and place of Mordred's birth in order to have him put to death, and the passage dealing with the symbolism of the beast. While this reduction is achieved by a combination of techniques (for example, the elimination of description, the omission of details, and so forth), much of it is the result of Malory's telescoping the revelations made to the king and having them disclosed, partly by the page and partly by the old man, in a direct and chronological sequence.

This device can be seen working more clearly in the Myles episode. In the Suite, the squire brings his master,

mortally wounded, to Arthur's court (H.174) and later, in spite of assiduous care, the knight dies (H.176). Malory, on the other hand, has the squire lament that the knight of the pavillion "hath slayne my mayster" (Works, 46) and this is the last we hear of Myles. More significantly, in the French redactions Gifflet petitions the king for knighthood following this incident (H.176), Arthur grants the request reluctantly (H.177), he ponders over the danger to his squire and seeks Merlin's advice during the night (H.178-179) and he knights and arms Gifflet the next day after obtaining from him the promise that he will return to Cardolle after the first joust (H.179). All of this is abridged to some twenty lines of factual reporting in which Gryfflet asks for knighthood, Merlin warns of the danger to his life, and Arthur grants the request upon the condition stated above. The whole episode elapses within the space of what seems a few minutes. The effect is to give to the "Merlin" a sense of greater immediacy.

4. Direct Quotation and Dialogue

The same episode can serve to illustrate what is perhaps the most important and characteristic feature of Malory's style, his superb handling of direct quotation and dialogue. One of the key devices that he uses to dramatize

events and to give to his narration a sense of realistic reporting is the elimination of elaborate phraseology and the cutting down of courtly exchanges and quasi-formulaic speeches which give the Suite an almost ritualistic texture. What emerges, as a result, is dialogue which is direct, spare, and highly dramatic, and the overall effect is one of greater immediacy and realism, clearly another indication of Malory's adopting the role of a chronicler of historical events. One might object that the historian does not, as a rule, attempt to record dialogue but one need only glance through the Anglo Saxon Chronicles to confirm that single speeches and dialogue were accepted conventions of the medieval chronicler.

In the passage referred to above, after explaining that Myles has been wounded by Pellinore, Malory has the squire state simply: "Wherefore I beseech you that my maystir may be buryed and that som knyght may revenge my maystirs dethe" (Works, 46). This remark is much more pointed and dramatic than the elaborate oration of the Suite:

"King Arthur, great need makes me come to you in order that I obtain your assistance and help, and I shall tell you why. It is true that you are king of this land by the grace of our lord, and when you were put in possession of the kingdom you promised the people that you would, within your power, right all evils that would be committed in your country, whether it were by knights or by others. And it has thus happened that a knight, I do not know who he is, has through his pride killed my lord in that forest

beside here. Thus it needs be that you will avenge the death of my lord." (H.174)

In the "Merlin", the squire's statement is followed by a direct and far less formal request by Gryfflet: "Sir, I beseeche you to make me knyght" (Works, 46). The squire's remark is free from all of the pleading and harking back to past services which is found in the Suite (H. 176).

When Gifflet confronts the knight of the pavillion, the French text has the latter exclaim:

"Ah, sir knight, you have not acted courteously towards me; you have struck down my shield. You should take it out on me if I have wronged you and not on the shield that has done nothing to you."
(H.181)

This is followed by a long exchange marked by all the rules of courtly behaviour. Malory, however, condenses this to, "Fayre knyght, why smote ye downe my shyld?" and Gryfflet's reply, "Sir, for I wode juste with you." (Works, 47).

In the first encounter between Arthur and the knight of the pavillion, the Suite relates that the latter begged the king to "show courtesy" and lend him a horse in order that he might continue his quest, warning the king that "the shame shall be yours and the injury mine" if he does not accede (H.152). When it becomes clear to the knight that the king wishes to take up the quest in his place, he exclaims, "What, sir evil knight...", and the argument continues in a subdued tone until Arthur finally dismisses his

adversary with the rather anti-climactic statement: "Then you may leave, for I do not wish to know any more of your affairs" (H.153).

Malory's treatment of this exchange is blunt and devoid of courtly etiquette. The epithet which Pellinore hurls at the king is not "sir evil knight" but "a, foole", and when the knight leaps on Arthur's horse he adds insult to injury by saying, "Grammercy, for this horse ys myne owne" (Works, 43). Arthur accepts the fait accompli but warns that "thou mayst take myne horse by force, but and I myght preve hit I wolde weete whether thou were bettir worthy to have him or I." To this, Pellinore replies ominously: "Seke me here whan thou wolte, and her nye thys welle thou shalte fynde me." Thus, by carefully shearing the dialogue of elaborate phraseology and by building to a climax in the final statement rather than deflating the tension by having Arthur dismiss Pellinore, Malory has achieved a greater dramatic effect and a much stronger sense of reporting actual events.

Malory's disregard for the niceties of courtly behaviour is again evident when Urfin accuses Igraine: "Ye ar the falsyst lady of the worlde, and the most traytours unto the kynges person" (Works, 45). The sequence of events leading up to the accusation is much more circuitous in the Suite and the dialogue there is marked by the nuances of

decorum and courtesy. The lady is said to be "disloyal" (H.166) rather than false and traitorous even though the crime of which she is accused in the French version is far more serious than in the "Merlin".

A far more striking example of Malory's original handling of direct quotation and of his attitude towards courtly conventions can be seen in comparing Arthur's exchanges with the envoys from the Emperor of Rome and with the messengers of King Rions. In the former sequence, the Suite has Arthur give a detailed explanation for refusing to pay tribute to the Emperor (H.180), followed by a veiled threat to the envoys and a warning from them that "very great harm must come to you" (H.181). Malory's treatment is concise, dramatic and far more effective:

"Well," seyde kynge Arthure, "ye ar messyngers; therefore ye may sey what ye woll, othir ellis ye sholde dye therefore. But thys ys myne answe: I owghe the Emperour no trewage, nother none woll I yelde hym, but on a fayre fylde I shall yelde my trwage, that shall be with a sherpe spere othir ellis with a sherpe swerde. And that shall not be longe, be my fadirs soule Uther!" (Works, 48)

Arthur's reaction in the "Merlin" to Rions' command is equally blunt and original. In the Suite, Rions' rather exorbitant demands are tempered somewhat by the compliment "because he values you more than anyone that he has conquered" (H.202), whereas in Malory they are brutal and to

the point:

...wherefore he sente for hys bearde, othir ellis he wolde entir into his londis and brenne and sle, and nevir leve tylle he hathe the hede and the bearde bothe. (Works, 54)

Arthur's reaction in the French redactions is one of amusement: he can still address the messengers as "fair friends" and tell them that he regards their lord as "foolish". In the "Merlin", Arthur becomes infuriated at the sheer audacity of the request which "ys the most orgulus and lewdiste message that evir man had isente unto a kynge" (Works, 55), and he replies that Rions "shall do me omage on bothe his knees, othir ellis he shall lese hys hede by the fayth of my body... for thys ys the moste shamefullyste message that ever y herde speke of."

5. Style as a Vehicle for the New Sens

If the new method of composition in the Morte was, as I have postulated, the first step in Malory's attempt to convey the sense that his work is a chronicle of historical events and thus to create an effective vehicle for integrating the new sens into the traditional matière, then the development of a distinct and original style of narration can be seen as the culmination of this process. Malory has freed the narration in the "Merlin" from the embellishments of the

Suite and sheared away many of the conventions which give to romance the aura of mystery and otherworldliness so that the tale is dominated by the events which are being related and these events have been given, as much as is possible in the circumstances, an air of actuality and plausibility. The tempo is swift, the exposition is relentlessly simple and direct, the dramatic effect is accentuated and the direct quotation is spare, pointed and realistic. The reader has the impression of following a dramatized account of real events which occurred in the distant past rather than of luxuriating in a tale of mysterious adventures in an imaginary fairyland. If this is not good history, it certainly has all of the ingredients of a good historical novel.

CHAPTER IV

MALORY'S REWORKING OF THE SUITE: SENS

Thus far, I have tried to demonstrate from evidence in the "Merlin" that Malory's restructuring of the architectural pattern of the source and his narration of the traditional material in a distinct and original style are the means by which he has conveyed a new interpretation of the Arthur legend and are inherently linked to the new sens which he has incorporated into the Morte.¹ What remains to be done is to determine whether there is any evidence in the excerpt under examination of the seeds of an original interpretation. As Wright has pointed out:

Much of the Suite is conditioned by the idea that the Grail adventures impend as the central event of Arthurian history...The sustaining theme is the Grail adventure, the chief subject of Merlin's admonitions. Malory was inextricably indebted to this romance for characters and episodes in the "Tale of King Arthur", but a comparison of his version with the Suite du Merlin reveals a difference of purpose that is fundamental.²

¹Whether Malory was conscious of this plan before he began to write is, in my opinion, immaterial since it is the work of art itself and not the author's attitude towards his work before the creative process has taken place which is the proper concern of the student of literature. For a thorough discussion of this question, see: P.J.Marcotte, The God Within: Essays in Speculative Literary Criticism (Ottawa, 1964).

²Malory's Originality, p. 12.

Vinaver remarks in his commentary to The Tale of King Arthur that "Malory shifts the whole emphasis of the tale from the story of a great magician to that of a great king."³

While it would be foolhardy to try to justify such broad evaluations on the basis of the evidence provided in the small excerpt under examination, nonetheless, there are three trends distinguishable in the "Merlin" which do indeed point towards a reinterpretation of the traditional legend. There is a subtle alteration in the character of Arthur such that he emerges as the prototype of the great hero of the later Tales, far more independent in his actions and less the puppet of Merlin. As Arthur's role is heightened, that of Merlin is diminished correspondingly, so that he becomes less the grand manipulator of events and more the mentor than the master of the king; less a supernatural being and more a magician par excellence. Finally, linked to this modification in the roles of Arthur and Merlin is a noticeable playing down of the supernatural element which is an inherent part of the Suite but which has little place in Malory's conception of the tale.

³Works, III, 1279.

There is very little outright description per se in either the Suite or the "Merlin" of the appearances or characters of Arthur and Merlin. What we know about them is inferred from their actions, their words and their attitudes towards events. The one hint as to Arthur's age and appearance is to be found in the episode in which Rions' envoys demand a part of Arthur's beard for his mantle. Arthur's reply in the Suite is, "I have no beard; I am too young" (H.202), whereas Malory has the king say that "my bearde ys full yonge yet to make off a purphile" (Works, 55).⁴

Vinaver suggests that it may have been Malory's intention to make Arthur seem older than in the French text.⁵ Be it as it may, Malory does alter events in such a way that Arthur emerges as a rather immature but strong-willed individual who does seek advice from Merlin when in doubt and who, on occasion, is rescued by him when his own obstinacy leads him to the brink of disaster, but who is far more decisive than the ineffectual king of the Suite. Confronted with the problem of manipulating two protagonists in The Tale of King

⁴There is one other reference of this nature in the Suite. In the sequence dealing with the battle between Arthur and the knight of the pavillion, the narrator tells us that the former "was much sprier and faster than the other for he still did not have a beard or a moustache but was a youngster" (H.192).

⁵Works, III, 1302, n.55-2.

Arthur, Malory seems to have adopted what Curtius refers to as the traditional Indo-European "contrasting of the stormy young hero with the experienced old representative of 'wisdom'."⁶ But he leaves no doubt that Arthur is the central figure in the "Merlin" and the one in whom the seeds of the traditional heroic virtues of courage and wisdom are being implanted to blossom forth into full flower in the subsequent Tales.

There are a number of instances in the "Merlin" where Malory has Arthur take the initiative in his actions. This shift can be observed, for example, in the sequence dealing with the knighting of Gryfflet. In both versions, Merlin warns the king of the extreme peril which the young squire faces in confronting the knight of the pavillion and of the great loss that his death would entail. However, in the Suite, Arthur seems to be at a loss to know what to do and we notice the following exchange:

Merlin: "Therefore let us see what we can do."

Arthur: "Indeed, I do not know."

Merlin: "Then I shall tell you." (H.179)

At this point in the French redactions, Merlin outlines the plan to keep Gifflet safe and Arthur happily acknowledges that "this advice was good and loyal" (H.179).

⁶E.R.Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. J.R.Trask (New York, 1953), p. 172.

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It would appear that Malory was not satisfied with this subordinate role for the king; in the "Merlin" it is Arthur himself, without prompting, who asks the "gyffte" which will save Gryfflet's life (Works, 47).

Again it is Merlin who controls events in the Suite when Urfin (Ulphuns) confronts Queen Igraine and Arthur's parentage is made known to the barons. The arrangements for the recognition scene are made in advance in the French redactions and, while the queen and Ector are in fact summoned by Arthur, Urfin, the main instrument in the revelation of the facts of the king's birth, comes at Merlin's request and is carefully rehearsed by him (H.164-173). Thus Merlin dominates the whole elaborate unravelling of the disclosure to the barons and directs each of the characters with all the control of an experienced conductor. In the "Merlin", however, it is Arthur who "askyd Ector and Ulphuns how he was begotyn" (Works, 44), and it is he who commands "that my modir be sente for" (Works, 45). Although Merlin, of necessity, must play a leading role in the denouement, Malory does succeed in diminishing his utter dominance of the episode.

On several occasions Malory deletes passages which, in the Suite, make Arthur appear helpless in the face of strange events and wholly dependent upon Merlin for a plan

of action. Thus, when Myles is brought into the court by his squire and Arthur learns of the strange happenings in the forest, the following exchange appears in the French redactions:

Arthur: "And you, Merlin, who know what we must do, I pray you that you advise me."
 Merlin: "I shall instruct you in such a way that it shall be remembered all your life..."
 (H.175)

As on numerous other occasions, Malory suppresses this passage which accentuates the role of Merlin and diminishes the stature of the king. For example, notice the cumulative effect of the following passages taken from the Suite:

Merlin: "And I shall make the people of this country know who your father was, because it is in doubt." (H.160);

Arthur: "By God, advise me how I can conceal my sin with the wife of King Lot that I have known carnally." (H.162);

Merlin: "But so that you know and that the people know that you are the son of Uther Pendragon, I shall occupy myself until I make them know it clearly." (H.163);

_____ : And all the way, meanwhile, Merlin advised the king and instructed him in what he should do... (H.163);

_____ : And they [the barons] said that Merlin had never brought such great joy to the kingdom as he now had... (H.173);

Merlin: "Now you can see that my knowledge is more valuable than your prowess. And I told you this morning that this would happen." (H.195);

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Merlin: "I shall tell you what you will do..."
(H.208);

Arthur: "I shall not act other than how you have
said." (H.208).

All of these passages are suppressed by Malory, as is the statement which concludes the banishment-of-the-infants episode and which clearly indicates the dominant role of Merlin in the Suite:

Thus did Merlin reconcile the king with his barons,
and great harm would have come to the country if
Merlin had not caused this reconciliation. (H.212)

Malory's version says a great deal about his reinterpretation of the roles of Merlin and Arthur:

So, many lordys and barownes of thys realme were
displeased for hir children were so loste; and
many putte the wyght on Merlyon more than on
Arthure. So what for drede and for love, they
helde thir pece." (Works, 55-56)

Notice particularly the attitude of the barons as expressed in the final sentence. They do not question Arthur's reasons for his actions because he is their king and overlord for whom they have both love and fear.

In this particular sequence, Merlin appears to Arthur in a dream in the Suite in order to prevent him from having the infants put to death as the king was planning. It is Merlin who dissuades Arthur from this plan and who provides an alternative (H.207). The fact that Malory suppresses this section implies that the idea of having the children

killed was not in keeping with his conception of a noble king. Furthermore, there is no suggestion in the "Merlin" that the plan to set the children adrift at sea in the hands of God originated with Merlin.

Again it is Merlin in the French redactions who controls the situation and does all the talking in the Excalibur episode (H.197-199). In Malory's version, however, after Merlin tells the king that "thys damsel woll com to you anone, and than speke ye fayre to hir, that she may gyff you that swerde" (Works, 52), it is Arthur, and Arthur alone, who negotiates with the Lady of the Lake. Equally significant is the manner in which Malory alters this sequence in order to play down the supernatural element of the Suite. While a hand reaching out of the water is by no means a natural phenomenon, Malory dispenses with the references to the enchantment of the lake, the invisible underwater palace, the Lady walking upon the water to get the sword, and all of the otherworldly aspects which the French narrators gave to the incident. Malory's rejection, as much as possible, of the fairy element of the French romance contributes to his characterization of Merlin as a wise advisor to the king and as a clever strategist with magical powers but definitely not the demi-god of the Suite "who knows hidden and secret things" (H.173) and to whom "God has

granted this grace" (H.161). This might also explain his consistent suppression of the many references to Merlin's demonic parentage which can be found in the Suite.

Although Malory's technique for diminishing the role of Merlin and elevating the stature of Arthur is basically one of playing down the former's manipulation of events as much as possible and of shifting initiatives to the king, there are two outstanding instances in which he conveys an entirely original conception of the king such that Arthur's attitude "becomes worthy of an epic hero."⁷ Malory presents a forecast of the courage and nobility of the mature Arthur of the Morte in the manner in which he has the king react to the demands of both the Emperor of Rome and King Rions. At the same time he is preparing for "the tragic tension between the warrior temperament and prudence" which Curtius speaks of in reference to the hero of the Song of Roland but which applies in equal measure to that of the Morte.⁸ In both passages, he shows Arthur incensed at the audacity of the two foreign rulers and treating the implied claims of supremacy in their demands as insults both to his person and to his position as king. It is a leader worthy of respect

⁷Works, III, 1300, n. 48.22-24.

⁸Curtius, European Literature, p. 176.

who tells the Emperor's envoys:

"I owghe the Emperour no trewage, nother none woll I yelde hym, but on a fayre fylde I shall yelde hym my trwage, that shall be with a sherpe spere othir ellis with a sherpe swerde." (Works, 48)

and who warns Rions that he "shall do me omage on both his knees, othir ellis he shall lese hys hede by the fayth of my body" (Works, 55). But we also see in these remarks the seeds of the pride and wilfulness which lead inevitably to tragedy and disaster.

That Malory wished to establish this impression of Arthur is further substantiated by the way in which he has the barons react to the king's confrontation with Pellinore, a passage which is in neither of the French texts:

...they mervayled that he would jouperde his person so alone. But all men of worship seyde hit was myrry to be under such a chyfftayne that wolde putte hys person in adventure as other poure knyghtis ded. (Works, 54)

Seen in isolation in the "Merlin", Malory's subtle alteration of the characters of Arthur and Merlin, his shifting of roles and responsibilities in relation to the events which are unfolding, and his placing of the story as much as possible on the realistic plain would indicate, if nothing else, that the author's conception of his protagonist in this subdivision of The Tale of King Arthur differs substantially from that of the French narrators. However, viewed

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against the broader panorama of the Tale and the Morte as a whole, the alterations that he has effected provide some justification for postulating that Malory has indeed prepared for a fundamental reinterpretation of the sens of the Arthur legend. "L'idée qui est au fond de son oeuvre", as Nitze defines sens, is far removed from that of the Suite, even at this early stage in the development of the Morte.

CHAPTER V

THE HUTH MERLIN:
A TRANSLATION OF FOLIOS 75-99¹

[p.147] Now the tale relates that one month after the coronation of King Arthur, there came to a great court that the king summoned at Cardolle² in Wales the wife of King Lot of Orkney, sister of the king. But although she was his sister, she knew nothing of it. The lady came to the court very richly furnished with a great company of ladies and maidens. And she had with her a great multitude of knights. And she brought with her the four sons whom she had had of King Lot who were very handsome children and of such an age that the eldest was only ten, and the eldest was named Gawaine, and the other Gareth, and the third Aggravayne, and the fourth Gaheris.³

¹Since the purpose of this translation is to provide further evidence, readily available to anyone who is not familiar with Old French, for the conclusions set forth in the preceding chapters, I have thought it advisable to make as literal a translation as possible while still providing a readable text. Certain liberties have had to be taken with idiomatic expressions, tense sequences and the various uses of the subjunctive mood in French; otherwise, the translation is as close as possible to the original text. (The page numbers at the left correspond to the pagination in the Paris-Ulrich edition; the folio numbers are those of that edition—see my p. 10, n. 7).

²Carlisle (Works, III, 1674). Malory refers to this city as Carlyon throughout the "Merlin" (pp.17,19,25,41,44).

³Not in either French text is Malory's suggestion that she "was sente thydir to aspye" (Works, I, 41).

Thus the lady came to the court with all her children whom she loved very dearly. And she was full of such great beauty that one could hardly see nor find her equal in [f.75b] beauty. The king did her great honour because she was a crowned queen and of the high lineage of King Uther Pendragon. King Arthur made very great joy over the lady and greatly feasted her and her children. The king saw the lady full of great beauty, loved her ardently, and made her stay at his court for two full months. And during that time he lay by her and begat upon her Mordred by whom, afterwards, many great evils were caused in the land of Logres and in all the world.⁴

Thus did the brother know his sister carnally and [p.148] the lady carried the one who thereafter betrayed him to death and put the country to destruction and martyrdom, about which you will be able to hear towards the end of the book.^{4a} When the lady had returned to her country, a very great adventure befell King Arthur such that it seemed to him while sleeping that he was seated upon a throne, just as he had commanded it, and above him there was such a great

⁴Malory suppresses both of these forecasts of disaster. Here we have an example of the frequent repetitions and reminders which are found in the Suite and which are deleted in the "Merlin".

^{4a}See note 4 above.

multitude of birds that he marvelled from whence all of them could have come. And when he had seen this apparition, it seemed to him that there arrived flying from another place a large dragon and a very great multitude of flying griffins and they went both high and low into the kingdom of Logres.

[f.75c] And wherever they went, they attacked whomever they encountered, and after them no castle remained without being all burnt and destroyed, and thus it put the kingdom of Logres completely to ravage and destruction. And when it had done this, it immediately returned and attacked him and all those who were with him, so that the serpent slew and put to death all who were with the king. And when it had done this, it ran so villainously towards the king. And then there began between these two a battle too sore and too cruel; it happened that the king killed the serpent but he remained so sorely wounded that it seemed necessary for him to die.⁵

The king had such great fear of this dream that he awoke from it and was so ill at ease that he did not know what counsel he could take, so that afterwards he could not sleep the whole night but thought continuously about this affair. The next day when it was light, he said to his men:

⁵As was pointed out in Chapter III, this whole paragraph is reduced to one sentence (Works, I, 41). See p.27.

"Ready yourselves and mount up, for I wish to go hunting."
And when they were ready, the king mounted a big and strong
[f.75d] horse adorned with a hunting robe, and left
Cardolle with a great company of servants and knights. And
[p.149] when they had entered the forest, they encountered a great hart, and they let the dogs go after it. The king, who was well mounted, began to chase the hart ahead of all of his companions and made such great haste to go after it that in a short time he had outdistanced them by two English leagues, so that he could not see them nor know where they were.⁶

Thus the king was separated from his men, and he chased his hart as well as he could. And he hunted it in such a way that his horse could endure it no longer but died beneath him. When he got to his feet, he did not know what to do, for his men were very far from him and from the hart. And the hart went quickly such that in a short time the king had lost sight of it, and he came after the hart on foot since he knew full well that his men would come shortly and that they would most certainly have taken it. And the king was weak and tired and covered with sweat and could not go

⁶Malory pares the description and suppresses many small details to give his narration the smoother flow discussed in Chapter III (Works, I, 42).

further but sat by a fountain. As soon as he was seated,
[f.76a] he began to ponder over what he had seen during
the night in his dream. And while he thought, he listened
and heard a great barking of dogs which made as great a noise
as if there were thirty or forty of them, and they were com-
ing towards him, so it seemed; he thought that it was his
hounds; he lifted his head and began to look at the place
from whence he heard them coming. And it was not long be-
fore he saw approaching a very large beast which was the
strangest of face that ever was seen, as much as it was
strange of body and of conformation, and not only so outside
than inside its body.

The beast came quickly to the fountain and it had a
very great inclination to drink. And when the king had ob-
served it carefully, he began to cross himself and said to
himself; "Now do I see the greatest wonder that I have ever
seen. For of such a strange beast as this have I never
heard spoken. And if it is wondrous on the exterior, still
more is it awesome on the interior. For I can hear and know
quite well that it has within its body live hounds that bark.

[p.150] Never were there found or seen such wonders in
[f.76b] the kingdom of Logres."

Thus did the king speak of the beast. And as soon as it had begun to drink, the beasts which were inside it and barked became silent and held themselves silent. When it had drunk and had come out of the fountain, they began to bark once again as they had done before. And they made as much noise as dogs make when after a wild beast. Thus the beast left the fountain with great noise and with great barking.⁷ Meanwhile, the king looked so aghast at the marvel that he saw that he did not know if he was asleep or awake. And it went rapidly so that the king had soon lost it from eye and sight. And when he lost it, he began again to ponder more than he had before. During the time that he was in such great thought, there came before him a knight who was on foot and he said: "Hear you, knight, who sit there thinking, tell me what I shall ask of you." The king lifted his head and listened to the knight and answered: "Sir knight, what do you ask?" "I ask," replied the knight, "if you have seen pass by here the strange beast, the one which has the barking [p.151] of dogs within itself." "Indeed," replied the

⁷An example of his compression of details, Malory condenses this whole passage thus:

And as he sate so hym thought he herde a noyse of howundis to the som of thirty, and with that the kynge saw com towarde hym the strongeste beste that ever he saw or herde of. So thys beste wente to the welle and dranke, and the noyse was in the bestes bealy. And therewith the beeste departed with a great noyse. (Works, I, 42)

king, "I saw it truly; it was here just now. It can not be [f.76c] further away than two leagues." "Ah, God!" said the knight, "I am so unhappy. If my horse were not now dead, I would have had it and my quest would have been over. Ah, God! I have followed it for a whole year and more to know the truth about it."

"What, sir knight," said the king, "have you followed it so long?" "Yes, sir."⁸ "And why, fair sir? Henceforth will I praise you if you would tell me, if it so please you." "Indeed," replied the knight, "full well will I tell you of it. It is true and we know full well that this beast must die at the hands of a man of my kin, but it is necessary that he be the best knight who will come out of the kingdom and from our lineage. Thus it is such that I am regarded as the best knight of our land and of all our country. And because I wished to know if I was the best of our lineage, for this reason I have followed it so long and have gone after it, and I have not said this out of pride of myself but

⁸ Compare the dialogue here with that in the "Merlin":
"Knyght full of thought and slepy, telle me if thou saw any stronge beeste passe thys way."

"Such one saw I," seyde kynge Arthure, "that ys paste nye two myle. What wolde ye with that beeste?" seyde Arthure.

"Sir, I have folowed that beste longe and kylde myne horse, so wolde God I had another to folow my queste."

to know the truth about myself." "Indeed," said the king, "you have said enough, sir knight. Therefore, you may go when it pleases you." "On foot?" asked the knight. "But I shall concern myself with any adventure of knight or vassal [f.76d] whom God leads here who would give me his horse."

While he spoke thus, there came to the king a squire mounted on a big horse, strong and swift, and he went looking for the king as well as he could.⁹ When the king saw him coming, he said to him: "Dismount and let me mount this horse; I wish to pursue a beast which is going from here." "Ah, sir," said the knight, "you will not do such a villain-[p.152] ous thing as to fall upon my beast which I have hunted for so long, but show courtesy and give me your horse and I shall return to my quest for I have nothing to hold me back. And if I should lose it through your fault, the shame shall be yours and the injury mine." "Sir knight," said the king, "you have conducted the quest for such a long time that you should leave it now. Therefore, stay and I will continue it for you for as long as God gives me the honour, if it so please him." "What," said the other, "sir evil knight!"

⁹Malory identifies the knight of the pavillion as Pellinore at this point. (Works, I, 43)

And you wish to take over my quest by force, this quest that has so fatigued and exhausted me? Indeed, you shall not."

And then he retired to where he saw the squire and threw him down from the horse and mounted before the king could reach

him. And then he said to the king: "Sir evil knight, I do not thank you now if I go after my beast. Therefore, stay and I shall go. And know that if I should come back to this

[f.77a] place I will repay you very well for what you have done to me, that you wished to take my quest away from me. And because you wished to involve yourself alone in so great a quest as this, so do I hold you to be crazy and evil.

For surely you are not a knight who should involve himself in such a lofty endeavour." "Knight," replied the king,

"you may say to me whatever pleases you and I shall listen to you, but know you well that if I thought to find you, today or tomorrow, be it near or far, I would go after you and I would show you with a sword of steel that I am, in my

estimation, as good a knight as you and as worthy of a lofty quest." "It will not be necessary for you to ride far,"

replied the knight, "if you wish to find me, for I remain always in this forest to follow the beast." "Then I promise you," said the king, "that I shall never be at peace until I

know and I have proven which of the two of us is the better knight." "When you wish to find me," replied the knight,

"come to this fountain. And know that if you wish one day to bring me to it that you will find me, for there is no day that I shall not come." "Then you may leave," said the king, "for I do not wish to know any more of your [p.153] affair."¹⁰

[f.77b] Therewith the knight left and went rapidly in that direction in which his beast had gone. And the king came to the squire and told him to go bring back another horse. And he returned a great distance on foot to the place where he thought to find his companions, and the king remained there alone and once again he began to ponder as he had the other time. The king remained there a long while so thinking of the adventure that he had seen that day, that about which he could not give himself good advice. And while he was

¹⁰Malory handles the argument dramatically with concise, pointed dialogue:

"Sir knyght," seyde the kyng, "leve that queste and suffir me to have hit, and I woll folowe hit anothir twelve-monthe."

"A, foole," seyde the kyng unto Arthure, "hit ys in vayne thy desire, for hit shall never be achieved but by me other by my nexte kynne."

And therewith he sterte unto the kyngis horse and mownted into the sadyl and seyde, "Gramercy, for this horse ys myne owne."

"Well," seyde the kyng, "thou mayste take myne horse by force, but and I myght preve hit I wolde weete whether thou were bettir worthy to have hym or I."

Whan the kyng herede hym sey so he seyde, "Seke me here whan thou wolte, and nye thys welle thou shalte fynde me," and so passed on his weye. (Works, I, 43)

thinking thus, Merlin came before him in the guise of a four-year-old child.¹¹ He knew the king full well as soon as he saw him; he greeted him, and pretended that he did not know in any way that he was the king. And the king raised his head and said: "Little page, may God bless you. Who are you? And Merlin answered: "I am a page from a foreign land, but I am greatly amazed that you think thus of the knight, for it does not seem to me that any man who is worth anything [f.77c] should think about something for which he can easily find counsel." The king looked at the child and he marvelled because he spoke so wisely. "Child, I do not believe that anyone besides God can advise me about what I am thinking." "Indeed," said Merlin, "you think about nothing that I do not know. Sire, you are amazed for naught! For you do not see anything while sleeping that will not happen in the future. So does it please the creator of this world.¹² And if you saw your death in your sleep, you should

¹¹Malory makes the child a more plausible fourteen years old (Works, I, 43). This is probably an error in the Huth manuscript since the Cambridge reads "un enfant de quatorze ans" (f.231v).

¹²One of the many examples in the Suite of the type of moralizing passages that Malory invariably suppresses in his version.

not wonder at it." And when the king heard Merlin speak thus it was no wonder if he was amazed. And Merlin said once again: "In order that you be more amazed, I shall tell you what you dreamt during the night." "Upon my head," said the [p.154] king, "if you can do this for me, I shall regard it as the greatest marvel that I have heard and seen today." "And I shall tell you," said Merlin. "Then you will come to greater thought than you had before."

Then he related his dream just as the king had dreamt it. And when the king had heard it all, he crossed himself at the amazement that he felt and replied quickly: "You are not a person that one should believe, but a demon.¹³ For you could not know through the knowledge of a human such secret things as you have related to me." "Because I tell you secret things," said Merlin, "you cannot say for this [f.77d] reason that I am a demon. But I shall prove to you directly that you are a devil and an enemy of Jesus Christ and the most disloyal knight of this country. For you are a consecrated king, and were surely placed in this honour and in this dignity by the grace of Jesus Christ, and by no other. Arthur, you have committed such a great disloyalty

¹³References to demons, even in this innocent context, are suppressed in the "Merlin".

in that you have had your own sister carnally whom your father begot and your mother carried, and upon her you have begotten a son who will be such as God well knows for through him much great harm will come on earth."¹⁴

Then the king replied, greatly ashamed by these words, and said: "Devil in truth, you cannot be certain of what you accuse me if you do not truly know that I have a sister; but you cannot know this, neither you nor anyone else, when I myself do not know it. It seems to me that no one can be certain of this more than I, but I know not anything of it."

[p.155] "By my faith," said Merlin, "you do not speak truthfully. I am more certain about this than you, for you yourself know nothing of it. For I know full well who your father was and who your mother was and who your sisters were.

[f.78a] And even though it has been a long time since I have not seen them, still I know full well that they are healthy and alive." Then the king took great comfort in this. And yet he did not know if he told him the truth, for he thought full well that he was a demon. And yet he said to him: "If you can guarantee me of my father and of my mother

¹⁴Malory has this particular revelation made to the king by the old man. The whole episode is greatly condensed and the revelations are made in a concise and chronological fashion as I have tried to illustrate in Chapter II. (See Works, I, 43-44).

and of my sisters, and let me know out of what lineage I am issued, you would not know what can be asked that I might have in my power that I would not give you." "Do you promise it to me as a king?" asked Merlin. "For know full well that if you lie to me, greater evil can come to you than you can imagine." "I promise it to you honestly," said the king. "And I shall tell it to you," said Merlin, "and I shall make you certain of it very soon."

"I tell you," said Merlin, "that you are a noble person and of such high lineage as the son of a king and a queen. And your father was a wise man and a good knight." "What?" said the king. "Am I such a noble person as you say? If it were so, I would never cease nor would I have any peace until I shall have put the largest part of the world under my dominion." "Indeed," said Merlin, "it will not be because you do not have enough nobility. Therefore, take care what [f.78b] you will do with it. For if you are as noble as your father was, you will never lose land but will conquer much." "And how was my father called?" asked the king. "You certainly can tell me this." "Indeed," said Merlin, "he was called Uther Pendragon and was lord of all this land." "By the name of God," said the king, "if he about whom you are speaking was my father, I cannot but be a noble person."

For I have heard so much spoken about him that I know full well that he was such a noble person that there cannot issue [p.156] from him an evil descendant except that there were some marvel. And certainly, if this were really true, the noblemen of this country would believe it only with great difficulty." "I will make them know it so well," said Merlin, "that all of them will be very certain of it before this month is passed, so that they will know in truth that you are the son of Uther Pendragon and that Queen Igraine is your mother." "You tell me wonders," said the king, "so much so that I can hardly believe you, and I shall tell you why. If I am the son of the person whom you say, I would not have been put in the hands of such a vassal as the one who raised me, and I would not be as unknown as I am. For it cannot be that the one who raised me did not know me, and he himself told me that he was not my father and that he did not know who I was. And you, who are a stranger, how can it be [f.78c] that you know the truth better than he with whom I have been all my years?" "If I have not told you the truth," said Merlin, "about all that you have heard, do not give me what you owe me. And know that I did not tell it to you out of scorn nor out of hatred but because I love you. And so I told you such words now; know that it will never be revealed by me, and know it truly that I shall conceal it as well as you yourself: it is of the sin with your sister whom

you had carnally, as I have told you. And I shall not conceal this matter from you as much for love of you as for love of your father who loved me greatly and did much for me, and I for him." "Do you say this truthfully?" "Yes," said Merlin. "By the name of God," said the king, "therefore I tell you that henceforth I shall never believe whatever you tell me. For you are not of an age that you could ever have seen my father, if he were Uther Pendragon; for this reason, he could never have done anything for you, nor you for him. And for this reason, I bid you to leave here, for after this lie [p.157] so manifest that you wish to make me believe for truth, I no longer wish to have your company."¹⁵

[f.78d] When Merlin heard these words, he pretended that he was very incensed and departed rapidly from the king and went directly into the forest where he saw it was very thick. And then he changed the appearance that he had and took the

¹⁵Notice how Malory telescopes this exchange into a few lines of pointed dialogue:

"Also I know what thou arte, and who was thy fadir, and of whom thou were begotyn: for kynge Uther was thy fadir and begate the on Igrayne."

"That ys false!" seyde kynge Arthure. "How sholdist thou know hit? For thou arte nat so olde of yerys to know my fadir."

"Yes," seyde Merlyon, "I know it bettir than ye or ony man lyvyng."

"I woll nat believe the," seyde Arthure, and was wrothe with the chylde.

So departed Merlyon... (Works, I, 43-44)

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likeness of an old and ancient man of eighty years, so weak in appearance that he could hardly walk. And he was dressed in a grey robe. In such a habit he came before the king and had the appearance of a wise man. And he greeted the king as if he did not know him and said to him: "God preserve you, sir knight, and grant you that your thoughts be brought full well to their conclusion. For it seems to me that you are not at peace." "May God so grant, sir nobleman," replied the king, "for certainly I have great need of it. Come sit with me if it please you, until my squires arrive." And then Merlin sat beside him and the two of them began to converse about various matters, and the king found Merlin so wise in all things about which he inquired that he was completely amazed. And then Merlin said to him: "What was making you think so deeply when I came here?" "Sir nobleman," said the king, "never has a man of my years seen so many marvels in [f.79a] such a short time, nor ever heard that which I have since last night while sleeping and while awake. And what I regard as the greatest wonder is that a child of few years came to me just now who spoke to me such words that I did not think that any mortal man knew, other than I alone." "Sir," said the nobleman, "you should not marvel at this, for there is nothing so secret that it will not become known. And if the thing was done under earth, then the truth of it

will be known on earth."¹⁶ Then Merlin said to the king:
 "Sir, for God's sake, do not be ill at ease and do not think
 so much, but tell me what it is that is the matter with you.
 [p.158] And I shall advise you in such a way that you will
 regard yourself counselled in all the things about which you
 are in doubt."

The king looked at the old man and it seemed to him
 that he was a very wise man, both from his appearance and
 from the words he heard; he thought that he would tell him
 part of his experience and hide part of it.¹⁷ And then he
 began to recount his dream just as the tale related it. And
 he thought to tell him the truth about the beast and about
 the knight. And when he had recounted all that he wished to
 tell, Merlin answered him: "Sir, I shall help you with this
 [f.79b] dream when I can without dishonouring myself.
 Know that you will come to sorrow and ruin by a knight who
 is conceived but who is not yet born. And all this kingdom
 will be destroyed and the noblemen and the good knights of

¹⁶This is an example of the type of aphorism which Malory consistently deletes from the "Merlin".

¹⁷Malory, in his role as objective chronicler, does not record the inner fears and motivations of his characters. Also, he deletes the prophecy at the end of this paragraph as is his general practice throughout (Works, I, 44).

the kingdom of Logres will be cut to pieces and killed. And the country will remain deprived of the good knights that you will see here in your time.

"Thus this land will remain deserted as a result of the deeds of this sinner." "Indeed," said the king, "if it should happen as you have told me, this harm would be too excessive and it would be better, then, in my opinion, and it would be a greater good deed that this evil person, and this evil body which will be born, be destroyed as soon as he is born rather than that great evils shall happen on account of him. And since you have told me so much, it cannot be that you do not know full well when he will be born and of whom, and I pray you tell me, for as soon as he be born on this earth then I will make him burn, if it please our Lord that I learn the truth of his birth." "Indeed," said Merlin,

[f.79c] "never, if it please God, will a creature of our lord receive harm from me. For although he be treacherous [p.159] towards the end, as long as he be innocent he would be disloyal who would kill him. And I tell you that I feel so heavy of my sin and so guilty towards our lord that never, if God so wishes, shall I do this disloyalty that the child, a creature not harmful in any way, should receive his death by my advice. Do not ask it of me for I shall have no part of it." "Then you hate this kingdom too mortally," said

the king, "and thus I shall show you how. You say, and I believe it full well, that the kingdom of Logres will be made desolate and brought to destruction by a knight. Would it not be better then that he by whom this great torment will come be destroyed himself than that so many people should die by his actions?" "True," said Merlin, "his death would be better than his life." "Then I tell you," said the king, "that it is better that you tell me of whom he will be born than that you hide it, for by your revealing it the land can be saved and by your hiding it, lost." "Sir," said Merlin, "I know full well that to reveal it would be better for one who would consider the benefit to the country. But although the country would gain, I would lose too much. For I would lose my soul which is more to me than all this country. And [f.79d] for this reason, I shall conceal it from you. I prefer to save my soul than to save the country." "Nevertheless, you can safely tell me," said the king, "when he will be born and in what place." And Merlin began to smile and said: "By that you think to find him. But you shall not, for it does not please our lord." "Indeed," said the king, "I will. If I know the hour of his birth and the country where he will be born, never shall this land be destroyed by him for I will prevent it." "And I shall tell it to you," said Merlin, "and it will avail you nothing. Know that he

will be born the first day of May and in the kingdom of Logres." "Is this true?" said the king. "Yes, you know it," said Merlin. "And I shall remain silent, therefore," said the king, "and I shall ask no more about it. But now tell [p.160] about all that I ask you."¹⁸

"It was not long ago that there came a beast, the strangest I have ever heard spoken of, strange and unusual in appearance, and it had within itself beasts which barked. And this seemed to be like a dream for I know full well that no earthly creature can project its voice outside while it is in its mother's womb." "Indeed," said Merlin, "I do not wonder if you are amazed for without doubt it is a marvel to [f.80a] hear and to see." "Then tell me," said the king, "what it is." "It is," said Merlin, "one of the adventures of the Grail."¹⁹ And I cannot tell you more, for it is not fitting for me: a more noble person than I will tell you." "And who is he?" asked the king. "He is not yet begotten nor

¹⁸ Malory has suppressed this whole passage concerning Mordred, retaining only the important fact that "hit ys Goddis wyll that youre body sholde be punyssed for your fowle dedis (Works, I, 44). This is an example of the way in which he restructures the tale by deleting "foreshadowings".

¹⁹ Malory does not explain the symbolism of the Questing Beast at this point and suppresses the prophecy concerning Percival.

born," said Merlin, "but he will be begotten soon. And the knight whom you saw hunting the beast will beget him." Then the king said to Merlin: "You know that I saw him?" "I know it full well," he said, "and I know all the truth about the pledges that exist between you two." "Then tell me," said the king, "what knight is he?" "You will know it full well," said Merlin, "if you try him at jousting. I shall tell you no more about him at this time, but such I tell you about the beast that you will never know the truth of the adventure until he who will issue from him lets you know it. And he will be called Percival of Wales, for he will be born in Wales, and he will be one of the best knights in the world and gracious towards our lord, such that he will preserve his virginity so surely and so marvelously that he will issue a virgin from a woman and he will enter a virgin into the earth. The knight who will tell you the adventure of the beast will have this virtue. And you will not be counselled [f.80b] until he tells you about it."

[p.161] "In the name of God," said the king, "it will be necessary for me to wait much if it is as you tell me." "So will it be," said Merlin, "And what do you know about it?" asked the king. "Are you then so certain of things which are to happen?" "Yes, in truth," said Merlin, "God granted

me this grace out of his mercy." "Since you are certain of things which are to happen," said the king, "you must know full well many of the things which were done in your time." "Indeed," said Merlin, "I do know. There are few things that can be recounted that anyone has done in this country since I was born about which I do not truly know all."²⁰ "Then would you be able," asked the king, "to tell me about something that I have a great desire to know." "I shall tell it to you," said Merlin, "because I know full well what you wish to ask me." "You know it?" said the king. "I have not yet told it to you. How can this be?" "You will see full well," said Merlin, "if I do know it. Therefore, be quiet a little and listen." Then he said: "You wish to ask me, 'Who was my father?' And you do not think that anyone knows it since you do not know. But some do know. And I shall make you know that I know. And I shall make the people of this country know who your father was, because they are in doubt."

[f.80c] The king raised his hand and crossed himself at this great wonder that he had heard, and he said to Merlin: "You make me marvel at your words, for you tell me what I am

²⁰In suppressing remarks such as we find here, Malory gives the impression of trying to play down the supernatural element of the Suite and to diminish as much as possible the role of Merlin in the tale.

thinking and I would not have thought that anyone besides God could do this. For this reason, allow me to know you, if it so please you, and tell me what you are called. And if it so pleases you to stay in my company, there is nothing that you could ask of me that I would not do because of the great wisdom with which you are endowed." "King," said Merlin, "I [p.162] am he who will never conceal himself from you. Know that I am Merlin, the good prophet whom you have so many times heard spoken of."

Then the tale relates that when the king heard these words, he was as happy as no other man could be, and he stretched out his arms towards Merlin and said: "Ah, Merlin, since you are the one about whom all the wise men of the age speak, I shall never doubt the words that you tell me. By God, if you wish to put me at ease, reassure me about what I [f.80d] am so doubtful of." "Willingly," said he, "I tell you in truth that Uther Pendragon was your father and he begot you of Igraine, but she was not yet queen." Then he related by what trickery he lay by her earlier. "And when I knew that you were to be born, I asked your father for you as a gift. And he said that he would willingly give you to me, because he knew that I loved him with a great love." After he related to him his life and how he had him nurtured with the milk with which Kay should have been nursed, and he told

him fully what had happened to Uther Pendragon and Igraine, just as the tale has already related.²¹ Sir Robert de Boron did not want to tell what he has said at another time because he did not wish to enlarge his book with such words, but he held the right way and said:

When the king had heard all about his birth and his state in life, he said to Merlin: "Merlin, you loved my father very much and you were very loyal to him, and he did not love you little. You know more than anyone in the world about my situation. By God, advise me how I can conceal my sin with the wife of King Lot that I have known carnally. I cannot conceal this from you, for I know full well that you know about it, but I would not at all wish that people should
 [p.163] know how it happened." "If I showed you how to
 [f.81a] conceal this sin," said Merlin, "then I would sin mortally. For three people know of it, those who are the best of your retinue, and it would first be necessary for them to die, and I shall not advise you to that extent. But in order that you may know and that the people may know that

²¹This is an example of the reminders and "echoes" which are necessary in the Suite because of its cyclic structure. Notice also the dominant role which the French narrator gives to Merlin in the next paragraph. Malory consistently leaves out remarks of this nature.

you are the son of Uther Pendragon, I shall occupy myself until I make them know it clearly." "I ask no more of you," said the king, "for thus you would have served me too much."

While they were speaking thus of this matter, there came to this place the king's men who were looking for him in the forest. And when they found their lord, they were very happy and told him that they had searched for him a great deal both high and low.²² The king immediately mounted his horse, and had Merlin mount another, and they returned quickly to Cardolle. And meanwhile, Merlin advised the king and instructed him in what he should do in order that the men of the kingdom should truly know that he was the son of Uther Pendragon. "And I desire," said he, "that you command all your barons within three days from this to be at your court a week from Sunday and that each bring his wife with him. [f.81b] And also let Queen Igraine know, and command that she bring her daughter Morgan with her. And then when she has arrived and the great barons have gathered in your hall, I shall so arrange, with the help of God, so that I shall make her know that you are her son."²³ And the king said

²²This is the type of descriptive detail that Malory suppresses. He says simply: "And as they talked thus, come one with the kyngis horse" (Works, I, 44).

²³Malory has Arthur take the initiative here in summoning his mother after verifying Merlin's account of his birth with Ector and Ulphuns (Works, I, 44-45).

that he desired nothing more. "And tell me," said Merlin, "whom do you think it was who spoke with you yesterday at the fountain in the appearance of a young page?" "I do not know what to think," said the king, "but now I think full well that it was you, for I have often heard it said that you change your appearance in whatever way you wish, and your form in whatever guise that suits you. And for this reason I do not [p.164] believe it was any other than you yourself." "Indeed," said Merlin, "it was truly I. And just as you were deceived, so was your mother deceived by appearances the night you were begotten. For she thought of Uther Pendragon that it was her lord who lay by her."

They spoke so much in this way that they came into the city and the king went down into his court and had Merlin dismount and brought him into his palace with him, and he made very great joy and festing for him. And he set out his messages right away to all his barons that they be at his [f.81c] court in Cardolle on the appointed day. Nor did he forget to send his own personal messenger to Queen Igraine that she be there in person and that she not send anyone else to represent her, and that she bring her daughter Morgan with her.

Thus was each and every one ordered to the court at Cardolle. And they wondered a great deal why the king had

summoned them; and each and every one came for they wished to hear what he would say. When Queen Igraine heard that the king summoned her to the court, she feared that he wished to seize her land and deprive her of everything, and she asked King Lot and her daughter and all her other relatives to come to the court with her, and if the king wished to harm her in any way, they would help her in every way they could. Merlin asked Urfin to come to the court, and he came as soon as he knew that Merlin was there; he was greatly attached to him and made great joy when he saw him. The king had Ector come to the court. And when he had arrived, Merlin took Ector and Urfin aside and said to Urfin: "You know full well that Uther Pendragon gave me his first heir to do with as I pleased." "That is true," said Urfin, "I know full well the day that he was born and that he was given to you." "And," he said to Ector, "do you know who gave Arthur to you?" And [p.165] Ector looked at Merlin and answered: "You gave him [f.81d] to me and on that day." And he named the day. And then both of them recalled the day and the hour. And because Merlin made them understand that Arthur was the son of Uther Pendragon, they said that there had never before been as great joy in the kingdom of Logres as the barons would make when they would hear this. For they hated and scorned him because they knew nothing of his ancestry.

Great was the joy that the king made for Urfin. For Merlin had made him understand that his great barons had asked Urfin a great deal about this matter, especially because Urfin had been very intimate with King Uther Pendragon. Merlin said to Ector: "Ector, be sure this day that you have in your company your neighbours who know full well the date that Arthur was given to you." And the latter said that he would have such witnesses to this matter who would be well believed. Thus Merlin stayed with the king until the day that they came to the court as it had been commanded.²⁴

On that day, there were many persons and many people at the court. And Queen Igraine came very richly adorned and with a great company of knights. And yet she was very greatly afraid that the king would wish to seize her land and that [f.82a] she would not keep under her rule as great a country as she now did, because she was a woman. When she came to the court, the king gave her a very warm welcome and received her very graciously amongst himself and his company, and he ordered his servants to honour her and cherish her above all who were there. And they obeyed his orders full well, but greatly wondered why it was so. There was but one

²⁴As I have pointed out in Chapter IV, Malory diminishes the role of Merlin here by omitting this intricate preparation for the recognition scene. The whole episode is greatly condensed in the "Merlin" (Works, I, 45-6).

who knew the situation between him and the wife of King Lot, so that they really thought that he did these things for the [p.166] mother out of love for the daughter.²⁵

On the day about which I told you, you could see at the king's court many good knights well and richly apparelled and adorned, and many beautiful maidens and many lovely ladies esteemed for their beauty, but of all those that were there that day, Morgan, Igraine's daughter, took the prize and honour for beauty. And without doubt she was a beautiful maiden until the time that she began to learn enchantments and spells; but after the devil was placed in her and [f.82b] she was inspired both by lust and the devil, she lost her beauty so completely that she became extremely ugly and afterwards no one regarded her as beautiful unless he was under her spell.

When the tables were set and they were seated about them, Urfin came before the king and said so loudly that everyone could hear it fully: "King Arthur, I am greatly amazed that you tolerate a disloyal lady and such a one as should not hold land to eat at your table. And whoever might wish to bring the matter as high as the truth would

²⁵There is no suggestion of this in Malory. The prophecy concerning Morgan in the next paragraph is suppressed in the "Merlin".

demonstrate, he would find very clearly that there is murder and treason in her. And since you are regarded as such a valiant man, and you tolerate that such a disloyal person eat at your table, certainly you should not be regarded as a king but as the most disloyal man of the age." The king pretended that he was very greatly angered at these words, and he answered quickly: "Urfin, be very careful first of all that you do not say what you cannot prove to be true. For you will be considered to be crazy and harm can come to you." "Sire, I know full well that such a person eats at your table who should not eat nor hold land, and she has great and rich [f.82c] lands. For she committed during my time and yours [p.167] such great murder and disloyalty that she cannot do any greater. And if she is such that she would wish to deny it, I would be ready to prove it against the best knight of the court if there be one so bold who would wish to defend her in this matter and enter the battlefield against me." "By my faith," said the king, "you have said enough. Now it is necessary that you say, before all these barons, the name of the person whom you accuse so bitterly." "Indeed," said he, "I shall tell it to you full well. It is Queen Igraine who sits there. And she will never be so bold as to dare

to deny it."²⁶

Then the king pretended that he was completely aghast at this marvel, and he said to the lady: "Lady, you hear full well what this knight says about you. Therefore, take care what you will do about it, for if he can prove before the court what he has said, then you are one who will never hold one foot of land under my power. And if I myself wished to tolerate this, then I would do it to my shame. For indeed, such a woman as he speaks of should not, in my opinion, remain in the world but should be condemned eternally or buried alive in the earth." The queen was completely aghast at what

[f.82d] Urfin accused her of, because she knew full well that he knew a great deal about her affairs. Nevertheless, she answered directly without advice from anyone: "Sire, if he had held out his glove to prove murder and disloyalty against me, I know full well that some would defend me with the help of God. For surely never have I engaged in such

²⁶Malory's treatment is much more direct and dramatic:

Ryght so com in Ulphuns and seyde opynly, that the kyng and all myght hyre that were fested that day,

"Ye are the falsyst lady of the worlde, and the moste traytours unto the kynges person."

"Beware," seyde kyng Arthure, "what thou syste: thou spekiste a grete worde."

"Sir, I am well ware,"....

(Works, I, 45)

evil, God knows full well." And Urfin immediately leaped forward and placed his glove in the king's hand and said so loudly that everyone could hear: "Lord barons of the kingdom of Logres, know full well that this quarrel concerns you as [p.168] much as me. For you see here Queen Igraine who conceived of King Uther Pendragon an heir from the first time he had met her, and when he was born, it was well known that it was a male; but she, who desired more the destruction of this kingdom than its profit, did not wish that the males stay there, but sent him I know not where to die or to find some other end so that there was no one afterwards, to my knowledge, who knew the truth about this creature. King Arthur, did not this lady do disloyalty to the very one that was issued from her? Her disloyal and evil heart surpassed that of every other mother, for all mothers love their children [f.83a] by nature. And if she wishes to deny that she committed this disloyalty, I would be ready to prove it. But I do not think that I need don my hauberk for she knows full well that I tell the truth."

The king pretended that he regarded this affair as most awesome, and he crossed himself and looked at the queen and said: "Ah, lady, is it true what this man says? Indeed, you have acted badly if it is as he says." And she was so ashamed that she did not know what to answer. For she knew

that he spoke the truth. And then a great noise and a great tumult arose in the court. For the poor and the rich who had heard these words all began to speak, and said the Urfin could very well be speaking the truth and that the queen fully deserved to receive her death when she had acted thus. And the king calmed them and made them be quiet.²⁷ And when the court had been calmed, the king said to the queen: "Lady, answer to what this knight accuses you of." And she was so terrified because she felt guilty of what he said that she trembled a great deal from fear.²⁷ And then she said a word in the manner of a woman who has great fear: "Ah, damn you Merlin! You have placed me in this sorrow for you obtained [f.83b] the child and did what you wished with him." And then Merlin spoke and said to the queen: "Lady, why do you [p.169] damn Merlin? He defended you and helped both you and King Uther many times, and never would the king have reached the point that he did if it had not been for Merlin." And she looked at him and answered: "If he acted well towards us in the beginning, he made us pay for it dearly in the end. For he took away the first child that God sent us and I do not know what he did with him, and he showed full well that he was descended from a demon inasmuch as he did not even

²⁷Examples of descriptive touches in the Suite which give way to bare narration in Malory's hands.

wish to wait that the child be made a Christian but he took him away before he was baptized because he did not wish that God have a part in the creature." "Lady," said Merlin, "I could tell the truth concerning this affair better than you if I so desired." "This cannot be," said she, "for you cannot know it better than I." "Sire," said Merlin to the king, "would it please you to hear why Merlin took the child?" "Did he take it then?" asked the king. "Yes," said Merlin, "know it in truth. And I shall relate to you how it was, if it please you, but on the condition that you make the queen swear on the relics that she will not lie about the truth that I tell her." Then he had the relics brought immediately to that part of the palace where they were eating. And the queen rose from the table and said to Merlin: "I shall make this vow but on the condition that you tell me who you [f.83c] are." And she quickly swore on the relics that she would not contradict him about the truth that he told, and she kissed the relics and rose to her feet. And the king had her sit where she was before. And then he said to Merlin: "Say what you have promised." "Sire, I shall do it willingly." And then the queen leaped up and said to Merlin: "I want you to tell your name before you say anything else." And he changed himself directly into his true appearance just as she had seen him in former times, and Merlin replied: "Lady, if

you do not know my name, I shall tell it to you, but I thought that you knew me, and you certainly should for you have seen [p.170] me already before." And she looked at him and now recognized him. And then she answered Merlin: "Now I know full well that, since you have accused me of this thing, you have been disloyal, in my opinion, for what I did with my child I did on the orders of my lord the king, and it is necessary that you return the child or that you die; for, on my head, he was given to you, this I know truly. And if you wish to deny that he was given to you, I shall make you so [f.83d] ashamed of yourself that never for all time will your enchantments endure."

Then Merlin began to smile and he said to the king: "Sire, the lady says what she wishes and I consent to it because she is a great lady; but still, I say full well that if it would please you I could tell what I began to say concerning why Merlin took the child away." And the king answered: "First I wish to know from your own mouth if you are Merlin, so that my barons can hear it clearly." And he said: "I am truly Merlin." And all the other barons who had seen him previously and who therefore recognized him cried out in one voice: "Sire, this is Merlin, know it in truth."²⁸ And they

²⁸Malory deletes these elaborate precautions which are taken to ensure that the barons will acknowledge Arthur.

did not realize in the least that the king knew him. Then the king made them be silent, and when they had calmed themselves, he said to Merlin: "Merlin, it is necessary that you answer what the lady asked you." "Sire, concerning what?" "About the child," said he, "that was given to you." "By God," said the lady, "do it directly, sir, if it please you, before the barons of your kingdom." And the king said to Merlin: "Merlin, answer since it is necessary for you to do so." "Sire," said he, "I shall answer willingly. And know that I shall not lie about what I tell you.

[f.84a] "It is true that the child of whom we are speaking
[p.171] here was given to me as soon as he was in his mother's womb. And his father authorized me to have it, whether it were male or female. And when he was born, as it pleased God, they kept so well their covenant with me that they put me in possession of him. I had loved the father very much, and I was to love the son more, and so I did; for, as soon as I was put in possession of him, I put him in safe hands and in the good keeping of those who brought him up so tenderly and better than if he were brought up their own child. And if he to whom I gave him wished to deny that I gave the child to him, I would make it known by my own mouth whether he wished it or not." Then he turned in that direction where Ector was seated and said to him: Ector, I ask you

for the one whom I gave you, that child whom Uther beseeched you so much to bring up. And know that he is the one for whom I am asked." And Ector answered: "Merlin, know in truth that I did for him so much that everyone in the kingdom should be thankful." "Give him back to me," said Merlin, "just as I gave him to you." Ector said, "Indeed, I cannot give him back, for he is not mine but I am his; but I shall [f.84b] show him to you as great and noble, whereas you gave him to me as a small creature and a poor thing."

Then he stood up and came to the king and said to him: "Sire, do not be upset if I touch you." And the king said that he would not be. And immediately he took him by the hand and said to Merlin: "Merlin, behold the one whom you gave me: did I take good care of him?" "If this be he," said Merlin, "you should not be criticized, but still I shall not believe you until you have made me know it better." And Ector answered: "I shall prove it by the testimony of all my neighbours who know full well the day on which he was given to me and who, since then, have always been with the child." And the neighbours whom Ector had had come to the court stepped forward and said that they testified to what he had said. And Merlin answered: "Among all of you, you say nothing unless you tell me if you know the date on which he was given over." And they cried out all in one voice: "We know

it full well." "And how long can it be," asked Merlin, "since he was given to him?" "It should soon be fifteen years," they said. And they told the day on which his fifteenth year would be reached. And the chaplain who had baptized him said to Merlin: "Merlin, he received baptism by my hand on [f.84c] the very day that they tell you, and he bears my name, not so much for me but because it was so ordered to Ector, as Ector himself told me."

Then Merlin said to the barons who were gathered there: "Lord barons of Logres, can I consider myself satisfied by what they testify?" And they said: "Merlin, we consider that you should be well satisfied, for they are regarded as honourable people." "By my faith," said he, "then, to my knowledge, I shall not be blamed this day for what I am accused of in this court." Then he said to the queen: "Lady, you have asked me for your first child who was given to me with the consent of the king, and I return him to you very different from the way in which he was given to me." Then he took Arthur by the arm and said to him: "Arthur, your father gave you to me as a gift for all my services. Since you were mine, so I think I can still address you and rightly so, but so I say on my life and on whatsoever I have from God that I wish for all to know that Queen Igraine is your mother and that you are her son, and King Uther Pendragon begot you

[p.173] the first night that he came to your mother; it is necessary that you go to her and acknowledge her as your mother and that she acknowledge you as her son. And you, [f.84d] lord barons of the kingdom of Logres, I say that you should no longer undervalue your lord because you do not know his ancestry. I am Merlin who knows hidden and secret things, as you know full well, and for this reason you must believe me in what I shall tell you. Know that you must love and value your lord, first of all because you obtained him by the grace of our lord and by no other; afterwards, because he is the wisest prince of his age in the kingdom of Logres; afterwards, because he is such a noble man as one must be who is begotten of King Uther Pendragon. And because in your hearts you have regarded him as base until now, because you did not know from whom he was descended, I beseech you that from now forward you do not despise him, but regard him as a legal lord both by the decision of our lord and by ancestry.

With this word there began an extremely great and marvelous joy in that place. For the king rose from the table and ran to the queen, his mother, there where he saw her, and he embraced and kissed her, and she in turn embraced him and both wept with joy and with pity. And when the barons saw this, they would not have been happier if they had seen God. And they said that Merlin had never before

brought such great joy to the kingdom of Logres as he now had

[f.85a] "and blessed be God who has brought it here at this time since, because of this revelation and because of this noble action, the kingdom of Logres will be worth more for the rest of our lives!" Great was the joy over this revelation in the kingdoms of Great Britain, in all the areas where king Arthur was lord. And the feasting lasted a full fifteen days.²⁹

[p.174] One day when the feasting was great and abundant and the king was seated at dinner and had had the first course, it happened that there came in the midst of the hall, which was on the ground level, a squire on horseback, and he carried in front of him a mortally wounded knight, and he was wounded full recently through the body by a lance, and he was still dressed in his hauberk and armour, but he did not have his helmet on his head.

The squire carried the knight in front of him. And

[f.85b] when he came to the entrance of the hall, he found no one who impeded him, and for this reason, he came on

²⁹Malory telescopes the preceding four paragraphs to a few sentences by ruthless paring of details, description and repetitions, and by discarding the circuitous exchanges between the characters (*Works*, I, 46). (Both the "Merlin" and the Cambridge ms. state that the feasting lasted only eight days.)

horseback before those who were eating. And he dismounted immediately and put his lord on the ground which was covered with green herbs, and then he said so loudly that all therein could hear him: "King Arthur, great need makes me come to you in order that I obtain your assistance and help, and I shall tell you why. It is true that you are king and lord of this land by the grace of our lord, and when you were put in possession of the kingdom, you promised the people that you would, within your power, right all evils that would be committed in your country, whether it were by knights or by others. And it has thus happened that a knight, I do not know who he is, has through his pride killed my lord in that forest beside here. Thus it needs be that you will avenge the death of my lord."³⁰

The king was greatly distressed by this news, and he became very thoughtful and did not understand what the squire said. And Merlin began to look at him and said: "King, are you amazed at this news? Do not think about it, for you would have too much to do if you wished to grieve every time

³⁰Malory identifies the knights as Myles (*Works*, I, 46). This particular episode serves as an excellent illustration of most of the points that I have tried to make in the preceding three chapters: Malory suppresses description; he discards the prophecy in the next paragraph; he does not attempt to spell out motivations; he substitutes dramatic direct quotation for elaborate set speeches; he has Arthur act on his own initiatives; he rearranges passages.

that you saw such news come to the court. This is the first
[p.175] adventure that has happened in your court, and it
[f.85c] troubles me greatly that the beginning is such as
this, for the indication is evil and disturbing. Have this
one put in writing and also the others afterwards just as
they happen in the kingdom of Logres. And know that before
you pass on from this world, there will have occurred so many
that the writings that will be made could make up a great
book. I have told you these words because I do not wish you
to be awed by such adventures, but I wish you to maintain
yourself vigorous when you see them occur." And the king
answered that he had never seen such things happen in his
land, and for this reason he was a little amazed and more
than he would have been if they had happened often. And then
he asked the squire where the knight was who had killed him;
"By my faith," said the squire, "whoever wishes to go to him
can find him in the forest, at the entrance, in a plain that
is enclosed by hounds and in a pavillion set up beside a
fountain. And it is the most elegant and richest pavillion
that I have ever seen. And he stays there night and day in
the company of only two squires. And he has had a lance and
a shield hung on a tree which is in front of the pavillion,
and it is necessary for every knight who passes there to
[f.85d] joust with him." "By God," said the king, "this

knight has involved himself in a great marvel and he is stout-hearted when he wishes to try all passers-by. Thus it is necessary that we have advice in this matter, for he has begun what no one dared to involve himself in. And you, Merlin, who know what we must do, I pray you to advise me." "Certainly," said Merlin, "I shall do it. And I shall instruct you now in such a way that it shall be remembered all your life, but afterwards there will be seen no one so noble in this land who will be able to keep it, for they will not be worth as much. Therefore listen; I shall tell you. And you, lord knights who are here, if it seems to you that I say rightly, then say so.

"It is true that this knight has begun those adventures of knight against knight, and since he has begun in [p.176] this way, it is necessary that what he has done wrongly be made right by a knight." "Then is it necessary," said the king, "that a knight of this court go?" "That is true," said Merlin.

At these words, there rushed forward a squire who formerly served the king, and he was called Gifflet, son of Dos, and the king loved him with a very great love, for [f.86a] Gifflet was handsome and noble and swift and was King Arthur's age, in such a way that he was only three

months older than the king. He came quite openly before the king and said: "Sire, I have served you till now as best as I could. And I pray you, as a gift for my service, that you give me arms and make me a knight. For certainly, I do not think that from this time forward I can carry arms from the hand of a more noble person than you. For this reason, I beg you to make me a knight, fair sire, and I shall go immediately to see who this knight is who, through his pride, has thus begun to kill passing knights. And if your court is avenged by me, I would not be blamed."³¹ "Gifflet, fair friend," said the king, "you are too young to undertake so great a task, as truly this is, against an elected knight. And indeed, know full well that if he were not a good knight and of lofty position, he would never have begun so great a thing. For this reason, I advise you that you refrain from this matter, for I shall send someone from here who is hardier in this trade than you are." "Sire," said Gifflet, "this is the first gift that I have asked of you since you first took the crown: if I have ever done anything that pleased you, do not deny me it." And then he knelt down before him and begged him in tears. And the king said to him: "I shall grant

³¹Malory condenses this formula-like speech to the simple statement: "Sire," seyde Gryfflet, "I beseche you to make me knyght." Arthur replies: "Well, at thyne owne desire thou shalt be made knyght." (Works, I, 46-47)

you what you seek, but this troubles me, may God help me, for I love you greatly, and it cannot be but that I shall be sorrowful if harm should come to you. Therefore, wait until morning when I shall dub you and give you arms. And then you can go to the knight, if your heart so advises you." And he said that he would then wait until tomorrow since the king wished it, and he thanked him profusely for that which he had granted him.³²

Thus did this matter remain. The king had the knight put in a room in the greatest comfort that he could but he lived for only three days afterwards, for the other knight had wounded him most mortally. Merlin came to the king that evening and said to him: "You love Gifflet a great deal and you are right, for he loves you with all his heart and was brought up with you; but I tell you that if you do not take counsel, he will never return alive from where he will go tomorrow; for the knight of the forest is too good a knight [f.86c] and of such great prowess. And do you know who he is?" "No," said the king. "Then know," said Merlin, "that it is the knight with whom you spoke earlier, and the one who for so long has continued the hunt of the marvelous

³²There is not this delay in the "Merlin" since Malory has Arthur act on his own initiative here. He deletes the prophecy in the next paragraph and the conversation that it provokes. The whole sequence is telescoped. (Works, I, 46-8)

beast; thus it will happen that if Gifflet, who is young and tender, goes to him, he who is a strong knight and hardy and old will kill him if the battle lasts a long time. And if Gifflet then died at this very point, it would be a very great tragedy; for if he lives to maturity, he will be as good a knight or better than that one. And so I tell you something that you will still see happen: he will be the knight who in this world will keep you company the longest time, and after he will have left you, not by his own wish but by yours, there will be no knight who will keep you company afterwards nor who will see you unless it be in a dream. And it will be the greatest sorrow that will come in your [p.178] time to the kingdom of Logres."

Upon these words, the king began to think deeply because he now saw that it was his death that Merlin was speaking about, and he was greatly moved at this time. And Merlin [f.86d] said to him: "King, what are you thinking about? So must it be that things happen as our lord has ordained them. Do not be troubled, for what I have told you about will not happen in my lifetime. And if you die, so must everyone of us. And indeed, if you knew by what an honourable death you will die, you would greatly rejoice, and you would do it with good reason. And I can rightly say that our deaths are very strange, yours and mine." "In what way?"

asked the king. "Tell me." "Because," said he, "you will die in honour and I in shame. And you will be richly buried and I shall be put in the earth fully alive. And this is a very shameful death." The king crossed himself at these words that he heard and he said: "What, Merlin! Will you die so dishonourably as you tell me?" "I do not see anything that can keep me from it, except God alone." "This is amazing," said the king, "that you cannot through your great intelligence save yourself from so great a misadventure as you relate to me." "But let us stop speaking of this," said Merlin, "for I have said nothing that will not happen just as I have said. But let us speak of Gifflet who is in danger of death if we do not take counsel. It is true that he will not leave it for any man, but he will go to joust with the [f.87a] knight as soon as he is made a knight, and it will happen that the knight, who is of such great might, will knock him to the ground at the first joust; and then if it [p.179] comes to a battle with swords, Gifflet will lose all: for he is the best swordsman that there is in the whole world. Therefore, let us see what we can do." "Indeed," said the king, "I do not know." "I shall tell you," said Merlin. "It is true that you will make him a knight. And when he will have received the order of knighthood from your hand, he will not dare by right to deny you the first gift

that you ask of him. And do you know what you will ask of him? That as soon as he will have jousted with the knight, he will return, whether he should come out well from the joust or whether he should come out badly. And by this request, he will be saved from death." And the king said that this advice was good and loyal.

The next day, King Arthur made Gifflet a knight, and he was tall and young and hardy. And as soon as the king had bestowed the order of knighthood on him, he said to him before all those in that place: "Gifflet, I have made you a knight, and you cannot deny me the first gift that I shall ask of you." "Sire, that is true: ask, for I am ready, within my power, to give it to you." And the king said to him: "I desire that as soon as you have jousted with the knight, [f.87b] whether you fare well or badly, that you return without doing more, whether on foot or on horseback." And he said: "Sire, since it pleases you, I shall do it, as it is in my power." Then he had his arms brought and said that he would not remain any longer but that he would go see the knight. And when he was fully armed, he mounted his horse and took a shield and put it at his neck, and a very good and strong lance was brought to him, and he left the court immediately in such a way that he did not wish to bring with him a servant or a squire. And the king remained very

thoughtful in his palace, for he loved Gifflet with a great love. The tables were set, and all sat down about them. And while the king was eating, behold there entered twelve men all of whom were dressed in white samite.³³ And all the men were old and ancient and all white with the paleness of age, and each carried in his hand an olive branch for a sign. When they came before the king, they stopped and greeted him, and he returned their greetings as one who knew a great deal. And one of them spoke to him and said:

[p.180] "King Arthur, the Emperor of Rome, whom all the lords of the earth must obey, asks this of you: that you send to Rome the tribute which your kingdom owes. Do not hold back [f.87c] this tribute longer than it has already been held back, for great harm will come first to you and then to your men, and the land will be destroyed. Therefore, take care that you act wisely at this time, for you cannot afterwards escape death if you do not." When they had spoken these words in such a manner, the king replied: "Lords, I do not at all possess anything through Rome, nor never do I seek to. And what I do possess, I have it from God alone who placed me in this power and in this grace, to the damnation of my

³³As I have pointed out in Chapter II, Malory re-locates this incident in the "Merlin", recounting it only after Gifflet's battle with Pellinore (Works, I, 48).

soul if I do not do what I must, and to its salvation if I rule the people as a father should. Thus, lords, I am beholden to him who has placed me in this high position that I give him tribute for all the honours that will come to me in his power, but I am beholden to no other, for no other has put me in power. For this reason, I wish you to tell your emperor quite clearly that he was not at all wise when he commanded me with such a word, for I am one who will give him nothing, nor shall I hold anything through him. But I tell you truly that if he entered my country tomorrow in order to do battle, he would never again come to Rome, if [f.87d] God did not deny me too much. And take care that [p.181] you never again be so bold as to enter into my land to announce such words, for harm could come to you physically. And know that if you were not envoys, I would make you suffer and you would never have anything else," said the king. "Therefore, we renounce you by the power of Rome, and by all the lands which are subject to it, and we tell you full well that you never did anything for which such great harm must come to you." "Go away," said the king, "for you have made your message fully."

Thus they departed from before the king, and they went through the court and left. And the king remained amongst his nobles and began to speak of the emperor and said

that he was not very wise when he commanded him to send tribute, as he would not do this for any man on this earth. But now the tale stops speaking of the king and his company and returns to Gifflet.

[f.88a] Now the tale relates that when Gifflet had left the court he rode quickly armed as he was until he came to the forest, and he turned in that direction in which he knew full well where to find the knight. He had gone so far in this way that he came to the plain where the knight had established himself, and he came to the fountain and saw the pavillion which was so beautiful and so elegant, just as it had been told. And at the entrance of the pavillion a big strong horse, blacker than a Moor, was tied, and before it there hung the knight's shield on a small tree. When he saw this, he led his horse to that place and headed for the shield and knocked it down to the ground. And the knight immediately leaped out of the pavillion and said to Gifflet: "Ah, sir knight, you have not acted courteously towards me, you who have struck down my shield. You should take it out on me if I have wronged you and not on the shield which has done nothing to you." And Gifflet said that he had done it to spite him: "Therefore, repair the injury if you have the power."

[p.182] "First tell me, out of courtesy," said the knight, "whose knight you are." And Gifflet said that he was King

Arthur's knight. "In truth," said he, "then tell me, by the
[f.88b] trust that you owe him, what I shall ask of you.
How long is it that you are a knight?" "Indeed," said
Gifflet, "you have so invoked it of me that I shall not lie
to you. I tell you truthfully that I received the order of
knighthood today at the hand of King Arthur himself." "In
truth," said he, "you are so recently a knight and you have
undertaken so great a task as to fight with me who am one of
the most famous knights of my country? Therefore, you will
go back: may our lord make you a wise man. And indeed you
will be, if it pleases God, because you have begun grandly
as a knight." "What, knight!" said Gifflet. "Do you wish me
to leave without jousting with you? This cannot be." "You
shall do it," said the knight, "for I will not joust with
you now since I would not be very happy if I should wound
you. For I have the hope that you will still be a noble man
and a good knight, with the help of God." "All this does you
no good," said Gifflet. "It is necessary that you mount up
and that you take your shield and lance, and we shall joust
together. And if you refuse me this, you will make me do
something that will turn me to shame: for I am on horseback
and I shall stab you there where you are on foot."

[f.88c] When the knight heard these words, he answered
smiling: "Indeed, sir knight, if it please God, you will not

begin to act villainously through any fault of mine." Then he came to his horse, mounted, and took his shield and his [p.183] lance, and then he said to Gifflet: "Sir knight, again I would advise you against this before harm should come to you." And Gifflet said that God should never help him if he left thus. And the knight replied that he would not plead with him any more, and he spiked his horse with his spurs and headed for Gifflet.³⁴ He did likewise, and they came towards each other as swiftly as they could press their horses and met each other and gave each other the greatest blows that they could. Gifflet made his spear fly in pieces. And the knight, who caught him from the right just as one who is well accustomed to it, struck him so hard that he pierced his shield and hauberck, and he plunged the point of the lance with a large section of the shaft through his left side, so that the point showed through on the other

³⁴Notice Malory's handling of this exchange:

"Fayre knyght, why smote you downe my shyld?"

"Sir, for I wolde juste with you," seyde Gryfflet.

"Sir, hit ys bettir ye do nat," seyde the kynge, "for ye ar but yonge and late made knyght, and youre myght ys nat to myne."

"As for that," seyde Gryfflet, "I woll jouste with you."

"That ys me loth," seyde the knyght, "but sitthyn I muste nedis, I woll dresse me thereto. Of whens be ye?" seyde the knyght.

"Sir, I am of kynge Arthurs courte."

So the two knyghtes ran togydir...

(Works, I, 47)

side. And yet it happened that the wound was not mortal. He pushed him, just as one does who has great strength, so that he knocked him to the ground, and he broke his lance in the fall so that he remained pierced through on the ground.³⁵ And the knight wheeled about and came back. And when he saw the other who lay on the ground and who did not have the [f.88d] strength to get up, he dismounted quickly and thought full well that he had killed him, and he was greatly troubled and regretted it very much, and he said that it was a shame for if he had lived longer he could not fail to be a good knight since he was so valourous. Then he loosened his helmet and removed it and lowered the opening to allow air to circulate. And when he had been like this a long while, he came to his senses and he raised himself as vigourously as if he were in full health, and he came to his horse that the knight was holding and mounted just as a knight who was badly wounded. And he took his shield and replaced his helmet, and then he said to the knight: "Indeed, sir knight, I cannot say

³⁵Malory reports the relevant facts with a minimum of sensory detail and description:

So the two knyghtes ran togydir, that Gryfflettis spere all to-shevirde. And therewithall he smote Gryfflet thorow the shelde and the lyffte syde, and brake the spere, that the truncheon stake in hys body, and horse and man felle downe to the erthe.

(Works, I, 48)

that you are not a noble person and a good knight; you know p.184 how to strike with the lance much better than I thought; but may God preserve me, if I had had the permission to do more than with the lance, even though I am wounded it would not remain but that I try you with the sword." And he answered: "Indeed, sir young knight, you have enough heart to begin a great thing. Our lord gave you the strength to raise yourself, thus you will be one of the best knights in the world."³⁶ He did not answer anything that the knight said to him. Thus he went quickly, so badly wounded that no other man, if he were not of such great heart, would have been able to hold himself in the saddle for anything in the world.

Thus he rode until he came to the court at the hour of vespers, and he was still all pierced through. And he came into the hall on horseback, and when the king saw him coming, bleeding as he was, he said to him in great sorrow: "Ah, Gifflet, it would have been better for you if you had stayed here. I told you full well that you should receive this and not have the better of the knight. What do you

³⁶Malory deletes this conventional exchange. In the "Merlin", Pellinore sets Gryfflet on his horse and "so be-toke hym to God and seyde, 'He had a myghty herte!'" (Works, I, 48).

think of him?"³⁷ "Sire, may God help me, he is the best knight that I have ever seen ride, and the most courteous that I have ever found. For he jousted very reluctantly with me because he saw that I am such a young man, and in the end he could have killed me if he wished, but he did not wish it and on the contrary he gave me back my horse and told me that it troubled him greatly that he had wounded me." "By God," said the king, "the knight is valiant and he is most gracious both in chivalry and courtesy. May it then please God that I should resemble him." Then the doctors were summoned and they had Gifflet disarmed and they removed the lance and told the king that he would not die since they thought to cure him quite soon. But now the story stops telling about him [f.89b] and says that King Arthur thought a great deal that night about the knight. And if he could go to him so secretly that no one would know about it, he would gladly do it; and the king was so deep in thought that night that he [p.185] little and thought much. And a little while before daybreak, he called one of his chamberlains who was very privy with him and he said to him: "Go immediately and get me my arms and horse and whatever is necessary for a knight,

³⁷Malory has suppressed these remarks. He reports simply that "passyng grete dole was made for hym" (Works, I, 48). It is at this point that he introduces the incident of the demand from the Emperor of Rome.

and do this so secretly that no one knows about it but you alone." "Ah, sire," said he, "what do you wish to do?" "Do not worry," said the king: "do not be afraid for I shall return, if it pleases God, at the first hour."

He did not dare refuse the order of his lord, and he ran and quickly assembled all that his lord had commanded. And when he came into the room, he found that the king was dressed and ready. "Sire," said he, "all that you have commanded of me is prepared." "This pleases me greatly," said the king, and he now took his arms. And when he was fully armed, he had his horse brought outside of the city by way of a garden which was beside his room. When the king was outside of the walls, he mounted his horse and took his shield and his lance. And then he said to his chamberlain: [f.89c] "I want you to stay under this tree and wait for me until I return. For if you go inside, my men will accuse you concerning me when they do not find me." And he said: "Sire, you speak the truth. And for this reason, I shall remain and wait for you until God brings you back."³⁸

³⁸Notice how simply and directly Malory reports the identical facts:

But the kyng was passyngly wrothe for the hurte of sir Gryfflet; and so he commanded a prevy man of hys chambir that or hit were day his beste horse and armoure "and all that longith to my person be withoute the cité or to-morow day." Ryght so he mette with his man and his horse, and so mownted up, and dressed his shelde and toke hys spere, and bade hys chambirlayne tary there telle he com. (Works, I, 48)

Then the king, armed as he was, left his chamberlain and rode at an easy pace until he came to the forest, and by then the day was full and beautiful and clear. And when he entered the forest, he met Merlin who was fleeing as fast as he could from three churls, their axes about their necks [p.186] with which they wished to chop off his head. And when the king saw Merlin and recognized him, he was greatly amazed and he came up to that churl who was closing in on him and said: "Flee, churl, do not touch him for I shall kill you right now." And when that one saw the armed knight who threatened him, he turned in flight and headed for the forest where he thought he might be safe, and the others who had no little fear for the armed knight did the same. And the king came to Merlin and said: "Merlin, you were close to death if God had not brought me to you at this time." "Do [f.89d] not be so upset," said Merlin, "for you are closer to death than I was if we do not take counsel in your affair."³⁹ "And what do you know?" asked the king. "I know it full well," said Merlin. "Did you not come here to do battle with the knight of the pavillion?" "Yes, in truth," said the king. "Then know in truth," said Merlin, "that you

³⁹The rest of this paragraph, as well as the next two, are suppressed. In the "Merlin", the narration moves directly into the encounter with Pellinore (Works, I, 49).

will not have the better of it and I shall tell you why. He is a hardened knight, and strong and versed in the trade, and proud and bold, and you are young and tender and do not have half the strength that you will have in five years, and you do not have the practice, and you have armour that is worthless nor do you have a sword that would suit you, and in my opinion he has the best armour that there is in this country. And besides this, he has a sword that is suitable for a king himself for it is, by agreement, the best that any knight in this land has in his possession. Therefore, take care that you be well equipped against him. I do not see anything that can be of value to you now outside of a good heart and the bravery with which you are filled. Thus I plead with you that you turn back, for it would be a great misfortune and a tragedy if you, who should come to very great honour and to most lofty affairs such as you can not now imagine, should die in such a manner." "Merlin, you [f.90a] can not tell me anything, for which I would turn back before I have tried the knight with sword and with [p.187] lance." "Since you do not wish to believe my advice," said Merlin, "then may it suit you well, for I shall not interfere any longer."

Then the king said to Merlin, "Merlin, why were those churls chasing you before?" And Merlin began to smile

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and said: "They were chasing me because of what I told them, and it was the truth." And the king asked what it was. "I shall tell you full well," said Merlin.

"It is true that as I was going through this forest, alone as you saw, chance brought me upon those churls who were cutting down two oak trees and were greatly hastening to bring them to the ground. And I said to them: 'Why do you hurry so at this task?' 'Because we must,' they answered. 'In truth, it is to your misfortune,' said I; "it is very necessary for you to come to your shame. Indeed, it is a great folly, for know full well that the sooner you have cut them down, the sooner you will receive your own deaths. For two of you will be hanged to these very trees and the third will be killed with one of your axes.' When they heard what

[f.90b] I was saying, they were very angry at the words and ran towards me, their axes in their hands, in order to kill me. They would have done me harm if they had been allowed." "Then tell me, Merlin, is it true that it will happen to them as you have said?" "Indeed yes," said Merlin, "for as soon as they will have done this, they will argue amongst themselves over a horse which they will buy meanwhile for each will want to have it since its gait will seem good to them. And for this reason, an argument will develop amongst them and the two who are brothers will kill the third

who is their first cousin. And immediately the judge of the city will happen upon this deed and he will have them seized and hanged to the very trees that they would have taken from the forest, because the trunks will be found very close by." And the king began to smile over this and said that this adventure that Merlin knew about, he did not know it from God but from the evil spirit. "Thus speak no more," said Merlin, "about my knowledge; I think it will still be worth more to you than all your power."

So they went talking in this way until they came to the plain where the knight was lodged. And when the king [f.90c] looked about, he did not see Merlin neither near nor far, and he smiled and said that he who wishes to look at the devil is very busy: he thought full well that Merlin was still beside him, and then he so completely lost him that he did not have any news of him. When the king came beside the fountain, he found the knight fully armed except for his shield and lance, and he was seated in a chair at the entrance to the pavillion. The king said to him, without greeting him "Sir knight, who ordered you to guard the passage through this forest in such a way that there is not a knight, foreign or native, who can pass on the path through this forest except that it be necessary for him to joust with you?" "Sir knight," said he, "I myself have taken leave without the

authority and without the grace of anyone." "You are very guilty," said the king, "in that you did not obtain in any way the leave of the lord of this land. And I order you on his behalf to remove your pavillion from here and never again be so bold as to involve yourself in such a matter." And he answered that he would not leave for him or for anyone else until chance brought a knight who could conquer him with arms. "By my head," said the king, "then that one is now f.90d come who will conquer you with arms, or I shall be p.189 shamed and vanquished in this place. And for this reason I wish you to beware of me for I challenge you, so mount up quickly on your horse or else I shall do you harm there where you are on foot."⁴⁰

The knight answered that he had heard many proud men speak but he valued pride very little, and so did he in his case, and he thought full well to put him in his place in a short time. Then he came to his horse, mounted, and took his

⁴⁰Malory handles this dialogue as follows:

"Sir knight," seyde Arthure, "for what cause abydist thou here, that there may no knyght ryde thys way but yf he juste with the? I rede the to leve that custom."

"Thys custom," seyde the knyght, "have I used and woll use magré who seth nay. And who that ys agreved with my custom let hym amende it."

"That shall I amende," seyde Arthure.

"And I shall defende the."

(Works, I, 49)

shield and his lance, and asked Arthur if he wished to joust. And he said that he had not come here for any other reason. They quickly moved away from each other more than an acre, and they came towards each other at great speed with lowered lances, and they struck each other so hard that the lances flew in pieces, and they hit each other, body and face, so that they were stunned and dazed, but neither the one nor the other fell this time, but passed each other badly arranged and in full disorder. And when they had gone a distance from each other, the king put his hand to his sword and wanted to run against the knight. But the knight said: "Ah, sir knight, if you please, let us not begin a match with swords yet, but [f.91a] I shall tell you what we shall do, and it will be a great courtesy. We have an abundance of lances, strong and good; let us, you and I, start again to joust until one of us falls. Then, when one of us has fallen, we can if it so pleases you begin the battle with swords." And the king said that he wished it full well. And immediately the knight brought two lances, gave one to the king and kept the other, and then he began to joust with him, and then the one ran towards the other and again they made their lances fly in pieces, but neither of them spilled to the ground. Then the knight said to the king: "May God help me, sir knight, I do not know who you are; for you are the best jouster that I

[p.190] have ever found. Do not be in the least proud, for I do not say it out of love for you, but for the good that I see in you."

The king did not answer at all to what the knight said to him. And the latter said to him again: "I pray you to joust again with a third lance." And the king said that he would as long as he could hold himself in the saddle. And the other quickly brought him another lance, and he took it; not withstanding, he suffered greatly from the two jousts that he had had for the knight was very powerful. Then they [f.91b] ran with great passion, the one towards the other, and each of them was angered that he had not struck down his rival; they came so grimly towards each other that it seemed from the noise of the galloping of the horses that the earth would collapse beneath them, and when they approached each other they struck each other so hard that they pushed the points of their lances through the shields; but the hauberks of each were so strong that they could not pierce them. They came at each other with great force and they made the lances fly in pieces and, as a result of the clash of bodies and of shields, King Arthur's horse fell to the ground over him. And the other knight ceased his attack and came back very quickly. And the king had already gotten up from the ground,

but he did not have his horse, for it had fled into the forest.⁴¹ And when the knight saw the king on foot, he said to him: "Sir knight, you know the situation very well and you know that I have the better of the fight, for you are on foot and I am on horseback. But because you are the best joustier that I have ever found, I shall release you from this battle, if it pleases you; for I do not wish that shame should come to you in any way at my hands." And the king said that al-
 [f.91c] though it had gone badly for him in the jousting, he would never leave the battle, if it pleased God, but he would try and pursue him to the end, and let him to whom God would give the honour take it. When the knight heard these
 [p.191] words, he answered: "What? Do you wish to fight with me who am on horseback and you are on foot? You can see full well that I have the better of it." "Even though you are on top," said the king, "I shall never leave off the battle, for I would never have honour since I am still healthy and sound."

When the knight saw that it could not be otherwise, he then reflected on this bravery that had never been shown

⁴¹This picturesque description of the battle is diluted in the "Merlin". As in the encounter between Pellinore and Gryfflet, the whole episode is masterfully condensed to the essential facts (Works, I, 49-51).

in the kingdom of Logres until then, but since then many brave men showed it in the same way. The king held his shield on the side and his sword in his hand and headed towards the one who was on horseback. And when the other saw him coming, he moved back a little and said to the king: "Sir knight, hold back; never, if it please God, shall I fight with you while I am on horseback and you are on foot. For indeed, if I vanquished you in such a way, I would never have honour." Then he dismounted quickly and tied his horse to the entrance to the pavillion, and then he grasped his shield and brandished his sword and said to the king: "Sir [f.91d] knight, now I shall have greater honour in fighting with you than I would have had on horseback. But still I would advise you for your own good to let this battle be." And the king said that he would in no way do this.⁴² And the knight then ran up and gave him a great blow on his shield so that he knocked off a piece. And the king was not at all

⁴²Notice Malory's disregard for all these niceties of courtly behaviour and the pointedness of the dialogue in his version:

Then seyde the knyght unto Arthure, "Thou arte in my daungere, whethir me lyst to save the or sle the; and but thou yelde the to me as overcom and recreaunte, thou shalt dey."

"As for that," seyde kynge Arthure, "dethe ys wellcom to me whan hit commyth. But to yelde unto the I woll nat!"

(Works, I, 50-51)

slow, but he gave him as great a blow on the helmet as he could bring from on high such that the knight was greatly burdened to sustain the blow. But he was strong and hardy and well versed in this trade and he knew about sword-play and he held the king so hemmed in with his cutting sword that before the first assault was over, the king had two wounds on his body of which another man would have been wounded to the death by the lesser, and he had already lost much blood, for the knight's sword was a very good one. And meanwhile [v.192] the king, who was endowed with a great heart and great courage, took strength and endured the blows that the other rained upon him, many and often, but he was not so slow that he did not strike the knight with many blows, for he gave him many wounds, small and large.

So it went in such a manner that the one and the [f.92a] other were very exhausted. And it had greatly aided the king that he was much sprier and faster than the other knight, for he still did not have a beard or a moustache but was a youngster. And if he had been as well armed both with the sword and with the other things that the knight had, Messire Robert de Boron⁴³ who put this story in writing

⁴³Malory does not repeat these references to the alleged author. The account of the match with swords is reduced to one vivid paragraph (Works, I, 50).

says very clearly that the king could very well have had the better of the fight in the long run, had he not lost as much blood as he did. And this was something which had slowed him down a little and cut down a great deal of his strength and power.

After the first assault, when they had rested a bit, the knight called the king back to battle. And the latter attacked him vigourously but he would have done much more if it had not been for the blood of which he had lost an abundance. They came to that stage where the king raised his sword to strike the knight, and the knight did likewise to strike the king, if he could, and when the swords struck one against the other and the blades met each other, it was necessary that the worse should break and shatter. And because the knight's sword was the better and the harder, he [f.92b] broke the king's sword right up in front of the hilt so that the blade fell to the ground and the handle remained in the king's hand.

When the king saw that he had lost his sword, he was not very secure because he felt wounded and exhausted and knew his enemy for a very good knight, and he did not know what to do for he then found himself in danger of losing his life and all earthly honour, nor did he ever before have such

great fear as he now did. And when the knight saw him without a sword, he thought that he would place him right to the fear of death to know if he would betray a word of cowardice, for so far he knew full well that he was truly brave.⁴⁴ Then he began to fall on him more and more; and he pierced his helmet and his shield and his hauberk. And meanwhile, the king protected himself as well as he could with the shield that he had, and he endured and suffered the force of the knight; and he had learned so much of sword-play that it happened rarely that the knight struck him if not on his shield. The knight marvelled greatly at the way in which the king could endure so much, for he knew full well that he had lost a great deal of blood, and it would have troubled him greatly if he brought him to his death, for he found him fully a good and noble knight, and he esteemed him above all those that he had ever encountered. Then he said to the king to test what he would say: "Sir knight, you know the situation full well. You are lost if you do not regard yourself [f.92c] as defeated and vanquished in this battle. And know full well that if you do not place yourself completely at my mercy, you will not have deliverance but I shall cut

⁴⁴Malory rejects this role of the omniscient observer who reflects on the thoughts and feelings of the characters and events.

off your head." "Indeed," said the king, "you are insane to ask this. Never, if it please God, shall I say a word out of fear of death that would bring me to shame, for indeed I fear shame more than I do death." "This is not necessary;" said the knight, "it is better for you to say differently or you will have come to your death." "When death comes," said the [p.194] king, "it will be necessary for me to accept it. But I do not think that death is as near to me as you say." And then he threw his shield to the ground and the piece of sword that he held in his hand, and he ran to the knight and grabbed him by the waist and lifted him high off the ground, about a foot or more, and then he hurled him with full force under himself so that he held him between himself and the ground. And he fell so hard that he was completely stunned. And the king grabbed his helmet so firmly that the straps broke, and he snatched it from his head, whether that one wished it or not, and threw it aside. And if he had then had something with which to harm the knight, the fight would have been over; but his hands were empty so that he could not harm him in the least.

[f.92d] When the knight saw that he was thus beneath the one who had put him down and ripped off his helmet, he was not very safe; for if the king could so arrange that he hold in his hand the sword which was quite close to him and which had

fallen from the knight's hand in his fall to the ground, he knew full well that he would have lost the battle. And for this reason, he took strength out of fear of death and grasped the king with all his force with both arms and clasped him so firmly against his chest that it seemed to him that he would die from the pain; he clasped him so tightly that he lost his power and his strength. And when the knight saw the king let go, he took the top and forced the king beneath him. And he stretched out towards the sword so that he took it; and as soon as he held it, he was so in pain from the suffering and the exhaustion that he had endured and from the fear that he had had that he forgot all nobility and prepared to cut off the king's head.⁴⁵ As he wished to cut the straps of his helmet, Merlin, who was nearby and who had observed the whole battle, when he saw the king in peril of death, it seemed to him that he could wait too long, for if he waited a little he would never be there in time.

[p.195] Thus he came there as quickly as he could, and found [f.93a] that the knight had already removed the king's helmet from his head. And when he saw this, he was afraid and spoke with the knight: "Knight, do not touch him any more

⁴⁵Malory does not find it necessary to excuse this lapse in courtly behaviour. He merely states the fact that Pellinore "wolde have smytten off hys hede" (Works, I, 51).

nor do him any harm; for you will make the kingdom of Logres lacking of a good lord." "What!" said the knight. "Is this then King Arthur?" "Yes indeed," said Merlin. And the other was troubled and said that for this reason he would not leave off killing him, and he raised his sword to strike. And when Merlin saw this he cast his spell so that he made the knight fall asleep on top of Arthur. And Merlin went to the king and said to him: "Now you can see that my knowledge is more valuable to you than your prowess. And I told you this morning that this would happen." The king raised himself quickly and noticed that the knight was asleep and that he did not move at all, and he really thought that he was dead and that Merlin had killed him with his spell; and he said to Merlin quickly: "Ah, Merlin, you have done wrong in killing this knight; never will this harm be put right, for he was in my opinion the best knight in the world. It would have been better, may God help me, to have lost the best castle that I have than for you to have killed him thus." "What!" said Merlin. "Do you then think that he is dead?" "It seems so to me," said the king. "Then know," said Merlin, "that he is [f.93b] quite alive, and that he will not awaken before it so pleases me."⁴⁶ The king said: "I was almost betrayed

⁴⁶It is at this point that Malory inserts the prophecy concerning Percival, the one such link to future events which is to be found in the "Merlin".

by my sword which failed me." "Did I not tell you so," said Merlin, "that it would not avail you? And know full well that I know but one good sword in this country and it is in a lake where the fairies dwell. If you could have this one, it would last you right to the end." "Ah, fair friend Merlin," said the king, "could you arrange for me to get it?" "I [p.196] shall bring you," said Merlin, "to the place where it is; but you can not have it through me for I do not have the power. Nevertheless, I know full well that you shall have it and in such a way that you will be greatly amazed.⁴⁷

"Thus let us go, you and I, to a hermit and you will rest there tonight. And tomorrow, when we have taken care of your wounds and they are cared for, then we shall leave together and go where I have told you that the sword is, if it is such that you can ride then, but I am afraid that you are so badly wounded that you will not be able to travel." And the king answered that he had no wound that would prevent him from riding. Then the king mounted the horse of the knight whom he had fought and went with Merlin. And he brought him to a hermitage on a mountain and the hermit was

⁴⁷Malory postpones this reference to Excalibur, mentioning it only after this particular episode has been concluded. He introduces the new episode by having Arthur state simply: "I have no swerde" (Works, I, 52).

a very noble man and of saintly life, and he had been a marvellously good knight in his time and he knew how to cure wounds.

When the king had dismounted in that place, he was disarmed and the nobleman took care of his wounds, and he told the king that he need not have fear for he would heal quite easily since he had no wound which was very dangerous. The king stayed there that day, Merlin with him, and the next day they did not move out either. Then they left and rode until they came to the sea which was quite nearby. Merlin turned right towards a mountain and they went until they came to a lake, and he said to the king: "King, what do you think of this water?" "Merlin," said the king, "it seems very deep to me, and it is such that no man can go into it who would not perish." "Indeed," said Merlin, "you speak the truth. No one can enter upon it without the permission of the fairies who would not be quite soon dead.⁴⁸ And know full well that the good sword about which I told you is in this lake." "In this lake?" said the king. "And how can one get it?" "This you will see quite soon," said Merlin, "if it pleases God." While they were

⁴⁸As I have pointed out in Chapter IV, Malory has deleted most of the otherworldly aspects of this episode.

speaking in this way, they looked in the middle of the lake and saw a sword appear above the water, as well as a hand and an arm which appeared right up to the elbow, and the arm was clothed in white samite, and the hand held the sword out of the water. "Now you can see," said Merlin, "the sword about which I spoke to you, the one you will carry." "Ah, God," said the king, "how can we get it? For no man can go into this lake who would not perish." "God will send you some advice," said Merlin, While they were speaking of the sword, they then saw a maiden who was coming by way of the sea. And she was so hot that it seemed full well that she had come a very long way, and she rode a black palfrey which was small and not at all large.

When she came near the lake, she greeted the king, and Merlin gave her his greetings, and she said to them: "I know full well that you are waiting until you can get that sword in some way. But it is folly to desire to have it, for without doubt you will never get it unless it is through me." "Indeed, maiden," said Merlin, "I know full well that it can not be had unless it is through you, for if someone besides [f.94a] you could get it, I would know it full well. For you have cast such a spell upon this lake that after that no other spell can do any good. And for this reason, I wish to beg you that you get it and give it to my lord, the king, as

a gift. For we know full well that there is now no one in the world by whom it would be better employed than by him."⁴⁹ "I know this full well," said she. "And for this reason, I hastened to ride so that I would be here in time for your arrival; and I tell you that if he promises me that he will give me the first gift that I shall ask of him, I shall get the sword and give it to him." And the king promised her that he would give it if it were a gift that he had in his power to give. "I do not ask more of you," said she. And she went quickly into the water and walked on it with completely dry feet, in such a way that her feet nor any part of her body were wet, and she came to the sword and took it. And the hand which held it aloft sank back into the water, so that it was no longer visible at this time. And the maiden came to the king and said to him: "Sire, here is the sword. And know in truth that I do not believe that there are two as good in all the world. And certainly, if I had thought that it would not be used well by you, you would not have it, for it has a much greater value than you think."

The king took the sword and thanked the maiden profusely. And she said to him: "Sire, I am leaving this place,

⁴⁹Malory shifts the initiative hereto Arthur by having the king negotiate with the lady rather than Merlin. Also in Malory's version, Arthur rows out into the lake and takes the sword himself (*Works*, I, 52-53).

for I have much to do elsewhere. Now remember full well that you owe me a gift; for I shall ask it of you by chance sooner than you think." And he answered her that he owed it to her indeed: she could come to ask for it when it pleased her for he would grant it within his power. And she left immediately, and Merlin greatly commended her to God and thanked him profusely for his kindness. And the king looked at the sword and saw that the scabbard was marvellously rich, and he valued it greatly. Then he drew the sword out, and he looked at it and found it so good and so beautiful that, in his estimation, he did not think that there was one as good or as beautiful in all the world. And Merlin said to the king: "Sire, what do you think of this sword?" "I value it so much," said the king, "that there is not a castle in the world for which I would give it, nor do I think that any armour can hold out against it, as long as a noble person [p.199] holds it in his hand." "Then tell me: which do you value more, the scabbard or the sword?" "I value the sword more than the scabbard," said the king, "even if there were a hundred like it. Nevertheless, this is the most [f.94c] beautiful and the richest that I have ever seen, and I do not think that there is a more beautiful one in all the world." "Indeed, sire," said Merlin, "now I know full well that you are poorly aware of the kindness that the maiden has done you. Know, in truth, that the scabbard is worth

more than ten such swords, for it is made of a leather that has such a virtue that never will a man who carries it on his person lose blood nor receive a mortal wound as long as he is properly armed."

Thus did Merlin speak about the scabbard of the sword, and he spoke the truth, but the tale does not explain at this time how this could be, but it waits to relate this at that time when the story explains it, how his sister Morgan stole it from him to give it to her lover who was to fight with King Arthur. And because she stole it from him, the king would have been killed if it had not been for the foresight of Merlin. And the story waits until this point to explain how it could be that he had a scabbard so endowed.⁵⁰

When the king heard Merlin praise the scabbard so much, he said to him: "Merlin, is this true what you tell me?" "You will not know this fully," said Merlin, "before you will have lost it; but then you will know it when you will have lost it." "What, Merlin, shall I lose it then?" "It will be stolen from you," said Merlin. "Now stop asking me about it, for I shall say no more." Then both of them

⁵⁰Another link which Malory suppresses in the "Merlin".

left the lake and the king brought the sword and he fastened it about himself, and he was very happy because chance had [f.94d] sent him such a valuable thing. He and Merlin [p.200] went in this way until they came to the place where he had fought with the knight earlier, and they found the pavillion, as beautiful and as rich as they had seen it before, but they did not find the knight.

The king asked Merlin: "Do you know what has happened to this knight?" "Yes," said Merlin, "I shall tell you. It happened a while ago that chance brought to this place a knight of your court called Egglame, and he is from the city of Camelot. When they saw each other, they ran against each other and the battle lasted until Egglame turned in flight as one does who can no longer endure and is afraid to die. And so began the chase towards Cardolle, and I tell you that it has lasted so long that we shall meet him there where he follows him towards the city." "I tell you, then," said the king, "that he cannot escape a battle with me. For if he finds no one who can overthrow him, never will any [f.95a] knight pass in front of his pavillion who will go by free from battle." "Indeed," said Merlin, "you will not attack him this time, by my advice, for you will obtain no honour from it because you are fresh and somewhat rested, and he is worn and exhausted." And the king said that he

would then refrain from battle this time. Then he asked Merlin: "Tell me how it can be that the maiden went over the water with dry feet." And Merlin began to laugh and said: "Sire, it was not as you saw it, but I will tell you how it is with regard to the lake, for I know it full well.⁵¹

[p.201] "It is true that there is a lake, big and marvellously deep. And in the middle of the lake there is a rock where there are beautiful and rich houses and a large and marvellous palace; but they are so surrounded by enchantment that no one who is outside can see them, if he is not from there. And there was no water at all where you saw the maiden going, but there is a wooden bridge which no one is able to see. And those who go inside pass by way of it, for [f.95b] they see the bridge which others do not see at all." "By the name of God," said the king, "I believe it must be so, for otherwise she would not have passed so quickly."

They went speaking thus until they approached the city. And then the king and Merlin met the knight of the pavillion. They said nothing to him nor he to them, but

⁵¹This explanation becomes unnecessary as a result of Malory's alteration of the episode. He thus keeps his account of the incident as much as possible on the realistic plain (Works, I, 52-53).

passed by, and the king entered the city; never was such great joy seen as that which the people of the city made over him, for they had been very much afraid of him. On the evening that the king had returned, King Uriens asked him for his sister Morgan for his wife.⁵² And he granted this to him very willingly, for he could not wed her to a better man in his land; and with her he gave him a great part of his kingdom, and he gave him a castle which was called Taruc, and this castle was situated on the sea and was as strong as any other.

King Uriens of Gore had a great and marvelous wedding and he was very happy that he had made such a lofty wedding. And the first night that he lay by Morgan, he begot Yvain, [p.202] the son of King Uriens. The king left the wedding feast and came to Carlion. And while he was sitting there at his table one day, a knight came before him, very elegantly dressed and very richly adorned, and he said to the king, [f.95c] there where he saw him amidst his men: "King Arthur, King Rions, Lord of North Wales, commands this of you, for he has conquered as many as eleven kings who are all in his service. And in commemoration of this victory, he

⁵²The marriage of Morgan and Uriens, and the begetting of their son is not in the "Merlin".

took the beard of each of them and had a mantle woven out of them for himself. But because he values you more than any-one that he has conquered, he commands you, if you do not wish to loose your land, that you come to him and that you do him homage and receive it [the land] from him. And at his orders, send him your beard; he will have it placed and fixed to his mantle. And do this that he commands of you or else it cannot be but that he will seize your land, for you can not endure against his power."

King Arthur laughed at this command. And when the messenger had spoken, the king said to him: "Fair friend, it does not seem at all possible to me that I am the one to whom King Rions has sent you; for I have no heard, I am too young, and if indeed I did have one I would not send it to him: I would prefer to have lost my head. And because he has ordered it of me, I regard him as the most foolish person that I have ever heard spoken of. And tell him that if he enters my land to take anything away from me, he will not have the power to return for he will receive something that will bother him. Tell him this on my behalf." And the one said: he would transmit this message full well, and he turned away [f.95d] from the king and went back on his way. And when he had left, the king spoke a great deal about this and said that he had never heard spoken such a foolish or vain order

as the one he commanded. And then he asked those who were about him: "Is there anyone of you who knows King Rions?"

[p.203] "Sire," said one of his knights who was called Naram, "it is a long time since I have known him. Know that he is one of the best knights in the world, and of all the wars that he undertakes he does not begin any from which, in the end, he does not come to honour. And for this reason, I fear very much that he will overthrow you before the end of the war." And the king said that whatever might happen to him, he would like that it should come through fighting.

They spoke a great deal of these things. And the king said one day to Merlin: "Merlin, soon that time will arrive when you said that there will be born the one by whose actions this kingdom will come to destruction. Therefore, know that no child will be born in the kingdom during this month that I shall not seize and place in a tower, or in two or three towers if so many are necessary. And I shall have them brought up there until I have taken counsel about the one you told me about." "King," said Merlin, "you will strive in vain. And know that you will not find him, but [f.96a] it will happen just as I have told you, for so it must be." And the king said that he would proceed as he

desired.⁵³

Thus the king waited until close to that time that had been told him. And then he had proclaimed throughout the kingdom of Logres that all the infants of the kingdom of Logres be brought to him. The people of the country did not know at all that the king wished to do that wondrous thing that he did do, so each one sent his infant. And they brought so many of them before the day arrived that the infant Mordred was born that he had more than 550 placed in his tower, and the oldest was not more than three weeks.

[p.204] Thus did the rich and the poor do, that as soon as their children were born, immediately after they had been baptized, they had them brought to the king, and he immediately ordered that they be locked up in his tower. King Lot, who knew that his wife was pregnant and ready to give birth, asked the king many times what he wished to do with all these infants that he had assembled thus, but he kept it secret in every way in that he did not wish to tell him anything. When he knew that his wife was delivered and that the

⁵³Malory does not have Arthur consult with Merlin about his plan to assemble the infants. This whole last episode in the "Merlin" displays an extensive and masterful condensation of the source.

child was born, he had him baptized and he received the name f.96b Mordred in baptism. He said to his wife, the queen: "Lady, I wish to send your son to your brother, the king, for so does everyone do." "I wish it so," said the lady, "since it pleases you."

Then the king had the infant placed in a crib which was very beautiful and rich. And when the mother was placing the child in the crib, it happened that he struck his head on it so that he had a great wound in the middle of his brow which showed there all the days of his life.⁵⁴ The king was greatly troubled about the wound and so were all the others. And for this reason, he did not delay to place him in the cradle. Afterwards, they placed him in a ship with a great company of ladies and knights, and the king said that they should go thus over the sea and bring the infant to his uncle the king. "And when you are there, tell him that I am sending him his nephew." And they said that they would deliver this message, if God allowed them to arrive at their destination.

Thus King Lot's men left the city of Orkney. And the wind filled the sails of their ship, so that in a few hours

⁵⁴Malory suppresses all of these details, reporting simply, "And so was Mordred sente by kynge Lottis wyff" (Works, I, 55).

they had gone such a distance from the port that they could not see the land at all. Thus they sped that day and that [p.205] night also, for such a great storm arose on the sea that all those in the ship began to cry out: "Ah, Jesus [f.96c] Christ, do not let us perish here. Have pity on us and on this tiny creature, the king's son." Thus did each and every one cry out and invoke the saints and make vows and moanings. And the sea was so troubled and the wind increased so that the ship struck a rock and immediately was shattered into more than ten pieces. And all those in the ship perished except for the child who was lying in the crib.⁵⁵ It happened that the crib floated on the current after all the others were drowned. And then there came by a fisherman who was looking for fish and who was in a small boat. And when he found the crib and the child on the water, he was most wondrously happy and he took both the one and the other and put them in his boat. But when he saw that the child was so richly dressed as one who was all covered with silk cloth and other clothing, he thought right away that he was issued from lofty noblemen, and he was more pleased than

⁵⁵Malory alters the facts here: Mordred arrives safely in Cardolle and is set adrift with the other infants. When the drifting ship is wrecked, Malory reports simply that "a good man founde hym, and fostird hym tulle he was fourtene yere of age and than brought hym to the courte" (Works, I, 55).

before. He returned quickly and took the cradle as well as the child towards the city and went by way of a short-cut to his home, in such a way that he was not observed, and he showed his wife who was therein what God had sent them. "Indeed," said the woman, "this is a most fortunate event and God has given it to us as a gift. From the wealth of the crib, we can live well and comfortably for twenty years, and I think that God has done this for us in order to send us help."

"Woman," said the good man, "this child is of lofty ancestry, this we can know very well. It is necessary that he be brought up as well as possible. For if God permitted that the ones from whom he is descended should recognize him, it would be for our good and they will repay us well. And it cannot be that he will not be recognized before long. And I would suggest even more that, rather than keep him, we should bring him just as we have found him to the lord of this land. For if he should find out by chance that we have found him and that we did not bring him immediately, he would destroy us and our descendants." And the woman said that this was the best advice and the safest that he could give. "Thus, let us go," said he, "you and I, and we shall make the lord the gift of this child." And they were both fully in agreement.

Thus they took Mordred and left their home and went [f.97a] directly to the castle which had the jurisdiction over all the country, and they found therein the lord who was called Nabur le Derree and who had a small son five weeks old who was called Sagremor: later he was a companion of the Round Table and was a marvellously good knight, and he was called in his own right Sagremor le Derree, just as the tale will relate it clearly later.⁵⁶ Nabur was very happy over the child that they brought him, for he thought full well that he was descended from good noblemen, lofty and powerful, from the beautiful apparel that he had about him. For this gift, he gave the fisherman such a reward that the latter considered himself well paid. And the king kept the child and had him placed with his son Sagremor; he had them brought up together and he said that if God preserved them until the day that they reached the age to become knights, he would have them knighted together.

Thus did Mordred escape from peril, and all the others were drowned, for so did chance go. Duke Nabur had him cured of the wound that he had on his forehead. And he found in a note which was in the crib that he was called [p.207] Mordred, but he found nothing else in the note

⁵⁶Another link which Malory suppresses.

about his birth or his ancestry. Thus did Mordred find safety and succour after the dangers of the sea. But now the [f.97b] tale stops talking thus and returns to King Arthur.

King Arthur, so the tale relates, had had assembled in his tower the infants that were born in his country, just as I have related to you. And when the time about which Merlin had spoken had passed, the king thought that he would have all the children put to death for he really thought that there was amongst them the one by whom such great harm would come, and that he was in this group. One evening, as he was sleeping in his bed, he became aware that there came before him a man so tall that he had never seen one as tall, and four beasts carried him, but the king could not recognize what kind they were.⁵⁷

The man said to the king: "King, why are you preparing to do such great evil, you who wish to destroy such holy and innocent creatures who are still pure and free from the corruption of the world? It would have been better for the creator of heaven and earth if he had not given you the grace that was bestowed upon you. He had intended you to be the pastor of his people, and you have become disloyal and a

⁵⁷Malory makes no mention of this dream. The plan to put the infants in a ship and cast them adrift is Arthur's own in the "Merlin" (Works, I, 55).

fiend. What harm could these creatures have done you that you wish to destroy them? Indeed, if you do this, the great master who placed you in this power in which you are will make such great vengeance on you that it will be spoken of [f.97c] forever after."

[p.208] The king looked at the nobleman and he was completely abashed at what he said, and he began to think about it. And the nobleman spoke once again: "I shall tell you what you will do, and thus you will have to consider yourself as well avenged. Have all of them placed on the sea in a ship, and the ship must be without a master, and the sails hoisted. And then have the ship move out to sea, and then let it go wherever the wind will take it. And then if they can escape from this danger, then Jesus Christ will have shown that he loves them and that he does not wish the destruction of the children. And this should satisfy you fully if you are not the most disloyal king that ever lived on this earth." The king said to the nobleman that "Indeed, you have taught me a marvellous vengeance. I shall not act other than how you have said." "It is not vengeance that you will have, for they have done nothing wrong either to you or to anyone else, but this is to fulfil your desire, and because you think by this to prevent the destruction of the kingdom of Logres; but you will not do it, for it must happen just as the son of the

devil has told you."

Then the king woke up, and it seemed to him that it [f.97d] was a dream that the nobleman who had spoken to him was still in front of him. And when he saw that it was a dream, he commended himself to our lord and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. And he said that he would do with the children exactly what he had dreamed. That day he had prepared a big enough ship; but even those who were preparing it did not know at all at this time why he was having it made ready. That evening, just as soon as night fell, the king had all the children gathered together, and they numbered by count 712, and he had them placed in the ship. And [p.209] when they were placed in it, the king had the sail of the ship hoisted and the wind which had arisen now filled the sail so that in a short time the ship was sailing on the high sea.

Thus were the children placed in peril of dying. But it did not please our lord at all that they should be endangered thus, for he saw that the children did not deserve to perish in this way. And through his mercy, he arranged for the ship to arrive at a castle called Amalvi. And the castle was beautiful and very seemly, and a king, who had been a pagan for a long time but who had recently been made a

Christian, was lord of it and he loved our lord a great deal and feared him, and he had recently had a son of his wife, [f.98a] and the child was named Acanor, but later his name was changed at King Arthur's court, and because he was not handsome but black and emaciated like his father, and he was as noble and as bold as no one else, thus they called him everywhere Lait Hardi. And the story tells of many things about him where it deals with the quest of the Holy Grail and before.⁵⁸

When the ship had come to the shore of the castle about which I have told you, it happened that King Oriant had gone out from there and had with him a large company of knights, and he had come by chance to ride at the port; and when he saw the ship that had arrived, he said to those who were with him: "Let us go see this ship to know who is in it, for it seems to me that it comes from afar." Then they went at a quick pace in that direction for they saw that it so pleased the king. And when they arrived at the ship and boarded it and found so many children as were there, they [p.210] crossed themselves at the amazement that they had. And the king said to his companions: "God have mercy on us, where can these children have come from and who could have

⁵⁸Another link dropped in the "Merlin".

assembled so many and put them together? For I did not think there were so many in the whole world." "By my head, sire," said one of the king's old knights, "I shall tell you what it [f.98b] is, and I shall not lie to you. It is true that chance brought me to the kingdom of Logres so that I came to the court of Arthur. There, without doubt, I saw before I had left that King Arthur was having all the infants of the kingdom of Logres assembled as soon as they were born, and they were put in the king's tower, but no one could find out why the king did this. Then I think, and I believe it is the truth, that the barons of the kingdom put them thus on the sea for whatever harm might come to them by chance, since they could not endure that they be killed in front of them. And for this reason, they had them put to sea in the hands of our lord and to the vagaries of chance. And everyone can see that if the barons had loved their lives as much as their deaths, they would never have allowed the ship to leave without a master."

To these words the king replied: "I believe you speak truthfully about whatever you tell me, and this seems true to me. Therefore, let us see what we can do with the children. For since God has sent them to us, I would say that they would be better off in a place where few people know about it.

[f.98c] For since the king has placed them in peril of

death, I know full well that if the king would find out that I have them, he would not be reconciled with me, but he would hate me for it and I do not wish his hatred in any way, for harm can come to me and to my land."

[p.211] "Sire," said the old knight, "I shall tell you what you can do with them. Place some men who know the sea in this ship, and then send these children to some refuge on any island in the sea. And certainly, they can be kept so secretly that King Arthur will never hear spoken about them." Thus the king had it done as he said, and he had them put in one of his lands and placed nurses with them, as many as were necessary. Afterwards, he had a good strong castle built and when it was built, the king called it the Castle of Genvres out of love for them. But now the story leaves them and returns to King Arthur.⁵⁹

Then the story relates that when the barons of the [f.98d] kingdom of Logres learned what the king had done with their children, they were as sorrowful as never before. They came to Merlin for they knew that he was privy with the king, and they said: "Merlin, what can we do about this disloyalty which the king has committed? Never has a king

⁵⁹Malory has suppressed this episode in the kingdom of Oriant.

committed such great disloyalty."⁶⁰ "Ah, fair lords," said Merlin, "by God, do not upset yourselves so much. For he has done this for the common good of the kingdom of Logres. For know full truthfully that during this month in which we are presently, there was born in this country a child by whose deeds and by whose perseverance the kingdom of Logres will be so ruined that, after him, there will remain no noblemen who will not receive death in battle. And so this country must remain devoid and stripped both of a good king and of good knights. And know that this is not a fable, but it is as true as you see me speaking to you. And because the king sincerely wished that this sorrow be prevented and that it not happen in his time, neither to him nor to you, so did he have done what he did with the children."

[p.212] When the barons heard these words, they said to Merlin: "Do you tell us the truth, that he did it for this reason?" "Yes, may God help me," said Merlin. "And I shall

[f.99a] tell you more about your children. Know truthfully that they are all safe and happy and have escaped from danger of death, for it did not please our lord in the least

⁶⁰As I have pointed out in Chapter IV, Malory has the barons react much differently even though they do not have the consolation of knowing that their children will be returned to them eventually as in the Suite.

that they should die. And before ten years have passed, you will see them healthier and happier." When they heard that Merlin spoke thus, they were much more relieved than they were before, and they restrained their anger and their ill will, for they believed Merlin completely in what he told them and they declared the king to be discharged for whatever he had done, and said that they would never bear him ill will. Thus did Merlin reconcile the king and his barons, and great harm could have come to the country if Merlin had not caused this reconciliation.⁶¹

⁶¹There is no division in the Suite at this point: the French romance flows, as usual, into the next episode without any suggestion of an ending or a beginning.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate, by means of a detailed comparison of the "Merlin" subdivision of The Tale of King Arthur with the parallel passages in the Huth and Cambridge manuscripts, that Malory's tale - and, by extension, the whole of the Morte Darthur - is the result of an extremely delicate melting down of the source and a reconstruction of this matter according to a new and consistent pattern, controlled by a highly personal style of narration, and inspired by an original interpretation of the traditional Arthur legend. The basic premise of the thesis is that Malory worked systematically to transform the Suite du Merlin in order to incorporate a new sens into the matière and, to do this, he had to develop a new method of composition and a style of narration which could convey this reinterpretation.

Chapter I provides a brief summary of scholarship relating to the Suite and examines the structure and style of the French romance.

Chapter II argues that Malory's method of composition and his restructuring of the pattern of the source were a necessary first step in achieving a modification of narrative outlook essential in giving the Morte the sense of a chronicle of historical events.

ABSTRACT

Chapter III shows that the development of a distinct and original style of narration was the culmination of this process of providing an effective vehicle for integrating the new sens.

Chapter IV outlines and analyses three trends distinguishable in the "Merlin" which point towards this re-interpretation.

Chapter V provides a further body of evidence, through an annotated translation of folios 75-99 of the Huth Merlin, whose purpose is to reinforce the hypotheses presented in the previous chapters.