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Transformations of the Merlin Legend in Late-Medieval England: Contextualizing Translation in Of Arthour and of Merlin, Henry Lovelich's Merlin, and the Prose Merlin

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Transformations of the Merlin Legend in Late-Medieval England:
Contextualizing Translation in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, and the *Prose Merlin*

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Abstract

This thesis investigates medieval translation through the comparative study of a group of Middle English Arthurian romances dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, and the English *Prose Merlin* derived independently from a common Old French source, the Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire de Merlin,* and each author reshaped the material of the original presenting the same story as their French source but from very different and, at times, divergent perspective. The interventions by the three authors were heterogeneous and ranged from changes to the order of the narrative, through expansions and abbreviations, to omissions and additions. In an attempt to unveil the authors' agenda, this thesis offers close textual analyses of these texts and investigates how the similarities and dissimilarities with their source and with each other reflect the social, historical, and literary contexts in which they were produced. The research builds on fresh critical approaches to medieval translation following the postcolonial turn in translation studies, emphasising the role of the translator in the production of medieval texts and the function performed by translation in medieval England's multilingual and multicultural context. It therefore sees translation as a cultural, rather than a merely linguistic, phenomenon and as a practice that shaped English vernacular literature. As the dates of these texts span over two centuries, this thesis explores the movement of the Merlin section of the Vulgate Arthurian legend as well as its shift from verse to prose in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, and before the composition of Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

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At a more personal level, the completion of this project would never have been possible without the support of a number of people in Wales and Italy. I would like to thank my friends Cristian, Carmen, Maria Cristina and Alberto for the hikes, coffee breaks and delicious dinners; Yaz, Mario, Libero and all my friends at Pulcinella's for feeding me and providing shelter on countless occasions; Sal for welcoming in her home and looking after me; Jenny, Chas and Calum, for teaching me to love the Welsh mountains and the fresh air.

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Abbreviations

AM	*Of Arthour and of Merlin* (copy in the Auchinleck MS)
Auchinleck MS	Edinburgh National Library of Scotland, Advocates MS 19.2.1
BBIAS	*Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*
Cambridge Ff. 3. 11	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 3. 11
Chronicle	*An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, ed. by Ewald Zettl, EETS OS 196 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935)
Corpus Christi 80	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 80
EETS OS	Early English Text Society, Original Series
EETS ES	Early English Text Society, Extra Series
ELH	*English Literary History*
Estoire	Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire de Merlin* (for the editions cited see Sommer and Lacy below)
Hale 150	London, Lincoln's Inn, MS Hale 150
HRB	Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of* De gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae), ed. by Michael D. Reeve and transl. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007)
Lacy	*The Story of Merlin*, in Lancelot-Grail*: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and transl. by Rupert T. Pickens (New York: Garland, 1993-1996), vol. 1 (1993)
Manual	*A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500 A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500*, 11 vols, ed. by J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967-2005), vol. 1 'Romances' (1967)
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
Merlyn	*Of Arthour and of Merlin* in London, Lincoln's Inn, Hale 150
Micha	*Merlin: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1979)
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*

Morte Darthur	*The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3 vols, ed. by Eugene Vinaver, 3rd rev. ed. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Associations of America*
Sommer	*Estoire de Merlin*, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-13), vol. 2 (1908)
TEAMS	*The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages*

Note on the Referencing System

For ease of reference, I have chosen to split the numbering of footnotes by chapter, although a continuous system of referencing will be used throughout the thesis. This implies that, with the exception of the editions of the romances discussed in each chapter, the full reference to a book will be provided the first time the work is cited in the thesis, rather than the first time it is cited in each chapter. *Estoire* is the abbreviation used for the *Estoire de Merlin* in the main text of each chapter. However, the editors' names are specifically used when quoting from the editions of the text – Sommer for the Old French edition and Lacy for the modern English translation of the *Estoire*.

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Introduction

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of three Middle English Arthurian romances deriving from the thirteenth-century Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire de Merlin*.[1] Partly translations, partly re-workings of the Old French Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin*, *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin* display the transformation of the Merlin section of the Arthurian myth in England over two centuries.[2] Although these texts derived from a common source, their translation into Middle English implied much more than the transition from one language to the other. Each author presented the same story as the French source but from very different and, at times, divergent perspectives. By using close textual analysis, this thesis highlights in what ways and with what implications these texts depart from the *Estoire de Merlin*. It considers aspects of authorship and translation, and the relation between these translations and their historical, social and literary contexts. Moreover, this study seeks to release these texts from the rather uncomfortable place they occupy in the canon of English Arthurian literature, as mere forerunners to Thomas Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' in his *Morte Darthur*.[3] It argues instead that the three romances deserve to be examined on their own terms and that the comparison with Malory's *Morte Darthur* or with the *Estoire* should not be a means to categorise these texts as second-rate literature.

Scholars have noted the need for a comparative study of this specific group of romances. Karen Hodder (née Stern) has appealed for 'a more comprehensive comparison between all the English Merlin romances, including the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and Lovelich's fifteenth-century verse romance'. She has suggested that 'there may be many subtle variations between the *Estoire*, Lovelich's *Merlin* and the English prose version, as well as between the two English translations

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[1] Henceforth *Estoire*. *Estoire de Merlin*, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-13), vol. 2 (1908), and *Merlin: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1979). Micha's edition, however, does not comprise the Vulgate *Suite de Merlin*, concluding just after Arthur is crowned King of England.

[2] *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. by O. D. Macrae-Gibson, 2 vols, EETS OS 268, 279 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973-79); *Henry Lovelich's Merlin*, ed. by Ernst A. Kock, 3 vols, EETS ES 93, 112, OS 185 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904-32); *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley, 2 vols, EETS OS 10, 21, 36, 112 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1865-99). The Vulgate Cycle is also known as the Lancelot-Grail Cycle or the Pseudo Map Cycle. For more information about the origins of the *Estoire de Merlin* and its *Suite-Vulgate*, see my discussion of the development of the Vulgate Cycle further on.

[3] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3 vols, ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 3rd rev. ed. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

(emphasised by the difference in literary form between the last two), which have yet to be examined'.[4] John Conlee, the modern editor of the *Prose Merlin*, suggests one compare Malory's *Morte Darthur* and the *Prose Merlin*.[5] These appeals, however, have remained largely unheard. To date no detailed study has been published on each of these romances or, comparatively, on all of them.[6] This thesis seeks to bridge this gap in the scholarship of English Arthurian romance by studying the three English Arthurian romances in parallel with each other and with their common source.

The lack of a comparative study exclusively dedicated to the three English Merlin romances is primarily due to the combination of two simple factors: the romances extensive length compared to most Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances on the one hand, and the lack of adequate modern editions on the other. Even the most fervent of scholars would feel slightly discouraged when approaching these texts for the first time: *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which stands at over 9,000 lines, is still shorter than Lovelich's *Merlin* (about 28,000 lines) whilst the *Prose Merlin*, were it not for a few folios missing at the end of the manuscript, would be as long as the original *Estoire*. As for modern editions, Lovelich's *Merlin*, published by the EETS, lacks, sadly, an introduction, notes, and glossary, as its final volume was never produced – and no other glossed edition of the romance has been published since. The EETS edition of the *Prose Merlin* is completely outdated and reflects an older generation of criticism, which was more interested in the legendary and folkloric roots of the romance, than in discussing the text itself. A new

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[4] See Karen Stern, 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, ed. by Alison Adams *Armel H. Diverres, and Karen Stern* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 112-22 (p. 114) and Karen Hodder, 'Dynastic Romance', in *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Life and Literature*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 80-83 (p. 81).

[5] John Conlee, on the other hand, encourages a comparison between Malory's *More Darthur* and the *Prose Merlin*. *See Prose Merlin*, ed. by John Conlee, *TEAMS* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), p. 1. Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Malory and His English Sources', in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 27-56 (p. 28);

[6] The only study fully dedicated to Lovelich's *Merlin* is James Fitzhugh Ransom, 'A Study of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1962). The only project on the *Prose Merlin* is Rowin Amanda Cross, 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2003). Marcella McCarthy, 'Late Medieval English Treatments of the Grail Story' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1988) is the only study that adopts this kind of methodology, but in relation to the tradition of Middle English Grail romances, *Joseph of Arimathie*, Lovelich's *History of the Holy Grail* and Malory's 'Tale of Sankgreal'.

student-friendly edition of the romance was edited by Conlee and published by *TEAMS* in 1998, but this only comprises a selection of extracts from each chapter.[7]

Whilst editors have dedicated much of their time to the identification of sources, eighteenth and nineteenth-century criticism has mostly focussed on highlighting the failings of these texts by means of a comparison with the *Estoire*. On the one hand, the authors of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and other fifteenth-century translations of the *Estoire* were accused of providing simplified and abridged narratives which had lost the stylistic subtlety of French romance. On the other, Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin* were charged with unoriginality and prolixity due to their close adherence to the source. In both cases, the derivative nature of these three romances has been interpreted as an indication of a lack of originality, and translation considered synonymous with subordination – i.e. to the French original and to the canonical authors of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The competence or incompetence of the translators was used as a major criterion in the assessment of the literary quality of these works and their right to become part of the main canon of Middle English Arthurian romance.

Moreover, previous studies on the history of English Arthurian literature and on Malory's *Morte Darthur* have seen these three romances as part of Malory's inheritance or as different interpretations of the narrative.[8] For instance, Christopher Dean, who looks at the various forms in which Arthurian literature appeared in England over the centuries, does not recognise the differences between the three romances but, instead, draws on and emphasises their (alleged) similarities in terms of plot, purpose and tone. He, however, praises *Of Arthour and of Merlin* for being, of the three, the romance that 'shows most artistic dependence from its source' due to the way its author merged the style of history

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[7] Conlee's edition can also be consulted online at http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/conlee-prose-merlin (retrieved on 27/07/2014).

[8] The following is just an outline of past scholarship on the three romances. More details about the (mainly negative) criticism on each romance will be discussed and questioned in greater depth in the relevant chapters. The romances are also briefly analysed in the canonical surveys of English Arthurian literature and English Arthurian romance. See Helaine Newstead, 'Arthurian Legends', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500*, 11 vols, ed. by J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967-2005), vol. 1 'Romances' (1967), pp. 38-79 (pp. 46-49); W. R. J. Barron, ed., *The Arthur of the English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 80-90. Only passing references can be found in the more recent compendia Douglas Gray, *Later Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.182-84, 386-87 and Barry Windeatt, *The Fifteenth-century Arthur* in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 84-102 (p. 85).

writing and fiction.[9] Dean's stern judgement is an example of how a modern understanding of what makes a successful or unsuccessful translation has been applied in the critical analysis of three romances. This thesis seeks to abandon this perspective and look, instead, at the cultural and social aspects involved in processes of translation.

Like Dean, Richard Moll investigates the historical tradition of English Arthurian writings and only touches on the Middle English romances prior to Malory. He explores English Arthurian literature looking at the relationship between historical and fictional narratives (the chronicle and romance tradition) and how these features influenced and interacted with each other in English Arthurian romances. Moll's approach to Arthurian literature advances the idea that we should not look at Malory's *Morte Darthur* as the 'inevitable culmination' of the Arthurian tradition but that investigating texts prior to Malory can help understand the literary context of Arthurian narratives from which he *Morte Darthur* sprung.[10] However, the main focus of his research is the relation and interaction between chronicle and romance forms and the texts analysed include Thomas Gray's *Scalacronica*, John Trevisa's *Polychronicon* and three romances which he places in that 'grey area' where romance and chronicle intersect – the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[11] Moll does not consider the three English Merlin romances and, in particular, *Of Arthur and of Merlin*, which, as will be shown later, has been shaped by the chronicle tradition.

Focusing primarily on *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin*, Catherine Batt notes how the English texts deriving from the Vulgate Cycle appear as 'readings' of the Arthurian story and as partial and fragmented narratives.[12] According to Batt, unlike their French counterparts, English authors were not interested in conveying a thorough and coherent account of the Arthurian material but in the interpretative potential of their

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[9] Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 68.

[10] Richard Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Late Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 8.

[11] Sir Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica, 1272-1463*, ed., transl., and intro. by Andy King (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis; Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Churchill Babington (London: Longman Press, 1865); Morte Arthure*: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Mary Hamel (New York: Garland, 1984); *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[12] Catherine Batt, *Malory's* Morte Darthur: *Remaking Arthurian Tradition* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 10.

sources.[13] If this is essentially accurate as far as *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is concerned, this thesis will show how this argument does not quite apply to the *Prose Merlin* and Lovelich's *Merlin*. Although the two English authors provided yet another understanding of the narrative, they did not engage in a selection of the original material or combine several sources, as Malory and the author of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* did. On the contrary, for reasons that will be considered at length in the chapters, they undertook a complete translation of a full branch of the Vulgate Cycle. When compared with *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin* display their authors' ambition in preserving the integrity of the narrative; they clearly have in mind an audience who would enjoy the unabridged version of the story.

Using Merlin as the primary thread for his discussion, Stephen Knight briefly touches on the three Middle English Merlin romances in his recent monograph on the transformation of the figure of Merlin from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era.[14] He applies a comparative approach to the three texts and their sources, making important observations on characterisation and characters-interaction. However, he limits analysis to the scenes involving Merlin. Although Merlin clearly figures prominently in the three texts, which is why I explore his presence and function at length, this thesis seeks to look at the three romances more broadly.

In particular, I scrutinize how the three romances and, therefore, the English versions of this particular branch of the Vulgate Cycle, were shaped and defined by translation activity. I will show that the movement of these texts from French to English encompassed a process of adaptation, through which these romances were revised in order to suit the needs of their new English audiences and to reflect historical and social realities that the authors and their audiences would be familiar with.[15] The simplification of narrative structure, the expansion of particular episodes, a more humorous or tragic

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[13] Batt, *Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, p. 19.

[14] Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power through the Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 81-96.

[15] The adjective 'English' is used in this thesis to refer to Middle English unless specified otherwise. 'French' is used to refer to both continental French and the variety of French spoken in England in the Middle Ages, which is commonly known as 'Anglo-Norman'. The linguistic distinction between French and Anglo-Norman will be briefly addressed in Chapter 1 but it is not in the scope of this thesis to focus at length on this matter. Several volumes have appeared on this topic: see Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 9, pp. 308-49, Richard Ingham, ed., *The Anglo-Norman Language and Its Contexts* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al*, eds, *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c. 1500* (York and Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009).

overtone and changes in features such as characterisation and description may demonstrate the nature of the author's undertaking in recreating the text, and may also reveal more about the socio-historical context in which the text was produced and read. Only by comparing the three texts with the *Estoire* and with each other is it possible to fully understand their cultural impact on the history of Middle English Arthurian romance before Malory.

At a time when the boundaries between the meaning of *translatio* (translation) and *expositio* (interpretation) seemed rather blurred, translation represented an author's reading of his source text, and also reflected his response to a change in the expectations and demands of a particular audience. The comparative analysis of texts and sources can be constructive only when it aims to reveal what implications – in terms of audience, authorial intention and socio-historical context – lie behind differences and similarities. This research is based on two assumptions rooted in new approaches to translation theory, which have developed in translation studies and have been adopted by a growing number of scholars of medieval literature during the past three decades. The first is that comparing and contrasting translations and sources should not be a normative process leading to an aesthetic assessment of a text or to a conclusive judgment on its literary value. The second assumption, which is inextricably linked to the previous one, is that past criticism has given too much importance to the ability of the translator as *fidus interpres*, whose skills are judged according to how well he can reproduce the spirit of the original text.

The comparative analysis of translations and their sources has often implied that translations were treated as the second (and secondary) term of comparison and as sub-products of the sources. Since the 1990s scholars of translation studies have increasingly questioned the relationship between source and translation, rejecting the hierarchical view according to which translation is an inferior copy of its source text. New lines of enquiry began to emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of translation studies and how cultural aspects of translation are as equally important as linguistic ones. Lawrence Venuti, for instance, has critiqued the structuralist approach to translation, which saw translations as 'false' copies of their sources, which are themselves original and 'authentic'.[16] He claims that translations are texts 'in their own right' and translation studies should liberate themselves from notions such as the translator's 'invisibility' and the translation's

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[16] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 6-7.

'transparence'.[17] Venuti's work has opened new avenues for research in translation theory, by underlining translation as a 'cultural political practice' whereby the translator makes choices that are subjective and dictated by context. If Venuti has stressed the subjectivity of the translator, he has also voiced the other major point developed by translation studies in recent decades, that target text and source text (original and translation) should not be analysed in isolation but should be placed in the contexts in which translation occurred.[18]

Translation studies have, therefore, tried to develop a new vocabulary for translation, which goes beyond the theory that the translation is a poor reflection of the original. They have also questioned binary notions of fidelity/truth and freedom/falsehood, which had characterised previous approaches to translation. Scholars of translation studies in the last decades have illuminated this approach as a point of weakness in translation theory, claiming that we should stop looking at how right or wrong a translation is and should focus instead on the 'uses' and the 'force' of translation.[19] Tejaswini Niranjana, for instance, has shown how futile it is to apply the binary opposition between truth and falsehood, betrayal and fidelity to translation in the colonial context, where the relationship between languages is determined by political and imperial powers and where asymmetry, in terms of prestige and usage, between languages, is 'perpetuated by imperial rule'.[20]

Similarly, literary critics working on translated texts have tried to disengage from that obsolete 'language of fidelity' which described translation as a process oscillating between the two extremes of freedom and slavishness. Medieval translators' work has often been neglected by those scholars who initially judged translations on the basis of how well these expressed the essence of the source text. As most attention was given to the ability of translators, translations were normally branded derivative pieces of writing without independent literary value. Mirroring the developments of translation studies, a new tendency in critical approaches to Middle English texts has emerged, emphasising the role of the translator in the production of medieval texts and the relationship between translations and sources.[21] The most interesting aspect of this new trend is a re-evaluation

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[17] Venuti, pp. 1-2.

[18] See also Susan Bassnett-McGuire, who finds pointless 'to argue for a definitive translation, since translation is intimately tied up with the context which is made' (Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies*, fourth edition (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 9).

[19] Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 58.

[20] Niranjana, p. 59.

[21] See for example Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn, Nicholas Watson, Ruth Evans, and Andrew Taylor, eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (Exeter:

of translations as aesthetic groupings independent of their source-texts. Re-evaluating Middle English romances that derive from foreign originals first of all requires the adoption of a new methodology that treats translations not as linguistic acts, but rather as, in Warren's words, 'manifestations of culture'.[22] From such a perspective, the study of how translation theory and practice developed over time becomes crucial for our understanding of vernacular culture. This is especially true as far as English medieval literature is concerned in view of the multilingual and multicultural context in which it flourished.[23]

Critics have stressed the social and political aspects involved in the process of translating a romance from foreign originals into Middle English – social difference within audiences, issues of national and local identity and cultural expectations.[24] More recently, there has been a call for a more impartial re-assessment of medieval translation, which would consider, above all, the function performed by translation for its audience. Rosalind Field has investigated the relationship between fourteenth-century Middle English romances and their Anglo-Norman sources, noting that translation should be seen as a straightforward process, based on the interaction of three major factors: the availability of the material that needed to be translated, the demand for translation, and the competence of the translators.[25] Of these three elements, Field believes that the ability of translators and therefore the quality of the final product have been most heeded by scholars. In many cases, the comparative analysis of Middle English translations with their sources has resulted in an evaluation of the translator's competence: in assessing the literary value of

University of Exeter Press, 1999) and Roger Ellis, ed., *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005-2010), vol. 1 'To 1550' (2008).

[22] Warren, 'Translation', in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 51-67 (p. 51). See also Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 7-8.

[23] Multilingualism and the complex relationship between French and English language in medieval England will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

[24] See, for example, Catherine Batt, 'Translation and Society', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture,* ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 123-39; J. D. Burnley, 'Late Medieval English Translation: Types and Reflections', in *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), pp. 37-53; Ivana Djordjević, 'Mapping Medieval Translation', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. by Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows, and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 7-24.

[25] Rosalind Field, 'Patterns of Availability and Demand in Middle English Translations *de romanz*', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 73-89 (pp. 74-75). See also Rosalind Field, 'Popular Romance: The Material and the Problems', in *A Companion to Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 9-30.

Middle English romances, modern editors focused on the question of how accurate they are, often taking a translator's fidelity to his sources as a lack of linguistic fluency.[26]

This also derived from the assumption that the main function of translation was to make a text accessible from one generation of readers to the next, readers who would not be otherwise able to understand it in the original language. This model of translation is not very helpful when considering that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English audiences were immersed in a multilingual context and were much more versatile in switching from French to English than scholars have given them credit for. A new approach to translation is therefore needed, which first of all recognizes the complexity of the relationship between French and English, and that English thrived by virtue of its contact with French. Moreover, we need to acknowledge that the translators' abilities were not simply a matter of linguistic proficiency, but were influenced by social and political factors. Ardis Butterfield, for instance, proposes 'Roughness' – that is the uneven and alleged unskilful nature of late Middle English translated texts – as a resource for the establishment of a new paradigm to interpret 'the character of medieval vernaculars as places of multiple but variable contact between a wide range of linguistic, political and social cultures'.[27]

In line with the new developments in translation theory and literary criticism, this thesis thus seeks to disengage from the idea of translation as a secondary and inferior literary form and to call into question the 'language of fidelity', which has too often resulted in anachronistic value judgements of the literary quality of translations. It approaches the three English Merlin romances from this perspective in the belief that these texts have much to offer to the scholar of Middle English romance, and in the hope that their place in the history of Arthurian romance will be finally reconsidered. Since the three English Merlin romances are distinct interpretations of a single source, their cultural importance consists in the way that they encapsulate different forms taken by the Merlin legend at specific points in history. They also witness to key features that characterize medieval romance in English: its unstable nature, the result of its subjection to a continual process of transformation, and the tight knot which binds Middle English romance to translation activities.

Medieval texts were transmitted from one generation to the next through a constant process of reworking and adaptation. Originality, which in modern times has become the

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[26]In these regards, see my discussion of Lovelich's alleged mistranslation in Chapter 2.

[27]Ardis Butterfield, 'Rough Translation', in *Rethinking Medieval Translation*, ed. by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), pp. 204-25 (p. 210).

major criterion by which the quality of a text can be measured, was an alien concept to medieval writers.[28]Even the most distinguished medieval authors, from Chaucer to Malory, relied on some kind of sources in the composition of their own work, often acting as translators and interpreters. In the Middle Ages, the idea of an author who worked independently of any previous literary tradition was simply inconceivable. For instance, in his theorization of the writing of theology, St. Bonaventure describes four different figures involved in the process of book production: the *scriptor* (scribe), who copies the words of others without adding or changing anything; the *compilator* (compiler), who puts together material written by others; the *commentator* (commentator), who writes someone else's words but adds his own in order to make the argument clearer; the *auctor* (author), who writes the words of other men as well as his own, but uses others just as a way to confirm his own ideas.[29]

Bonaventure's hierarchical classification is relevant to his discussion of authorship and hence it would be inappropriate to transfer it to the situation of vernacular translation – that is, he is not taking into account writers who write works by others in another language. However, it is used here to demonstrate how medieval sensitivity towards the production of texts differed significantly from the modern one. Cautious as we are about issues such as copyright and intellectual property, we would naturally have reservations about a book that extensively draws on someone else's ideas. Bonaventure, instead, does not consider the possibility that a writer might only use his own words, composing a text without relying on somebody else's *auctoritas,* and so implicitly suggests that literature is produced and grows through a cumulative process.

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[28] Eugène Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 54.

[29] St Bonaventure writes: 'Ad intelligentiam dictorum notandum, quod quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit alienam materiam nihil addendo, vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena addendo, sed non de suo: et iste compilator dicitur. Aliquis scribit at aliena, et sua; sed aliena tanquam principalia, et sua tanquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator. Aliquis scribit at sua, et aliena; sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tanquam annexa ad confirmationem: et talis debet dici auctor' (*S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, ed. by A. C. Peltier, vol. 1 (Paris: Ludovicus Vives, 1864), p. 20). 'The method of making a book is fourfold. For someone writes the materials of others, adding or changing nothing, and this person is said to be merely the scribe. Someone else writes the materials of others, adding, but nothing of his own, and this person is said to be the compiler. Someone else writes both the materials of other men, and of his own, but the materials of others as the principal materials, and his own annexed for the purpose of clarifying them, and this person is said to be the commentator, not the author. Someone else writes both his own materials and those of others, but his own as the principal materials, and the materials of others annexed for the purpose of confirming his own, and such must be called author'. (Translation from Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984), p. 94).

Intertextuality, in the sense of an indissoluble relationship between texts and their sources, is therefore one of the most distinctive features of medieval literature. Most medieval texts were not independent creations, but came to exist in a dialogue with something that had been previously written somewhere else by somebody else. This also accounts for the other important feature of medieval literature, which is textual instability. Medieval texts were never created to become finished products but to undergo a process of adaptation. Texts changed just as much as the tastes and expectations of their audiences did.

Romance clearly displays the intertextual and unstable nature of vernacular literature, and its history cannot be disentangled from translation activity.[30] The largest part of Middle English romances produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries derive from a foreign original, written in languages other than English. However, the English translation was just the beginning of the textual process, for the same text could then be copied or re-translated several times, offering parallel readings of the same narrative. The composition of romances was therefore based on a continual process of re-creation and re-elaboration and hence the study of their corpus cannot be separated from that of their sources.

The identification of sources has been an important tool in the reconstruction of the descent of vernacular texts, which represented the primary concern of an earlier generation of criticism.[31] However, the study of sources can reveal key information about authorship and authorial intention, potential and actual audiences, as well as the social and political circumstances that may have played a part in the composition of a text.

The comparative study of texts with their sources, in recent decades, has enabled scholars to reflect on the practice of translation in the late Middle Ages and the theory that underpins it.[32] However, the definition of a medieval translation theory, especially as far as literary translation is concerned, is patchy and inconsistent for several reasons. First and foremost, in the late Middle Ages, translation is anything but a uniform phenomenon.

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[30]To quote Rosalind Field, '[T]he history of English romance has always been seen as predominantly a history of translation'. See Rosalind Field, 'Romance', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, pp. 296-331 (p. 296).

[31] Consider, in particular, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century EETS editions of romances.

[32] See Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle* Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Ruth Evans, *et al.*, 'The Notion of Vernacular Theory', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *et al.* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1999), pp. 314-30; Nicholas Watson, 'Theories of Translation', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, pp. 73-91. Scholarly interest in translation in the Middle Ages and its theorization is also shown by 'The Medieval Translator' conference, which has been held every two years since 1987.

Medieval translators are never keen to explain why and how they intend to use their sources. Save for a few conventional allusions to St Jerome's broad notions of 'word for word' and 'sense for sense', no translator explicitly discusses the technical aspects involved in his work nor his own personal approach to translation. The other conventional way in which translators talk about their work is the use of the humility topos, by which translators present their subordinate, humble status in relation to their real or alleged sources.[33] However, this should not be interpreted so much as a reflection upon the act of translating itself but rather as a rhetorical device typical of late medieval literature. Lovelich himself makes use of this device in his *History of the Holy Grail*, when he humbly describes his poor abilities at translating:

> And I, as an vnkonneng man trewely,
>
> Into Englisch haue drawen this story;
>
> And thowgh that ʒow not plesyng it be,
>
> Ʒt that ful excused ʒe wolde hauen me,
>
> Of my neclegence and vnkonnenge. (*HG*, LVI, ll. 521-25)[34]

Translators, however, never engage in an in-depth discussion of the linguistic challenges they have to face, such as the distance between languages in terms of grammar and vocabulary and how this affects the choices they make when translating (these being well-known issues for modern translators as well as for translation theorists). This has led many to doubt the medieval translators' awareness of any issues of translation theory, and even to question the actual existence of a properly formed theoretical model of translation in the Middle Ages.[35] Another great problem is the lack of consistency in the actual practice of translation as the translators' choices seem to have been influenced by their own individual approach to translation rather than a specific model. Therefore, translation is anything but an easily-definable, uniform phenomenon throughout the Middle Ages and this has delayed scholars' attempts at investigating the work of medieval translators.[36]

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[33] Major poets like Chaucer and Hoccleve employ this device and even Caxton, in the prologues of his translations, spends some words on his deficiencies as a translator. For some examples of the humility topos, see David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH* 54 (1987), 761-99.

[34]*The History of the Holy Grail by Henry Lovelich*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, EETS ES 20, 24, 28, 30, 45 (London, 1874-1905). Hereafter *HG*, cited by chapter and line numbers.

[35] Samuel K. Workman, *Fifteenth Century Translation as an Influence on English Prose* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 84.

[36] With the exception of Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation*, which, however focuses on translation as literary theory, the only study which employs a comparative approach in order to shed some light on the practice of medieval translation is Workman's *Fifteenth Century Translation*. Workman claims

However, a line can be drawn between the translation of romances prior to and after the turn of the fifteenth century. Translation represented a pivotal activity in the production of fifteenth-century romance: as a matter of fact, most romances produced in this period are translations of foreign originals. Moreover, English translation in this period coincided with the gradual change in the literary form of romance from verse to prose. The shift of romance to prose was accompanied by a more rigorous approach to translation as the production of close translations probably resulted from the audience's preference for a more exhaustive rendition of the sources' narrative. This would appear as a phenomenon analogous to that of the movement from verse to prose in the development of the Vulgate Cycle in fourteenth-century France. The adoption of prose enabled the authors to make individual romances more comprehensive and to include as much as possible of the Arthurian world within them.[37]

As far as Middle English romance is concerned the prose romances are by far the most neglected and only in the last twenty years or so has an upsurge of interest in these texts finally emerged, thanks to a re-evaluation of fifteenth-century literary production.[38] Most fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prose romances have remained largely unstudied due to the inadequacy of the modern editions of these texts and their underestimation by scholars.[39] Although a few of the prose romances are believed to have been written in the first half of the century, the great majority appeared between 1460 and 1520, the decades that were defined by Caxton's translations and his publication of the first edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[40] The prose translations produced by Caxton and the other translators during the fifteenth century all share a strong dependence on their originals, often resulting in the replication of the grammatical structures of the source languages.

For a long period, scholars of Middle English romance have struggled with the problem of how to approach close translations: the general tendency has been to dismiss

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that translation from French and Latin into English prose not only had an impact on the development of English prose as a medium for literary discourse, but also sees translation as a method of composition.

[37] Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Re-writing and Re-reading of a Text: The Evolution of the *Prose Lancelot*', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance*, pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

[38] See Cooper's work on prose romances and in particular her 'Counter-Romance: Civil Strife and Father-Killing in the Prose Romances', in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, pp. 141-62, and Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*. See also Megan Leitch, 'Wars of the Roses Literature: Romancing Treason in England, c.1437 – c.1497' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2012).

[39] In these regards, see George R. Keiser, 'The Romances', in *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), pp. 271-89 (p. 271).

[40] The romances produced before and around 1450 are: *The Prose Alexander*, 1400-1450; *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, 1400-1450; *The Sege of Troy*, 1425-1450; *The Sege of Thebes*, ca. 1450; the *Prose Merlin*, ca. 1450; *The Sege of Jerusaleme*, 1450-1500. See Keiser, 'The Romances', pp. 271, 283-86.

literal translations as these were far from being original compositions and hence not worthy of being scrutinized.[41] Some critics have interpreted the translators' methodology as a sign of a lack of style on the part of English writers and labelled their works 'machine-translations' or 'stencil translations' in order to underline the mechanical or even passive nature of this process. Moreover, far too much attention was given to analysing (and undermining) the translators' prose style in comparison with that of their source texts. Malory is believed to be the only exception, having, in Gordon's words, a 'style of his own' in comparison with his contemporaries, and his *Morte Darthur* is usually considered in isolation from the other prose romances.[42] Malory is often contrasted to his contemporaries due to the different approach that guided his composition. Fifteenth-century translators of romance normally worked on a single source from beginning to the end, which did not grant them the same level of freedom as if they were collating material from several sources. The originality of Malory's *Morte* lies instead in the way he re-structured his sources by combining, selecting, abridging and rearranging the material; French romances in prose, English verse romances and chronicle writings. In other words, Malory moved away from the strictest approaches to translation, which had regulated the work of previous prose translators, by acting as an editor rather than as a translator and showing an idiosyncratic approach to his sources. His major skill lies not only in the *inventio* of new material but in the conscientious elaboration of a significant range of texts. It is impossible to say with certainty whether he followed a precise plan of action for his work, but he must have had a broad vision of what he wanted to achieve and hence took the liberty to intervene in the texts accordingly. This explains why the comparison between Malory and his contemporaries has always been to the detriment of the latter.

For other critics, keeping a translation close to the original was a means of retaining the quality (especially in terms of style) of the original narrative and, being the fifteenth century at a time of 'restless experimentation' during which English prose was slowly taking shape, translators needed to imitate French and Latin originals in order to be able to raise the standard of their own writing.[43] According to Samuel Workman, for instance, it

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[41] A. E. B. Coldiron, 'William Caxton', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, pp. 160-69.

[42] According to Gordon, for instance, Malory uses a language that 'looks at the past in terms of vocabulary and syntax' so that his style is deliberately 'artefact', see Ian A. Gordon, *The Movement of English Prose* (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 65-7. See also P. J. C. Field, *Romance and Chronicle: A Study of Malory's Prose Style* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1971), pp. 62-68.

[43] Gordon, *The Movement*, p. 57.

was the processes of translation and imitation that provided writers with the 'structural technique' necessary to develop their own style.[44] However, these are outmoded ways of looking at prose translation and fit in that view that, on one hand, the translation is second to the source and that, on the other, the translator should aim at reproducing the essence (be it the content or the style) of the original. Recent criticism has also questioned to what extent the English language developed thanks to the influence of French; highlighting how much more needs to be done in the study of fifteenth-century English and its complex relationship with French.[45]

We should not dismiss prose romances as mere translations but rather ask why there was such a great demand for close translations in the fifteenth century and why the new reading public should favour literal translations to re-elaborations. For example, the shift from verse to prose romances did not necessarily involve a change in the social background of their audiences but mostly a change in their expectations. This is demonstrated by the similarity of the social background between the supposed audience of Lovelich's *Merlin* and that of the fragment of the *Prose Merlin*: despite the different medium, both romances are likely to have appealed to a middle class audience, signalling its interest in Arthurian and chivalric themes.[46]

The shift of Middle English romance from verse to prose occurred quite late in comparison to its continental counterpart. In particular, the French prose of the Vulgate Cycle, which saw its origins in Robert de Boron's triptych of verse romances, was composed in the early thirteenth century. Despite the wide dissemination of the copies of the Vulgate Cycle romances amongst fourteenth- and fifteenth-century aristocratic families, the Middle English versions of the Cycle were unaffected by this innovation for over a century.[47] Even though prose had been the preferred form for other literary genres in England – chronicles and religious writing, for example – Middle English romance displays a resistance to the new medium. The shift to prose was not as abrupt as one would have expected, as prose and verse romances coexisted during the whole of the century.

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[44] Workman, *Fifteenth Century Translation*, pp. 28-29.
[45] Butterfield, 'Rough Translation', p. 224.
[46] This will be discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3.
[47] In these regards, see Roger Middleton, 'Manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* in England and Wales: Some Books and their Owners', in *A Companion to the* Lancelot-Grail Cycle, ed. by Carol Dover (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 219-36, and Carol Meale, 'Manuscripts, Readers, and Patrons in Fifteenth-Century England; Sir Thomas Malory and Arthurian Romance', *Arthurian Literature* 4, ed. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), pp. 93-126.

The reason for this is the lack of surviving earlier English prose romances and that, unlike other literary genres, Middle English authors and translators lacked authoritative models to emulate – Chaucer is, perhaps, the only exception, and critics have shown how the courtly style of his poetry has not only influenced the poetry but also the prose of the period.[48] Another reason is the nature of romance itself, which is notably unstable; as a genre constantly open to transformation and contamination, romance had the plasticity necessary to evolve, moulding itself according to the tastes and demands of ever-changing audiences. This is especially valid for Middle English romance, whose fluid corpus has proved to be problematic to define according to clear-cut categories.

In view of the great diversity in narrative styles, themes, structure and form that characterizes Middle English romance, its history appears as a multi-faceted phenomenon in which generic borders are continually re-defined. Past literary criticism has engaged in several attempts to form a taxonomy of romance based on generic distinction and reflecting preoccupations, which are typical of modern scholarship, but would have been alien to medieval audiences. The mainstream classification, due perhaps to its functionality for the companions and anthologies of medieval romance, is still one that prioritizes subject over form or date of composition, dividing romance into 'Matters' – the Matter of Rome, France and Britain.[49]

However, it is generally agreed that the use of a classification based on 'matters' carries the risk of associating romances that have nothing in common apart from themes, whilst overlooking key elements such as style, structure, and originality. Recent criticism has therefore tried to challenge previous taxonomies seeking other criteria that would emphasise these features, aligning romances that would not otherwise be associated, and changing our perspective of how Middle English romance has developed through time. Rhiannon Purdie's monograph on tail-rhyme romance treats this verse form, which is unique to English romance, as if it were a distinct genre, investigating its origins and

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[48] Norman Francis Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), p. 124.

[49] While the Matter of England is a modern invention, it was the late twelfth-century French poet Jean Bodel who first proposed the broad division of medieval romance into the three Matters of France, Rome and Britain. Bodel's classification is the only medieval attempt to classify romances. However, as critics have recently shown, Bodel's classification was not the result of a detailed discussion, but appears in the opening of his *Chanson des Saisnes* as a means to qualify the content of his own work. See Rosalind Field, 'The Curious History of the Matter of England', in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 29-42 (p. 29). Barron uses this kind of classification in his survey of Middle English romance; see W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 57-60.

transmission in time and geographical space.[50] In her article on Middle English fourteenth-century romance, Rosalind Field attempts a new classification of romances in terms of their relationship with their French-language sources, looking at the history of romance as a mirror of translation activity.[51]

To the scholar of romance, the three English *Merlin* romances represent a valuable case study for an investigation of the transformation of romance from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, as the movement of the Merlin story echoes the general trend of romance in this period and its dependence on translation.[52] On the one hand, we have a continuation and further elaboration of verse romance as shown by the composition of Lovelich's *Merlin* and several fifteenth-century copies of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which fed into a certain continuity of taste and expectations on the part of their English audiences. On the other, the *Prose Merlin* accounts for the gradual rise of prose romances and a tendency amongst English romancers to translate their sources exhaustively.

In the following chapters I will explore how the three English Merlin romances exhibit divergences in translation practices in the fourteenth and fifteenth century as well as the transition from verse to prose romance occurring at the mid-fifteenth century. The relationship of each romance with the *Estoire* and with each other will be discussed in depth in the three chapters of this thesis and detailed textual analysis will be provided. In some cases, and especially in Chapter 3, significant portions of each text will be used in order to better document the innovations introduced by the Middle English translators.

The first chapter focuses on *Of Arthour and of Merlin,* the oldest Arthurian romance written in the English vernacular.[53] *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is the text that has been scrutinized with most attention for its nationalistic concern and the remarkable presence of Saracens in the narrative, including the crusade-like depiction of the battles between Saxons and Britons.[54] Its prologue is quoted in many modern anthologies for its explicit

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[50] Rhiannon Purdie, *Anglicising Romance: Tail-Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S Brewer, 2008).

[51] Rosalind Field, 'Patterns of Availability and Demand', pp. 73-89.

[52] Critics have urged the need for further research on the connection of prose romances with their verse predecessors. For instance, according to Pearsall, this would be essential in order 'to get a true sense of the narrative skill among the authors and to show how they continued the tradition of their English predecessors' (Keiser, 'The Romances', p. 281).

[53] Although Laȝamon's *Brut* may also present some elements that are characteristic of the romance genre, it is here considered a chronicle. Chapter 1 will look at how *Of Arthour and of Merlin* was influenced by the chronicle tradition and will also offer some comparisons between the romance and *Laȝamon's* Brut.

[54] Elizabeth Sklar was the first scholar to focus on this aspect of the romance in a brief essay. See Elizabeth Sklar, '*Arthour and Merlin*: The Englishing of Arthur', *Michigan Academician* 8 (1975-6), 49-57. See also Thorlac Turville-Petre's discussion of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* in his *England the Nation: Language,*

defence of written English and taken as a testimony of the rise of the English vernacular in contemporary literary discourse. More recently, Knight has recognized that *Of Arthour and of Merlin* played a key role in shaping a portrait of Merlin that is distinctly English. Knight claims that, in drawing on Layamon's *Brut* rather than Wace's *Roman de Brut,* the author of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* initiated the transformation of Merlin from wizard to national prophet and political counsellor.[55]

Of Arthour and of Merlin enjoyed great success in England through the late Middle Ages and beyond; it was copied at least five times until the seventeenth century. By means of a comparative analysis, the chapter will consider the two very different versions of the romance contained in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, also known as the Auchinleck manuscript (c.1330, henceforth Auchinleck MS), and in London, Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 (c.1425). Many elements in the text show that the Auchinleck version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* narrates the same events as those occurring in the *Estoire*, but with a radical change in perspective. The text was tailored to the tastes of an audience familiar with the Arthurian legend through the chronicle tradition and the circulation of French Arthurian romances, but who favoured literature written in English. Moving away from the *Estoire*, the author of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* demonstrates great versatility in selecting, rearranging, altering, reducing, expanding and omitting the material of his source.

On the one hand, as demonstrated by a number of studies focusing on the romance, the variations contained in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* illustrate the intention of its author to adjust and adapt the material taken from the French source so as to make it suitable to a later non-French-speaking audience. On the other hand, the romance integrates the French material with elements and features deriving from the chronicles: changes to the order of the narrative, episodes, and characters enable the author to comfortably fit the romance plot into an historical framework. As will be explained in the relevant chapter, these changes affect the way the romance can be classified in terms of literary genre, and raise

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Literature and National Identity 1290-1340 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Helen Young, *Constructing England in the Fourteenth Century: A Postcolonial Interpretation of Middle English Romance* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010); Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (London: Routledge, 2005) and Felicity Riddy, 'Reading for England: Arthurian Literature and National Consciousness', *BBIAS* 53 (1991), 314-32.

[55] Knight, *Merlin*, pp. 85-89. See also Geraldine Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), who explores the connection and the interrelation between good counsel and good kingship in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and other Matter of England romances.

the question of whether the original audience would perceive its fictional content as historically accurate, or was at all aware of, and interested in, distinctions of genre.

The analysis will demonstrate that the original text has been historicised on two grounds; firstly, its narrative has been modified and rearranged in order for it to fit into the canon of historical writing. Many variations, such as a new organization of the events in the plot, show the clear influence of chronicle accounts of the story. Secondly, the romance was adapted to reflect and explore themes and preoccupations that were relevant to its early fourteenth-century audience. In particular, the variations contained in the romance highlight a discourse over the principles of good kingship based on the perpetuation of royal lineage.[56]

The second part of the chapter will focus instead on *Merlyn*, the version of the romance contained in London, Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150, which was produced just a century after the Auchinleck MS. The *Merlyn* scribe did not just copy the romance but intervened in the composition of the text by means of extensive abridgements, revisions and alterations. Studying the revisions contained in *Merlyn* is not only important in order to fully appreciate the cultural significance of the two romances: a comparison between the texts can also prove useful in gaining an improved understanding of how the Arthurian story had changed from the early fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. Through a detailed comparison with its predecessor, it will be shown that *Merlyn* and *Of Arthour and of Merlin* approach the narrative of the *Estoire* from contrasting perspectives.

As mentioned above, *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is anchored in the chronicles and presents the Arthurian story as part of British and, in particular, English history. In contrast, the author of *Merlyn* focused entirely on Merlin, omitting the historical foundations of Merlin's story by starting his narration with Merlin's conception and birth. Moreover, the author seems to have expanded on what must have been considered the most entertaining episodes of the story. When looking at the prologue of *Merlyn* as well as other key episodes, it will be shown that the author worked according to different principles, which greatly affected the tone and style of the narrative. Other revisions and expansions in the text have enhanced the entertaining potential of the romance, marking the interaction between author and audience – a listening public as the romance was most likely read aloud or recited. The revisions contained in *Merlyn* mark a fundamental stage

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[56] This discussion was inspired by the reading of Barnes's *Counsel and Strategy*, which explores the connection and the interrelation between good counsel and good kingship in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and other Matter of England romances.

in the history of this romance as well as in the transmission of the Arthurian story as it enters the fifteenth century: the disappearance of the historical frame and the reworking of the story so as to reflect the new audience's interests and expectations.

Chapter Two focuses on Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, the second Middle English translation of the *Estoire*. This romance was composed by one of the most atypical figures in the panorama of English Arthurian literature: the amateur translator Henry Lovelich. At a time when the greater part of the production of Middle English romance was entrusted to professional scribes and translators, Lovelich's occupation as a skinner and member of one of the great London Companies would take scholars by surprise. However, critics have not been as magnanimous in their judgement of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin* as they have been with *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. Lovelich's monumental albeit amateurish work on the first two branches of the Vulgate Cycle contributed to the building of his reputation, in the words of Robert W. Ackerman, as 'the most clumsy and tedious poet of the fifteenth century'.[57] Even though critics have called for further research on this author and in particular on his *Merlin*, the romance has been dismissed for its poor literary quality and its strong similarity to the French source.[58] Most criticism has focussed on Lovelich's approach to translation, noting that in turning the French prose into English verse he was unsuccessfully seeking to replicate the work of the professional translators in the London scriptoria, who had played a pivotal role in the production and circulation of Middle English romance since the previous century.[59] In recent years, however, a growing interest in Lovelich's work has helped salvage his reputation. Codicological and palaeographical research has shed more light on the figure of Lovelich and his affiliation to a specific network of acquaintances – the twice mayor of London Harry Barton and the scribe John Cok – as well as on the early modern audience of his manuscript.[60] Roger Dalrymple and

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[57] See William Edward Mead, 'Outlines of the History of the Legend of Merlin', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, pp. ccxlii-lviii; Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, p. 152. Robert W. Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's Name', *MLN* 67 (1952), 531-33 (p. 531).

[58] Roger Dalrymple, '"Evele knowen ȝe Merlyne, jn certeyne": Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', in *Medieval Insular Romance,* ed. by Weiss, *et al*., pp. 155-67.

[59] Robert W. Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', *PMLA* 67 (1952), 473-84 (p. 473). It is generally recognized that the best example of this sort of production is the Auchinleck MS, the result of the close collaboration of a number of scribes who translated many French romances into English. For further information, see my discussion of the origins of the Auchinleck MS as well as Laura Hibbard Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible London Bookshop of 1330-1340', in *Adventures in the Middle Ages: A Memorial Collection of Essays and Studies by Laura Hibbard Loomis* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1962), pp. 150-87.

[60] Carol Meale, '"Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men": Romance and Its Audiences', in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol Meale (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 209-25.

Michelle Warren have noted how some subtle changes introduced by Lovelich in the narrative of the *Estoire* (especially in terms of lexis) show evidence of the urban social reality in which he lived.[61] Raluca L. Radulescu has investigated Lovelich's interest in the history of the Grail in her new monograph on fifteenth-century romance in England.[62]

The first part of this chapter will look at the relationship between Lovelich's *Merlin*, the *Estoire*, and the *Prose Merlin*, whose origins are closely connected to those of Lovelich's romance.

The second part of the chapter will look at paleaographical evidence that has led to the identification of Lovelich as the author of his romances. It will also discuss Lovelich's poor reputation amongst scholars and the mainly negative criticism received by his romance in the last century or so, with particular attention to Lovelich's infamous mistranslations.

The third part will discuss the stylistic features of Lovelich's *Merlin* against the background of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English Arthurian romance. It will show how Lovelich's translating techniques differ from those of the English romancers in the previous century and especially from the author of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, and why I would define Lovelich's *Merlin* as a 'French romance written in English'.

The fourth and final section will place the figure of Lovelich among the merchants of fifteenth-century London. Palaeographical evidence has enabled scholars to identify Lovelich's network of acquaintances in the capital, first among them Harry Barton, a prominent member of the Skinners' Company who held the office of Sheriff and Mayor of London in the first three decades of the fourteenth century. Textual evidence will also demonstrate Lovelich's participation in the civic scene of the capital and how the romance reflects his origin and occupation, as well as his view of contemporary social reality.

Chapter Three will consider the English *Prose Merlin*, the third translation of the *Estoire* into Middle English. The *Prose Merlin* has remained largely unexplored due to its strict dependence on the *Estoire* and its subordinate relationship (in terms of literary value) to Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. These two aspects have served as treacherous hurdles rather than aspects urging further critical investigation, seemingly relegating this

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[61] See Dalrymple, 'Evele knowen' and Warren, 'Translation', pp. 51-67.
[62] Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013).

text to the same treatment given to most Middle English prose romances.[63] For too long, criticism on the *Prose Merlin* had been limited to a handful of hurried references in a few anthologies and general surveys on the development of Middle English Arthurian romance.[64] Here the *Prose Merlin* is described as an interim work between the earlier Middle English Merlin romances and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and, more broadly, as the product of the gradual transition of Middle English romance from verse to prose. It is only in the last three decades that the *Prose Merlin* seems to have finally drawn the attention of scholars.[65] Whilst Meale looks at the manuscript's codicological evidence in order to identify the romance's late medieval and early modern readership, Stern intrepidly counters decades of assumptions and harsh criticism on the romance by pointing out the flaws of Henry B. Wheatley's EETS edition of the text. Both scholars join the chorus of critics, among whom Edward Donald Kennedy and the second editor of the romance Conlee, in urging the need for further research on the *Prose Merlin*.[66]

The choice by the *Prose Merlin*'s translator to use prose sets the romance apart from the previous English renditions of the *Estoire* and from the rest of Arthurian romances, for which verse was still the preferred medium during the first half of the fifteenth century. This innovation will be seen as an opportunity to trace the transformation, in terms of audiences and their expectations, of this portion of the Arthurian story before it was moulded in its final and most accomplished shape in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

The chapter will investigate and contrast the argument according to which the *Prose Merlin* is a very straightforward prose translation of its French source. It will be shown that in the fifteenth century, adhering to the original texts was the norm rather than the exception and that the *Prose Merlin* translator has been unfairly compared with Malory and his unusual *modus operandi* – a comparison that could not but result in further neglect of his romance in modern studies – when his work should instead be related to the

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[63] See Helen Cooper, 'Prose Romances', in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. by A. G. S. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 215-29, and Keiser, 'The Romances', in *Middle English Prose*.

[64] See for example Barry Windeatt, 'The Fifteenth-Century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 84-102 (p. 85); Weinberg, *The Arthur of the English,* pp. 80-2. See also Robert W. Ackerman, 'English Rimed and Prose Romances', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 480-519 (p. 485).

[65] See Carol Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audiences of the Middle English *Prose Merlin*', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance*, pp. 92-111; Stern, 'The Middle English', pp. 112-22.

[66] Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Malory and His English Sources', in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 27-56 (p. 28); Conlee, *Prose Merlin*, p. 1-12. Sterne, 'The Middle English', p. 114; Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audiences', p. 93.

production of romances by the professional translators in late medieval London workshops.

Finally, it will be shown that the *Prose Merlin* is, in fact, anything but identical to its source; small but significant changes to the original can be found, and these demonstrate the *Prose Merlin* translator's intention to adapt a thirteenth-century French romance to a fifteenth-century English audience. By exploring the nature of these changes and their implications, it will be noted that these refer to chivalry and its code of ideals – which is one of the most important themes in the *Prose Merlin* and in the *Estoire*. Close readings of some central passages will demonstrate that, by means of subtle omissions and rewordings, the *Prose Merlin* translator was not always translating mechanically – as some critics have erroneously assumed – but possessed a certain degree of ability in interpreting the original text and reshaping it accordingly. The literary merit of the *Prose Merlin*, one of the most debated aspects of this text, should therefore be reconsidered in view of these striking interventions; only then will the *Prose Merlin*'s literary merits be freed from Malory's shadow and brought into the light as a work that deserves to be read and studied in its own right.

However, before delving into comparative analysis of the three romances and their common source, it is important to explain how the three English *Merlin* romances came to exist and the specific characteristics which link them to or detach them from their source. The following introductory material will, therefore, offer a brief account of the complex origins of the Vulgate Cycle and its second branch, the *Estoire de Merlin*, so as to clarify some aspects that will be referred to in the chapters.

The Vulgate Cycle (also known as the Lancelot-Grail Cycle or the Pseudo-Map Cycle) was composed in the early thirteenth century, most probably between 1215 and 1235.[67] It is the longest vernacular collection of prose texts on Arthurian subjects, merging the complex corpora of Arthurian and Grail narratives, and combining secular and religious history. The Cycle relates the history of the Grail, the story of Merlin and the foundation of the Round Table, Arthur's birth and life, Lancelot and Guenevere's love, the Grail quest accomplished by Galahad, and the final decline of the Arthurian world. Although the various sections were written at different stages and according to different principles, they came to form the most coherent and exhaustive account of the Arthurian story to have circulated in the medieval world.

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[67] See Miranda Griffin, 'The Space of Transformation: Merlin between Two Deaths', *Medium Aevum* 80:1 (2011), 85-103 (p. 86), for a concise summary on the dating and the composition of the Vulgate Cycle.

The authorship of the Cycle is unknown and its provenance unclear, but most manuscripts are known to have been produced in the North-East of France, which is now part of Flanders in Belgium.[68] Most scholars agree on the Cycle's multiple authorship: it is possible that each romance or branch was composed by different authors and that such authors were working under the guidance of a supervisor/editor – in Frappier's words an 'architect' – who had carefully planned the structure of the original Cycle.[69] This theory offers an explanation for the complex interlaced structure of the Cycle, where episodes are interrupted to be completed at a later stage of the narrative, and flashbacks and flashforwards make reference to previous and following branches. The Cycle, as we know it from the extant medieval manuscripts, consists of five interconnected romances: the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the *Estoire de Merlin* with its continuation (*Suite du Merlin*), the *Prose Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Mort le roi Artu*.[70]

However, the evidence of the extant manuscripts containing combinations of the various romances demonstrates that the Cycle was initially designed as a trilogy containing the *Prose Lancelot*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort le roi Artu*, whilst the other two romances, the *Estoire del saint Graal* and *Estoire de Merlin*, were added at a later stage so as to provide the Cycle with a sort of prequel which would relate its historical and religious foundations. The authors of the Cycle drew their material from a number of sources, mainly from the early verse romances by Robert de Boron and Chrétien de Troyes, but also from the Celtic legends about Merlin, the chronicle tradition initiated by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*.[71] Boron's trilogy of verse romances (*Joseph d'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and *Perceval*) dates to around 1200, but only its first part, the *Joseph*, and the beginning of the second, the *Merlin*, have survived in their verse form.[72] The trilogy was then expanded and turned into prose. However, Linda Gowans has contested this general view, claiming that Robert de

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[68] Middleton, 'Manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle',* p. 219.

[69] See Jean Frappier, 'The Vulgate Cycle', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, pp. 295-318. See Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Making of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*', in *A Companion to the* Lancelot-Grail Cycle, pp. 13-22 (p. 13).

[70] An edition of the Vulgate Cycle's romances is in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-13).

[71] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of* De gestis Britonum(Historia Regum Britanniae), ed. by Michael D. Reeve and transl. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), henceforth *HRB*;
's Roman de Brut*: A History of the British: Text and Translation*, ed. and transl. by Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), hereafter *Brut*.

[72] Fanny Bodganow, 'The *Vulgate Cycle* and the *Post-VulgateRoman du Graal*', in *A Companion to the* Lancelot-Grail Cycle, pp. 33-54 (p. 33).

Boron composed his texts in prose and that what has survived is in fact a versification of de Boron's original work.[73] Whichever view is endorsed, it is important to note that instability and a disposition towards transformation are characteristics of the Merlin story from the early days of its history in Europe. When the story finally reaches England, English authors make the most of this feature presenting their fresh readings of the story, varying greatly at both the level of content and that of form. Although the three English Merlin romances relate the same story, drawing from and further developing the narrative of the *Estoire*, they differ greatly in the approach taken by their authors and in the medium in which they are written – two in verse and one in prose. They are all unique in one way or another. *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is the earliest surviving Arthurian romance in the English language, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin* was composed by one of the few authors of medieval romance whose name is known and the *Prose Merlin* is (as far as we know from the evidence) the first Arthurian romance ever written in English prose. Whilst *Of Arthour and of Merlin* should be read as a key text, in that it triggered the growth of an English tradition of Arthurian romance focusing on Arthur and Merlin, the other two are testimonies to the enduring success of the subject in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

With its forty-six surviving copies and eight fragments, the *Estoire* enjoyed great success during the Middle Ages, both on the continent and in England.[74] However, its textual origins are as problematic as that of the Vulgate Cycle: it was first composed as a sequel to an earlier Grail romance, *Joseph d'Arimathie* (or *Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal*) and to follow *Perceval*, becoming part of the triptych of romances attributed to Robert de Boron.[75] De Boron's *Merlin* recounts only the dawning of the Arthurian myth – Vortiger's usurpation of the English throne, the story of Merlin's origins and early life, the return of Uther and Pendragon to England – ending after the episode of the sword in the stone and Arthur's coronation. It was only around 1220-35 that a modified version was integrated into the longer and more exhaustive Vulgate Cycle as a means to connect the narrative of the *Estoire de Saint Graal* and that of *Lancelot*. In this new version, a continuation of the romance, the *Suite du Merlin*, was added to the *Merlin*, forming the

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[73] See Linda Gowans, 'What Did Robert de Boron Really Write?', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 15-28.

[74] Alexandre Micha, 'Les manuscrits du *Merlin* en prose de Robert de Boron', *Romania* 79 (1958), 78-94.

[75] Annie Combes, 'The *Merlin* and its *Suite*', in *A Companion to the* Lancelot-Grail Cycle, pp. 75-86 (p. 77).

version of the *Estoire* as we know it nowadays.[76] Although they sit next to each other in the Cycle, the *Merlin* and its Vulgate *Suite* differ greatly from each other. On the one hand, the *Merlin* provided the Cycle with the historical and religious foundation to the Arthurian world and placed the Arthurian story in a broader eschatological frame.[77] On the other, the Vulgate *Suite* was added to allow time to pass, anticipating, in its endless sequence of battles and chivalric endeavours, the destruction of the Round Table and the final collapse of Arthurian society. The addition of the Vulgate *Suite* provided the fragmented cycle with the cohesion that it initially lacked and solved some problems of chronology and structure.[78]

The various branches of the Vulgate Cycle have survived in 220 manuscripts, but only nine of these comprise the cycle in its complete form.[79] At least a third of the surviving manuscripts are believed to have been in England and Wales at some point in their history.[80] Roger Middleton has found that more than half of the manuscripts of the Vulgate Cycle written or circulating in England contain individual texts, with the *Estoire del saint Graal* and the *Estoire* often found together as though they were one romance.[81] These two sections of the Cycle are also the ones that more often attracted the attention of English authors and translators throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. If Lovelich's translation of the *Estoire del saint Graal* demonstrates an interest in the origins of Christianity in Britain as well as in the Christian foundation of the Arthurian legend, the three English Merlin translations of the *Estoire* and Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' bear evidence of the English audiences' enduring interest in British (legendary) history. Moreover, the English adaptations of the *Estoire* testify that translation in its various forms – from re-working to word-for-word renditions – has been a vital activity for

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[76] Henceforth Vulgate *Suite*. Note that the Vulgate *Suite* should not be confused with its later rewriting, the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* or *Huth Merlin*, which was composed at least a decade after the Vulgate *Suite* and incorporated into the Post-Vulgate Cycle.

[77] Combes, 'The *Merlin*', p. 77.

[78] Combes, 'The *Merlin*' p. 83. Approximately ten years divide the composition of the *Merlin* from that of the next branch *Lancelot*. This is reflected in the two narratives, which, being written independenlty and at different stages, are interrupted by a long chronological gap: at the end of the *Estoire*, Arthur is about fifteen years old when he is crowned after he has drawn the sword from the stone; he then reappears as a middle-aged man at the beginning of the *Lancelot*. The other inconsistency regards Merlin, who in the *Estoire* is extolled as the *deus ex machina* behind the establishment of Arthur's reign but is already out of the scene when the *Lancelot* begins. Thanks to its extensive length, the Vulgate *Suite* allowed characters to age and made possible the insertion of the episode of Merlin's imprisonment.

[79] Miranda Griffin, *The Object and the Cause in the Vulgate Cycle* (London: Legenda, 2005), pp. 2-3.

[80] Middleton, 'Manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail*', p. 219.

[81] Middleton, 'Manuscripts', p. 234.

European cultural and literary development, enabling the accessibility and the circulation of foreign texts and, more importantly, allowing the transmission of the Vulgate Cycle all over Europe.

Chapter 1 – *Of Arthour and of Merlin*

This chapter will consider *Of Arthour and of Merlin,* the oldest Arthurian romance written in the English vernacular.[1] It will investigate the two very different versions of the romance: *AM*, from National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, known as the Auchinleck MS, and *Merlyn*, a fifteenth-century copy which is extant in London Lincoln's Inn, MS Hale 150.[2] Detailed comparisons will show that *Merlyn* and *AM* differ greatly from their major source – the Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire* – in that they approach the narrative from contrasting perspectives.[3] On the one hand, the *AM* poet historicised the material taken from the *Estoire* by anchoring it to the chronicles' tradition, presenting the Arthurian story as part of English national history and Arthur as its greatest king. On the other, the *Merlyn* poet moved the focus of the narrative exclusively onto Merlin and expanded on what he must have considered the most entertaining episodes of the story.

The first part of the chapter will introduce *AM* and investigate the history of the manuscript where the text survives, the Auchinleck MS, whilst the second section will look at the well-known prologue of the romance. The prologue of *AM* is not just a testimony of the linguistic fragmentation of early fourteenth-century England, but also provides some information on the intended function and audience of the text. It will be shown that the author of the prologue envisaged the romance as instructional material for an audience that would comprise children as well as adults.

The third part of the chapter will look at the two ways by which the *AM* poet historicized the narrative of the *Estoire*: firstly, by using the chronicles, and in particular Wace's *Brut*, as secondary sources for his composition; secondly, by modifying his source

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[1] Henceforth *AM* (always and only referring to the Auchinleck version of the text) and cited by line number only. The romance was first edited by William Turnbull in 1838 and by Eugene Kölbing in 1890. See *Arthour and Merlin*, ed. by William B. Turnbull (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1838) and *Arthour and Merlin, nach der Auchinleck-hs*, ed. by Eugene Kölbing (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1890).

[2] For the sake of clarity, the copy of *AM* contained in London Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 will hereafter be referred to as *Merlyn*, as this is the title commonly used by scholars. The edition of *AM* and *Merlyn* consulted and quoted in this chapter is *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. by O. D. Macrae-Gibson, 2 vols, EETS OS 268, 279 (London, 1973-79), cited by line number only.

[3] Citations of the *Estoire* in this and the following chapters are from *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 8 vols (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908-13), vol. 2 (1908) (henceforth Sommer, cited by page number) and, only when necessary, *Merlin: roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. by Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1979) (henceforth Micha, cited by page number). The modern English translations of the quotations from the *Estoire* are from *The Story of Merlin*, in Lancelot-Grail*: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, 5 vols, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and transl. by Rupert T. Pickens (New York: Garland, 1993-1996), vol. 1 (1993) (henceforth Lacy, cited by page number).

material so as to highlight specific themes of concern for him and his audience – the need for a kingdom to have a rightful king, chivalry as a major requirement to attain kingship, and religious war.

The final section of the chapter will provide a comparison between *AM* and the *Merlyn*, shedding some light on the different perspectives from which the two texts were composed. Whilst *AM* can be seen as a hybrid instructive text which combines features of chronicle and romance, the *Merlyn* poet's desire to entertain his audience as attested by his predilection for description, dialogue and comic scenes initiates a new phase in the transmission of the story of Merlin in England.

1.1   *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and the Auchinleck Manuscript

Of Arthour and of Merlin must have enjoyed some success in England throughout the late Middle Ages and beyond, as it was copied several times until the seventeenth century. The romance is known to be extant in five manuscripts: the earliest and most complete version of the romance – more than 9,900 lines of text – was composed around 1330 and survives in the Auchinleck MS (Edinburgh National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.2.1).[4] Fifteenth-century abridged versions of the romance include London Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 (c.1425);[5] Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 236, produced in the early fifteenth century; and London British Library MS Harley 6223, dating to the late fifteenth century and containing only a fragment of the text. Part of the text also appears in the famous seventeenth-century Percy Folio, London British Library MS Additional 2787.

The Auchinleck MS, one of the earliest and largest collections of Middle English texts, was produced in the 1330s and is well known amongst scholars for being written almost entirely in English and for its distinctly English character.[6] The book contains a

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[4] A facsimile edition of the Auchileck manuscript is: *The Auchinleck Manuscript: National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS. 19.2.1*, intr. by Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham (London: Scolar Press, 1977). The manuscript has also been digitised and is available online at http://auchinleck.nls.uk (retrieved on 18 October 2013).

[5] Henceforth Hale 150.

[6] The *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* provides the *terminus a quo* for the composition of the manuscript as it ends with a reference to the death of Edward II (1327) and a prayer for his successor, the young king Edward III. This implies that the book was produced in the 1330s. See *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, ed. by Ewald Zettl, EETS OS 196 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 105-107. For the Auchinleck manuscript 's English character, see Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*; Sklar, '*Arthour and Merlin*'; Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*. Turville-Petre's and Calkin's

total of forty-four texts ranging from religious to secular subjects: saints' lives and religious poems are placed in the first part of the manuscript, whilst most of the romances, the historical and political texts occupy the centre and the end of the collection. The variety of texts and their arrangement suggest that the manuscript was intended for a secular audience and designed to meet the diverse demands of a household.[7]

 Scholars have debated the early ownership of the manuscript for decades, putting forward a number of different theories. In view of the scale of the project and quality of the manuscript, most scholars now believe that a wealthy 'aspirant middle-class' family, belonging, perhaps, to the merchant class, commissioned the manuscript.[8] Peter Coss has also argued for the possibility that a buyer from the country gentry might have bought the book when visiting London on judicial or parliamentary business.[9] As for the process involved in the production of the manuscript, it is likely that the copying/composition of the texts had been delegated to several scribes, and that the texts were assembled at a second stage. Palaeographical evidence shows that the book resulted from the collaboration of multiple copyists, even though the number of people partaking in the project as well as their *modus operandi* is still under debate.[10] Recent studies have singled

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arguments will be referred to in greater detail in the relevant sections of this chapter. See also Diane Speed, 'The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance', in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, pp. 135-58, and Robert Allen Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), esp. ch. 4. A few exceptions are the French expressions that can be found in *AM* and other texts in the manuscript, which I consider later in this chapter.

[7] Despite the diverse content of the manuscript and its complex origins, I have decided to avoid the word 'miscellany' to describe the Auchinleck MS, preferring terms like 'collection' and 'anthology'. This is mainly because the term 'miscellany' is often used to define mixed-content manuscripts where items have been arbitrarily assembled. A fresh interest in miscellanies and their internal (logical or arbitrary) arrangement resulted in the conference 'Insular Books: Vernacular Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain' (London, 21-23 June 2012), organized by Dr Raluca Radulescu and Dr Margaret Connolly and hosted and sponsored by the British Academy.

[8] Even though the manuscript cannot be described as *de luxe* its miniatures and decoration show a degree of artistry. Unfortunately, although most items were originally preceded by illustrations, all but seven miniatures have been cut out. See Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham, 'Introduction', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, p. viii.

[9] See Peter Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood', *Past and Present* 108 (1985), 35-79 (p. 64).

[10] The origins of the manuscript have long been debated by scholars. Loomis first suggested that the Auchinleck MS was produced by professional bookmakers in what she described as a 'secular London bookshop'; she even considered the possibility that Chaucer himself may have had access to the manuscript (Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', pp. 154-57). A. J. Bliss agreed with Loomis on the workshop theory and suggested that the scribes must have worked in the same place and in close collaboration so as to consult one another as they worked. See A. J. Bliss, 'Notes on the Auchineck Manuscript', *Speculum* 26:4 (1951), 652-58 (p. 657). Pearsall suggested instead that the scribes were working in different locations and produced

out the work of one scribe – Scribe 1 – who undertook a great deal of the copying and, like a modern editor, seems to have also been in charge of the supervision of the whole project.[11]

However, scholars seem to agree on two important aspects regarding the production of the manuscript: firstly, that the work had been specifically commissioned by the buyer from a book dealer; secondly, that whoever commissioned the book might have had a say in choosing the items to be included in the manuscript and, perhaps, also in the way in which such items were to be organised. Therefore, it is likely that the texts contained in the manuscript and their arrangement were planned prior to its production and that they reflect the heterogeneous interests of the buyer and his family. As will be explained in greater detail further on, this assumption bears important implications regarding the internal organization of the manuscript and the thematic connections amongst the various texts.

The nature of the texts contained in the manuscript and the bipartite structure in which they are arranged also reflect its mode of reception, as the book was likely used for both private reading and public recitation for small groups of listeners within the family. When taking into account the romances of the Auchinleck MS, Andrew Taylor excluded the possibility that they were performed by professional minstrels: the illumination and expensive design of some folios suggest instead that the manuscript was produced for a prosperous private owner.[12] However, as the romances were written in a 'minstrel style' – i.e. they contain oral-formulaic features that could be best appreciated when listening to the texts being read aloud – Taylor assumed that they had been designed to be read aloud either by a family member or even by a skilful servant to the rest of the household.[13]

Recent research has demonstrated the bi-modality of the reception of medieval texts: medieval audiences might read the books privately or listen to them being read aloud.[14] D.

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twelve separate fascicules subsequently bound together in a workshop. See Pearsall and Cunningham, 'Introduction', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, p. ix.

[11] Timothy Shonk, 'A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: Bookmen and Bookmaking in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 71-91. See also Alison Wiggins, 'Are Auchinleck Manuscript Scribe 1 and Scribe 6 the Same Scribe? The Advantages of Whole-Data Analysis and Electronic Texts', *Medium Aevum* 73:1 (2004), 10-26, where she compares the language of Scribe 1 and Scribe 6 using whole-data analysis.

[12] Andrew Taylor, 'Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: The Question of the Middle English Romances', *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992), pp. 38-62 (p. 51).

[13] Taylor, 'Fragmentation', p. 42.

[14] For further information on the current state of research on the modes of transmission of medieval texts, see Mark Chinca and Christopher Young, 'Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction

H. Green and Joyce Coleman have critiqued the idea of two distinct phases in the history of medieval literacy: one in which texts were recited by professional minstrels and another in which literature was read privately.[15] According to Green and Coleman, these two modes of reception coexisted throughout the Middle Ages, even after the increase of literacy and the growth of book production.[16] Listening to book readings was a way for people to develop their knowledge of literature.[17] Nevertheless, people who were in possession of manuscripts would choose to have the books read aloud, enjoying literature as a kind of sociable activity. Coleman has underlined the companionability of book readings as shared literary experiences, claiming that in fourteenth-century England, 'aurality', or reading aloud, was the most common mode of transmission of literature.[18]

However, as far as the texts of the Auchinleck MS are concerned, reading aloud was not just for the audience's communal entertainment, but also for instruction while the first part of the manuscript could be used for the religious education of the household, the second provided the audience with stories on the heroes and kings of England, and on (real and presumed) events of English history. One can imagine that when readings were concerned with history and politics, they would generate discussions and debates among the listeners.[19] In such cases the romances would provide a format for the circulation of ideas about history and politics.

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and its Consequences', in *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages: Essays on a Conjunction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green*, ed. by Mark Chinca and Christopher Young (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 1-15.

[15] D. H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature, 800-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[16] Coleman refers to such a rigid dichotomy between oral performance and private reading as 'the great divide'. According to this strict approach, oral–formulaic features appearing in texts which chronologically belong to the age of private reading should then be explained as residues of a previous phase. She has exposed the many flaws of this assumption and countered the concept of an 'expiry date' for the oral delivery of texts. See Coleman, *Public Reading*, p. 32.

[17] Ruth Crosby, 'Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 11 (1936), 88-110 (p. 100).

[18] Coleman, *Public Reading*, pp. 53-55. 'Aurality' represented an intermediate mode of reception between orality (indicating the performances of bards and minstrels who used to memorize the texts before performing them) and literacy (private readings); 'aurality' was the most popular format for the reception of secular texts in Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English (Coleman, *Public Reading*, p. 81).

[19] Take for example texts such as the *Richard Coer de Lion*, *The Simonie* or the *Short English Metrical Chronicle*. See *Richard Coer de Lion*, ed. by Karl Brunner, in *Der mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz: kritische Ausgabe nach allen Handschriften mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen und deutscher Übersetzung* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1913), *The Simonie: A Parallel-Text Edition*, ed. by Dan Embree and Elizabeth Urquhart (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991).

Thanks to the English-centred content of their narratives, the romances also brought to the fore a debate about nation and identity. In the last few decades, critics have shown increasing interest in the Auchinleck MS and its romances, considering these as written evidence for a growing sense of national identity in fourteenth-century England. The most eminent example is Thorlac Turville-Petre, who in his magisterial study of English nationalism in the late Middle Ages has defined the Auchinleck MS as the 'handbook of the nation', claiming that the texts contained in the manuscript follow a common thread overemphasising England and the English.[20] In particular, *AM* and other romances such as *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, and *King Richard* reinforce the nationalistic motives behind England's crusading endeavours, reflecting the 1330s' ideological assumptions about crusades.[21] In this group of romances, Arthur and his knights are transformed into fourteenth-century English crusaders, who uphold Christianity against the threats of the Saxons/Saracens. However, *AM* is the romance that more openly displays what Turville-Petre and other scholars have read as a nascent sense of patriotism due to the nature of its prologue, which advocates the use of English for the written word.

1.2   The Prologue: Language and National Identity

The oft-cited opening lines of *AM* are usually taken by scholars and historians as evidence of the multilingual setting of post-Conquest England. A lot of research has been done on the linguistic fragmentation of England following the Norman Conquest and the *AM* prologue has been assigned to that strand of Middle English writing in which writers defended the suitability of English for the written page and in literary contexts, where the use of French and Latin would have normally prevailed.[22] For instance, in addition to *AM*, which has already been discussed, early evidence of this attitude can be found in the prologue of the encyclopaedic poem *Cursor Mundi*, written around 1300:

> Þis ilk bok es translate
>
> Into Inglis tong to rede

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[20] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, pp. 108-38.

[21] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, pp. 126-27.

[22] See for example John Burrow, 'The Language of Medieval England', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, ed. by Peter France and Stuart Gillespie, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005-2010), vol. 1 'To 1550', ed. by Roger Ellis (2008), pp. 7-28; Robert M. Stein, 'Multilingualism', in *Middle English*, pp. 23-37; Christopher Baswell, 'Multilingualism on the Page', in *Oxford History of Literary Translation*, pp. 38-50.

> For the love of Inglis lede.
>
> Inglis lede of Ingland,
>
> For the commun at understand.[23]

The prologue, which is usually associated with that of *AM* in terms of themes and preoccupations, makes an explicit complaint against the use of French, and appraises the value English. Just like the author of *AM*, that of the *Cursor Mundi* establishes English as the language for an English 'lede', the ideal medium for written culture.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, when *AM* was copied into the Auchinleck MS, English had not yet regained the status it had lost with the Conquest: writing in English was still a problematic choice for English authors. Therefore, the *AM* poet's preference for English over French and Latin needed to be justified in the opening lines of the romance. Just after a conventional introductory prayer to Christ and the Virgin Mary, the romance starts with a sort of *manifesto* in which the author explains his reasons for undertaking the translation into the vernacular but also introduces, from the very beginning, an Anglo-centric approach that will be developed throughout the text, differentiating the romance from its French source. In the prologue, the author defends the validity of English as a medium for literary discourse and gives an account of the use of English language as a marker of English identity:

> Of Freynsch no Latin nil y tel more
>
> Ac on I[n]glisch ichil tel þerfore:
>
> Riȝt is þat I[n]glische vnderstond
>
> Þat was born in Inglond.
>
> Freynsche vse þis gentil man
>
> Ac euerich Inglische Inglische can,
>
> Mani noble ich haue yseiȝe
>
> Þat no Freynsche couþe seye,
>
> Biginne ichil for her loue
>
> Bi Ihesus leue þat sitt aboue
>
> On Inglische tel mi tale –
>
> God ous sende soule hale. (*AM*, ll. 19-30)

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[23] *Cursor Mundi*, ed. by Richard Morris, EETS OS 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, 101 (London: London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & co., 1874-93), (vol. 2, ll. 232-36).

The prologue of *AM* has often been considered as evidence that Middle English authors and, by extension, their audience perceived themselves as part of a big community brought together through linguistic affinity. Not surprisingly, the author's first concern is the association of language with identity: being able to speak English is a *sine qua non* condition to be recognized as English. Speaking English is not promoted as a convenient choice, but as the 'riȝt' thing to do for those who want to be called English.

The author's intention of promoting the English language as the symbol of national identity reappears in the key episode of the withdrawal of the sword in the stone, in which Arthur establishes his right to be king. When the sword appears in the churchyard, the Archbishop reads aloud the words carved in the stone:

> Et puis sabaissa & uit lettres al perron qui toutes estoient dor si les lut . si
> disoient les letres que cil qui osteroit [ceste espee] seroit rois de la terre
> par lelection ihesucrist. (Sommer, p. 81)

> Then he leaned down and saw on the stone writing that was all of gold,
> and he read it. The writing said that the one who pulled this sword out
> would be king of the land by the choice of Jesus Christ. (Lacy, p. 212)

In *AM* the writing is carved directly into the sword's hilt rather than on the stone (there is no mention of an inscription on the stone), and the words do not need to be interpreted by the Archbishop and then explained to the people:

> On þe pomel was ywrite
> 'Icham yhot Estalibore
> Vnto a king fair tresore'
> (On Inglis is þis writeing
> 'Kerue stiel and iren and al þing'). (*AM*, ll. 2,815-20)

The inscription on the hilt does not have to be translated as it presumably is in English. However, the *AM* author does provide an explanation for the name of the sword, 'Estalibore', anticipating a moment that in the *Estoire* occurs much later on in the narrative, when Arthur faces the Saxons in battle:

> Et les lettres qui estoient escrites en lespee disoient quele auoit non escalibor &
> cest j, non *ebrieu* qui dist en franchois trenche fer & achier & fust si disent les
> lettres voir si comme vous orres el conte cha en arrière. (Sommer, p. 94; emphasis
> mine)

> And the letters that were written on the sword said that it was named Excalibur –
> this is a Hebrew word that means in French "cuts through iron and steel and
> wood". (Lacy, p. 219)

Unlike the corresponding passage in *Estoire*, however, the Hebrew origins of the word are omitted in *AM*. By neglecting the connection between Arthurian and biblical history, the *AM* author secularises the moment of the sword's apparition in the churchyard, removing the religious undertone of the trial of the sword in the stone – secularization being a procedure that he applies consistently throughout the romance. According to Warren, who has analysed the implication of the corresponding passage in the *Estoire*, the Semitic roots of the sword's name are a means to further clarify the symbolism of the sword as instrument and proof of divine intervention.[24] While in the *Estoire* the Hebrew writing on the stone signifies Christ's election of the new king, in *AM* the focus is rather on Excalibur's political function and unifying powers. The sword in *AM* comes to represent a relic of a past time when England was united under the government of a 'riȝtful kinge'.

Since the death of Uther Pendragon had left the kingdom without a legitimate heir, England risked being ruled by an outsider – just as had happened with Vortiger's treacherous accession to the throne. Therefore, when the sword in the stone is found in the churchyard, the author specifies that amongst all the barons who have gathered for the election 'Al þat was born in Inglond / On þis swerd cast his hond' (*AM*, ll. 2,835-36), as if to suggest that only English competitors are allowed to take part in the challenge.

The prologue and the appearance of Excalibur do not just promote Englishness and its relationship to written English, but also offer a brief overview of medieval English society and its linguistic heterogeneity. For over three centuries after the Norman Conquest, England was essentially a trilingual country due to the coexistence of English, French (Anglo-Norman) and Latin. Tim Machan has drawn attention to how the linguistic situation of England from the twelfth century up to the end of the Middle Ages, was in fact one of *diglossia* – where two or more languages are used within a single language community.[25] In diglossic societies, the choice of using one language rather than another depends on contexts of social interaction as well as the social function affiliated to the two languages: one language (the 'low' variety) is used for the ordinary life while the other (the 'high' variety) is preferred in specific settings and situations such as education,

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[24] Michelle Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1330* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 192.

[25] Tim Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 109.

government and business. In post-Conquest England up until the fourteenth century, while French and Latin were the languages paired with prestige, culture and authority, Middle English was the medium for everyday life, used in domestic and informal contexts. In his sociolinguistic analysis of Middle English, Machan has shown how the study of Middle English in medieval England cannot be disentangled from the other two languages but, on the contrary, it owes 'its newly acquired status and social meaning thanks to its relation to Latin and French and the sociolinguistic functions it performed'.[26] In other words, the relation between Middle English and the other two languages of medieval England was not one of mutual exclusion, and we can learn more about the sociolinguistic function of Middle English by looking at its interaction with French and Latin. Manuscripts offer us a glimpse of the multilingual reality of medieval England showing that, even at a time when English was gradually rising in importance, the use of French was still widespread and English-speaking audiences were likely to have maintained some degree of bilingualism.[27]

Although *AM* is written entirely in English, the presence of several French phrases and the reference to Latin at specific moments in the narrative demonstrate the persistence of diglossia in fourteenth-century England as well as the author's versatility in switching from English to French. The intrusion of French and Latin in the narrative signals the author and audience's awareness of the different function performed by the three languages in various contexts. While Latin is associated with the written word and authority, French usually surfaces in formal and courtly contexts. In the episode of Vortiger's collapsing tower, even though Merlin is still a child, he speaks Latin to Vortiger's clerks (*AM*, l. 1,566), and when Gawain reads a letter the author specifies that this is written in Latin (*AM*, l. 8,560). Most of the appearances of French occur in direct speech: in a number of instances Merlin refers to Ban and Bors and other knights of the Round Table as 'bieu seygnours' (*AM*, ll. 3,607, 5,543, 6,147), while both Guenevere and Leodegan employ the tag 'ie vus dy' when talking to Arthur (*AM*, ll. 5,913, 6,546). From a sociolinguistic point of view, these examples could be interpreted as tag-switching, a type of intra-sentential code-switching which occurs in conversation and where the speaker is switching one tag-phrase from one language to the other.

The presence of French in *AM* is quite surprising if we consider the author's strong defence of English in the prologue and his explanation that the audience may not be able to understand Latin or French. The question is, therefore, whether the *AM* author was

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[26] Machan, *English in the Middle Ages*, p. 111.
[27] This, however, is a complex issue that cannot be discussed in depth in this chapter.

switching to French unconsciously or the interpolation of French was instead a deliberate strategy. *AM* is not the only text in the Auchinleck MS to contain sudden moments of code-switching from English to French. The *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, *Beues of Hamtoun* and *Kyng Alisaunder* all include similar episodes. As for *AM*, the French phrases in these texts do not compromise the intelligibility of the narrative as we can imagine the romances' audience to have been familiar with these expressions. Christopher Baswell, who has analysed code-switching as evidence of how multilingualism can manifest itself in a text, has defined the unexpected and dramatic intrusions of a second language in a monolingual text as a 'language of authenticity'.[28] According to Baswell it is in these moments that the genuine voice of the author, his social status and sense of belonging are revealed to the audience: in *Kyng Alisaunder*, for instance, the French phrases give away the 'emergences of the Anglo-French language of aristocratic authenticity', exposing an author who 'asserts his status as a militant aristocrat' and speaks the language of antiquity.[29] Thea Summerfield has also analysed the presence of French in other texts of the Auchinleck MS such as *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* and *Kyng Alisaunder*, but, unlike Baswell, she believes that the French phrases were deliberate additions by the authors who was seeking to 'enhance, embellish, and enliven the narratives in a calculated way'.[30] According to Summerfield, this would be exemplified by the use of French by Guenevere, where the French phrase 'ie vus dy' is employed to enhance the courtly dimension of the scene.[31] Interestingly, however, in the two examples above involving Leodegan and Guenevere, the French phrase 'ie vus dy' is placed right at the end of the line so as to rhyme with 'gramerci', suggesting that this could simply be a stock phrase in the author's repertoire, rather than a deliberate choice. Similarly, the French 'bel ami' (*AM*, 9,897) and 'gode ami' (*AM*, 7,350) appear in combination with 'merci' in the second line of each rhyming couplet.

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[28] Baswell, 'Multilingualism on the Page', p. 40.

[29] Baswell, 'Multilingualism on the Page', p. 43.

[30] Thea Summerfield, '"Fi a debles," quath the king': Language-mixing in England's Vernacular Historical Narratives, *c*. 1290-*c*.1340, in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al*. (York and Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 68-80, p. 80.

[31] Summerfield, '"And she answered in hir Language": Aspects of Multilingualism in the Auchinleck Manuscript', in *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066-1520): Sources and Analysis*, ed. by Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 241-58 (p. 250).

Although the prologue of *AM* bears evidence that at the turn of the fourteenth century an audience already existed for the circulation of literature written exclusively in English, the interpolation of French by the author, whether deliberate or not, is evidence of the author's response to the complexities of a multilingual society.[32] The textual multilingualism in the texts of Auchinleck MS also complicates the conventional view according to which during the fourteenth century a drastic language shift from French to English occurred. Richard Ingham has challenged the idea that a language shift re-defined the linguistic situation of fourteenth-century England and suggests a more complex scenario of 'language maintenance'.[33] The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries marked a fundamental stage in the gradual rise of the use of English in contexts that were previously dominated by French and provided the social context in which Middle-English romance could flourish. Even though French remained the language used by the nobility, especially in written communication, English was becoming increasingly common amongst the rest of the population, a tendency that intensified towards the end of the thirteenth century.[34] However, as English gradually but relentlessly gained prominence, French did not disappear abruptly, but kept being used in administrative and legal documents for three centuries after the Conquest.[35]

The shift of emphasis from French to English was a consequence of the political separation of England and France, which had become irreversible after England lost its territories on the continent: the loss of Normandy in 1204 and then of most of the Angevin territories in 1243 broke the ties which linked England to Europe.[36] A sense of rivalry developed in the two countries, ultimately resulting in the Hundred Years' War. The English nobility lost its connections with France, starting to identify itself as English.[37] Such political changes affected the language so that knowing French ceased to be a natural consequence of the relationship between the two countries and became merely an economic and political necessity. The use of French in written discourse started to be felt

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[32] See also Batt, *Remaking the Arthurian Tradition*, p. 8.

[33] Richard Ingham, 'Later Anglo-Norman as a Contact Variety of French?', in *The Anglo-Norman Language and Its Contexts*, ed. by Richard Ingham (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 11.

[34] Barbara A. Fennel, *A History of English: A Sociolinguistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 120.

[35] Ingham, 'Later Anglo-Norman', p. 8.

[36] Susan Crane, 'Anglo-Norman Cultures in England, 1066-1460', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 35-60 (p. 43).

[37] Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, fifth edition (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), p. 130.

as increasingly artificial.[38] The importance of English amongst the elite was also rapidly growing so that by the middle of the fourteenth century a conspicuous part of the nobility had serious difficulties in speaking and reading continental French and hence had to be taught French through the medium of English.[39] Anglo-Norman, on the other hand, was very much alive and maintained by bilingual speakers well into the fourteenth century.[40]

Multilingualism, diglossia and the rising demand for English writing among the middle classes, are not the only themes in the opening of *AM*. The prologue of the romance also casts some light on the function of the text and its intended audience:

> Childer þat ben to boke ysett
> In age hem is miche þe bett
> For þai mo witen and se
> Miche of Godes priuete
> Hem to kepe and to ware
> Fram sinne and fram warldes care,
> And wele ysen ȝif þai willen
> Þat hem no þarf neuer spillen –
> Auauntages þai hauen þare
> Freynsch no Latin [sic] eueraywhare. (*AM*, ll. 9-18)

There is no reference to entertainment and the author seems instead to consider the subject of his 'boke' a very serious matter, announcing that it is to be utilized for the education of children. This reference has encouraged some scholars to investigate the instructional features of the romance, leading them to believe that the narrative structure and content of the romance was designed for a mixed audience made up of adults and children.[41] It is not a coincidence that the author's allusion to book learning and children's education comes just before his bold defence of the English language. By connecting these two things the author indirectly encourages parents to educate their children in English, as they will have

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[38] Fennel, *A History*, p. 118.

[39] Such books were used by both children and adults (Baugh and Cable, *A History*, p. 140).

[40] According to Ingham, whilst continental French was taught as a second language, Anglo-Norman was preserved through bilingualism and bilingualism was a major factor in the grammatical deviations of Anglo-Norman from Continental French (Ingham, 'Later Anglo-Norman', p. 9).

[41] In this regard, see for example Nicole Clifton, '*Of Arthour and of Merlin* as Medieval Children's Literature', *Arthuriana* 13:2 (2003), 9-22, and Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 150-64, (p. 152). The educational function of the romance and its suitability for young adults will be discussed later on in this chapter.

the 'auantages' of being taught Latin and French when they are older.[42] *AM* will, instead, provide children and young adults with models of exemplary behaviour and instruct them in their cultural heritage.

The reference to children and education is a point deserving some attention not only because it explicitly acknowledges that the content of the romance is suitable for children, but because it has important implications for the intended audience of the romance, which may have included children as well as adults. The idea that medieval popular romance is a genre for children is not new; Nicholas Orme has shown how complex it is to identify extant medieval literature as specifically for young audiences. Nevertheless, in his survey of texts and genres that could be associated with young audiences, Orme has explained that romances, *chansons de geste* and saints' lives were likely to attract the attention of children and adolescents as well as adults: in particular, verse romances were even more appealing to a young audience 'for their fast-moving plots, suspense, exotic locations, and (usually) happy or victorious endings'.[43] Similarly, Phillipa Hardman has endorsed Orme's assumptions, claiming that 'young readers should be taken into account among the potential target audience of Middle English romance'.[44]

AM is one of the few examples in which children are addressed in the opening of a romance; such statements are uncommon in medieval texts. The identification of a text as tailored to a young readership usually results from other internal features: a type of story suitable to children's tastes, the presence of characters who are children themselves or who act as role models, a form and a style 'friendly' to children.[45] A number of adjustments made by the author of *AM* might demonstrate that he aimed at making the story more appealing to a young audience: for example, the presence of themes related to children in the first half of the romance, such as inheritance, child-bearing and the education of children.[46] However, even the textual context, that is to say the manuscripts in which texts are extant, can shed some light on whether the audience might have included children. Some miscellaneous manuscripts possessed by the gentry contain items that could have been read to, or read by, children for their entertainment or education.[47]

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[42] Hardman, 'Popular Romances', pp. 151-52.

[43] Nicholas Orme, 'Children and Literature in Medieval England', *Medium Aevum* 68 (1999), 218-46 (p. 219). See also Clifton, '*Of Arthour*', pp. 9-10.

[44] Hardman, 'Popular Romances', p. 159.

[45] Orme, 'Children and Literature', p. 219.

[46] Clifton, '*Of Arthour*', p. 12.

[47] In particular, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Porkington 10; Oxford, Balliol College, MS 35. See Orme, 'Children and Literature', p. 227-28.

The content of the Auchinleck MS can be easily associated, in terms of themes and topics, with childhood. As Hardman suggests, the manuscript contains some 'material that seems especially appropriate for parental guidance of young readers in the way it endorses the value of lessons on chivalric or courtly accomplishments or religious instruction'.[48]

In view of both internal and external evidence, Nicole Clifton has suggested that the *AM* poet must have been aware that children would have been part of the audience and adjusted the material accordingly.[49] The *AM* poet emphasised those points in the plot that described achievements by children and young knights: young Merlin's extraordinary assistance to his mother, Vortiger and Uther; Arthur's accession to the throne before he has reached maturity; the series of battles in which Arthur's young knights take part.[50] Even the bipartite structure of the romance would contribute to the educational content of the romance. Whilst the first half of the romance highlights the moral components of Merlin's story, the second part of the text, dealing with the wars against the rioting barons and the Saracens, provides young audiences with examples of appropriate knightly behaviour. The episodic arrangement of battles and wars puts into the spotlight the military conduct of Arthur's 'childer' – Gawain, Gaheris, Agravaine and Gareth – with whom knights-to-be could easily identify. By emphasising the martial component of these battles as well as their violent effects, the *AM* poet brings knighthood and its principles into prominence, offering points of discussion and instruction on which any young man aspiring to become a knight could reflect. These and other aspects of the romance – including the content of the prologue – have led Clifton to conclude that children were the intended audience of the *AM* poet to the point that the romance should be considered as 'the earliest extant example of Arthurian children's literature in English'.[51] Hardman, on the other hand, has noted how the narratives of *AM* and the earliest romances of the Auchinleck MS focus on child heroes, suggesting that 'a concern with children is one significant attribute of the complex category "Middle English Romance".[52]

Hardman and Clifton are certainly right in claiming that *AM* contains themes that would interest children and from which children could benefit. However, an intended audience made up exclusively of children, as Clifton has suggested, is hard to imagine. The romance has as much to offer, in terms of the themes and concerns addressed, to

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[48] Hardman, 'Popular Romances', p. 159.

[49] Clifton, '*Of Arthour*', p. 11.

[50] Clifton, '*Of Arthour*', p. 12.

[51] Clifton, '*Of Arthour*', p. 9.

[52] Hardman, 'Popular Romances', p. 153.

adults as to youngsters. As will be shown further on, the romance leads its audience to reflect on political issues such as the nature of good and bad kingship and the importance of lineage as well as instruct them on the history and the genealogy of the British kings.

The evidence in the *AM* prologue demonstrates how the author of the Auchinleck *AM* managed to reshape the French material so as to please that portion of the English public who probably understood French to some degree but had a preference for literature written in English. As has been explained earlier, the translation was far from being mainly linguistic, but operated on a cultural level: the transition from one language to the other enabled the author to present a story which the audience – a mixed audience consisting of adults and youngsters – could reflect on and learn from. The prologue displays the author's pride in the English language but also his intent in educating his audience about the origins of the country, affecting their vision of English history and society.

As will be examined in the following pages, the educational function of the romance is confirmed by the chronicle-like organization of its narrative and several other interventions by the *AM* author, which owe more to the tradition of chronicle writing – Wace's *Brut* in particular – than to his French source. The attention given by the author to specific themes such as principles of good kingship and how these are connected to chivalry and its code of ideals demonstrate that *AM* is a romance that engaged with contemporary political issues.

1.3   Translation as Historicization: Kingship, Chivalry and Warfare in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*

AM has often been considered in relation with its main source, the Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire*. However, as will be shown in the following pages, the composition of *AM* was also greatly informed by the chronicle tradition of Geoffrey's *HRB* and its vernacular renditions by Wace and Laȝamon.[53]

The narrative of *AM* can be divided into two parts: the first comprises the events occurring after the death of King Constance and ends with Arthur's coronation; the second focuses on the description of the establishment of Arthur's reign, his battles against the

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[53] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, pp. 19-20. *Laȝamon's* Brut*, or,* Hystoria Brutonum, ed. and transl. by W. R. J. Barron and C. Weinberg (New York: Longman, 1995).

rioting barons and the wars fought with the Saxons/Saracens. As Macrae-Gibson has observed, whilst the second part of the romance closely resembles the *Estoire*, in the first section the *AM* poet does not seem to have drawn material exclusively from his French source.[54] This is evident when comparing the first section of *AM* with the *Estoire*: the narrative in *AM* is organised chronologically and gives prominence to the genealogical succession of the British rulers following King Constance's death. In the *Estoire* the narrative starts with its protagonist Merlin and his begetting by the incubus. The *Estoire* opens with a council of devils planning the creation of the Antichrist who would bring evil on Earth and harm humanity. The devils are outraged because Christ had descended to Hell and freed all the just. He has also established the sacraments of baptism and confession, which allow people to be cleansed of their sins before death.

The account of the assembly and its Biblical references provides a thematic link with the previous romance in the cycle, the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, highlighting the religious content and the moral instructive features of the text. The thematic continuity between the two romances can be explained by the articulate development of the Vulgate cycle.[55] Even though the *Estoire* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal* are the first two books in the modern edition of the *Vulgate*, in which the plot is organized chronologically, they were in all probability written in a second phase, when the work on the *Lancelot*, the *Quest for the Holy Grail* and the *Death of Arthur* had been completed. Moreover, the *Estoire* was originally part of the trilogy composed by Robert de Boron, hence followed the theological perspective of the *Joseph*, the first romance in the triptych.

Clearly, the author of *AM* did not have the same goals. Once it has lost all the biblical echoes, the opening of *AM* reads as a chronicle: the narrative starts in *medias res* with the death of King Constance and the events related to the illegitimate succession by Vortiger. Merlin enters the narrative only in a second phase, when Vortiger needs his help to erect his tower. The narrative shifts to the account of Merlin's demonic origins but differs greatly from the French source: the introductory episode about the council of devils which was meant to make the reader aware of the reasons behind Merlin's begetting disappears completely. The moral perspective that characterized the opening scene of the *Estoire* is lost whilst the reader of *AM* learns about political instability in England before the coming of Arthur. The focus is therefore moved from the religious to the historical and

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[54] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 7.
[55] For more information on the history of the Vulgate Cycle and the *Estoire* see my Introduction, pp. 14-17.

political framework, a procedure that will be repeatedly employed by the *AM* poet throughout the romance.

In his alterations to the narrative order, the poet shows not only his own interests but also his expertise in handling such diverse literary material. The new chronological arrangement demonstrates that the text was created with a clear sense of structure. According to Macrae-Gibson, changes to the order of the events, omissions and abbreviations suggest that the author of *AM* was clearly seeking 'a coherent and straightforward narrative'.[56] If his aim was to create a thorough account of Arthur's story, he managed to do so by combining the material taken from the French source with elements and features that were derived from historical writings, hence drawing the attention of his public to the political and historical circumstances within which Arthur's story must be seen.

Other alterations were introduced to make the story more linear and understandable. Interlacing and encasement, which represented a key feature of the Vulgate Cycle, disappear completely.[57] Also, the Vulgate Cycle had marked a break from the previous tradition of French romance by shifting the emphasis from courtly love to Christian morality: the secular Arthurian material taken from the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron was connected with biblical history.[58] This link is completely neglected by the *AM* author, who excluded the Grail from his romance and highly reduced the religious tenor of the text. The 'meruails' of the Grail are mentioned a few times in relation to the Round Table and its knights (*AM*, ll. 2,222; 2,750; 4,294; 8,902), but there is no explanation of the connection between the Grail and the Table as there is in the *Estoire*, where we find a long digression on the three tables of Christianity and the explanation of the significance of the vacant seat at the Round Table (Sommer, pp. 53-54; Lacy, pp. 196-97).

However, the redactions were not a means to simplify the complex narrative structure of French romances for an unsophisticated public. The *AM* poet seems to approach the French material from a different perspective by presenting the Arthurian

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[56] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 15.

[57] *Entrelacement* is used when a knight's adventures are alternated with those of others; *encasement* occurs when the narrative of an event is interrupted by the insertion of the narrative of another event. See Douglas Kelly, *Medieval French Romance* (New York: Twayne, 1993), p. 39.

[58] Robert de Boron was the first vernacular romancer who created a connection between the Arthurian myth and sacred history by linking the Grail to Christ's death. However, de Boron's task reaches completion only after the composition of the Vulgate Cycle (See Kelly, *Medieval*, p. 41).

story as a chain of events finally culminating in the establishment of Arthur's sovereignty over England. The historical frame in which the material of the *Estoire* is embedded was meant to give more credibility to the narrative and more prominence to themes related to kingship and the welfare of England. As Barnes has shown in her monograph on Middle English romance, the romances of the Auchinleck MS explore what, according to the poet, are the principles of good governance; England needs a strong leadership to exercise both political wisdom and military competence, while the king himself needs advisers who can be fully trusted and can provide wise counsel.[59] According to Barnes, the romances of the Auchinleck MS can be divided into two separate groups. While *AM*, *Beues of Hamtoun*, and *Guy of Warwick* are characterised by a strong focus on 'counsel', in other romances such (*Floris and Blauncheflur*, *The Seven Sages*, *Sir Tristem*, *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Richard Coer de Lion*), the emphasis is on 'strategy'; in the first group, *Beues of Hamtoun* addresses the issue of tyranny, while *Guy of Warwick* the use of prowess and its legitimacy.[60] The first part of *AM* seems to function as a warning about the dangers to a kingdom governed by unwise rulers, dangers ultimately overcome thanks to Merlin's intervention. According to Barnes, Merlin acts as the true *deus ex machina* in the story, who comes to encapsulate the role of the wise counsellor, losing most of his prophetic and magical abilities.

However, the following discussion, rather than focusing on Merlin and his transition from wizard to political counsellor, will show that other political themes emerge from the narrative, in particular, the king's need of the full support of the barons and above all, the need to preserve the royal bloodline when a kingdom experiences a transmission of power. This concern is particularly evident in the first part of the narrative, which begins with an overview of the examples of English kings who, for different reasons, exemplify models of bad kingship.[61]

Constance is initially depicted as an ideal king, noble, brave and honourable. However, he himself is not flawless and even though he is capable of imparting good counsel, he is not particularly skilled in choosing his advisers as he is responsible for creating the premises for Vortiger's illegitimate rise to power by providing Vortiger with 'boþe lond and lede' (l. 86) in exchange for his services as a steward. However, the

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[59] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, pp. 61-67.
[60] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, p. 61.
[61] For a discussion of the first part of the romance with an emphasis on 'counsel' see Barnes, p. 60- 90. Stephen Knight in his analysis of Merlin in *AM* also follows Barnes' argument. See Knight, p. 86.

situation described in *AM* is atypical: Vortiger is not bound to the king by any feudal constraint and it is not clear how he reaches the status of steward without possessing any aristocratic title. Unlike *AM*, the *Estoire* presents Vortiger as a liegeman, whilst in Geoffrey's *HRB* he is defined as the 'consul Gewisseorum', 'the earl of the Gewissei' (*HRB*, pp. 118-19) and in the Wace's *Brut* as a count from Wales 'de parenz bien enforciez' (l. 6,483), 'with influential kin' (Wace, pp. 164-65).[62] The *AM* poet seems here to imply that without a formal feudal agreement between the two, Constance's trust in Vortiger is misplaced.

After the king's death, Constantine, who is Constance's eldest son and legitimate successor, is expected to ascend to the throne of England. Unfortunately, he has another vocation and, against his father's counsel, enters the monastery at Winchester and becomes a monk, withdrawing from the line of succession and thus impeding the natural transmission of powers. He is replaced by his brother Moyne (initially named Aurelius Brosias), who becomes king with the barons' final approval (ll. 99-102). However, Moyne's total incompetence in military matters means that he is not able to stop the advance of the Saxon aggressors, so that he soon loses his authority over the barons as well as their respect. His inability to take the right decision on military matters ('he no can conseil to no gode', l. 209) and his lack of courage ('he is so adrad he is neiȝe wode', l. 210) have made the kingdom vulnerable without and within. As Geraldine Barnes noted, since Moyne is not able to rule his kingdom and ensure its security, guidance will be sought elsewhere through an act of treason.[63]

Vortiger cunningly leads a group of barons to believe that he needs to be made king in order to save the kingdom from the Danish threat, and hence Moyne must be killed (ll. 169-71). By means of treachery, Vortiger disrupts the royal lineage altering the natural transmission of the title. However, even though he cannot become king by right, he has the support of the court and is made king through the barons' election, for the barons realize that the country needs a mighty king who will be able to succeed where others have failed and drive the invaders out of Britain. It becomes quite clear that baronial favour is a necessary condition for a king's political success. When the barons are excluded from the administration of power a rightful monarchy risks turning into a tyranny, as in the case of

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[62] *Wace's* Roman de Brut*: A History of the British: Text and Translation*, ed. and transl. by Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), cited by line and page numbers.
[63] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, p. 64.

Vortiger's decision to have the treacherous barons publicly executed for murdering Moyne (ll. 381-84).

What follows is an illustration of the effects of Vortiger's bad governance due to his incapacity to discern his personal interests from those of the kingdom: his allegiance with Hengis and the marriage with Hengis' daughter, the construction of the tower, and the search for Merlin's blood. In particular, the union with Hengis's daughter (ll. 477-84) changes the equilibrium of power by creating a new branch in the royal bloodline that will be interrupted only with the death of Vortiger and his kin in a fire (ll. 1,890-94). The example of Vortiger's reign offers a practical demonstration that, when the royal bloodline is forcibly interrupted, the political stability of the kingdom is in serious danger both from within and without. The realm's internal cohesion is threatened again later on in the narrative, when Constance's line of descent breaks off with Uther's death, leaving England without an heir and initiating a period of political unrest which will only be settled by Arthur's ascent to the throne.

AM therefore advocates the need of a rightful king who would possess the wisdom to govern – the ability to give good counsel, but also that of choosing the right advisers – and the military skills necessary to protect the kingdom. When one of these two sets of qualities is missing or, as in *AM*, when these are encapsulated in two different figures (Moyne and Vortiger), the kingdom is in danger and its governance unstable.

In the second part of the romance, Arthur is the king who incarnates all these qualities. Bearing further evidence of the influence of the chronicles on *AM*, Arthur's portrayal seems to owe more to the chronicles, and in particular Wace and Laȝamon, than to the *Estoire*.[64] After Uther's and Ygerne's wedding Ygerne gives birth to Arthur, who is immediately left to Antor's care. We learn that Arthur is nursed by Antor's wife whilst Cai, Arthur's stepbrother, is breast-fed by a wet nurse (Sommer, p. 77; Lacy, p. 210). At this point the narratives of *AM* and the *Estoire* separate once again: whilst the *Estoire* relates Uther's sudden illness and his last battle against the Saxons, the *AM* gives instead an exhaustive description of Arthur's distinctive qualities:

> He wex fair and wele yþei

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[64] Macrae-Gibson was the first to note that in the first part of the narrative the author of AM was influenced by the earlier tradition of historical writings deriving from *HRB*, Laȝamon and Wace, p. 26. See also Felicity Riddy, 'Reading for England', where she analyses how English Arthurian romance has been informed by the *HRB* tradition (pp. 314-32).

> And was a child of gret noblay
>
> He was curteys hende and gent
>
> And wiȝt and hardi verrament
>
> Curteyslich and fair he spac
>
> Wiþ him was non iuel lac. (*AM*, ll. 2,719-24)

This passage, which is absent from the French source, represents a rare case of descriptive expansion by the *AM* author. However, if we compare this fragment with Wace and Laȝamon, some similarities can be observed. The two authors spend quite a few lines describing Arthur's character and in many instances the vocabulary is very similar to that used by the *AM* poet:

> Chevaliers fu mult vertuus,
>
> Mult fu preisanz, mult glourius;
>
> Cuntre orguillus fu orguillus
>
> E cuntre humles dulz e pitus;
>
> Forz e hardiz e conqueranz,
>
> Large dunere e despendanz,
>
> E se busuinnus le request,
>
> S'aidier li pout, ne l'escundist. (*Brut*, ll. 9,017-24, p. 226)
>
> He was a most mighty knight, admirable and renowned, proud to the
> haughty and gentle and compassionate to the humble. He was strong,
> bold and invincible, a generous giver and spender, and if he could help
> someone in need, he would not refuse him. (*Brut*, p. 227)

Similarly, Laȝamon engages in a long description of Arthur's generosity, honesty and boldness:

> Þa þe Arður wes king   –hærne nu seollic þing–
>
> he wes mete-custi   ælche quike monne,
>
> cniht mid þan bezste   w[u]nder ane kene (Laȝamon's *Brut*, ll. 9945-47)
>
> When Arthur was king – now listen to a marvellous matter – he was generous to
> every man alive, among the best of warriors, wonderfully bold (Laȝamon's *Brut*, p.
> 513)[65]

Even though the description provided by the *AM* poet is briefer and the word choice was clearly affected by the requirements of metre, Arthur's merits seem to

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[65] See also ll. 9948-61; p. 515.

echo those mentioned by Wace and Laȝamon. Generosity, nobility, and courtesy are the central characteristics that make Arthur naturally suited to the throne. Strength and bravery are not enough as they have to be matched by honesty, kindness and, more importantly, truthfulness. These qualities mark the difference between a good, legitimate king and a bad, illegitimate ruler; they also create a moral opposition between Arthur and his evil counterpart Vortiger, who had been previously described in such terms:

> Strong he was and wiȝt ywis,
>
> Fals and ful of couaitise.
>
> Þe king he hadde yserued long
>
> And for he was so wiȝt and strong
>
> In him was al his trust at nede
>
> And ȝaue him boþe lond and lede (*AM*, ll. 81-86)

Here again, the *AM* poet may have been influenced by his familiarity with Wace's *Brut*. In the *Brut*, Vortiger is described in very negative terms and it is also specified that he was secretly planning to become king after the death of Constance:

> Uns forz huem, en Guales maneit,
>
> Riches huem mult e cuens esteit;
>
> De parenz ert bien enfoirciez
>
> E mult cuintes e vezïez.
>
> De bien luin avant purveeit
>
> Ço que il enginnier vuleit. (*Brut*, ll. 6,481-86, p. 164)[66]

The terms used to describe Vortiger in the *Estoire* are not as strong and there is no mention of his imminent act of treachery:

> Icis constans auoit vn homme en sa terre qui auoit anon uertiger si estoit moult sages del siecle & moult engigneus et boins cheualiers […] & vertiger auoit de la terre moult dauoir sor soi trait & ot les cuers des gens & si sot quil le tenoient por preu & por sage si leua orguel en lui. (Sommer, p. 20)

> This Constant had a liegeman on his land called Vortigern; he was very shrewd in the ways of the world, clever, and a good knight […] and

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[66] See also *Brut*, ll. 6,579-80, p. 166; 6,639-40, p. 166.

> Vortigern had taken for his own use much of the land's wealth, and he
>
> had the hearts of the people. He knew that they held him to be worthy
>
> and wise. (Lacy, p. 177)

Arthur and Vortiger seem to have been defined in opposition to each other as two contrasting models of kingship: the crafty steward who gets to the throne by means of treachery and the legitimate heir who will restore the lineage. Moreover, by providing such a precise description of Arthur's character, the *AM* poet implies that although Arthur will become king on the basis of his descent he will succeed as the noblest of the English kings thanks to his personal, human qualities. Arthur's natural suitability for governance is made more prominent through the omission of Uther's last battle against the Saxons, which is thoroughly recounted in both the *Estoire* and Wace's text (Sommer, pp. 77-79; Lacy, pp. 210-11; *Brut*, pp. 223-27).[67] As a means to unravel the narrative of his sources and hence follow only the events involving Arthur, the *AM* poet sums up the whole episode saying that Uther 'In bedde fel in gret sekeling / And was ycomen riȝt to his fin' (ll. 2,736-37). Therefore, Arthur's description is separated from the episode of the sword in the stone by just fifty lines so that his success in the trial is directly linked with his outstanding virtues.

Arthur's integrity is also displayed in another instance. When Arthur withdraws the sword from the stone, the author of the *AM* specifies that he is completely unaware of the presence of the sword in the stone in the church courtyard and, therefore, of the significance of his action: 'Arthour no seiȝe it neuer ar / Ni wist neuer why it stode þar' (ll. 2,899-900). The version provided in the *Estoire* is not as clear and the reader does not learn whether or not Arthur knows the implication of the trial. Nevertheless, Arthur seems to be aware that pulling out the sword is part of a test:

> Et quant il ueoit quil nen pot nule trouer si sen tourna arriere par deuant
>
> le monstier ou li perrons estoit *si pensa quil ni auoit onques assaiet . &*
>
> *sil le pooit auoir quil le porteroit a son frere.* (Sommer, p. 83, emphasis
>
> mine)

> When Arthur saw that he could not find a sword, he turned back and
>
> went to the church where the stone was. *The thought came to him that he*

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[67] This omission and its possible implications will be analysed with great attention further on in this chapter (p. 83).

had never tried the test, and if he could pull the sword out he would take

it to his brother. (Lacy, p. 213, emphasis mine)

As a consequence, the Arthur of *AM* appears far more innocent and any doubt about his honesty is dismissed.

As shown above, Arthur's integrity is depicted in contrast to Vortiger's. Yet Arthur is the point of comparison for the descriptions of another controversial character, Sir Cai. In the *Estoire*, Cai gets the sword from Arthur and, without a word, rides to his father:

Et kex sen corut encontre son frere si li demanda sespee is & il li respont

quil ne la pot auoir mais il li auoit aportee vne autre si li doune cele de

lenglume & il li demande ou il lauoit prinse & il dist que cestoit lespee

del peron . Et kex le prent si le met desos son giron. (Sommer, p. 83)

Kay ran up to meet his brother and asked him for his sword. He answered

that he could not find it, but that he had brought him another, so he gave

him the sword from the anvil. Kay asked him where he had found it, and

he told him that it was the sword from the stone. Kay took it and hid it

under his tunic. (Lacy, p. 213)

In *AM* the same passage is expanded to form a dialogue between the two stepbrothers:

In his hond he it nam

His hors he lepe vp anon

To þe turnay he com son

And seyd 'Haue þis swerd sir Kay

Þi leuedi finden y no may.'

Kay þis swerd wele knewe ywis

To Arthour he seyd 'Where hadestow þis?'

'Certes' quaþ Arthour 'herbiȝonde

In a ston ich it fond'

(Arthour no seiȝe it neuer ar

Ni wist neuer why it stode þar)

Sir Kay seyd þo to Arthour

'Telle it to no man par amour

Þat þou þis swerd out drouȝ

And þou schal haue gode ynouȝ'. (*AM*, ll. 2,890-904, emphasis mine)

The addition of direct speech, a rather unusual procedure by the *AM* author, enhances the realism of the scene and displays a side of Cai's character that is not as evident in the French source. Cai asks Arthur to keep the secret and to pretend that he has not withdrawn the sword. The English Cai therefore looks a lot more scheming than his French counterpart. As a confirmation of this, when Antor questions him regarding the trial, the Cai of *AM* reveals the truth only after his word has been contradicted by the evidence that he is not actually able to pull the sword out of the stone again (ll. 2,919-28). In the *Estoire*, instead, Cai admits his fabrication as soon as Antor disputes his word and his attempt to withdraw the stones *follows* the revelation:

> & cil li respont comme cil qui ot grant honte certes iou ne vous Antor
> mentirai pas artus mes freres le maporta quant iou li dis quil maportast la
> moie mais iou ne sai mie comment il lot. (Sommer, p. 83)

> And he answered, for he was very much ashamed, 'I won't lie to you. My
> brother Arthur brought it to me when I told him to bring me mine, but I
> do not know how he got it'. (Lacy, p. 213)

Another striking difference between the *Estoire* and *AM* occurs later on in the narrative. In the *Estoire*, as soon as Antor learns that Arthur has succeeded in the trial he reveals to him that he is not his real father and begs Arthur to make Cai his seneschal. Then Arthur is required to pull the sword out of the stone once again, this time before the very eyes of the Archbishop and all of the barons. Antor explains that Arthur is not a knight but should be allowed to attempt the trial anyhow:

> Lors le menerent al autel & le iura bien & loialment a tenir . & quant il
> lot iure si vindrent arriere par deuant le monstier . & lors fu la mellee
> remeise si sen reuindrent li baron al moustier por oir uespres . & lors
> apela antor ses amis & lor dist que artus auoit ostee lespee . & puis le
> disent al archeuesque . *Sire vees chi . j . mien enfant fait antor qui nest
> mie cheualiers . si me prie que iou le fache essaier a ceste espee* si apeles
> sil vous plaist de ces barons. (Sommer, p. 84, emphasis mine)

> Then they took him to the altar, and he swore that he would faithfully
> keep his word. And when he had so sworn, they came back out in front of
> the church. By then the melee had come to an end, and the barons came
> back to the church to hear vespers. Antor then called his friends and told

them that Arthur had drawn the sword out, and they told the archbishop.

'Sir, this is one of my sons,' said Antor. '*He is not a knight, but he begs me to let him try the test of this sword*. Please call the barons together.'

(Lacy, p. 214, emphasis mine)

In *AM* something completely different happens at this point: Antor prays Arthur to make Cai his steward promising that, in turn, he will help him become king. Antor's help consists in Arthur's investiture:

> Forþ ȝede Antor anon riȝt
>
> And sir Arthour made kniȝt,
>
> First he fond him cloþ and cradel
>
> Þo he fond him stede and sadel
>
> Helme and brini and hauberioun
>
> Gaumbers quissers and aketoun
>
> Quarre scheld gode swerd of stiel
>
> And launce stef biteand wel. (*AM*, ll. 2,971-78)

It is made clear in these lines that Arthur cannot become king without being a knight and thus it is necessary for him to possess all of the paraphernalia that distinguish a knight from a squire, a highborn from a lowborn. Arthur cannot afford to make a poor impression in the presence of the barons and the Archbishop and hence has to be clothed and armed accordingly. In other words, if his success in the trial of the sword in the stone depends on his distinctive qualities, the actual right to be king cannot be secured until he reaches the appropriate rank.

The armour and weapons with which he is endowed are the essential equipment of a knight and are here described in great detail. The technical vocabulary used by the author suggests his familiarity with the military milieu or, at least, with the rituals of investiture. Since this part of the story is not reported either in the *Estoire* or in Wace's *Brut*, it could be a descriptive addition by the author of *AM*.

Although some Arthurian romances contain descriptions of Arthur's arming before an imminent battle, the scene of Arthur's investiture is never described in such great detail as in *AM* or occurs right before the more important event of his crowning ceremony. The author of *AM* must have considered Arthur's knighting as a fundamental step on his path towards kingship and must have decided to expand and supplement the scant information he had found in the *Estoire*. As a consequence, the knighting ritual acquires greater

gravity, even overshadowing the moment of Arthur's coronation. Arthur's crowning ceremony is only briefly mentioned after a seasonal headpiece:

> Mirie it is in time of June
>
> When fenel hongeþ abrod in toun
>
> Violet & rose flour
>
> Woneþ þan in maidens bour;
>
> Þe sonne is hot þe day is long
>
> Foules make miri song.
>
> *King Arthour bar coroun*
>
> *In Cardoile þat noble toun* (*AM*, ll. 3,059-65, emphasis mine)

Headpieces intersperse the narrative with brief moments of lyricism. They are common *topoi* in French romance and can be found in several romances of the Auchinleck MS. Their purpose varies from being purely ornamental and signalling the time of the day or the season when a specific event is about, to winning back the attention of the audience after an interruption in the storytelling. The headpieces in *AM* are not additions by the author but are all translations from the corresponding passages in the *Estoire*. According to Macrae-Gibson headpieces in *AM* function as 'chapter-headings', as they are a means to break the narrative, smoothing the transition from the end of an episode to the beginning of the next.[68] Batt has noticed instead that some of the headpieces in *AM* are not only unrelated to the narrative, but also in disagreement with the mood of the episode they precede, creating a sense of ironic contrast.[69] This particular headpiece, however, seems to follow the conventional *topoi*, functioning as a descriptive interlude in tune with the peaceful and convivial atmosphere of Arthur's crowning.

In the medieval feudal system, the knighting ceremony or *adoubement* represented the key event in the life of a knight, denoting his legal majority and his right to bear arms.[70] A great number of texts constituting the vast corpus of Middle English romance include references and descriptions of the knighting ritual, whose length and details vary greatly from one romance to the other.[71] In most cases, ceremonies took place in the hall

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[68] Macrae-Gibson looks at the headpieces in *AM* and *KA* as a way to validate that the two romances have common authorship. See Macrae-Gibson, p. 69-72.

[69] See Batt, *Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, pp. 19-20.

[70] Robert W. Ackerman, 'The Knighting Ceremonies in the Middle English Romances', *Speculum* 19:3 (1944), 285-313 (p. 285).

[71] Ackerman has identified forty-four Middle English romances that contain accounts of the knighting ritual (Ackerman, 'The Knighting Ceremonies', p. 286).

of a lord's palace or directly on the battlefields as a reward for the prowess shown by knights during the battle. Then, after the twelfth century, when the chivalric code gained a more Christian overtone, ceremonies were often held in churches and the title was bestowed by the clergy. Both chronicles and manuals of chivalry treated knighthood as a Christian institution whose major duty was to safeguard the Church.[72] Consequently, the secular symbolism of the knighting ceremonies was complemented by the addition of some religious observances: the knight had to keep vigil all night praying and meditating before the altar; he had to attend a mass in the morning and swear an oath of chivalry; he then received the order of knighthood from somebody who was himself a knight.[73] In the *Estoire* we see a variation of this custom; on the eve of his coronation, Arthur is made a knight by the Archbishop and has to keep vigil all night in the church. However, unlike the long description found in *AM*, the *Estoire*'s does not provide any detail on the knighting itself, dismissing it in half a line:

> Et li archeuesques ot as aparellie le coroune & le sacre la uelle de la
> pentecouste & par le commun conseil de tous . & par lacort des plus haus
> barons *fist li archeuesques artus cheualier* . si ueilla artus cele nuit al
> moustier iusqual endemain quil fu adiourne. (Sommer, p. 87, emphasis
> mine)

> And the archbishop had made the crown ready for the coronation. On
> Whitsun Eve, following everyone's wholehearted counsel and all the
> barons' agreement, *the archbishop made Arthur a knight*. And Arthur
> kept watch in the church all that night until day broke the next morning.
> (Lacy, p. 215, emphasis mine)

The knighting ceremony seems to be a formal procedure and subordinate to that of Arthur's crowning, which, on the other hand, is not only directly connected with the withdrawing of the sword from the stone but also contains the longest description of the withdrawal:

> Et il fu a ienols & prinst lespee a mains iointes & la leua del englume
> ausi legierement comme sele ne tenist a nule chose . Et lors porta entre
> ses mains lespee toute droit si lenmenerent al autel . & il le mist sus &

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[72] The knighting ritual started to be addressed as the 'eighth sacrament' (Ackerman, 'The Knighting Ceremonies, p. 290).

[73] Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 10.

quant il li ot mise si le sacrerent & enoinsent & fisent toutes les choses
que on doit faire a roy. (Sommer, p. 88)

He went down on his knees and took the sword in both his hands. He
raised it out from the anvil as easily as if the sword had not been held fast
by anything. He bore the sword upright in his hands, and they took him
to the altar and set him down there. And when he was seated, they
anointed him and crowned him and did everthing that must be done to a
king. (Lacy, p. 216)

However, before being crowned king by the Archbishop, Arthur must swear an oath that
expounds his commitment to the Church and the Christian community (Sommer, p. 88;
Lacy, p. 215). In the *Estoire*, the importance of Arthur's accession is universal as the focus
is not on the national interest but that of the whole of Christianity. The political settlement
achieved by Arthur's accession is overshadowed by the religious overtone of his election.
Similarly, the significance of Arthur's withdrawing the sword from the stone goes beyond
its political function of singling out an heir for the kingdom. Great emphasis is placed
instead on the concept of divine election. After the sword appears in the courtyard, the
Archbishop specifies that neither social status nor wealth will be decisive factors in the
trial. The Lord himself will select a leader who will defend the Church and its people:

Nostre Sires qui toutes les choses voit et set et conoist en a un esleu, mais
nos ne savons lequel ; et tant vos puis je bien dire que richesce ne
hautesce ne fiertez n'i a mestier, se la volanté non dou voir seingnor dou
ciel.[74] (Micha, p. 270)

Our Lord, who knows and sees all these things, has chosen one man, but
we do not know who he is. I can tell you for the truth that wealth and
high rank and nobility will have nothing to do with it, but only the will of
Jesus Christ. (Lacy, p. 212-13)

Since the election lies entirely in the hands of God, Arthur's fate is part of a providential
plan, in the trial as well as in the rest of the narrative. Moreover, since Arthur has been
chosen directly by God, it is sufficient for him to draw the sword just once in order to be
accepted as the future king by the Archbishop and all of the people. It is not so in *AM*: as

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[74] The passage here cited is taken from Micha as Sommer's edition differs slightly and does not include the
first line: 'nostre sires a establis en terre que nus homs pour hautece ne pour riquece terriene que diex li ait
dounee en cest siecle encontre ceste election ne aille.' (Sommer, p. 82)

will be shown in great detail below, Arthur has not only to be made a knight but also to prove his prowess in a tournament before the Archbishop can accept him as a valid candidate for the trial.

Unlike the *Estoire*, the trial in *AM* is not presented as a 'divine election': the Archbishop simply says that all the barons should gather in the church to pray so that God sends them a king who could be of help 'to the riȝt oȝains þe wrong' (l. 2,795). Once again, the stress is on the need for a legitimate sovereign: 'For to haue a riȝtful kinge' (l. 2,804). This being so, the sword loses its symbolic meaning of justice and defence of Christianity and comes to be a token of England's political stability. The sword will provide whoever will succeed in the trial with the legitimacy needed to govern so that history – Vortiger's usurpation and allegiance to the Saxons – will not be repeated.

In *AM* Arthur's route to the throne follows a secular pathway: the author seems to have deliberately omitted most of the material related to ecclesiastical matters. This is first clear when Excalibur appears in the churchyard. If the inscription on the sword in the *Estoire* explicates that 'cil qui osteroit [ceste espee] seroit rois de la terre par lelection ihesu crist' (Sommer, p. 81; 'the one who pulled this sword out would be king of the land by the choice of Jesus Christ', Lacy, p. 212), the writing provided in *AM* does not make mention of God or the idea that the election will represent God's will, nor the 'king-making function of the sword': 'Icham yhot Estalibore / Vnto a king fair tresore' (ll. 2,817-18).[75] The writing seems to imply that only a king – or, by extension, someone of royal blood – will be able to pull the sword out.

Secondly, the ritual does not take place in the church, but in the churchyard, by the stone and anvil.[76] The Archbishop is not present and does not play any part at all in the ritual. Unlike any other version of the story, it is Antor who confers knighthood on Arthur and thus gains a far greater role in this part of the narrative. Not only does he provide Arthur with all the necessary equipment but he also approaches the Archbishop and proposes Arthur's candidature claiming that Arthur is 'Boþe gent and noble' (l. 2,988) and 'schuld be our king wiþ lawe' (l. 2,989). Gentility, or nobility of blood, is therefore the prerequisite that Arthur has to demonstrate in order to be admitted to the trial and for this reason Antor's intervention is indispensable for Arthur's eligibility. In other words, before

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[75] Rosemary Morris, *The Character of King Arthur in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), p. 42.

[76] Even though the author does not make direct mention of the place where the ritual is held, we can assume that Arthur, Cai and Antor are still in the churchyard, where their previous conversation was set.

being allowed to participate in the trial, Arthur needs to possess the status of a knight, conferred on him through the knighting ceremony, and that of a nobleman, which is validated by Antor's word.

However, Arthur must also show that his status is matched by military power, denoted by the size of the army – i.e. the number of knights – that he controls, and to this extent he is also said to have the service of forty knights (ll. 2,979-80). Although in a realistic late medieval context forty knights would make Arthur a mighty leader, in the romance Arthur's knights are not enough to gain him the respect of the other barons, who have much larger armies at their service. Later on in the narrative, when all of the minor kings of Britain gather in Cardoile to attend the crowning ceremony and pay homage to Arthur, the author gives the audience an idea of the proportions describing the military force of Arthur's guests: King Lot has the service of 'fiue hundred noble kniȝtes' (l. 3,071); King Urien brings along twenty-thousand knights (l. 3,087); King Carodas is accompanied by six-hundred knights (l. 3,094). Clearly, Arthur's military power is inferior to that of the other kings and hence his suitability to govern is questioned again after his coronation. In the *Estoire*, the barons repeatedly refuse to accept Arthur's authority on two grounds: his young age and his low status – Arthur is still a squire when he withdraws the sword in the presence of the barons and the Archbishop (Sommer, p. 86; Lacy, p. 215). In *AM*, instead, age does not seem to represent an obstacle for Arthur's accession as much as his low social status. In other words, even though Arthur is a nobleman, a knight and a king by pulling out the sword the barons challenge him because they do not recognize him as an equal. Rosemary Morris suggests that such a change in the character of the rebellion represents a point of weakness in the narrative of *AM*:

> The somewhat earthly-minded author of *AM* misses the opportunity of
> emphasising the sacrilegious and damnable nature of the rebellion by
> bringing out the mystical and symbolic elements of the coronation
> itself.[77]

However, Morris does not take into account the different perspective with which the two works – the *Estoire* and *AM* – were designed. As was explained before, the tendency to accentuate the religious implications of the events must be explained in view of the religious framework of the *Estoire*, whose true subject is the connection between the

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[77] Morris, *The Character*, p. 47.

Arthurian story and the Grail.[78] The author of *AM* shows instead a clear inclination toward secularization as he tries to insert the material provided by the French sources into the historical frame of the chronicles. In other words, the omission of the mystical and symbolic elements implies a conscious narrative strategy.

The expansion of Arthur's investiture in *AM* presents another interesting feature highlighting the contrast between the interpretation of knighthood in the *Estoire* and *AM* once again. After Antor has made Arthur a knight and has given him horse, arms and knights, Arthur hurries to the tournament:

> And so þer dede verrament
>
> Þat ich day sir Arthour
>
> Þe los he bar and þe honour. (*AM*, ll. 2,982-84)

The tournament functions here as the ultimate test in which Arthur is required to establish his reputation as a knight. Prowess therefore joins lineage and military power as a prerequisite for Arthur's admission to the trial of the sword in the stone and, by extension, for his accession to the throne. The prominence given to prowess in this particular phase of the story as well as the association of military skills and reputation are grounded in the chivalric code. For this reason it will be necessary to examine the ways in which *AM* conforms to the contemporary understanding and idealization of chivalry.

During the eleventh century an ethical code of knighthood began to take shape, resulting from a shift in the ecclesiastical attitudes towards and from the propaganda on the Christian mission of knighthood in the wake of the crusades.[79] A set of defining qualities a knight was expected to possess, among which prowess was the chief virtue: knights were fighters and their principal activity was warfare, therefore they had to show competence in combat and behave as effective soldiers in the service of their lords. The knight whose prowess stood out in battle and tournaments would increase his prestige in the eyes of his lord and his peers.[80] In many cases, squires were knighted directly on the battlefield on the basis of their deeds in battle. However, prowess was also fundamental for the functioning of feudal chivalry and to guarantee the success in the exchange of feudal obligations between the lord and his knights. Loyalty and trustworthiness were also

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[78] See my discussion of the development of this branch of the *Vulgate* Cycle in the Introduction (pp. 14-17).

[79] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 45-48.

[80] Matthew Strickland stresses the link between reputation and prowess in combat saying that 'above all, a knight's reputation, honour and pride, rested on his *prouesse* – prowess in combat and on the performance of feats of arms'. See Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 99.

necessary qualities to seal the bond between lords and knights. A knight had to serve his lord faithfully, proving himself worthy of his trust.[81]

However, when the idea of knighthood began to be directly associated with nobility two other qualities entered the chivalric ethos: *largesse* and courtesy.[82] *Largesse* or generosity consisted in the knight's ability to provide sumptuous hospitality and magnificent gifts. The latter referred to the relationship amongst fellow knights and between knights and ladies. During tournaments and battles, courtesy implied that knights had to show respect for their fellows as well as treat their enemies and prisoners fairly.

In the *Estoire*, *largesse* not only occupies a high position in the hierarchy of knightly virtues but also represents the defining quality for a king. When Arthur succeeds in the trial he is only a young squire, and the barons challenge his right to be king twice: once on the basis of his age, and the second time on the grounds of his social status. Eventually, the barons yield to the Archbishop's and the people's will and judge Arthur worthy of being king, but only after one last test: they gather up all the kingly things that a man might wish to possess so as to expose 'se ses cuers seroit couoiteus ne prenans' (Sommer, p. 87; 'whether his heart was greedy or grasping', Lacy, p. 215). However, to the incredulity of the barons, Arthur acts as a good king would by asking about the value of each present and then distributing all the goods he possessed to the knights and the people around him:

> Ensi departoit tuos les dons que cil li auoient doune qui le vaudrent
> essaier de quel maniere il vaudroit estre . & quant il le virent de tel
> contenance si ni ot celui qui moult ne le prisast en son cuer & disoient
> bien par deriere quil seroit de bien haut a faire car il ne veoient en lui
> nule couoitise car ausi tost com il auoit lauoir ausi tost lauoit il bien
> enploie . & que tout si don estoient raisounable selonc ce que chascuns
> iert. (Sommer, p. 87)

> Thus he shared the gifts bestowed on him by those who wanted to test
> what kind of man he was. And when they saw that he had borne himself
> so well, there were none who did not esteem him in their hearts. They all
> whispered behind their hands that he was surely of high birth, for they

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[81] Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practises in Medieval France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 30.
[82] Painter, *French Chivalry*, p. 32.

found no greed in him: as soon as anything of worth came his way, he

put it to good use, and all his gifts were fair according to what each one

deserved. (Lacy, p. 215)

Thus Arthur demonstrates to the barons his good heart, finally winning their respect. His generosity is interpreted by the barons as evidence of his nobility; the last obstacle to his accession is overcome and the barons agree that Arthur should be king on the basis of the distinctive quality he has shown. The role played by *largesse* in this instance is crucial in validating Arthur's high lineage and ensuring his right to be king.[83] Interestingly, this episode, which would surely strengthen the *AM* author's argument on Arthur's natural suitability to the throne, does not appear in *AM*. At this stage, more importance is given to the qualities that define Arthur as knight and a military leader, promoting prowess above any other quality of the chivalric code.

The material analysed so far shows that the author of *AM* employed a strategic expansion in order to highlight a moment of particular importance in the narrative – i.e. Arthur's knighting as an indispensable stage for him to reach kingship. However, *AM* also contains some omissions that provide readers with a different version of the story from the *Estoire*, shaping their understanding and evaluation of Arthur's actions and behaviour. A striking omission involves the episode relating Mordred's begetting by Arthur and his half-sister Morgause. The thorny issue of Mordred's parentage is touched on several times in the *Estoire*: at first Mordred is presented as one of King Lot's sons and as Arthur's nephew (Sommer, p. 73; Lacy, p. 207); in a second instance, Merlin reveals that Arthur is the real father of one of Lot's sons but without mentioning which one (Sommer, p. 96; Lacy, p. 220). Finally, the *Estoire* provides a full explanation of Mordred's parentage by means of a flashback occupying an entire chapter:

& si fu voirs quil auoit vne des serors le roy artu de par sa mere & de cele

dame issi gauaines & agrauains & guerehes & gaheries icil furent fil au

roy loth . & dautre part en issi mordret qui fu li maines que li rois artus

engendra si vous dirai comment . Car ausi vaudra miex lestoire se iou

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[83] Taking into account the *Prose Lancelot* and other thirteenth-century prose romances, Elspeth Kennedy noted that medieval French romance treated *largesse* and the other moral qualities as virtues that could be inherited through lineage. Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Quest for Identity and the Importance of Lineage in Thirteenth-Century French Prose Romance', in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood: Papers from the Third Strawberry Hill Conference, 1986*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1988), pp. 70-81 (p. 74).

vous fais entendant en quel manière il fu engendres de lui . car maintes

gens len priseroient mains qui la uerite nen sauroient. (Sommer, p. 128)

It is also true that his [Lot's] wife was one of King Arthur's half-sisters,

his mother's daughter. This lady gave birth to Gawainet, Agravain,

Guerrehet, and Gaheriet, who were all King Lot's sons. Furthermore, she

also bore Mordred, who was the offspring whom King Arthur fathered.

And I will tell you how, for the history will be more worthwhile if I make

you understand how Mordred was sired by him, for many people would

find King Arthur less worthy because of it if they did not know the truth.

(Lacy, p. 237)

In sleeping with his half-sister, Arthur is guilty of two sins: adultery and incest; incest, of course, bears a far greater seriousness and will irredeemably blacken Arthur's reputation.[84] However, by relating the whole episode in the form of a digression, the author of the *Estoire* underlines that at the time of their first encounter Arthur was unaware of his relation to Morgause: when they conceive Mordred Arthur had yet to undergo the trial of the sword in the stone and to learn his true parentage (Sommer, pp. 128-29; Lacy, p. 237).

The author of *AM* completely avoids the risk of compromising Arthur's reputation by removing the incest issue from his narrative and presenting Mordred as the son of Lot and Belisent (Morgause), and Gawain's younger brother (ll. 8,377, 8,406-408). According to Macrae-Gibson, such concealment might result from the influence of the chronicle tradition, reporting Mordred's legitimacy and contrasting with that of French romance.[85] Geoffrey of Monmouth explains that Lot 'in the reign of Aurelius Ambrosius had married the king's sister and fathered Gawain and Mordred' (*HRB*, pp. 203-04), while Wace presents Mordred as one of Arthur's nephews (pp. 280-81) and so does Laȝamon (pp. 654-55).[86]

Both the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Cycles contributed to the formation of a literary tradition in which Arthur's sin became a central theme in the narrative and a major cause of the downfall of Camelot and the disintegration of Arthurian society.[87] Incest first

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[84] For a study of incest in the Middle Ages and in medieval literature, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

[85] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 8.

[86] *Laȝamon's* Brut*, or,* Hystoria Brutonum, ed. and transl. by W. R. J. Barron and C. Weinberg (New York: Longman, 1995), cited by page number.

[87] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval*, p. 206.

entered the Arthurian story at the beginning of the thirteenth century with the composition of the Vulgate Cycle. Early references to Mordred's origin can be found in the *Agravain* portion of the *Lancelot* section as well as in the *Morte Artu* that concludes the cycle.[88] The matter of Mordred's illegitimacy is then further expanded in the Post Vulgate Cycle by the author of the *Suite du Merlin* who provides the most complete account of Mordred's conception as well as his miraculous escape from Arthur's mass infanticide.[89] Scholars have different opinions about what prompted sibling incest in the Arthurian myth. Micha has shown that the incestuous element of the motif was imported from legends about Charlemagne's begetting of Roland.[90] M. Victoria Guerin points out the biblical roots of the motif, claiming that Arthur's incest was used by the French prose writers as a conscious reference to David's adultery with Bathsheba.[91] She also notes an element of reiteration within the narrative; by committing adultery and incest, Arthur moves along the same sinful path as his father, a path that will ultimately lead to his own downfall.[92]

According to Helen Adolf, in the Middle Ages, incest was seen as an expression of lust and could be equated with Original Sin. By extension, the fact that Arthur commits incest makes him a symbol of the human condition in general.[93] Secondly, Adolf makes an interesting point suggesting that the incest charge makes Arthur 'blatantly human' at a time when his figure could be easily exploited and turned into a 'national and political saint'.[94]

The introduction of incest in the Arthurian story produced an opposition between the French vision of Arthur as a fallible human being and the chronicles' conception of Arthur as a flawless hero for the nation. As Rosemary Morris notes:

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[88] It is important to remember that even though the *Lancelot* and the *Morte Artu* follow the *Estoire* in the narrative sequencing of the Cycle, the date of their composition precedes that of the *Estoire* (see Introduction). For a full discussion of the two references to Mordred in the *Lancelot* and the *Morte* see Archibald, *Incest*, p. 204.

[89] See *La suite du roman de Merlin*, ed. by Gilles Roussineau (Geneva: Droz, 1996), pp. 1-2, 56-59.

[90] Alexandre Micha, 'Deux sources de la *Mot Artu*: II. La naissance incestueuse de Mordred', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie 66* (1950), 371-72.

[91] Guerin, M. Victoria, 'The King's Sin: The origins of the David-Arthur Parallel', in *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition*, ed. by Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe (New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 15-30 (p. 23).

[92] Guerin, 'The King's Sin', p. 23.

[93] Helen Adolf, 'The Concept of Original Sin as Reflected in Arthurian Romance', *Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Margaret Schlauch,* ed. by Mieczyslaw Brahmer *et al.* (Warsaw: PWN – Polish Scientific Publishers, 1966), pp. 21-29 (pp. 22-23).

[94] Adolf, 'The Concept', p. 29.

No French prose author could consider Arthur any kind of a saint, while English chroniclers, in whom if anywhere lies the inclination to make him a 'saint', go on doing so undeterred by the incest-motif, which most ignore.[95]

Whilst the *Estoire* and its Post-Vulgate continuation, the *Suite de Merlin*, fully exploit the incest-motif and its repercussions on the plot, historical writings do not make any mention of this. In Geoffrey's *Historia*, Wace's *Brut* and Laȝamon's *Brut*, Mordred is introduced as Arthur's nephew and no further detail regarding his origins is provided. As has been observed earlier, the author of *AM* seems to have been influenced by the chronicles as an additional source for part of his narrative. However, the portion of *AM* in which Mordred's true parentage should be revealed derives exclusively from its French source. The relevance of the incest's omission in *AM* should then be reconsidered in view of the relation between *AM* and its historical sources. The author of *AM* was aiming at adhering to the chronicles' version of the Arthurian story, which defined the English tradition of Arthurian romance.[96]

It is remarkable that the story of Mordred is not even included in the only historical writing contained in the Auchinleck MS, the *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, linked with *AM* in terms of themes and interests.[97] *AM* and the *Chronicle* also have in common a series of notes in the margins that Macrae-Gibson has ascribed to the same hand.[98] Only a few marginalia are in English whilst the majority (over twenty interventions) are written in Latin. The annotations can be found in the first 2,000 lines of the romance, dealing with Merlin and Vortiger. They summarize in a few words the content of the various sections of the narrative up until when Vortiger is ultimately driven in the castle by Uter and Pendragon. If, on the one hand, the marginalia draw attention to episodes such as Vortiger's illegitimate accession to the throne, the conclusive battle between Vortiger and the two brothers, the description of Uter's banner, on the other they appear at the most salient points in the flashback dedicated to Merlin's story – his begetting by the incubus, his birth and baptism. According to Macrae-Gibson, the hand responsible for these interventions is of about 1600.[99] Although these marginalia are quite

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[95] Morris, *The Character*, p. 107.
[96] Riddy, 'Reading for England', p. 330.
[97] Henceforth *Chronicle*. Citations are from *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, ed. by Ewald Zettl, EETS OS 196 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), cited by line number only.
[98] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 39.
[99] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 39.

late, they demonstrate that, at least in some phases of the reception of the romance, the text was read with particular attention and must therefore have enjoyed a certain degree of popularity. The similarities between the notes left in the margins of *AM* and the *Chronicle* imply that – at the time when the marginalia were left but perhaps also at an earlier stage – the two texts must have been approached in combination with each other and shared similar audiences of readers who had a special interest in the early history of England and in the Arthurian legend.[100]

Placed in the last part of the manuscript, the *Chronicle* lists many English heroes and kings appearing elsewhere in the manuscript, functioning as a reference that could support and integrate the reading of the other texts in the manuscript – in particular saints' lives and the romances. As Turville-Petre has suggested, the *Chronicle* could be used as a 'chronological grid' in which events and characters could be easily collocated.[101] It covers the history of England and the genealogy of its rulers from the story of Albina and her sisters to the death of Edward II (1327). The Auchinleck *Chronicle* should be set apart from the copies extant in other manuscripts for its degree of variation and innovation – a feature that brings together many texts in the Auchinleck MS. Of the five manuscripts in which it survives, the Auchinleck MS contains its longest metrical version, stretching to 2,370 lines. The *Chronicle* stands out for its rather unusual transformation of Hengis into an ideal king defined by his chivalric qualities, and for the addition of Albina's story at the very beginning of the text.[102] The presence of this legend creates an important link between English and Greek history, but also shows that in the chronicle, just like in the romances of the Auchinleck MS, facts and fantasy are indissolubly entwined. The text contains an enumeration of both historical and legendary facts described in little detail so

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[100] Hardman makes a similar point noting that the presence of the so-called Battle Abbey Roll in the collection and the fact that the popular romances of the Auchinleck MS are translations from Anglo-Norman texts 'suggest a programme of making available to younger readers the traditionally valued narratives of their cultural heritage, as members of an English family conscious of Norman ancestry' (Hardman, 'Popular Romances', p.155).

[101] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 108.

[102] Hengist's transformation has been addressed by Turville-Petre in *England the Nation* (pp. 109-10), and more recently by Purdie in *Anglicizing Romance* (pp. 96-97). Whilst all of the extant copies begin with the arrival of Brutus in England, the *Chronicle* opens with a long prologue on the origins of England, which relates the legend of Albina and her sisters who came to Britain after having been banished from Greece, becoming the first inhabitants of the island. Impregnated by the devil, they give birth to a race of giants, whom Brutus then had to fight in order to take control of the island. This legend was well known in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and similar accounts in Latin, French and English can be found in many versions of the *Brut* chronicle and other historical texts. See Zettl, 'Introduction', in *An Anonymous*, pp. xlvii- xlviii.

as to serve as 'a complete' survey of English history and a hybrid text, in which facts and legends, history and fiction are so well blended together as to make it impossible to define the text in terms of genre. [103]

The same can be said for the seventy-lines-long Arthurian section of the chronicle: it does not provide a full account of Arthur's life and reign but makes brief references to episodes that do not appear in other Arthurian chronicles.[104] The events described in the Arthurian section are additions unique to the *Chronicle* and do not appear in *AM*, probably due to the fact that the*Chronicle*'s copyist was working on previous Middle English versions of the text, whilst the author of *AM* was translating from an Old French source. Although the Arthurian material contained in the *Chronicle* does not overlap with the narrative of *AM*, these two texts share the educational function performed.[105] *AM* and the *Chronicle* were indeed read and scrutinized by the same audience, as it is possible that such an audience associated these two texts not just in terms of a common Arthurian subject, but also in terms of their genres' hybridity: fictionalized history in the case of the *Chronicle* and historicized fiction in that of *AM*.

The features of *AM* discussed so far demonstrate the author's intention to 'historicize' the narrative of the *Estoire*: from the re-structuring of the plot in chronological order to the strong thematic link between *AM* and the Auckinleck *Chronicle*. Another means by which the *AM* poet historicized the content of the romance is by highlighting (and expanding on) specific themes in the narrative which reflected interests and preoccupations of his time. The following paragraphs will explore other themes that

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[103] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 108. Turville-Petre has labelled the text 'romance-chronicle' (*England the Nation*, p. 111).

[104] Zettl does not suggest a particular source for this part of the text, noting that the author must have treated whatever sources he used very freely or must have written the story down from memory. See Zettl, 'Introduction', in *An Anonymous*, p. lxii. The part dedicated to Arthur is divided into two separate sections. In the first (ll. 1,042-56), Arthur is summoned by the barons to fight Vortiger, who had imposed a high taxation upon the people and was responsible for the impoverishment of the land. Arthur, the 'strong conquerour' (ll. 1,045), defeats Vortiger and his men and wins England back. In the second part (ll. 1,057-116), Arthur is crowned king at Glastonbury and goes to war against Lancelot who holds Guinevere prisoner in Nottingham. In the final lines, Lancelot and the queen return to Glastonbury and harmony is restored. A messenger called Cradoc arrives at court and gives Guinevere a mantle which is ironically destined to the wife of a 'cokkewold' (l. 1,106) and which, according to the author of the chronicle, could still be seen in Glastonbury. The presence of this episode is further evidence for the peculiar character of the chronicle, in which the boundaries between history and fiction are blurred.

[105] This can also be demonstrated by the *Chronicle*'s concise style and metre, which would have facilitated its memorization and recitation. According to Zettl, the original *Chronicle*, which must have been around 600 lines long, likely had an instructional purpose and 'was probably intended for the instruction of the little-educated parts of the community' (Zettl, 'Introduction', in *An Anonymous*, p. cxxx).

figure prominently in the romance: war and chivalric action. It will be shown that war and particularly religious conflict is a central theme in *AM* and it is employed to assert identity by means of an anachronistic clash between Christian and pagans.

In *AM*, war is anything but a monolithic concept. It can take many forms and be provoked by various situations; it can be a form of defence from an external threat, as in the case of the war against Hengist and his army; it can be a civil strife in reaction to usurpation and tyranny, as in Uther's last battle against Vortiger; it can signify a sort of martial trial to legitimize the king's leadership, as in the case of the barons' revolt against Arthur following Arthur's accession to the throne; finally, war can be fought against the infidels for the defence of the whole of Christendom, resembling the crusading ventures in the Middle East. In *AM,* each situation, as well as the diversity of the opponents encountered, determines the way in which war is described as well as the degree of brutality displayed by the participants.

Traditionally, in medieval romances battles could be portrayed from two divergent angles, as large-scale warfare between opposing armies, or as single combat between two or more small groups of knights.[106] In view of their attention to the heroism of individual knights and their chivalrous deeds, medieval romancers usually display a preference for the second type of representation. *AM* makes no difference and presents war as an endless series of single combats organized according to formulas and repetitive dynamics. If much emphasis is given to the physical dimension of one-to-one combat and to the fast-paced development of the events, other elements, which are part of the repetitive narrative pattern of battle sequences, are left out.[107] In particular, the *AM* poet surely favours facts over words: in the second part of the narrative, direct speech is reduced to a minimum, and scenes in which the knights make boasts and challenge each other prior to or during combats almost disappear. The audience is left with a vivid sequence of images depicting the various stages of the fights, whose dynamics are always the same: one knight knocks another knight off his horse; a sword combat follows, which concludes with one of the

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[106] One evident example of large-scale battle can be found in the *Estoire*'s flashback relating the war between Claudas and Ban, which describes the campaign of the two armies (Sommer, p. 98; Lacy, p. 221). This episode will be examined below.

[107] In her analysis of the theme of battle in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, Jean Ritzke-Rutherford has completed a list of recurring motifs that make up the 'stereotyped narrative patterns of battles', or 'type-scene'. These include challenges, verbal eruptions of anger or grief, councils and vows, and exhortations. See Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, 'Formulaic Macrostructure: The Theme of Battle', in *The Alliterative* Morte Arthure*: A Reassessment of the Poem*, ed. by Karl Heinz Göller (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 83-95 (pp. 84-85).

knights fleeing or being pierced to death – this seems to depend on the enemy's nature, if he is a 'geaunt' Saracen he is more likely to be brutally killed.

The *AM* poet's fascination for war and conflict is more evident in the second half of the romance, which is dedicated to their full record. This section, starting with Arthur's coronation, first relates the war that Arthur fights against the rebellious barons, and then the recurrent threat of the Saxon/Saracens to England. Martial action is the element that receives the most thorough treatment, producing a story that, in Macrae-Gibson's words, is 'close-packed with action', hence speeding up the pace of the narrative.[108] The detailed depiction of war scenes amplifies the realism of violence by describing the brutal effect of war in very explicit terms: the Saracens' heads severed from their bodies and flying to the ground, Arthur's knights drenched in the blood of their adversaries, bodies slit from head to navel. These are only some of the recurrent grisly images that can be found in the descriptions. Extensive violent scenes are constantly reiterated with little variation so as to emphasise the ideas of war and violence in positive terms. Violence, which is exclusively inflicted by the English knights on the Saracen enemies and never the other way around, is regarded as an effective practice of knightly conduct. Moreover, such a representation of battles expresses a strong link between knighthood and warfare, promoting an ideology in which martial skills are the defining quality of the chivalric ethos.[109]

Unlike later Middle English romances where the impact of war is explored and condemned –for example, the alliterative *Morte Arthure* – the *AM* seems to present a conventionally romanticized portrayal of war.[110] War and extreme violence are glorified throughout the poem so as to highlight the heroism of the knights involved, offering a portrait of early English history as a period of incessant war and destruction.[111] War and military action are usually presented as a response to the Saxon invasion and, in various instances, the Saxon invaders are said to come from Denmark, Saxony and Ireland (ll. 111;

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[108] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 9.

[109] As explained above, this can be seen in Arthur's knighting ceremony when Arthur has to prove that he is worthy to be king by fighting in a tournament.

[110] Morte Arthure*: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Mary Hamel (New York: Garland, 1984). A number of critics have interpreted the alliterative *Morte Arthure* as a sort of anti-war poem reflecting fourteenth-century preoccupations with war and warfare. In this regards, see Dorsey Armstrong, 'Rewriting the Chronicle Tradition: The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and Arthur's Sword of Peace', *Pareregon* 25:1 (2008), 81-10, and Karl Heinz Göller, 'Reality Versus Romance: A Reassessment of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*', in *The Alliterative* Morte Arthure*: A Reassessment of the Poem*, ed. by Karl Heinz Göller (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 15-29.

[111] Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, p. 194.

2,067; 4,728; 6,931 etc.).[112] Even though these lands are not remote from England and do not have any special connection with the Middle East, the foreigners who come from these countries to conquer England are usually referred to as 'Sarraʒins' (ll. 316; 325; 475; 479 etc.).

The identification of the Saxons as Saracens in Middle English romance has received growing attention from scholars as *AM* is not the only text in the Auchinleck MS to be characterized by the presence of Saracens.[113] Other romances in the manuscript – *The King of Tars*, *King Richard* and *Guy of Warwick* to mention a few – contain references to Saracens and some of them relate episodes set in the Middle East at the time of the crusades.[114] Some have interpreted this feature as evidence that the audience of the manuscript was particularly keen on the theme of crusades and some of its members might even have been directly involved in the crusade ventures.[115] Saracens represent a unifying feature for the romances contained in the Auchinleck MS, but *AM* stands out for being the only romance of the collection in which Saracens invade England.

The word 'Saracen' entered medieval literature bearing a variety of meanings eluding an exclusive definition, especially as far as the translation from Middle English is concerned.[116] In the *Estoire*, the Saxons are named 'sesnes' or 'saines' but in no instance are they referred to as 'sarazzins', the Old French term for Saracens. However, Saracens do appear in other branches of the Vulgate Cycle (the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Livre d'Artus*), in Manning's *Chronicle* and in Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, suggesting that the Old French or the English Arthurian tradition might have influenced

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[112] For a discussion of the Irish Saracens see Aisling Byrne, 'West is East: The Irish Saracens in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 55 (2011), pp. 221-32.

[113] A recent publication of *Arthuriana* (Winter 2006) has been entirely dedicated to Saracens in Arthurian Literature and to Malory in particular. See the introduction to the journal issue in Jaqueline De Weever, 'The Saracen as Narrative Knot', *Arthuriana* 16:4 (2006), 4-9. See also Ivana Djordjević, 'Saracens and Other Saxons: Using, Misusing and Confusing Names in *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick*', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Ashe *et al.*, pp. 28-42. See also Helen Young, *Constructing 'England' in the Fourteenth Century: A Postcolonial Interpretation of Middle English Romance* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). Young reads the romance in the light of postcolonial theory and, in particular, Homi K.Bhabba's formulation on hybridity, claiming that the romance validates the existence of a hybrid English nation 'the Saxon can be read as having the potential to become legitimately English through the deeds of their descendants, who are ultimately the audience of the poem' (p. 247).

[114] *The King of Tars: Edited from the Auchinleck Manuscript, Advocates 19.2.1,* ed. by Judith Perryman, Middle English Texts 12 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980); *Guy of Warwick*, ed. by Julius Zupitza, EETS ES 42, 49, 59 (London, 1883-91).

[115] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 136.

[116] Diane Speed has shown the various meanings of the word in the context of Middle English romance and the *chanson de geste*. See Diane Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', *Speculum* 65:3 (1990), 564-95.

the *AM* poet in his use of the Saracens.[117] In Middle English texts as early as the middle of the thirteenth century, the word Saracen was used with a variety of meanings as recorded by the *MED*: along with its basic meaning of '(1) a Turk, Arab, or Muslim, often with reference to the Crusades', the word could also define '(2) a heathen, pagan, or infidel', '(3) a type of non Christian, and '(4) one of the pagan invaders of England, especially Danes and Saxons'.[118] Although the *MED* cites *AM* only with regard to meaning (4), in the romance the term broadly ecompasses the other definitions too, and especially in the second half of the romance, where there is more diversity in the vocabulary to encourage an association between the pagan invaders and the Middle East. Words like 'soudan' (ll. 4,440; 6,758; 6,763 etc.) or 'amirail' (ll. 1,749; 6,174; 8,154 etc.), which define members of the Arab military command, are the designated titles of many leaders in the Saracen host. Similarly, on numerous occasions Saracens are associated with Islam or pagan deities, as they worship or swear their vows to 'Mahoun' (ll. 5,066; 7,497 etc.), 'Dagon' (ll. 5,775; 7,505), and 'Apolin' (ll. 6,096; 6,371 etc.). Originally worshiped by ancient Mesopotamian populations as the god of fertility, Dagon was one of the gods in the pantheon of the Philistines, and represented as a fish from the waist down.[119] Together with the fictitious deity Termagaunt, the Greek god Apollo was often associated with Mohammed and believed to be worshipped by the Saracens. The author of the romance goes even further, and if Saxons are turned into Saracens, by means of a similar procedure Britons are depicted as champions of Christianity and are often referred to as 'our Cristen men' (ll. 6,208; 7,402 etc.). The cultural clash between the Celtic and Germanic people therefore acquires profound religious implications, being underpinned by a religious ideology. Christianity becomes a marker of identity as important as ethnicity and language when the war between Britons and Saxons is turned into a crusade-like conflict. As Speed has noted, religion becomes the main criterion by which the two opposing armies can be identified, although it is not 'developed as a significant theme' in the narrative.[120]

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[117] *Lestoire del saint graal, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, vol. 1 (1908), *Le Livre d'Artus, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, vol. 7 (1913), Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *The Story of England*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. by William Aldis Wright (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887). See Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, pp. 171-72.

[118] See the *MED* at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ (retrieved on 22/10/2013).

[119] According to the *MED* the word is only recorded in Wycliff's Bible: 'The princis of Philistiens camen to gidre in oon, for to offre oostis of greet worship to Dagon, her god' (Judg.16.23). See *The Holy Bible, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, ed. by Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850).

[120] Speed, 'The Saracens of *King Horn*', p. 594.

The antithesis between Christians and infidels further encourages the audience of *AM* to identify themselves with Arthur's Britons. The social patterning of Britain both in Arthur's time and in fourteenth-century England was characterised by a complex ethnic stratification. Arthur's Britons were originally the Celtic population who inhabited the British Isles. Following the Roman and Saxon invasions, the Britons were confined to the North and the West of the island towards Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, and eventually mingled together with the occupiers. In the same way, the variegated social panorama of fourteenth-century England resulted from the Norman Conquest of 1066 with its linguistic, cultural and social repercussions. Arthur was indeed a hero that offered points of identification for the various ethnic groups of the island – Celtic, Germanic, Norman. By extension, the Arthurian story offered many possibilities of identification for its audience, depending on the political agendas of authors and their patrons.[121]

In *AM* Arthur's identity shifts from Celtic to English when sixth-century Britain is equated to fourteenth-century England. In order to make the story more relevant to national history, the author employs a couple of lines to clarify that Arthur's Britain is now England and its Celtic population is now English:

> (Ac Inglond was yhoten þo
> Michel Breteyne wiþouten no).
> Þe Bretouns þat beþ Inglisse nov
> Herd telle when he com and hou
> Þat Angys bi water brouȝt. (*AM*, ll. 117-21)

By identifying the Britons with the English the *AM* poet makes England's past relevant to his own present and creates a contextual relationship between pre-Saxon (and pre-Norman) Britain and fourteenth-century England. This is achieved through the fabrication of a convenient albeit anachronistic cultural distance between English and Saxons – who should have been the people more easily associated with the English in terms of culture and language – and through the equation of Saxons with Middle Eastern Saracens. The religious division between Christians and Saracens becomes a remedy for both geographical division and social conflict: the romance shows how the hostility between ethnic groups – Welsh, Scottish and English – can be overcome when the threat comes from a common enemy. As Siobhain Bly Calkin has suggested, the conflict with

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[121] In this regard, see Warren, *History on the Edge*, who shows how the Arthurian story was manipulated and modified to reflect particular national and political ideologies.

the Saracens creates a sense of unified insular identity based on religion.[122] In the narrative, this also means that Arthur's men are ready to leave behind the feuds that had characterised the first phase of Arthur's reign, and fight united against the Saxons.

By employing the personal and possessive pronouns 'our' when referring to British knights and people – 'our kniȝtes' (ll. 6,303; 6,644; 8,839 etc.), 'our folk' ('ll. 6,646, 6,899; 6,948 etc.) – the author seems to encourage the audience to identify with the Christian army. The religious diversity between Saxons and Britons is stressed even more in the second part of the narrative, where it becomes *the* main reason for the conflict between the two people. This would also offer a justification for the impressive quantity of brutal violence employed in the battles against the Saracens. Despite his tendency to compress material taken from the sources, the poet expands upon the scenes containing the Britons' military and chivalric achievements and supplements these with an excessive outpouring of violence and gory details. The author's predilection for gruesome descriptions, together with the repetitiveness of battle scenes, have often been disparaged by scholars and interpreted as a symptom of the unrefined style of Middle English romance. When referring to the 'south-eastern group' of verse romances in the Auchinleck MS – *Havelok*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Beues of Hamtoun*, *Richard Coeur de Lion*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, and *AM*, Derek Pearsall claims that these romances are 'professional adaptations of French poems of the *chanson de geste* type, blunting the first keen edge of unsophisticated appetite with battles and heroic adventures strung in loosely climactic sequence over many thousands of lines'.[123] As far as *AM* is concerned, Pearsall identifies the strong presence of martial encounters as the most prominent aspect in the text, explaining that *AM* is 'the stock-in-trade of this first growth of romance, an interminable catalogue of Arthur's first battles against the barbarians, preceded by some account of the marvels surrounding Merlin's birth and early career.'[124] Similarly, Dean sees as monotonous the author's scrupulousness in recounting battles.[125] However, Dean is also struck by the remarkable presence of Saracens in the narrative, noting that they 'become just conventional evil foes, provided to justify and make acceptable the poet's lust for epic-scale slaughter'.[126] Dean is right in note that the presence of the Saracens licenses

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[122] Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, p. 180.

[123] Pearsall, 'The Development', p. 17.

[124] Pearsall, 'The Development', p. 21.

[125] Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 69.

[126] Dean, *Arthur of England*, p. 70.

Arthur's knights to brutal acts of slaughter. On the other hand, Saracens are not quite conventional enemies, on account of their super-human, monstrous qualities, which define their appearance as much as their behaviour. In the second part of the romance especially, Saracens come to symbolize the evil that could destroy Arthur and his kingdom. The author seems therefore to authorize extreme violence in the case of opponents who represent something alien to and threatening for Christian, Western society.

In particular, one thing about the Saracens is often remarked: their extraordinary gigantic appearance (ll. 4,885; 5,004; 5,308 etc.). Saracens are directly associated to 'geauntes' (ll. 6,152; 6,303 etc.) and acquire one characteristic that is directly linked with monstrosity. Because of the equation of Saracens with giants, many encounters between Arthur's knights and the Saracens end with the beheading of the enemy and the mutilation of his body, as happens in many descriptions of the strife between men and giants in other Middle English romances. The fights with the giants conform to the conventions of popular romance where the giant represents the ultimate trial for a knight, where the knight can assert his reputation as a hero. It is not coincidental that the presence of these giant-like Saracens is more prominent towards the end of the romance, with the result of creating the effect of a climactic sequence of fights against increasingly dangerous enemies. By doing this, the *AM* poet reveals his assumptions as a romancer and meets the public's expectations: before gaining a final recognition the hero must fight against a giant. If the giant is not available in the narrative, the alternative is simply to make the human look more gigantic and thus change the proportions of the contest.[127]

Nonetheless, it is not just appearance that classifies Saracens as fiends; Saracens behave like monsters in that they do not conform to the ideals of the chivalric code. They are described as carrying not just a sword – the instrument which best symbolises chivalry – but also a 'clobbe' (l. 4,542), a weapon for giants or the commoners as well as a symbol of undisciplined violence. The Saracens' violence is directed indiscriminately at all ranks of society, as in the following passages:

> Þe lowe folk in þe cauntry
> Were yslawe for nouȝt al day. (ll. 4,543-44)

> Man and wiif and children bo
> No hadde þai no pite to slo. (ll. 4,737-38)

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[127] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 73.

> Man and wiman al þat þai founde
>
> Þai slowen doun into þe ground. (ll. 5,599-600)

> And wenten to þe plaines oȝan
>
> To quellen wiif child and man. (ll. 5,615-16)

By not abiding by the rules that restrict the practice of violence and prescribe the appropriate behaviour of warriors in western society, Saracens cannot be integrated in that society and hence their lives cannot not be spared.

Martial confrontation is the only way in which the chivalric ethos is put into practice in the romance, highlighting the contrast between the behaviour of Saracens and Christian knights. For the Christian knights, the use of legitimate violence against the Saracens represents a practice through which their identity as knights can be asserted. In other words, violence becomes the means by which Arthur's knights can express their (only) identity as warriors and *preudhommes*. Exercising violence against the Saracens is also a way to give cohesion to Arthur's companionship and 'forges the chivalric and military fellowship that will define Arthur's court', as demonstrated by the scenes in which the various knights rush to the aid of Arthur or some other companion.[128]

However, the ability to exercise violence is also dependent upon the status of the knight: the most prestigious knights, like Arthur, Gawain and his brothers, are also those whose blows inflict most damage. These knights are depicted almost as berserkers in the way they lose control when fighting against the Saracens, especially when they are driven by furious revenge. A striking example occurs when Gawain succours his brother Gaheriet who has been knocked off his horse and is 'deueling [sic] opon þe grounde' (l. 5,024) about to be killed by a group of Saracens:

> Þo was Wawain so wroþ
>
> His owhen liif was him loþ
>
> Þer he smot sore apliȝt
>
> Boþe a left half and a riȝt,
>
> On he smot þat þe dent þrest
>
> Þurth helme and heued to þe brest,
>
> Anoþer on þe schulder he hitt
>
> Þat to þe ribbes he him slitt

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[128] Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, p. 198.

Anoþer he toke aboue þe scheld

Þat his heued fleiȝe in þe feld,

Þus he serued mani arawe. (*AM*, ll. 5,027-37)

When Gawain sees his brother lying hurt and defenceless, he loses any inhibition and, in defiance of danger, starts hitting Saracens left, right and centre, taking on several opponents at once. In Gawain this kind of extreme behaviour is even more prominent due to his ability to double his strength 'passed þe midday':

Bitven auensong and niȝt

He no hadde bot o mannes miȝt

And þat strengþe him last

Fort arnemorwe bi þe last,

And fram arnemorwe to þe midday

He hadde strengþe of kniȝtes tvay. (*AM* ll. 4,783-88)

After this short digression explaining Gawain's supernatural powers, the *AM* poet continues with one of the longest and crudest descriptions in the romance, involving Gawain and his brothers:

Wiþ an ex scharp & strong

Þe bite was to fot long,

Whom he miȝt take and hitt

Þe heued he clef oþer of kitt

He hem tohewe ich ȝou swer

So flesche doþ þe *flesche-heweere*;

He and his hors fram heued to taile

Blodi weren al saun fayl

Of þe paiems þat he slouȝ

Wiþ gode riȝt and no wouȝ. (*AM*, ll. 4,797-806, emphasis mine)

Gawain is compared to a 'flesche-heweere' (l. 4,802), a butcher, as he stands in the battlefield covered in the blood of the 'paiems' just slaughtered. Yet, his righteousness is not questioned by poet, who reassures us that Gawain has been acting 'wiþ gode riȝt and no wouȝ' (l. 4,806). A similarly biased interpretation of the squires' murderous deeds reappears when Gaheriet encounters a group of forty Saracens who 'Þer he dede to helle go' (ll. 4,834). The young squires' mission, which in a first moment had the clear political

aim of defeating Hengis's vengeful allies, becomes a means to accomplish God's will and hence acquire even more legitimacy to the eyes of the *AM* poet and those of the audience. In direct comparison to a number of other romances that foreground discussion of knighthood and knightly behaviour, in *AM* the chivalrousness of Arthur's knights is measured according to the magnitude of their chivalric deeds. Following the ideal that 'he who does more is of greater worth', chivalry in *AM* is a one-dimensional concept, easily conflated with prowess.[129]

The context in which chivalric deeds are accomplished is another fundamental parameter for the assessment of a knight's prowess. The variety of scenarios in which a knight could display his prowess is discussed at length in the *Book of Chivalry*, the military treatise about the ideal and the practice of chivalry written by Geoffrey de Charny around 1350. Although Charny's treatise was composed decades after *AM* it reflects the way chivalry was likely to be perceived at the time of composition of *AM*. Unlike other manuals that were written in the previous centuries, Charny's book presents chivalry from the secular perspective of a layman, and a knight himself, who fought for France in the Hundred Years War. As Richard Kaeuper has shown, Charny's manual stands out from the rest of the treatises, for being less ideal and more practical, a characteristic that would give more reliability to its description of mid-fourteenth century chivalry.[130] Charny's theorization of the chivalric code and his taxonomy of wars can help shed some more light on the *AM* poet's reasons for reshaping wars of national interests into crusade-like conflicts. At the beginning of the text, Charny provides a 'scale of prowess' ranking the situations in which a knight can demonstrate his honour: jousts, tournaments, and wars. The chivalrous behaviour of men-at-arms is measured according to the types of deeds of arms undertaken: Charny explains that peacetime activities, such as jousts and tournaments, even though worthy of praise, require less prowess and bravery than those taking place in warlike circumstances; he therefore exhorts his audience to praise and value the men who get involved in wars 'more highly than any other men-at-arms'.[131] Consequently, tournaments and war games are useful for the knights in that they constitute a preparatory training to the much higher engagement of fighting wars.

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[129] This motto is repeated countless times in *The Book of Chivalry* by Geoffrey de Charny. See *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context, and Translation*, ed. by Richard W. Kaeuper and E. Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

[130] Kaeuper, 'Introduction', in *The Book of Chivalry*, p. 29.

[131] Kaeuper, *The Book of Chivalry*, p. 87.

However, wars are not all the same, and the circumstances in which wars are fought are another important factor in assessing a knight's value. Charny distinguishes between local wars and those fought on foreign soil, claiming that the chivalric deeds achieved abroad are even more chivalric than those undertaken in one's own country.[132] Wars fought far away from home provide a knight with the best possible setting to win honour and glory. This being so, the crusades in the Middle East, which are clearly included in this category, come to constitute the highest objective for a knight, and participating in the Holy War becomes the greatest ambition. But the knights' awareness of the supremacy of crusading amongst the rest of war activities was also a result of the pressing propaganda by the Church during the previous centuries: in order to encourage the involvement of European states and promote the cause of the first crusade, the Church had given knighthood – originally a secular institution – with a further religious orientation. Another precept appeared in the chivalric code: the greatest duty of a knight is to serve the interest of Christianity and protect its holy places.[133] *AM* seems indeed to reflect this perspective in the way the narrative shifts from wars fought on English territory, through wars abroad (the brief episode of Arthur's knights in Brittany), to the crusade-like battles against the Saracens. If the significance of wars increases along the narrative, so does the knights' legitimate exercise of violence, which, as has been shown above, increases to the point of becoming completely uncontrollable by the end of the romance, where, despite the profusion of single victories by the Christian army, there is no conclusive resolution of the conflicts between Christian and Saracens.[134]

Battles are not treated consistently in the romance: the author expanded, compressed or omitted battles depending on their relevance to the plot and how they accorded with the poet's agenda. Battles that the author must have considered of minor importance have been significantly compressed and in some cases even omitted. For instance, in view of his English-centred handling of the French source, the *AM* poet excludes from his narrative battles that were not fought on English soil. A number of digressions in the *Estoire*'s storyline take place on the continent, with their reports receiving as thorough a treatment as episodes occurring in England.

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[132] Kaeuper, *The Book of Chivalry*, p. 91.

[133] Maurice Keen, *Nobles, Knights, and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), p. 4.

[134] Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity,* p.190.

When Arthur is threatened by the eleven kings, Merlin advises him to send some knights to 'lesse Breteine' and seek the help of two kings, Ban and Bors, who had sworn their loyalty to Uther (ll. 3,403-19). Antor, Kay, Ulfin and Bretel rush to Brittany and there have to fight against seven knights who, formerly part of King Claudas' army, were now living as rebels ravaging the land with their criminal behaviour. The author briefly explains that King Claudas had warred with Ban and Bohort until he was overcome and fled to Rome (ll. 3,492-96); however, the reasons behind this war remain unclear. The *Estoire* offers, instead, a full explanation of the circumstances, reporting that Claudas was laying claim to Ban's castle, which was built on the borders between Claudas' and Ban's lands (Sommer, pp. 98; Lacy, p. 221). The war was due to a dispute over local property, an issue that, from the *AM* author's point of view, was not really a British affair. The episode is related in the form of a flashback, a narrative strategy that would not agree with the *AM* poet's inclination to present events chronologically. French romancers constantly play with the fabric of time by interpolating in the narrative countless flashbacks and predictions of future events and producing an intricate framework of interlacing adventures. Not surprisingly, just before the end of the flashback, the author of the *Estoire* foretells that Claudas will be back again further on in the story, when he allies with the Emperor of Rome and King Frollo of Germany in order to wage war against Arthur. The present emerges from the past when mention is made of Arthur's messengers observing the visible effects of the war on the land.

An even more radical treatment is given to the episode in which Claudas returns to the Laid Waste Land. The long digression that, in the Vulgate, comprises the decisive war between Claudas and Arthur is completely ignored; in its place, a dismissive transitional passage in which Merlin goes to dictate his prophecies to Blasy is found (ll. 8,570-84). Later on in the digression, just after the campaign against Claudas, Ban marries Eleine and conceives a child with her. On that same night, Eleine has a convoluted dream about a great leopard that would bring peace between two lions fighting each other (Sommer, pp. 277-79; Lacy, pp. 320-21). The dream/vision, which can be interpreted as a complex metaphor of the future events involving Arthur and Lancelot, is not included in *AM*. As has been specified above, the *AM* poet seems not to have been interested in reporting facts that were not relevant to the storyline, which, in *AM*, takes a rather insular orientation.[135] However, in the case of this particular omission, much more is implied: Ban is an

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[135] Elizabeth Sklar, '*Arthour and Merlin*', p. 53.

important character in the Arthurian story, and not just for the military support he gives to Arthur at need. His and his brother's loyalty to Uther had marked the beginning of a beneficial alliance between Britain and Little Brittany, and his exchanges of favours with Arthur had further cemented the cordial relationship between the two countries. Furthermore, it is Ban's progeny that will ultimately secure the Anglo-French bond: later on in the story, Lancelot will search for Arthur and become one of the most prominent members of the Round Table, with an impact on the fortune (and final doom) of Arthurian society.

AM was written between 1330 and 1340, the decade that saw the culmination of the disputes between England and France and the beginning of the Edwardian phase of the Hundred Years War (1337-60). Clearly, in the years around the composition of the romance, the relationship between France and England was anything but cordial so that perhaps the *AM* poet considered it more appropriate to avoid any circumstance that would present France in a favourable light. The *AM* poet breaks the bond between France and England and carefully removes any major occurrence implying a French part in the development of the Arthurian story. The name of Lancelot is mentioned only once (l. 8,906) towards the end of the text but without any further detail on the identity of the character; consequently, at least in *AM*, his fame is concealed. The history of the present affects the (semi-invented) history of the past showing that the *AM* author and, presumably, his audience, were affected by contemporary events.

This, however, is not the only instance in which the *AM* author omits some material from the *Estoire* as a way to make the text more fitting to his own present. There is one specific battle whose omission does not seem to accord with the usual procedures by the *AM* poet. Uther's last battle against the Saxons, which is thoroughly recounted in both the *Estoire* and in Wace's *Brut*, is not included in *AM*. This passage relates that after many years of peace and security, Uther falls seriously ill. Perhaps taking advantage of the king's sickness, some rebels start to cause major upheavals in the country. Uther is too weak to intervene personally and hence appeals to his barons so that they can put down the rebellion in Uther's absence. However, despite their military skills and unity, the barons are overwhelmed by the rebels, and many of them are killed in the fights. The rebel army becomes even stronger when the Saxons who had not fled the country join the rebels' ranks. Merlin visits Uther and gives him a lesson on kingship and military leadership: he explains that a good king should join and support his men in the battle because, despite the strength of the army, 'terre sans seignor ne vaut pas tant comme cele qui a seignor'

(Sommer, p. 77; 'a land without an overlord is worth less than a land that has one', Lacy, pp. 210). Uther follows Merlin's advice and is carried to the battle on a horse-drawn litter. The strategy is successful and Uther's army victorious (Sommer, p. 78; Lacy, p. 211).

The *AM* poet glosses over the whole episode, hastening the narrative up to Uther's death (l. 2,754). Considering the nature of this episode, its omission seems completely unmotivated. On the one hand, even though this war is not a key episode, it is surely relevant to the plot and it signals a dangerous break in the period of peace that had characterized Uther's reign up to that moment. On the other hand, the episode functions as a miniature mirror for princes: the lesson imparted by Merlin on aspects of behaviour in the ideal king – the need to take an active part in war, the benefits of *largesse* at the end of each conflict – would have been perfectly suitable to the *AM*'s didacticism, evident elsewhere in the romance. This being so, why, then, was Uther's last struggle completely neglected?

A tentative explanation can be found in the history of the decades prior to the composition of the romance and in an event that, coincidentally, resembles the episode related in the *Estoire*. By the turn of the fourteenth century, after the death of the Scots leader William Wallace, it seemed that the restless situation between England and Scotland had finally settled with Scotland having been entrapped under the English yoke. However, in 1306, following the assassination of John Comyn of Badenoch, Robert Bruce, one of the noblemen in the line to the Scottish throne, claimed the Scottish kingship despite the ordinance of 1305, which was supposed to have established the administration of Scottish government and the English king's indisputable lordship over Scotland. Bruce was crowned king of Scotland on 25 March, reopening a chapter that only a few years before seemed to be closed. In 1307, Edward I decided to intervene personally and began his last journey to the north. However, he was too old and too ill to do that: apparently, the king's poor health was due to a problem with his legs and he was struggling to walk.[136] Just like Uther, he was carried on a litter by his men, but then his health deteriorated along the way and he died before reaching Carlisle. The similarity between the two episodes – Uther's in the *Estoire* and Edward I's in real history – is quite surprising even though it is possible it is only a coincidence. However, the *AM* poet might have been aware of such a similarity and might have decided to omit Uther's final battle in order to avoid any inappropriate allusion to Edward's less glorious campaign. At the time of composition of

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[136] Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 556.

AM Edward I was already celebrated as one of the greatest kings of England for his outstanding chivalric qualities, his conquest of Wales and his successful handling of the Scottish affair. In the Auchinleck *Chronicle*, Edward is described as the strongest of knights (ll. 2,310-14) and remembered for his campaigns in Wales and Scotland. Perhaps then the *AM* poet did not want to cast a shadow on this much-respected figure, by reporting Merlin's long speech about the importance for a lord to personally guide his men into battle. This revision is important in that it illuminates the political significance of this text, reinforcing the idea that the French source was adapted to reflect the historical and political reality of fourteenth-century England in a way that would be relevant to the romance's contemporary audience. The romance promotes the idea of a unified England with direct reference to Edward I's campaigns to unify the British Isles.

The battles relevant to the plot show an entirely different approach by the author than those of minor importance, and his tendency towards expansion rather than abbreviation. The decisive battle between Vortiger and Uther, in which Vortiger will be killed and England will return in the hands of King Constance's kin receives a very thorough treatment in *AM*. This episode is particularly important in the narrative as it relates the civil war between the forces of Vortiger and those of Uther. Thanks to this battle, Vortiger, who is guilty of treachery, usurpation and tyranny, will be deposed and killed in order for the genealogical continuity of lineage to be restored.

After Merlin has prophesied that Vortiger will be killed by the two brothers, Uter and Pendragon, he leaves Winchester and goes to dictate his story to Blasy. Uther and his companions are speeding to Winchester, where the battle will be held (Sommer, p. 35; Lacy, p. 185). The *AM* poet specifies that Uther has the military support of a large number of people that have come to his aid from all over the country 'forto winnen Inglond' (l. 1,766). The national importance of this last battle is emphasised in visual terms, by means of a description of the Britons' banner, unique to *AM*:

> Þai vndede her gomfaynoun
> *Wiþ a briȝt gliderand lyoun*
> Þat her faders hadde yben.
> *Þe buriays it gun ysen*
> *Þe gomfaynoun sone þai knewe*
> Costaunce ded þo gun hem rewe
> Þat hadde her noble lord yben

And Moynes ded þat was *his stren* (*AM*, ll. 1,767-74, emphasis mine)

The banner showed 'a briȝt gliderand lyoun', a token that linked Uther and Aurelius's genealogical right to win England. If in religious contexts the lion was usually associated with Christ, in Middle English romance it became also a token of England and English identity: the lion had been adopted as the symbol of English royalty during King John's reign (1199-1216).[137] The reference to lions is not exclusive to *AM* but is also present in other romances of the Auchinleck MS. It is not unlikely that the audience of the romance would easily recall Richard the Lionheart, who fought in the crusades and represented one of the most highly regarded kings in the history of England.

The sight of the lion reminds the people of Winchester that Uther Pendragon and Aurelius Brosias descend from Constance, and they recognize Vortiger's responsibility for the killing of King Constance. What follows is an account of how the people turn against Vortiger and join Uther's army, in an episode of great dramatic intensity:

> *Of þis lond baroun and kniȝt*
> *Of þe lyoun hadden a siȝt*
> King Costaunce þat hadde yben
> And Vter Pendragoun was *his stren*,
> Anon turned her mode
> To Vter Pendragounes *riȝt blod*.
> Þer was þousandes mani on
> Opon Fortiger þai turned anon
> And seyed to him 'Wicke traytour
> þou schald abigge þine errour!' (*AM*, ll. 1,803-12, emphasis mine)

In *AM*, the thousands of people shouting at Vortiger amplify the tension of the scene. Moreover, the importance of lineage in the people's choice of fighting alongside Uther is stressed when Uther is recognised as Constance's 'stren' and 'riȝt blod'. The visual elements (the description of the banner) and the specific vocabulary introduced in this scene make this battle an occasion for the *AM* author to further bring into the spotlight themes of concern to him and his audience, which were analyzed earlier on in this chapter: in this case, the restoration of royal lineage is presented as the only means for the re-establishment of a healthy governance, even if this is achieved through civil war.

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[137] Arthur C. Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (London, T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1909), pp. 173-74.

The evidence provided so far demonstrates that the *AM* poet followed a methodology that enabled him to fulfil his stylistic and narrative aims. His handling of the sources shows distinguished editorial skills: an extensive knowledge of both French and English sources; the meticulous selection of the material that would form his narrative; the use of rhetorical techniques to adapt the material to particular personal needs. Moreover, the examples analysed above show that he mastered the strategies of *abbreviatio* and *amplificatio*, two common devices for medieval writers who had to work with diverse sources.[138]

However, the *AM* poet employs *abbreviatio* – the contraction of the narrative to provide only the necessary information for the development of the plot – as his main rhetorical principle. The poet chose to avoid the amplification and expansion of the narrative in favour of abbreviation and reduction matching the procedures utilised by chroniclers.[139] In other words, the *AM* poet shared the same methods employed by writers of historical narratives: he removed all of the material considered superfluous in order to clarify the plot and the logic of the events. He chose linearity over complexity by rearranging the structure of the narrative in chronological order and removing digressions, flash-backs and flash-forwards.

Nevertheless, a few particular moments in the story have received more thorough treatment by the author, in order to enhance the prominence of certain themes in the narrative and, as first demonstrated by Barnes, the problems related to the transmissions of powers within a kingdom. However, this chapter has also demonstrated that the author was interesting in promoting an ideal of kingship based on the perpetration of royal bloodline, seen as a necessary element for the welfare of the kingdom; knighthood as an indispensable precondition for kingship. Moreover, by introducing Arthur's detailed portrayal, which echoes lines by Wace and Laȝamon rather than the *Estoire*, and the omission of his incestuous affair with Morgause, the *AM* author sets Arthur as an archetype of good kingship and as an exemplary king in the history of England.

The central role given to Arthur in the narrative is unique to *AM* as it does not appear in later copies of the romance, all of which end before the key episode of the sword

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[138] James M. Murphy, *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 81.

[139] Alan MacColl has observed how, in a period in which authors were continuously shifting from one technique to the other, *abbreviatio* became the major rhetorical technique employed by historians and, in particular, by the author of the French Prose *Brut*. Alan MacColl, 'Rhetoric, Narrative, and Conceptions of History in the French Prose *Brut*', *Medium Aevum* 74:2 (2005), 288-310 (pp. 293-94).

in the stone. The following section will examine the earliest rewriting of the romance, *Merlyn*, which is extant in Hale 150. It will show that the differences between *AM* and *Merlyn* are due to the authors' contrasting aims when writing their romances. The interventions by the *Merlyn* poet demonstrate that, unlike his predecessor, he did not have an interest in highlighting the historical dimension of the narrative, but his expansion and re-elaboration of specific episodes of the narrative demonstrate that he was aware of the romance's potential as a source of entertainment.

1.4   From the Auchinleck Manuscript to Hale 150

About a century after the composition the Auchinleck MS, another version of *AM*, *Merlyn*, appeared in Hale 150, a miscellaneous manuscript also containing a selection of Middle English romances (*Lybeaus Desconus* and *Kyng Alisaunder*, the *Seege of Troye*) as well as a copy of *Piers Plowman*.[140] Scholars have interpreted the peculiar shape of the book as evidence that the manuscript was employed by an itinerant minstrel for public reading: having a narrow and elongated shape, the book could comfortably fit into one's pockets and be easily carried.[141] However, this view has been recently discredited by other critics. In a recent article, Simon Horobin and Alison Higgins have observed that the manuscript's size and shape do not function as sufficient evidence to prove that Hale 150 was a 'minstrel book' as the oblong format conforms to that of other Middle English miscellanies that were destined for the household.[142] Moreover, the types of texts contained in the manuscript, four romances and one allegorical poem, were ideal for entertaining or instructing the members of the household and being read aloud within a household context. Even though the scale of production of Hale 150 is not as ambitious as that of the Auchinleck MS, the two manuscripts can be associated in terms of function,

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[140] For a description of the manuscript's contents see Joseph Hunter, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn* (London, 1838), pp. 143-46; *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. by M. Mills, EETS OS 261 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), *Kyng Alisaunder*, 2 vols, ed. by G. V. Smithers, EETS OS 227, 237(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952-57), *The Seege or Batayle of Troye, a Middle English Metrical Romance*, ed. by Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, EETS OS 172 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), *Parallel extracts from twenty-nine manuscripts of* Piers Plowman*, with comments, and a proposal for the Society's three-text edition of this poem*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, EETS OS 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1866).

[141] Smithers, 'Introduction', in *Kyng Alisaunder*, pp. 11-12.

[142] Simon Horobin and Alison Higgins, 'Reconsidering Lincoln's Inn MS 150', *Medium Aevum* 77:1 (2008), 30-53, p. 32. See also Taylor, 'Fragmentation' for a detailed discussion of how most manuscripts containing 'minstrel romances' – i.e. romances that for their style were associated with minstrels and were believed to be the result of memorial transmission – were in fact produced for the private reader (pp. 43, 62).

audience, reception and, most importantly, content: both of these manuscripts were designed for the needs of a family and included texts that were composed with a form and a style that could favour their reading in a family setting; both contain very similar copies of *Kyng Alisaunder* and *AM*, the two romances of the Auchinleck MS which may have been composed by the same author.[143]

Merlyn is a much-abbreviated version of *AM* which comprises the whole story of Merlin but concludes with Vortiger's death at line 1,981. The *Merlyn* author did not just copy the romance but participated in the composition of the text with revisions and alterations, following what seems to be a deliberate plan of action. Studying the revisions contained in *Merlyn* is not only necessary to fully appreciate the cultural significance of the two romances: a comparison between the texts can also prove useful in gaining an improved understanding of how the perception of the Arthurian story had changed from the early fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century. The comparison below will demonstrate that *Merlyn* and *AM* follow two different traditions of Arthurian writing approaching the same story from contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, *AM* is anchored in the chronicles presenting the Arthurian story as part of British and, in particular, English history. On the other hand, *Merlyn* contains a selection of what must have been considered the most entertaining portion of the story. The variations contained in *Merlyn* mark a fundamental stage in the history of this romance as well as in the transmission of the Arthurian story, the shift from a hybrid genre that combines features of both chronicle and romance – as seen in the Auchinleck *AM* – to a form of romance as it would be better appreciated in the fifteenth century. They also testify to the nature of medieval romance as a genre that could be fashioned countless times, taking as many shapes as the number and varieties of audiences to which it appealed.

By looking at the level of variation in *Merlyn* and the later versions of the romance, critics have tried to recreate the history of the text. Kölbing was the first scholar to propose a stemma for the romance, according to which *Merlyn* does not derive from *AM* but from an archetype of equal importance (*y*) which did not survive and which had the same

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[143] According to the editor of *Kyng Alisaunder* G. V. Smithers, the Auchinleck MS's *AM*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, *Richard Cœur de Lion* and the *Seven Sages of Rome* are the work of a single author (Smithers, 'Introduction', in *Kyng Alisaunder*, p. 41). Macrae-Gibson partially contested Smithers' argument, saying that although the *Seven Sages of Rome* and *Kyng Alisaunder* could share a common authorship, *AM* might have been composed by the author in an earlier stage of his career, while *Richard Cœur de Lion* is of distinct authorship (Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 75).

predecessor as *AM*.[144] Macrae-Gibson believes, like Kölbing, that *Merlyn* and *AM* belong to distinct traditions and that *Merlyn* and the other versions of the romance derived from a common predecessor, now lost, which he names Ur-AM2.[145] However, he also notes that it is impossible to say with certainty whether this predecessor has derived from *AM* or from another romance, antecedent to *AM* and from which *AM* might have itself derived. The affiliation proposed by Macrae-Gibson would account for the discrepancies between *AM* and all of the later versions of the romance as well as for the correspondences between *Merlyn* and the romance contained in London, British Library, Additional MS 27829, also known as the Percy Folio MS.[146]

What is relevant to the present discussion is the shared assumption that *Merlyn* and *AM* were part of different branches of the stemma. This would imply that the idiosyncrasies found in *Merlyn* should not be considered as corruptions inserted by a distracted copyist, nor should they be ascribed to the oral transmission of the romance.[147] In other words, even though *AM* is likely to have been delivered orally – recited or more probably read aloud – this might have not have been a decisive factor for the differences between *AM* and *Merlyn* in view of their separate line of descent. Therefore, the level of variation in *Merlyn* bears evidence that the two texts reflect their authors' independent interpretations of the same story.

That the composition of the two romances was driven by diverging points of view is first evident when comparing the two prologues, which differ greatly in themes, tone and style. The author of *Merlyn* does not seem to be driven by the same preoccupations as the author of *AM*:[148]

  He þat made wiþ his hond

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[144] Kölbing's proposition is summarized in William E. Holland, 'Formulaic Diction and the Descent of a Middle English Romance', *Speculum* 48:1 (1973), 89-109, p. 90.

[145] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 44.

[146] For a list of the manuscripts containing copies of *AM* see Chapter 1, p. 35. Unlike *Merlyn*, the narrative of Percy Folio continues after Vortiger's death and relates the events up to Uther's coronation. For this reason, it was used by Macrae-Gibson in his parallel edition together with *Merlyn* and *AM*.

[147] In this regard, William E. Holland has claimed that 'oral improvisation played an important role in the descent of the text', so that the variants contained in the later manuscripts would result from the oral transmission of the original romance ('Diction', p. 94-96). This view was later contradicted by Macrae-Gibson who, in relation to his discussion of the history of the romance, explained that 'it is doubtful if actual oral transmission played any significant part in any of the transmissions that produced our AM2 texts' ('Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 52). Note that when Macrae-Gibson uses the abbreviation AM2 he implies the group of romances that did not derive from *AM*, that is to say *Merlyn* and the copies contained in the later manuscripts.

[148] See my discussion of the prologue of *AM* (p. 39).

Wynd and water wode and lond

ʒeue heom alle good endyng

Þat wolon listne þis talkyng,

And y shal telle, ʒow byfore,

How Merlyn was geten and bore

And of his wisdoms also

And oþre happes mony mo

Sum whyle byfeol in Engelonde. (*Merlyn,* ll. 1-9)[149]

In *Merlyn*, both the patriotic and instructional motifs disappear and the openly propagandistic undertone is lost. If the prologue of *AM* had been designed to defend and promote the use of written English, the opening of *Merlyn* is less ambitious and rather conventional: instead of dwelling upon the advantages of speaking English and the benefits of book-learning, the author of *Merlyn* prefers to employ a few introductory lines to familiarize his audience with the subject of the romance, the story of Merlin's origins and wise deeds – even though the section of the text dedicated to Merlin commences but 570 lines after –, a conventional feature in Middle English romances. With no apparent secondary agenda, the prologue of *Merlyn* anticipates the content of the story in an attempt at capturing the attention of the audience, who is directly exhorted to listen to a 'talkyng'. The interaction between the author and his audience becomes paramount, implying that the romance should be read aloud or recited.

Holland provided an explanation for the great difference between the two prologues by saying that there was no need for the copyist of *Merlyn* to make a statement about translation as he was not translating from the French but copying a text that was already written in English.[150] Yet, as has been explained before, scholars have not reached a definitive conclusion regarding the descent of the romance and, therefore, it cannot be said with certainty whether *Merlyn* derived directly from *AM* or whether the two texts derived from a common predecessor, or even a common French source. A more likely reason for this revision might be ascribed to the later origins of *Merlyn*. By the time of composition of its prologue (*c.* 1450), the circulation of English vernacular literature in England was

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[149] Quotations from *Merlyn* refer to Hale 150. However, following Macrae-Gibson's parallel edition, passages which are on damaged or lost folios have been replaced by the corresponding sections as contained in Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 236.
[150] Holland, 'Formulaic Diction', p. 94.

far more common than in the 1330s.[151] The use of English for literary works did not need to be justified or excused.[152] If, for the two centuries following the Conquest, English society had split into three linguistic groups – French, Latin and English – and French considered the language of culture, in the second half of the thirteenth century knowledge of French started to decline and the language was progressively confined to the spheres of the highest nobility.[153] As testified by *AM*, already in the 1330s a large part of the middle classes commissioned and consumed literature written in English; in the course of the fourteenth century, the use of English slowly spread to other domains. By 1362, cases in the law courts had to be pleaded in English and in 1363 English was used to open Parliament for the first time.[154] With this historical evidence in mind, it is not surprising that the scribe in charge of copying the romance discarded a vindication of English; such a discourse, at the time when the author of *Merlyn* was writing, was outdated.

However uninterested in defending the English language the author of *Merlyn* might have been, a number of interventions show that he certainly took great pride in advertising the story's English appeal. As we have seen above, his prologue does not refer to language and identity but very explicitly sets the romance in a non-specified time in English history, explaining that Merlin's 'wisdoms' 'sum whyle byfeol in Engelonde' (*Merlyn*, l. 9). This is just the first of a number of striking interventions, reinforcing the distinctly English perspective already present in *AM*, which can be found in the version of *Merlyn* contained in Hale 150: the word 'England' is mentioned twenty-seven times whilst just nine times in *AM*. The abundant repetitions of 'England' and 'English' in *Merlyn* are not meant to just refine the geography of the narrative so as to make it more recognizable to the audience. They also seem to put forward the message that the events related in the story have an effect on the whole kingdom and the whole English population. This is made very clear, for instance, when Vortiger marries Hengis's daughter and the heathen Saxons mix with Christian Britons: while the *AM* poet explains that 'Þer was wel neiȝe *al þis lond* / To þe Deuel gon an hond' (*AM*, ll. 487-88, emphasis mine), the *Merlyn* poet makes the ethnical

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[151] See Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) for a fresh investigation of the languages written and spoken in medieval England and at the time of the Hundred Years War.

[152] Baugh, *A History*, pp. 35-37.

[153] Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 11.

[154] Nicholas Watson, 'The Politics of Middle English Writing', in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *et al.* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), pp. 331-52 (p. 333).

and cultural implications of their heathen wedlock more dramatic, specifying that 'Soe that nighe *all England* / Was fallen into the Devills hand' (*Merlyn*, ll. 418-19, emphasis mine)

These interventions raise two important points. Firstly, they clearly show that by the time *Merlyn* was copied into Hale 150, a strong association existed between this particular text, England and English history, and that Arthur was increasingly perceived as an English topic, thanks to the circulation of *AM* and other Arthurian romances since the first half of the previous century. Secondly, the overuse of the words 'English' and 'England' perhaps implies that during the course of the fourteenth century the audience for this romance had increasingly learnt to identify themselves as English, reading the text from an English perspective.

However, these interventions do not point to the conclusion that *Merlyn* displays the same interest in English history as *AM* did. The rest of the interventions that will be analysed further on – ranging from structural issues to descriptive expansions – do not intensify the historical tenor of the narrative; on the contrary, they capitalize on what could be seen as the most entertaining moments in the story, to which we can imagine the original audience might have been particularly responsive.

The narrative of *AM* occupies about 9,000 lines and can be divided into three sections focusing on the events involving the three major characters in the story: Vortiger, Merlin and Arthur. As explained above, *Merlyn* comprises only the two sections of the story in *AM*, whilst that involving Arthur and his exploits is completely omitted. Such an omission has important repercussions on the interpretation of the romance and its function. In the chronicle-like structure of *AM*, Arthur is over-emphasised and comes to symbolize a climax in the development of the history of England. His character is defined through the martial skills he shows on the battlefield and his accession to the throne becomes the core episode of the entire romance, presenting the longest and most detailed depiction of Arthur's investiture within the corpus of Arthurian romance.[155]

In *Merlyn* Arthur is neither born nor conceived when the romance concludes, and no lines are employed to anticipate his future triumphs. Such a glaring omission in the narrative moves the focus away from Arthur and his military achievements, which are celebrated and extolled in the third part of *AM*; instead, the figure of Merlin is highlighted. The omission of Arthur and his prominence in English history changes the perspective of the entire story: with Arthur out of sight, *Merlyn* can be interpreted as a tribute to the

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[155] See my discussion of the knighting of Arthur (p. 93).

legendary wizard and his crucial role in the re-establishment of rightful governance in England. When Merlin is trying to save his mother from execution, he tells the people nearby about his origins, underlying his self-awareness of his God-given role in shaping England's history:

> He gat me on hire wiþowte lesyng
> Þat heo neo wiste þerof nothyng
> And for heo no wiste whenne hit was
> Y preoue þat heo is gultles,
> For alle þe feondes wende wiþ me
> To haue schent al Cristiaunte
> And hadde of me a wicked fode
> Bote God haþ me now turned to gode
> *And now y am a Godes sonde*
> *Forto helpe al Engelonde*. (*Merlyn*, ll. 1,129-38, emphasis mine)

When the romance concludes with Vortiger and his family dying in a fire, the reader is left with the comforting perspective of a peaceful England:

> Fortager regnede here
> Al fully seouen ȝere.
> Now preyȝe we Ihesu Heouene-kyng
> And his modur þat swete þyng
> He blesse ows alle wiþ his hond
> And sende ows pes in Engelond. (*Merlyn*, ll. 1,976-81)

It could be argued that the author of *Merlyn* decided to make Merlin the axis of the narrative for his personal interest in this character or because he was composing the romance for an audience who was particularly keen on this section of the story. The second option is even more likely if we consider that the romance was in such demand as to be copied three times in the following centuries.[156] With no Arthur on the scene, the romance demonstrates a radical change of perspective. Merlin becomes the unchallenged protagonist of the story and the character whose origins and ancestry are explained in greater detail. The reader follows him through the various stages of his life, from birth, through childhood to adulthood, a treatment that is usually granted to heroes in popular

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[156] For a list of all the manuscripts in which the romance is extant see Chapter 1, p. 35.

romances and that accords with the plots of the other romances contained in Hale 150: *Libeaus Desconus* and *Kyng Alisaunder*.

The passage from *AM* to *Merlyn* marks an important stage in the history of the Arthurian story: its gradual shift from history to romance. The re-organization of the French material chronologically in *AM*, following the genealogy of the English kings, demonstrates that the *AM* author aimed at providing his audience with a thorough account of the Arthurian story. The author of *Merlyn* does not seem concerned with the historical implications of the story as he selected only the episodes that he considered potentially more appealing for his audience. The scope of the narrative is narrower as the narrative disengages from history and loses its function of providing notions about the history of the nation and the genealogy of its rulers.

The divergent perspectives of the two romances are also demonstrated by the different treatment of names in the two texts.[157] The two romances present different sets of names to define the English king and his two sons at the beginning of the romance. In the *HRB*, the first text to name these characters, the British king is called 'Constantinus' and his three sons named 'Constans', 'Aurelius Ambrosius' and 'Uther Pendragon' (*HRB*, pp. 118-19). Anglo-Norman and English adaptations of the *HRB* written by Wace and Laȝamon adhere to Geoffrey's text presenting very similar names: King Constantine, his sons 'Constant', 'Aurelius' known as 'Ambrosius' and 'Uther' (Wace, p. 162-63; Laȝamon, pp. 336-37). The *Estoire* presents instead some changes to the original names: the king is called 'Constans' and his sons 'Maines', 'Pendragon' and 'Uther' (Sommer, p. 20). We find, therefore, two separate groupings of names: on the one hand, there is the tradition of names initiated by Geoffrey and followed by the vernacular chroniclers; on the other, the tradition that originated in French romance. It is remarkable that the author of *AM*, despite his use of the *Estoire* as his primary source, initially opted for the chronicle grouping, keeping the three princes' names unchanged: 'Costaunt' or 'Constentine', 'Aurilis Brosias' and 'Uterpendragon' (*AM*, ll. 32-49). He then reverts to the *Estoire* and mixes the two sets of names by explaining that Constance, the eldest brother who is going to become a monk, 'King Moyne men cleped him euer more' (*AM*, l. 104). The *Merlyn* instead moves away from the chronicle tradition and adheres to the French source by presenting a very similar set of names as the one found in the *Estoire*: the three brothers

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[157] Macrae-Gibson has a long discussion of the treatment of personal names in the romance, using their differences as a way to work out the text's affiliations. Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, pp. 27-28.

are called 'Moyne', 'Uter' and 'Pendragon' (*Merlyn*, ll. 14-30). This is another piece of evidence that *AM* has a stronger connection with the chronicles whilst *Merlyn* follows more closely the romance tradition and it is likely that it derived from a French original. It also reinforces the hypothesis that *Merlyn* is not a later recension of *AM*, but both derive from independent originals.

The general change of perspective in the narrative and the attention given to entertaining potential are even more evident when we compare the two texts. The *Merlyn* poet shows great versatility in his handling of narrative techniques ranging from word for word translation, through *abbreviatio*, to *amplificatio*. The decision to employ one technique rather than another is far from accidental as it is possible to discern a rationale behind the use of these techniques: whilst reductions and omissions are more likely found in the section of the romance dealing with Vortiger and his treacheries, expansions are instead prevalent in the second part of the romance. After Merlin enters the narrative, the author starts to translate more freely, enriching the story with further details on the setting and the circumstances of the unfolding events. The expansions introduced seem to be designed to amplify the dramatic potential of the romance in that part of the story that must have appealed the most to the author and his audience. However, he does not seem to be as keen on expanding battle scenes as the author of *AM* was. In *Merlyn*, battles and warfare are shortened and simplified. Where battle scenes are concerned, most of the lines describing action and conflict are omitted, as in the passage relating the battle between Vortiger and Hengist:

> Many a bold champion
> And many a 1000 in that stonde
> Were slaine and brought to ground,
> Many a ladye and damsell
> Can weepe that day with teares fell.[158] (*Merlyn*, ll. 387-91)

Compared with the corresponding passage in *AM*, which goes on for fourteen lines and describes with remarkable scrupulousness weapons, blows and injuries (*AM*, ll. 445-58), the description in *Merlyn* is so abridged that it resembles a mere summary. A much dryer account of what happens on the battlefield is given, describing the aftermath of the battle – the great number of knights lying dead on the battlefield and the sorrow of the ladies for

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[158] As this part of the text belongs to a portion of the manuscript which was badly damaged, it has been supplied from the Percy Folio.

the loss of their beloved – but not the precise dynamics, in terms of actions and warfare, that have brought this about. This clearly implies that combat and its violent nature did not represent an important element of the narrative for the *Merlyn* poet, as they did for the *AM* poet.

Just a few lines later, the *Merlyn* translator shifts to *abbreviatio* and reduces the passage that follows, which introduces the character of Vortiger and in *AM* is fifteen lines long:

> Þan hadde þis king as ȝe may here
> A steward þat hiȝt Fortiger
> Strong he was and wiȝt ywis,
> Fals and ful of couaitise.
> Þe king he hadde yserued long
> And for he was so wiȝt and strong
> In him was al his trust at nede
> And ȝaue him boþe lond and lede
> To help his childer after his day
> And oftsiþes he gan him pray
> To gouerny hem wiþ al his miȝt
> His treuþe he dede him forto pliȝt
> (And when þe king hadde his liif forlore
> Sone þat traitour was forswore
> And wiþ gret tresoun brak his treuþe
> And dede hem wrong and þat was reuþe). (*AM*, ll. 79-94)

In *Merlyn*, the description of Vortiger is much more concise: the poet does not mention either Vortiger's remarkable strength or his strategic ability, thus slightly altering the audience's perception of this character:

> Þan hadde þe kyng a styward feir
> Þat was cleped sir Fortager
> His treowthe to þe kyng he plyȝt
> To helpe his chyldre at his myȝt
> (Bote sone þat traitour was forswore
> He brak his treowþe and was forlore). (*Merlyn*, ll. 49-54)

With the exception of the word 'traitour', the *Merlyn* poet does not engage in a description of Vortiger's treacherousness and does not explain how he came to be the steward of the king. The author of *AM* sounds more biased in condemning Vortiger's viciousness and explaining that Vortiger had received from the king lands and power in exchange for his service. This revision seems to imply that although the *Merlyn* poet is also portraying this character in a negative light, he is more restrained in his judgement of Vortiger's moral behaviour. Even in the last lines of the romance, when Vortiger and his family die in the fire set by Uther and Pendragon, the author of *Merlyn* restricts himself to relating the facts as they occurred rather than refreshing his public's memory about the king's villainies:

> And Fortager wiþ child and wyf
>
> And al þat was þerynne on lyue
>
> Best and mon wiþ lym and lyth
>
> Hit brente doun wiþowte gryth. (*Merlyn*, ll. 1,972-75)

Instead of concluding the episode by mentioning the fire, the *AM* author continues with some further remarks suggesting that Vortiger and his family were killed in the fire in punishment for their immoral behavior:

> Men seyt ȝere and oþer to
>
> Wrong wil an hond go
>
> And euer at þe nende
>
> Wrong wil wende;
>
> Þus ended sir Fortiger
>
> Þat misbileued a fewe ȝer
>
> Þei he wer strong of miȝt
>
> To nouȝt him brouȝt his vnriȝt. (*AM*, ll. 1,891-902)

The last three lines seem to convey an open moral judgement on Vortiger. The attention given by the author in defining Vortiger's character reflect that in *AM* Vortiger occupies a key role in the structure of the narrative by providing a model of bad governance. The poet of *AM* seems to imply that the positive qualities possessed by Vortiger are not sufficient to make him a good steward, let alone a good king. Vortiger's characterization is more developed in *AM* because he comes to encapsulate the archetype of the wicked illegitimate ruler creating an antithesis with the other archetype, Arthur, who epitomizes good legitimate kingship.

When the focus of the narrative moves from Vortiger to Merlin, however, the *Merlyn* poet begins with significant expansions of the account he found in his source.

A clear example of the poet's new course of action can be found in the account of Merlin's origins, which in both romances is introduced by a sort of mini-prologue. In the passage, the antecedents of Merlin's conception are expounded with reference to the biblical episode of Lucifer's banishment from Heaven and his fall on Earth:

> He þat was and is and ay schal ben
>
> Chese him here a swete quen
>
> In whom he nam flesche and bl[o]d,
>
> Wiþ wiche he bouȝt ous on þe rode
>
> Whareþurch we ben to heuen ycorn
>
> And þe deuel his miȝt forlorn,
>
> Blisced be he in euerich song
>
> And Mari of whom he sprong.
>
> Listneþ wele to mi steuen –
>
> Þe deuels, þat fel out of heuen
>
> Wiþ her pride Lucifer
>
> Sum fel to helle-fer,
>
> Sum in water sum in lond
>
> Sum in þe aire gan wiþstond;
>
> Al fort our Driȝt seyd 'ho!'. (*AM*, ll. 631-45)

The passage serves to pause the narration and signals a partition in the romance's structure, introducing the digression on Merlin's origins. The author asks the audience for tolerance ('Listneþ wele to mi steuen', l. 639), almost as to anticipate a change in the mood of the narrative and the moral lesson to follow.

The account given in *AM*, in itself a significantly abbreviated version of that given in the *Estoire*, is much more concise and vague than *Merlyn*.

In *Merlyn* the whole sequence of facts is expounded – Lucifer's sin of excessive pride, God's revenge, the devil's expulsion from heaven – in order to build the audience's expectation of what will happen after (how the incubus tempts his victims):

> Dauid þeo profete and Moyses
>
> Witnesse and seiþ how it wes
>
> Þo God hadde mad þoruȝ his myȝt

Heouene ful of angelis bryȝt

Þeo fairhed þat þey hadde þa

Nis no tonge þat telle kan

Til Lucifer hit forgult wiþ pryde.

Alle þat heold wiþ him þat tyde

Such veniaunce God on heom gon take

Þat þey arn now feondes blake

And as y fynde in holy wryt

Þey felle fro heouene to helle-put

Sixe daiȝes and seoue nyȝt

As þikke as hayl in þondur lyȝt

And when þey weore out of heouene

Our Lord seide wiþ mylde steuene

And heouene lowked aȝeyn ful stille

Als hit was his owne wille. (*Merlyn*, ll. 588-606)

The lines added in *Merlyn* create a context for the event described, enhancing its dramatic effect.[159] Simon Horobin and Alison Wiggins have shown how the variants contained in *Merlyn* reveal the interests of Hale 150's fifteenth-century audience. They believe that the scribe followed a deliberate plan of revision, enhancing *AM*'s potential for entertainment, and that revisions involve mostly scenes of direct confrontation between characters: the physicality of these scenes is increased thanks to the addition of details describing settings and characters' gestures.[160] A clear example can be found in the scene in which Merlin's mother, the good sister, is instructed by Blasy on how to protect her virtue:

Alle þe werkes þat gode ware

To don he hir tauȝt þare

Þat sche hir laid doun to slape

Ar hir dore and hir fenester

Hadde yblisced and ich ester –

Þus he tauȝt hir to done

And þo sche went hir hom sone. (*AM*, ll. 811-18)

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[159] Dalrymple Roger, *Language and Piety*. Ch 43 103-38. Dalrymple examines the pious formulas in the romances of the Auchinleck MS, with particular attention to the invocation of God's names. Here it is not just a formula but the retelling of a passage of the scriptures.

[160] Horobin and Wiggins, 'Reconsidering Lincoln', pp. 35-38.

In *Merlyn* Blasy cautiously adds that the woman must keep her candles lit when she sleeps, lock all the doors and windows and cross herself before falling asleep:

> [He] Bad hire heo schulde nyme kepe
>
> Þat heo neo leyde hire nouȝt to slepe
>
> And nameliche nouȝt on nyȝt
>
> Bote heo hadde candel-lyȝt
>
> And wyndowes and dores in þat stounde
>
> Waren sperd by rof and grounde
>
> 'And make þeraȝeyn wiþ good voys
>
> þeo signe of þe holy croys' (*Merlyn*, ll. 791-98).

As Horobin and Higgins have observed, the description of the setting as well as the gestures made are so detailed as to make the episode suitable for performance.[161] The enhancement of physicality for the sake of entertainment is even more evident a few lines after, when the woman receives a visit from her wicked sister and other harlots. In *AM,* the visit is motivated by the wicked sister's request for money; the poet explains that the younger sister had inherited her father's fortune, so the older sister was claiming her portion of inheritance. With the help of some harlots the older sister furiously attacks the younger sister who eventually escapes to her chamber whilst the neighbours chase away the harlots and the bad sister (*AM,* ll. 823-34).

In *Merlyn* the same scene tells another story. The good sister has been drinking with some neighbours and when the older sister arrives she is so drunk as to get repeatedly abused:

> Wiþ neyȝhebours to þe ale heo went
>
> Longe heo sat and dude mys
>
> Þat heo was dronkyn ywis;
>
> Hire oþir sustur þat ilke day
>
> Wiþþ mony an harlot and made deray
>
> And mysseide hire as heo weore wod
>
> And calde hire oþir þan good,
>
> And heo was dronkyn soþ to seyn
>
> And mysseide hire aȝeyn

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[161] Horobin and Wiggins, 'Reconsidering Lincoln', p. 36.

> So longe heo chidde wiþoute les
>
> Þeo hore start vp in a res
>
> And wiþ hire fust in outrage
>
> Smot hire in þe visage
>
> Drouȝh hire her and rent hire cloþ
>
> And beot hire boþe eouele and wroþ. (*Merlyn*, ll. 810-26)

With such a different scenario – the good sister being inordinately drunk and the omission that the older sister's actions are driven by her desire for money – the audience is prompted to feel less sympathetic to the good sister than in the equivalent scene in *AM*. By means of these revisions, the *Merlyn* poet seems to change the heart of the matter and draw the attention of his public to the risks of drinking without moderation.[162] Moreover, just like the previous passage, the scene is enriched by a number of details describing movements and gestures. The older sister does not just beat the poor woman up, but rips up her clothes and hits her right in the face.

Codicological evidence would support the assumption that this would be a noteworthy episode for the romance's audience as a *marginalium* is placed in correspondence with the beginning of the episode. Marginal marks with the shape of a *manicula* and a clover symbol can be found in various places in *Merlyn*. According to Horobin and Wiggins, these marginalia were drawn in order to divide the narrative into 'sub-narratives' and therefore signal passages particularly fitting to be read aloud or performed.[163] It is indicative that these marks were placed next to passages that underwent the largest amount of elaboration, a detail implying that the scribe was involved in the programme of revision as much as he was in the composition and in the reception of the text:

> The way that the annotations mark up particular narrative episodes, the
>
> attention given to the dramatically elaborated story of Merlin's mother,
>
> as well as to noises and asides, makes it difficult to avoid the impression
>
> of a text that was being primed as a script for oral delivery.[164]

In other words, the scribe was aware of the dramatic potential of the text he was copying and altered it accordingly, with a clear idea of how the text might be performed.

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[162] Horobin and Wiggins, 'Reconsidering Lincoln', p. 40.

[163] *Ibid*.

[164] *Ibid*.

Another example of how the *Merlyn* poet enhanced the entertaining potential of the narrative by means of descriptive expansions can be seen in the episode where Merlin meets Vortiger's chamberlain, a woman pretending to be a man. This short comic scene cannot be found in the *Estoire* and has not been discussed by Horobin and Higgins. By this stage, Merlin has been brought to Vortiger's court in order to help the king solve the mystery of the tower that, erected during the day, collapses during the night. After having burst into unprompted laughter for the third time, Merlin explains to the clerks sent by Vortiger that an amusing misunderstanding is taking place at court, where the chamberlain is about to be hanged. The crime justifying this harsh punishment consists in the chamberlain having refused the queen's offer to become her lover as he would not 'tresoun do for no gold' (*AM*, l. 1,356). Outraged by the chamberlain's refusal, the queen had told the king that the chamberlain had made improper advances to her so that the king had sentenced the chamberlain to death. Merlin reveals that the chamberlain will be unjustly executed as he is in fact a woman who 'goþ in gise of a man / For he is louely and of fair hewe' (*AM*, ll. 1,350-51). In *Merlyn*, the scene in which the queen tries to seduce the chamberlain is expanded so as to incorporate a saucy *tête-à-tête* between the chamberlain and the queen:

>Þeo false quene þat is vntreowe
>
>Bysouȝte hire to beon hire lemman derne
>
>And heo onswerde and can hire werne
>
>Nede heo moste þat game forsake
>
>For heo no hadde takil forþ to take
>
>Forto make hire no counfort
>
>For hire takil was to schort,
>
>Þerfore þe quene was a fool
>
>For hadde heo wist of hire tol
>
>And how schort hit was wrouȝt
>
>Heo neo hadde of hire loue souȝt. (*Merlyn*, ll. 1,428-38)

The author plays with the double sexuality of the chamberlain explaining that he/she cannot accept the queen's invitation because he/she is not equipped with the 'right tool'. The episode of the untruthful queen, one of the topoi of medieval romance, loses any educational function and becomes a moment in which both the author and his audience can make fun of Hengis's queen just as Merlin does in the same scene. It is possible to

imagine that, when performed, this sketch-like scene would trigger a lively response from the audience. This confirms that the author of *Merlyn* was following a deliberate plan of redactions designed to enhance the comedy of certain episodes for the amusement of his audience. The more sober scene in *AM* is instead designed to promote a different agenda and vouches for the romance's educational function: the *AM* poet condemns the immorality of the queen by equating her inappropriate behaviour to a political problem, unveiling the dysfunctional nature of Vortiger's court and underlining the moral inadequacy of his rule. The bawdiness of this scene in *Merlyn* may also suggest that the composition of the intended audiences for the two romances may have been dissimilar. While *AM* would make for suitable reading in a family context and a mixed audience of both adults and children, we can imagine *Merlyn* being enjoyed by an adult, even predominantly male, audience.

This passage bears further evidence to how *AM* and *Merlyn*, the two Middle English versions of the *Estoire* anayzed in this chapter, do not just differ greatly from their common source, but also show the tendency of their authors to handle their source material from contrasting perspectives. Whilst the *AM* author presents the Arthurian story as part of English national history, by merging the narrative of the *Estoire* with that of the chronicles – as shown by the close resemblance of some passages with Wace's *Brut* –, the author of *Merlyn* focussed entirely on Merlin by following the order of the events as found in the *Estoire*. Moreover, the author of *Merlyn* expanded on what he must have considered the most entertaining aspects of the story, by providing the reader with visual details and original dialogues that would stress the comical effect of particular episodes. In the following chapter, however, it will be shown that *Merlyn* is just one of the various forms taken by the Merlin legend during the fifteenth century. Around the same period, Henry Lovelich wrote yet another interpretation of the story, which reflected his personal understanding of society and which was imbued with the values and aspirations of a new audience: the London merchant classes.

Chapter 3 – The Middle English *Prose Merlin*

The present chapter will consider the third Middle English translation of the Old French Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire*, the English *Prose Merlin*.[1] It will first place the *Prose Merlin* in the context of fifteenth-century romance and its shift from verse to prose. It will then discuss two features of the *Prose Merlin* which have greatly influenced its modern reception: the text's close adherence to the original French source, and its subordination (in terms of literary value) to Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[2]

The second section will look at the relation between the *Prose Merlin* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*. It will be noted that the *Prose Merlin* translator and Malory used contrasting approaches to their sources: Malory selected and reworked the material taken from several sources in order to present a new and personal interpretation of the Arthurian myth, while the *Prose Merlin* translator was aiming at providing an exhaustive and faithful rendition of a single source. For this reason, it will be suggested that the *Prose Merlin* translator has been erroneously aligned with Malory when his methodology resembles that of the professional translators of the fifteenth-century London bookshops. Also, a detailed comparison with the *Estoire* and the *Morte Darthur* will reveal that the *Prose Merlin* translator's approach to translation can vary from passage to passage as shown by his reduction of repetitions and his simplification of psychological descriptions.

The third and last part of the chapter will discuss the translator's most striking alterations, which involve the theme of chivalry. It will be shown that a more open approach to translation, by means of paraphrase and specific lexical choice, suggests that the translator was aiming at promoting an ideal of chivalry and of the Round Table that differs greatly from that found in the *Estoire*. Attention will be given to an important innovation that has been completely overlooked by past criticism: the *Prose Merlin* is the first English romance where the Round Table is defined as a 'fellowship' and its knights as 'brothers'. This neglected romance introduced a sophisticated and distinctly English view of Arthurian chivalry, which it shares with Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

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[1] As the most recent edition, Conlee's for *TEAMS*, is targeted to university students and hence does not comprise the whole text but only a selection of chapters, this chapter will refer exclusively to *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley, 2 vols, EETS OS 10, 21, 36, 112 (London, 1865-99), cited by volume and page number.

[2] All quotations are from *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3 vols, ed. by Eugene Vinaver, 3rd rev. ed. by P. J. C. Field (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), cited by volume and page number.

3.1   The English Merlin Legend: From Verse to Prose

For a long time, there has been a general tendency amongst scholars to draw a line between the production of Middle English romance before and after 1400, the date that separates the two centuries during which the great majority of romances were composed.[3] Criticism of a few decades ago tended to focus primarily on romance before 1400 due to the fact that most romances are known to have been composed before that date, whilst the majority of fifteenth-century romances are not original compositions but copies and adaptations of older romances. [4] Inevitably, fifteenth-century texts have been condemned by some critics who have considered the production of this period as a less than inventive reworking of previous material.[5] Barron, suggesting that traditional narrative forms are exhausted in the fifteenth century, has characterized this period either as one of deterioration of popular romance towards the ballad genre, or as witnessing a transition, from verse to prose, towards Malory's work of excellence – the only exception being the alliterative texts.[6] Barron, in particular, chose to overlook prose in his survey. However, prose replaced verse as the preferred form of romance composition only during the second half of the fifteenth century, when verse and prose romances coexisted for several decades.

Similarly, in what is to date the only study fully dedicated to the development of Middle English romance in the fifteenth century, Derek Pearsall tries to analyse the features that distinguish fifteenth-century romance in terms of a change in the composition of its public and their literary tastes. He observes that Middle English romances shift between two extremes; on the one hand, some fifteenth-century adaptations of French originals such as *The Seege of Troye* in BL, MS Harley 525, indicate a tendency towards a greater degree of sophistication, thanks to the impact of Chaucerian poetry, and were intended for a literate audience who could appreciate Chaucer's style.[7] At the other extreme there are romances such as *The Grene Knyght*, *The Turke and Gowin* and the fifteenth-century copy of *Sir Orfeo*, which signal the 'regression' of romance into the oral

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[3] Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, p. 53.

[4] Derek Pearsall, 'The English Romance in the Fifteenth Century', *Essays and Studies* 29 (1976), 56-83 (p. 58).

[5] In these regards, see Helen Cooney, 'Introduction', in *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Helen Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 9-14, and Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', 761-99.

[6] Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, p. 54.

[7] Pearsall, 'The English Romance', p. 63. Other examples cited by Pearsall are *Generydes* and *Partenope of Blois*, which show a further refinement of the subtleties of their French originals.

tradition and represent the last stage of these narratives before their transformation into ballads.[8] If, over thirty years ago, Pearsall's article was approvingly cited by scholars, his arguments have been increasingly questioned. As demonstration that this mode to approach Middle English romance is out-dated, Pearsall himself has revisited his value judgements on the development of popular romance, abandoning the formalist analysis and focusing on the 'pleasure' medieval and modern audiences took in romance rather than on aspects of 'literarariness'.[9]

Growing attention has been paid to the transmission of romance in the fifteenth century and much work has been done to re-assess the fifteenth century and recover its literary value. Scholars such as Helen Cooper and Helen Cooney have urged a re-evaluation of fifteenth century culture, explaining that it was a period 'characterized by historical turbulence and intellectual ferment' and hence its literature 'operates by different principles'.[10] In her seminal study of English romance, Cooper has highlighted the continuity, in terms of motifs and subject matters, that this genre enjoyed through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and through its shift from verse to prose.[11]

As far as Middle English romance is concerned, one such key principle that distinguishes fifteenth-century productions from those of the previous century is represented by the changes in form; as the production of verse romance decreases (especially after 1450) this century sees the rise of prose romances, which reached its zenith with the work of Malory and Caxton. The authors' choice of prose rather than verse was not necessarily dictated by the perception that prose was the more fitting medium for their narratives. It was a question of reshaping the original texts according to the demands of their public, an increasingly literate public. According to scholars, the rise of prose romance in France and England was triggered by slightly different factors. Gabrielle Spiegel argues that the conditions under which prose narratives originate vary from culture to culture and, whilst in some cases they might be natural developments in literary history,

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[8] Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', in *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches*, ed. by Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 11-35 (p. 12).

[9] Derek Pearsall, 'The Pleasure of Popular Romance: A Prefatory Essay', in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. by Michael Staveley Cichon and Rhiannon Purdie (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 9-18, p. 11.

[10] Helen Cooper, 'Introduction', in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. by Helen Cooper, S. Mapstone and J. Fichte (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 1-14 (p. 4). Cooney, *Nation, Court and Culture*, p. 11.

[11] See Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

in others they might be 'socially generated by precise cultural needs and possess ideological functions and meanings'.[12] In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France, prose did not operate as a mere replacement of verse and did not become popular for historical or social reasons.[13] The arrival of prose romances had more to do with aspects such as the audience's demands and expectations, involving a shared awareness – amongst both the audience and the romance authors – that prose was, in Norris Lacy's words, an 'inevitable consequence of the emerging view that [it] was necessary for the presentation of truth'.[14]

Similarly, in fifteenth-century England, prose was perhaps perceived as necessary to make romance narratives – in particular, those rooted in legend or history – appear more comprehensive and reliable.[15] However, even though prose chronicle writing played a role in the origins of English prose romance, other factors such as social change and historical circumstances seem indeed to have had a greater impact on the dissemination of prose romance in England. According to Pearsall, the arrival of prose romance in England in this period was an inevitable consequence of 'the influence of continental models and demands of an increasing reading public'.[16] During the previous two centuries, romance in its various forms had appealed to the tastes of a broad social spectrum, from the upper classes to the gentry. By the fifteenth century, however, the reading of romances was being recognized as predominantly middle-class pastime.[17] The romance audiences came to encompass the increasingly literate middle classes, merchants and townspeople. In particular, the role played by the London merchant classes in the purchase and consumption of literature has been fully acknowledged by medievalists such as Ralph Hanna, Boffey and Meale. Studies of manuscripts containing Arthurian romances have demonstrated the popularity of the Arthurian subject in the capital during both the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries.[18] Moreover, the rise of prose was due to the

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[12] Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteen-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 2.

[13] See Norris J. Lacy, 'The Evolution and Legacy of French Prose Romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 167-82. Similarly, Spiegel, focusing on the social implications of the emergence of prose in Old French historical writings, argues notes that 'the turn to prose as the preferred medium of historical writing occurred in service to an ideological initiative on the part of a threatened elite to authenticate its claim to historical legitimacy'. See Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, p. 3.

[14] Lacy, 'The Evolution', p. 167.

[15] Helen Cooper, 'Prose Romances', pp. 216-17.

[16] Pearsall, 'The English Romance', p. 71.

[17] Cooper, 'Prose Romances', p. 216.

[18] See in particular Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Julia Boffey and Carol M. Meale, 'Selecting the Text: Rawlinson C. 86 and Some Other Books

combination of some social and technological preconditions such as the increase of literacy among the middle classes and the beginning of the printing era.[19]

Another important factor to consider in the rise of prose romances was the influence of continental models, especially French and Burgundian, which coincided with the beginning of a print culture in England. Unquestionably, William Caxton, England's first printer, had a major role in the assimilation of foreign models as well as in the dissemination of prose romance through his work as translator and publisher. During his long publishing career from the 1470s to the 1490s, Caxton published eight prose romances.[20] With the exception of Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1469-70) these were translated by Caxton himself from continental originals (French and Dutch). Caxton has often been criticized for the weighty influence that Burgundian prose romances had on their Middle English counterparts. However, recent criticism has shown how Caxton's familiarity with romance was not limited to what had been produced in Burgundy, but extended to the rest of the continent.[21]

Although a few prose romances are believed to have been written in the first half of the century, the great majority of texts appeared between 1460 and 1520, the decades that were defined by Caxton's translations and his publication of the first edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[22] As far as Middle English romance is concerned, the prose romances are by far the most neglected, and only in the last twenty years or so has an upsurge of interest in these texts finally emerged thanks to a re-evaluation of fifteenth-century literary production.[23] Most fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prose romances have remained largely

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for London Readers', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. by Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), pp. 143-69. The production and circulation of Arthurian romance, with particular reference to the three English Merlin romances, will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.

[19] Cooper, 'Prose Romances', p. 216.

[20] These are: *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (1469-76); the *History of Jason* (1476-78); *Godefrey of Boloyne* (1481); *Charles the Grete* (1485); *Paris and Vienne* (1485); *Blanchardygn and Eglantine* (1489-91); *The Foure Sonnes of Aymon* (1489-91); Caxton's *Eneydos* (1490). See Norman Francis Blake, *Caxton and his World* (London: André Deutsch, 1969), pp. 125-50.

[21] Jennifer Goodman has argued that Caxton's romances reflect his wide experience with this genre and reflect his connection with Europe, not just Burgundy. See Jennifer R. Goodman, 'Caxton's Continent' in *Caxton's Trace*, ed. William Kuskin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006), pp. 101-23 (p. 23).

[22] The romances produced before and around 1450 are: *The Prose Alexander*, 1400-1450; *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, 1400-1450; *The Sege of Troy*, 1425-1450; *The Sege of Thebes*, ca. 1450; the *Prose Merlin*, ca. 1450; *The Sege of Jerusaleme*, 1450-1500. See Keiser, 'The Romances', pp. 271, 283-86.

[23] See Cooper's work on prose romances and in particular her 'Counter-Romance: Civil Strife and Father-Killing in the Prose Romances', in *The Long Fifteenth Century*, pp. 141-62, and Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*. See also Megan Leitch, 'Wars of the Roses Literature: Romancing Treason in England, c.1437 – c.1497' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2012).

unstudied due to the inadequacy of the modern editions of these texts and the prejudice with which they have always been approached by scholars.[24]

Amongst the various versions of the Merlin story, the *Prose Merlin* is the longest and most exhaustive, even surpassing Henry Lovelich's extensive verse romance. Unlike his predecessors, the author of the *Prose Merlin* translated the *Estoire* into English prose, which enabled him to reproduce the narrative of his source most closely. The romance has survived in its almost-complete form in a single manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 3. 11 (henceforth Cambridge Ff. 3. 11). The manuscript lacks the final three leaves, so that the story breaks off just after Merlin's imprisonment and one last final narrative shift to the events occurring in Benoic, where Kings Ban and Bors are involved in a new military campaign against their old enemy King Claudas de la Deserte. In addition to the Cambridge manuscript, a brief fragment of the romance is also preserved on fol. 43 of Oxford Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson D. 913, a fifteenth-century miscellany.[25] The text contained in this manuscript deals with the prophecies made by Merlin to Arthur and Kings Ban and Bors, who are helping Arthur and King Leodegan in their fight against King Rion in the land of Tamelide. The Rawlinson fragment was originally part of a book made of paper and was copied by a single scribe Meale identified as a copyist 'active in London during the third quarter of the fifteenth century'.[26] However, the fragment contained in this manuscript is badly damaged and almost illegible, so full attention will be given to the text contained in Cambridge Ff. 3. 11, which is also the sole manuscript used in both Wheatley's and Conlee's editions of the text.

Palaeographical and codicological evidence suggests that the Cambridge manuscript was written in the first half of the fifteenth century or around 1450.[27] The dialect of the text and the history of its ownership trace the text back to Kent.[28] However, recent

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[24] In these regards, see Keiser, 'The Romances', p. 271.

[25] A third copy of the text, which will not be analysed in this chapter, survives in a sixteenth-century manuscript, Oxford Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 802 (ff. 66-82). According to Conlee, there is no relationship between this version of the romance and the other two texts. See *Prose Merlin*, p. 12.

[26] Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audience', p. 94. See also Meale, 'Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons', p. 113.

[27] For a detailed description of this manuscript see Cross, 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*', pp. 8-20, and Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audience', pp. 94-95.

[28] Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, M. Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, 4 vols, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), vol. 1, p. 67. Meale's extensive research on the history of the manuscript has shown that around 1500 it was owned by the Guildfords, 'a Kent family who rose steadily to prominence throughout the fifteenth century until, during the reign of Henry VIII, various members occupied influential positions at court and within the government' (Meale, 'Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons', p. 114). See my discussion of Meale's findings further below.

linguistic analysis seems to challenge this view: although the text's language displays some of the features of the Southern English dialects in general, its spelling is more likely to be associated with the London area rather than Kent.[29] Moreover, the low quality of the manuscript seems to indicate it was not aimed at an upper-class audience, as the book looks, in Cross's words, 'reasonably attractive, but primarily functional' and therefore could be a typical product of one of the London bookshops.[30] This is an interesting possibility that should be examined further as the *Prose Merlin* could be yet another Middle English translation of the *Estoire* to be produced and intended for circulation in London. This would also confirm the idea that the London bookshops played a pivotal part in the dissemination of the Arthurian story before Malory, and that the capital was particularly attentive and receptive to Arthurian romance.[31]

Even though the *Prose Merlin* occupies a unique position in the history of Middle English romance as the first Arthurian romance written in prose – preceding Malory's *Morte Darthur* by just a few decades – it has remained largely unexplored.[32] Like most of the prose romances produced in the fifteenth century, the *Prose Merlin* has been disparaged for its exceedingly derivative nature: critics have often underlined that the romance is *just* a translation of the *Estoire* and *must*, therefore, be set apart from Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[33] There has been some debate about what direction criticism should follow when dealing with this romance.[34] The strict dependence of the *Prose Merlin* on the

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[29] Cross, 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*', p. 49. Cross's PhD thesis provides a diplomatic edition of the Robert de Boron section of the *Prose Merlin* together with a discussion of codicological and palaeographical features of the manuscripts, drawing attention on the linguistic characteristics of the manuscript and its provenance. She only includes a brief textual analysis of the text by looking at the role played by female characters and sexual relationships in some key episodes in the romance.

[30] Cross, 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*', p. 14.

[31] See 2.4 for more information on the production and circulation of Arthurian romance in London.

[32] See my Introduction (p. 11).

[33] For example, Meale is very cautious in associating the two romances with one another: after she describes the *Prose Merlin* as 'the only other Arthurian romance in Middle English to approach Malory's in terms of physical magnitude', she instantly specifies, 'I should add that I do not equate the *Merlin* qualitatively with the *Morte*, since it is a relatively straightforward translation from the French, but quantitatively the comparison does have validity' (Meale, 'Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons', p. 113).

[34] Ackerman dedicated less than a page to the *Prose Merlin*, stressing its inferiority to the *Morte Darthur* and explaining that 'because the English *Prose Merlin* is a fairly literal translation from the French Vulgate it requires only brief comment'(Ackerman, 'English Rimed and Prose Romances', p. 488-89). Similarly, in Severs' *Manual*, Helaine Newstead concludes her short paragraph on the *Prose Merlin* with a connection to Malory, claiming that 'it is important chiefly because it is an Arthurian text written in English prose shortly before Malory' (Newstead, 'Arthurian Legends', in *A Manual*, p. 49). The author of the 'Introduction' to Henry B. Wheatley's EETS edition of the *Prose Merlin*, William Mead has pointed out that, in view of the close adherence of the *Prose Merlin* to the *Estoire*, any investigation of this text should be restricted to the

Estoire has proved to be the most troublesome issue for scholars, hindering any thorough investigation of the romance, leaving critics with a dilemma that echoes modern approaches to translation: should criticism focus on a text that is so strongly dependent on its source? Like most of the prose romances written in the fifteenth century, the *Prose Merlin* cannot be tackled as though it were an original composition, but must be related to its source.[35]

Despite his extensive research on the manuscripts of the *Estoire* surviving in France and England, William Mead was not able to identify the *French* original and ruled out the possibility that any of the extant copies of the *Estoire* can be considered the direct source of the *Prose Merlin*.[36] However, instead of contemplating the possibility that the differences between the *Prose Merlin* and the *Estoire* might derive from a conscious process of selection and interpretation by the author, Mead takes into account the theory of a lost source, reaching the following conclusion:

> I am firmly convinced that the English version is a slavish translation of
> a fourteenth-century manuscript now lost, and that a careful collation of
> all the extant MSS might enable us to find a French equivalent for
> almost every word of the translation.[37]

As Stern has rightly observed, Mead's methodology reflects a general tendency among scholars to hunt for 'lost exemplars' with which Middle English texts can be associated, and pointed out that the *Prose Merlin* 'deserves to be re-examined, re-edited and reassessed according to modern practice and theory'.[38] This does not imply that the *Prose Merlin* should be read in isolation of its source or that we should neglect the fact that it is a close translation. On the contrary, the comparative analysis of the romance with the source

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translator's competence. He labelled the *Prose Merlin* 'a close and almost servile translation of the French *Merlin ordinaire*' (Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, p. ccxliv).

[35] See my discussion of the use of sources in the Introduction (p. 13).

[36] For further information on Mead's analysis of the possible sources and his findings, see 2.1 (p. 108).

[37] Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, p. clxxxiv.

[38] Stern, 'The Middle English', p. 112. Mead's 'Introduction' to the romance betrays the editor's bias against the text and its author – or authors, as he suggested. To the reader of this edition, Mead's dislike of the romance is clear even just looking at the way his introductory material was structured. Reflecting the customs of an older generation of criticism, who focused on myth and folklore, the best part of his 'Introduction' is too general to be useful to contemporary informed readers of the *Prose Merlin*. The analysis of the text's style and content does not occupy more than a handful of pages, and even then Mead's discussion of the literary value of the romance becomes an opportunity to list all the shortcomings for which the text should be dismissed. See Stern's 'The Middle English *Prose Merlin*' for a more comprehensive discussion of Mead's numerous value judgments.

should be a fruitful exercise where the translated text is seen to be the result of a rational (and creative) activity and where the source text is not set as a paragon of literary quality.

The problem with the *Prose Merlin* is rather that it does not satisfy the traditional assumption about Arthurian romance deriving from a French source: the other translations of the *Estoire* which we know to have circulated in the fifteenth century, were written in verse and hence had to undergo a process of adaptation (from prose to verse) which allowed the translators to handle the narrative of their source with a greater degree of freedom.[39] Instead, the *Prose Merlin*, by virtue of its medium, was composed according to different principles. As will be shown in this chapter, the norm for fifteenth-century prose romances is to replicate their foreign original as closely as possible, with selection and re-elaboration – which characterized Malory's *modus operandi* – being exceptions rather than the rule.

The second editor of the *Prose Merlin*, Conlee, seems to be less judgmental towards the romance, appreciating some of its stylistic features. For instance, he praises the romance in view of the prominence of a Christian morality in many episodes and the great attention given to characterization and to female characters, whose flaws and weaknesses are, he suggests, handled with more indulgence than they are in the *Morte Darthur*.[40] Nevertheless, just like earlier scholars, Conlee seems to be uncertain about how to tackle the great similarity between the *Prose Merlin* and the *Estoire*. After his convincing re-evaluation of the text and his author, Conlee acknowledges in a footnote that any consideration on the literary features of the romance will apply to the French source as well.[41]

As demonstrated by this brief excursus, until now, two features of the *Prose Merlin* have greatly affected its modern reception: the fact that it cannot be separated from its source, to which, according to many scholars, it owes all of its literary value; and its ancillary role, in terms of importance, to Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

Although critics have repeatedly stressed that examining the *Prose Merlin* in contrast with Malory's *Morte Darthur* would be beneficial to both romances, a detailed comparison of Malory's work and the *Prose Merlin* is yet to be attempted. Conlee believes that a comparison between the two texts could shed some more light not only on the *Prose Merlin* but even on Malory's work. Edward Donald Kennedy has even claimed that

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[39] See for example my discussion of Lovelich's *Merlin* in the previous chapter.
[40] Conlee, 'Introduction', in *Prose Merlin*, p. 7.
[41] *Ibid*.

Malory may have been familiar with some English translation of the *Estoire* and that he may even have used one of these as a minor source for his first tale.[42] It would be impossible to say with any degree of certainty whether Malory had read the *Prose Merlin*, and this is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, much more can be revealed about the *Prose Merlin*'s style and features by comparing it with Malory and their common source and by reflecting on the different approaches used by the two English authors. The following section will, therefore, compare an episode in the two romances – the 'Merlin' section of Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' and the corresponding narrative in the *Prose Merlin* – and draw some conclusions about what prompted Malory and the *Prose Merlin* translator to follow such different methodologies, and with what consequences.

3.2   The *Prose Merlin* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*

The *Prose Merlin* has frequently been associated with Malory's *Morte Darthur* for two evident reasons: they share the same subject-matter and were composed roughly at the same time; when Caxton's edition of the *Morte Darthur* was published in 1485, two versions of the *Prose Merlin* were in circulation in or around London.[43] However, a parallel reading of the *Prose Merlin* with Malory has so far appeared to be a knife with a jagged edge, as it has also (too often) resulted in an unforgiving assessment of the *Prose Merlin*'s literary value. Scholars who have compared the two texts have only put into the spotlight the *Prose Merlin*'s stylistic flaws as compared with Malory's work.[44] For example, in his anthology of medieval English prose, William Matthews takes the *Prose Merlin* as a specimen of Middle English prose romance translated verbatim from their foreign sources. He compares the episode of the sword in the stone with the corresponding versions in the *Estoire* and in the *Morte Darthur* so as to show the different methodologies employed by the *Prose Merlin* and by Malory, noting that:

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[42] Kennedy, 'Malory and His English Sources', p. 34. For a thorough discussion of Malory's minor sources see also Ralph Norris, *Malory's Library: The Sources of the* Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008). However, in his analysis of the English sources for the *Tale of King Arthur*, Norris does not mention the possibility that Malory may have read the *Prose Merlin*.

[43] For more information on the two fifteenth-century manuscripts containing the romance see 3.1.

[44] See Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, pp. 62-68. P. J. C. Field states that 'what stencil translation from the French is really like is shown by a fifteenth-century translation of the prose *Merlin*' (p. 62). See also the many comparisons between Malory's style and that of the *Prose Merlin*'s author in Mark Lambert, *Malory: Style and Vision in* Le Morte Darthur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

> Unlike Malory, this writer was content to translate word for word,
> without kindly abbreviation, so that his style is seamed with French
> locutions and retains the unhurried loquaciousness that Malory avoided.
> […] The style of the episode and of the translation as a whole is easy,
> clear, and well-ordered but it is twice as long as Malory's version, and
> comparison will show readily the directness and energy that Malory
> achieved by his own selective translation.[45]

Malory's greatest skill was that most of the time he did not restrict his methodology to translating and adapting from his French and English sources, but, for each source, he only selected the material that he thought would be fitting to his own vision of the story. His narrative is therefore independent of and considerably shorter than that of his sources. For this reason and also due to the distance between Malory's methodology and that of his contemporaries, he has been singled out from the rest of fifteenth-century romance translators by modern critics.

A comparison between Malory's *Morte Darthur* and the *Prose Merlin* requires some caveats as it can lead to several possible pitfalls. Firstly, the sources of the two romances as far as Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' is concerned do not coincide: whilst the author of the *Prose Merlin* took his material exclusively from the Vulgate's *Estoire*, Malory used both the Vulgate's *Estoire* and the Post Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* as his major sources.[46] It is important to remember that, as far as the Merlin branch of the cycles is concerned, the greatest difference between the Vulgate and Post Vulgate versions lies in the nature of their so-called *Suite*, or continuation – the part of the narrative following Arthur's crowning ceremony and starting with the wars between Arthur and the rebellious kings. Whilst the Vulgate *Suite* focuses on the large-scale battles between Arthur's forces and a large number of opposing armies, the Post Vulgate *Suite* relates stories that are centred on the adventures of single knights, anticipating the interlacing character of the narrative in the Quest for the Holy Grail.[47] Therefore, only a comparison between the first section of the *Estoire* in the *Prose Merlin* and Malory can be fruitful due to the different sources used by the two authors for the 'continuation' section. As for Malory's use of the *Estoire*, he chose not to provide a straightforward translation of the French romances, omitting the best part of the story, which deals with Merlin's origin and early years, and with

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[45] William Matthews, *Later Medieval English Prose* (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1963), p. 287.
[46] Henceforth called Post Vulgate *Suite*. Norris, *Malory's Library*, p. 14.
[47] See my discussion of the development of the Vulgate Cycle in the Introduction.

Vortiger's rise to power and final demise. Furthermore, he conflates the material taken from the Vulgate with that of the chronicles, which were 'the primary source of the Arthurian story to English readers of the fifteenth century'.[48] Malory is believed to have used John Hardyng's verse *Chronicle* as a minor source in this and other parts of the *Morte Darthur*.[49] His romance and Hardyng's *Chronicle* share many features ranging from the geographical details to the narrative style; Kennedy and Ralph Norris have recognized how the authors adopted a similar style in their narratives, which is more straightforward and less interlaced than that of the French cyclic romances.[50] However, the most obvious point of connection between Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Hardyng's *Chronicle* is the starting point of Malory's narrative, which coincides with Hardyng's beginning of the Arthurian section in his chronicle.[51] Malory follows Hardyng's model in focusing entirely on the events directly related to Arthur (Uther's love for Ygerne and Arthur's begetting), so that the first episode of the narrative functions as a prologue to Arthur's later appearance in the story. Moreover, in both Malory's and Hardyng's texts, the section of the story dedicated to Uther and his reign is much briefer than in the versions provided by other chronicle versions.

Malory's use of Hardyng's *Chronicle* as a minor source testifies to his interest in 'realism'. In the later Middle Ages, chronicles were still believed to convey historical truth.[52] By working with a single source, the author of the *Prose Merlin* could never achieve that blend of history and fiction that characterizes the content and the style of the *Morte Darthur*. His methodology should not be aligned with Malory's, but rather, with the work of contemporary translators. An exhaustive rendition of the original text was the force that drove the enterprises of fifteenth-century translators as opposed to the works by the romancers of the previous centuries.[53] The prose translations produced by Caxton and

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[48] Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Sir Thomas Malory's (French) Romance and (English) Chronicle', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P. J. C. Field*, pp. 223-34 (p. 224).

[49] *The Chronicle of Iohn Hardyng*, ed. by Henry Ellis (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1812). Other English works have been suggested as possible sources for Malory: *Sir Orfeo*, *AM* and other popular romances, Vegetius' military treatise *De re militari*. See P. J. C. Field, 'Minor Sources', in *Malory: Texts and Sources*, ed. by P. J. C. Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 27-31 (p. 28), and Norris, *Malory's Library*, pp. 15-22.

[50] Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Malory's Use of Hardyng's Chronicle', *Notes and Queries* 214 (1969), 167-70; Kennedy believes that Hardyng could have had a direct influence on Malory's style as well as the narrative's structure. Norris is more cautious about the latter aspect, as he notes that, in terms of structure, Malory still owes more to his French sources than to Hardyng (Norris, *Malory's Library*, pp. 16-17).

[51] Field, 'Minor Sources', p. 28.

[52] Norris, *Malory's Library*, p. 22.

[53] See Workman's *Fifteenth-Century Translation*. See also my Introduction (p. 21).

the other translators of this period all share a strong dependence on their originals, often resulting in the replication of the grammatical structures of the source languages (Latin and French). Amongst the various types of late medieval English prose, these translations have been classified as 'written prose', whose characteristics were indicative of a process of translation; in particular, they aimed at communicating the content of the source in the clearest possible way.[54] Mirroring the approach of most contemporary Middle English translators, the *Prose Merlin* author maintains the characteristic style of the original French romance. Following thoroughness and clarity as his major principles of composition, he retains untouched the episodic arrangement of the narrative as found in the *Estoire*, showing a general tendency towards a systematic rendition of the source's syntactic structure.[55]

If we compare sections of the *Prose Merlin* and Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur', it is apparent that Malory's narrative is often half as long as that of the *Prose Merlin*. The episode focusing on Uther's final battle against the Saxons can serve as a useful example of how Malory tends to reduce the material in his source, in contrast to the methods adopted by the *Prose Merlin* translator.[56] In the *Estoire*, this passage is quite long and functions as a sort of miniature *speculum principis*. A sudden illness prevents Uther from joining his army in the fight against the Saxons. Having strengthened their position on the island, the Saxons are giving a hard time to the Britons, who keep losing ground. As a last resort, Uther seeks Merlin's counsel on the matter. Merlin suggests that, even though he is unable to fight, the king should be carried into battle on a horse litter as an example to his men. The passage in the *Estoire* is meant to emphasise the importance of a strong military leader in a battle:

> & merlins respont ore poes ueoir que nus ne vaut riens sans boin seignor
> . & li rois li dist por dieu merlin conseillies moi que ien puisse faire . &
> cil li dist iou ten dirai vne priuee parole que ie uoeil que tu croies . fai
> semonre tes gens . & quant il seront tout assamble si te fai metre en vne
> biere cheuaucheresse & ten ua combatre a tes anemis & saches
> chertainement que tu les uaintras.[57] (Sommer, p. 77)

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[54] Gordon, *The Movement*, p. 69.

[55] However, this is just a general tendency. As will be shown further on, the translator has sometimes edited the text by adding to or shortening the French original.

[56] For a discussion of this episode in *AM* see Chapter 1 (p. 83).

[57] See also the passage in Micha, p. 256, which is almost identical.

And Merlin replied, 'now you can see that no one is worth anything without a good overlord.' 'For God's sake, Merlin,' said the king 'advise me as to what to do!' 'I will tell you something meant for you alone that I want you to believe. Have your army called together. And when they are all gathered, have yourself put on a horse-drawn litter and go out to fight your foes. I can assure you that you will defeat them'. (Lacy, p. 210)

The *Prose Merlin* presents a close rendition of the original passage, which matches the syntactic arrangement of the French source, mainly based on parataxis:

And Merlin saide, "Now maist thow se that peple ne a-vaile not in bataile with-oute a gode lorde." And the kynge saide, "For godes love, Merlyn, counseile me what I shall do." And Merlin seide, "I will telle the a thynge in previte, that I will tho byleve: make somowne all thyn oste and thy peple; and whan thei be alle come, do the to be bore in a lytier, and so go fight with thyn enmyes; and, wite it verily, thow shalt hem venquise". (Prose Merlin, p. 92)

Even so, the concluding sentence of Merlin's speech is not quite a verbatim translation. The French source presents a comparison: '& quant tu auras uencue la bataille si sauras bien que terre sans seignor ne vaut pas tant comme cele qui a seignor' (Sommer, p. 77; 'And after you have won the battle, you will understand what it means to say that a land without an overlord is worth less than a land that has one', Lacy, p. 210) with the repetition of the word 'seignor' for the third time in a short space. The *Prose Merlin* translator shortens this last sentence by removing the comparison and also replaces the word 'signor' with 'kynge': 'And whan thow hast hem venquysed, thow shalt knowe well what a londe is worth that is with-outen a kynge' (*Prose* Merlin, p. 92). The resulting effect is more climactic than the original due to the removal of the comparison but also to the implications of the use of 'kynge' in place of 'lord', which subtly transforms a speech on military strategy into one on ideal kingship. Merlin's advice to Uther gains a slightly different significance: the constant presence of a healthy king is important not just in order for the army to win a battle, but also for the prosperity of the whole kingdom. Moreover, Merlin's warning about the dangers of weak leadership subtly reminds the reader of earlier sections in the romance describing the time when England was governed by inadequate rulers.

Following the *Estoire* closely, the *Prose Merlin* continues with a profound moral lesson on how every person should aim at meeting a 'gode ende' (*Prose Merlin*, pp. 92-93).[58] The passage conveys the same universal truth as its source and demonstrates a shift in Merlin's composite identity; from cunning counsellor and military strategist, Merlin comes to incarnate the prophet and preacher, advocating that men should not be attached to worldly goods if they desire the salvation of their souls. The translation, which is very close to its source, is consistent with the general treatment of religious and moral content in the *Prose Merlin*. Unlike Malory, the translator has a tendency to leave untouched the Christian morals promoted by the text. After the digression, the translator, still following his source, proceeds:

> And the kynge somowned his oste, and seide he wolde go with hem on
> his enmyes. Than he was ledde in a letere; and the sarazins com and
> fought with hym. And the kynges men, be the counseile of her lorde,
> discounfited their enmyes, and slowen grete plente; that hadde the kynge
> the victorye of the bataile, and venquysed his enmyes. And so the londe
> was set in pees; and than he be-thought hym of that Merlin hadde hym
> seide, and repeired to london, and sente for his grete tresour, and yaf his
> godes to gode men and gode women, and to mysese peple of his reame,
> and dide many faire almesse dedes; and the remenaunt he dide departe
> be the advise of his mynistres to holy cherche. Thus departed the kynge
> his tresoure, that nought be lefte to hym-self wher-of he cowde
> remembre, that he ne yaf all for the love of god by the counseile of
> Merlyn.[59] (*Prose Merlin*, p. 94)

Following Merlin's instructions, Arthur distributes fairly, to his people and to the clergy, the treasures gained after the battle. Here again Merlin, the true interpreter of God's will, is not only teaching Arthur a moral lesson, but is also acting for the benefit of the society and hence the preservation of England's social order. Batt has shown how English works deriving from *Estoire* re-contextualised the narrative of the original, turning Merlin into a political rather than a spiritual guide and focusing on issues of power and social order.[60] In particular, in the *Prose Merlin* Merlin is a paradoxical character who employs his powers

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[58] For a comparison with the *Estoire*, see Sommer, pp. 77-78, Micha, pp. 256-58, and Lacy, p. 210.

[59] See Sommer, p. 78, Lacy, p. 210.

[60] Batt, *Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, p. 52.

and prophetic knowledge for, in Batt's words, 'aspects of human organization' – that is, for England's social and political stability.[61]

Malory goes even further in this transformation of Merlin into a political adviser and he radically abridges this whole episode, summarizing Merlin's long speech in just a couple of lines and omitting the spiritual message completely:

> 'Sir,' said Merlyn, 'ye may not lye so as ye doo, for ye must to the feld, though ye ryde on an hors-lyttar. For ye shall never have the better of your enemyes but yf your persone be there, and thenne shall ye have the vyctory.' So it was done as Merlyn had devised, and they caryed the kynge forth in an hors-lyttar with a grete hooste towarde his enemyes, and at Saynt Albons ther mette with the kynge a grete hoost of the North. And that day syre Ulfyus and sir Bracias dyd grete dedes of armes, and kyng Uthers men overcome the northeryn bataylle and slewe many peple and put the remenaunt to flight : and thenne the kyng returned unto London and made grete joye of his victory. (*Morte Darthur*, vol. I, p. 11)

Malory goes straight to the point of Merlin's strategy – Uther needs to accompany his army in person in order to be victorious – emphasising Merlin's role as a wise counsellor/strategist, whilst removing any element that might evoke Merlin's role as a spiritual guide, which derives from his half-human and half-supernatural nature. The story takes a rather biographical turn. Whilst Arthur gains a central role in the story, Merlin is a less rounded character than in the *Estoire* or the *Prose Merlin*, as he is only instrumental to the progress of Arthur's story. In other words, the abridgment just shown can be justified by Merlin's different function in the *Morte Darthur*. Since the narrative of his origins is neglected, in the *Morte Darthur* Merlin does not represent God's authority and his actions are not necessarily guided by God's will, as Merlin's major role is to serve Arthur and the foundation of his kingdom.[62] It is not so for the other fifteenth-century translations of the *Estoire*, which preserve Merlin as a primary character in the narrative, perhaps reflecting the audience's interest in Merlin and in the early history of the island.[63]

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[61] Batt, *Remaking Arthurian Tradition*, p. 44.

[62] See Knight, *Merlin*, p. 94. See also Donald L. Hoffman, 'Malory's Tragic Merlin', in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. by Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 332-41.

[63] The people's fascination with the figure of Merlin is displayed not just in the Middle English Merlin romances, but also in a fifteenth-century commentary on his prophecies. See *The Prophetia Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth: A Fifteenth-Century Commentary*, ed. by Caroline D. Eckhardt (Cambridge, Mass.:

Malory's synthesis of the entire episode only provides factual information on the positive outcome of the battle and the king's return to London. However, his introduction of a precise location for the battle ('Saynt Albons') and the provenance of the enemies ('the North') enhances the geographical realism of the description and also alludes to recent events. Malory's mention of St Albans might have been informed by his knowledge of the first Battle of St Albans, fought by King Henry VI against the Yorkists on 22 May 1455, or by his reading of this event in Hardyng's *Chronicle*.[64]

The example shown above highlights the usual methodology used by the *Prose Merlin* translator as compared to Malory's. Most of the time, he proceeds by tackling each sentence individually and sometimes even word by word. The resulting narrative is often as verbose as its French original, with a great similarity in terms of syntactic structure at the expense of correctness. This, however, should not be interpreted as evidence of the *Prose Merlin* translator's incompetence at writing English; like most of the prose romances written in this period, the *Prose Merlin* belongs to an early tradition of English prose writings still very receptive of foreign influences.[65] Neither should we read this as his lack of personal style. Unlike Malory, his work as a professional translator did not allow him to re-shape the original as much as he could have.

P. J. C. Field, who also briefly compared the *Prose Merlin* with the *Morte Darthur*, looked at the difference in the vocabulary used in the two texts with particular attention, claiming that the *Prose Merlin* translator uses many more French loanwords and 'phrases which had no place in English' than Malory does.[66] Malory normally shortens the material of his French source, but even when he is translating word for word, he employs a style of his own which does not depend on French in terms of syntax and diction. Instead, the *Prose Merlin* and the majority of the translations produced during Malory's time, tend to reproduce their sources to the point of sounding 'not quite English'.[67] Field is certainly right to note that the *Prose Merlin* does contain words that are borrowed directly from the *Estoire* and are not recorded in other Middle English texts – take for example words such as 'briaunt' (p. 117), 'volage' (p. 436), and 'fremyssh' (pp. 284, 326, 648). However, considering the length of the text and the fact that it is a translation from a single source,

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Medieval Academy of America, 1982). The interest in the early history of Britain is also testified by the numerous copies of the Middle English *Brut*. See Windeatt, 'The Fifteenth-Century Arthur', p. 85.

[64] Field, 'Fifteenth-Century History', p. 51.

[65] See my Introduction (p. 22).

[66] Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, p. 63.

[67] Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, p. 64.

the number of French borrowings is not substantial enough for one to accuse the *Prose Merlin* translator of being strongly dependent on the French vocabulary or to have produced 'bad English'.[68] Moreover, it is quite problematic to define what would 'bad English' be in this period, and it would be misleading to base any judgement on how correct does English sound merely on the presence of French words in the text. Scholars such as Machan and Butterfield have urged the need to adopt a new perspective in the study of Middle English, which would take into account the multilingual reality of the time and how this is reflected in the texts examined.[69] This implies that we need to abandon the idea of the text as a monolingual entity and acknowledge that throughout the Middle Ages written and spoken English did not exist in isolation from French. The presence of French in the *Prose Merlin* testifies to the multilingual context in which the romance was composed and circulated, and it is thus important to analyse in what situations and with what implications French 'intrudes' on the *Prose* Merlin.[70]

When looking at French loans more closely, it appears clear that the translator uses loan words in specific situations: for instance, when he cannot find a satisfying English equivalent or when the word is part of a set phrase. He seems to borrow 'cerne' from the *Estoire* (*Prose Merlin*, pp. 309, 310, 681; Sommer, p. 210) to describe the magical circle drawn by Merlin in the Viviane episode and later on by Viviane to imprison Merlin. According to the *MED*, the term is only recorded in the *Prose Merlin* and in another Middle English text, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which anticipates the *Prose Merlin* by several decades, so we assume that English has already assimilated this word by the time of composition of the *Prose Merlin*.[71] However, in other episodes the *Prose Merlin* translator seems fully aware of the existence of the alternative 'cercle' (*Prose Merlin*, pp. 265, 421, 431), which has nothing to do with magic but has its own technical definition as it is used exclusively to describe 'the band of a crown' and 'a band encircling a knight's helmet'.[72]

Another example where the *Prose Merlin* translator decides to borrow French words for lack of a suitable equivalent in English can be seen in the chapter where Arthur, Ban

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[68] Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, p. 65.

[69] Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, p. xx. Machan, *English in the Middle Ages*, p. 109.

[70] See also my discussion of the intrusion of French and Latin in *AM* in Chapter 1.

[71] 'With Cernes, bothe square and rounde, / He traceth ofte upon the grounde, / Makende his invocacioun' (vol. 2, ch. 6, ll. 1,327-29). See *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, EETS ES 81, 82 (London, 1900-02).

[72] See the entry for 'cercle' in the *MED*.

and Bors are in the land of Tamelide to help King Leodegan. Here the French term used is 'tortue' and describes the twisted tail of the dragon that is pictured on the banner carried by Merlin:

> for he bar a dragon that was not right grete, and the taile was a fadome and an half of lengthe *tortue*, and he hadde a wide throte that the tounge semed *braulinge* euer, and it semed sparkles of fier that sprongen vp in to the heire out of his throte. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 206, emphasis mine)

> car il portoit el semet . j . dragon petit ne gaires grant qui auoit la keue longue vne toise & demie *tortice* & auoit la geule baee si grant quil vous fust auis que la langue qui dedens estoit se *branlast* tous iours . & li sailloient estincheles de feu hors de la goule parmi lair. (Sommer, p. 143, emphasis mine)

> The banner had on top a fairly small dragon with a twisted tail a yard and a half long; its mouth gaped open so wide that you would think its tongue always quivered inside, and fiery sparks shot out of its throat into the air. (Lacy, p. 245)

The word, almost identical to the French 'tortice', is not recorded elsewhere in Middle English.[73] However, in the same passage another word, this time deriving from a Germanic root, is used to express more or less the same meaning as 'tortue'. 'Braulinge' comes from 'braulen' (meaning 'to squirm, wag') and is also recorded in the *Morte Arthure*.[74]

As anticipated earlier, in other cases the *Prose Merlin* translator uses French words as part of set phrases that he and his audience would have been familiar with. A good example is his use of the word 'barbe', which can be found in the expressions 'of prime barbe' (p. 117) and 'at pryme barbe' (pp. 144, 203) corresponding to the *Estoire*'s 'de prime barbe' (Sommer, p. 109) and 'de premiere barbe' (Sommer, 174). Field claimed that it was impossible that 'such a Gallic phrase, and one unknown elsewhere in English, should be anything but a literal translation from the French' and that Malory's 'beards' are

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[73] See the *MED* entry for 'tortue'.

[74] See the *MED* entry for 'braulen'. 'Thane frescheliche þe freke the dente vpe rererys / Brochis hym in with the bronde to þe bryghte hiltys, / And he brawles on the bronde and bownes to dye' (Morte Arthure: *A Critical Edition*, ll. 4,249-51).

never 'barbes'.[75] However, the use of 'barbe' is restricted to this particular expression, for which the *Prose Merlin* translator could not find a fitting translation, in the awareness that his readership would be able to understand it anyway; in all the other instances he chose the English 'be(e)rd' just as Malory would (pp. 43, 261, 279, 424, 627, 635, for example).

What has been said so far about the tendency of the *Prose Merlin* translator to reproduce his source *verbatim* – keeping unchanged the syntactical arrangement of the narrative and even borrowing words and expressions directly from French – is true only to a certain degree. There are many cases in which he abandons the usual procedure, letting his own style creep into the translation. The following examples will show that he intervened in his source by simplifying the syntactic constructions and reducing the redundancy of the narrative. A good example can be found in the passage in which Merlin's mother gives birth to Merlin in the tower, where the *Prose Merlin* translator omits almost half of the passage in order to avoid redundancy. In the *Estoire*, the author describes at great length the reasons why Merlin is taken under God's wing despite his demonic origins. After spending all her pregnancy locked in a tower, Merlin's mother gives birth to Merlin, who, being the son of an incubus, has gained the demonic power of knowing things that had happened, were done or said in the past. Thanks to Merlin's mother's high morals and genuine repentance, God deceives the devil in his plan to make Merlin his own follower, but decides to let the child keep the powers inherited from the incubus (Sommer, p. 12; Lacy, p. 172). In the *Prose Merlin*, the part of the episode just related is mostly a sentence for sentence translation of the original. However, in the following part, when the narrative of the *Estoire* becomes repetitive, the translator changes method and opts for a concise paraphrase of the original, which is worth citing in full here:

> Et pour ce ne vaut pas diex que li diables i perdist chose quil i deust
> auoir ains uelt bien quil ait ce quil doit auoir . pour ce li estora il quil
> eust lor art de sauoir les choses faites & dites & allees tot ice sot il . *Et*
> *nostre sires qui tout comnoist & set par la repentance de la mere & par*
> *la boine reconnisance & par le lauement des confessions & par le boine*
> *repentance quil sot que en son cuer estoit & que par son gre ne par sa*
> *uolente nauoit este ce que auenu li estoit & par la force del baptesme*
> *dont il estoit laue es fons vaut nostre sires que le pecie de la mere ne li*
> *peust nuire . si li donna sens & pooir de sauoir les choses qui estoient a*

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[75] Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, pp. 64-65.

uenir . Et par ceste raison sot il les coses faites & dites & alees & les a & tient del anemi . *& le sorplus que il sot les choses qui sont auenir* vaut nostre sires quil seust encontre les autres choses que il sauoit par endroit de lautre partie . or se tourne a laquele quil voldra . Car sil veut il puet as diables rendre lor droit & a nostre signor le sien ausi. (Sommer, p. 12, emphasis mine)

This is why God did not want the child to lose, because of the devil, anything that belonged to him; rather He allowed the child to have what was his by right. Therefore, He bestowed on him the devil's art of knowing things that are done, said, and past – all this he knew. *And Our Lord, who is all knowing, knew by the mother's repentance, by her good confession, by the cleansing of her heart, that she had not wanted or willed what had happened to her. By the power of Baptism with which the child was washed in the font, Our Lord willed that the sin of the mother should not harm him. And He also gave him the sense and the power to know the future.* This is the reason why he knew the things that were done, spoken, and past: he inherited this from the devil. *Moreover, he knew things that were to come;* Our Lord willed that he should know things that were contrary to those he knew from the other side. Now he could turn to whichever side he wanted, for if he wished, he could give the devils their due, or else His to God just as well'. (Lacy, p. 172, emphasis mine)

The translator does not state twice that Merlin has been given the power to see into the past (see italicized passages above), the present and the future as the French author does. Also, some remarks about the behaviour of Merlin's mother are shortened and paraphrased: he omits the references to the sacraments (baptism and confession) when he explains that God has rewarded Merlin for his mother's repentance:

Therfore oure lorde wolde not lese that shulde be his. And ther the deuell was disseyued of his purpos, that he hadde ordeyned that childe to haue his arte and witte to knowe alle thynges don, and seide, bothe that were paste and that were to come. And oure lorde, that alle thynges knoweth, sye the repentaunce of the moder, and that it was not her will that was so be-fellen, he wolde have hym on his parte; neuertheles, he yaf hym fre

choys to do what he wolde, for yef he wolde he myght yelde god his

parte, unto the feende his also. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 15)

Moreover, the syntactic arrangement of the original passage results in some quite clumsy structures due to the extensive use of parataxis – a long series of coordinating clauses introduced by 'et' – which gives excessive heaviness to the narration and increases the sense of repetition. In the corresponding section, the *Prose Merlin* translator more consistently reproduces the structure of the first half of the paragraph.[76] He reduces the overlong sentences of his source to a single period containing only three coordinating clauses and introducing hypotaxis in the last line. This example shows that the *Prose Merlin* translator was able to apply different methods in translating according to the characteristics and, as in this case, the flaws of the portion of text on which he was working. Moreover, passages like the one discussed above demonstrate that the *Prose Merlin* translator had some ideas of his own about style and principles of composition.

In another instance, he completely changes the effect of the description of Uther's love-sickness by providing details that are not in the original. The *Estoire*, when Uther seeks Ulphin's counsel on his *affaire de coeur*, reads:

Si li demanda quil poroit faire car lamor de ygerne lochioit & quil ne

pooit dormir ne reposer . & sil nen auoit autre conseil quil en quidoit

bien morir & quil nauoit pooir de uiure sil nauoit autre conseil.

(Sommer, p. 59)

He asked him what to do, for love of Ygraine was killing him and he

could neither sleep nor rest. He was at his wit's end, for he thought he

would die, and he would be utterly unable to live without some kind of

help. (Lacy, p. 199)

In the *Prose Merlin*, the accumulation of details intensifies the instability of Uther's emotional status:

And the kynge hym tolde of the grete peyne that he was inne for the love

of Ygerne, that so hym constrained that he might nother ete, ne slepe, ne

go, ne ride, and that he wende verily to dye when he was oute of her

sight, and that he might not long lyve but he hadde oþer counseile of her

love. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 65)

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[76] See my summary of this paragraph at p. 164 and, for the original, see Sommer, p. 12 and Lacy, p. 172.

The *Prose Merlin* translator also avoids repetition by replacing the initial 'car lamor de ygerne lochioit' ('for love of Ygraine was killing him') with the less dramatic 'the grete peyne that he was inne for the love of Ygerne', thus rearranging the sequence of the descriptive elements by increasing gravity. The scene continues with Uther confiding in Merlin:

> Vous le deues bien sauoir car vous saues bien que ie me mur por lamor
> de ygerne si voi moult bien que a morir men conuendra . car iou en ai
> perdu le boire & le mangier & le dormir & le repos . & por ce sai iou
> bien que iou en morai car iou ne puis ueoir comment ien puisse achief
> uenir & por ce ai ie pite de moi misme. (Sommer, p. 64)

> You should know why, for you are well aware that I am dying for love
> of Ygraine. And I see plainly that I will have to die because of it. I have
> lost the will to drink, to eat, to sleep, to rest – this is how I know I will
> die, for I can see no other way out of this. And I am so sorry for myself.
> (Lacy, p. 202)

The *Prose Merlin* translator shortens this description by removing the redundant details that had been already given in the previous conversation between Uther and Ulfin: the fact that his unhappiness stops him from satisfying the primary human needs and that he is going to die for love of Ygerne:

> Thow knowest wele wherefore, for thow woste wele that I dye full of
> love of Ygerne, for I haue loste bothe mete and drynke, and all reste that
> a man ought to haue. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 71)

In the *Prose Merlin* version, the psychological description of Uther is concise and less impassioned than that of the original. As in the previous passage, a further remark about Uther's lost hopes and fear of death by love is dismissed and replaced by the plainly informative observation that he has lost everthing 'a man ought to haue'. Also striking is the omission of Uther's final outburst of self-pity that we find in the French original '& por ce ai ie pite de moi misme' ('And I am so sorry for myself'), which, placed as it is right at the end of his speech, makes Uther sound inconsolable and, to the eyes of a modern reader, perhaps even a little pathetic. This is not really the kind of behaviour that the king of England should show in the presence of his counsellors. Although the *Prose Merlin* translator does retain many details of the fine psychological descriptions of the

Estoire, he reduces their sharpness. The behaviour described in the French source is indeed typical of a courtly lover and as the *Prose Merlin* is a romance and a faithful translation of its source, we would expect to find the same same degree of subtlety in the English version. Instead, it is not so and in the *Prose Merlin* Uther does not appear quite as faint-hearted as he does in the original. This example looks like an attempt by the *Prose Merlin* translator to 'English' the French original, and it also gives us a glimpse of Malory's usual procedure when dealing with the French sources; he reduces, if not eliminates, psychological description in the narrative, representing the characters' inner life by means of different strategies. Malory's characters have action-oriented minds, with the result that, when they are not entirely omitted, dialogues are often more abrupt and to the point than their French originals.[77]

In the *Morte Darthur*, the treatment of Uther's love-sickness is entirely different from the *Estoire* and the *Prose Merlin* and barely described. For instance, Malory introduces Gorlois, Ygerne's husband, as the 'myghty doek in Cornewaill that helde warre ageynste hym long tyme', implying that Uther's future actions are politically motivated, rather than driven by incontrollable passions. Malory severely abridges the whole episode, making Uther's love for Ygerne a detail of secondary importance:

> Thenne for pure anger and for grete love of fayr Igrayne the kyng Uther felle seke (*Morte Darthur*, vol I, pp. 3-4)

> 'I shall telle the,' said the kynge. 'I am seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne, that I may not be hool.' (*Morte Darthur*, vol. I, p. 4)

The king's emotional breakdown in Ulfin and Merlin's presence is not recounted either, and Malory repeatedly explains that Uther's love-sickness is accompanied by anger, a much more manly type of feeling directed towards the duke (and perhaps Igrayne herself).

The comparison between the *Prose Merlin* and the *Estoire* has so far focused mainly on formal elements such as overall structure, vocabulary and syntax, proving that the translator had a diverse and idiosyncratic approach to his source. The following section will show, however, that most important changes introduced in the *Prose Merlin* have to do with content (and in particular as reflected by lexical choices) rather than form, and with one of the key themes in the narrative of the *Estoire*: chivalry.

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[77] Shunichi Noguchi, 'Englishness in Malory', in *Aspects of Malory*, ed. by Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 9-16; 19.

A number of variations contained in the text suggest that the *Prose Merlin* translator presents chivalry and the chivalric bond among the knights in a very different light from that of his source. The *Prose Merlin* adumbrates an ideal of chivalry that is typical of the late fifteenth century and that will find its best expression in Malory's *Morte Darthur* only decades later. The translator's subtle but significant interventions in his source bring into the spotlight specific aspects of chivalry, such as communality, mutual love and dependence amongst knights, which, as will be shown in the following discussion, characterize the English ideal of the chivalric code. The emphasis on these particular aspects of chivalry not only demonstrates that the *Prose Merlin* translator had an awareness of the temporal and cultural distance that existed between the French romance that he was translating and the audience for whom he was translating it, but it also urges us to reconsider the connection between the *Prose Merlin* and fifteenth-century literary production. The subtle changes introduced by the translator as well as the very content of the text lead us to read the *Prose Merlin* in relation to fifteenth-century chivalric literature rather. The *Prose Merlin* will be best understood if related to Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Caxton's chivalric romances, but also to the production of instructional texts on chivalry, such as military treatises and manuals, which by the time of composition of the *Prose Merlin* were circulating in England amongst both the nobility and the gentry. In the following section it will be shown that, by reflecting and attracting late medieval audiences' interest in all things chivalric, the *Prose Merlin* can be placed in the context of fifteenth-century on-going debates over the principles and ideals of chivalry.

3.3   Chivalry and Fellowship in the *Prose Merlin*

Recent criticism has recognised that chivalric romances of the late fifteenth century were designed for a public who could appreciate the didactic elements in chivalric literature. Megan Leitch, for instance, has noted how Caxton's prose romances of the 1480's – *Godeffroy of Boloyne*, *Charles the Grete*, and *The Foure Sonnes of Aymon* – share with Malory's *Morte Darthur* a particular interest in 'horizontal chivalric bonds', 'anxieties about trust and fellowships of central concern to the aristocratic, gentry, and mercantile readerships of these texts during the later stages of the War of the Roses'.[78] Caxton's

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[78] Megan Leitch, 'Thinking Twice about Treason in Caxton's Prose Romances: Proper Chivalric Conduct and the English Printing Press', *Medium Aevum* 81 (2012), 41-69 (p. 43).

selection of texts for translation and publication was informed by his awareness of English taste: he chose to publish Burgundian texts not because he was trying to promote Burgundian culture in England but because he knew that in England there was a public who was already familiar with the genre of and values expressed in Burgundian chivalric literature. In other words, Caxton must have been aware that in the decades preceding the publication of his texts on chivalry, the reading of chivalric literature – comprising both romances such as the *Prose Merlin* and treatises on knighthood – had contributed to the development of a fervent public for his own publications.

In the last few decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the joint effort of scholars and historians to study medieval chivalry has led to a shared appreciation of the contribution of medieval literature (romances especially) towards the development of a codified ideal of chivalry.[79] Both Maurice Keen and Richard W. Kaeuper, in their seminal works on chivalry, have noted the importance of literary sources in the study of chivalry, making use of the evidence provided by literature in their fresh investigation of knighthood. According to Keen, 'fifteenth-century chivalric literature is a little more true to life than is sometimes recognised', and it had a clear influence on the development of the orders of chivalry and the way they were organised internally.[80] Kaeuper questions the relationship between the practice of chivalry in real life and its literary representations, showing that chivalric literature engaged with some of the important issues of the period, such as the decline of chivalry in the fifteenth century and the need to regulate and confine knightly violence.[81]

Instructive texts, such as military treatises and manuals on chivalry formally established the complex set of rules and principles that defined and regulated the chivalric ethos. Their circulation in England increased during the fifteenth century as Latin and French originals were translated into Middle English and then printed by Caxton and later publishers. Among the treatises on chivalry, Ramon Lull's *Libre del ordre de la cavayleria* (c.1280) stood out as the most widely read and was translated from French into English several times during the fifteenth century: first translated in 1456 by the Scottish author Sir Gilbert Hay, Lull's text was then re-translated and published by William Caxton

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[79] See Keen, *Chivalry*, Richard W. Kaeuper and Montgomery Bohna, 'War and Chivalry', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture*, pp. 273-91; Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (Harlow: Longman, 1970).

[80] Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 208, 194.

[81] Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 33-36.

as *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* in 1484, the year before the publication of the *Morte Darthur*.[82] Lull's treatise put forward the Christian ideology of chivalry by asserting that the first duty of a knight is to serve God rather than his feudal superior. However, in fifteenth-century England and France the religious view of knighthood was not the only one presented in the texts about chivalry. Another fifteenth-century bestseller, Christine de Pizan's *Epistre of Othea to Hector* (c.1400) was translated into English three times in the space of a hundred years: the first translation, dated around 1450, has been assigned to the professional author and translator Stephen Scrope and was copied in at least three manuscripts.[83] Also by Christine de Pizan, the *Livre des fais d'armes et de chevalerie* (c.1410) was translated by Caxton as *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and Chyvalrye* in 1489.[84] Flavius Renatus Vegetius' *De re militari* was yet another military treatise which enjoyed great popularity in the late Middle Ages. It was translated into English for the first time in 1408, and a verse paraphrase titled *Knyghthood and Bataile* was then composed between 1457 and 1460 by a supporter of the Lancastrians during the War of the Roses.[85] In this treatise, as in other contemporary writings on chivalry, a reform of chivalry is seen as the solution to England's internal problems.

In the late Middle Ages, social changes and increasing literacy enabled the public of these treatises to grow so as to encompass not only members of the nobility but also the middle classes (gentry and merchants), who, although they might not be knights themselves, found in knightly life an exemplary model to aspire to. Around the middle of the fifteenth century treatises were often assembled together to form anthologies, the so-called 'great books', which contained material related to knighthood and, in particular, one group of texts that were in great demand: Vegetius' *De re militari*, English translations of the *Secreta Secretorum*, *The Book of Governance*, and *The Epistle of Othea*.[86]

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[82] Sir Gilbert Hay, *The Buke of the Ordre of Knychthede and the Buke of the Guernaunce of Princis*, ed. by Jonathan A. Glenn, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 1993). William Caxton, *The book of the Ordre of Chyualry,* ed. by A. T. P. Byles, EETS OS 168 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926).

[83] Stephen Scrope, *The Epistle of Othea*, ed. by Curt F. Bühler EETS OS 264 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[84] William Caxton, *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye*, ed. by A. T. P. Byles, EETS OS 189 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[85] See Catherine Nall, *Reading and War in Fifteenth-Century England, from Lydgate to* Malory (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 16-19. *Knyghthode and Bataile*, ed. by R. Dyboski and Z. M. Arend, EETS OS 201 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).

[86] *Lydgate and Burgh's* Secrees of Old Philisoffres. *A Version of the* Secreta Secretorum, ed. by Robert Steele, EETS ES 66 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894); Karen Cherwatuk, '"Gentyl" Audiences" and "Grete Bookes": Chivalric Manuals and the *Morte Darthur*', in *Arthurian Literature* 15, ed. by James P.

Scholars have demonstrated how these 'great books' shared a common audience with romances: Karen Cherewatuk, for instance, suggests that the chivalric anthologies and Malory's *Morte Darthur* shared the same type of audience, who was 'very much like the Paston family, householders most eager to learn about and practise knighthood and to have their own non-noble social status validated'.[87] Cherewatuk explores the thematic and structural relationship between the *Morte Darthur* and the chivalric anthologies, concluding that they promoted the same vision of knighthood, a vision which their authors and audience had in common.[88]

Along with treatises and manuals, then, chivalric romance was also feeding the middle classes' imagination with vivid portrayals of chivalry. Chivalric romance, a genre that always performed the dual function of entertaining its public whilst educating it, displayed the chivalric ethos. If tournaments and jousts were real-life occasions for nobles and gentlemen to practise the knightly behaviour described in the chivalric manuals, romance provided a fictional framework where audiences could observe (exemplary or condemnable) 'chivalrie' into action. The romance examples of chivalric behaviour and knightly life voiced what chivalry should have been according to medieval authors and their audiences. Chivalric romance had the tendency to present an idealized picture of chivalry that, although it might or might not correspond to the actual practice, was inspirational for its readership (both male and female).[89] By celebrating a specific ideal of chivalry at a time when chivalry was very much in decline, the reading of chivalric romances was likely to trigger a response from the audience, bringing to the fore a debate over chivalry, its strengths and shortcomings.

The very content of the *Prose Merlin* reflects the translator's and his English audience's involvement in knightly discourse, making the text a romance about chivalry. It has been shown elsewhere in this chapter that past criticism has been particularly unfavourable to the *Prose Merlin*. One of the points made by critics was that the *Prose Merlin* provides the English public with a full (and far too long) English translation of a branch of the French Vulgate Cycle. Yet no one has ever questioned what could have

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Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 205-16 (p. 209). See also C. F. Bühler, 'Sir John Paston's *Grete Booke*, a Fifteenth-Century "Best Seller"', *MLN* 56 (1941), 345-51 (p. 351).

[87] Cherewatuk, '"Gentyl" Audiences', pp. 215-16.

[88] Karen Cherewatuk, 'Sir Thomas Malory's "Grete Booke"', in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's* Morte Darthur, ed. by D. Thomas Hanks Jr and Jessica G. Brogdon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 42-67.

[89] Raluca Radulescu, 'How Christian is Chivalry?', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalind Field, *et al.* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 69-83 (p. 72).

triggered the audience's interest for a complete translation of this particular branch of the cycle that, more than any other, is so markedly composite in nature.[90] As explained earlier in this chapter, the author of the *Prose Merlin* was in all probability a professional translator working in one of the London bookshops, he must have translated the romance on demand and his *modus operandi* might have been affected by the instructions received from a buyer. As Meale has claimed, 'patronage did not provide the sole means by which writers could work in the fifteenth century', and the *Prose Merlin* is taken as a case of an Arthurian romance that might have been produced on a commercial basis.[91] Her theory implies the existence of a market for this particular product and a public that was interested in the story of *Estoire* but also in the chivalric-themed subject of its continuation. That translations of this specific branch of the Vulgate Cycle were in great demand is confirmed by the fact that the *Prose Merlin* was copied more than once. This evidence suggests that the demand for an English translation of the *Estoire* and its *Suite* was not a sporadic phenomenon: around the same time (c.1450) two parallel copies of the *Prose Merlin* were circulating and these were destined for different types of audiences.[92] These audiences, however, shared a common fascination with this particular branch of the Vulgate Cycle and its chivalric-centred material.

This is particularly evident thanks to the fact that – unlike other fifteenth-century translations of the *Estoire* which reflect the fifteenth-century surge of interest of part of the English public in Merlin and his story – the *Prose Merlin* presents a full translation of the *Suite*.[93] Starting after Arthur's coronation, its main concern is the consolidation of Arthur's kingdom and the institution of the Round Table. In the *Suite*, Arthur finally becomes the real hero of the narrative and can show his prowess in countless battles, proving himself worthy of the loyalty of the Round Table: he first fights to win support of a number of British allies and in the meantime gains the service of his young nephews – Morgause and King Lot's sons, Gawain, Agravain, Gaheris and Gareth – whose allegiance will be of crucial importance in the later war between the Britons and the Saxons. The differences between the *Estoire* and its *Suite* also extend to the structure of the narrative, which in the latter is much more digressive and interlaced in character. For this reason, its English translations seem at odds with the general trends of Middle English romance,

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[90] Combes, 'The *Merlin*', p. 77. See my Introduction for more information on the complexity of the development of the Vulgate Cycle.

[91] Meale, 'Manuscripts, Readers, and Patrons', p. 113.

[92] See 3.1, where I discuss the two extant copies of the text.

[93] See for instance Hale 150's *Merlyn*, discussed in Chapter 1.

which favoured linear plot against the encasement and interlacement of French romance. From the point of view of the content, we might wonder why an English audience would be so interested in the chivalric endeavours of minor characters: the *Suite* narrates the adventures of the squires and other knights trying to attain honour in order to become part of the Round Table. In many such adventures Arthur does not figure as a prominent character but plays a peripheral role. However, in view of their content, these episodes are didactic in terms of chivalry and chivalric behaviour, as they represent and explore elements of the chivalric code. In this part of the narrative the reader learns about the future companions of the Round Table through their chivalric deeds.

Chivalry is also paramount in the first part of the text, as a binding force that assists the consolidation of the kingdom thanks to the establishment of Uther's Round Table. Chivalry as an institution is embodied by the Round Table, the fellowship of selected knights most faithful to the English king. The *Prose Merlin* translator emphasises cohesion and unity as major elements in the chivalric code of this institution, and he achieves this by paraphrase and specific lexical choices. It will be demonstrated that he was the first English author to use the Germanic-deriving word 'fellowship' to define the Round Table and the first to highlight the strong bond linking its knights by presenting them as equals and 'brothers'. Although the focus will be on fine aspects of vocabulary, the following discussion will make use of long quotes from the text and from the *MED*. This is for the sake of clarity, as isolating the examples from their context would not be sufficiently explanatory.

The establishment of Uther's Round Table is a very important moment in this part of the narrative and provides the *Prose Merlin* translator with the perfect opportunity to promote a certain ideal of chivalry. The knights are assembled at Cardoel, and before departing from Uther's court they each give a speech that expresses their sense of belonging to the newly established Round Table. The episode starts with a long digression on the story of the two tables on which Uther's Round Table will be modelled. Merlin reveals to Uther that God himself has given him the task to establish at his court a third table, which will accommodate fifty of the best knights in the country. However, one seat will remain empty for the knight who will accomplish the quest for the Holy Grail. It will be Merlin who will choose such knights and he explains to Uther that, as soon as the knights have sat down at the table, they will show no desire to ever return to their countries, deciding instead to stay permanently at Caerdoel:

Ensi furent toutes les . viij . iors . si douna li rois a cele feste grans auoirs & maint biau ioel & a dames & a damoiseles . Et quant ce vint au congie prendre . si vint li rois a ces preudomes & lor demanda comment il lor estoit . Et il li respondent . nous nauons nul talent que nous nous departons iamais de ci & que nous ne soions chascun iour a ceste table a eure de tierce . *si i ferons nos femes uenir & nos enfans en ceste uille . &* ensi uiuerons nous al plaisir nostre signor que teus est nostre corages . & li rois demande aues vous tout tel corage & il dient tuit oil uoir . & si nous meruellons moult comment ce puet estre . Car il en i a de tels de nous qui napartenons lun lautre & ne nous estiens onques entre ueu et poi en i a de nous dont li vns fust acointes del autre . & ore *nous entramons tant ou plus comme fiex doit amer son père* . ne iamais ce nos est auis ne nous departirons se mors ne nous depart. (Sommer, p. 55, emphasis mine).[94]

So they were for a whole week, and during the season of that feast the king gave away much wealth and many lovely jewels to ladies and unmarried gentlewomen. And when it came time for leave-taking, the king went to his worthy companions and asked them how they were. And they answered him, "We have no wish ever to leave here, and we want always to be at this table at the hour of terce, so *we will have our wives and children come to this town*. And so we will live here at Our Lord's pleasure, for this is what our hearts tell us to do." The king asked, "Do you all feel this way?" And they all said, "Yes indeed! And yet we wonder at how this can be. For many of us have no bonds with any among us; others have not seen one other before; and few of us were friends before. And now *we all love one another as much as a son should love his father*, or more, and it does not seem to us that we will ever be parted unless it is by death". (Lacy, p. 197, emphasis mine)

In the *Estoire*, this passage is part of a key episode of the narrative on a number of accounts. Firstly, it characterizes the Round Table as a markedly religious institution,

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[94] As the version of this episode in Micha's edition of the text is almost identical to that in Sommer, it has not been copied in the main body of the text. However, any references to the *Estoire* are relevant for Micha's edition too. See Micha, pp. 188-89.

deeply rooted in Christian history rather than just a secular order. In a long and detailed digression, the Round Table is described as the third of the three tables of Christianity and linked directly to the Grail story – whilst the first table was used by Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper, the second was built by the knight errant who released Christ's body from the cross – and with the Grail story. The author of the *Estoire*, through Merlin's voice, is very specific about the role of the knights of the Round Table in protecting the Holy Church and her people as he is about the most important feature of the third table: the presence of a 'vacant seat' which is destined to be filled by the best knight of all time.

Secondly, the passage presents for the first time that special bond that exists amongst the Round Table knights, which distinguishes them from any other company of knights mentioned in the narrative. It also introduces a ritual – sojourning permanently at Caerdoel and gathering every day at the hour of Terce – that constitutes the basis of the Round Table's cohesion and which will be further developed by Malory with his invention of the Pentecostal oath and the redesigning of the Round Table on the model of the late medieval orders of chivalry.[95]

Thirdly, the *Estoire* makes very clear that Merlin plays a key role in the foundation of the Round Table as a prophet and interpreter of God's will. In the Vulgate it seems quite clear that, thanks to Merlin's magic, which he ultimately employs to facilitate God's master plan for England, the Round Table knights begin to feel united by a mysterious force urging them to remain at court with their families. By creating the Round Table, Merlin is fulfilling his task to guarantee the triumph of the hero that will achieve the Holy Grail, but also to create a new model of chivalry, which will enable Arthur's reign to flourish.[96] Therefore, the Round Table is the token of Arthurian chivalry, the practical actuation of its ideal. The passage underlines the importance of chivalry as an institution without which the King of England would not be able to govern. In other words, the founding of the Round Table – and the implied system of loyalty and code of chivalry which the Round Table expresses – is an essential step towards the establishment and success of both Uther's and Arthur's reigns. This passage in the Vulgate also provides an insight into medieval chivalry, its idealization and codification.

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[95] Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the* Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), p. 35.
[96] Alexander Micha, 'Robert de Boron's Merlin', in *Merlin: A Casebook*, pp. 296-308 (p. 301).

The version provided by the *Prose Merlin* differs in a number of details suggesting an ideal of chivalry and of the Round Table that is significantly different from that represented in the *Estoire*:

> and thus thei diden, alle eight dayes. And the kynge yaf grete yeftes to lords and to ladyes and to dameseles. And when they departed, the kynge come to the fifty knyghtes and axed how hem lyked. And thei seyde, 'Sir, we have no talent to remeve fro hens, and therof we have merveile what it maketh, *for we be entred as brethern*; and therof we will never departe till deth us separate.' When the kynge herde hem thus sey, he hadde grete merveile and *comaunded hem to be served and kepte as his owne body*. And thus departed the grete prese. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 61, emphasis mine)

Only in the *Estoire* do the knights tell Uther about their desire to stay in Cardoel wondering why they feel so close to each other as, they say, 'si nous meruellons moult comment ce puet estre . Car il en i a de tels de nous qui napartenons lun lautre & ne nous estiens onques entre ueu et poi en i a de nous dont li vns fust acointes del autre' (Sommer, p. 55) ('yet we wonder at how this can be. For many of us have no bonds with any among us; others have not seen one other before; and few of us were friends before'; Lacy, p. 197). The knights' surprise at their own sudden desire to stay at Uther's court strengthens the role played by Merlin's magic in the establishment of the Round Table. In the *Prose Merlin*, these lines have been omitted, making Merlin's involvement less obvious to the reader.

This seems to reflect the general development of the English Arthurian tradition, where Merlin's supernatural powers are constantly reduced and his role becomes that of a political adviser.[97] In both the *Vulgate Cycle* and its Middle English renditions (Malory's included), Merlin acts as a mediator between human desire and God's will. Although Middle English Arthurian romance retains Merlin's ability to see into providential history and uphold God's ultimate plan for England, it has a tendency to reduce the importance of Merlin's magic in the narrative. From this point of view, the omission by the *Prose Merlin* translator is not surprising and is consistent with the way Merlin had already been treated

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[97] See Knight, *Merlin*, pp. 81-96. However, in his study of Merlin, Knight does not address this particular scene.

in the English tradition.[98] In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the marvellous that is associated with Merlin's magic is diminished and that makes Merlin's character even less easy to define for the reader.[99]

As in the *Prose Merlin*, Merlin's intervention is not revealed to the reader, the knights seem to be motivated exclusively by their own will and hence their affection towards one another looks much more genuine and spontaneous than in the French source. Moreover, the bond that has been created among them is much stronger than in the French counterpart, as in the *Prose Merlin* it affects the knights' family relationships too. In the *Estoire*, the knights are willing to remain at Caerdoel together with their wives and children: 'si i ferons nos femes uenir & nos enfans en ceste uille' ('so we will have our wives and children come to this town'), therefore maintaining intact the nuclear family. This line has been omitted in the *Prose Merlin* almost as if to imply that the knights are ready to leave their families behind in order to be at the service of Uther and his Round Table. This stresses even further that cohesion and unity, the defining characteristics of the Round Table, are due to that sense of attachment that the knights feel for each other. The fraternal affection amongst the Round Table knights takes precedence over any other kind of relationship they might have, disrupting the dynamics of the family nucleus. The *Prose Merlin* translator is here putting forward the idea that knightly love is more important than any other type of love, courtly love included – a traditional feature of medieval romance, as many scholars have demonstrated.[100] Yet, the absence of the knights' families is also a precaution against the dangers of having a strong family bond, as it can interfere and even clash with the system of loyalty amongst knights and between knights and kings.[101]

However, the most striking alteration introduced by the *Prose Merlin* translator concerns the knights' tentative description of the nature of the affection that unites them. In the *Estoire*, this is defined as a father-and-son type of relationship – 'nous entramons tant ou plus comme fiex doit amer son pere' ('And now we all love one another as much as a son should love his father') –, whilst in the *Prose Merlin* the knights collectively call themselves 'brethern'. Moreover, the French original is not too explicit about who is

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[98] In the Auchinleck *AM*, some of the scenes showing Merlin's magic were greatly abridged whilst others were even omitted so as to highlight Merlin's role in the narrative as royal counsellor. See my discussion of *AM* in Chapter 1.

[99] Hoffman, 'Malory's Tragic Merlin', p. 332.

[100] See Kennedy, *Knighthood*, p. 203, and Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 217.

[101] Malory, for example, makes the most of a knight's 'conflict of interest', when Lancelot's love for the Queen is incompatible with that which binds him to Arthur and the other knights, and the clash ultimately results in the disruption of the Round Table.

speaking: 'si vint li rois a ces preudomes' ('the king went to his worthy companions'), whilst the *Prose Merlin* translator specifies that these are the knights previously chosen to become part of the Round Table, 'the kynge come to the fifty knyghtes'. Although the similes contained in both passages imply a kind of familial relationship, the expression used in the French source seems to suggest a certain hierarchy within the fellowship of the Round Table. The *Prose Merlin* translator decided, instead, to present the knights who enter the fellowship of the Round Table as brothers and equals. Equality becomes one of the founding principles of the Round Table in the *Prose Merlin*: within the Round Table status or wealth are not factors that discriminate one knight from another; in spite of differences in wealth or status, the knights of the Round Table stand on the same level. This same ideal, parity amongst the members of the order, can also be found in the European orders of chivalry, which, although aristocratic institutions, remained 'remarkably unhierarchical, internally'.[102] According to Keen, this passage in the *Estoire* can be looked at as an 'archetype of the medieval orders of chivalry', such as the English Order of the Garter established by Edward III.[103] The orders held regular meetings and had statutes listing the rules and principles that each member had to abide by, but also the punishment in the event that such rules were broken. It will be Malory who will make the most of this resemblance by creating the ritual of the Pentecostal Oath, which knights have to swear in order to enter the fellowship of the Round Table.[104]

However, the word 'brethern' also has another resonance in that it immediately recalls another medieval body similar to the orders of chivalry but of an even more personal nature, that of fraternity in arms. As shown by Keen, fraternity in arms, although similar to the orders of chivalry on many accounts, was characterized by a fraternal bond, implying that the relationship between the members of the fraternity was familial rather than feudal.[105] The fraternities were, in fact, allegiances on the model of the brotherhood-in-arms and entailed a very close relationship, established formally between two persons of military status. This relationship was based on reciprocal trust, honour and loyalty. In the brotherhood-in-arms, knights had to swear oaths to help and support each other in any

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[102] Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 196.

[103] Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 190.

[104] See Robert L. Kelly, 'Royal Policy and Malory's Round Table', *Arthuriana* 14:1 (2004), 43-70.

[105] Maurice Keen, 'Brotherhood in Arms', *History* 74 (1962), 1-17 (p. 8).

situation and even in personal affairs, in the same way as members of the same household would.[106]

Even though the Round Table knights are brothers and equals, the *Prose Merlin* translator is also quite clear about the preeminent role of the king in the fellowship. The passage in the *Prose Merlin* concludes with a short but striking addition by the translator: after hearing the knights' words Uther 'comaunded hem to be served and kepte as his owne body' (p. 61). Uther is here recognizing on a public stage that the newly established Round Table will hold a complementary role to that of the king in maintaining order within the kingdom; his knights will be instruments of peace-keeping. The fact that it is the king himself who states this in a public speech gives strength to the message. Not only will the Round Table respond directly to the king's authority, but they will become the keepers of that authority in the absence of the king, in whatever corner of the country their adventures will lead them. Uther's metaphor implies that the Round Table knights' first duty is to do the king's will and to work as his officers. This addition recalls the medieval theory of governance in which the king is strongly dependent on his knights and, in the fifteenth century, knights were often defined as 'royal officers'.[107] In the political theory of the body politic, both the king and his knights are seen as belonging to an organic body: the king represents the head, taking decisions and controlling the movements of the rest of the body, whilst his knights are the members (arms and hands) obeying him and helping him to keep the realm in order. Further to this metaphor, in order to be able to govern his kingdom, the king must trust his knights as if they were parts of his own body.[108]

The alterations shown in the passage above are quite significant and contradict what has been previously claimed about the *Prose Merlin*'s closeness to its French source, demonstrating that, even though the *Prose Merlin* translator had a tendency to translate his source faithfully, at times he resolved to be more independent of the original. Also, these subtle variations by the *Prose Merlin*'s translator seem to imply that he might have been receptive to ideas of chivalry that were circulating at the time when he was writing. The details he modified convey a vision of the Round Table that differs significantly from that of thirteenth-century French Arthurian romance and that is linked instead to a fifteenth-century ideal of chivalry. More interestingly, his variations adumbrate a literary

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[106] Keen, 'Brotherhood', p. 12.

[107] Kennedy, *Knighthood*, pp. 47-48.

[108] See John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and transl. by Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

development of the Arthurian legend that will take full shape and will be questioned in Malory's work: the Round Table as a High Order, where all members are equals but ultimately depend on the king's authority.

Other changes seem to suggest that the *Prose Merlin* translator was deliberately promoting an ideal of chivalry that differed from that of his source. If in the passage shown above the knights of the Round Table define themselves as brothers, there are a number of other instances in the narrative where the Round Table is defined as a 'fellowship', a word dense with meaning and anticipating that particular view of chivalry that will be found in Malory's work. Scholars have shown the importance of unity and cohesion in Malory's ideal of chivalry and how this is expressed in the institution of the Round Table.[109] Elizabeth Archibald has focused her attention on the one word that seems to encapsulate Malory's ideal of chivalry, 'fellowship', claiming that this concept is much more important in Malory than in the other Old French and Middle English romances.[110] By looking at the word's frequency in the *Morte Darthur* (over two hundred entries under the various spellings) and the different contexts in which it appears in the text, she noted that two meanings of 'fellowship' are fundamental to understand Malory's own vision of chivalry: the private dimension of fellowship, that special feeling of camaraderie that binds the Round Table's knights and is based on brotherly love and admiration, and its public sense, by which fellowship describes the long-lasting order of the Round Table.[111] Archibald claims that the use of 'fellowship' in the latter sense – its public dimension – is unique to Malory and reflects his personal view of the Round Table as an organized body that works according to set rules and values:

> In Malory Arthur's knights are described, both by themselves and by the narrator, as belonging to a collective body which is not to be identified with Arthur's household, the 'felyshyp' of the Round Table, a title which Malory seems to have invented.[112]

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[109] See P. J. C Field, 'Introduction' to *Le Morte Darthur: The Seventh and Eighth Tales*, London Medieval and Renaissance Series (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), p. lxv. Terence McCarthy, *Reading the* Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), p. 168. See Hyonjin Kim, *The Knight Without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 60-62.

[110] Elizabeth Archibald, 'Malory's Ideal of Fellowship', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 43:171 (1992), 311-28.

[111] Archibald, 'Malory's Ideal of Fellowship', p. 327. See the voices 'felaushyp', 'feliship', 'felyshep', 'felyship', 'felyshyp', 'felyshyppe', 'felysship' in Tomomi Kato, *A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974).

[112] Archibald, 'Malory's Ideal of Fellowship', p. 313.

Certainly, Malory did put a great emphasis on the word 'fellowship' and the concept it expresses, as shown by the high number of entries for this word in the text. However, this use of the word 'fellowship' to describe the Round Table as a formal order or brotherhood was used a few decades before the composition of the *Morte Darthur*. Interestingly, the word is not attested in either the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* or the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the two English Arthurian romances from which Malory took much of his material, but appears in the *Prose Merlin*.[113]

In the following discussion it will be shown how the *Prose Merlin* translator did not use the word arbitrarily, but rationally as a means to differentiate the fellowship of the Round Table from all the rest of the (usually short-term) companies of knights mentioned in narrative. The passages investigated will demonstrate that this particular lexical choice agrees with the interventions analyzed previously, reinforcing a view of the Round Table as a sort of fraternity, where knights are bound to each other by much more than a formal duty to serve their lord in any military endeavour.

The *MED* offers eight meanings for the term 'felaushipe', whose differences in usage can be very subtle: the condition of temporarily being in company with others; comradeship/friendship; conviviality; amity/charity; a company of associates (pilgrims, disciples or workmen); an organized society of persons united by office, occupation, or common rules of living (a knightly order, fraternity, or guild); one of the heavenly companies of angels.[114]

With the exception of the *Morte Darthur*, where the word 'fellowship' is used in the first six senses mentioned above, most of the examples cited by the *MED* are taken from moral or religious texts, historical documents and military treatises. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the few romances where the word is recorded and it is used as an example for meaning 4, 'camaraderie'. Fellowship intended as 'a knightly order' becomes more commonly used during the fifteenth century: the earliest examples provided by the *MED* is from the *South English Legendary* (*c*.1300), whilst the other two examples from mid fifteenth- and late fifteenth-century works and refer to the knightly orders. In *The Rolls of Parliament*, for instance, we find a reference to 'The Felship of the Garter' (l.

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[113] Both the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* do not define the Round Table as a company either. They simply uses the phrase 'Round Table' as a means to identify collectively the knights who belong to the institution. See Le Morte Arthur*: A Critical Edition*, ed. by P. F. Hissiger (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) and Morte Arthure*: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Hamel.

[114] This is just a summary for the full entry, see the *MED* at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/> (retrieved on 21/07/2014).

5176), while *The Book of Noblesse* mentions 'the knightys of the order and felouship of saint George was ordeigned' (l. 46).

However, at present, the *MED* does not attest this meaning 6 ('a knightly order') in any *romance*, not even in Malory. As for the *Prose Merlin*, the *MED* provides a unique example to illustrate meaning 5 of 'felaushipe', 'a band of followers, adherents or disciples':

> "Than," quod he, "enquereth a-monge you who will take the labour to serche oute the cause why, and lete me wite." Than enquered oon of a-nother yef ther were eny that cowde of that art. So ther were two that seide thei cowde i-nough as hem semed. Thise tweyne chosen to hem of hir othir *felischep*, that thei were vij in nombre. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 29, emphasis mine)

This example is taken from the episode of the construction of Vortiger's tower. Vortiger has sent after the wisest men on the earth in order to stop the tower that he wants to have built from collapsing every night. He eventually finds seven astronomers who might be able to tell him the cause why the tower does not stand. When comparing the translation with its original this is yet another occasion on which the *Prose Merlin* translator does not translate word for word but edits the *Estoire*, summarizing the content in four short sentences:

> Et li rois dist vous qui estes clers les connissies bien si en parles ensamble & le sacies entre vous li quel ce sont qui en seiuent ouurer si viegnent auant hardiement . & il ne me demanderont ia chose sil le me seiuent dire quil naient . Lors se traient a vne part si demanderent li vns al autre sil seiuent riens de cel art . & lors sentraent . ij . auant & dient quil en seiuent asses pour tel chose sauoir . & si auons chi . ij . autres clers qui en seiuent . & li preudome dient queres vos *compaignons* & uenes a nous parler tout ensamble . & cil dient quc volentiers le feront . si quisent cil doi tant quil furent . vij . (Sommer, pp. 23-4, enphasis mine)

> And the King said, "You clerks know who you are, so get together and talk about the matter. Find out which ones among you know how to work astrology, and let them come forward boldly. And they will never ask me for anything, if they can tell me what I want to know, that will

not be theirs. Then they drew aside and asked one another if they knew
anything about that art. Two of them stepped forward and said that they
knew enough about it to find out the answer. "We have here two clerks
who know about it." And the wealthy men said, "Go find your fellow
astrologers and come talk to us all together." They said they would do so
gladly, so the two looked about until there were seven of them. (Lacy, p.
79)

Whilst the *Estoire* uses the words 'compaignons' the *Prose Merlin* translator chooses the
word 'felischep' to describe the relationship between people belonging to the same order –
in this case, the astrologers. This choice, however, can be explained by the fact that
'compaignoun', 'a companion or a comrade', is rarely used in Middle English, and by the
time of composition of the *Prose Merlin* had gone out of use.[115] It is more useful to look at
the examples of the use of 'fellowship' in the *Prose Merlin* which are not cited by the
MED, when the translator had to translate the Old French 'company', by making a choice
between the French cognate 'compaignie' and its Germanic counterpart 'felaushipe'. The
use of the word 'compagnie' in the *Estoire* (and in French romance more generally) is
widespread and can bear both meanings of temporary companionship and that of an
established knightly order like that of the Round Table. Not surprisingly, the word
'compagnie' in its various forms is extremely common in the *Prose Merlin*: the *MED*
database gives 343 hits for this word in the *Prose Merlin* against the 9 hits for
'fellowship', and the great majority of hits for both words are located in the second part of
the narrative, following Arthur's coronation.[116] This is justified by the war-centred
material in this part of the text, which recounts the interlaced adventures of the various
knights seeking to show their prowess in combat. The *MED* entry for the term
'compaignie' offers several different meanings: a group of persons having a common
interest, purpose, faith, status, occupation, function (a group of warriors, an army or host);
intimate association with another or with others; companionship or intimacy between the
sexes; friendship.

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[115] The examples given by the *MED* are all dating to the beginning of the fourteenth century and the word is
attested in the Auchinleck *AM* ('Adragein anon vp stirt / On fot and halp his compainoun', ll. 9,082-83) and
Guy of Warwick ('Gret onde he hadde to Gyoun, & to Herhaud, his compaynoun', *Guy of Warwick*, ed. by
Zupitza, p. 208, ll. 3,627-28).
[116] The full text of Wheatley's edition of the *Prose Merlin* is searchable at
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/merlin> (retrieved on 30- 10-2013).

Even though the meanings provided by the *MED*, 'compagnie' and 'fellowship', do not fully coincide, some of them overlap slightly. However, the words are not synonyms and are not used as such by the *Prose Merlin* translator or by Malory. Whilst 'compagnie' is used mostly to describe a short-term physical association – i. e. a group of people who have assembled together on a specific occasion for a specific purpose – 'fellowship' is often used to convey the idea of a deeper and more personal relationship among the members of a group, such as that of the Round Table. A clear example of this is shown in the prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, where Chaucer deliberately uses both terms to convey these different meanings:

> Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
>
> Of sondry folk, by auenture yfalle
>
> In felawshipe, and pilgrymes were they alle.[117] (ll. 24-26)

He chooses 'compaignye' to define the physical group of pilgrims and 'felawshipe' to describe the comrade-like relationship that unites the members of such a group.

The *MED* cites two examples from the *Prose Merlin*, describing meaning 3, 'to have as a companion' and 4, 'intimacy between the sexes, sexual intercourse':

> She hadde neuer knowynge of mannes company. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 13)

> Theire fader sholde neuer haue a-gein his wif in companye. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 314)

However, the *MED* does not acknowledge that, just like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the *Prose Merlin* displays several examples of the translator's selection between the two words:

> And the kynge Leodogan com to Merlin, and seide, "Sir, will ye not that
> these worthy men come in youre *companye*?" "Certes," seide Merlin,
> "sir, we will right wele, and þei be right welcome, for we be the better
> that thei be with vs in *felisship*." "Sir," seide the kynge, "gramercy."
> Than yede the kynge leodogan to hervy de rivell, that bar the baner, and
> seide, "Feire frende, come ye and youre *felowes* with me, and ye shull be
> in feliship of these worthi men, and so moche shull ye be the more
> worthy." "Sir," seide Hervy, "with right gode will yef it hem plese."

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[117] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition, gen ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 23.

> "Certes," seide the kynge, "it hem lyketh wele that ye be fro hens-forth
> *felowes* and in *companye* to-geder." "In goddes name," quod hervy, "for
> the *feliship* of so worthi men is not to be refused." (*Prose Merlin*, p. 218,
> emphasis mine)

'Company' is here solely used to describe Merlin's band of knights, the group of men that he will be leading into battle. 'Fellowship', instead, is used with the double meaning of being temporarily in company with others ('in feliship') but also of the spirit of comradeship amongst the worthy 'felowes' who make up the company.

The difference in use between 'fellowship' and 'company' seems also to reflect the difference between 'compaignie' ('company') and 'eschiele' ('echelon') in the *Estoire*. While the first term has a number of overlapping meanings like its Middle English counterpart, 'eschiele' is used exclusively to refer to a military arrangement. The original passage in the *Estoire* can highlight this difference:

> Et li rois leodegan uint a merlin & si li dist . Sire dont ne voles uous bien
> que cist preudomme soient en uostre *compaignie* . certes sire fait merlin
> uoirement le uolons nous bien & bien soient il uenu que nous ne
> vaudrons se de miex non se nous sommes en vne *eschiele* ensamble . sire
> fait li rois grans mercis . Lors sen uint li rois leodegans a herui de riuel
> qui portoit la baniere si li dist . biaus amis venes ent vous & uos
> *compaignons* auoeques nous si seres en la *compaignie* a ces preudommes
> si en uoldres asses de miex . sire fait heruis moult uolentiers sil lor plaist
> . certes fait li rois il lor plaist bien que vous soies desore mais & peir &
> *compaignon* ensamble . ensi soit de par dieu fait heruis la *compaignie* a
> si preudommes ne fait mie a refuser. (Sommer, p. 152, enphasis mine)

> And King Leodagan came to Merlin and said to him, "Sir, are you
> willing to keep company with those good men?" "Certainly, sir," said
> Merlin, "We truly are, and they are very welcome, for we would be
> worth all the more if we were in an echelon together." "Sir," said the
> king, "many thanks!" Then King Leaodagan went up to Hervi of Rivel,
> who was carrying the standard, and said to him, "Dear friend, come
> along with us, you and your companions; you will be the companions of
> those good men, and you will be much worthier for it." "Sir," said Hervi,
> "very gladly, if they are willing." "In truth," said the king, "they want

very much to be peers and companions with you from now on." "May it so please God," said Hervi, "Fellowship with such worthy men should not be refused." (Lacy, p. 250)

However, there is a particular instance where the translator opts deliberately for 'fellowship', this time in direct relation to the Round Table:

> For the *felisship of the table of Logres* were gon oute for to chaunge helmes, that weren to hewen and rente; and whan thei saugh theire party turned to disconfiture, thei hem hasted and henten speres, and come in to the turnemente as faste the horse myght hem bere, and smote in a-monge the grettest presse, and kay cam before alle his *felowes* as he that was desirouse to shewe his knyght-hode, and griped a grete growen spere, and he was a merveillouse gode knyght, yef he ne hadde not be so full of wordes, for his euell speche made hym to be hatid of a-monge his felowes, and also of straungers that herden of hym speke, that after refuseden to go in his *felisshep* to seche a-uentures in the reame of Logres, that after endured longe tyme, as this boke shall reherse here-afterwarde. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 135, emphasis mine)[118]

This passage is taken from the episode of the tournament at Logres, after King Ban and Bors have arrived to pay a visit to Arthur. It displays the two uses of the word 'fellowship' that the *MED* does not record in the *Prose Merlin*: on the one hand, the 'felisship of the table of Logres', that is to say the knightly order of the Round Table where every knight is a fellow and a brother; on the other, 'in his felisshep', which expresses that sense of comradeship, or spirit of companionship which inspires knights 'to seche a-uentures'.

The examples shown so far demonstrate that the *Prose Merlin* translator is aware of differences in usage of the words 'company' and 'fellowship'. They also show that, like Malory, the *Prose Merlin* translator uses the word 'fellowship' on purpose in order to make a distinction of the knights who are at Arthur's service from all the others, almost as if to suggest that only the knights who earned the right to become part of the Round Table can be regarded as a 'fellowship' in the romance. In a move that anticipates Malory's own vision of this institution, the *Prose Merlin* translator sees the Round Table as a formal knightly order or a brotherhood, whose wholeness and cohesion is determined by the

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[118] The *Estoire* here reads 'car li compaignon del roialme de logres' (Sommer, p. 103); 'The companions of the Kingdom of Logres' (Lacy p. 224).

profound bond that exists amongst its members. The *Prose Merlin* translator therefore seems to understand the importance of 'fellowship' as a binding force within the Round Table and as a component that distinguish the Round Table from any other 'company' of men at arms.

In conclusion, the *Prose Merlin*, far from being a verbatim translation of the *Estoire*, presents some original elaborations suggesting that the translator was trying to adapt the text of his source to a specific fifteenth-century English middle class audience. Such an audience was familiar with the Merlin story to the point of creating a demand for its translation from French into English that was probably driven by an interest in chivalry and its literary representation. The small changes introduced by the *Prose Merlin* translator strikingly involve the Round Table, which is the most famous embodiment of literary chivalry as well as a key institution in the Arthurian world. These changes amplify some of the characteristics that an English public would have expected to find in the English chivalric ethos: communality, brotherhood, and equality but also a strong relationship amongst the king and his most loyal knights. By means of these variants, the *Prose Merlin* translator has produced a text both innovative and original, more so than has ever been recognized. In particular, my examination of chivalry in the *Prose Merlin* demonstrates that a shared notion of chivalry and its code of ideals existed at the time when the *Prose Merlin* was written, and that the Prose Merlin anticipates terms current in Malory's own portrayal of chivalry only a couple of decades later. Broadening the field of investigation to other neglected chivalric prose romances in conjunction with other forms of chivalric literature can thus prove to be a way forward for deepening our knowledge of fifteenth-century chivalry, and the language writers used to describe and explore it.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated a group of lesser-known Middle English Arthurian romances, following the history of the Arthurian legend in England from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century. *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, and the *Prose Merlin* all derived from a common source – the Vulgate Cycle *Estoire de Merlin* – but were written independently of each other. By means of close textual analysis, I have shown how these texts depart from the *Estoire*. I have highlighted the implications of the differences and similarities between these romances and the *Estoire* and between each other, considering aspects of authorship and translation, and placing the three texts in their historical, social and literary contexts. Moreover, I have argued that these romances deserve to be liberated from their reputation as secondary and subordinate (in terms of literary value) to Malory's *Morte Darthur*. I have instead examined the three romances in their own right and my methodology has taken into account the most recent approaches in postcolonial translation studies and literary criticism. These latter approaches urge a re-consideration of the relationship between translations and sources, and reject the idea that translations are poor copies of their sources. This involves the abandonment of the 'vocabulary of fidelity' that until recently has been employed as a measure of a translation's success in replicating the essence of its source-text I have focused instead on the specific cultural aspects of translation, examining the choices made by each translator in the contexts in which individual translations were produced. The objective was not to achieve an aesthetic assessment of the texts or an evaluation of their literary value. Rather, it was to understand the cultural importance of the three romances by examining the way in which they embody different forms of the Merlin legend in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

The three chapters have shown how diverse were the authors' approaches to their source, testifying to the inconsistent and shifting nature of medieval translation. The interventions examined ranged from major changes to the source's narrative structure, through omissions and reductions, to strategic amplifications and subtle changes at the level of vocabulary. Each of the three translations offered a specific and evidently contextualized reading of the *Estoire*. In *AM* romance and (legendary) history are combined to create a hybrid text, in which didacticism and a focus on English history seem to prevail. The *AM* poet historicized the narrative of the *Estoire* by using the chronicles as his secondary sources and by highlighting themes and issues that would be

of interest and concern for him and his audience – the importance for a kingdom to have a rightful king, chivalry as a requirement to attain recognition and ultimately confirm the right to be king, as well as civil and religious wars. The fifteenth-century copies of *AM*, and in particular Hale 150's *Merlyn*, are a testimony to the enduring success of this romance in England and show how, by the fifteenth century, there was an audience who interpreted the story as a distinctly English and would enjoy the romance as a source of entertainment.

Composed about a century after *AM*, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin* is yet another re-fashioning of the story. Elaboration and adaptation, which had characterized the tradition of the Merlin romances up to this point, are replaced by a close rendition of the source and an unconventional taste for the typical features of French romance. In his *Merlin*, an interest in fine characterization and abundant descriptive details distinguish Lovelich's translation techniques from those of the rest of the fifteenth-century English translators. His descriptions of urban settings as contexts for social interaction reflect his origins and occupation as a member of the Great Company of Skinners living in the capital.

The last translation of the *Estoire*, the *Prose Merlin*, bears testimony to a final shift of the story from verse to prose and its author's intention to adhere to his source's narrative. Yet the fine and significant innovations examined here have demonstrated that the *Prose Merlin* is not a mechanical translation, but contains a number of specific lexical choices placing the romance in the broad context of fifteenth-century chivalric literature. By describing the Round Table as a 'fellowship' and its members as 'brothers' the *Prose Merlin* adumbrates an ideal of chivalry that is distinctly English and that the author shared with his contemporaries and with Malory. The *Prose Merlin* translator's view of chivalry also reflects the characteristics of fifteenth-century orders of chivalry and brotherhoods in arms: the bond of mutual love existing among knights and that of loyalty and obedience between the knights and the king.

The comparative analysis of the texts contained in this thesis – be they in verse or prose – points to translations from a specific angle: it argues that, just like original compositions, the study of translations cannot be disentangled from the cultural context in which they were produced. The translated text serves as a fertile research ground for literary scholars; the examination of divergences and similarities between translations and sources can reveal precious information on aspects of text production, authorial intention and how this accords/contrasts with the expectations of particular readerships. Studying the three English Merlin romances against the background of both romance production

and translation activity has helped envisage the cultural importance of these texts in the history of Arthurian literature written in English, opening up new lines of investigation on these neglected texts.

The three English Merlin romances fed the English public's interest in the Arthurian legend, maintaining the growing demand for Arthurian texts. Moreover, the thesis shows that Malory's *Morte Darthur*, often singled out as an isolated example of excellence, was indeed part of a continuum of ideas and meanings originating in the commission of the first translation of the *Estoire* around 1300 and consolidated by the transition of the story from verse to prose in the *Prose Merlin*.

Chapter 2 – Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*

This chapter discusses Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, the second Middle English translation of the Old French Vulgate Cycle *Estoire*.[1] Its primary aim is to encourage a re-assessment of Lovelich's work by means of a fresh analysis of its stylistic features. It argues that the romance should not be set apart from the literary context in which it was produced as though it were an anachronism that clearly cannot stand comparison with the work of professional authors and translators of romance. I claim instead that Lovelich's *Merlin* is best understood if read in relation to, rather than in opposition to, the production and circulation of English Arthurian romance in the fifteenth century.

The first part of the chapter will introduce Lovelich and his work and focus on the close connections among his *Merlin*, its French source, and the English *Prose Merlin*. The second will look at the codicological evidence that enabled scholars to identify Lovelich as the author of the romances and will contest previous criticism on the romance by looking at Lovelich's controversial mistranslations. The third part of the chapter will investigate Lovelich's translating techniques and how these distance him from the rest of the English romancers and in particular from the author of *AM*, whose work has been analysed in the previous chapter. Finally, this chapter will consider how specific features of Lovelich's *Merlin* reflect the time and place in which he lived and worked: fifteenth-century London. Lovelich's variegated network of acquaintances will be first taken into account, showing that he was immersed in the literary milieu of the capital. It will be shown how the romance reflects Lovelich's origin and occupation, and also his view of social reality. The latter will be particularly evident when looking at Lovelich's lexical choices and his depiction of urban settings as contexts of social interaction.

Chapter One has shown how, in his abridged rendition of the *Estoire*, the *AM* author gave voice to an interest in political themes such as the principles of governance and ideal kingship. Around a century after the composition of *AM*, the author of *Merlyn* further re-worked the narrative of the *Estoire* so as to appeal to an audience who would be appreciative of the text as performance and interested in the dynamic interaction between characters. The English authors' tendency toward re-elaboration is a common feature in popular romances deriving from French and Anglo/Norman originals and lasts well until the end of the fifteenth century.

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[1] *Henry Lovelich's Merlin*, ed. by Ernst A. Kock, EETS ES 93, 112, OS 185 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904-32), cited by line number only.

For instance, the author of the Middle English romance *Sir Tristrem*, deriving from the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* of Thomas and uniquely extant in the Auchinleck MS, produced a parallel reading of his source by reducing the courtly elements of the narrative, its soliloquies and introspection, in favour of a greater attention for action and movement.[2] Composed roughly a century later, the Scottish poem *Lancelot of the Laik* (*c*. 1480), derives from the Vulgate Cycle's *Lancelot* but, again, is far from being a close translation of its sources.[3] In a similar approach to that by the authors of *AM* and *Merlyn*, the author of *Lancelot of the Laik* emphasises action at the expense of the psychological scrutiny typical of the French source. The romance is also characterised by a tempering of the religious overtone of the narrative, a straightforward storyline, and thematic emphasis on politics, governance and kingship – characteristics that, as shown in the previous chapter, it shares with *AM* and are much less prominent in the *Estoire* and *Lancelot*. Although *Lancelot of the Laik* is mostly a close rendering of its French source, the way events are related is simplified by means of selection so as to highlight specific questions such as, in Flora Alexander's words, 'Lancelot's identity and his love for Guenevere, the virtues of heroic brotherhood between knights, and the behaviour of a just monarch'.[4]

The short English poem *Arthur* also displays how English Arthurian romances deriving from French originals have the tendency to offer an alternative reading of their sources that incorporates elements from the chronicle tradition. Composed between 1412 and 1428, *Arthur* is uniquely preserved in the Liber Rubeus Bathoniae (The Red Book of Bath), Longleat House 62 MS 55, No.28.[5] The manuscript, which was produced for the Magistrate of Bath, contains a selection of items in English, Latin and French, both in verse and prose. The texts, including *Arthur*, reflect a common interest in interest in genealogy, chronology and kingship. *Arthur* seems to derive mainly from a version of the Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut* and, for the strong influence of the chronicles has been recently defined as a 'chronicle poem'.[6] So as to underline continuity in terms of themes and

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[2] Maldwyn Mills, 'Chivalric Romance', in *The Arthur of the English*, p. 146.

[3] *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, ed. by Alan Lupack, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994).

[4] Flora Alexander, 'Chivalric Romance', in *The Arthur of the English*, p. 149.

[5] Marije Pots and Erik Kooper, '*Arthur*: A New Critical Edition of the Fifteenth-Century Middle English Verse Chronicle', in *The Medieval Chronicle* 7, ed. by Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 239-66.

[6] See Erik S. Kooper and Julia Marvin, 'A Source for the Middle English Poem *Arthur*', *Arthuriana* 22:4 (2012), 25-45.

preoccupations with the chronicle material, *Arthur* is conveniently placed between two portions of the Latin *Prose Brut*, and is decorated with several coats of arms.[7]

Although Lovelich may have not read these specific romances, it is unlikely that he decided to devote himself to such an ambitious literary project without any knowledge of other Middle English romances. However, instead of moving along the same lines of previous and contemporary English romancers, Lovelich uses a different approach; he closely follows his source and abandons some of the traditional features that had distinguished the adaptations of the Arthurian French romance into English up to his time – a tendency to substantially rework the French material by means of abbreviation and paraphrase, and the use of occasional expansions to highlight specific themes and preoccupations in the narrative. Unlike the English romances just mentioned, in *Merlin*, elements such as characterization (especially of the female characters), moments of introspection and courtly love are treated with unexpected care.

2.1   Lovelich's *Merlin* and Its French Source

Lovelich's *Merlin* is an anomaly in medieval English literature; one of the few romances whose authorship is known, this romance was not written by a professional scribe in one of the many London bookshops, nor by one of the most distinguished poets of the fifteenth century. Its author was neither an intellectual nor a professional translator, but a member of the great London Company of Skinners, and hence a figure who one would not instinctively associate with the production of Middle English romance.[8] However surprising the Lovelich phenomenon may seem, history teaches that, at some point between 1425 and 1435, and for reasons that still need to be addressed, Lovelich embarked on a project of a scale similar to, if not greater than, those carried out by the

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[7] John Finlayson, 'The Source of *Arthur*: An Early Fifteenth-Century Verse Chronicle', *Notes and Queries*, 7 (1960), pp. 46-47.

[8] For example, Henry Bradley argued that a marginal note on f.127r , which identifies 'Henry Lovelich Skynner' as the translator of the romance, had been misread, claiming that Lovelich was not a skinner but a 'scrivener': 'Now it seems at least rather unlikely that a skinner in the fifteenth century should have occupied himself in the metrical translation of two long French romances, and I do not see that the unlikelihood is much lessened by the supposition that "skinner" here means a member of the Skinners' Company. […] At any rate, a scrivener seems less unlikely than a skinner to have produced works of this kind.' See Henry Bradley, 'Henry Lonelich the Skinner', *Athenaeum* 3914 (1 Nov. 1902), 587. Bradley's idea was later rejected by Walter W. Skeat in 'The Translator of "The Graal"', *Athenaeum* 3917 (22 Nov. 1902), 684. The marginalium and its implications will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter.

professional translators in the London workshops. He produced more than 50,000 lines of Middle English poetry in the form of two Arthurian romances uniquely preserved in Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 80[9]: *Merlin* and the *History of the Holy Grail*.[10]

Several dates have been suggested for the composition of Lovelich's *Merlin*: in Severs' *Manual*, Newstead dates it to *c*.1425, whilst according to Robert W. Ackerman, the text was composed in the third decade of the fifteenth century.[11] More recent research has provided evidence that the *terminus ad quem* for the romance must be 1435 as this date corresponds to the death of Henry Barton, the possible owner of the book who is mentioned in some of the marginalia found in the manuscript.[12]

Monumental at 27,852 lines, *Merlin* is the longest and most faithful verse translation into Middle English of the Old French Vulgate Cycle's *Estoire*, and hence provides the most thorough account of the story of Merlin written in English verse. However, the translation contained in Corpus Christi 80 is not complete and the romance breaks off several chapters before the end of the *Estoire*, when Arthur's army is engaged in a battle with Claudas at Trebes (Sommer, p. 275; Lacy, p. 319).

To date, the *Estoire* is believed to be the only source used by Lovelich for his translation, but the version of the *Estoire* from which he translated has yet to be identified. Scholars have highlighted its great similarity with another translation of the *Estoire*, the English *Prose Merlin*: in his extensive introduction to Henry B. Wheatley's edition of the *Prose Merlin*, William E. Mead examined the first 6,200 lines of the *Prose Merlin*, finding that it closely agreed with Lovelich's *Merlin*.[13] Most of the time, the differences between the two romances are very slight and many of them derive from the fact that one is written in verse while the other in prose. As for the innumerable similarities, three possible explanations have been suggested: that Lovelich's *Merlin* is a versification of the *Prose Merlin*; that the *Prose Merlin* is derived from Lovelich's text; that the two romances shared exactly the same French source. Mead, in view of the evidence found from a

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[9] Henceforth Corpus Christi 80.

[10] Hereafter called *HG*. A description of the manuscript can be found in the online catalogue 'Parker on the Web' at:
www.parkerweb.stanford.edu/parker/actions/manuscript_description_long_display.do?ms_no=80.

[11] See Newstead, 'Arthurian Legends', in *A Manual*, p. 49 and Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 176. Barron suggests instead the date 1450 (Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, p. 152).

[12] See Dalrymple, 'Evele knowen', p. 155. The relationship between Barton and Lovelich will be considered in greater detail later on.

[13] Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, pp. lxiii-xix.

comparison of names, numbers and phrases, concluded that the two romances were translated from two almost identical manuscript versions.[14]

The same conclusion was reached by James Fitzhugh Ransom, who analysed the sources and the methodology used by Henry Lovelich in what is to date the only study fully dedicated to Lovelich's *Merlin*. Ransom provided a detailed analysis of the first 7,884 lines of Lovelich's *Merlin* in contrast with a number of texts – the *Estoire*, the English *Prose Merlin*, Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, and other versions of the story which do not seem to be directly related to Lovelich's text, such as *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Like Mead before him, Ransom dismissed Eugene Kölbing's initial assumption that the *Prose Merlin* and Lovelich's romance were translated independently from a common French source, suggesting that the author of the *Prose Merlin* and Henry Lovelich used different, if closely related, versions of the *Estoire*.[15]

These scholars' assumption that Lovelich was translating directly from French is validated by Lovelich himself who, in both the *HG* and *Merlin,* takes responsibility for the authorship of the two romances and refers to the sources used for their composition. Towards the end of the *Holy Grail*, Lovelich presents himself as a translator and identifies his source with the work of Robert de Boron. He reveals his intention to extend his ambitious project to the second 'brawnch' of Robert de Boron's triptych and translate the story of the 'Prophet Merllyne':

> Now of al this storie haue I mad an ende
> That isswede of Celidoyne; & now forþere to wende,
> And of anothir brawnch moste we be-gynne,
> Of the storye that we clepen Prophet Merllyne
> Wiche that Maister Robert of Borrown,
> Owt of Latyn it translated hol & som,
> Onlich into the langage of Frawnce (*HG*, LVI, 509-15)[16]

The same concept – translating from French into English in order to facilitate the audience's understanding – reappears in the *Merlin*, followed by a request for prayers for Henry Lovelich's good health, which would enable him to finish his work:

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[14] Mead, 'Outlines', p. lxix.
[15] Ransom, 'A Study of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 240.
[16] See also *HG*, LVI, ll. 521-33.

> Of the merveilles that aftyr befalle,
>
> J hope to declaren to ȝou alle,
>
> Ȝif that God wile granten me grace & myht,
>
> Helthe of body, and myn eyen syth,
>
> Owt of Frensch jnto Englysch now wyl j fonde
>
> Hit to drawen, that ȝe moun vndirstonde.
>
> Therfore for Herry Louelyche that ȝe preye,
>
> That til this be endid, he may not deye. (*Merlin*, 10,245-52)

This passage, containing Lovelich's remarks about his deteriorating health and eyesight, may suggest that he wrote the romance towards the end of his life and that, perhaps, the translation of the *Merlin* was interrupted by Lovelich's own death. It might also imply that Lovelich was planning a work on an even greater scale than translating the first two romances of de Boron's trilogy: his remark on the fact that he is about to start the narrative of 'anothir brawnch' (*HG*, LVI, l. 511) might suggest that he was familiar with the partition of the Vulgate Cycle and that perhaps he wanted to translate more and at least the third romance by de Boron. It is possible that he was working on a single manuscript of the Vulgate Cycle containing a number of branches. Ransom has also suggested that in view of such comments as well as the decreasing standards of the translation as the romance progresses we must be in possession of everything that Lovelich ever wrote.[17] However, this cannot be certain as the manuscript containing the romance, Corpus Christi 80, is not believed to have been by Lovelich.[18]

In his *Merlin*, Lovelich mentions another source with which Robert de Boron himself might have been familiar with, when he refers those readers eager to learn more about the early history of the British kings to a version of the *Brut* translated from Latin into French by a certain Martin de Bièvre:

> And hos that wil knowen jn certaygne
>
> What kynges that weren jn grete Bretaygne,
>
> Sethen that Cristendom thedyr was browht,
>
> They scholen hem fynde, hos so that it sowht,
>
> Jn the story of Brwttes book;

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[17] Ransom, 'A Study of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 12.

[18] Meale claims that: 'The identity of the scribe of Corpus Christi 80 is unknown, and there is no evidence in the manuscript to indicate whether or not it was Henry Barton's personal copy' (Meale, 'Gode men', p. 218).

> There scholen ȝe it fynde, and ȝe welen look;
>
> Which that Martyn de Bewre traunslated here
>
> From Latyn jnto romaunce jn his manere. (*Merlin*, ll. 1,667-74)

Lovelich is not the only author to mention Martin de Bièvre. Interestingly, as further evidence that the *Prose Merlin* and *Merlin* share homologous sources, the name of the French translator is also recalled in the *Prose Merlin*:

> And euer here-after shall thy boke gladly be herde, and he that will
>
> knowe the lyf of kynges whiche were in the grete Bretayne be-fore that
>
> cristendom come, be-holde the story of Bretons. That is a boke that
>
> maister Martyn traunslated oute of latyn, but heire rested this matere.
>
> (*Prose Merlin*, p. 23)

The same name as well as its variations Martin 'de Rocester' and Martin 'de Rouen' can be found in a number of manuscripts containing the *Estoire*.[19] Unfortunately, Mead did not manage to trace this Martin de Bièvre anywhere, nor did Alexander Micha, who also identified the translator's work as one of the possible sources of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*.[20] Micha explains that this Martin de Bièvre might have been the author of an interpolated version of Wace's *Brut*, which Robert de Boron might have used as a secondary source for his *Merlin* long before the composition of the *Vulgate Cycle*. He also suggests that the numerous differences found between the story in Geoffrey's *HRB* (or Wace's *Brut*) and Robert de Boron's *Merlin* should be ascribed to Boron's use of Martin de Bièvre's chronicle. Micha also hypothesised that Martin's book might have been one of the few French verse translations of Geoffrey's *HRB* – of these some fragments are extant – and that this was used by Boron as a secondary source.[21]

It seems unlikely that Lovelich or the author of the *Prose Merlin* were acquainted with or might have ever seen Martin's mysterious chronicle, especially in view of the argument that his name has been known since the time of Robert de Boron. It is more likely that the two English authors were simply reporting what they found in the manuscripts they were translating. The presence of Martin's name in both Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin* enables us to isolate a specific group of manuscripts that

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[19] For a list of and further details on these manuscripts, see Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, p. lxviii.

[20] Alexandre Micha, *Etude sur le "Merlin" de Robert de Boron: roman du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2000).

[21] Micha, *Etude sur le "Merlin"*, p. 32.

make a direct reference to Martin and might be similar to the actual French source from which the two English romances were translated.[22] Of these, two manuscripts in particular – Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS fr. 105 and fr. 9123 – agree with the *Prose Merlin* more closely. Mead believes that the author of the *Prose Merlin* must have used a fourteenth-century copy of the *Estoire* that was very much like the ones contained in those two manuscripts and 'that a careful collation of all the extant MSS might enable us to find a French equivalent from almost every word of the translation'.[23] The scholars' argument that Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin* were word-for-word translations of the *Estoire*, however, is challenged by the evidence provided in this and the following chapter, where the translators' diverse approach to the original text will be analysed.

The section that follows will instead provide the reader with a review of the (mainly unfavourable) past criticism on Lovelich, in order to show how this has influenced the modern reception of his work. The few comparative analyses of Lovelich's *Merlin* and the *Estoire* that have been undertaken in the past have mainly resulted in the conclusion that Lovelich was as an incompetent translator as he was an author. In particular, the greatest faults with which Lovelich has been charged are what are assumed to be his many mistranslations, mostly found in his *Merlin*. The following discussion, however, will cast doubts on the theory of Lovelich's poor ability as a translator, showing that these alleged mistakes can (at least sometimes) be better explained by his use of a damaged or incomplete copy of the *Estoire*.

2.2   Lovelich, the Forgotten Arthurian: the Modern Reception of *Merlin*

Thanks to the growing importance of codicological and palaeographical research in the study of medieval literature, manuscript work has proved a valuable tool for the identification of the authorship of many works; it has also enabled scholars to link particular manuscripts and texts to the same authors and translators. In some cases, the discovery of the authorship of late medieval literary works has triggered research on neglected works and boosted the modern popularity of authors not usually included in the literary canon. Take, for example, Margaret Connolly's work on the author/scribe John Shirley and the sudden change of route that can be seen in the criticism on Lydgate

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[22] *Ibid*.
[23] Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, p. clxxxiv.

produced in the last decade.[24] It might therefore be assumed that a similar treatment would be reserved for Lovelich and his extensive literary production. However, that is not the case: even though much light has been shed on the figure of Lovelich, such as his roots and his affiliation to a specific network, his work has remained largely unexplored by scholars. Scant references to Lovelich can be found in manuals and anthologies, where he is usually credited with the completion of the first English translation of the *Estoire del saint Graal*.[25] More recent references to the *HG* can be found in articles by Dalrymple and Warren, whilst a full chapter dedicated to Lovelich in Radulescu's recent monograph discusses Lovelich's extensive use of *amplificatio* in his *HG*.[26]

The lack of interest in his *Merlin* seems to spring from the misfortunes of the EETS edition of the text, which sadly lacks introduction, notes, and glossary. The final volume of Kock's edition was never produced and no revised edition of the romance has been published since. To date, a thorough analysis of the whole *Merlin* has yet to be produced. Several critics have called for further research on this exceptional author and his *Merlin*, but the call has mostly remained unheard. Roger Dalrymple, in particular, encourages an investigation of the language used in Lovelich's *Merlin*, noting that a detailed comparison with the French source might enable us to unveil the emphasis of Lovelich's interventions on the original.[27]

Overall, the romance has never attracted much favourable criticism, being often dismissed for its amateurish character, its poor literary quality and its strong similarity with the French source. The critics' antipathy towards Lovelich seems also to derive from his being a *dilettante*, a situation he seemed to be fully aware of: in the *Holy Grail*, he takes responsibility for the composition of the two romances (and their stylistic flaws), humbly advertising himself as an amateur translator:

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[24] See Margaret, Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Larry Scanlon, and James Simpson, *John Lydgate: Poetry Culture, and Lancastrian England*, eds, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Lisa H. Cooper, and A. Denny-Brown, eds, *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[25] See for example Phillip C. Boardman, 'Grail and Quest in the Medieval Englsih World of Arthur', in *The Grail, the Quest and the World of Arthur*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 126-40.

[26] See Dalrymple, 'Evele knowen', Michelle Warren, 'Lydgate, Lovelich, and London Letters', in *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth* Century, ed. by Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 113-38 and her 'Translation', in *Middle English*, pp. 51-67, and Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England*, ch 3, pp. 87-148.

[27] Dalrymple, 'Evele knowen', p. 158.

And I, as an vnkonneng man trewely,

Into Englisch haue drawen this story;

And thowgh that ʒow not plesyng it be,

Ʒt that ful excused ʒe wolde hauen me,

Of my neclegence and vnkonnenge. (*Holy Grail*, LVI, ll. 521-25)

The widespread critical perception of Lovelich as an inept translator has hampered the hunt for the positive qualities of the romance and negatively conditioned the modern reception of his work. Critics have claimed that, in turning the French prose into English verse, Lovelich's methodology closely resembled that of the translators in the London scriptoria, who played a pivotal role in the production and dissemination of English secular literature in the late Middle Ages.[28] It is generally recognized that the best example of this sort of production is the Auchinleck MS, which resulted from the close collaboration of a number of scribes who translated many French romances into English.[29] However, as will be shown below, many points of difference distinguish Lovelich's *modus operandi* from that of other translators and, in particular, the author of *AM*. Lovelich shows a greater adherence to his French source than any previous translator of the *Estoire*.[30]

Lovelich's bad reputation also results from an assessment of his poetic skills according to stringent modern literary standards. If, on the one hand, the figure of Lovelich filled early twentieth-century critics with curiosity on account of the amateurish character of his enterprise, on the other his poetry was often compared and contrasted with the authorities of his time. While Chaucer represents the archetype of the professional author and translator, Lovelich is the other side of the coin as the unskilled Arthurian who undertook a work too big and too difficult for his expertise. While Lydgate's innovations represent that 'change of temper' typical of the fifteenth century expounding, in Pearsall's words, 'a sober and ethical preoccupation with practical and ethical issues',[31] Lovelich's texts undoubtedly belong to popular culture and are still anchored in the tradition and conventions of Arthurian romance of the previous centuries.

An artisan amongst artists, Lovelich could be taken as the representative of that 'dullness' that, according to some out-dated criticism, characterized the literary production

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[28] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 473.

[29] See Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', pp. 150-87 and Chapter 1, p. 36.

[30] See my discussion of these aspect later on this chapter (p. 118).

[31] Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 68.

of the fifteenth century in contrast with the previous and following centuries.[32] Many negative judgments have highlighted Lovelich's unbearable prolixity, his 'unskilful padding of the verse'[33], or even his 'limping verse'[34], the discordance of his rhymes; all of which characterize Lovelich as 'the most clumsy and tedious poet of the fifteenth century'.[35] Surely, such observations contain a degree of truth: Lovelich's style is far from being elegant and refined; the length of his verses, which are sometimes stretched to form improbable pentameters, is inconsistent; his fabricated rhyming couplets sometimes do not rhyme at all. However, Lovelich's abilities and techniques deserve to be reconsidered in view of his strict dependence on his source and bearing in mind that he was neither a professional translator nor a romancer, so should not be affiliated to those categories.

For some critics, the greatest fault of all in Lovelich's *Merlin* is the high number of errors that can be found in his translation, believed to have sprung from Lovelich's wobbly knowledge of French rather than from his hunger for originality. Ackerman, in particular, claims that Lovelich's mistranslations are so serious as to 'provide a devastating comment on Lovelich's attentiveness and perhaps his ability to read French'.[36] He also noted that the same quantity of errors does not appear in the *HG*, which seems overall a better-executed work than *Merlin*, and that the discrepancies in the accuracy of the two translations could be ascribed to a declining enthusiasm and a growing sense of weariness for the length of the work, which Lovelich experienced after the completion of his first translation.[37] However, when looking at the passages analysed by Ackerman more closely, what he labels as 'blunders' may not be mistranslations but misreadings, attributable to Lovelich's use of a poor copy of the *Estoire* – perhaps poorer than his copy of the *Estoire del Saint Graal*.

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[32] See Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', pp. 761-99. Lawton contests these views, advocates the need for a fresh critical response to the literary production of the fifteenth century, which would take into account the historical instability of this century and the various authors' responses. According to Lawton, it is the fifteenth-century writers' lack of individualism and a desire to feel part of a group that make the modern reader perceive them as 'dull'. Lawton uses the term 'dullness' to describe and investigate the modest and impersonal way fifteenth-century authors like Lydgate and Hoccleve tend to present themselves, rather than as a means to undermine fifteenth-century literary production.

[33] Mead, 'Outlines', in *Merlin or The Early History of King Arthur*, p. lxiii.

[34] Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, p. 152.

[35] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's Name', p. 531.

[36] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 483.

[37] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', pp. 483-84. Marcella McCarthy pointed out the accuracy of Lovelich's HG noting that his translation contains few – if any – of the verbal confusions found in less able translators' (McCarthy, 'Late Medieval English Treatments of the Grail Story', p. 63).

Ackerman was the first to point out how Lovelich's inaccuracies in translating the original led to the creation of several new characters and new places, whose names appear in the *Merlin* only.[38] For example, Lovelich seems to completely misunderstand a passage that in the *Estoire* reads: '& nous ne faisons chi fors muser a la folie . si ne gardons leure que nous ne serons pris ausi comme li oisiaus au brai' (Sommer, pp. 130-31; 'Here we do nothing but waste our time in foolishness, and we are not looking ahead to a time when we'll be in trouble, just like the bird caught in a trap', Lacy, p. 238). Lovelich does not seem to grasp the sense of the simile contained in the passage and translates:

> For god forbede but ȝif that we
>
> As worthi in armes scholden be
>
> As they sein Ambroy oyselet is. (*Merlin*, ll. 12,551-53)

Ackerman has suggested that due to his poor linguistic competence, Lovelich was unable to find a suitable English equivalent for the phrase 'li oisiaus au brai'; he therefore chose a name that would take after the sound of the original, losing the overall meaning of the expression.[39] However, this is quite unlikely as, to the eyes of any experienced translator, Lovelich's translation of this expression does not look like an error. The simile itself is not obscure enough to be misunderstood even by somebody with very little skill; hence it is improbable that someone like Lovelich – who had just brought to completion the entire translation of the *Graal* – could not find a fitting equivalent. To have an idea of what the passage should have been like in Middle English, we need to look at the *Prose Merlin*, which reads:

> 'And we ne do but as musardes, and ne a-wayte nought elles but when
>
> we shall be take as a bridde in a nette' (*Prose Merlin*, p. 183).

It is clear that the whole passage in Lovelich's *Merlin* is in fact a rewriting rather than a translation; apart from 'Ambroy oyselet', which resembles the sound of the original simile, the previous lines differ completely from the source. The most likely explanation for this is that Lovelich was unable to read the passage and hence had to fill the gap in the narrative by inventing a few lines and ending up with a new character. Despite his less than benevolent judgments about Lovelich's translating skills, even Ackerman admits the possibility that at least some of the textual errors are the result of a poorly written original:

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[38] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 478.

[39] *Ibid*.

some French works were probably available only in texts which had been copied by English scribes entirely ignorant of French and therefore incapable of filling in abbreviations or indistinct letters correctly.[40]

However, Ackerman's hypothesis that the laborious task of copying such extensive texts as the romances of the Vulgate Cycle into English would be entrusted to scribes who did not have any command of French needs to be questioned. English and French bilingualism was still strong during the whole of the fifteenth century and especially in the capital, where a public still existed for works written in French. Recent criticism has recognised the enduring impact of French (in all its varieties, written and oral) on medieval English culture.[41] For instance, in her comprehensive study of French and English during the Hundred Years War, Ardis Butterfield has demonstrated that we cannot simply assume that, as English slowly gained importance and authority, spoken French was gradually abandoned in the thirteenth century and almost completely disappeared during the following two centuries. On the contrary, the importance of both oral and written French in legal, diplomatic and commercial contexts kept growing in the fourteenth and even in the fifteenth century, demonstrating that French was not as obsolete as previously assumed.[42]

What is more likely, in relation to Lovelich's supposed mistranslations, is rather that he was working on a damaged or heavily used copy of the *Estoire*. Confirmation of this explanation can be found in another episode where Lovelich seems to translate incorrectly the refrain of a French song. In this part of the story Merlin is teaching Viviane the secrets of his magic. Viviane is so amazed by Merlin's enchantments that she cannot understand the song that the damsels are singing, but she is able to recognize the refrain, which in the *Estoire* goes: 'voirement sont amors a ioie commenchies & finissent a dolor' (Sommer, p. 210; 'Truly, love begins in happiness and ends in grief!', Lacy, p. 282). Interestingly, both Lovelich and the author of the English *Prose Merlin* decided not to translate the refrain into English. However, whilst the *Prose Merlin* accords with the *Estoire*'s 'Vraiement, comencent amours en joye et fynissent en dolours' (*Prose Merlin*, p. 311), Lovelich offers a variation of the refrain: 'A joye, a joye et amours / Et sen issent a dolours!' (*Merlin*, ll.

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[40] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 483.

[41] See my discussion in Chapter 1. See also W. M. Ormrod, 'The Use of English, Language, Law and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England', *Speculum* 78:3 (2003), 750-87 and Jeremy Catto, 'The Making of the Language 1370-1400', *Past & Present* 179 (2003), 24-59.

[42] Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 9, pp. 308-49.

21,429-30). The difference between the version given in the *Estoire* and the *Prose Merlin* on the one hand, and Lovelich's text on the other is certainly striking. If the variation of the first line may be ascribed to the requirements of metre and rhyme, the divergence 'finissent'/'sen issent' in line 21,430 may look like the consequence of a misreading. In the case of the song's refrain, however, Lovelich is not translating from French into English but, like the author of the *Prose Merlin*, he is simply copying the refrain found in the original. Even if Lovelich's knowledge of French were as poor as critics have suggested, he would still have been able to understand and copy (or translate) the simple vocabulary used in the refrain. Perhaps this variation is an indication of the fact that the copy of the *Estoire* used by Lovelich presented an incorrect variant of the refrain in the first place, which, for some reason, Lovelich decided not to correct. The difference between Lovelich's and the *Prose*'s refrains bears further witness to the idea that the two romances do not share the same sources: such a possibility would be consistent with Mead and Ransom's studies of the romance in relation to its sources and that of the *Prose Merlin*.[43]

Another example used to prove Lovelich's inconsistency in the quality of his translation involves a certain Archbishop 'of Dobrice':

> And whanne al this ryalte was j-doon,
> Fulsone to þe mynstre they wenten anon,
> Where *therchebyschope of Dobrice* þe messe song,
> Whiche Dover js j-clepid now vs among.[44] (*Merlin*, ll. 25,803-06,
> emphasis mine)

According to Ackerman, Lovelich seems to have confused the name of the bishop – 'de brice' or 'brice' in the *Estoire* – with the Dover diocese, which in Roman times was known as 'Portus Dubris'. However, when looking at the *Estoire*, it is clear that even in this instance, Lovelich has been unjustly charged with 'neclegence' and 'unkonnenge'. In the *Estoire*, the phrase 'li arceuesque de brice' can be read not as a title followed by a proper name but rather as the description of an office. In Lacy's modern English edition of the *Estoire*, Rupert T. Pickens translated 'brice' with 'Brice' as if it were the name of an archdiocese presided by the Archbishop. This seems to be confirmed by the context where

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[43] See chapter 2.2 for a discussion of the relationship between Lovelich's romance, the *Prose Merlin*, and their possible sources.
[44] See Sommer, p. 254 and Lacy, p. 307.

the phrase appears for the first time in the *Estoire*. In an earlier episode, just after Arthur's coronation, Arthur receives the first threats from the revolting barons, and it is up to Merlin to convince them that Arthur is in fact of higher birth than any of them. He suggests that king Arthur should summon two archbishops:

> Et merlins li dist quil die au roy quil amaint en sa compaignie
> larceuesque de brice & larceuesque de logres . & cil respont quil li dira
> uolentiers. (Sommer, p. 89)

> And Merlin told him to tell the king he should bring along with him the
> archbishop of Brice and the archbishop of Logres. (Lacy, p. 216)

This passage seems to clarify that 'brice' is in fact the name of a region just like 'Logres' was, but also that in the *Estoire* there are two distinct archbishops for two distinct archdioceses.

So far, this chapter has contested the view of Lovelich as an inept translator who could easily misunderstand the French of his original. The following section will, instead, counter the critics' assumption that Lovelich's *Merlin* must be related, in terms of form and style, to the romances of the previous century. The comparison between Lovelich's *Merlin* and *AM* will show, instead, how, about a century after the composition of *AM* and in parallel with that of *Merlyn*, a different approach to the *Estoire* had emerged, which gave prominence to features usually neglected by English translators of French romance.

2.3 Translating Techniques: Lovelich's *Merlin* as a French Romance Written in English

To those interested in Middle English translation, a major problem with Lovelich's *Merlin* is that the romance does not satisfy the traditional assumptions that scholars make when they deal with Middle English translations of French romance. For instance, such assumptions were voiced in J. D. Burnley's intervention at the Medieval Translator conference (1987), where he summarized the distinctive features of Middle English translation of French romance:

> In medieval England, the transition from French to English involved a
> cultural descent, or at the very least a considerable broadening of appeal.
> Anglicisation often meant popularisation, adaptation to a new audience
> of less sophisticated tastes. The hallowed landmarks of aristocratic

cultural reference will be omitted: the references to classical legend, the appreciative detail of physical beauty and moral perfection, connoisseurs' descriptions of objects of value or of recent fashion. Psychological subtlety and the formal analysis of character are likely to be replaced by familiar formulae, and introspection by narrative action. Of more profound importance than the mere change in language used, the text undergoes a process of social adaptation.[45]

In his discussion, Burnley referred primarily to fourteenth-century romance, and in particular to the Auchinleck *Kyng Alisaunder*. However, value judgements like 'cultural descent' and 'an audience of sophisticated tastes' are quite common in scholarship about medieval romance. In the last few decades, comparative analysis of English romances with their French sources has proved a fertile ground for the investigation of the process of translation and what this reveals about the romances' new English-speaking audiences. Unfortunately, when Lovelich's work is taken into account, most of the criteria used to define and assess Middle English romance cannot be applied. Lovelich paid close attention to the source, producing a narrative that remains consistent with that of the *Estoire*. Unlike the authors of *AM* and *Merlyn*, who engage in a selection of the material and made visible interventions in the text, Lovelich's versification of the *Estoire* did not bring forth major changes to the plot or to the order of the events, but maintained intact the episodic arrangement of its source. His romance retains the structure and style of French romance favouring elements such as courtly customs and situations, descriptions and romantic interactions. Even though there are times in his text when he fails to master the verse form and its metre, there are indeed scenes in which he seems to have fully grasped the psychological subtlety of his original so as to suggest his understanding and appreciation of the qualities of French romance.

In his dissertation on Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, Ransom has observed, any assessment of Lovelich's *Merlin* needs to take into account Lovelich's literary ideals and culture, which detach him from his contemporaries and relate him to the work of fourteenth-century romancers.[46] According to Ransom, Lovelich was still using the 'obsolescent' rhyming couplet in a period in which prose would have been the ideal form of expression for English literary and didactic work, and his choice was a question of

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[45] Burnley, 'Late Medieval English Translation', p. 42.
[46] Ransom, 'A Study of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 7.

personal convenience, as the undertaking of such a long translation in more complex forms of metre would have been far too daunting. Ransom also suggests that in using this particular rhyme Lovelich intended to produce romances that would replicate the style of the hack versifiers in the early stationers' shops.[47]

However, this argument is debatable on several grounds. Firstly, the rhyming couplet had not gone out of use as prose is a late development in Middle English romance occurring towards the end of the fifteenth century, when it was finally established as the most suitable form for English romance, thanks to work by Malory and Caxton. Before that, at the time when Lovelich translated his texts, most of the romances circulating in the fifteenth century were witnesses of fourteenth-century originals and still written in verse; some of them even reached print in their verse form.[48] The verse forms used for Middle English romance varied considerably: even though the use of tail-rhyme started to decrease towards the end of the fourteenth century, it continued to be used for over a century;[49] other verse forms were Chaucer's rhyme royal, alliterative verse and, of course, the rhyming couplet, considered the traditional metre for Middle English romance, and which continued to be used for fifteenth-century Arthurian romance (see for example *Lancelot of the Laik*) and which was also used by Lydgate for some of his poetry.[50] The three extant fifteenth-century copies of *AM* contained in Hale 150, Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 236, and London British Library MS Harley 6223 are all written in rhyming couplets. Had Lovelich chosen prose as the form for his translation around 1430 he would have been a remarkable exception. From this point of view, Lovelich's choice is neither surprising nor convenient but perhaps resulted from his familiarity with previous Middle English translations of the *Estoire*. Why would he change the metre of a text he knew to have conventionally been translated in rhyming couplets? This seems more likely if we consider that copies of *Merlyn* were circulating in London in the first decades of the fifteenth century.[51]

As for Lovelich's intention to mimic the work of professional versifiers, it is not possible to imagine that he embarked on such a large-scale project translating two whole

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[47] Ransom, 'A Study of Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', pp. 5, 10. Here Ransom follows Loomis' argument about the existence of professional translators who were working for the book dealers. See Loomis, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', pp. 150-87.

[48] Cooper, *The English Romance*, p. 30.

[49] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, p. 9.

[50] See Lydgate's poems 'Disguising at London and 'Disguising at Hertford' in John Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*, ed. by Claire Sponsler, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010).

[51] See section 2.4 for more information on the provenance of Hale 150.

branches of the Vulgate Cycle without any familiarity with the work of other translators of Middle English romances. However, as will be explained later, Lovelich's methodology when translating is different from that of his previous and contemporary translators, as his romance replicates the structural and stylistic features of thirteenth-century French romance.

Furthermore, palaeographical evidence seems to deny that the manuscript was heavily used, suggesting instead that the book was employed for display or private reading rather than for public recitation. In these regards, Warren has recently noticed that the manuscript 'is designed for illustrations that were never completed' and has claimed that 'the spaces for images, the chapter initials, and the double-column layout mirror exactly the structure of Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 178, suggesting that Lovelich was involved in a project whose aspirations were far more than textual'.[52] Radulescu contests Warren's association of the two manuscripts, noting the fourteenth-century manuscript 'came to England in the post-medieval period and was read, according to the inscriptions on its leaves, by consideration of an aristocratic audience', and its miniatures do not correspond in terms of size, positioning and quality to those in Corpus Christi 80.[53] It should also be noted that the layout and initials do not provide enough evidence to support the idea of the use of the romance: lines are crammed in double columns, and no other graphic features were inserted to assist a hypothetical performer in his recitation. Furthermore, initials are not noticeable enough to locate sections of the story by means of a quick scan of the page.

The mere fact that the romance is written in rhyming couplets is not strong evidence of oral delivery either, especially if we consider the length of the romance and that more functional verse forms were available such as tail-rhyme. Purdie explains that the choice of the couplet form is usually dictated by 'ease of composition' rather than an 'ease of performance'.[54] Other forms of poetry, such as the twelve-rhyme stanzas of tail-rhyme romances, were easier to memorize than countless series of couplets. In other words, the fact that Lovelich chose to use couplets for his translation may not imply that he was writing for a listening public but may represent his way to consciously align himself with a tradition of Middle English romance written in this form.

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[52] Warren, 'Translation', p. 57.
[53] Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts*, p. 105.
[54] Purdie, *Anglicising Romance*, p. 91.

Even if we leave form aside and focus on the content of the romance it is clear that all those characteristics that had marked the development of Middle English romance in the fourteenth century – abbreviation, a linear narrative structure, a preference for action rather than words and descriptions – do not apply to Lovelich's work. Nor can we expect to find in Lovelich's romance elaborations that reflect the fourteenth-century division between the literary tastes of royalty and aristocracy and those of the middle class.[55] The oddity of Lovelich's position within the canon results from his challenging of our assumptions regarding the association of specific social classes with specific literary tastes: to make things simple, Lovelich did not write an English romance but a French romance in English intended for a merchant readership.

As the examples below will show, other than Lovelich's general tendency to remain faithful to his source, significant cases of original elaboration can be found, and these involve the elements that Middle English romance usually reduced and neglected: dialogues, characterization and scenes of courtly love. At particular points in the narrative Lovelich shows remarkable skill in refining the descriptive content of his source and triggering a potential response by his audience. When looking at dialogues and descriptions, Lovelich's subtle, albeit significant, developments of the female characters and their interactions with the opposite sex with remarkable and unprecedented care differentiate the romance from his source but also underline the contrasting perspective from which Lovelich and his predecessor, the authors of *AM* and *Merlyn*, undertook their translations. The emphasis on female characters, their feelings and behaviours is a feature that is already visible in Lovelich's *HG* and which distinguishes it from its source; as noted by Radulescu:

> Lovelich's presentation of female characters results in an even more
> positive view of their agency in supporting noble and royal lineages than
> in the original *Graal*.[56]

A comparison between the description of Guenevere in Lovelich's text and in the *Estoire* shows that Lovelich did not intend to miss out any of the traits, both physical and moral, which define this character: he praises her extraordinary beauty focusing on every single feature as described in the *Estoire* and then acclaims her 'bowunte', 'prowesse',

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[55] Rosalind Field, 'Romance in England, 1066-1400', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 152-76 (p. 168).
[56] Radulescu, *Romance and its Contexts*, p. 121.

'largenesse', 'kurtesye', and her 'gret wyt and valour' (15,369-402). However, Lovelich does not restrict himself to only reporting with extreme meticulousness what he found in the source. To this description he makes some additions that are the fruit of his own judgement. When the *Estoire*'s author describes Arthur's first encounter with Guenevere, he explains that Arthur's feelings are reciprocal, making a brief mention of Guenevere's interest in the king:

> & li rois artus fu de moult biaute plain si le regarda la pucele moult
>
> durement & li rois lui & ele dist entre ses dens que moult deust estre lie
>
> la dame qui si biaus cheualiers requerroit damours & si boins comme cis
>
> est & deueroit bien estre hounie qui len econduiroit. (Sommer, p. 157)

> King Arthur was filled with great beauty, and the maiden stared at him
>
> and he at her. And she said softly to herself that a lady had reason to be
>
> very happy if such a good and handsome knight as he asked for her love,
>
> and shame on her who refused him. (Lacy, p. 252)

In Lovelich's version, Guenevere's physical attraction to Arthur is more pronounced and she expresses her feelings more directly than in the *Estoire* when she reveals to Arthur her happiness were she to be loved by such a 'worthy body':

> Kyng Arthewr was a man ful of bewte,
>
> And that beheld this mayden, ful certeynle.
>
> And kyng Artheur beheld hyre also;
>
> So mochel of bewte hadde sche tho.
>
> Thanne so they spoken betwixen hem tweyne,
>
> That to Arthour this damysele gan sayne
>
> *That glad jn herte sche was, sekerle,*
>
> *Of swich a worthy body beloued to be.* (ll. 15,283-90, emphasis mine)

By minimizing the verbosity of the *Estoire* in this passage, Lovelich's Guenevere gains in lack of inhibition and openness, traits that will be reinforced even further by Lovelich's intervention in her characterization. However, unlike the *HG*, where, as Radulescu has shown, the characterization of the female characters and the description of their emotions are meant to emphasise their function in the narrative as protectors of the royal line, in *Merlin*, Guenevere's personality is developed by Lovelich in relation to and as a trigger for Arthur's own emotional response. Lovelich expands on Guenevere's emotional

involvement and interaction with Arthur so as to increase the psychological subtlety of the scene. This may have been to the benefit of the audience, who may have easily included women as well as men and who would appreciate not only the chivalric and action-oriented content of the romance but also the nuanced individualisation of the female characters.

Echoing Guenevere's feelings, Arthur appears more spontaneous than his French counterpart. The scene before the battle against King Rion, when Arthur and Guenevere kiss goodbye, presents another opportunity for innovation to Lovelich. Just after Guenevere has armed Arthur, Merlin starts making fun of the king by comparing the scene to a second dubbing ceremony. However, Lovelich omitted the part in which Merlin suggests to Arthur that, in order to complete the dubbing and become a new knight, he needs one last kiss from the queen. In the *Estoire*, this part contains an amusing interchange between Arthur and Merlin:

> En che que Merlins regardoit la damoisele qui si serui son signor si commencha a rire . & dist au roy comme cil qui gaber le voloit en riant . sire onques mais ne fustes vous chaualiers si adroit comme vous estes ore . & se ni faut ore que *vne seule chose que vous ne soies tous nouiaus* & bien poes die quant de chi partires que fille de roy & de roine vous a fait cheualier nouel . Sire fait li rois ore me dites quele est la chose quil i faut si li ferai sil nest trop grant desconuenue dont ele aust honte sele le faisoit. […] Chest sire fait merlins *li baisiers se a la dame sier & plaist . Certes fait li rois ia por che ne remandra que iou ne soie cheualiers nouiaus.* (Sommer, p. 219, emphasis mine)

> While Merlin was looking at the young lady serving her betrothed, he began to smile. He said to the king laughing, as he wanted to poke fun at him, "Sir, you have never been so fit a knight as you are now, *but you need just one thing to make you a new knight again*, and you will have a right to say that the daughter of a king and a queen has made you a new knight!" "Sir," said the King, "now tell me what is the thing I need, and I will have her do it, unless it is so unseemly that she would be ashamed to do it." […] *"It is, sir," answered Merlin, "a kiss, if the lady wishes it and would like it." "Indeed," said the King, "I'll never let that keep me from becoming a new knight!".* (Lacy, p. 287, emphasis mine)

In Lovelich's version Merlin does not suggest to him that he should kiss Guenevere goodbye, but teases Arthur with a final bantering remark: 'The besynesse of this lady so fre / ʒow a newe knyht hath dubbed, in certeinte' (ll. 22,315-16). Instead, predominance is given to Guenevere's declaration of love to Arthur, which culminates in a kiss that is the fruit of Arthur's spontaneity:

> "Jn the name of God," seide this faire lady,
>
> "God grunte ʒow grace and victory
>
> And a worthy knyht to contenuen ay!
>
> But þe certeinte of on thing ʒe knowen verray:
>
> That ʒe ben myn, and j am ʒowres
>
> To alle manere obeyschaunse & honoures,
>
> Which thing js more plesinge to me
>
> Thanne alle the goodis jn Cristiente"
>
> Whanne that kyng Arthewr herde hire say,
>
> Ful mochel hit was tho to his pay.
>
> *To hire he ran & hire gan to enbrace*
>
> *And sche in hire armes him gan to lase,*
>
> *And kysten sweetly bothe in fere.* (*Merlin*, ll. 22,321-33, emphasis mine)

In the passage that follows, the *Estoire* reveals that, following their brief encounter, Arthur's feelings for Guenevere have deepened and he wants to make her his wife and queen:

> & moult le couoite & aime la fille au roy leodegan . & tant y muse que tout sen uoblie & bien uoldroit sil peust estre quele leust a per & a compaignon. (Sommer, p. 159)

> And Arthur loved and yearned for the daughter of King Leodagan, and he was daydreaming so about her that he forgot where he was; he very much wanted to have her as his wife and helpmeet, if he could. (Lacy, p. 254)

In contrast with the *Estoire*, which refers to Arthur's burning passion for Guenevere, Lovelich turns his attention to Guenevere once again, disclosing her innermost thoughts:

> Ful sore hire loue on hym caste thore,
>
> And desired jn herte ful pryvyle,
>
> To hym j-weddid that sche myhte be

Aboven alle tho that ever sche say. (*Merlin*, ll. 15,508-11)

Lovelich's exhaustive treatment of Guenevere and her emotional response to her encounters with Arthur not only distinguishes his text from the source but further develops her character in a way that only the author of the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* had achieved before him. In the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (*c.* 1450), the episode of the encounter between Lancelot and Guenevere is not present in the source but is an addition by the English poet.[57] In this episode, Guenevere who has confined herself in the Tower of London in order to resist to Mordred's advances, takes the veil after learning of Arthur's death, and in a dialogue with the nuns and with Lancelot blames herself and her lover for the deaths of Arthur and many other knights:

> Abbess, to you I knowlech here
>
> That through this ilke man and me,
>
> For we togeder han loved us dere,
>
> All this sorrowful war hath be;
>
> My lord is slain, that hath no peer,
>
> And many a doughty knight and free;
>
> Therefore for sorrow I died ner,
>
> As soon as I ever gan him see. (ll. 3,638-45)

However, although this expansion gives Guenevere a voice, it is ultimately meant to underline the tragic repercussions of her affair with Lancelot. Rather than an expression her love for Lancelot, Guenevere's words reveal her profound sense of guilt and elucidate the rapid decay in the foundations of Arthurian society, which has been undermined by an irreparable crisis in its system of values.

A comparison of Arthur's encounter with Guenevere in Lovelich's romance with the corresponding passage in *AM* displays the two poets' contrasting methods with regard to the characterization of women. In the first chapter it was shown that, by combining the material taken from the *Estoire* with other sources, the author of *AM* created a text that accords with the expectations of the readership of English medieval romance: the tendency to favour action over dialogue, scant characterization with little or no use of introspection, little interest in female characters and in *affairs de coeur*, an emphasis on military achievement. Such a literary paradigm had an impact on the representation of Guenevere, who, in *AM*, was not introduced by any physical or moral description. The narrative

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[57] *Le Morte Arthur*, ed. by P. F. Hissiger (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

quickly shifts from the scene where Arthur and Ban reach Leodegan's court to the moment
when Guenevere washes Arthur's shoulders:

> Ac to court þai were yfeched ra[þ]e
>
> And ydon in riche baþe;
>
> Gveneour wesche þe king Arthour
>
> And Ban and Bohort wiþ honour
>
> Gvenore anoþer damisel
>
> And oþer maiden fair and fel
>
> Weschen alle her gentil feren. (*AM*, ll. 6,465-71)

Only one conversation between Arthur and Guenevere, albeit considerably abbreviated, is
preserved (ll. 6,544-52), whilst the only remark that qualifies Guenevere is contained in
the lines 'Gveneour was euer tofor Arthour / And serued him wiþ gret honour (ll. 6,553-
54).

The absence of a description of Guenevere goes along with the exclusion of her say
in the affair. After a dull allusion to Arthur's feelings, the poet specifies that Arthur is
trying hard to control himself and conceal any sign of his emotional distress – presumably
from the gaze of the other knights:

> Ac on Gveneour biheld Arthour
>
> And was al nomen in hir amour
>
> Ac he tempred so his blod
>
> Þat non oþer it vnderstode. (*AM*, ll. 6,537-40)

More major descriptive expansions which distinguishes Lovelich's translating techniques
from those of the other translators can be found in Lovelich's treatment of Viviane and her
(pseudo) romantic liaison with Merlin. The comparison between the *Estoire* and
Lovelich's versions of Viviane's first encounter with Merlin reveals Lovelich's habit of
expanding his source with descriptive details which magnify the scene's vividness. The
episode contains one of the longest examples of Merlin's magic, which, in this instance, is
employed to make an impression on Viviane. Merlin takes the shape of a young handsome
boy and meets Viviane by a well in the middle of the forest of Briosque; there could not be
a more conventional setting for the magical event to take place. After telling her that he is
capable of performing magic tricks in many different ways, he draws a circle on the
ground and performs his enchantment. Unlike the *Estoire*'s author, Lovelich does not
mention the apparition of the castle but describes Merlin's power of wizardry at greater

length:

> There sawh sche comen vppon a ryng
>
> Boþe lordys and ladyes ful fayrre dawnsyng,
>
> Knyhtes, sqwyers, & manye other men.
>
> Ech be the hond held other then,
>
> Syngeng, daunsyng, makyng gret ioye;
>
> Neuere swich was herd in breteigne the bloye.
>
> And to-forn þat damysele cam there more
>
> Pypes, trumpes, and clariouns also,
>
> Harpe, fithele, sawtre, & melodyes mo,
>
> Tymbres, symbelis, and also þe rote,
>
> Symphanes, concordis, conclaues, god wote.
>
> Tabowrers with chimbys so merye gonne rynge,
>
> Therto many jogelowrs to-forn hire pleyenge. (*Merlin*, ll. 21,379-92)

The abundance of details provides the scene with a higher degree of realism but also entices the readership in that festive atmosphere that will characterize the episode of Ban and Bors arrival in London. Lovelich's greatest achievement in his elaboration of this scene is the way he magnifies the virtuosity of Merlin's wizardry in Viviane's eyes and, consequently, amplifies the response of the audience to the marvellous elements described in the episode. Again, when the heavenly orchard appears, other details are introduced: fruit is hanging on every tree and a greater emphasis, achieved by means of reiteration, is given to the scent spread by many types of flowers:

> An orchard he made there forto schewe
>
> With many diuers trees vppon a rewe,
>
> And on every tre froyt hangynge,
>
> & jn that orchard diuers flowers smellynge.
>
> For so swete was the savowr þere to smelle,
>
> Þat þe mayden thowthe non tonge myht telle. (*Merlin*, ll. 21,401-06)

Much has been said by scholars of Middle English romance about Lovelich's poor literary skills and his incompetence in translating from French into English, but this scene is clearly a successful rendering of its source and the variations introduced add a tinge of conviviality to the episode. Other original elaborations are to be found a few lines later

when Lovelich reports the arrival of the ladies in the orchard, by specifying that they are 'so fayr of fase' (l. 21,446) and wear golden dresses 'with precyows stones hem abowte / On cornalȝ an sercles a ful gret rowte' (ll. 21,443-44).

However, Lovelich's interventions in this episode stretch beyond the descriptive and extend to the relationship between Merlin and Viviane, which gains a greater emphasis than in the source. In the *Estoire*, the relationship between the two characters is based on an exchange of favours governed exclusively by the two characters' contrasting interests – Merlin's irresistible attraction for Viviane and Viviane's dangerous desire for knowledge. Following the enchantment, the *Estoire* reports a dialogue between Merlin and Viviane, where Merlin reminds Viviane of their agreement and Viviane replies that she is going to keep her promise once he has taught her his craft:

> Sire fait ele quel seurte voles vous que ie vous en face . deuises & ie le vous ferai . ie voeil fait il que vous me fianchies que vostre amor soit moie & vous auoeques por faire quantques il me plaira quant iou uoldra . & la pucele pense vn poi & puis dist sire si ferai iou par tel couent que apres chou que vous maures aprins toutes les coses que ie vous demanderai & que ien saurai ouurer . & il li dist que ce li est bel . & la pucele li fiance a tenir couent ensi comme ele li ot deuise. (Sommer, pp. 211-12)

> "Sir," she said, "what pledge would you have me give you? Tell me and I will do it." "I want you to swear," he said, "that your love will be mine, and you along with it, to do whatever I wish whenever I will." And the maiden thought awhile and then said, "Sir, I will do this if, afterwards, you swear to teach me everything I ask you, so that I will know how to do it." He told her that that suited him. And the maiden pledged that she would keep her oath just as she had sworn, and he took her pledge.
> (Lacy, p. 283)

In Lovelich's translation, the relationship between Merlin and Viviane is more developed and Viviane's character shows other facets than mere deviousness. When Merlin questions her reaction to his magic she replies with what seems an outburst of genuine affection:

> "Myn owne swete love," thanne seyde sche,
> "Ȝe han so mochel j-doon for me,

> That J am ȝoure Owne Al Only,
>
> J-sey to ȝow, my swete sire, feythfully." (*Merlin*, ll. 21,473-76)

And again, after Merlin's reminder of their 'covenaunt' (l. 21,478), she does not show any expectation of gaining anything in return, but mildly replies: "Certes, sire," sche seyde, "with ryht good wylle / J wyl performe that j seide ȝow vntylle" (*Merlin*, ll. 21,479-80). Lovelich tames Viviane, remodelling her character in an original way. If, on the one hand, Lovelich's Viviane speaks freely of her feelings for Merlin, on the other her over-affectionate words would probably stir up the scepticism of the most informed audiences – those who would expect Viviane to eventually turn against Merlin. In any case, Viviane's speeches acquire a subtlety that is not discernible in the source and which makes her a much more rounded character than she is in the *Estoire*.

Viviane's dubious goodwill is displayed again almost at the end of the romance, during Arthur's campaign against Claudas and his army who have laid siege to the castle of Trebes. Lovelich foretells Claudas's evil death explaining that later on in the narrative Viviane will warn Lancelot about Claudas's plan to murder Boors and Lionel, a warning that is not present in the *Estoire*:

> Now wilen ȝe heren how þat warned he was
>
> Of this treson ordeyned jn that plas;
>
> Be on Nymyane, the lady of lake
>
> Which Launcelot euere for gentry sake
>
> Hire gouerned ay sethen he was knyht. (*Merlin*, ll. 27,220-33)

Lovelich's surprising attentiveness to the figure of Viviane and her romantic relationship with Merlin – which could be seen as French rather than traditionally English concerns – sets his work apart from the previous translation of the *Estoire*, and in particular *AM*. Whilst Lovelich seems to make the most of the liaison between Merlin and Viviane, even expanding on magic and personal feelings, in *AM* Viviane is mentioned only once and, for some obscure reason, her powers are compared to those of two other sorcerers, Morgane and the less famous Carmile, sister of a rich Soudan named Hardogabran (ll. 4,438-40). The narrative breaks off before Merlin's imprisonment by Viviane but not before Merlin and Viviane's first encounter by the well, an episode which is completely omitted by the poet:

> Wiþouten Arthours so[ster] abast –

> Morgein forsoþe was her name
>
> And woned wiþouten Nimiane
>
> That wiþ hir queint gin
>
> Bigiled þe gode clerk Merlin. (*AM*, ll. 4,444-48)

According to Macrae-Gibson, the *AM* somehow misread his source here, using Nimiane/Viviane as a geographical name due to the presence of 'without'.[58] However, 'wiþouten' is used twice in l. 4,444 and l. 4,446 and seem to mean 'in addition to' or, as noted by Knight, 'with the exception of/except' rather than 'outside', hence suggesting that the *AM* author was well aware of who Viviane is and what her role is in the story.[59] Even though the passage anticipates Merlin's unfortunate fate and hints at Viviane's crafty and yet seductive nature – 'hir quaint gin' (l. 4,447) – no mention is made of the two characters' romantic liaison. Macrae-Gibson believed that even if the romance did not break off before Merlin's final imprisonment the poet would not have included it in the narrative as he did not appear to be interested in the sub-plot involving the two characters.[60] However, these interventions cannot simply be ascribed to the poet's personal tastes but appear to be consistent with the *AM* poet's intention of adapting his romance to a different audience. The story of Merlin and Viviane's encounter operates in the *Estoire* as a self-contained episode displaying a facet of Merlin's character that cannot be found elsewhere in the narrative. In this case, it is Merlin's representation as a courtly lover that the *AM* poet is rejecting. As Stephen Knight has observed, such a transformation was an elaboration on the part of the author of the *Estoire* and an expression of the secular courtly context of the romance.[61] The *AM* author, who was composing the romance for a provincial gentry household, was interested in highlighting only those of Merlin's traits that would be appropriate for his romance and his audience at the expense of others, presenting Merlin as a source of wise counsel.[62]

As has been shown in this section, Lovelich's treatment of Guenevere and Viviane detaches his romance from the previous English translations of the *Estoire* but also from traditional fifteenth-century English romance – which is not usually expected to replicate, let alone further develop, the distinctive features of their French originals. Abbreviation

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[58] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 118.

[59] Knight, *Merlin*, p. 87

[60] Macrae-Gibson, 'Introduction', in *Of Arthour*, p. 8.

[61] Knight, *Merlin*, p. 66.

[62] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, p. 62.

and an emphasis on chivalric action usually replace dialogue and introspection, while political themes such as governance and kingship are emphasised and further elaborated to the expense of psychological scrutiny and characterization.

In Lovelich's longer and more refined dialogues between the two women and their lovers, Guenevere and Viviane are given a voice to express their innermost feelings and display fresh facets of their personality. Moreover, in the passages discussed, Lovelich's surprising amplifications nurture the audience's imagination with fine sensuous descriptions of the characters' surroundings. In the next section, Lovelich's use of descriptive *amplificatio* will be investigated further, demonstrating how this was prompted by his vision of the place where he belonged: fifteenth-century London.

2.4   Lovelich and London: the City and Its Social Reality in *Merlin*

Thanks to Lovelich's own testimony we can be certain that he translated directly from the French, and that his source was one of the versions of the *Estoire* that were circulating in London in his time. Lovelich does not explain why he decided to undertake the translation or what the complete project would entail. He does not even mention whether his work was commissioned by a patron (or a buyer) or was the fruit of his personal interest in Arthuriana. In these respects, it is only thanks to a marginal comment on fol. 127r of Corpus Christi 80 that we are able to shed some light on the history of the manuscript:

> J henr' louelich skynner' þt translated þs boke oute of ffrensche in to
> englysshe at þe instaunce of harry bartoun.[63]

This note, written at a later stage with a darker type of ink than that used in the main text, seems to be the work of the same hand that annotated the rest of the manuscript, and which has been identified with the hand of John Cok, a brother of St Bartholomew's Hospital.[64] This note not only provides evidence for the identification of Lovelich as the author of the romance but it connects his name to that of Harry Barton, a skinner and an eminent member of the London Company of Skinners. The extant records of Harry Barton attest that, in addition to being a distinguished member of the Company, he held the office of sheriff of London from 1405 to 1406 and that of mayor twice from 1416 to 1417 and

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[63] A transcription of the note was published in Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 475.
[64] Skeat, 'The Translator of the Graal', p. 684. See also A. I. Doyle, 'More Light on John Shirley, *Medium Aevum* 30 (1961), 93-101.

then from 1428 to 1429.[65] Even though Barton was a wealthier and a more prominent member of the company by far than Lovelich may have been, the evidence provided by the manuscript seems to suggest that the relationship between the two men may have been a friendly one. Critics have speculated that Cok's annotation might imply that Lovelich wrote his two romances as a personal favour to Barton, who might have been unable to read the French originals.[66]

The connection between Barton and Lovelich was further substantiated by the discovery in 1903 of Barton's will in the Hustings Rolls of the City of London, where a certain Henricum Lovelich is described as 'civem et pelliparium' of London.[67] The name of Lovelich and that of his wife Margaret are mentioned several times in the will with regard to some property transaction that he must have concluded on behalf of Barton. Meale, however, has reconsidered the implications of Cok's marginalium, suggesting that perhaps Lovelich's work 'was intended for a wider circulation than it might seem'.[68] She claims that the annotation on fol. 127r could be read in a different light and that Cok's use of the word 'instaunce' resembles the same commercial connotation of some expressions to be found in Caxton's prologues to his prose romances: in the mercantile vocabulary the Middle English 'instaunce' bears the meaning of 'demand, request' and this might imply that perhaps the manuscript was given to Barton through a commercial transaction rather than as a friendly gift. Meale also notes that the manuscript must be the result of a professional rather than an amateurish enterprise for the care with which the text was copied.[69] Her idea seems to be confirmed by the numerous spaces for illustrations in both the *Holy Grail* and the *Merlin*, which were supposed to be filled in at a later stage of production but were never completed.

Although the lack of ownership marks at the beginning and the end of the manuscript makes it impossible to establish whether the book was Barton's personal copy, we know that the texts in Corpus Christi 80 were not written by Lovelich himself.[70] It has even been speculated that Lovelich might have composed his romances on wax tablets or

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[65] Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 337-40. See also Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 323.

[66] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 476.

[67] A transcription of the will can be found in F. J. Furnivall, 'Henry Lovelich Skinner', *Athenaeum* 3924 (10 Jan. 1903), 50-51.

[68] Meale, 'Gode men', p. 219.

[69] *Ibid*.

[70] See also Doyle, 'More Light on John Shirley', p. 92.

sheets of paper, and that these were then handed to one or more scribes who copied the material into the manuscript.[71] The characteristics of the manuscript as well as the possibility that more than one person was involved in the copying of Lovelich's texts seem to suggest that the final product was supposed to be an object of considerable artistic value, rather than a simple translation for a friend who had some difficulties in reading French.

Another important connection can be drawn between Lovelich and another contemporary poet who was similarly rooted in the urban and mercantile context of the London companies: John Lydgate. As Warren has demonstrated, Lydgate and Lovelich were writing for the same urban public, and their writings reflect the aspirations of those merchants and members of the guilds who belonged to the commercial and political elites of the city.[72] Like Lydgate, Lovelich was deeply immersed in the culture of the capital and its intricate network, including guildsmen and high-placed citizens, prominent members of the political and literary spheres, indicating that he was a less isolated and eccentric figure than previously thought.

Moreover, Lovelich's work deserves to be re-evaluated in the light of the most recent palaeographical findings: if the manuscript was not the fruit of a spontaneous act of friendship but was specifically commissioned and purchased by Barton and presumably a project involving more than one scribe, then the circulation and the reception of Lovelich's romances acquires a greater significance, reflecting the interest of the London merchant classes in Arthurian literature.

Henry Lovelich's extensive literary production is the most distinguished example of a Londoner's passion for Arthurian literature, which he seems to have shared with the upper echelons of London's municipality. However, his case is not unique: other merchants of the capital are known to have owned copies of Arthurian romances, proving that these were in demand in the city; Boffey's and Meale's research on late medieval miscellanies has singled out the names of a number of late medieval owners of Arthurian romance, such as John Colyns who owned the stanzaic *Morte Arthure*; the mercer and alderman John Keme, whose name was found on a copy of the *Awyntyrs of Arthur;* John and Thomas Pateshale, associated with the members of the Mercers' Company in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and who owned Lambeth Palace Library MS 491,

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[71] Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', p. 474.
[72] Warren, 'Lydgate, Lovelich, and London Letters', in *Lydgate Matters*, p. 114.

containing a copy of the *Awntyrs*.[73] The presence of many Arthurian romances in these miscellanies gives us a glimpse of the popularity of the genre, but also of the heterogeneous literary interests of late medieval merchants.

The role played by the London merchant classes in the purchase and consumption of literature has been fully acknowledged by both literary scholars and historians.[74] The impressive number of Arthurian romances circulating within London demonstrates that the genre was particularly rooted in the capital, which functioned as the fulcrum of its transmission and dissemination during both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In total, twenty-five manuscripts contain Arthurian works and of these, eleven are believed to have been produced or circulated in London.[75] The oldest is the Auchinleck MS which has been discussed in Chapter 1 and contains a series of romances that have been ascribed to a single authorship and London provenance.[76] Nine other manuscripts which included Arthurian romances have been dated to the fifteenth century.[77] Finally, two Arthurian romances can be found in two sixteenth-century manuscripts produced in London: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C. 86, which contains *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, and London, British Library, MS Harley 6223, comprising a sixty-two-verse fragment of a copy of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. To this number, another manuscript that is associated with the dissemination of texts produced in the capital should be added: Hale 150, containing the fifteenth-century copy of *AM* analysed in the previous chapter. The provenance of this collection, in view of the dialect used by the scribe and the sixteenth-century ownership of the book, points to the Shropshire area.[78] However, the content of Hale 150 derives from texts that are known to have circulated in London – versions of the Auchinleck *AM* and *King Alisaunder*; *Lybeaus Desconus* and a copy of *Piers Plowman A*. As Ralph Hanna's work on London literature has shown, since 1400 the metropolitan community had been involved not only in the production of texts but also in their export outside the capital, and Hale 150 bears evidence to this practice:

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[73] Boffey and Meale, 'Selecting the Text', p. 161.

[74] See Hanna, *London Literature*, and Boffey and Meale, 'Selecting the Text', pp. 143-69.

[75] See Newstead, 'Arthurian Legends', pp. 38-79 and Boffey and Meale, 'Selecting the Text', p. 161.

[76] See 1.1 for further information.

[77] These are the following: Corpus Christi MS 80: Lovelich's *Merlin* and *History of the Holy Grail*; Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 3. 11: *Prose Merlin*; London British Library MS Add. 59768: Malory's *Morte Darthur*; London British Library Harley 2252: the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*; London Lambeth Palace MS 306: *Libeaus Desconus*; London Lambeth Palace MS 491: *The Awntyrs off Arthure*; Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Douce 324: another copy of *The Awntyrs of Arthur*; Oxford Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS D. 93: fragment of the *Prose Merlin*.

[78] Horobin and Wiggins, 'Reconsidering Lincoln's Inn', p. 31.

> The exemplars underlying Hale 150 presumably ended up where they did
> as the result of the forays in and out of the capital by a servant of
> prominent local lords as he went about the business of his masters, the
> Fitzalan earls of Arundel, in their guise as barons of Clun and
> Oswestry.[79]

Hanna's argument implies that it is likely that a greater number of Arthurian romances than those which have survived had been produced/copied in and around London, a region of great importance for the development of Arthurian romance.

However, the data on the circulation of Arthurian romance have other implications that, for the argument of this thesis, deserve to be considered. All four translations of the *Estoire* analysed in this thesis are connected – for their production or circulation - to the London area and three of them are contained in manuscripts that were available in, or were closely associated with, the capital.[80] Therefore, these romances can be grouped together not only due to the fact that they share a common French-language source, but also on geographical grounds. In this perspective, Henry Lovelich's work needs be placed in the thriving literary activity of the production of Arthurian romance in the capital.

If Lovelich's literary activity can be situated in the London municipal scene, so can the narrative of his *Merlin*. Lovelich's reshaped the geography of his source by stressing the urban features of the narrative as well as expanding the descriptions of the scenes set in the city. As first noted by Dalrymple, the emphasis on the urban is primarily achieved by means of lexical variation: 'for Lovelich is very much a London poet, and when the focus of action is civic the narration picks up'.[81] Lovelich transforms the Arthurian landscape by having the narrator and its audience move through a distinctively urbanized territory, mapped by towns and cities. The words 'cyte' and 'town' feature throughout the romance (much more in Lovelich's text than in the *Estoire*), and the general terms to describe the people (e. g. 'cels de dedens', Sommer, p. 140; 'Those inside', Lacy, p. 243) are often replaced by the more appropriate 'ceteʒeines' (ll. 13,598; 13,613 etc.). Even when the *Estoire* remains vague about the localities where particular events take place, Lovelich has a tendency to introduce more specific geographical references. For example, when the judges are looking for Merlin's mother in order to imprison her in the tower, where the *Estoire* says 'tant que li iuge vindrent en la terre' (p. 11; 'until the judges came

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[79] Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 16.
[80] *AM*, *Merlyn*, *Merlin* and the *Prose Merlin.*
[81] Dalrymple, 'Evele knowen', p. 163.

to the region', p. 172) Lovelich prefers the more accurate 'thanne comen [they] jnto the same town' (l. 871). Another clear example of how Lovelich urbanizes the narrative can be seen in the scene where Arthur's messengers, on a mission to seek the allegiance of Ban and Bors, reach the 'chastel de benoyc' (p. 100). In *Merlin*, the castle is reworded as the 'cyte of Baynoyc' (l. 9,054) and the man who takes the horses is not a simple 'escuier' (p. 100) as in the *Estoire* but is described as 'a good man of the town' (l. 9,062), in other words a citizen. This and other remarks such as 'the worthy burgeys of that cyte' (l. 8,748) 'fair cite […] / with iij thousend men bothe goode & lel' (ll. 12,597; 600) place city life and citizenship in a positive light and account for Lovelich's civic pride. These word-choices also reflect Lovelich's tendency to describe the social stratification of the urban and mercantile context he was familiar with – and which will be discussed later.

Even the realm of Logres, where much of the narrative is set and which in the *Estoire* is not identified with any specific place, is identified with London rather than England:

And sethen to Logres he wente, j vndirstond,

That now is clepyd Londone jn Engelond. (*Merlin*, ll. 8,553-54)

'Londone in Breteine' (*Merlin*, l. 12,994) (see also ll. 25,527-28)

This variation is, however, not unique to Lovelich, but can also be found in both the *Prose Merlin* and Malory's *Morte Darthur* so as to suggest that in the fifteenth century it was quite common for an English audience to see London as the capital of Arthur's realm. What is more striking in Lovelich's *Merlin* is that the centrality of London in the Arthurian world is often emphasised through several descriptive expansions, which depict London as the secure headquarters for Arthur and his community: 'the chyef cyte of Artheur the kyng' (l. 12,995), 'the stronge cite of Arthewr the kyng' (l. 21,817). Lovelich's lexical choices also transform the setting of the narrative so as to make it identifiable and imaginable for the audience: when Arthur arranges a tournament to celebrate the arrival of Ban and Bors, Lovelich specifies that the tournament is set 'at Londone faste by temses syde' (l. 9,412), perhaps drawing on his personal experience watching tournaments and public gatherings in Smithfield near the river Thames. Smithfield, which in medieval documents is referred to as the 'king's field' or the 'common ground', was a 'border area' where the common people would be able to watch the tournaments and glimpse the King and the royal entourage. The tournaments in Smithfield were festive occasions preceded by processions, offering the opportunity to

social demarcation.[82] Smithfield was where the famous tournaments in honour of Edward III and Richard II where held in the second half of the thirteenth century.[83]

Further major changes to the narrative of the *Estoire* involve the landscape and setting of the narrative. Lovelich's translation emphasises the function of the city as the safe place where, once hostilities are suspended, the Arthurian community withdraws. The city is also the core of Arthur's political power and the headquarters for crucial decision-making: it is in the closed chambers of the palaces where the country's greatest leaders – Arthur, Merlin, and the barons – meet up to discuss military strategy and possible alliances. Most importantly, the urban landscape of the city is the setting in which the whole Arthurian community is invited to assemble and celebrate. Lovelich's innovative picture is one that reflects the reality of a municipal rather than provincial milieu: it shows the existence and the importance of a hierarchical order within society and, at the same time, it portrays public gatherings and celebrations as occasions where social distinctions are transcended for the sake of ritual. It is in such public events that it is possible to get a glimpse of how Lovelich's translation goes beyond the simple linguistic transfer and shows how changes in time and space have affected the narrative.

Lovelich's representation of reality (and in particular the social reality) derives from his own experience as a citizen and merchant living in the capital. When the two kings Ban and Bors arrive at London it is time for Arthur to follow Merlin's advice and welcome the two brothers 'in merie processiown' (l. 9,252), as is appropriate for men of such high lineage:

> The Kyng Artheur & al his baronye,
>
> Therchebisschope of Dover with his clergye,
>
> Thus with processioun they hem metten, sykerle.
>
> Thanne gret kysseng & joye there men myhten se.
>
> Thus toward the cyte passeden they there,
>
> Where as dawnsyng many maidenis were
>
> With many karoles & ryht merye song,
>
> At that tyme was these maidenis among. (*Merlin*, ll. 9,269-76)

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[82] Sheila Lindenbaum, 'The Smithfield Tournament of 1390', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 20:1 (1990), 1-20.

[83] Lindenbaum, 'The Smithfield Tournament of 1390', p. 8.

Lovelich stretches and refines the *Estoire* description (Sommer, pp. 101-02; Lacy p. 223), adding a number of details that enhance the sensuous perception of the scene, giving the audience more elements with which to picture the urban landscape. Before the beginning of the procession, the streets of the 'cite' are cleared up and decorated with silk cloth for the arrival of the two brothers; even the weather comes to Arthur's aid and the clear skies appear almost as if to guarantee the success of the event. However, Lovelich's description goes even further; damsels are dancing in the streets while the young men are jousting, and the streets are illuminated by special scented lights:

> Whanne that these kynges jn þe cite were,
>
> Daunsyng of ladies syen thei there,
>
> Torneyeng of bacheleris ȝonge,
>
> That alday lasted jnto evensong.
>
> More ouer alle the stretis of the cyte
>
> With clothis of sylk weren hanged, sikerle.
>
> And bothe fayr wedyr and cler hyt was,
>
> For nethyr rein ne hayl þat day þere nas.
>
> And alle the stretys with lampes hanged were,
>
> And euerich lampe ful of bawm was there,
>
> Whiche that brenden so swetely,
>
> That al the cyte þere-offen savourede, trewly,
>
> So that the swete odowr smellyd myhte han be
>
> Half a myle thanne, ful certeinle. (*Merlin*, ll. 9,299-312)

The odour of the lamps that fills the streets up recreates that festive atmosphere of an urban celebration. Radulescu makes a link between Lovelich's emphasis on the lamps, and Harry Barton, his patron, who is credited with having introduced a system of lighting in London.[84] The records show that this major innovation for the capital involved not only the use of hanging lanterns but also the employment of thousands of men to carry the lanterns around the city:

> He ordained that lanthorns with lights should be hung out on the winter
> evenings betwixt Hallowtide and Candlemas. Beside these, every
> constable in London had his cresset or lanthorn, the charge for which was

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[84] Radulescu, *Romance and its Contexts*, p. 130.

in lights iis. iiid.; each cresset had two men, one to bear or hold it, and
another to carry a bag with lights to serve it. There were about 2,000 men
so employed. Each one beside his wage had his breakfast, and was
furnished with a straw hat on which a number was conspicuously
displayed. Five hundred cressets were furnished by the City Companies,
and the rest by the Chamber of London.[85]

Then a 'processioun' commences and the royal party sets off for the event 'with cros,
baneris and gomfanoun' (ll. 9,315-16), symbols of both religious and municipal
authorities. The account provided in the *Estoire* is much drier and even though the event is
described as a 'procession', it lacks the festive overtone that characterizes Lovelich's
description:

> Lors saparelle li rois artus & satourne comme por les . jj . rois recheuoir .
> si atendi en tel maniere iuscal diemence . lors monta li rois & si baron &
> sa maisnie & li arceuesques de brete & lor uont al encontre a grant
> procession. (Sommer, p. 102)

> Then King Arthur prepared to welcome the two kings, and he waited
> until Sunday. Then the king, his barons and household, and the
> Archbishop of Brice mounted their horses and went out to meet them in a
> grand procession. (Lacy, p. 223)

Lovelich transforms what was supposed to be a welcome befitting the two kings into a
dazzling panoply and an occasion for the city to show off its finest array.

It should be noted that some similarities can indeed be discerned between Lovelich's
Merlin and the *Prose Merlin* as far as this particular passage is concerned. The *Prose
Merlin* description of the episode is longer and more detailed than the one provided in
Sommer's edition, giving further evidence to the hypothesis that Lovelich's *Merlin* and the
Prose Merlin derived from similar copies of the *Estoire* (not used by Sommer for his
edition). However, Lovelich's version contains specific evocative details that further
enhance the realism of the scene. For instance, in the *Prose Merlin,* when King Arthur, his
barons and the Archbishop go to meet Ban and Bors, they are on horseback and welcome
them with what sounds like a joyful, but at the same time, quite solemn reception:

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[85] See James F. Wadmore, *Some Accounts of the Worshipful Company of Skinners of London, Being the
Guild or Fraternity of Corpus Christi* (London: Blades, East and Blades, 1902), pp. 152-53.

> And the kynge and hys barouns were on horse-bak, and the archebisshop
>
> yede a-gein hem with grete procession; and ther as they dide mete, grete
>
> was the ioye and the wurship that eche of hem did to other, and so they
>
> entred in-to the town alle to-geder, and ther thei were met with caroles
>
> and daunces, and with all maner of ioye. (*Prose Merlin*, p. 132).

Lovelich, instead, has Arthur and his retinue giving a hearty welcome to the two kings on foot, so that 'thane gret kysseng & ioye there men myhten se' (l. 9,272), and more than once refers to the maidens who, singing and dancing, mingle in the procession (see quotation above, ll. 9,269-76). Again, in the passage that follows, the *Prose Merlin* author describes how the city has been decorated for the arrival of the two kings. However, the city is not lit by lamps filled with scented balm hanging from the city walls, but by the many lights that could be seen through the buildings' windows (*Prose Merlin*, pp. 132-133).

Lovelich, who usually tends to adhere to his source, must have been particularly keen on this passage and expanded it using his own experience of celebrations in London. Dalrymple has rightly pointed out how Lovelich highlights the 'festive context' of specific scenes, and that his description and specific word-choices project London 'as a site of tournament ad pageantry'.[86] As a member of the Company of Skinners, he must have attended the annual feast of Corpus Christi, to which the fraternity of Corpus Christi was dedicated.[87] For the Skinners of London the day of Corpus Christi was the most important day of the year. Firstly, it was the occasion when new officers and functionaries were elected by the Company members. Secondly the Skinners were traditionally in charge of organising the famous Corpus Christi procession – a privilege that they are recorded to have held as early as 1393 – which was one of the most salient social events in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century London.[88]

The feast was celebrated every year in the capital and in the rest of the country on a day that fell between the end of May and the end of June.[89] To give further evidence about the similarities between the account of the procession in *Merlin* and the Corpus Christi

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[86] Dalrymple, p. 39-40. Dalrymple, in particular, draws a comparison between Lovelich's descriptions of such scenes with Lydgate's celebratory lines on the return of Henry VI from Calais in 1432, which were commissioned by the aldermen of London (p. 39).

[87] Thrupp, *The Merchant*, p. 30.

[88] Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 111.

[89] Mervyn James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past & Present* 98 (1983), 3-39 (p. 3).

ritual, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century records of Corpus Christi processions taking place in London registered the sale of flags and canopies, flower garlands, and a great number of torches. Even though the records do not mention any lamps being filled with balm, they do indicate the purchase of decorations for the torches as well as the payment of a cross bearer and several torchbearers to serve on the day.[90]

The ritual of the Corpus Christi feast, which in towns and cities was particularly elaborate, had both a religious and a secular character. The day opened with a mass during which the Host was consecrated to represent the Corpus Christi, the body of Christ; a procession of congregates followed where the Host was solemnly carried on a route through the principal streets of the town to some other church where the Host was deposited. The procession was attended by the most important social groupings – the clergy, the members of the guilds and the town authorities – moving through crowds of citizens and proceeding according to a specific order of precedence: the humblest crafts marching at the head of the parade and the highest liverymen, aldermen and the religious authorities following behind them.[91] Last in the procession came the mayor who paraded side by side with the bishop/priest who was carrying the host.[92] In addition to the religious meaning of the feast, Corpus Christi functioned as a display of the articulate framework of power and authority that held the urban community together. However, the participation of the entire community in the procession shows the Corpus Christi feast as a socially inclusive act that, once a year, involved the whole range of urban social reality – from the mayor to citizens and visitors who viewed the processions from the sides of the streets. Just as the Corpus Christi symbolized the body of Christ, the feast represented the urban social body in its wholeness.[93]

Warren has paid much attention to Lovelich's perception of social reality as reflected in his *Merlin*, observing that 'Lovelich's text is socially inclusive where the French is hierarchical' and its depiction of society expresses 'the profound difficulty of defining clear social boundaries in the urban community'.[94] Certainly, far from representing an egalitarian society, Lovelich's picture of London is socially inclusive, in the sense that every social grouping is represented on the page. However, this does not

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[90] Lawrence Blair, 'A Note on the Relation of the Corpus Christi Procession to the Corpus Christi Play in England', *MLN* 55:2 (1940), 83-95 (pp. 88-91).
[91] Veale, *The English Fur Trade*, p. 111.
[92] James, 'Ritual', p. 5.
[93] James, 'Ritual', p. 11.
[94] Warren, 'Translation', pp. 55-56.

necessarily create such a great contrast with the hierarchical depiction of society as found in the *Estoire*. In Lovelich's version as in the *Estoire*, the hierarchical sequence of the procession is particularly stressed. Here Lovelich is not trying to subvert the social order he found in his source but rather to reconcile it with a later one with which both Lovelich and his audience would have been more familiar. Late medieval urban societies, and in particular London as the core of England's political power, were just as fragmented as thirteenth-century French aristocratic society. A thick line could be drawn between those who were recognized as citizens and those who were marginalized as aliens. Within the companies, a clear distinction had existed among the middle class between those who wore the livery and the rest of the members of a company. An example of this is Lovelich himself, who was a less important member of the Skinners' Company than Harry Barton – he was just a *cives* while Barton was alderman and mayor. This would be demonstrated by the absence of Lovelich's will amongst records and his involvement in other people's business transactions.[95] Unfortunately, to date, it has not been possible to establish what his exact occupation was within the company of Skinners. Even though we can trace the names of a company's members, as Sylvia Thrupp has shown, it is very hard to distinguish between the different activities of tradesmen within each craft, as these are unlikely to be mentioned in the records.[96] However, a rough distinction can be made for the so-called greater companies between the members who were involved in wholesales and those who just worked as retailers or artisans. Such a distinction existed in the Company of Skinners since the fourteenth century: the records of the company testify to the existence of skinners who manufactured the goods that were then sold by the company's merchants; these skinners did not own a shop but just a chamber that served as a workshop.[97] Therefore, the actual image of the community in which Lovelich lived and worked was one where social boundaries could be easily visualized.

This was even clearer when the Corpus Christi procession was accompanied by 'pageants', wheeled moving platforms where actors would represent scenes from the Scriptures. The arrangement of the pageants was the responsibility of the guilds and the wagons stopped at particular stages of the procession where the dramatic scenes would be performed. In many cases, the representations took the form of extended plays that were eventually written down in the famous Corpus Christi play cycles, which have survived in

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[95] See my discussion of Barton's will earlier in this chapter (p. 131).
[96] Thrupp, 'The Merchant', p. 12.
[97] Thrupp, 'The Merchant', p. 12.

a number of English cities.[98] The procession and the plays' greater function was to enhance the prestige and the 'honour' of the community: the wealth of the artefacts employed and the lavishness of the costumes would attract the attention of nobles and kings. The scale and the elaborate progression of the event was especially planned so as to enhance the honour of the community in the eyes of the outside world.[99] In the same way, the honour of the guilds, visible in the decorations of a wagon and the actor's costumes and accessories, was at stake when the plays were being performed. In other words, the pageants of Corpus Christi were occasions in which the work and the social position of the various guilds and their occupational communities could be recognized and appreciated. Lovelich was aware that the Corpus Christi feast was a pivotal moment for the company and its members so it is not surprising that when he found the short passage describing the procession in his source, he was prompted to expand it and recreate the sense of a scene he had witnessed so many times in his life.

Lovelich's lexical choices also demonstrate that the *Estoire* has been subjected to a process of social adaptation in order to conciliate the social organization of the French romance with that of his own time. As shown by Warren, Lovelich's translation embraces a wider social spectrum offering a different portrayal of social categories than that found in the *Estoire*.[100] After the battle against the six kings Arthur first goes to Wales, where he garrisons cities and castles, and returns to London, where, after having distributed many gifts to the people around him, he wins the love of everyone, 'knyht, Sqwyer and comunealte' (l. 8,566). Lovelich's selection of the word 'comunealte' to define a distinct social class is noteworthy as the term was not just used to describe the common people, but, in the urban context, carried the additional meaning of 'the body of citizens as distinct from governmental officials and men residents' and, even more interestingly, 'the membership of a guild'.[101] Lovelich's use of the word is not recorded in the *MED* and there is no citation that shows that the word was ever used in a romance. Most of the examples provided by the *MED* come from commercial and governmental texts, or from the chronicles, dated to as early as 1425: these include the *Petition in defense of the liberties of Chester*[102], the *Rolls of Parliament*, several versions of the *Prose Brut*[103], the

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[98] See for example the Chester and York cycles that have survived in their almost complete state.

[99] James, 'Ritual', p. 17.

[100] Warren, 'Translation', p. 56.

[101] See the entry 'communalte' on the *MED* at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ (retrieved on 25-10-2013).

[102] 'All the Clergy, Barons, Knyghtes, Squiers, & all the cominaltee of your comite palatyne of Chestre' [H. D. Harrod, 'A Defence of the Liberties of Chester, 1450,' *Archaeologia* 57 (1900), 75-77, p. 75].

Short English Chronicle[104], and the *Excerpts from the account book of the Brewers' Craft, London*[105]. The addition of the new social category 'communealte' to the traditional opposition between noble and non-noble allows Lovelich to conflate the social reality of his source with that in which he lived.

Another example of Lovelich's portrayal of society can be observed when Arthur's new allies, the Kings Ban and Bors go to pay homage to Arthur, and, entering London 'they fownden ful gret plente / of divers peple there' (l. 9,056). The term 'divers' has here a qualitative rather than a quantitative connotation, thus taking the meaning 'of various kind', and this addition makes even more sense if one thinks that the scene is not set within the walls of a castle but through the streets of a city, offering the picture of variegated crowds of inhabitants. Moreover, the heterogeneity of the crowd is described by means of a succession of phrases indicating status and wealth: 'riche and powre' (l. 9,288), 'bothe to hye and to lowe' (l. 9,294), 'eche man jn his degre' (l. 9,295). The latter, in particular, is a phrase that Lovelich employs countless times in his romance and which emphasises social distinction.

Warren rightly observes that Lovelich reflects the set of values within the merchant class of fifteenth-century London and therefore defines social difference in terms of wealth rather than status.[106] A clear example of this can be seen when Lovelich relates the aftermath of the war between the brothers Ban and Bors and King Claudas:

> & dautre part deuers la terre de gaunes entra li rois bohors qui freres
> estoit au roy ban si arst asses de la terre claudas & arst asses de ses uilles
> si en prinst tant comme il en pot auoir car il mist a destruction tout le pais
> si que vous ne truisies mie dedens . xv . lieues ou vous puisies herbergier
> en couert . se ce ne fuist sor roche naie ou en chelier desous terre . si en
> fu claudas si amatis & si apouris quil se tint si cois quil nosa entrer en la
> terre le roy ban iusqua grant piece apres . Mais puis greua il les . ij .
> freres moult durement si comme vous orres dire al conte cha auant.

[103] 'A feue of þe grettste persones of stat..he sent into Engelond..& al þe communialte of þe toun þe king lete go' (*The Brut, or, the Chronicles of England*, ed. by Friedrich W. D. Brie, EETS OS 131, 136 (London, 1906-1908), pp. 301-12).

[104] 'The Maire, Aldurmen, and Shoryvis, with all the comenalte of the Cite, him resseyved right worthily' (*Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. by James Gairdner, *Works of the Camdem Society* NS 28 [London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2007), p. 61].

[105] 'All þe comynalte of þe Cite, and all þe Cite, was well plesed with hym' (Harrod, 'A Defence of the Liberties', p. 182).

[106] Warren, 'Translation', p. 55.

Furthermore, King Bors, who was King Ban's brother, moved into the
land of Gaunes, and he burnt a great deal of King Caludas' land and set
fire to many of his towns, and he took as much booty as he could, for he
laid waste the country so that you could not find shelter under cover
anywhere within fifteen leagues other than beside rocks or in cellars
below ground. And King Claudas had been brought so low and made so
poor that he kept quiet. He did not dare to move into King Ban's land for
a long time afterwards, but then he brought very grievous harm to the
two brothers, as you will hear in the story farther along. (Lacy, p. 221)

Lovelich underlines the financial consequences of the conflict, using the adjective
'emporyssched' (l. 8,767) (see also 'emporysched' [ll. 8,859; 9,139]) to describe Claudas'
loss of economic power. The simplification made here by Lovelich is noteworthy,
showing that he is assessing the gravity of the destruction and pillaging in the realm of
Carmelide on economic grounds. By means of repetitions, Lovelich lingers on the
dramatic effects of the war on Carmelide, which in his description becomes the 'Cyte of
Desert':

On anothir partye entryd kyng Boors anon,

That half-brothyr was to kyng Ban,

Jnto kyng Clawdas lond entrede he than,

And þere brende and dyde distrocciown

Abowten al hi lond jn vyrown

Jnto the Cyte of Desert ;

Thedyr he brend ful sone and apert,

And that lond distroyede al abowte,

That nowher for hym non man myhte rowte.

So gret distrocciown there he dede,

That jn twenty myle of lengthe & brede

No man jn that lond loggen myhte,

To liggen drye be day ne be nyhte,

But ȝif undir roche oþer undir erthe hit were,

Cowde no man drye loggen hym there.

So was kyng Clawdas *emporysched* there tho,

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> That he ne wyste what he myhte do,
>
> So on the kynges dorste he non more were make,
>
> Lest hit scholde hym torne to sorwen and wrake.
>
> *Thus fownden they this long distroyed & brent,*
>
> They that on kyng Arthewris message went,
>
> And merveylled mochel of this thing
>
> As jn the contre they paste ryding. (*Merlin*, ll. 8,844-66, emphasis mine)

Even the distinctions between the various social groupings are affected by Lovelich's utilitarian view of society. He has the habit of presenting society as broadly divided between rich and poor, sometimes failing to mention the connection between wealth and nobility, which in the *Estoire* is always remarked on. For example, when the Archbishop warns the aspirants to the trial of the sword in the stone that nobody, either rich or poor, should question the outcome of the election, Lovelich explains:

> For love, for hate, neþer for envye,
>
> Whethir to pore or to riche it happe, trewlye,
>
> That non man aȝens this elexioun ne be. (*Merlin*, ll. 7,052-55)

The warning contained in the *Estoire* is slightly different: no one, not even the noble and the wealthy, should question the outcome of the trial: 'rikeche ne hautece ne gentilleche ni aura ia mestier fors la uolente de ihesu crist' (Sommer, p. 82; 'wealth and high rank and nobility will have nothing to do with it, but only the will of Jesus Christ', Lacy, p. 212). As the story continues, in the *Estoire* the highest-born and the wealthiest men are not satisfied with the Archbishop's decision and claim that they should be the first to have a go – clearly, in view of their privileged social position: 'li plus haut home & li plus rice qui la forche auoient distrent quil lassaieroient auant' (Sommer, p. 82; 'the highest born and the wealthiest men who had the strength to do so said that they would try it first', Lacy p. 212). Lovelich reports instead that even the commons take part in the dispute:

> Thanne began there ful gret discord
>
> Betwixen communes, gentyles, and lord,
>
> That to ony enerytaunce hadden ryght. (*Merlin*, ll. 7,070-73)

The commoners, in the *Estoire* as well as in Lovelich's text, will not be allowed to engage in the trial before the nobles but, at least in Lovelich's translation, they acquire the right to protest. The inclusion of the commoners in this scene as in the actual trial (ll. 7,149-50;

7,451-53) is indicative of the slowly growing importance of the lower classes in the political sphere in fifteenth-century England.

Later on, the Archbishop explains to the crowd that neither lineage nor wealth will be key qualities to succeed in the trial and Lovelich follows the source closely with the observation: 'neythir gentrye ne richesse this day / ne schal not onlych his wille hauen here' (ll. 7,084-85) and again that 'ho that this wile on hym take, / be he neuere, so hygh, prowd, oþer Riche' (ll. 7,118-29). However, in the lines that follow, Lovelich supplements the source with an explanatory expansion:

> Loke ʒe pore men ne ben not wroth,
>
> Thowgh that the riche to ʒow ben loth,
>
> Thowgh they assayen the swerd to-fore,
>
> For grettere thanne ʒe they ben & worthiere more.' (*Merlin*, ll. 7,121-24)

Lovelich gives what seems a personal judgement that betrays his bias in favour of the wealthy upper classes. Although the poorer will be allowed to participate in the trial, the 'riche' have the right to pull the sword first by virtue of the higher social position they occupy – that is, entirely on account of their wealth.

In another instance, he expands on the *Estoire*'s description of a character so as to intensify the audience's perception of the same as a very rich man. At the beginning of the romance, the *Estoire* introduces the designated victim of the devils' plan as a 'moult riche homme' who owned a 'moult grant plente de bestes & dautres biens' (Sommer, p. 4; 'a very rich man who had a great plenty of livestock and other goods', Lacy, p. 168). Lovelich expands on the description in these terms:

> This riche man hadde moche of worldly good,
>
> Morre thanne ony man tho vndirstood,
>
> Of bestes and of other richesse,
>
> Of kamailles, of jewelis, & of oþer worthynesse. (*Merlin*, ll. 133-36)

Jewels can be immediately associated with luxury whilst the ownership of livestock in the Middle Ages represented a clear sign of economic success; but what about the 'kamailles'? Why would an English man, even though a very rich one, own camels and for what purpose? And even if camels were traded as livestock in late medieval England, why does Lovelich associate the ownership of camels with the man's fortune? Camels, in view of their distant provenance, were expensive animals and we can imagine that only the

wealthiest of merchants might have been involved in their trade. Although Lovelich was familiar with the exoticism found in the *Estoire del saint Graal*, the reference to the good man's camels as a symbol of prosperity is a striking addition which also leads to the question of how informed Lovelich was about exotic animals and their commercial value. Surely Lovelich would not have had to go far in order to find exemplars of lions, leopards and other rare beasts, as these had been kept in the Tower of London since the reign of King John (1199-1216). Whether Lovelich actually visited the Menagerie and saw the animals with his very eyes is impossible to know, but, as a citizen and friend of the mayor of London, he must have at least heard about them and that they were kept in the Tower.

A further if tentative explanation for the presence of camels in this episode can perhaps be provided by considering Lovelich's profession as a skinner and a possible association of camels with a medieval textile named camelin. Camelin was a high quality fabric similar in texture to wool and, due to its name, it was sometimes believed to derive from the camel's skin.[107] The *MED* registers the use of the word 'cameln' (with its variants 'camlin' and 'chamelin') since 1286 and defines the material as 'a fabric of wool mixed with silk or other fibers', without any mention of a possible relationship between the fabric and camels. The citations provided by the *MED* suggest, on the one hand, the exoticism of this type of textile – in *The Wars of Alexander* it goes along with snake's skin – and, on the other, its use to produce fine clothing for the upper classes.[108]

The emphasis placed by Lovelich on wealth and economic power as opposed to social status and reputation is combined with a shift in the values that underpin Arthurian society. Lovelich replaces the ethos of the chivalric community with that of the merchant class: when two knights face each other in a contest, Lovelich clarifies their inner aspirations:

> For worthy knyhtes they weren bothe two,
> And eche be hym-self desirede also:
> The toon desired worschepe, trewelye
> The toþer richenesse and seygnourye. (*Merlin*, ll. 9,373-76)

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[107] The debate on the provenance of camelin is still ongoing. See *Medieval Textiles*, 'http://medievaltextiles.org/reprintNMMcamelin.pdf, (retrieved on 02-11-2013).

[108] See 'camelin' in the *MED*. 'Is þam na surcote of silke ne serkis of raynes / Ne kirtils of camlyn, bot as þam kind lenes' (ll. 4,468-69). See *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. by Hoyt N. Duggat and Thorlac Turville-Petre EETS SS 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

The second knight's desire for wealth and power cannot be found in the *Estoire*, which reveals: 'car moult estoient ambe doi preudomme & boin cheualier . li uns fu couuoiteus de pris conquerre & li autres de son pris essauchier & acroistre' (Sommer, p. 102; 'for they were both strong and brave, and they were good knights. One was eager to win acclaim, and the other wanted his fame to spread', Lacy, p. 224). This variation bears evidence of how Lovelich subtly contextualized the material of his source into the here and now of London social structures, where power and wealth were the qualities that distinguished the high citizens (those who wore the livery) from the low. In Lovelich's time only those who were wealthy enough could gain access to those chambers where the important decision were taken, could elect the mayor and ultimately become mayors themselves.[109]

In conclusion, this chapter has been an attempt to improve Henry Lovelich's literary status and release his romance from a too-long and undeserved oblivion. Three major misjudgements have been addressed and contested: firstly, that Lovelich was an inept translator and that the errors contained in his *Merlin* are due to a precarious knowledge of French, when what critics have labelled serious blunders are in fact misreadings or re-elaborations which can be ascribed to Lovelich's use of a damaged source text. Secondly, that Lovelich was an unskilled versifier: his taste for fine descriptions and painstaking characterization set his methodology apart from what scholars would see as the usual way French sources have been approached by Middle English romancers and professional translators in both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thirdly, and most importantly, that Lovelich's *Merlin* is *just* a translation: the comparison with the *Estoire* has demonstrated that his use of *amplificatio* is anything but arbitrary as it highlights the urban elements within the narrative, where the city becomes a place for celebration and social interaction. Lovelich provides his own vision of the Arthurian world whose social structures are as stratified and hierarchical as those of the thirteenth-century French source, but where the differences among the social groupings largely rely on wealth rather than status. In his utilitarian interpretation of the Arthurian society, even though, as Warren has shown, all citizens are allowed to take part in the trial of the sword in stone (commoners included), the wealthiest still maintain the privilege of being the first to try. Once again revealing his care when it comes to describing characters as well as settings,

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[109] Thrupp, *The Merchant*, p. 39. See also Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 215.

Lovelich presents knights who are after riches rather than honour and renown, makes a meticulous inventory of the goods and exotic beasts owned by townsmen, and enthrals his readers with his enactment of the jubilant atmosphere of feasts and tournaments in medieval London. These are major points of difference with the *Estoire* but also with the *Prose Merlin* – which, as was shown at the beginning of this chapter, was translated from a version of the *Estoire* very similar to that which Lovelich used. The *Prose Merlin*, which will be analysed in detail in the following chapter, displays its translator's interest in chivalry as a core institution in Arthurian England, a chivalrymost epitomised for him by Arthur's Round Table.

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