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**MALORY'S LIBRARY**  
The Sources of the *Morte Darthur*

Ralph Norris

## ARTHURIAN STUDIES LXXI

### MALORY'S LIBRARY

#### THE SOURCES OF THE MORTE DARTHUR

The first book-length study of the sources of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* since 1921 and the first comprehensive study since that of Vinaver's three-volume edition, *Malory's Library* collects the results of over one hundred years of scholarship, providing new discussions of the major sources of the eight tales recognised in the standard edition. It also, for the first time, explores possible minor sources of the *Morte Darthur*, evaluating the case for them to see what conclusions may be drawn of Malory's life, work, and mental furnishings. In so doing, it clarifies the process by which Malory created his work. It shows that Malory carried an eclectic body of literature in his mind and worked at least partly from memory; and it illuminates his interest in characters of his own social class, the breadth of his enthusiasm for Arthurian literature, and the depth of his commitment to provide his countrymen with 'the hoole book of kyng Arthur and of his noble knyghtes of the Round Table'.

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THE SOURCES OF THE MORTE DARTHUR

Ralph Norris

D. S. BREWER

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To Patricia

*Único remedio deste afligido corazón que te adora*

## *Preface*

I have incurred both personal and academic debts in this attempt to trace as full a picture as possible of the sources that Sir Thomas Malory used to compose his *Morte Darthur*. My thanks must go first to Professor P. J. C. Field for entrusting an untried Ph.D. student with a project that he had wished to pursue himself. That project, a study of Malory's minor sources, culminated in my dissertation. From that first instance of generosity, he has never failed to set inspiringly high standards in scholarship, dedication, industry, and friendship. Lucy Armit and Ad Putter spotted many errors and weaknesses, to this work's general improvement. Carleton Carroll kindly gave me the benefit of his expertise in Old French. This book has also greatly benefited from the friendship, advice, and assistance of Samantha Rayner, who has from the beginning unselfishly given invaluable moral and scholarly support.

I have also benefited from the help and support of many friends on both sides of the Atlantic. In particular, I am grateful to Professor Field's family, his wife Vanessa and his daughters Catherine and Elizabeth, and to Jack Rayner for making an expatriate feel much more at home. I must also name here Margerie Dobbin, Wendy Charles, Barbara Stevenson, Laura Dabundo, Bradford Fletcher, and Hugh T. Kennan. I also owe thanks to the librarians of the University of Wales, Bangor, and of Kennesaw State University, particularly to Rita Spisak, for their patience and efficiency.

My greatest personal debt is to my step-children, James, Adria, and Richard, and especially to my wife for their many sacrifices in allowing me to spend the greater part of several years in Wales to pursue my dream.

Finally, I must thank Caroline Palmer of Boydell & Brewer and the Arthurian Studies series editor Norris J. Lacy for their interest, support, and hard work in bringing this book to print.

Even all of the scholars and well wishers in this impressive list could not prevent the errors and defects that inevitably survive. For these, I alone am responsible.

Ralph Norris  
Atlanta, Georgia  
February 2007

## *Abbreviations*

<i>BBSIA</i>	<i>Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne</i>
BL	London, British Library
BN	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale
EETS	Early English Text Society
	e.s. extra series
	n.s. new series
	o.s. original series
	s.s. special series
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
SATF	Société des Anciens Textes Français
STC	Short Title Catalogue
STS	Scottish Text Society

## Preliminaries

When Sir Thomas Malory completed his *Morte Darthur* in “the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the Fourth” he was nearing the end of his life.<sup>1</sup> He had spent much of that life as a knight during troubled times, and his life records show that he faced adventures as difficult and dilemmas as painful as any he would write about.<sup>2</sup> Despite a busy life of action, however, he must have also found time to indulge a love of reading, particularly of romance. Although we cannot know how much of Malory’s life was spent in the actual composition of this work,<sup>3</sup> the learning it displays from a variety of sources must have taken years to acquire. The *Morte Darthur* was to be the last great piece of medieval Arthurian literature, and it is a culmination of many strands of that tradition.

This tradition began to take shape at least three centuries before Malory’s time.<sup>4</sup> In the 1130s, Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his *Historia regum Britanniae*, which was the first work to give King Arthur a coherent biography.<sup>5</sup> This work introduced many of what were to become the major Arthurian themes,

- 1 *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 3 vols., 3rd ed. rev. P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 1260.25–6. All subsequent references to the *Morte Darthur* will be to this edition, unless specified otherwise. The ninth year of Edward IV was from 4 March 1469 to 3 March 1470. Malory died, according to his epitaph, on 14 March 1471; for Malory’s life, see P. J. C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993).
- 2 For the facts, see Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*; for a lively reconstruction of Malory’s life with less scholarly restraint see Christina Hardymont, *Malory: The Life and Times of King Arthur’s Chronicler* (London: Harper Collins, 2005).
- 3 Vinaver believed that Malory wrote his second tale, “The Tale of Arthur and Lucius,” first and suggested that the explicit of the first tale, “The Tale of King Arthur,” indicated an interruption in Malory’s writing; Field argues that Malory was imprisoned for the final time soon after 14 June 1468 and conjectures that he wrote the *Morte Darthur* during the period between this and the *terminus ad quem* of 3 March 1470.
- 4 For more detailed discussions of the individual works and their place in the Arthurian tradition, see *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959); for the English tradition in particular, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, see *The Arthur of the English*, ed. W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1999); and for the French tradition see *The Arthur of the French*, eds. Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2006).
- 5 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985). This is a single manuscript edition of Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 56 and is the best edition available. A critical edition that takes into account the entire textual history remains a *desiderium* of Arthurian studies. The new edition and translation, Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An edition and translation of the De gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae)*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007) is a step towards this ideal. The standard English translation is *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1966).

such as the obsession of Arthur's father Uther for the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, Arthur's continental warfare against the Roman Empire, and Arthur's tragic defeat at the treacherous hands of Mordred, here described only as Arthur's nephew, not yet his incestuous bastard son. This work gave rise to what is often called the chronicle tradition of Arthurian literature, in which Arthur is given a specific place in British history.

The romance tradition, which in contrast concerned itself with adventures of individual knights in a timeless setting, began decades later when Chrétien de Troyes became the first important poet to use the Arthurian legend. Chrétien's poems include the oldest surviving work to tell the story of Lancelot and Guenevere's love affair and the oldest surviving work about the Grail. Chrétien's work inspired many continuators and imitators, but during the course of the following century prose romances began to displace poetic romances in popularity and importance.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of linking together various romance motifs into a comprehensive history of King Arthur's realm was begun by the poet Robert de Boron and taken over by the authors of the thirteenth-century cyclic prose romances.<sup>7</sup> This trend influenced the French prose Grail romance *Perlesvaus*<sup>8</sup> and culminated in what is today usually called the Vulgate Cycle or the Lancelot-Grail Cycle.<sup>9</sup> Scholars generally explain the increasing elaboration of Arthurian material, from individual stories such as those told by Chrétien de Troyes and his successors to complex narrative cycles as caused by the desire of thirteenth-century audiences for clarification of what earlier stories left unexplained.<sup>10</sup> In its final form, the Vulgate Cycle begins with the story of the Grail from the time of Christ, tells the story of the birth of Merlin, continues to tell the story of the birth of Arthur, the birth of Lancelot, on through several long volumes of interwoven adventures, through the quest of Arthur's knights for the Grail, to reach the death of Arthur, and end with the deaths of Lancelot and Guenevere.

6 For an overview, see Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien de Froissart*, trans. Margaret Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

7 Robert de Boron, *Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*, ed. William A. Nitze (Paris: Champion, 1927); *Merlin: Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1979); *The Didot Perceval, According to the Manuscripts of Modena and Paris*, ed. William Roach (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1941). All three works have been collected and translated into English: *Merlin and the Grail*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001).

8 *Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus*, eds. William A. Nitze and T. Atkinson Jenkins, 2 vols. (New York: Phaeton, 1932–37); for an English translation see *The High Book of the Grail*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978).

9 *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols. (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1908–16) remains the only complete original language edition. For critical editions more useful to the Malory student, see the discussions of the various branches below. For a discussion of this cycle, see Carol Dover, ed., *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003). For an English translation of the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate cycles, see *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1993–96).

10 Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).

The Vulgate romances, like Chrétien's poems earlier, inspired imitation. The Prose *Tristan*, written in at least four stages, is an extended imitation of the central branch of the Vulgate Cycle, the Prose *Lancelot*. It puts Tristan and Isolde into the world of the Vulgate Cycle and, in its fullest version, includes a modified version of the Grail quest and the death of Arthur.<sup>11</sup> Later, another author, who perhaps began as a scribe copying the Vulgate Cycle, dramatically reworked the story into a shorter version, which scholars today call the Post-Vulgate Cycle or Romance of the Grail.<sup>12</sup> The author of the Post-Vulgate, by focussing more on Arthur himself and on the Grail, and less on the adventures of Lancelot and Arthur's other leading knights, produced a work with greater unity of theme than the Vulgate Cycle. In this respect, the Post-Vulgate Cycle represents the ultimate expression of the thirteenth-century impulse to connect and to elucidate the various adventures of the Arthurian world into a coherent whole.

The final important development of this tradition for students of Malory was the use of Arthurian characters and themes by Middle English poets, particularly in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Some, such as the author of the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, used the chronicle tradition.<sup>13</sup> Others reworked the French romance tradition. The most important of them for readers of Malory rendered the *Mort Artu*, the final romance of the Vulgate Cycle, into a stanzaic poem called *Le Morte Arthur*.<sup>14</sup> Still others, like the author of *Ywain and Gawain*, returned to the episodic type of romance originally made popular by Chrétien.<sup>15</sup> Although Malory would not have known all of the above-named works, as we shall see, he did know many of the most important ones well.

By Malory's time the creative period of Arthurian romance was mostly past. Yet despite the paucity of new romances, the old stories appear to have remained popular, judging from evidence such as bequests in wills.<sup>16</sup> However, the creation of new material would have been increasingly inhibited by fact that the passage of time had stabilized the Arthurian story. The thirteenth century had seen the combination of the twelfth-century themes of the love of Lancelot and Guenevere, the quest for the Holy Grail, and the downfall of King Arthur's realm. In the fifteenth century, innovation of this kind was no longer to be thought of.

Arthurian literature did contain a gap, however, which Malory filled admirably. As Caxton notes in his preface to the *Morte Darthur*, the whole story of Arthur's life as it appears in the French romances had never been presented

11 Emmanuèle Baumgartner, *Le Tristan en prose: essai d'interprétation d'un roman médiéval* (Geneva: Droz, 1975).

12 Fannie Bogdanow, *The Romance of the Grail* (New York: Manchester UP, 1966).

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

14 *Le Morte Arthur*, ed. P. F. Hissinger (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

15 *Ywain and Gawain*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London: J. M. Dent, 1992).

16 Carol Meale, "Manuscripts, Readers, and Patrons in Fifteenth-Century England: Sir Thomas Malory and Arthurian Romance," *Arthurian Literature IV*, ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985) 93-126.

in English. In producing what is essentially a brief English Arthurian prose cycle, Malory retold the old story in a way that incorporated elements from many strands of Arthurian legend and therefore brought a measure of hitherto unrealized harmony to this diverse body.<sup>17</sup>

For the most part, the *Morte Darthur* is a retelling of significant parts of the three great Old French prose Arthurian cycles, the Vulgate or Lancelot-Graal Cycle, the cyclic version of the Prose *Tristan*, and the Post-Vulgate Cycle or Romance of the Grail. In addition to translating, abridging, and adapting these works, Malory also included much material that was not to be found in his major sources, from names for minor characters to entire adventures of major characters. In this way, he created a uniquely detailed version of the Arthurian legend, uniquely focussed on Arthur and his knights.

Because Malory's book is largely a retelling, he necessarily expressed his originality most often in his selection and organization of older stories and elements rather than by invention. For this reason, the analysis of the sources of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* has been a fundamental aspect of Malory studies since the nineteenth century. Some of the merits of the study of Malory's sources have been set out in a work devoted to Malory's relationships with his major sources:

The chief advantage of source study ... is that it furnishes a valuable approach for the assessment of a literary work. Once a student can believe – as a result of factual comparison – that Malory used the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as source for his "Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius," he can then examine Malory's handling of this source with an eye for patterns which point towards that interpretation of the "Tale" which Malory intended. In such an examination we must observe what Malory borrowed *verbatim* from the source, what he altered, what he omitted, and what he added. The fundamental assumption is that in each of these aspects of his work Malory was consciously aware of his handling of the source. He controlled the source; it did not control him, for he could have handled it in an infinite number of ways had he so desired.<sup>18</sup>

One need not agree that all of Malory's creative changes were conscious to admit the general validity of this position.

Source study has provided valuable information for a number of important aspects of the literary study of the *Morte Darthur*. For example, it may aid literary biography in determining the conditions under which Malory wrote, whether he had only limited access to books from a sort of prison librarian

<sup>17</sup> The composite nature of the *Morte Darthur* also leads Malory into a number of inconsistencies, most of which are small and pass the casual reader unnoticed. For discussions see Field, "Author, Scribe, and Reader in Malory: The Case of Harleuse and Peryne," *Malory: Texts and Sources* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998) 72–88; and idem, "Malory and his Audience," *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. Alan Lupak (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002) 21–32.

<sup>18</sup> R. M. Lumiansky, Introduction, *Malory's Originality*, ed. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1964) 5–6.

or, as is increasingly coming to seem more likely, whether he worked under more favourable conditions of some kind.<sup>19</sup> Nor would any analysis of Malory's style fail to discuss the heavy alliteration and almost verse style of Malory's "Tale of Arthur and Lucius," which would be inexplicable without the comparison with the alliterative *Morte Arthure* that can only be provided by source study. Source study has also been of essential practical use in the case of Malory's work in helping to establish even the text that ought to be read.

Vinaver's three-volume edition of Malory's work, which has been the standard edition since its first appearance in 1947, is primarily based upon the Winchester Manuscript, but it also uses Caxton's printed version and Malory's major sources in combination to correct scribal corruption in the Winchester.<sup>20</sup> Vinaver gives a characteristic example of how source study can solve mysteries in the text:

In describing preparation for a tournament, C [Caxton] remarks (Book VI, ch 6) that *there were scaffoldis and holes that lordes and ladyes myghte beholde*. This has usually been taken as a hopelessly corrupt passage, and when Dr. Oakeshott first disclosed some of the features of the Winchester MS. he claimed to have found the correct reading of it: *scaffoldis and towrys* instead of *scaffoldis and holes*. ... All 'rational' conjectures as to this, however, are made unnecessary by the reading found in F [Malory's French source]. The French prose writer states that on the occasion of the tournament stands were erected and *windows (fenestres)* made (presumably in the woodwork) so as to enable the ladies to watch the fighting. ... That C's *holes* is Malory's rendering of *fenestres* is evident; and this is confirmed by the fact that the *Catholicon Anglicon* gives *holes* as an equivalent of *fenestra*. The seemingly corrupt reading thus turns out to be Malory's and the seemingly 'better' one a corruption. (cxv-i)

This process can produce a text that is much closer to Malory's original autograph than would otherwise be possible. In fact, there are instances in which recourse to source study is necessary to correct unintelligible readings found in both Caxton and the Winchester, as Vinaver also points out:

Another interesting case is the remark *thou hast resembled in to thynges*, alleged to have been made by Josephe, son of Joseph of Arimathea, to Galahad. The sense clearly requires the insertion of *me* after *resembled*, and it is arguable that the word may have dropped out before *in* owing to the likeness between *m* and *in*. But the emendation would not be certain without the support of the corresponding reading in F: *tu m'as resemblé en deus choses*. (cxvii)

Source study, therefore, as a method of illuminating more precisely the relationship of an author to his work fills at least four important functions:

<sup>19</sup> For the arguments, see Field, *Life and Times*, 126–47; and Anne Sutton, "Malory in Newgate: A New Document," *The Library* 7th Series, 1.3 (2000): 243–62.

<sup>20</sup> *Works* c–cxxvi.

it is an aspect of literary history, it often can aid in literary biography, it can at times elucidate otherwise puzzling features of a text, such as the style of Malory's second tale, and it is often helpful and at times essential in textual studies.

The present study focusses mainly on the less familiar subject of the minor sources of Malory's work. The contribution of the minor sources, even collectively, will naturally be less than that of the major sources, and so their value to literary studies will also be correspondingly less. This is not to say, however, that their contribution will be negligible. Study of the minor sources will provide the same benefits as that of the major sources, though on a more modest scale. Recognition of Malory's minor sources will contribute to scholarship's ongoing efforts to understand precisely the nature of the *Morte Darthur*. A consideration of the breadth of as complete a list of Malory's sources as possible will help to develop our picture of his mental life, which may have greater critical applications. For example, indications that Malory uses near-quotations from Chaucer and Lydgate will show him to be a man of wider literary interests than is often thought. Further, a consideration of minor sources is essential in establishing the most accurate possible text for Malory's second tale, "The Tale of Arthur and Lucius,"<sup>21</sup> and minor sources may be of less obvious help in the establishment of the texts of other of Malory's tales.

Scholarly understanding of Malory's relationship to his sources has made great progress since the initial investigations of the nineteenth century, which began as ground work for an authoritative edition of the *Morte Darthur*. Successive editions, from Caxton's *editio princeps* of 1485 until those of the nineteenth century, incrementally corrupted and bowdlerized Malory's text, and scholars became increasingly aware of the need for an authoritative edition.<sup>22</sup> In 1817 Robert Southey based his edition on that of Caxton and began his project with impressive goals, as Marylyn Jackson Parins notes:

Letters of this period indicate ambitious plans for a history of Arthur drawn from Welsh sources as well as a chapter-by-chapter source study using the French romances. The introduction and notes that appear in the edition of 1817 did not fulfill these aims.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this, however, and despite the fact that the Post-Vulgate *Suite du*

21 See Field, "Caxton's Roman War," *The Malory Debate*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, et al. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000) 127–68; Ralph Norris, "Lucius's Exhortation in Winchester and The Caxton," *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. Wheeler (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004) 253–260; and idem, "Minor Sources in Caxton's Roman War," *Studies in Philology* 103:1 (2006): 68–87.

22 See Larry D. Benson, "Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*," *Critical Approaches to Six Major English Works: Beowulf through Paradise Lost*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky and Herschel Baker (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1968) 81–131.

23 Marylyn Jackson Parins, *Malory: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1988) 95.

*Merlin* had not been rediscovered when he wrote, Southey's notes are the first real step forward in the identification and analysis of Malory's sources.

Later in the century and on the other side of the English channel, the manuscript that would become known as the Huth manuscript of the *Suite du Merlin* was identified by Paulin Paris and F. J. Furnivall, who quickly realized that it represented a version of one of Malory's sources.<sup>24</sup> In their introduction to their edition of this manuscript, Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich discuss Malory's debt to the *Suite* and correctly recognize it as the source for the first four books of Caxton's *Morte Darthur*, equivalent to Vinaver's "Tale of King Arthur." They assume, however, that Malory ended his adaptation where he did because, "Le rédacteur de la *Morte Darthure* [sic] ne semble pas avoir eu sous les yeux la troisième partie de notre compilation."<sup>25</sup> This is an assumption that modern scholars, who generally have a higher estimation of Malory's ability to adapt his sources to suit his own aesthetic purposes, would be slower to make.

In 1891, H. Oskar Sommer made notable advances in the study of Malory's sources in the third volume of his landmark edition of the *Morte Darthur*.<sup>26</sup> In a published letter that preceded the appearance of the volume, he stated,

The result of my researches surpasses all my anticipations. I have been enabled to determine exactly Malory's position in the history of English literature. I can clearly show what were the versions of the sources he used, and how he altered and added to them to suit his purpose.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this confident assertion, Sommer's was not the last word, and indeed some of his conclusions quickly came under attack. In particular Sommer's unclear statements about the relationships between the French *Mort Artu*, the English stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, and Malory's last tale<sup>28</sup> drew fire from J. D. Bruce in an article in *Anglia*,<sup>29</sup> and Sommer's hypothesis of a "Suite de Lancelot,"<sup>30</sup> which he believed accounted for many of the differences

<sup>24</sup> See Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, eds., *Merlin: Roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1886) ii-iv. This manuscript is now British Library MS Additional 38117.

<sup>25</sup> Paris and Ulrich lxxii.

<sup>26</sup> *Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory*, ed. Sommer, 3 vols. (London: David Nutt, 1889-91).

<sup>27</sup> Sommer, "The Sources of Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur,'" *Academy* 37 (1890): 273-4.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. "A close examination of the last portion of Malory's compilation shows that he cannot have derived his account from the Prose-Lancelot [i.e. the *Mort Artu*], or from a common original. In the English metrical romance 'Le Morte Arthur' ... we possess a version which stands in the same relation to Malory's source as that does to the Prose-Lancelot; and of this Malory was aware, for in the last two books, he often makes use of the very words of the English poem," *Le Morte Darthur* 3: 220. Sommer later denied, during a sometimes heated discussion with Bruce, that he claimed the poem as one of Malory's sources: "On Dr Douglas Bruce's Article: 'The Middle English Romance 'Le Morte Arthur', Harl. MS. 2252.' etc." *Anglia* 29 (1906): 529-38.

<sup>29</sup> J. D. Bruce, "The Middle English Metrical Romance 'Le Morte Arthur' (Harleian MS. 2252): Its Sources and its Relation to Sir Thomas Malory's 'Morte Darthur,'" *Anglia* 23 (1901): 67-100.

<sup>30</sup> Sommer, Commentary, *Le Morte Darthur* 3: 272-79.

between Malory's work and the French sources as they survive, was shown to be superfluous by Eugène Vinaver in an early monograph.<sup>31</sup>

In a further monograph, *Malory*, Vinaver helpfully summarized all that was then known about Malory's major sources, which was by then very close to modern views. Probably the only point that modern scholarship would reject outright is Vinaver's theory that Malory translated "a single French ms. divided into three or four volumes."<sup>32</sup>

Vinaver's point of view was typical of early assumptions about Malory and his sources, which often led critics to theorize the existence of lost manuscripts of Malory's sources rather than to credit Malory with the ability to make creative changes himself. J. D. Bruce, for instance, said of the difference in the narrative structure between the end of Malory's story and its sources that the change "seems to me to be quite beyond Malory's capacity for independent invention."<sup>33</sup> In fairness to these pioneering critics, Malory often speaks of a "Frenche boke" in the singular, and only rarely in plural. Increasing awareness of Malory's closeness to his major French sources, however, has led modern scholars to assume that what Malory calls his "Frenche boke" is more likely to be the French source he is using, or claiming to use, for the passage in question than an unknown and enormous single French work that gathered all of his French sources within one set of covers.<sup>34</sup>

The last incontestable addition to the list of Malory's major sources occurred in 1932 when Robert H. Wilson showed that Malory had used the *Perlesvaus* for parts of his "Tale of Sir Launcelot."<sup>35</sup> In light of then-current ideas, this episode was originally thought to have been interpolated into Malory's copy of the *Lancelot*. This idea now looks unlikely, as it seems instead that Malory probably knew the entire *Perlesvaus* and not only the parts whose narrative he retold.<sup>36</sup> Although two known manuscripts of the Vulgate *Queste* interpolate sections from the *Perlesvaus* as an introduction, this highly eccentric piece of Arthurian literature is inconsistent with much of the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate cycles, and the odds are greatly against interpolation of as much of it as Malory seems to have known into any manuscript of either cycle.<sup>37</sup>

Eugène Vinaver played a further role in the advancement of scholarly understanding of the *Morte Darthur* as editor of a new edition of Malory's work based on the Winchester Manuscript, which W. F. Oakshott discovered in Winchester College in 1934.<sup>38</sup> Vinaver, like Sommer before him, devoted a large part of his edition to an analysis of Malory's sources, and with the publi-

31 Vinaver, *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseult dans l'œuvre de Thomas Malory* (Paris: Champion, 1925) 25–30.

32 Vinaver, *Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 153.

33 Bruce, "Metrical Romance" 71.

34 Robert H. Wilson, "Malory's 'French Book' Again," *Comparative Literature* 2 (1950): 172–81.

35 Wilson, "Malory and the *Perlesvaus*," *Modern Philology* 30 (1932): 13–22.

36 Field, "Malory and *Perlesvaus*," *Texts and Sources* 224–35.

37 See *Perlesvaus* 3–14.

38 W. P. Oakshott, "The Finding of the Manuscript," *Essays on Malory*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 1–6.

cation of this work, the study of Malory's major sources essentially reached its current state, though the debate continues. For example, the source of "The Tale of Sir Gareth" remains a matter of conjecture, and scholars still disagree on such issues as which of the surviving manuscripts of Malory's sources most closely resembles the version that Malory actually used.

Over much of the same time, scholars have also come to realize that the major sources listed above are not the only works that provided material for the *Morte Darthur*. Recognition and analysis of these minor sources, however, has not advanced as steadily as work with the major sources has. This is largely due to the nature of the problem. In the early years of Malory source study, critics often assumed that many of the differences between Malory's work and his major sources resulted either from differences between surviving manuscripts and Malory's copies of those sources or from scribal interference. Some differences are doubtless due to this, but knowing when this is the case can be difficult. Further, even when this is probably not the case, tracing a minor source can be difficult. In contrast, for example, once the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* was discovered and compared with Malory's "Tale of King Arthur," no one could reasonably argue that Malory had not used some version of it. On the other hand, the differences between Malory's version of a fight between a giant and a knight and the corresponding fight in Malory's major source for the passage might or might not indicate the presence of a minor source that accounts for these differences, and even when a possible minor source is identified that could explain Malory's changes, there will still be a chance, greater or smaller, that the differences reflect Malory's independent creativity. This is not to say, however, that scholarship has made no progress in this area. It is merely that, as has been said, because some of Malory's minor sources are extremely minor, they are often hard to identify.<sup>39</sup>

The first scholar to recognize that Malory had used minor sources was Robert H. Wilson. He noted that Malory habitually named characters that his major sources left anonymous and that these names are often not to be found in Malory's major sources, even when several manuscripts of the source were compared.<sup>40</sup> Wilson also argued convincingly that Malory displayed knowledge from the very beginning of the *Morte Darthur* of a number of English Arthurian romances that were not among his primary sources.<sup>41</sup> Wilson's observations were an invitation to others to try to find more, and since that time scholars have suggested more than two dozen minor sources, including John Hardyng's *Chronicle* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Le chevalier au Lion*.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Field, "Malory and Chrétien de Troyes," *Texts and Sources* 237.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, "Malory's Naming of Minor Characters," *JEGP* 42 (1943): 364-85 and "Addenda on Malory's Minor Characters," *JEGP* 55 (1950): 563-87.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, "Malory's Early Knowledge of Arthurian Romance," *University of Texas Studies in English* 29 (1950): 33-50.

<sup>42</sup> Field, "Malory and Chrétien" 237.

Although over fifty years of work has gone into the question of Malory's minor sources, there has been no study to survey the field to try to evaluate the strength of these various suggestions and to see, once the balance is taken, what conclusions may be drawn of Malory's life, work, and mental furnishings. This study is an attempt to redress this deficiency.

However, because the diverse elements of the Arthurian story are traditional, it will often be impossible to distinguish sources from analogues. For example, when Malory adds small pieces of information, as when he names minor characters that are anonymous in his major sources, the information may have come from a number of works. In such cases, there is often no evidence upon which to base an opinion of which of the surviving sources may have contributed to Malory's version or whether the information may have come to Malory through untraceable avenues of oral tradition or lost manuscripts. On the other hand, in cases in which Malory's wording or phrasing has a close parallel in an older work, the natural conclusion will usually be that Malory is indeed borrowing from that work. It will also be possible, however, that phrases from sufficiently influential works, such as the Bible or *The Canterbury Tales*, may have entered Malory's mind in such a way that he may not always have been conscious of his borrowing, just as the Bible and Shakespeare are often unconsciously quoted in the English-speaking world of today.

A due consideration of these difficulties shows that this study, like all such studies, can only aspire to determine probable lines of influence, and often we will have to content ourselves with discussions of mere possibilities. And yet we shall often find that small pieces of evidence scattered throughout the text of the *Morte Darthur* will tend to point towards the same conclusion, and their cumulative power will therefore strengthen conclusions that would otherwise be far more tentative.

Ideally, a study of Malory's sources would examine the eight tales of the *Morte Darthur* in the order that Malory composed them. This would show whether Malory's relationship to his sources changed consistently as his writing matured, or whether Malory's differing treatment of each of his sources was otherwise inspired. Any patterns that emerged would be interesting to see, whether Malory's use of minor sources increased or decreased as his work developed, or which minor sources most attracted him at different points during the development of his career as far as we have evidence for it. This, however, cannot be done because the order of composition of the tales is far from certain.

The eight tales of Malory's *Morte Darthur* follow the same order in both of the medieval versions of the text, the Winchester Manuscript and Caxton's first edition of 1485, but, as Eugène Vinaver pointed out, Malory need not have composed the tales in this order.<sup>43</sup> Vinaver, in fact, argued that Tale II,

<sup>43</sup> The Winchester Manuscript is now BL MS Add. 59678, and the British Library prefers to call it the Malory manuscript. A photographic facsimile was published as *The Winchester Malory*, intro. N. R. Ker (London: EETS, 1976). For Caxton's version see *Caxton's Malory*, eds. James Spisak and William Mathews, 2 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983). A

"The Tale of Arthur and Lucius," was composed before Tale I, "The Tale of King Arthur." He saw Marholt's fight against a giant in "The Tale of King Arthur," which is very different in Malory's main source for the tale, as modelled on King Arthur's battle with the giant of Mont St Michel in Malory's own second tale. Vinaver speculated that apart from that the tales may have been written in the order that they appear.<sup>44</sup> Vinaver's conclusions were once widely accepted, but over time they have been treated with more scepticism. As J. A. W. Bennett pointed out in his review of *The Works*, the parallels that Vinaver finds between the two episodes in Tale II and Tale I are conventional and therefore cannot prove that Tale I was written before Tale II.<sup>45</sup>

Terence McCarthy suggested that Malory might have composed the tales in descending order of fidelity to his major sources, and on those grounds he provisionally proposed the order VI, II, V, I, III, IV, VII, VIII.<sup>46</sup> McCarthy thought that in adapting both Tale VI and Tale II, "The Tale of the Sankgreal" and "Arthur and Lucius," Malory "surrenders his own style."<sup>47</sup> He contrasts Malory's stylistic "surrender" in these two tales to the relative freedom with which Malory treats the sources of Tales VII and VIII. McCarthy argued that his posited order of composition would not be an unnatural result of an author working in prison with limited and irregular access to books.

Given McCarthy's assumptions, his argument is plausible, but, as McCarthy himself admits, his assumptions are arbitrary. Primarily, he uses verbal fidelity as his only criterion to measure Malory's independence from his major sources and thus ignores, for example, that from the point of view of abridgement of narrative, Tale III, "The Tale of Sir Launcelot," is at least as radical a departure from its primary source, the Vulgate *Lancelot*, as any of Malory's other tales. In addition, the fact that Malory also used the *Perlesvaus* as a major source for this tale suggests a similar level of creative freedom to Tale VIII, in which Malory also uses more than one major source. And if P. J. C. Field is correct in suggesting that Malory based the Phelot episode in the "Tale of Sir Launcelot" on *L'Âtre périlleux*,<sup>48</sup> the degree of freedom with which Malory composed Tale III may have been even greater than Malory used in Tale VIII. Further, when McCarthy's cites "The Tale of Sankgreal" as Malory's most derivative effort, he does not allow sufficiently for the important change in tone between Malory's version and his source. In addition to these objections, Malory treats each of his major sources differently from the others, and the fact that he follows the wording of some sources more closely

photographic facsimile of the Pierpont Morgan copy of Caxton's version was published as *Le Morte Darthur Printed by William Caxton 1485*, intro. Paul Needham (London: Scolar, 1976).

<sup>44</sup> Vinaver, *Works* li–lvi.

<sup>45</sup> J. A. W. Bennett, review of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, *Review of English Studies* 25 (1949): 161–4.

<sup>46</sup> Terence McCarthy, "The Order of Composition in the Morte Darthur," *Yearbook of English Studies* 1 (1971): 18–29.

<sup>47</sup> McCarthy 22.

<sup>48</sup> Field, "Malory's Sir Phelot and the Problems of Minor Sources," *BBSIA* 54 (2002): 345–61.