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ERRORS IN THE MALORY ARCHETYPE:
THE CASE OF VINAVER'S WIGHT AND
BALAN'S CURIOUS REMARK

by

RALPH NORRIS

THE text of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* is based upon two authoritative witnesses: the Winchester Manuscript and the incunable printed by William Caxton in 1485.¹ Scholarship, primarily by Eugène Vinaver, has established beyond reasonable doubt that the two versions descend from a common archetype rather than one from the other and that the archetype was not Malory's own autograph.² This situation allows textual scholars to reconstruct more of Malory's exact words from the errors and interference that are an inescapable part of the transmission of medieval romance than would otherwise be possible.³ Not only does each witness allow for a check upon the other, but in conjunction with Malory's sources they can at times allow scholars to correct the archetype and glimpse the exemplar that must lie beyond it.

1. The manuscript is now British Library MS Additional 59678; the British Library refers to it as the Malory Manuscript. It lacks its first and last gatherings and three other leaves. Caxton's first edition survives in two copies: a perfect copy owned by the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and one wanting eleven leaves in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, England. The Winchester Manuscript is reproduced in photographic facsimile in *The Winchester Malory: A Facsimile*, intro. N. P. Ker, Early English Text Society, suppl. ser., 4 (1976), and the Morgan copy of the Caxton in *Le Morte Darthur printed by William Caxton 1485*, intro. Paul Needham (London: Scolar, 1976). A digital facsimile of the Winchester and of the preface, table of contents, Book V, and Book XXI of the Rylands Caxton are available online at The Malory Project, directed by Takako Kato and designed by Nick Hayward, <http://www.maloryproject.com>.

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2. See especially the relevant part of Eugène Vinaver's Introduction to Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works*, ed. Vinaver, 3 vols. (Clarendon: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947, rev. 1948; 2nd ed. 1967, rev. 1973; 3rd ed. rev. P. J. C. Field 1990), c-cxxxi. For a discussion of subsequent challenges to Vinaver's conclusion, see P. J. C. Field, "The Earliest Texts of Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Poetica* 37 (1993): 18-31, reprinted in *Malory: Texts and Sources* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), 1-13; further citations to this article will be to the reprinted version.

3. Although this is no longer seen as the only priority of the editor of medieval texts, it remains a legitimate goal: see Nicolas Jacobs, "Kindly Light or Foxfire? The Authorial Text Reconsidered," *A Guide to Editing Middle English*, ed. Vincent P. McCarren and Douglas Moffat (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1998), 3-14, on 12-13.

The cases discussed below show that the scribe of the archetype occasionally misread his exemplar. One has long been familiar to Malory scholars from the introduction to Vinaver's magisterial editions; the other is a more recent contribution to Malory studies. However, neither scholar seems to have come as close as possible to the reading of the exemplar of the archetype, and the new critical edition by P. J. C. Field retains Vinaver's readings at these points.⁴ Although no such textual problem can ever be solved with certainty, probable solutions can be found that create clauses much more characteristic of Malory's usual style and that, therefore, are more likely to take us a little closer to the ideal of recovering Malory's exact words.

I

In addition to being Malory's most important twentieth-century editor, Eugène Vinaver was a significant exponent of the theory of editing medieval literature that is associated with his mentor, Joseph Bédier. This theory calls for an editor to choose a single manuscript, the best manuscript so far as it can be determined, and only to emend manifest errors and readings that could not possibly be correct.⁵ Because of this, Vinaver's three-volume edition *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* took a conservative approach towards emendation of the text. This edition is based upon the Winchester Manuscript but also uses the Caxton to fill Winchester's lacunae and to shed light on various textual cruxes. Furthermore, despite his allegiance to Bédier's motto, *conserver le plus possible, réparer le moins possible*,⁶ Vinaver was, to his credit, willing to recognize a number of occasions that seemed to demand conjectural emendations, that is to say, emendations to the text that produce readings that are not found in either medieval witness.⁷

One of the more notable examples of this kind of emendation occurs in the "Book of Sir Tristram" section. Because this error is the basis for Vinaver's argument that the archetype of Winchester and the Caxton was not Malory's original autograph, he discusses it at length in the introduction to his edition: "The following sentence in Caxton, totally unintelligible as it stands, but reproduced without comment by all modern editors, should suffice to prove this."⁸

4. Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 2 vols. (vol. 1 Text, vol. 2 Apparatus). Citation of the *Morte Darthur* will be to this edition unless stated otherwise, and will be cited parenthetically by page and line number.

5. Joseph Bédier, Introduction, *Le Lai de l'Ombre*, (Fribourg, 1890), with more development, (SATF, 1913). For Vinaver's elaboration of Bédier's ideas, see "Principles of Textual Emendation," *Studies in French Language and Medieval Literature Presented to M. K. Pope* (Manchester, 1930), 351-369; reprinted in *Medieval Manuscripts and Textual Criticism*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1976), 139-159; and "The Method of Editing," Introduction, *Works*, c-cxxi.

6. Bédier attributed this statement to archeologist Adolphe-Napoleon Didron.

7. For a discussion of this kind of emendation in medieval literature, see George Kane, "Conjectural Emendation," *Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway*, ed. D. A. Pearsall and R. A. Waldron (London: Univ. of London Press, 1969), 115-169; reprinted in *Medieval Manuscripts and Textual Criticism*, op cit., 211-225.

8. Vinaver, Introduction, *Works*, ciii.

And the meane whyle word came vnto sir Launcelot and to sir Trystram that sire Carados the myghty kynge that was made lyke a gyaunt / that fought with sir Gawayn and gaf hym suche strokes that he swouned in his sadel / and after that he took hym by the coller / and pulled hym oute of his sadel / and fast bounde hym to the sadel bowe / and so rode his wey with hym toward his castell /⁹

Vinaver asserts:

This reading is the result of two mistranscriptions: the words *made lyke a gyaunt that* are clearly a corruption of some such phrase as *made lyke a gyaunt whyght* (or *whycht*); some early scribe, mistaking the final *t* for *e*, made *whyght* (or *whycht*) into *whyche*, and a later redactor, probably Caxton himself, changed *whyche* to *that*. The first of these two errors is found in the Winchester MS.; hence it must have occurred in the common source of our texts, and this source (X) could not, therefore, have been Malory's own manuscript.¹⁰

The reading of Vinaver's edition is, therefore,

And meanewhyle worde com to sir Launcelot and to sir Trystramys that kynge Carados, the myghty kynge that was made lyke a gyaunte which<t>, fought wyth sir Gawayne and gaff hym suche strokys that he sowned in his sadyll.¹¹

Vinaver makes *fought* into the verb of the main clause rather than of a subordinate clause, thus producing a complete sentence, and this resolves one of the three differences in wording between the two versions. Field endorses this reading with a small change in the spelling of *wyght* and a further emendation that will be discussed below.

However, brilliant as this proposed solution is, it is unlikely to be correct. In the first place, Malory is not likely to have used the word *giant* as an adjective, as Vinaver's emendation would require. Nowhere else in the *Morte Darthur* does Malory use *giant* in this way.¹² Nor is it probable that Malory used the word *wight* to refer to Carados. Malory certainly knew this word in its noun form, referring to a person or being; however, it is not an active part of his vocabulary. In fact, it appears only once elsewhere in the *Morte Darthur*, in the Roman War section, in which the narrator describes the giant of Mont Saint Michel as "the foulst wyghte that ever man sye" (157.9).¹³ In this instance, Malory was probably influenced by his source, which for the Roman War section is the alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Although the sole surviving manuscript of this poem does not contain this word at the corresponding place, it appears at a slightly earlier point: an old lady whom Arthur encounters curses the giant saying "Weryd worthe þe wyghte."¹⁴

Defenders of Vinaver might concede the influence of the poem in this case but argue that this use of *wight* supports the idea that Malory used it to describe

9. *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. s v^r.

10. Vinaver, *Works*, ciii.

11. *Works* 2nd ed., 418.14-17.

12. Tomomi Kato, *A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Tokyo: Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1974), s. v. Another nuance of English seems to have escaped the multilingual Vinaver in a similar way: see Terence McCarthy, "Did Morgan le Fay Have a Lover?" *Medium Ævum* 60.2 (1991): 284-289.

13. Malory does use the adjective form, meaning "valiant, strong" four times: *Concordance*, s. v.

14. *Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, ed. Mary Hamel (New York: Garland, 1984), line 959.

Carados, who was made like a giant. However, despite the fairly large number of giants and huge knights in the *Morte Darthur*, Malory never selects this word elsewhere. Nor does his source for the section containing the passage in question, the prose *Tristan*, seem to contain anything that would suggest this reading. Although no form of *wight* could be expected in an Old French text, one of the interesting aspects of Malory's adaptation of his sources is his tendency to choose English words that sound like words of different meanings in his source.¹⁵ Vinaver's argument would be much stronger, therefore, if Malory's source contained a word with a similar sound that might have brought this rarely-used word to Malory's mind. The *editio princeps* of the prose *Tristan* is based upon a manuscript that is very close to Malory's source,¹⁶ and at the equivalent point in the story, it calls Carados, "vng geant que on appelloit karadoes le sire de la douloureuse tour."¹⁷ The semantic range of *wight* could include *geant*, but Malory always uses the English derivative for this word, as he does here as well. Therefore, because neither Malory's normal usage nor the source suggest it, the odds seem to be against Malory's actually using the word *wight* in this passage.

If Vinaver's emendation is therefore rejected, we return to the question of what Malory actually wrote. Since Vinaver first proposed this idea, several other editions of the *Morte Darthur* in addition to Field's have appeared that contain the passage in question, yet, despite their many differences, these editions, by Janet Cowen, James Spisak, Helen Cooper, and Stephen Shepherd, all agree in their solution to this problem. Their texts each read, "Carados . . . that was made like a giant fought with Sir Gawain,"¹⁸ thus removing the relative pronoun that Vinaver believed had originally been *wight*. This is a sensible solution. It produces a clear, intelligible reading at the price of removing a single word, and the reading thus created could not differ greatly from the meaning that Malory had intended.¹⁹ This solution seems to imply that arrhythmia had caused the scribe of the archetype to intrude an unwanted word into his copy. Arrhythmia, however, is generally a hypothesis of last resort, so we should try to exhaust all other possibilities before reaching this conclusion. In fact, looking at the context suggests something besides an isolated error.

Vinaver's solution was characteristically ingenious, and the way he presented it makes it seem even more so. In his introduction he creates the impression, though without doubt inadvertently, that the two witnesses have only one sig-

15. This is amply attested in the apparatus to both Vinaver's and Field's editions.

16. For the most recent discussion of the sources of "The Book of Sir Tristram" see Ralph Norris, *Malory's Library: The Sources of the "Morte Darthur"* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 95-133; and vol. 2 of Field's edition of the *Morte Darthur*, 245-253.

17. *Tristan 1489*, intro. C. E. Pickford (London: Scolar, 1976), sig. g vii.

18. *Le Morte D'Arthur*, ed. Janet Cowen, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 1: 352; *Caxton's Malory*, ed. James Spisak and William Matthews, 2 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 1: 227; *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 195; *Le Morte Darthur or The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 261.

19. However, none of these editions discusses the merits of Vinaver's solution or the editor's reasons for adopting the readings that she or he does. Cowen notes Vinaver's emendation but without offering an opinion as to its cogency, 1: xxxviii.

nificant difference, *that* and *which*, and that he has explained that difference and solved the unintelligibility of the passage at a stroke. However, comparison of the passage in the two versions shows that they have three differences of equal magnitude to the *that/which* discrepancy. In the Winchester, the passage reads:

And [_] meane whyle worde com to sir launcelot & to Sir Trystramys that kyng Carados the myghty kyng that was made lyke a gyaunte whyche fought wyth Sir Gawayne and gaff hym suche strokys þ^t he sowned in his sadyll & after þ^t he toke hym by þ^e coler & pulled hym oute of his sadyll & bounde hym faste to the sadyll bowȝe & so rode his way w^t hym toward his castell.²⁰

Again, the Caxton version:

And the meane whyle word came vnto sir Launcelot and to sir Trystram that sire Carados the myghty kyng that was made lyke a gyaunt / that fought with sir Gawayn and gaf hym suche strokes that he swowned in his sadel / and after that he took hym by the collar / and pulled hym oute of his sadel / and fast bounde hym to the sadel bowe / and so rode his way with hym toward his castell /²¹

These discrepancies seem to show that the process that created them was more complex than any single mistake.

If we take these discrepancies one at a time, the following suggests itself. Malory probably wrote "And *the* meane whyle" rather than "And meane whyle." In the 67 instances of his use of *meanwhyle*, Malory always precedes it with *the*, or, in thirteen cases, *this*, except for the possibility of this disputed case. The next discrepancy involves whether he wrote "Sir Carados" or "King Carados." The fact that the phrase "the mighty king" follows in both versions argues in favor of *sir*, since it is unlikely that Malory would feel the need to qualify "King Carados" by explaining that he was a mighty king.²² Probably, therefore, Malory wrote *Sir Carados* as he sometimes did, and the Winchester scribe, who was more accustomed to seeing this name preceded by the royal title and whose eye may have caught the word *king* in close proximity, made a mistake.

This mistake would be the easier for a scribe to make because in the *Morte Darthur* there are three characters with this name.²³ The Carados of this scene, brother of Sir Tarquin and lord of the Dolorous Tower, is not said to be a king except in this episode, and in this episode, according to the Winchester, Carados is called "King Carados" twice and "Sir Carados" four times.²⁴ In the Caxton, he is referred to only as "Sir Carados."²⁵ Again excluding this disputed instance, Malory refers to a character by this name 36 times, 12 as "Sir Carados" and 24 times as "King Carados," and before this instance, the statistics are 12 and six respectively. This fact shows that the scribe would be twice as likely to have

20. *The Winchester Malory*, f. 173^r. Underlined passages stand for discrepancies between Winchester and the Caxton.

21. *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. s v^r. Underlined passages stand for discrepancies between the Caxton and Winchester.

22. Although Malory does once introduce "Kyng Anguyshaunce, the kyng of Irelande" (274.17), defining a king's domain is not the same as merely reiterating a king's royal status, even with the added information that he was a great king.

23. Field, ed., *Morte Darthur*, Index of Proper Names, 2: 867.

24. *Winchester*, f. 173^r; *Morte Darthur*, 333.

25. *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. s v^r.

written *King*.²⁶ Either the Caxton regularized its copy or the Winchester scribe varied his, or perhaps both happened.

There is some evidence that both may have happened. In 1498 Caxton's successor, Wynkyn de Worde, printed a new edition of the *Morte Darthur*, and recently de Worde has been shown to have occasionally used Caxton's exemplar to supplement Caxton's copy.²⁷ Surprisingly, this may, in fact, be the case for this page as well: de Worde's edition deviates from the Caxton in eight instances on this page, and of those instances Winchester agrees with de Worde four times and with the Caxton three.²⁸ None of the variations is very great, and all of them together might be coincidence. If so they are de Worde's personal variation and have no bearing on the issue, yet if they are not, then de Worde's edition gives our conclusions some support.

One of the correlations between Winchester and the de Worde involves Carados. In the passage under discussion, de Worde agrees with the Caxton against Winchester in calling Carados *Sir Carados the mighty king*; however, the de Worde and Winchester both call this character *King Carados* against the Caxton's *Sir Carados* when they refer to him next. If de Worde were following Caxton's copy text for this page rather than the Caxton itself, it would confirm the conclusions reached above.²⁹

Now we must account for the grammatical mistake that led Vinaver to draw attention to this passage in the first place and answer the question of the relative pronoun. Both versions agree that there is a relative pronoun, and, therefore, either "*which* fought with Sir Gawain," "*that* fought with Sir Gawain" or a phrase with a word that a scribe could mistake for one of the two must have been in the exemplar of the archetype. *That* appears far more often in the *Morte Darthur* than *which*, at 8,426 occurrences to only 158 respectively.³⁰ In both previous instances, we have seen that if the argument is sound the advantage goes to the Caxton version, suggesting perhaps some problem with the exemplar of the Winchester or with the attention of the scribe.³¹ Together these facts argue in favor of *that*; however, Vinaver was probably right to say that Malory did not write either one.

26. *Concordance* for the above statistics.

27. Tsuyoshi Mukai, "De Worde's 1498 *Morte Darthur* and Caxton's Copy-Text," *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 51, no. 201 (2000): 24-40, and P. J. C. Field, "De Worde and Malory," *The Medieval Book and a Modern Collector*, ed. Takami Matsuda et al. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 285-294. The sole surviving copy of de Worde's 1498 edition is in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester. A digital facsimile can be found in the Manchester Digital Collections on the Rylands Library website.

28. De Worde's edition sig. q f. C and W: "that I may," de W: "that ever I may," C: "de-syre most," W and de W: "most desyre;" C and W: "word came," de W: "came word;" C and de W: "syr Carados," W: "kyng Carados;" C: "fast bound hym," W and de W: "bond hym fast;" C: "sire Carados," W and de W: "kyng Carados;" C: "toke swords," W and de W: "toke theyr swords;" C and W: "this same tale," de W: "this tale." Therefore in one case, Winchester agrees with neither.

29. De Worde also prints "In the meane Whyte," like W and unlike C.

30. *Concordance*, s. v. The *Concordance* follows Vinaver's text, so the present case is not counted as either.

31. The Winchester exemplar is probably not the archetype but an intermediate manuscript. See Vinaver, Introduction, *Works*, c-cvi. Vinaver's hypothesis of intermediate copies has been challenged, but his idea receives support from Takako Kato, "Corrected Mistakes in the

The construction of the passage in question as preserved by its two witnesses contains multiple subordinate clauses, one embedded into another, and this is very unusual for Malory. Although one could not say that Malory never uses subordinate clauses, paratactic constructions of simple clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions, usually *and* or *but*, are much more common.³² Of course, this very fact might account for Malory occasionally losing his way when creating a clause with a complex construction, yet any rational solution that removed a double subordination would have some inherent plausibility.

The alternatives suggested by textual criticism are misreading and internal contamination, that is reminiscence of words already written or anticipation of those later on the page. Vinaver's attempt to restore the passage posits misreading, and in this respect Vinaver is clearly correct. Internal contamination occurs when, after looking away from the exemplar, the scribe resumes at the wrong point and introduces words from elsewhere on the page into his copy. Although it appears from the above that Vinaver failed to determine the exact misreading, there is no reason to suspect that the *that* (or possibly the *which*) could have come from any other place on the page nearby.³³

The most likely solution is that the misread word was *had*. The exemplar of the archetype probably read,

that Sir Carados the myghty kynge that was made lyke a gyaunte *had* fought wyth Sir Gawayne and gaff hym suche strokes that he sowned in his sadyll.

The scribe of the archetype would have misread *had* for *pat*. The scribe of the archetype would have taken the descender and front loop of the *h* for a *p*, correctly read the *a* and then, perhaps already having the word *that* in mind, mistook the stroke of the *d* for that of a *t*.³⁴ There is evidence that the exemplar of the Caxton was irregular and hard to read,³⁵ and perhaps the exemplar of the archetype was as well. The Winchester scribe would then have altered *that* to *which*, and the Caxton compositor would have reproduced faithfully from his exemplar, which is in keeping with the accumulating evidence that the Caxton is the more accurate witness for this passage.

This explanation is no more radical than the one Vinaver proposed. Although misreading *p* for *h* is not a commonly recognized scribal error, neither is Vinaver's suggestion of misreading *t* for *e*. Moreover, this emendation is more plausible because it creates a clause more typical of Malory. The reading thus

Winchester Manuscript," *Re-viewing "Le Morte Darthur,"* ed. K. S. Whetter and Raluca L. Rădulescu (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 9-25. Now see the introduction to Field's edition.

32. Field, *Romance and Chronicle* 31-5, 38-46. See also Bonnie Wheeler, "Romance and Parataxis and Malory: The Case of Sir Gawain's Reputation," *Arthurian Literature XII*, ed. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993) 109-132.

33. See *Morte Darthur*, ed. Field, 333.

34. Another example of a *d/t* error may be found in *Morte Darthur* 15.9n: "he putteth these two kynges moost part *to* the werse," where the Caxton has "*do* the werse" (my emphasis). This error occurs during an lacuna in Winchester, so there is no way to know if this error derives from the archetype, but it demonstrates that such errors did occur.

35. Takako Kato, *Caxton's "Morte Darthur": the Printing Process and the Authenticity of the Text*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s., 22 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literatures, 2002), 49-62.

created is also more logical grammatically: because two levels of past tense are involved in the narrator relating that a character heard news of a yet prior event, the narrator's indirect discourse would naturally be in the pluperfect tense.

This conjectural emendation also has some support from Malory's source. The relationship of Malory's writing to its sources can vary from almost literal translation to very free retelling within the same tale, but in this case, Malory seems to be working somewhere between these two extremes. The prose *Tristan* reads here,

il [i.e. Gallehaut] estoit alle eu royaume de logres ou le roy artus auoit tenu court a londres a vne penthecouste et y auoit este vng geant que on appelloit karadoes le sire de la douloureuse tour / et celui par sa force auoit prins monseigneur gauvain et lauoit emporte.³⁶

Although Malory's version is clearly not anything like a direct translation, he is describing the same action. Therefore the French *par sa force auoit prins* could have led Malory to write *had fought*.

One last point to consider before reaching our final conclusions about this passage is the emendation of "word com to sir Launcelot" to "word come to sir Galahalt" that P. J. C. Field introduced in his revision of *Works*.³⁷ Although Winchester and the Caxton agree on reading *Launcelot*, Field is almost certainly correct to emend as he does. If the reading of *Launcelot* were correct, the result would be a sequence of events conspicuous for being both oddly-narrated and implausible. Launcelot would reenter the story for the first time since the end of "The Tale of Sir Gareth" to hear these tidings, apparently apart from Tristram, and then happen upon Carados and Gawain "by fortune" (333.15) before Carados could bring Gawain to his castle. In a tale of wonder, plausibility can stretch far, and it is true that we do not know what distance Carados had to travel with his captive, but the story gives us no reason to think that rumor is running faster than the hooves of Carados's horse.

In this instance, Malory's sources are no help. The story is related very differently in the prose *Tristan* and in its own source, the prose *Lancelot*. In these versions, the action is narrated directly to the reader rather than through the intermediary of uninvolved characters hearing the news. Lancelot is present during the abduction and pursues Carados, but he is not able to free Gawain until after Carados has taken him to this dungeon.³⁸

Malory's story itself, however, shows that Field must be correct. The story of Gawain's abduction and rescue is told to Tristram and Galahalt at Galahalt's court before Tristram's departure. The story is framed on one side with the words quoted above and on the other with, "So this same tale was tolde to Sir Galahalte and to Syr Trystrames, and Sir Galahalte sayde, 'Now may ye hyre the nobles that folowyth Sir Launcelot.'" ³⁹ The episode, therefore, ends as it must

36. *Tristan* 1489, sig g vii^r.

37. *Works*, 418.14, and see Field's note to the third edition, 1757. Shepherd adopts the emendation in his edition. Now, of course, see Field's edition 333.4-14 and note.

38. *Tristan* 1489, sig. g vii^r, and *Lancelot: Roman en prose du XIII^e siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, 9 vols. (Paris: Droz, 1978-83), 1: 175-348.

39. *Morte Darthur*, 334.4-6. The second *Sir Galahalte* itself is an emendation; see note.

have begun, with Sir Galahalte and Sir Tristram hearing one of the innumerable stories of the nobility of Sir Launcelot, not with Launcelot and Tristram hearing the story of Gawain's abduction.

Just how the error of *Launcelot* for *Galahalt* occurred takes us to the limits of what scholarship can discover. Perhaps, as Field suggests, the mistake is a "mental echo caused by the preceding alternation of *Sir Trystram* and *Sir Launcelot*,"⁴⁰ or, to paraphrase Field in another connection, because authors do not always write what they intend, there must be a real possibility that Malory himself inadvertently wrote *Launcelot*. If so, the reading that Malory intended will have existed only in Malory's mind until Field put it into print.⁴¹ Or, finally, perhaps the scribe of the archetype was confused by seeing Tristram and Galahalt together immediately after Tristram was said to have taken his leave,⁴² and if so, perhaps he made the change to try to restore sense.

In any case, if the above arguments are sound then Malory's original should be,

And [the] meanewhyle worde com to Sir *Galahalt* and to Sir Trystramys that [Sir] Carados the myghty kynge that was made lyke a gyaunte *had* fought wyth Sir Gawayne and gaff hym suche strokys that he sowned in his sadyll, and after that he toke hym by the coler and pulled hym oute of his sadyll and bounde hym faste to the sadyll bowȝe, and so rode his way with hym towarde his castell.⁴³

The possibility that the scribe of the archetype could misread one small word for another, and in particular misread the stroke of a *d* for a *t* may shed light on another small mystery of the archetype of Winchester and the Caxton.

II

In a study of corrected mistakes in Winchester, Takako Kato demonstrated that, contrary to the impression one might get from the apparatus of Vinaver's edition, the Winchester scribes were not human *automata*, only reproducing their text accurately or making only unconscious errors.⁴⁴ They also sometimes noticed mistakes in their copy and tried to correct them.

One of her examples comes from the story of Balin. Balin has recently been released from King Arthur's prison when he encounters his brother, Balan. The Winchester version records Balan's words as follows: "I am ryȝt glad of your delyueraunce and of youre dolorous pr̄esonment."⁴⁵ Kato rightly observes that the inclusion of the *and* makes nonsense of the passage, which certainly is why the scribe deleted it,⁴⁶ but that the same word appears without the correction in the Caxton: "I am ryȝht glad of your delyueraunce *and* of youre dolorous

40. *Morte Darthur*, 333.9n.

41. Field, "The Earliest Texts," 7.

42. *Morte Darthur*, ed. Field, 333.7.

43. Italics indicate conjectural emendations, and brackets denote readings borrowed from the Caxton. Capitalization and punctuation are my own.

44. Kato, "Corrected Mistakes in with Winchester Manuscript," 17-18.

45. *Winchester Malory*, f. 25^v. See *Morte Darthur*, 55.

46. Kato, 17.

prysonement."⁴⁷ Kato draws convincing conclusions about how most of the errors she discusses probably originated, but her discussion of this error is less extensive than the others, leaving the reader with the impression that the Winchester scribe restores Malory's original intention. However, as above, something must have led the scribe of the archetype to make this mistake.

Here internal contamination can be ruled out, if not as swiftly as in the case above. It is true that the scribe of the archetype could possibly have been misled to write *delyveraunce* and by the words *delyverde* and which appear in the line below in Winchester and two lines below in the Caxton.⁴⁸ Yet if that were so he must have paused after *delyveraunce*, returned to his exemplar and found *delyverde* and resumed his copying but realized his mistake after writing the single word *and*. Then he must have returned to the correct place and continued without either adapting the wording to tidy up the mistake or even, like his successor of the Winchester manuscript, deleting the word. Such a situation would be most unlikely in a case of internal contamination.

By way of comparison, to illustrate a more probable instance of internal contamination, consider this similarly illogical sentence from "The Tale of Sir Launcelot:" "Than Sir Launcelot made his complaynte unto the kyng, how he was betrayed, and how he was brother unto Sir Lyonell, whyche was departed frome hym he wyste not where" (197.34 – 198.1). This reading has been retained by every edition based upon the Winchester, nor has any editor commented on what appears to be an example of unintended humor: Launcelot complaining that he has recently been betrayed and also complaining that Lyonell is his brother. A look at the Caxton text illuminates how the Winchester scribe came most probably to produce this reading. The Caxton reads, "Anone syre launcelot made his complaynte vnto the kyng how he was bytrayed And how his broder syre lyonel was departed from hym / ne nyst not where /"⁴⁹ The Winchester scribe apparently committed an error of *saut du même au même* and returned to the first *how* in the phrase in the line above the one that he intended and recopied "he was," only realizing his mistake as he reached the word "betrayed." The scribe then altered the rest of the sentence to compensate, an example of what Field has called invisible mending.⁵⁰

The textual situation is different in the example from the story of Balin. Field believes that this is a case of an intruded *and*, which "W often and C and the archetype sometimes use . . . to cure textual difficulties, real and imaginary."⁵¹ Given that the scribe of the archetype shared this tendency with his successor of the Winchester Manuscript, this is a neat solution to this mystery. However, it begs the question of what textual difficulty, an imagined one presumably, the scribe of the archetype might have thought he was solving by adding a word that destroys the sense of what he was copying.

47. *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. d i^r, my emphasis.

48. *Winchester Malory*, f. 25^v, *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. d i^r. See *Morte Darthur*, 55.12-13.

49. *Le Morte Darthur* 1485, sig. k vi^r.

50. For a discussion of this phenomenon in Malory, see Field, Introduction, *Morte Darthur*, 1: xxxvi.

51. Field, ed. *Morte Darthur*, 2: 17, 18.30n. This note also includes a list of such intruded *ands*.

A better solution is that the scribe of the archetype misread a word in his exemplar without realizing it, and the misread word would almost certainly be *out*. One can see easily how such a misreading could take place. Mistaking the loop of the *o* for an *a*, the scribe would naturally interpret the double minims of the *u* as an *n*, and finally mistake the stroke of the *t* for a *d*, the same error, in the opposite direction, as above. This hypothesis would produce as the reading of the archetype's exemplar, "I am ryght glad of youre delyveraunce *out* of youre dolerous presonment." This reading is idiomatic, makes very good sense, and is typical of Malory's style. Malory never uses the word *presonment* other than this once, but he refers to knights' release (or otherwise) from prison fourteen times and always uses the construction *oute of preson*, never, say, merely *delyverde of preson*.⁵²

The similarity of this misreading on the part of the scribe of the archetype to the misreading of *had* for *pat* is remarkable. In both cases short functional words, an auxiliary verb and a preposition, have been mistaken for another word, and both contain a similar *d/t* confusion. Each of the two cases provides supporting evidence for the validity of the other.

III

The effect of considering these cases together is to affirm both the importance and the dangers of conjectural emendation in editing Malory's text. Kato's article provides outstanding examples of how this principle can solve textual mysteries, and even Vinaver, a textual conservative, recognized its usefulness.

Vinaver's intelligence and industry stand as an inspiration to all later Malory scholars. His grand editions remain monuments of twentieth-century scholarship and will doubtless continue to be the standard by which new editions of Malory's work will be measured. And as this article shows, his conclusions about the existence and nature of the archetype from which Winchester and the Caxton independently derive remain solid.

However, in the cases discussed above, Vinaver appears to have been misled. In the instance from "The Book of Balin," Vinaver's theory of editing prevented him from considering the implications of the corrected mistake in his copy text: because the corrected reading was not impossible, he apparently did not give much thought to the fact that the Caxton contains the same mistake.⁵³ On the other hand, his emendation to *wight* in "The Book of Tristram" section actually demonstrates a danger of conjectural emendation that Bédier and Vinaver sought to avoid with their best text system of editing. Perhaps swayed by the excitement brought about by examining the then newly-discovered Winchester manuscript with its promise of solutions to mysteries, Vinaver introduced into the standard edition of a major author an erroneous reading of his own creation.⁵⁴

52. *Concordance*, s. v. *preson*, *presonment*.

53. Vinaver notes the Caxton reading in his apparatus at the foot of the page, and he marks it with † to indicate that it is an inferior reading.

54. Walter Oakeshott, then a junior master, later Headmaster of Winchester College, who discovered the Winchester manuscript was once similarly tempted to accept a Winchester reading when the Caxton was correct. Walter Oakeshott, "The Text of Malory," *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 September 1934; cf. Vinaver, Introduction, *Works*, cxv-cxvi.

Of these two pitfalls, however, the narrowness of Vinaver's theory is the more harmful because it focuses attention away from the analysis of textual variants, which is indispensable to textual criticism. Vinaver's caret brackets alert the reader to the hand of the editor. In all such cases the scholarly reader must judge the validity of the emendation, which will lead to progress either as confirmation or refutation. Yet the missing word in the story of Balin threatened to vanish from all consideration into the tiny type at the bottom of the page until rescued by Kato's study, a small loss perhaps, but a distortion of a great author's syntax, nevertheless. Applying a less narrow theory of editing and possessing a greater appreciation of the critical importance of both major witnesses, we are in a position to continue to recover more of Malory's exact words than ever before. Field's new edition is a great step forward in this endeavor; it improves on Vinaver's text in a multitude of closely-reasoned variants. This paper argues for a few more in the ongoing effort to safeguard Malory's work from, as has been memorably put, time's wallet of oblivion.