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Edited by KEITH BUSBY
and ROGER DALRYMPLE

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Arthurian Literature XIX

Comedy in Arthurian Literature

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with

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GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

There can be little doubt that humour is a fundamental characteristic of the genre of Arthurian romance. Indeed, the comic treatment of conventional themes and motifs appears to be not only an attribute of later romance (say, the Chrétien epigones or the prose *Tristan*) as is sometimes assumed, but an essential element of the genre from the earliest stages of its development. The range of texts examined in the essays included in Vol. XIX of *Arthurian Literature* once more underlines the wide dissemination of the Arthurian story in medieval and post-medieval Europe, from Ireland to Italy, while the various analyses of the manifestations of comedy put to rest once and for all any notions of romance as a humourless genre. Authors of Arthurian romance, from Chrétien de Troyes to Malory, writing in French, Italian, Middle Dutch, and Middle English, and the creator of a late Irish prose tale, all question the fundamental assumptions of romance and romance values through the medium of comedy.These essays clearly demonstrate that Cervantes and Rabelais were not the first to see the ridicule inherent in the romance world.

In the opening essay, Elizabeth Archibald shows the potential, comic and tragic, in the tradition of recognition scenes in some French and Middle English romances. Christine Ferlampin-Acher argues in her study of a selection of French texts that comedy is closely related to the *merveilleux* and often proceeds from it. Angelica Rieger draws interesting parallels between Chrétien's *Yvain* and the modern comic-strip, showing not only how the episodes featuring the lion would be susceptible of such treatment but also that medieval illuminators already sensed something of the sort. The next three contributions all deal with the relationship of later verse romances to Chrétien de Troyes and earlier convention: that convention is both mined and undermined humourously by the author of *La Vengeance Raguidel*, as Norris Lacy demostrates; Peter Noble points to the differences between the irreverent comedy of *Les Merveilles de Rigomer* and the more severe treatment of Arthurian tradition by the author of *Hunbaut*; and Karen Pratt reveals the comic side of Heldris de Cornuälle, whose humour in *Le Roman de Silence* derives from his response, not only to Chrétien's *œuvre*, but also to other contemporary genres, such as didactic poetry and the *fabliaux*. Bénédicte Milland-Bove examines the amorous misadventures of Gauvain's brother, Guerrehés, in the Prose *Lancelot* to illustrate the author's technique of 'comic counterpoint', which employs secondary characters to contrast and question the actions of the major figures. While not directly concerned with comedy in the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle, Frank Brandsma's reconsideration of its genesis, based on a careful reading of the manuscript evidence, will be of consequence for any further studies of humour in the trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu*.

Marilyn Lawrence's reading of *Le Chevalier du Papegau* concentrates on the role of the parrot itself in the romance's comic plot, concluding that the bird essentially mimics the kind of professional performer who might have read aloud, without singing, the text itself. Italy proved especially receptive to the figure of Dinadan from the Prose *Tristan*, as Francesco Zambon shows. However, rather than mocking Arthurian society from inside, as he does in the French texts, in the Italian *Tavola Ritonda* in particular, Dinadan attacks it from the outside, hardly sharing its values at all. Marjolein Hogenbirk examines the fortunes of the French Keu, Arthur's seneschal, in some of the inserted romances of the Middle Dutch *Lancelot-Compilatie*, where his villainy is tempered by a certain comic blundering. Two essays recognize the comedy of Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Donald Hoffman argues that even within Malory's fundamentally tragic scheme, there is a real variety of comedy and comic techniques, and that later humourous versions of the Arthurian legend, such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, may have rediscovered this aspect of his work; Elizabeth Sklar, in a detailed study of *The Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake*, points to its humour at the same time as she suggests it is ultimately hollow in nature. Finally, Linda Gowans discusses the late sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century Irish prose *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* as a comic response to Chrétien's *Perceval*, of which the Irish author shows considerable knowledge.

It is also interesting to observe that the particular romances discussed here reflect renewed interest in areas of scholarship largely neglected, say, twenty years ago. Basic studies of the epigonal romances and new editions of the French prose cycles in particular, as well as a concerted effort to bring Middle Dutch literature to the forefront, have changed the landscape of Arthurian studies for good.

Many of the articles in this collection were originally presented as papers at the nineteenth International Congress of the International Arthurian Society in Toulouse, France, 25–31 July, 1999, where one of the chosen themes was that of comedy in Arthurian romance. The Society continues to play an important role in encouraging scholarly endeavours and its meetings remain essential to the health of our collegial discipline.

Keith Busby
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I

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY IN SOME ARTHURIAN RECOGNITION SCENES

Elizabeth Archibald

Recognition scenes were a staple of classical drama, as Aristotle's famous comments on Oedipus and other plays bear witness.[1] Towards the end of one of Menander's comedies, *The Arbitrants*, a character remarks 'And now they have had a recognition scene, and all is well.'[2] Recognition scenes are also a common feature of Arthurian and other medieval romances and narratives of love and adventure, and often provide comic closure to an episode or to a complete narrative. Sometimes the recognition involves the abandoning of a disguise or pseudonym adopted by the Fair Unknown, but sometimes he himself has been unaware of his own identity and lineage.[3] The suspense is usually less great for the reader than for the fictional characters. Whether or not the narrator has made the truth clear at the beginning of the narrative, the reader, well read in romance motifs, has often seen this revelation coming long before the characters have, and there can be a comic sense of *déjà lu*. But some of the characters do show an awareness of the narrative patterns associ-

1 See *Poetics*, ch. 16. The standard study is T. Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford, 1988), but he has very little to say about the Middle Ages. One of the few medievalists to study this theme is Piero Boitani: see 'A Spark of Love: Medieval Recognitions', in Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 1989), 115–41.

2 Menander, *Epitrepontes/The Arbitrants*, lines 1121–2, ed. and trans. W. G. Arnott, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Ma., and London, 1979); the translation here is my own.

3 Dhira Mahoney categorizes the hero who is ignorant of his noble lineage as Type 1, and the hero who deliberately conceals his true lineage as Type 2, in 'Malory's Tale of Gareth: The Comedy of Class', in *Arthurian Yearbook I*, ed. Keith Busby (New York, 1991), pp. 165–89 (see p. 166). On the Fair Unknown theme see R. H. Wilson, 'The "Fair Unknown" in Malory', *PMLA* 58 (1943), 1–21; Maldwyn Mills, 'The Story of the Fair Unknown in Medieval Literature', in the introduction to his edition of *Lybeaus Desconus*, EETS o.s. 261 (London, 1969), pp. 42–68; Claude Luttrell, *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance: A Quest* (London, 1974), pp. 80–104; Elspeth Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail: A Study of the Prose Lancelot* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 10–47, and 'The Quest for Identity and the Importance of Lineage in Thirteenth-Century French Prose Romance', in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood II*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge, 1988), pp. 70–86. I have also found useful Donald Maddox, 'Specular Stories, Family Romance, and the Fictions of Courtly Culture', *Exemplaria* 3.2 (1991), 301–26; and Sarah Kay's chapter on 'Patriarchy' in *The* Chansons de geste *in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 79–115.

ated with the arrival of a Fair Unknown. When La Cote Male Tayle comes to Arthur and asks to be knighted in the *Prose Tristan*, Lamerok urges the king to grant the request, predicting that he will be a good knight, and comparing him to the young Lancelot: ' "Soveigne vos de Lancelot dou Lac, qui est li mieudres chevaliers dou monde, en quel maniere il vint a cort. Vos ne seüstes mie qui il estoit, et totevoies le feïstes vos chevalier. Dites vos or que chevalerie ne soit mie bien emploiee en li?" ' ('Remember how Lancelot du Lac, who is the best knight in the world, came to court. You had no idea who he was, and all the same you made him a knight. Are you saying now that he is not an excellent representative of chivalry?').[4] Malory includes the speech too: ' "evyn suche one was sir Launcelot whan he cam fyrst into this courte, and full fewe of us knew from whens he cam. And now is he preved the man of moste worshyp in the worlde . . ." '[5] La Cote Male Tayle himself is invoked in the same way in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*, when Lancelot warns Kay not to be unkind to the Fair Unknown who has just arrived at court (p. 295.15–18; VII/2).

Even if we do not know exactly who the Fair Unknown is, we can be sure that he will turn out to be well born; he is also very likely to be the son of a known hero, and so not an outsider at all, but one of the dominant élite. Paternal lineage is crucial in the chivalric world. Often the recognition scene is unproblematic and comic, both in making the reader or listener laugh, and in bringing about a happy ending. No doubt aristocratic medieval readers were amused by the story of Tor related in the *Suite du Merlin*, the first part of the thirteenth-century Post-Vulgate cycle, and in Malory's *Tale of King Arthur* (where he is called Torre), though modern readers are likely to be disturbed by the revelation that the promising young knight is the product of a casual rape.[6] When Arès the cowherd brings his son Tor to Arthur's court and complains to the king that the boy will not do agricultural work, the knights find it funny.

> 'Et quans enfans as tu?' dist le rois. 'Jou en ai treize; li onze[7] labeurent pour lour vivre et se tienent a ma maniere, mais icil ne s'il veult acorder en nule guise, ains dist qu'il ne sera se chevaliers non. Ne sai dont chis corages li puet venir.' Et lors commenchent tout a rire li baron dou palais qui ceste parole entendirent. Et li rois, qui moult estoit sages, ne tient mie ceste chose a gas . . .
>
> (*Suite*, 2, 70)

4 *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, vol. 2, ed. R. Curtis (Leiden, 1976), p. 217; my translation.

5 Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P. J. C. Field, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1990), pp. 459.31–460.1 (IX/1). This edition will be cited as Malory, by page and line number (pagination is continuous through the three volumes); Caxton's book and chapter numbers follow each page reference, for the convenience of those using other editions.

6 *Merlin: Roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. G. Paris and J. Ulrich, 2 vols., SATF (Paris, 1886), cited hereafter as *Suite*; see 2, 69–136. It is translated under the title *The Merlin Continuation* in *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (New York, 1992–6), cited hereafter as *L-G*; see 5, 224–45. For Malory's version see 99.15–101.34 (III.3–4).

7 This seems to be a mistake; Asher notes in the *L-G* translation that the correct number is given in a fragmentary text published by Micha.

> ‘How many children do you have?’ asked the king.
>
> ‘I have thirteen; twelve work for their living and conduct themselves as I do, but this one won’t agree to it under any conditions but says he will only be a knight. I don’t know where he gets this disposition.’
>
> Then all the barons, hearing this speech, began to laugh. The king, who was very wise, did not take the matter lightly . . . (*L-G*, 4, 225)

The text indicates that the laughter of the barons is prompted by the presumption of the farmboy who wants to be a knight, but we may wonder if they are also laughing at Arès because they can see what is coming; the boy turns out to be the son of King Pellinor, who impregnated the cowherd’s wife the very week that she was married. In this first scene, Merlin declares that Tor is not the son of Arès and that he is of noble birth, but refrains from naming the father, at Tor’s own request – he is worried about his mother being shamed. Arthur duly knights Tor, and he sets off on his first quest. His true parentage is whispered privately by Merlin to Arthur (*Suite*, p. 114; *L-G*, pp. 237–8). Later, when Tor has completed his test, his mother is brought to court to confront Pellinor, and is greatly ashamed at the public revelation of her seduction (*Suite*, pp. 131–6; *L-G*, pp. 242–4). Tor and his biological father are delighted with one another, but the mother makes a farewell speech warning Tor that God can cast him down, just as he has raised him up. Malory concentrates all these scenes into one brief episode, and has the wife brought to court to tell her story while Aryes is still there, before Torre’s first quest. When the story of the seduction comes out, Torre tells Merlin ‘ “Dishonoure nat my modir” ’, but Merlin points out that it is to his advantage to be the son of a good knight and a king, and that Pellinor may well be able to help both Torre and his mother (p. 101.20–25). He also notes that she was not married when Torre was conceived, and both husband and wife seem to find this encouraging: when she says ‘ “That ys trouthe” ’, Aryes comments ‘ “Hit ys the lesse gryff unto me” ’ (p. 101.26–27).

No doubt medieval readers, like the barons in the French text, laughed at the cowherd’s complaint that his son ‘ “woll nat laboure for nothynge that my wyff and I may do, but allwey he woll be shotynge, or castynge dartes, and glad for to se batayles and to beholde knyghtes. And allwayes day and night he desyrith of me to be made knyght” ’ (Malory, p. 100.6–10). They would have seen only comedy in the happy discovery that the would-be knight is in fact of noble birth; they would not have been disturbed by the low status of his shepherdess mother, or her pastourelle-style rape, or indeed by her embarrassment when the truth comes out. The cowherd and his wife are of no significance in Camelot society. But some recognition scenes can be problematic, even tragic, in their implications if they reveal a sexual transgression by a much admired character, as in the cases of Galahad and Arthur, or a failure on the part of the hero, as in the case of Percival. In this essay I want to consider the comic aspects of some Arthurian recognition scenes involving major characters; then I shall show how these comic conventions can also be reversed, shadowed or over-shadowed by tragedy.

Almost every major Arthurian hero is described somewhere as arriving at court as a Fair Unknown. This motif is not present in the seminal twelfth-century 'historical' texts: in Geoffrey of Monmouth and in Wace there is no mystery about the parentage of Arthur or of Gawain. Perhaps it was the introduction of Lancelot that started the fashion for creating a mystery around the identity of the Arthurian hero which is resolved in an eventual recognition scene: this is an important motif in Chrétien's *Charrete*, in the *Lanzelet*, and in the French prose *Lancelot*. At any rate, the Fair Unknown theme seems to have burgeoned in late twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arthurian narratives, and became attached even to some heroes who had been celebrated for centuries already, Gawain and Arthur himself, as well as to newer heroes such as Percival and Galahad.[8] There are a number of variables in these stories, and in the examples that follow I will describe some contrasting patterns. Important details include whether the Fair Unknown does in fact know who he is throughout his adventures; if not, at what point the revelation occurs, and how it affects his subsequent progress; whether there is a reunion with his father; the point at which Arthur learns of the young hero's identity; and whether the recognition scene leads to a wedding or some other form of happy ending, or to tragedy. Since I have to be highly selective, I shall largely ignore texts in which little is made of the recognition scene. This means excluding what might seem obvious choices, the *Bel Inconnu* and its analogues, except for Malory's tale of Gareth, with which I begin.[9]

This tale, for which no direct source is known, is clearly designed to evoke laughter, and does end happily with family reunion and wedding.[10] Gareth is

8 See for instance two brief and unexpected passages in *Perlesvaus*, IX. 6570–6614 and X. 7288–7337, ed. W. A. Nitze and T. A. Jenkins as *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1932–7), 2, 280–2 and 307–8. During a pilgrimage Arthur and Gawain each learn for the first time the circumstances of their births; these revelations come as a great surprise to them, but play no further part in the plot, and are not mentioned again.

9 I am struck by the fact that so little is made of Guinglain's parentage in the *Bel Inconnu*; he discovers his identity halfway through the narrative when he achieves the Fier Baiser, but does not meet Gawain till the very end, and then it is a pretty cursory meeting. Some of the analogues make more of the potential of the unrecognized father-son encounter: in *Wigalois* and in *Lybeaus Desconus*, when the Fair Unknown first arrives at Arthur's court, he is given Gawain as a teacher, though neither knows of their true relationship. But in *Lybeaus Desconus* the recognition scenes with both father and mother survive only in variant versions. In the Italian *Carduino* the conventions are altered even more drastically, since Gawain turns out to be the murderer of the hero's father, and Carduino actually kills one of Gawain's brothers. Being Gawain's son seems not to be at all important once the Bel Inconnu has discovered his name and established his heroic credentials – though perhaps Renaut de Beaujeu's ambivalent ending, with the offer to his own lady that if she is nice to him, he will reunite the now married Guinglain with his real love, the fairy Blances Mains, is a way of showing that Guinglain really is a chip off the old block!

10 For discussion of this tale and its relationship to other versions of the Fair Unknown story, see Wilson, 'The Fair Unknown in Malory'; Mills, 'The Story of the Fair Unknown'; Mahoney, 'Malory's Tale of Gareth'; P. J. C. Field, 'The Source of Malory's "Tale of Gareth" ', in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. T. Takamiya and D. S. Brewer (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 57–70, repr. in Field, *Malory: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 246–60; and Barbara Nolan, '*The Tale of Sir Gareth* and *The Tale of Sir Lancelot*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 153–181 (esp. pp. 156–169).

aware of his true identity from the beginning of the narrative, and his recognition by various members of his family and the court is spread over a number of scenes, so that some suspense is maintained to the very end. In fact the reader is aware of the truth before most of the characters are: comedy is created by the discrepancy between the snobbish behaviour of various knights and our knowledge of Gareth's parentage and distinction. As Mahoney points out, we see here not only 'the comedy of frustrated expectations' (those of the characters who mistrust the disguised Gareth), but also 'the comedy of satisfied expectations' (those of the reader), which operate both at the level of the main plot and also at the level of structural and verbal repetition.[11] Gareth's first appearance at court is explicitly presented as comic: he is much larger than his two companions, yet leans heavily on them as if unable to walk alone. Arthur feels drawn at once to this Fair Unknown, but Kay makes a fool of himself, in our eyes, by his hostile response (pp. 294.36–295.3; VII/1): ' ". . . for I undirtake he is a vylayne borne, and never woll make man, for and he had be com of jantyllmen, he wolde have axed horse and armour, but as he is, so he askyth" '. Gareth has asked Arthur only for food and drink for a year, and then two more as yet unspecified gifts in a year's time. Kay finds this very ignoble, and jokes that the youth must have been raised in an abbey where he did not get enough to eat. It is Kay who nicknames him Beaumains, sends him to work in the kitchen, and makes fun of him. Clearly Kay is not well read in chivalric romances, or has not been paying enough attention to major plot motifs! As I mentioned before, Lancelot reproaches him for his rudeness, reminding him how wrong he was about La Cote Male Tayle. Malory hints that the youth will turn out to be related to Gawain – his son, we might guess, as in the *Bel Inconnu*. In fact the stranger is Gawain's younger brother, as he soon confesses to Lancelot when he is knighted (p. 299.27–28; VII/5).

Gareth also reveals his true identity to Sir Persaunt (p. 317.6–9; VII/13), and a dwarf takes the news that he is a prince of Orkney to the besieged Lyonesse, the damsel in distress, though he does not tell her Gareth's actual name till later (pp. 317.20–21 and 329.24–29; VII/14 and 20). So Arthur and the court are the last to know Gareth's identity, and it is revealed to them in a way that is both embarrassing and comic when the Queen of Orkney arrives and asks after her youngest son. She criticizes them roundly for having used him as a kitchenboy for twelve months (pp. 338.35–340.25; VII/25–6). When Gawain and Arthur apologize for not having recognized Gareth, she says ' "ye dud yourself grete shame whan ye amonyst you kepte my son in the kychyn and fedde hym lyke an hogge" '. She notes that she sent Gareth to court with fine armour and plenty of money; clearly he has set up his own

[11] Mahoney, 'Malory's *Tale of Gareth*', pp. 173–4. Nolan makes a similar point in '*The Tale of Gareth*' (p. 158): 'The entire tale, then, turns on the interplay between Beaumains' many demonstrations of his prowess and the largely comedic difficulties surrounding his refusal to say who he is. This refusal introduces a delightful dramatic irony for the audience. It also issues in several "romantic" recognition scenes . . .'

scenario of disguise and revelation. The moment of family reunion is put off even longer when Gareth asks Lyonesse to give a tournament, with her hand in marriage as the prize. Sir Ironside tells Sir Tristram who the champion is, but Arthur is still in the dark, till finally a herald sees the answer to the mystery written around Gareth's helmet in letters of gold: ' "This helme is sir Garethis of Orkeney" ' (p. 351.11–16; VII/31). Gawain is unhorsed by Gareth and follows him into the forest, but loses him, though they do fight later when Gareth has defeated several more opponents. Gareth marries his Lyonesse – but he avoids Gawain ever after, as a vengeful murderer (p. 360.32–6; VII/35).

So here the conventional parent-child recognition scene is fragmented into a much more complex story. Gareth's father is long dead. He seeks recognition from his famous uncle, and from the court that every young knight aspires to join; but almost everyone else in the story knows who Gareth is before Arthur finally finds out. When Gareth does return to court at the end, Arthur is overwhelmed by emotion, fainting and weeping; his reaction is mirrored by that of Gareth's mother, though she has not been in any doubt about his identity, but only about his immediate whereabouts (p. 358.11–26; VII/34).[12] Lancelot seems to act as a substitute brother/father, knighting Gareth and becoming his devoted friend and ally. Gareth fights Gawain in a version of the traditional fight between unrecognized father and son; but this does not lead to reconciliation and a happy family reunion, since Gareth concludes that his brother is a bad knight, and avoids him. Comedy is achieved here in various ways: the kitchenboy joke which rebounds on Kay, Morgause's rebukes to Arthur and to Gawain about their treatment of her son, and the continued bafflement of Arthur and Gawain when most of the other characters know who Gareth is. Although recognition and acceptance by the king are clearly crucial to the happy ending in this type of story, it often seems that the watchword here is in fact 'Don't tell Arthur!' Some shadows darken the ending, however. The alliance with Lancelot is part of the happy comedy resolution of the story, but it leads to tragedy much later when Lancelot kills Gareth by mistake while rescuing the queen from the stake. Gareth's failure to bond with Gawain is also an ominous foreshadowing of later tragedy, and of the family divisions that help to destroy Camelot.[13]

The source of Malory's story of Gareth is unknown. In a group of earlier texts including the *De Ortu Waluuanii*, the *Perlesvaus*, and the fragmentary

12 There is a grim irony in the pairing of Arthur and Morgause here. Arthur responds as a father might; he does indeed have a son by Morgause, the fatal Mordred, but we are never shown Mordred's arrival at court or discovery of his own parentage (see my comments at the end of this essay). Morgause's role here is an exception to Sarah Kay's argument that in stories of separated families 'the privileged position tends to be that of the father', and that in courtly texts the mother tends to be killed or forgotten, whereas in *chansons de geste* she is more likely to have 'a far more permanent presence'; see 'The *Chansons de geste*', pp. 104–5, and also Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1981).

13 On the roles of Gawain and Lancelot see Field, 'The Source of Malory's *Tale of Gareth*', and Nolan, '*The Tale of Sir Gareth*', esp. pp. 164–9.

Enfances Gauvain, it is Gawain himself who is the Fair Unknown, secretly sent away at birth because he is illegitimate and raised in Rome by the Pope or the Emperor.[14] In the *De Ortu* there is a strong element of comedy in the final recognition episode, again largely at Arthur's expense, though here the watchword is not so much 'Don't tell Arthur' as 'Don't tell Gawain.' When Arthur is informed by his psychic queen that an unbeatable knight has arrived from Rome, he hurries off in the middle of the night and attacks the stranger at a ford (pp. 100–106). Arthur is out of his depth here; he is ignominiously knocked off into the water and has to go back to bed with Guendoloena sopping wet, pretending (unsuccessfully) that he was out in the rain to stop a fight among his men. Here Arthur finds out who Gawain is before Gawain himself knows: documents identifying both him and his parents were left with the infant Gawain when he was abandoned by his mother, and later at Rome were passed by his dying fosterfather to the Emperor, who ordered Gawain to give them to Arthur without reading them himself (Aristotle would have disapproved of all this – he thought recognition through tokens very unartistic). Arthur is so surprised by the existence of this unsuspected nephew that he summons Gawain's parents, now a respectable married couple, and they confirm the story (p. 110). But no one tells Gawain anything. He asks politely to be accepted as one of Arthur's knights, and is understandably upset when the king refuses, saying he must first prove himself. Gawain does this most impressively in the final episode of the story, and thus creates more embarrassment for Arthur; he and his men are easily routed by the pagan king besieging the lady of the Castle of Maidens, but Gawain singlehandedly kills the enemy king and rescues the lady (pp. 112–20). Although Arthur may be helpless in battle, however, he is in control of the recognition scene, which is extremely short and brisk, as if the writer were not interested in this motif at all in spite of the very long buildup. Arthur enthusiastically greets the returning hero, offering him special honours and asking him his name and where he was brought up. When Gawain replies that he is the Knight of the Surcoat from Rome, Arthur says ' "Plane falleris" ' (p. 120: 'You are plainly mistaken'). He sends for the letter written by the Emperor of Rome and publicly acknowledges Gawain as his nephew. Gawain's parents are present, but there is no account of his reunion with them, except for the brief statement that he is acknowledged by his father; his mother's reaction is not mentioned at all (p. 122). In this text Arthur is presented as inferior in fighting skill and courage, but superior in his knowledge of who Gawain really is, and in his

14 *De Ortu Waluuanii*, ed. and trans. Mildred Leake Day as *The Rise of Gawain, Nephew of Arthur (De Ortu Waluuanii Nepotis Arturi)* (New York, 1984); *Perlesvaus*, ed. Nitze and Jenkins (see n. 8 above); 'Les Enfances Gauvain: fragments d'un poème perdu', ed. P. Meyer, *Romania* 39 (1910), 1–32. In Geoffrey of Monmouth Gawain is raised in Rome, but is not an illegitimate foundling; there is no account of his return to England and to Arthur's court. On the French Gauvain tradition generally see K. Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature* (Amsterdam, 1980); on the English Gawain see T. Hahn's introduction to his edition *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 1–7.

manipulation of that information to present the young hero to best advantage. And for Gawain the end of his quest is acceptance at Arthur's court, rather than reunion with his parents.[15]

In the *De Ortu*, Gawain is kept in the dark about his own identity till the very last page, while performing more and more magnificent adventures. Lancelot is also ignorant of his own identity at the beginning of his story, but the revelation, and his acknowledgement by Arthur, are very different, and occur far apart. As in the case of Gawain, the opening account in the Middle High German *Lanzelet* and in the French prose *Lancelots* (non-cyclic and Vulgate) of Lancelot's birth and his upbringing by the Lady of the Lake puts the reader ahead of all the other characters.[16] In the *Lanzelet* his name is not revealed to us till he himself learns it, but it is announced in the very first paragraph of both the French versions, though for a long time he knows himself only as King's Son. When he finally does discover his name in the French texts by lifting the tombstone destined for him, he pretends not to have read the name and lineage engraved there, and swears the damsel with him to secrecy (Micha, 7, 332; *L-G*, 2, 80). It is a long time before the maiden reveals his name to Gawain (Micha, 7, 425–9; *L-G*, 2, 105), who then carries the news to court – but Lancelot is not there to be celebrated and welcomed into Arthur's élite circle. He continues to maintain his incognito through many more battles and encounters, and admits his identity only to Guinevere, after a long conversation in which he gradually acknowledges more and more adventures and victories of which news has reached the court (Micha, 8, 104–109; *L-G*, 2, 143–5). This ought to be a climactic moment, since he has been in love with her since they first met, and he is now so distinguished in prowess. Her first reaction is to tell him that the court will be thrilled, since Gawain had long since told them Lancelot's name. This is what one would have expected from one of the Round Table Knights; it is striking that she focuses on the reactions of the public world, the court, rather than her own private emotions, though she does go on to interrogate him about what – or who – inspires his great deeds, thus leading him to admit his love for her.

As for Arthur, although he too has heard much of Lancelot's exploits, they do not actually meet till very late on in the narrative when Lancelot frees Arthur from prison and is finally made a knight of the Round Table (Micha, 8,

15 Siân Echard argues that there is potential for further conflict in this ending, where the reappearance of Gawain's parents reminds us of the clandestine love affair that prompted his exposure at the beginning: see *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 156. But I see no indication of this in the text: Gawain's parents have long been married, apparently, and there is no hint of future problems to be caused by Gawain's reunion with them.

16 Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, ed. K. A. Hahn (Frankfurt, 1845), trans. K. G. T. Webster (New York, 1951); *Lancelot do Lac: the non-cyclic Old French romance*, ed. Elspeth Kennedy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1980), trans. Corin Corley as *Lancelot of the Lake* (Oxford, 1989); *Lancelot: roman en prose du XIII siècle*, ed. A. Micha, 9 vols., TLF (Geneva, 1978–83), cited here as Micha by volume and page number, with translation from vols. 2–3 of *L-G*. See also Elspeth Kennedy's useful comments on the non-cyclic version of the story (details are given in n. 3 above). Unless otherwise stated, I refer to the Vulgate Cycle version.

478–9; *L-G*, 2, 236). Again it is not Lancelot who names himself, but Gawain. Arthur falls at Lancelot's feet and does homage to his saviour; Lancelot says nothing, but is clearly embarrassed. By this time Lancelot has achieved so many outstanding adventures, and is so famous, that he hardly qualifies as a Fair Unknown any more. His name is known to all; it is his face that is not recognized, and Arthur is absolutely the last to put face to name, with Gawain's help (it takes the whole of the non-cyclic version for Arthur to discover who Lancelot is and recruit him for the Round Table). Not only does everyone else know who Lancelot is, but indeed he and Guinevere have been lovers for some time. So when Arthur sends for Guinevere to introduce her to the great hero, she immediately embraces Lancelot and makes a disingenuous but elegant speech, saying that she does not know who he is, but that for the love of her husband and for her own honour she must owe him her love. Arthur is touched and impressed by this apparently spontaneous and noble gesture, which is in fact a cunning strategy to preserve the secret of their love (Micha, 8, 484–5; *L-G*, 2, 237). The king is the last to know the identity of the mysterious champion to whom he is greatly indebted and by whom he has been repeatedly cuckolded; this makes him look ridiculous, as he also does (though for different reasons) in Malory's tale of Gareth.[17]

We might wonder why Lancelot is presented as so obsessed with anonymity after he has discovered his own name. According to both the non-cyclic and the Vulgate versions, he is following the orders of the Lady of the Lake, who has planned or at least foreseen the moment of revelation. She commands him through a maiden not to settle down at Arthur's court or anywhere else, but rather to do as many deeds of valour as possible, and make himself famous (Micha, 7, 321; *L-G*, 2, 77). He is not the only chivalric hero to maintain extended anonymity. John Burrow comments on the Middle English *Ipomedon* that 'it would seem that the story assumes that the chief use of incognito is precisely to accumulate "pryce" in its purest and most unquestionable form'. Susan Crane, in a more general discussion, argues similarly that chivalric disguise is 'a language of self-presentation rather than a means of self-concealment'.[18] Lancelot certainly succeeds as far as his 'worship' is concerned – but we might question whether his recognition is ultimately comic or tragic. Though he discovers his name and parentage, his parents are

17 C. Stephen Jaeger, describing what he calls 'the courtier narrative', notes that in many Fair Unknown stories which serve to criticize court life, 'a stranger appears at court, dazzles the king and his court with his charm and talents, rises swiftly to favor and power, inspires envy, and becomes entangled in romantic complications with a woman close to the ruler'; see *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 237–8. His examples are Walter Map's tale of the King of Portugal, Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied*, and Tristan, but Lancelot clearly fits this pattern as well.

18 John Burrow, 'The Uses of Incognito in *Ipomedon A*', in *Readings in Middle English Romance*, ed. Carol. M. Meale (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 25–34 (see p. 28); Susan Crane, 'Knights in Disguise', in *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain van d'Elden (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 63–79 (see p. 70). See also the comments of Elspeth Kennedy in *Lancelot and the Grail* (n. 3 above).

both dead, so there can be no family reunion with them. He does not claim his kingdom till much later in the story, as a last resort when everything in his life is falling apart and he is no longer welcome at Camelot. Acknowledgement of his prowess by Arthur, a surrogate father, and admission to the Round Table élite are in one sense a happy ending, but of course greatly complicate his illicit relations with Guinevere. Luttrell ends his list of the stages in the Fair Unknown narrative (based on the *Bel Inconnu*) with 'Wedding to a Queen', but there can be no happy ending in terms of marriage for Lancelot.[19] The queen he loves is not available as a bride; after this recognition scene he will not see her again for a long time, and then only in secret. In one way, his reception by Arthur does of course mark his achievement of chivalric glory; but it can also be argued that the fall of Camelot is Lancelot's fault. In that sense his initial knighting at Camelot, when the queen gives him his sword and he falls hopelessly in love with her, and his eventual recognition by both Arthur and Guinevere as a hero and a valued member of their court, can be seen as having nothing but tragic consequences.

In view of Lancelot's devotion to the queen, it is hardly surprising that the arrival at court of Galahad, his son by Elaine of Corbenic, at the beginning of the Grail Quest should also be problematic; it is also highly unconventional in relation to other Arthurian recognition scenes.[20] Lancelot is summoned away from the court to a convent where the nuns ask him to knight an unknown boy they have raised. In the French *Queste* Lionel and Bors, who are also present, guess that the youth is Lancelot's son, but are unable to draw Lancelot out on the subject (*Queste*, p. 3; *L-G*, 4, 4; Malory omits this conversation). So Galahad arrives at court already knighted, and is presented to Arthur not by Lancelot but by a mysterious old man. In one sense there is no doubt about his identity: the old man introduces Galahad as being of the lineage of David and Joseph of Arimathea, as if his actual parentage were quite irrelevant (*Queste*, pp. 7–8; *L-G*, p. 5; Malory, p. 859.11–15 [XXX/3]). He is not marginal or an outsider, since the Siege Perilous has his name on it, by right of religious destiny rather than chivalric prowess. Many notice his likeness to Lancelot, not least the queen – this is a very rare case of recognition by physical resemblance – but there is no formal acknowledgement of him as the son of Camelot's top knight, and no contact between father and son. The one private conversation Galahad has about his own identity is the most surprising one possible – with Guinevere, who tries to make him admit that Lancelot is his father (*Queste*, pp. 19–20; *L-G*, p. 9; Malory, pp. 863.10–864.4 [XXX/5]); he acknowledges it tacitly. Recognition here includes Guinevere's encounter with the visible proof that Lancelot has been unfaithful to her. As for

19 Luttrell, *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance*, pp. 80–104 (see p. 84).

20 References are to *La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. A. Pauphilet (Paris, 1978), cited as *Queste* by page number, and to the translation in vol. 4 of *L-G*. Malory's version is very similar, though somewhat briefer (pp. 853ff.; XIII.1).

Lancelot, the arrival of his unacknowledged son leads to public humiliation when a damsel announces that Lancelot is no longer the best knight in the world, as proved by Galahad's success in drawing the sword from the stone (*Queste*, pp. 12–13; *L-G*, p. 7; Malory, pp. 870–4 [XIII/8]). At an early stage of the quest, Galahad defeats Lancelot in battle. Usually the father-son encounter in battle comes near the end of the story and leads to a final recognition scene, but in this case Lancelot does not recognize him, and Galahad immediately rides away (*Queste*, p. 56; *L-G*, pp. 19–20; Malory, pp. 892.30–893.16 [XIII/17]). It is not till considerably later on that Lancelot learns that Galahad is his son, and it seems to come as a total surprise to him; this revelation is swiftly followed by Lancelot's first acknowledgement of his own sinfulness (*Queste*, pp. 137–8; *L-G*, pp. 44–5; Malory, p. 930.11–14 [XV/4]).

Galahad's existence is a continual reproach to Lancelot, in courtly terms because of his betrayal of Guinevere and his behaviour to Elaine, and also in spiritual terms, as it becomes clear that Lancelot cannot achieve the Grail Quest but his perfect son can. For the characters in the story and for the reader, Galahad's identity is never in doubt from the beginning of the narrative; rather it is his Christlike status that is gradually revealed in the course of the quest. Though Lancelot may be his biological father, the only important father-figure for Galahad is God. Even though he is not a Fair Unknown for more than a page or two, he remains an enigmatic figure throughout, and most unlike the other young heroes of Fair Unknown narratives. Arthur's acknowledgement and approval are more or less irrelevant to him, since his place at the Round Table is already reserved for him; he does not need to prove his prowess through a series of adventures. And his arrival at court coincides with the beginning of the Grail Quest, which is regarded as a disaster by Arthur and Guinevere; it is the first fragmenting of the Round Table fellowship, and the first occasion for criticism of chivalric ideology. As a virgin Grail Knight, Galahad has no interest in marriage or worldly power; he never returns to Arthur's court to be congratulated, or to be married, or to claim a kingdom. His story is a happy one in Christian terms, since he sees the beatific vision and is then taken up to heaven; but for Camelot it could be seen as a tragedy. His perfection shows up the imperfections of his father and everyone else in the Arthurian world.

Galahad is one example of the fact that the discovery and public acknowledgement of an Arthurian hero's parentage are not always unproblematic causes for celebration. This is even more true in Arthur's own case: in some French and English texts the recognition scene which makes public his parentage is itself far from comic, and though it ends happily, it has tragic consequences, both long-term and short-term. This scene is a late addition to the story of Arthur. In Geoffrey and his immediate followers Arthur is always known to be Uther's son, so when he becomes king there is no need for a recognition scene (the problem here is the timing of his conception and his legitimacy). The first elaboration of the identity theme appears in the Vulgate

Estoire de Merlin.[21] When the barons complain about the low birth of the unknown young man who has become their king, Merlin simply explains to them how Arthur was conceived and taken at birth to be raised by Antor. Antor confirms the story; Arthur says nothing, and his mother does not appear. In Merlin's account here, she is represented as being slandered by her own husband, without any subsequent redress or comfort. When Uther discovers that she is pregnant, he claims that it cannot be either his child or Gorlois's, and she admits that she conceived on the very night that Gorlois died. Uther is pleased by her honesty, but does not bother to tell her that he himself was her mystery partner. He demands that the child should be handed over to him to be disposed of, since it is not his, and she agrees. There is no reference to any further conversation on the subject; it appears that Ygraine never knew she had borne Uther's son. Although Merlin had said at the beginning of this account that Arthur is indeed Uther's son, the barons reject him as a bastard, and a war ensues. Once Arthur has won, Merlin tells the story again, just for the king and Ulfin, prefacing it with an account of his own birth and his dealings with Vortigern.[22] Arthur makes no comment, and Ygraine is not present.

This recognition scene is not well constructed; perhaps it is a cobbling together of two different versions, in one of which Arthur hears his own story in private (as in the *Perlesvaus* episode mentioned above). A more elaborate and problematic version appears in the *Suite du Merlin* and was adapted by Malory: here the recognition scene is immediately preceded by Arthur's fatal tryst with his unrecognized sister Morgause, when Mordred is conceived.[23] Although Mordred is identified as Arthur's son in some earlier French texts, there is no coherent account of the circumstances of his conception before this scene in the *Suite*.[24] After Arthur has had his prophetic dream of the griffins and serpents which ravage both him and the kingdom, Merlin appears to him first as a child and then as an old man, with the unexpected and unwelcome news that he is Uther's and Ygraine's son, and therefore Morgause's half-brother. Merlin goes on to explain, in Malory's version: ' "... ye have done a thyng late that God ys displesed with you, for ye have lyene by youre

21 This episode does not appear in the text of the Prose *Merlin* attributed to Robert de Boron; I cite the edition of H. O. Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, 8 vols. (Washington, DC, 1908–16, repr. 1983), 2, 90–1, trans. in *L-G*, 1, 216–17.

22 Sommer, 2, 96; *L-G*, 1, 220. Immediately after this story Merlin describes Lot's sons, among whom he numbers Mordred; either the story of Mordred's incestuous conception had not yet been invented, or the writer did not wish to use it (for further comment on Mordred, see below).

23 See *Suite*, 1, 147–73, trans. *L-G*, 4, 167–74; and Malory, pp. 41.11–46.15 (I/19–21). In the *Suite* the barons are so hostile that Arthur leaves Carlion, where they are gathered; after Merlin's explanation they still reject Arthur, and fight against him. In Malory the barons first challenge Arthur's right to the throne, and are told by Merlin of his parentage, at pp. 17–18; then there is a long war before the recognition scene takes place.

24 See Archibald, 'Arthur and Mordred: Variations on an Incest Theme', in *Arthurian Literature* VIII (1989), pp. 1–27. For the argument that the story of Mordred's incestuous birth was in fact known much earlier, by Geoffrey's time, see M. Victoria Guerin, *The Fall of Kings and Princes: Structure and Destruction in Arthurian Tragedy* (Stanford, 1995), esp. pp. 1–17.

syster and on hir ye have gotyn a child that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme" ' (p. 44.16–19; I/20). Arthur begs Merlin to help him conceal this sin. Merlin replies that if he did so, he himself would commit a mortal sin; but he volunteers to prove to the people, to Arthur himself, and also to the queen that he is indeed Uther's son and heir. This creates a considerable shift of context and tone for the recognition scene. The first issue is Arthur's moral standing as a Christian and a sinner, which is then displaced and replaced by the problem of his social and political status, his worthiness as king.[25]

Arthur finds this story that Uther is his father incredible, and so summons his barons (who are unhappy about his accession) and also Ygraine. In both the *Suite* and Malory, the crucial recognition scene begins with a vicious slander against the queen; this is perhaps derived from Uther's reported conversation with her in the *Estoire de Merlin* version described above. She is already anxious when she comes to court that she will be dispossessed of her lands, but it is even worse than she fears. Ulfin comes in and opens the attack:

> 'Rois Artus, moult m'esmerveil de chou que tu sueffres que dame desloiaus et tele que elle ne deveroit pas tenir terre mengue a [ta] table. Et qui vaurroit la chose mener si haut comme la verités mousterroit, il trouveroit tout apertement qu'il a en li murdre et traison.' (*Suite*, 1, 166)
>
> 'King Arthur, I marvel greatly that you permit a lady so false that she should not hold land to eat at your table. Whoever wanted to pursue the matter in order to discover the truth would find clearly that there is murder and treason in her.' (*L-G*, 4, 172–3)

He accuses her abruptly and very harshly of infanticide: he claims that she was pregnant by Uther, but destroyed the child because she was not interested in the honour of the kingdom, thus jeopardizing its stability. This unpleasant charade is acted out with the greatest sincerity and venom. For a knight these would be fighting words; all the poor queen can do is deny the charges. Arthur pretends to be shocked but interested, and Ulfin continues to embroider the story and to expand his accusations (he calls her an unnatural mother too). The horrified queen reproaches Merlin for his accusation, and demands that he return the child she entrusted to him, threatening to have him tortured if he denies receiving the baby. Merlin in turn asks Ector to verify the story of the fostering of Arthur, and demands that the child be returned to him. Ector says that he cannot return the child as he was, and identifies the king as his foster-son; his neighbours bear witness that he speaks the truth. All is speedily clarified: Merlin declares himself cleared of all charges, the barons are delighted that their king is in fact of royal blood, Arthur and his mother embrace, weeping with joy, and there are many days of national celebration.

25 This moral concern is in keeping with the tenor of the whole Post-Vulgate Cycle, which puts much more emphasis than most other versions on Arthur's sin of incest; see Fanni Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail* (Manchester, 1966), esp. ch. 6.

Here the recognition scene is more painful (at least for Ygraine) than in the *Estoire*, but is followed by celebration and peace, not by civil war. It is elegantly constructed, with a series of parallel demands and responses from the various adults involved in Arthur's birth and upbringing. There is also a doubling of the recognition motif, since Merlin is disguised for the first part of the scene, and speaks of himself in the third person till the queen orders him to identify himself.

Malory's version is much shorter, with a smaller cast of characters. Ulphuns begins with the same sudden and violent accusation – ' "Ye ar the falsyst lady of the worlde, and the moste tratoures unto the kynges person" ' – but this time he accuses Ygraine of causing great bloodshed by failing to disclose that she had borne a son to Uther or to acknowledge Arthur, which would have averted the present tension between king and barons (p. 45.10–27; I/21). He ends his speech by offering to fight anyone who denies that she is false to both God and England. The queen's first reaction is typically Malorian in its concern with 'worship' and good name: ' "I am a woman and I may nat fyght; but rather than I sholde be dishonoured, there wolde som good man take my quarrel" ' (p. 45.28–30).[26] When she describes how she gave up her baby to Merlin, Ulphuns reproaches the enchanter: ' "Ye ar more to blame than the queene" ' (p. 46.4). Without further ado, Arthur effects his own recognition, asking Merlin ' "Ys this my modir?" ' (p. 46.9). We hear this question in direct speech; we do not hear Ector's explanation, which is summed up in two lines of narrative, immediately followed by the embrace of mother and son, and eight days of feasting. The confrontation here begins just as nastily as in the *Suite*, but is much briefer, and the tone soon shifts from the hostile to the emotional. We are spared the repeated explanations of what we already know, and Merlin has a much smaller role here than in the *Suite*, where he draws out the recognition scene with long speeches like an all-powerful Master of Ceremonies, demanding applause and appreciation from his audience at the end.

Both versions end with rejoicing and feasting, followed not by more wars but by the knighting and first adventure of the squire Girflet (Grysfflet in Malory). But the recognition that Uther and Ygraine are Arthur's parents also confirms that Morgause is his half-sister, though this is not explicitly stated at this point either in the *Suite* or in Malory. Without much delay, however, both versions return to the consequences of their incest, Arthur's attempt at a Massacre of the Innocents and Mordred's miraculous – or fatal – survival (*Suite*, 1, 203–12; *L-G*, 4, 183–5; Malory, pp. 55–6 [I/27]). Though the recognition scene itself ends happily with Arthur embracing his mother, the discovery of his parentage is thus framed by disastrous events; it is in fact the beginning of a very unhappy ending to the larger story of Arthur's life and reign. Here, as in some of the other recognition scenes discussed in this essay,

26 It is also an ominous precursor of the various episodes in the final books where Guinevere is accused of a crime, and needs a champion to fight for her or rescue her.

the conventions of the Fair Unknown story are turned upside down. Arthur is already established as king when the recognition scene occurs, though there is doubt about his social status and opposition to his rule. The father he thinks he knows, Ector, turns out to be merely a foster-father. His biological father is dead, so there can be no reunion with him, and there is no other authoritative male figure to acknowledge him (besides Merlin, who has known his true identity all along). His mother is presented as terribly vulnerable, and Arthur is complicit in a brutal plot to accuse her falsely, in order to bring about the recognition scene. The discovery of his parentage comes immediately after his unwitting incest, and his ominous dream of disaster to come; knowledge of his true identity does not launch him on a new career path or raise him to a new status, but confirms his terrible destiny, already prophesied by Merlin, and induces him to act as brutally as Herod, with equal lack of success. Fair Unknown stories sometimes end with the hero marrying a queen or heiress; Arthur's marriage takes place a little later, but it does not really matter much whom he marries. The proof that he is the legitimate king, Uther's son, is also the proof that he has already committed incest (though of course it is also very clear that when Arthur slept with Morgause he could not possibly have known their true relationship). Thus the revelation of his parentage also seals his tragic fate, as in the Oedipus story; his line is destined to end when Mordred and he kill each other.

So what about Mordred's recognition scene? As many critics have noted, at the end of a brief account of Arthur's attempt to destroy Mordred along with all the other children born around May Day Malory mentions an account of how Mordred grew up and came to court:

> And so by fortune the shyppe drove unto a castelle, and was all to-ryven and destroyed the moste party, save that Mordred was cast up, and a good man founde hym, and fostird hym tylle he was fourtene yere of age, and than brought hym to the courte, as hit rehersith aftirward and toward the ende of the MORTE ARTHURE. (p. 55.28–33; I/27)

It is not entirely clear if Malory is promising to describe this scene himself, as most critics assume, or referring to his source. *Morte Arthure* might be his own work, the Alliterative *Morte*, or some French version; he regularly uses the verb *rehersen* to refer both to his own text and to his sources. But no comparable passage exists in the *Suite*, his immediate source here, nor does the scene of Mordred's arrival at court appear in any extant Arthurian text. Peter Field has recently argued that Malory may have been referring to a now lost version of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* which did contain this scene.[27] This is an ingenious suggestion, but unless such a text is discovered, it must remain merely a hypothesis, and not one that I find persuasive. Writers in the

[27] Field, 'Malory's Mordred' (see note 9 above). There are some casual, brief references to Mordred's fostering in the *Suite*, which suggest that a more developed account of Mordred's youth may have existed in some form in the early thirteenth century: see 1, 275 (*L-G*, 4, 202), and 2, 139 (*L-G*, 4, 245).

Middle Ages felt quite free to expand and adapt their sources, to add new characters, and to invent scenes which clearly needed inventing, such as the first kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere. The authors of the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate versions made many additions to the twelfth-century versions of the Arthurian legend, filling in gaps, developing existing characters, and inventing new ones. As we have seen, numerous Arthurian writers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did add recognition scenes to their versions. Why did they not include the scene of Mordred's arrival at court, and/or his discovery of his true parentage? It would seem very surprising if the author of the Alliterative *Morte* alone of all medieval Arthurians chose to describe Mordred's arrival at court, and equally strange if such an important scene was added and then subsequently omitted.

In my view, Mordred's recognition scene was just too problematic for medieval authors. They seem to have taken considerable pains to avoid humiliating Lancelot too much when Galahad comes to court; in the face of considerable provocation, Lancelot never actually acknowledges his own status as Galahad's father, the name of the boy's mother, or the circumstances of his conception. How much more awkward would it have been for Arthur to welcome Mordred to his court and make him a knight – not to mention for Guinevere! Modern Arthurian authors do not flinch from the challenge of describing the hopes and fears and expectations of father and son, Mordred's emotions at confronting his father at last, Arthur's desire to make amends or to muzzle this potential monster, and Guinevere's behaviour towards her stepson.[28] But I think that in spite of their passion for recognition scenes, medieval writers recognized that this one was better left out.[29]

28 See for instance Mary Stewart's *The Wicked Day* (London, 1986), which focuses on Mordred and devotes much space – and imagination – to his early life in Scotland, his thoughts about his parentage, and his life at Arthur's court before everything goes wrong.

29 I am grateful to the Arthurians who heard an earlier version of this essay at the International Congress at Toulouse for their helpful comments, and especially to Ad Putter for his help with the final draft.