



Thomas Malory as “Translator” and the Role of “Source Study” in Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal*

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Abstract

Malory’s *Tale of the Sankgreal* affords the student of the text an opportunity to examine Malory’s treatment of his French source material, and consider his reworking of details in his version of the Grail Quest with theoretical parallels to issue present in the field of both translation studies and “translator studies.” In particular, Malory’s recasting of seemingly minor details in his text provides insight into his characterization of the knight Sir Gawain, and as such, illuminates ways in which his version of the narrative differs from the French original and serves to illustrate his attitudes as a writer, wishing to develop an economical and psychologically realistic character portrait, as well as indications that Malory, as a fifteenth century English translator of a previously established French repertoire, appears to have struggled with some of the same issues inherent in current theoretical assessments of the process of literary translation.

Keywords: Malory, Arthurian, Gawain, Translation, Sources, Dreams

1. Introduction

Walter Benjamin famously stated in his essay, *The Task of the Translator* (1921), that the process of translating a linguistic work from one language to another can never be an objective practice, and that the “transmission of subject matter” (255) into an “embryonic form” (255) is ultimately a remaking of the original ideas into their “latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding” (255) of their intentionality and possibility. As such, the process of translation, for Benjamin at least, is a necessary stage in the renewal of works that have achieved the quality of fame, and that such a process involves and indeed necessitates “change” to the original text:

To grasp the genuine relationship between an original and a translation requires an investigation analogous in its intention to the argument by which a critique of cognition would have to prove the impossibility of a theory of imitation. In the latter, it is a question of showing that in cognition there could be no objectivity, not even a claim to it, if this were to consist in imitations of the real; in the former, one can demonstrate that no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living—the original undergoes a change. (256)

To those familiar with the Arthurian narratives produced by Thomas Malory, the translation process described by Benjamin will receive little criticism, and the avenue of inquiry suggested by the title of the essay at hand will resonate as either insurmountable or simply pointless. Pointless, in that a return to source material to evaluate the “renewal” of an original text by its translation—that is, source study—has long been thought of as an uneventful subject of inquiry. Even before Stephen Greenblatt, in one of the foundational essays of the New Historicist theoretical camp, *Shakespeare and the Exorcists* (1988), stated that “source study is, as we all know, the elephants’ graveyard of literary history” (198), the issue of differentiating true source from analogue from coincidental similarity has driven source study into smaller and smaller circles of circumlocution. Likewise, the essay at hand could be seen to offer a discussion of an insurmountable problem, in that any attempt to define and differentiate between what it means to “translate” and what it means to “write” a text is highly subjective and filled with nuance, even in relation to as specific an object as a single tale by the fifteenth-century British author Thomas Malory.

2. Specific Thesis

Yet, the question is valid: how might one truly determine the intellectual steps by which Thomas Malory facilitates the “renewal” of anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal* into his own *Tale of the Sankgreal*? Apart from the differences of vocabulary and grammar, at what moment is the original renewed? Is it renewed? I suggest that, for Malory at least, this process of renewal occurs in the reworking of his source material to reflect an economical and psychologically realistic means of characterization, in a manner which both reflects the sense of the original text but also serves the purposes of one particular translator’s needs; needs determined in part by his tendencies as a literary artist and a fifteenth century Englishman appropriating an anonymous French romance about “English” knights on a quest for grace.

For our purposes, it is necessary to begin with that moment in 1476 when William Caxton, merchant, translator, and—let’s use the term—“publisher,” first began the operation of his printing press in Westminster, England. Not long after that moment, in 1485 to be more precise, he would produce the first printed edition of the works of Thomas Malory, and thereby forever link the aforementioned problems of “definition,” “differentiation,” and “impact” to that particular text for the foreseeable future. These issues appear to have been at the forefront of Caxton’s mind as he adopted the role of “editor” in the production of Malory’s works, as is evidenced by the editorial attitude indicated by Caxton’s characterization of Malory’s texts as translations of Arthurian narrative originally written in the French language.

In Caxton’s *Preface* to Malory’s *Book of King Arthur and his Noble Knights of the Round Table*, the printer is careful to note that the stories he is presenting represent Malory’s reduction of previous French versions of Arthurian narrative into the substance of the volume at hand. The purpose of the project, Caxton states, was “*to enprynte a booke of the noble hystories of the sayd Kyng Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a copye unto me delyverd, whyche copye Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe*” (xv).ⁱ While it is our intention to return to this statement in the succeeding pages of the essay at hand, it is important to note that anyone who has taken the time to read Malory and then consulted the “*certeyn bookes of Frensshe*” which he used as source material and “*reduced*” into his own language, will notice tendencies towards textual difference. Thus, what may appear as simple clarifying statements in Caxton’s *Preface*, the words of a medieval man talking about a medieval text, in fact represent a distillation of the issues of editorial conception of authorial intention, the dynamics of translation as the act of both communicating and substantively changing ideas, and illustrative of the ongoing struggle to define what is meant when we attempt to characterize a narrative which has journeyed through several minds and cultures in order to reach its eventual reader. In light of this, what becomes clear in regard to Malory’s approach to his role as writer and translator, is that the author saw his source material, such as the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal*, as an opportunity to trim away all that detracted from what he saw as the immediate impact of the narrative, and to produce a text which told a story of seamless cause and effect, endowed with psychological realism and an economy of expression that were to Malory important fixtures storytelling. This idea becomes even most apparent when we as readers engage in the comparative analysis of several provocative instances in Malory’s own *Tale of the Sankgreal*, in particular Malory’s reworking of sequences involving dreams and prophecy, and the “original” versions in Malory’s source, the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal*.

3. Review of Pertinent Research

In order to make clear why asking such questions about a Fifteenth-century author should matter in the Twenty First-century, it is necessary to place our discussion of Malory within the context of current Translation Theory. Indeed, for some of the same reasons which make Caxton’s qualifying statements about Malory’s text important to our understanding of his editorial role, it would be likewise difficult to adequately define the far reaching impact of that day in 1972, when American scholar James S. Holmes presented his paper “*The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*” at the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen. In what would eventually be recognized as the founding document of the theoretical field of Translation Studies, Holmes stated that the time had come for the discussion about translation to openly embrace the myriad of topics and avenues of approach which were ultimately at the core of the practice of conveying ideas represented in one language into the “same” ideas represented in another language:

After centuries of incidental and desultory attention from a scattering of authors, philologists, and literary scholars, plus here and there a theologian or an idiosyncratic linguist, the subject of translation has enjoyed an constant increase in interest on the part of scholars in recent years, with the Second World War as kind of turning point. As the interest has solidified and expanded, more and more scholars have moved into the field, particularly from the adjacent fields of linguistics, linguistics philosophy, and literary studies, but also from such seemingly more remote disciplines as information theory, logic, and mathematics, each of them carrying with him paradigms, quasi-paradigms, models, and methodologies that he felt could be brought to bear on this new problem. (67-8)

In his evaluation and critique of Holmes’ pivotal essay, Andrew Chesterman (2009) describes the fundamental approaches to various subdivisions within the study of translation as the products of an interpretative translator; what he terms Translator Studies. His critique essentially moves beyond what he defines in Holmes’ approach as a focus “highly weighted towards texts rather than the people that produce them. This is not surprising, in view of his own special interest in literary translation and research on it” (19).ⁱⁱ Holmes continues:

The textual branch deals with all matters textual, and thus by definition lies outside Translator Studies. But the three other branches are all relevant to us here, and indeed offer one way of conceptualizing this subfield of Translation Studies. The cultural branch deals with values, ethics, ideologies, traditions, history, examining the roles and influences of translators and interpreters through history, as agents of cultural evolution. The cognitive branch deals with mental processes, decision-making, the impact of emotions, attitudes to norms, personality, etc. The sociological branch deals with translators’/interpreters’ observable behaviour as individuals or groups or institutions, their social networks, status and working processes, their relations with other groups and with relevant technology, and so on. (19)

Those who are familiar with the scholarship surrounding the idiosyncratic nature of translation in the European Middle Ages, as well as the medieval tendency to rework text within a particular social, cultural, historical, or interpretative tradition, are aware that this complex approach to Translation/Translator Studies has been part of what medievalists have been wrestling with for a little over a century—and a topic of consideration for medieval translators themselves since the era of Saint Augustine. As Lynne Long (2010) has pointed out in relation to Geoffrey Chaucer's practices as translator, the theoretical problems that have faced the study of translation in the field of medieval studies can benefit from the application of modern Translation Studies,ⁱⁱⁱ while Anthony Pym (2014) has noted:

Studies of European medieval translation practices have developed in relative independence of Translation Studies as an academic interdiscipline. This, I suggest, has been much to the detriment of Translation Studies as a whole. Many of the ideas and models most in tune with medieval translation are nevertheless reappearing in certain contemporary fields, in new guises, via deviously fashionable detours, and mostly without knowledge of their past. (19)

Clearly, there appears to be a case of mutual benefit proposed by the coupling of the medieval and the modern, both in regard to the reinvention of theoretical problems that have long faced medievalists, and the possibilities of organization and elaboration reflected in the modern view of these old issues of linguistic and cultural variance, editorial practices, and idiosyncratic interpretation. Thus, while the process of glancing backwards towards the Middle Ages raises helpful questions about the modern understanding of the process of translation, gazing forwards from the distinctly medieval translation towards the future is equally helpful.

Therefore, Chesterman's movement beyond Holmes' approach to Translation Studies allows for the sphere of analysis of translation to incorporate a growing number of categories of data and inquiry, and will no doubt continue to expand for those working in the field of Translation/Translator Studies in tandem with future advances in technology, changes in definitions of what constitutes "text," as well as the social and private applications of communicating data successfully from one context and category of perception to another. It is with Chesterman's final suggestion, however, that emerging work in the field of Translator Studies have begun "focusing not on translations as texts, nor even on the translation process, but on the translators themselves and the other agents involved" (20), that we return to the issue of Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*. To make clear Malory's role as translator and author in relation to current discourse in Translation/Translator Studies, it becomes necessary to apply a hybrid of both Holmes and Chesterman's approaches, including both the source study inherent in Holmes' Translation Studies' "textual branch" and the "cognitive branch" approach of Chesterman's Translator Studies. Those familiar with Malory's *Sankgreal* are aware of the degree to which previous scholarship has expanded upon the possibilities of the both the "sociological" and "cultural" branches in this regard. It remains for us, then, to consider the first and only problem of defining Malory as both a translator and a creative writer—if there is a difference—and this problem is the tired and uninteresting practice of consulting and studying Malory's source material for his *Sankgreal*.

To return to Greenblatt's critique of source study, then, that "source study is, as we all know, the elephants' graveyard of literary history" (198), we must note that Malory's treatment of sources is not only germane to our topic at hand, but important to an overall understanding of how this particular author created. As Ralph Norris (2008) has noted, "source study" in Malory's work can illuminate "more precisely the relationship" between the author and the work he accomplishes, and "it often can elucidate otherwise puzzling features of a text" (5-6). In particular, it makes clear aspects of the necessary discussion of how Malory viewed his role as a translator of French source material. In the case of Thomas Malory's development of Arthurian narrative and the author's divergence in matters of detail or style from his source material, the changes Malory made to his narrative foundations, often on a miniscule level, speak to the author's attitudes towards concepts of setting, plot, imagery, and character. The consideration of such minor changes to source material, and the effect such changes had on the stories that Malory has left for us, precludes us, by virtue of their specificity, from the wide ranging disasters of "those critics," P. J. C. Field cautioned (1968), who are "seduced into describing their own reactions to Malory's style to the exclusion of the style itself" (476). We may avoid missing the textual forest for the emotive trees, however, because in this particular case we are focusing on such a very tiny cluster of woodland. Taking Field's advice to heart, we can enjoy some confidence in analyzing specific changes Malory made, because when we compare Malory's sources with the divergence of his own material output, we realize that source study is an invaluable component to understanding the relationship between the artistry of Malory and the "editorial choices" made by Malory, and thereby the differences between Malory the translator and Malory the writer. Using as a starting point the French *Queste del Saint Graal* as a close source for Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*, considered by many readers as proof of Malory's direct translation from one text to the other, we notice those textual moments where Malory chose to diverge from his source, and that these moments have clearly discernable ramifications for his characterization of King Arthur's knight, Sir Gawain.

To return to Caxton's Preface, then, it becomes possible to elaborate more fully on its significance:

to enprynte a booke of the noble hystories of the sayd Kynge Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a coppye unto me delyverd, whyche coppye Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe. (xv)^{iv}

So, to reiterate our previous statement, that Malory consulted the “*certeyn bookes of Frensshe*” which he used as source material and “*reduced*” into his own language, we should also note that the table of contents for Caxton’s book, too, uses distinctly editorial vocabulary, as in the term “*chronicled*” (xii), and the phrase “*briefly drawn out of the French*” (xii), to suggest the spirit of compositional method and indebtedness to source. The spirit of these statements is not simply that Malory translated the material, but engaged in revision and alteration of it. If we accept Caxton’s characterization of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* and its achievement, then several of the tales function as contributions to preexisting traditions and as narratives manifesting a direct relationship to extra-textual sources. Interestingly, even a cursory consideration of instances where Malory amends or alters narrative details or structural aspects of his sources indicates that, like so many medieval authors, whose produce paradoxically both codified and re-contextualized source material (Copeland 95), Malory engages in actively *reworking* preexisting tales to fit his own narrative and thematic purposes, both in response to demands of style and authorial designs that—as Eugene Vinaver has suggested—can only be guessed at. In writing on *Sankgreal* and its source, Susanna Fein (1977) notes, that Vinaver considered the *Sankgreal* little more than a translation and called it ‘the least original’ of Malory’s works (215). It is understandable, therefore, that with the appearance of Vinaver’s influential 1947 edition of Malory’s *Works*, critics noted Malory’s “freedom of treatment” of sources (Wilson 136),^v his tendency to avoid “undesirable repetition” and material that would “run counter to the general tone” of his own work (Wilson 24), and the sense that Malory appropriated his sources and worked them to mesh with a larger “thematic scheme” (Moorman 497).

As one of the most elaborate studies concerning Malory’s reworking of dreams and visions, Sandra Ihle’s *Malory’s Grail Quest* (1983) dissects issues of style and symbolism through application of the poetic rhetoric of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, arguing that Malory’s response to the amplification of material in his French sources was to abbreviate (27), suppress digressive material (110-19), and eliminate repetition (125-26). As Ihle notes, Malory’s editing and compositional tendencies enabled the intensification of the text’s power through an economy of focus:

Whereas The *Queste* is composed according to principles of amplification, Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s instructions on abbreviation aptly describe the process by which Malory altered his source. As we have seen, he does not simply shorten. Specifically, Malory removes those elements that contribute to elaboration, and thus he does indeed “let the entire theme be confined within narrow limits.” Those limits are the present time and place and the literal level. By judicious use of emphasis, he expands on the particulars he retains so that the focus of the work becomes the actions of men on earth. (164)

While it is our intention to suggest that Malory’s editorial and compositional aims also contribute to the dramatic quality and psychological realism of his narrative, we believe Ihle’s characterization of Malory’s general technique to be both insightful and helpful. However, much of what passes for concise rhetorical method in Malory’s work appears random or elusive in its purpose, apparently depending at certain points in the text on the dynamics of sound and rhythm, as well as what must have been accidental or unconscious artistic choices—if such things are allowable in the estimation of early literature. In this process, one constant appears to be Malory’s tendency towards subtraction as part of the handling of source material and the blending of his own narrative products. P. J. C. Field (1971) notes that “Malory’s relative independence of his sources was due to his decision to shorten them” (63), while Mark Lambert (1975) characterizes Malory’s “impure, inconsistent” art as an originality that “consists more of leaving out than putting in” (56). While these approaches to Malory’s editorial tendencies suggest how his version of a given episode, or entire text, may differ from their earlier forms, Malory’s “decision to shorten them” also aids in the concentration of character and the psychological effect of Malory’s narrative. Additionally, this also calls into question the definitive process of translation and interpretation which represent Malory’s attitude towards his source material.

4. Discussion and Analysis

By way of example, Malory’s reception—really, his translation and reworking—of the prophetic dreams experienced by Gawain and Hector in his *Tale of the Sankgreal*, indicates Malory’s desire to trim away particular narrative details from his source, the anonymous *Queste del Saint Graal*, and thereby afford the sequence in question a greater subtlety of inference and a denser concentration of relationship between dreamscape and the concerns and motivations of the knights themselves. In this particular episode, the anonymous *Queste*-Author addresses the reader and explains the importance of the dreams depicted, thereby justifying their inclusion in his narrative: “When they had fallen asleep, each knight had a vision, strange and wonderful; both merit setting down in story lest they be forgotten, for both were rich in meaning” (164).^{vi} However, In Malory’s version there is no such reference to the textual value or meaning of the dreams at the outset; the episode is simply yet another step in his ordered progression of events:

“*And than they sette hem downe in the segys of the chapel, and as they spake of one thyng and of other, for hevynesse they felle on slepe. And there [befelle] hem bothe mervaylous adventures.*” (558)^{vii}

Granted, Malory also leaves out other details, such as the knights being hungry and so forth, but Malory’s choice to exclude the particular details of authorial interjection has a direct effect upon the dynamics of his narrative. Malory’s exclusion of the *Queste*-Author’s interjection allows the “meaning,” and therefore the *value*, of the dreams to develop as a synchronic part of the episode as a whole, allowing the symbolic meaning of the dreams to stand independent of an

overt narrative voice, and as such, does not represent an excising of superfluous detail, but rather a reframing of pertinent details. The resultant narrative of the dream episode within the context of the knights simply falling asleep lends the scene a subtlety and economy of realism not present in the sequence as depicted in *Queste del Saint Graal*.

Additionally, the *Queste*-Author follows up the description of Gawain and Hector's respective dreams by having the knights waking fitfully, laying in the dark, and expressing curiosity about the meaning of their "visions."

"Upon my faith," said Sir Gawain, "I too can say the same. I had the most extraordinary vision, and I assure you I shall never rest content until I know the truth concerning it."

"And I likewise promise you that I shall never rest content until I know the truth concerning Sir Lancelot, my brother." (*Queste* 165)

In Malory's depiction of the scene, the inquisitiveness of the knights is reduced, most specifically that of Gawain. We are told that they "*mervayled*" at the details of their "*avision*" (*Quest* 559), and Ector professes that "I shall never be myrry tyll I hyre tydynges of my brother sir Launcelot" (*Quest* 559). The concept of meaning being associated with the dreams is still present, but it is made subordinate to the narrative flow. Here, too, Hector's desire for clarity is directly tied to his relationship with another, while Gawain's egocentric tendency is towards clarifying ambiguous meaning so that he himself will understand.

The waking-vision of the hand and lower arm "*coverede with red samyte*,"^{viii} which follows the two individual dreams, is used in both Malory's work and *Queste* to transform the apparitions of the night into the subject of a mini-quest, and thereby serves to intensify the inquisitiveness of the knights, whose curiosity is peaked by the marvel. But the tendency to dissociate Gawain from the search for larger meaning continues, for while the *Queste*-Author has Gawain propose a search for "some man of God, who can tell us the meaning of our dreams and interpret what we have heard" (*Queste* 166), while Malory substitutes Hector: "*Ye truly, seyde sir Ector, 'I herde all. Now go we, seyde sir Ector, 'unto som ermyte that woll telle us of oure avision, for hit semyth me we laboure all in waste*" (*Quest* 560). While the substitution may seem trivial, one cannot escape the suspicion that Malory's shifting of the proposal from Gawain to Hector, like the pruning of Gawain's inquisitive statement in relation to his own dream, seems to be consistent with the characterization of Gawain as a savage knight, short-sighted and bound by the cloying fetters of earthly existence.

In contrast, when the knights finally locate the hermit who will interpret their dreams and visions, the *Queste*-Author has Gawain take the initiative:

"Good Sirs," he [the hermit] asked, "what adventure has brought you here?"

"Sir," replied Gawain, "our great desire and longing to talk with you, to be enlightened where we were in darkness and to receive assurance where we were in error." When the hermit heard Sir Gawain speak thus he judged him well endued with worldly wisdom, and said to him:

"Sir, all that lies within my power and ken I hold at your disposal." (*Queste* 169)

The scene is clearly complimentary to Gawain and, like the *Queste*-Author's previous handling of the subject, concerns the deciphering of information and the attainment of clarity. But Malory's handling of the scene stresses Gawain's more pedestrian concerns. When the knights meet with the hermit, the initial exchange indicates nothing about a search for specialized knowledge, gnomic wisdom, or the like. After the hermit asks what "adventure" has brought them to him, Gawain's response mentions nothing about dreams: "*Than seyde sir Gawayne, 'to speke with you for to be confessed.' 'Sir, seyde the ermyte, 'I am redy'*" (*Quest* 561). One is left with the impression that Gawain's motivation here is more closely linked to his most recent "*mysseadventure*" (*Quest* 561), where he killed a fellow knight, "*Uwayne le Avoutres, that somtyme was sone unto kynge Uryen, who was 'in the queste of the Sankgreal'*" (560-61). This notion about Gawain's need to "be confessed" does not negate the oracular role of the hermit; it simply subordinates the search for *meaning* within the larger context of the flow of narrative events and Malory's need to characterize Gawain as rash and shortsighted.

Additionally, Malory's tendency to subordinate symbolic or inferred meaning in the service of narrative economy, realism, and the logic of his text, is further evident in his pruning of Gawain's dream of the wandering bulls. The *Queste*-Author's inclusion of a final scene in Gawain's dream, depicting the bulls destroying their home, and thereby foretelling the ultimate upheaval of Arthur's court and the "internecine strife that will decimate the Round Table in the *Mort le Roi Artu*" (Matarasso 294),^{ix} endows Gawain's vision with a prophetic quality ranging beyond the Grail-quest itself, to foreshadow events from the final episode of the Arthurian cycle:

And with that they all moved off and wandered, not in the meadow, but out across the moor, and were a long time gone. When they returned there were many that were missing, and those that came back were so thin and weak they could hardly stand. Of the three without spot, one returned and the other two stayed behind. When they were all assembled round the hayrack they fell to fighting among themselves till their fodder was destroyed and they were forced to go their several ways. (*Queste* 164)

The hermit of *Queste del Saint Graal* interprets Gawain's dream for him, even going so far as to note that some of the bulls who return "will be so blinded with sin that some will have killed their fellows" (*Queste* 171), but recoils from discussing the ominous final scene. "The last part of your dream," the hermit says, "I will not interpret to you, for no good would come of my doing so, and you might be improperly prevented from fulfilling it" (*Queste* 171). In Malory's version of the dream, the returning *questing* bulls are likewise emaciated, but the final sequence is removed:

And so som wente and som com agayne, but they were so megir that the[y] might nat stoned upright. And of the bullys that were so whyght that one com agayne and no mo. But whan thys whyght bulle was com agayne and amonge thes other, there rose up a grete crye for lacke of wynde [that] fayled them. And so they departed, one here and anothis there. (Quest 559)

Malory's hermit, like the hermit depicted by the *Queste*-Author, is careful to maintain the importance of confession as a means of preparation for the questing knights (XVI. 3.5-15), and for this reason, the narrative and thematic connections between the ideas of sin, debility, and wasteland are still present. However, the hermit's warning is more general in tone, and there is no suggestion of precognition and no need for the hermit to defer meaning. We are simply told that "For everych of them shall sle other for synne, and they that shall ascape shall be so megir that hit shall be mervayle to se them" (*Quest* 562). The effect is to reduce the oracular agency of the scene and focus instead on the dynamics of cause and effect, the logic of inference and evidence. As an example of the "cognitive branch" of Translator Studies, Malory's translation of the scene directly reflects not just a shift in the cultural view of the scene, but of the translator/writer realigning the way the narrative "works" as a text.

The shift also indicates how Malory enlists such changes to inform the development of character. The hermit in both Malory's version and that of the *Queste*-Author clearly explains to Gawain the relationship between his misadventures, his failure in the quest, and the sinful nature of the knight's life. But the *Queste*-Author generalizes to a degree about the role of sinfulness in the failure of both Gawain and Hector, telling Gawain that he will "never reap anything but shame," (*Queste* 174), and Hector that "while you are in mortal sin nothing you do there...will bring you honour" (*Queste* 174). But Malory directs the bulk of the hermit's indictment at Gawain, "ye fayle" (*Quest* 563), "ye bene an untrew knight and grete murtherar" (*Quest* 563), and so forth. Malory's motivation seems to hinge upon the need to locate Gawain's failure within the knight's sinfulness, unrepentant nature, and his violent temper. He is compared continually with Lancelot, who at the very least "hath takyn [upon] hym to forsake synne" (*Quest* 563). Likewise, Malory's exclusion of the hermit's reference to "things to come" does not undermine the role of providence and piety in the tale, but simply draws it into a tighter web of cause and effect. The dream, therefore, serves first and foremost as a psychological manifestation of the anxiety of the knights, who've "complained" (*Quest* 558) and are "ny wery of thys queste, and lothe to folow further in straunge contreyes" (*Queste* 558). Once again, Malory's actions as both translator and writer are indicative of ideas that speak to an authorial intention concerned with the "drawing out" and "reduction" of the translatable text—to reference Caxton's editorial terms—and also reflective of a view of that translated text as a document which the translator has made his own through aesthetic, structural, and intellectual choices.

5. Conclusion

Even on the larger, thematic level of the work as a whole, Malory's alteration of Gawain serves what must clearly have been a chief concern of Malory's as he reworked his source material. As Barbara Bartholomew (1963) has noted:

Gawain, like the mass of knights, is zealous in his pursuit of the Grail until he becomes aware that this quest is beyond his achievement because it differs from his usual blood-and-thunder adventures not in degree but in kind. Ultimately he, like the other knights not characterized on the individual level, admits failure and returns without regret to Arthur's court. Thus Malory realistically pictures the human factor, whose bent toward expediency hinders the ideal. (266)

However, much of what passes for concise rhetorical method in Malory's work appears to be purposed towards the dynamics of sound and rhythm, as well as what must have been accidental or unconscious artistic choices—if such things are allowable in the estimation of early literature. Most importantly, these choices reflect the need to both communicate meaning and to create an "impression" upon the reader—the former being the work, in some way, of the translator and the latter the work of Malory the creative writer. In this process, one constant appears to be Malory's tendency towards subtraction as part of the handling of source material and the blending of his own narrative products. P. J. C. Field (1971) notes that "Malory's relative independence of his sources was due to his decision to shorten them" (63), while Mark Lambert (1975) characterizes Malory's "impure, inconsistent" art as an originality that "consists more of leaving out than putting in" (56). While these approaches to Malory's tendencies as translator suggest how his version of a given episode, or entire text, may differ from their earlier forms, Malory's "decision to shorten them" also aids in the concentration of character and the psychological effect of Malory's narrative. Additionally, this also calls into question the definitive process of translation and interpretation which represent Malory's attitude towards his source material. In writing on *Sankgreal* and its source, Susanna Fein (1977) notes:

The Tale of the Sankgreal, does not, however, have a narrative structure substantially different from its source, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, because his source lacked complex interlace structure, Malory did not have to unravel the threads. (215)

The structural requirements which Malory would have had to consider to how extensively to rework his “translation” do not, of course explain all of the various decisions he appears to have made, and in particular the shortening and concentrating of the details in his characterization of Gawain. Of importance, also, is the role and influence of the literary marketplace, and how Malory’s need to meet the demands of an English reading public interested in French tales may have shaped some of his choices as “translator.” As Edward Kennedy (2004) has suggested:

Malory must have been hoping that his readers would accept his Arthurian stories as a new and fuller Arthurian account, better than the one they knew because it was based, after all, not on English works, but on the French book, and it was “*auctorysed*.” (234)

In this sense, we can be forgiven for viewing Malory’s *Sankgreal* as in many ways the least consequential of Malory’s works, deeply imbedded in the editorial process, and less the result of the author’s creative process than it was an attempt to consciously interact with the repertoire of French romance. However, this is a question that rises again and again when considering Malory’s relationship to his source material throughout his career, and would therefore make also make *Sankgreal* most representative of the spirit of reception that marks Malory’s works as a whole. Indeed, what we have found in our discussion of Malory’s alterations of source, his actions as translator, his creative tendencies, and his role in the “renewal” of *Queste del Saint Graal* all coalesce in much of the spirit of characterization and narrative attitudes already present in his French sources, and are “in the air” of the Arthurian Tradition as it were. Yet, when we read Malory’s “versions” of these texts, we encounter a text whose difference moves beyond that of linguistic accident, and embodies a narrative voice and purpose which differs from the source material and “originals.” We might extend this idea to include the tendency in Chretien de Troyes’ portrayal of Gawain as less than courteous and noble^x, while still accepting that Malory’s reworking of Gawain differs strongly from French sources, reconfiguring the knight as a character shaped by “self-pity,” who is “selfish,” and ultimately defined by Malory’s tendency to strip “Gawain of...kindness,” showing him as “self-absorbed” and flawed by “egocentrism” (Clark 50). In this refashioning of Gawain’s character, facilitated by choices made in part by Malory as translator, we see what Gideon Toury (1995) would identify as that tendency to rework translated material within an acknowledged or growing literary repertoire: “the more peripheral this status, the more translation will accommodate itself to established models and repertoires” (271). Malory makes many choices as translator, and while it is clear that some of these choices are indicative of artistic temperament, such choices do not occur within a creative vacuum, but are rather a response to the necessity of translating French narratives of English knights being reworked for an English literary marketplace. As Aiga Kramina (2004) has indicated, all translation participates in process of manipulation—itsself a difficult thing to define and categorize—and contains in part the ideological struggles of power inherent in all public communication. Malory’s roles as both “writer” and “translator” are indicative of this struggle, and more particularly and perhaps profoundly, of the struggle between the temperament of the literary artist saddled with the linguistic responsibility of communicating and meeting the expectations of a preexisting narrative repertoire and realizing the subtleties of expression and communication which manifest his—and ultimately our—experience of *The Tale of the Sankgreal*.

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Notes

ⁱ Caxton, William. *Preface. Malory: Works*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971.

ⁱⁱ Chesterman, Andrew. "The Name and Nature of Translator Studies." *Hermes – Journal of Language and Communication Studies*. no 42. 2009. 13-22.

ⁱⁱⁱ Long, Lynne. "Medieval Literature Through the Lens of Translation Theory: Bridging the Interpretive Gap." *Translation Studies*. Vol. 3. Issue 1. (2010). 61-77.

^{iv} Caxton's Preface, Vinaver, Eugene ed. *Malory: Works*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971.

^v Wilson, Robert. "Malory, *The Stanzaic Morte Arthur, and Mort Artu*." *Modern Philology*. Vol. 37, No. 2 (Nov. 1939). 125-38.

^{vi} All citations of *Queste del Saint Graal*, hereafter parenthetically noted as *Queste*, are drawn from Matarasso's translation, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. London: Penguin, 1969. Numbers refer to pages in that edition.

^{vii} All citations of Malory's *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, hereafter parenthetically noted as *Quest*, are drawn from Vinaver's edition, *Malory: Works*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971. Numbers refer to pages in the second edition.

^{viii} In *Queste* translated as "bright red samite" (*Queste* 165), an indication that Malory values narrative detail and chooses to prune only those details that have an effect on the larger dynamics of his narrative.

^{ix} See note in Matarasso edition of *Queste* (294).

^x This is perhaps most pronounced in the depiction of Gawain's character and actions in Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval*.