

A COMPARISON OF MALORY'S "TALE OF KING ARTHUR" WITH THE SPANISH *BALADRO*

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Both Malory's "Tale of King Arthur" and the Spanish *Baladro del Sabio Merlin* are mainly versions of the Huth Ms., published by Gaston Paris in 1886. The Huth Ms. (H) is one of the extant manuscripts of the *Suite du Merlin*, which is part of the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*; it deals essentially with the early history of Arthur's kingdom. Other manuscripts preserved are the Cambridge Ms. (C), discovered by Vinaver in 1945, the fragments in Mss. B. N. 112 and 12599, published by H. O. Sommer in 1913 and the unnumbered Ms. of Siena.

Fanny Bogdanow, in her essay "Essaie de Classement des Mss. de la *Suite du Merlin*" (1960), points out several differences between C and H, and concludes in her study that both Malory's and the Spanish texts are versions of H. When Bogdanow alludes to the Spanish version, she is referring to the Burgos edition of 1498, published in 1957 by P. Bohigas as *El Baladro del Sabio Merlin según la edición de Burgos de 1498* (B), and the above mentioned published in 1907 in Madrid by Bonilla y San Martín with the title *Baladro del Sabio Merlin: primera parte de la Demanda del Sancto Grial* (D).

The object of this study will be to explore in what sense Malory and the Spanish translator of D diverged from the French source; that is, to contrast both works by analyzing the principal additions and omissions that might appear in them. In order to study the differences between the English and Spanish versions, I will follow Caxton's division of Malory's "Tale" in four books.

BOOK I (D: I-CXC)

The first striking difference between the two texts is that the Spanish version begins with a long and minute relation of Merlin's origin which appears in Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, and before in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Malory starts his account with the story of how Uther Pendragon begot Arthur upon Igraine, omitting thus the important

preliminaries of the early life of Merlin and the foundation of the Round Table. These different beginnings illustrate what is going to be the main difference between the two texts; that is, the fact that Malory is primarily concerned with the figure of Arthur, whereas D gives much more importance to Merlin.

Thus, D begins with a long relate narrating "de cómo trabaron los diablos hombre que razonasse su engaño" (D. 4). Merlin appears as a rather benign figure; according to the editor of B, Bohigas, in the prosification of Robert de Boron, Merlin appears as the protector of the Britons. Though begotten by a devil in order to deceive human beings, he inherits the good qualities of his mother and the faculty of foreseeing the future and the knowledge of magic arts of his father. He is referred to throughout the book as a good Christian. This characterization of Merlin is common to both Spanish texts and is also present in H. On the other hand, though Merlin also plays an important role in M, it is clear that Malory does not like supernatural elements and magic, and that he tries to make his work believable. Thus, Merlin is characterized essentially as Arthur's advisor, since his main concern is Arthur. Wilson has pointed out that "the sources of the first five books present Arthur as a rather strong ruler, particularly successful in military affairs, and this impression is heightened considerably by Malory, especially in books I-IV" (Wilson 109). This idea is illustrated for example in Arthur's battle with the eleven kings, in which Arthur is presented as a valiant and righteous king who rewards his men with gold and silver (M. I, 12-17). This scene, not in H or D, is in the Cambridge MS. and in the Suite de Merlin (C), which indicates that Malory did get it from the French source. There is no reference to this battle in D, and the only hint we have of the kings' dislike of Arthur being the king of the Britons is the fact that they postpone his coronation for three times till Pentecoste, and three times must Arthur pull out the sword to prove he is the right king (D. 50).

Malory pays much more attention to battles and combats than to fantastic adventures; he proves to have a more realistic mind than the Spanish translator. The narrator in M differs basically from D in that whereas D continues the tradition of the twelfth-century French prose romances, interweaving episodes in a technique which has been compared with the technique of tapestry, Malory's aim at a more logical and sequential line of events, and so he alters his source when necessary, omitting or simplifying the adventures he considers too confusing. His purpose is mainly didactic, not romantic. Nevertheless, oversimplification can also lead to confusion, and so the reader is sometimes faced with insufficient information. Thus, for example, in the episode of the "Questing Beast," Merlin speaks to Arthur: *Esta es una maravilla del sancto Grial, e nos puedo mas dezir, ca mejor hombre que yo os lo dirá... que no sabredes ende la verdad hasta que de*

aque! que deste saliera os lo fara conocer, e aura nombre Perceval de Galaz (D. 57).

Merlin anticipates thus the arrival of Perceval, who is going to play an important role in the quest of the Holy Grail. Even though Merlin does not want to tell Arthur of the significance of the animal, he tells him of his origin, introducing thus the theme of incest by relating the story of Iomedes' daughter and her love with her brother. This is meant to anticipate Arthur's incest with his half-sister. On the other hand, Malory does not provide an explanation of the origin of the Questing Beast. In M, Merlin predicts both Arthur's and his death omitting thus a long passage in H, which is clearly the source of the Spanish passage quoted above (M. 48).

Another sample of Malory's technique of simplification is the way Arthur's parentage is revealed. Malory solves the problem in two pages, first with Merlin appearing to Arthur as a boy and telling him who his father was (M. 47), and then introducing Arthur to his mother (M. 49). On the contrary, in D, Arthur is told of his lineage in CXLIX (D. 55), and then there is a long section in which Merlin finally proves that Arthur is Uther's and Iguerna's son (D. 61). Malory thus summarized what in H had been a much longer passage that the Spanish translator followed much more closely.

Malory's dislike of the supernatural is also evident in the episode referring to Arthur's sword, Excalibur. In D, there is no logical explanation for the Lady of the Lake walking on the water to get the sword; on the contrary, the magic of the scene is reinforced when Merlin says "Mas vos encantastes este lago, en guisa que un entendimiento no puede valer cosa e por ende os ruego que vayais por ella" (D. 68). Malory, on the other hand, does not make any reference to magic or the supernatural, except for the scene where Arthur gets the sword from a hand coming out of the water.

BOOK II (D: CXCI-CCXCIX)

Malory's book II deals mainly with the tragic story of Balin, the knight with the two swords. According to Vinaver, Malory's concept of narrative was opposed to the idea of an indefinitely extensible whole: he "saw the whole work as an independent production and each division of it as a self-contained entity". Balin's story is a good example of this. Vinaver also pointed out that there is a difference between the significance of the Dolorous Stroke that Balin strikes in M and in the *Suite*; in the latter the disasters that appear as a consequence of the stroke are due to Balin's violation of the Grail mysteries, whereas in M, it is the punishment for the death of the lady who came as a messenger of the Lady of the Lake. Therefore, this means that in M, there is no need for any reference to a story beyond Balin's story.

Basically, the Spanish account of the story of Balin and Malory's are very similar. Both relate how Balin pulled out the sword that the damsel of the lake brought to Camelot, how he killed the Lady of the Lake, how Lancelot pursued him and was slain, and how Balin and his brother Balan took King Rion prisoner to Arthur's court to recover his favour; finally, both recount the adventures with the invisible knight, the Dolorous Stroke, and the episode where Balin and Balan killed each other tragically.

The first difference is that in D, Balin kills the Lady of the Lake because she murdered his father: "Donzella, mas ha de tres años que vos ando buscando... [C] a vos matastes a mi *padre* con ponçoña" (D. 74). In M, it is Balin's mother she killed: "he saw the Lady of the Lake, that by her means had slain Balin's *mother* and he had sought her three years" (M. 64). Here Malory is following C, which says: *Ha, damoiselle, vos ai jeo longement quise plus de iii anz que jeo ne vus finai de quere, qui estes cele qui ma mère arcit de venim.*

H offers a completely different version: "vous estes cele qui arcistes de venin *mom frère*". The reasons of the Spanish choice are unknown, since it is not found in any source, but it might be due to an error of the scribe or to a corrupt manuscript. In this respect, the French scribe might have written *père* instead of *frère* in the Ms the Spanish author was using.

It is also noticeable that when King Mark appears and finds the bodies of Lancelot and his beloved, there is no reference in Malory of his being the same Mark who later married Isolde, although the allusion to Isolde is clear when Merlin says: "when Tristram is taken with his sovereign lady" (M. 71). This reference to Mark as Isolde's husband is made clear in D: *El rey Mares que despues casó con Yseo ... assi como este cuento adelante os dirá, ca mucho conviene que lo ayuntemos ay por una aventura del sancto Grial" (D. 78).*

Moreover, in M, Merlin tells Mark of the battle which would take place between Lancelot and Tristram. In D, Merlin does not speak, but writes: *En este llano se ajuntará la pelea de dos amigos que más se amaran en su tiempo, e sera aquella pelea estremada, más que nunca los que antes fueron que ellos ni despues sin muerte de hombre. (D. 78).*

He also prophesized the Dolorous Stroke.

Malory's interest in summarizing is also clear in the account of the battle between Arthur and Nero and King Lot. Whereas in M the narration of the battle is developed in three chapters (9-11, pp. 73-78), in D it occupies exactly twenty chapters (CCVII-CCXXVI). The long description of the battle illustrates the interest in detail of the Spanish translator in contrast with Malory's dislike for lengthy accounts. A minor difference is also that in the Spanish version, as in the French source, thirteen kings are killed, but Malory only mentions twelve. Vineaver thinks that this might be due to the fact that King Lot was not included in Malory's count.

Another important piece of evidence of Malory's condensed narrative is to be found at the end of chapter 11 (M. 77-78), in which the summarizes in a few sentences what in D and H corresponds to a long digression of Morgan Le Fay's plot to kill her brother: Morgan loves another man –Accolon in M, but not named in D– and makes a copy of Arthur's scabbard, which was believed to have magic power, but she confused them and gives her lover the false one, so when he is wounded, he suspects that she has deceived him, and tells Arthur of her machinations (D, 88-90). Awkwardly, Malory develops this plot again in his last book (IV, 8-14) whereas in D, Morgan's treachery is not mentioned again.

After this digression, both texts continue with Balin's story. Although the episode of the invisible knight is quite similar in both of them, nevertheless we find an important difference: whereas M continues the story of Balin till the end, D inserts several digressions, such as the appearance of Ebron's wife in the court to ask for her son Brius to be a knight (D, 93) and Bamndemagus' imprisonment and subsequent delivery by Orian's daughter and the adventures they underwent till they arrived to the place where Merlin was buried by Nimue.

These digressions make clear that compared with M, the Spanish author is much more fond of interweaving stories in the tradition of the French romances, something which obviously was not Malory's idea of narration. As a matter of fact, the reader of the Spanish text is quite confused when faced with Bandemagus in prison, without having been told that such a crime has been committed, in addition to presenting Ebron's widow before Arthur when there had been just a slight mention of Arthur's killing Ebron.

The main differences between the Dolorous stroke in M and D is the fact that in D, the violation of the sacred place is considered as the cause of the miseries which will follow the stroke; so, when Balin enters the chamber he hears a voice saying: "Por tu mal ay entraras, que no eres tal que debas entrar en tan alto lugar santo" (D, 109). Malory omits this voice because for him, the Dolorous stroke is not considered as a retribution for the violation of the sanctuary, but he associates the death of the Lady of the Lake with it.

Moreover, in D there is also a voice that anticipates the *Demanda del Sancto Grial: Agora comienca las aventuras del reyno aventurado, que jamás nunca fallecera fasta que sea claramente comprado el fecho de aquel que la santa lanca tomo con sus manos lixosas e viles con que llago al mejor hombre de los principes, y el gran maestro tomara desde venganca, assi que laceran por ende de los que lo merecieren* (D, 110).

This passage is quite similar to the passage in M which does not appear in any of his sources: "And King ... tray and tene" (M, 84). Therefore it seems quite possible to infer that here both Malory and the Spanish translator used the same source, derived from the French Ms.

As regards to Balin's and Balan's tragic deaths, the story in both texts is basically the same, though D is much richer in details and therefore much longer. But for example, there is no reference in M to the lady of the tower and her story (D, 109=, which obviously reinforces the idea of Malory's dislike of interwoven stories.

Moreover, the reference to Lancelot in D is much more complete than in M; in D, there is an important mention of Lancelot's ring and of the interest of the author in the three parts of the book being of equal length: "mas porque todas las partes de mi libro sean yguales, la una tan grande como la otra ... assi como lo devisa la alta historia del sancto Grial." (D, 120).

It is also important to notice that Malory's conclusion is original; it does not appear in D or in any of his sources, and in this sense. Vinaver has pointed out that "it serves much the same purpose as the opening paragraph of this section; it helps to make the Romance of Balin into a self-contained work" (Vinaver, 1318).

BOOK III (D: CCC-CCCXXIII)

Malory's book III is also conceived as an independent story. It narrates Arthur's marriage to Guinevere and the recovery of the Round Table, as well as the adventures of Gawain, Tor and Pellinor. The source of these adventures is Pseudo-Wauchier's continuation of Chretien's *Conte del Graal*, but here the three adventures were taken by Perceval. Finding this too complex, the author of the *Suite du Merlin* introduced three different questers: Gawain pursuing the hag, Tor the knight who took the hound, and Pellinor the damsel. In general, D follows this scheme too, though a few details vary.

Firstly, it is noticeable that when the Spanish translator is quite consistent in saying that the Round Table has one hundred and fifty knights, and that there are fifty seats left, Malory seems to be strikingly inconsistent, saying first that "Merlin had found such knights that should fulfill twenty and eight seats, but no more could he find" (M, 95). and later King Arthur asks "What is the cause that there be two places void in the siege?" (M, 97) The awkwardness of this sum suggests either that Malory was not very good at arithmetic or, more likely, that a bad scribe had mistaken the numbers.

A clearer difference between the two texts lies in the mystery of Tor's parentage. Whereas Malory makes clear that Tor is Pellinor's son before Pellinor comes to Camelot (M, 97), in D, it is not until the end of Tor's adventure that we know who is really Tor's father (D,137) and the explanation is completed when Tor's mother is called to Arthur's court.

In the same way, in M, the lady with the wounded knight, who died because Pellinor did not help her, turns out to be his own daughter, "begotten on the

Lady of the Rule" (M.115). On the other hand, in D, Merlin refuses to tell Pellinor who was the lady: "Yo nos dixe tanto como puedo, dixo Merlin," (D.141) and also refuses to explain to him the meaning of the voice he heard the day of his coronation: *Esto no os dire yo en ninguna guisa, ca no a cosa porque descubriese la cosa que el alto maestro puso a su voluntad fazer*" (D 142).

Here, the Spanish text follows more closely the French source, whereas Malory, who does not like leaving things unfold, provides the reader with a suitable explanation for the identity of the lady and omits the reference to the voice of the prophecy. As Vinaver says: " This is an example of Malory's practice of solving a mystery at the earliest possible opportunity" (1329).

Finally, there is another original passage in M at the end of the book. After recapitulating briefly the three adventures carried by Gawain, Tor and Pellinor, he concludes with an outline of knightly behavior in which he explains his conception of knightly behaviour, paying special attention to the worship of the king and "always to do ladies, damosels, and gentlewomen succour upon pain of death" (M.116). This is part of Malory's didactic scheme.

BOOK IV (D: CCCXXIV-CCCXLI)

This is the book which has more differences with the Spanish text. In the French source corresponding to the last part of M, the incidents centre around three main themes: Merlin and Nimue (Niviene, Vivienne), Arthur and Accolon and the adventures of Gawain, Uwain and Marhaus. As a variant to the source, D deals only with the story of Merlin which ends up with his death, being buried in a rock; whereas M is primarily about Arthur and Accolon and about the adventures of the three knights.

Malory briefly refers to Merlin being in love with Nimue and eloping with her until: *it happed that Merlin showed to her in a rock whereas was great wonder; and wrought by enchantment that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there... and so she departed and left Merlin.* (M.118)

and this is the only reference to Merlin's end in this book. The virtual suppression of the Merlin and Vivienne theme is an example of Malory's dislike of the supernatural and another hint of the greater importance of Arthur in this work.

On the other hand, D, being primarily concerned with the life of Merlin the Prophet, dedicates the last part of the narration to how Merlin fell victim of his own witchcraft, since he taught Nimue all his art and she used it to deceive him. Merlin had predicted his own death several times throughout the romance, "ca mucho supo despues, e de otre, e de su muerte e dixo el que mujer lo mataria" (D, 146). But he was unable to prevent it.

Anticipating an event which would be completed later on is a device used especially in oral tradition in order to keep the attention of the audience till the end. Thus, D begins this section by going back to chapter CCLXI in which Bandemagus was left standing by the rock where Merlin was, therefore the reader was already aware of Merlin's confinement in the rock: *y esta donzella del lago encerrara, ay en un monumento de marmol bermejo que ay estava, a Merlin, e metiole dentro... e porque esta hystoria no vos la quiere fazer entender mas llanamente, e contarvos he todo el fecho de Merlin e de la donzella del lago...* (D, 101).

Another important digression appears in CCCXXV, when Merlin tells Nemina how the cave was built; this episode is rich in details and therefore, more illustrative for the reader than Malory's account, which can be somewhat confusing, since we do not have a clear idea of how and where Merlin was buried. This episode of the origin of the cave in D has a singular analogy with the tale of the First Kalenda in *The One Thousand and One Nights*. At the same time it serves as an excuse for Nemina in order to bring Merlin to the chamber with romantic purposes.

The description of Merlin's death focus on supernatural elements in order to heighten the drama of the scene. Thus, Bandemagus arrives, and standing by the cave, he hears a terrible voice, "oyo una voz espantosa y fea," (D, 151) which is the voice of Merlin complaining of his fate. After a long conversation in which Merlin predicts the downfall of the Round Table caused by Mordred, and the battle between Mordred and Arthur, he falls silent until noon, and then he utters a terrible cry: "dio Merlin un baladro grande e un gemido tan espantoso, que Bandemagus hubo muy gran miedo," (D.153) and then he died. This is the cry which gives title to the book, *El Baladro de Merlin*, as it is explained later on (D, 154).

The source of this cry has been subject of much controversy by scholars; some, like G.Paris or E. Weschssler assume that it is a translation of a lost *Conte du Brait*, which was essentially the story of Merlin's last cry; on the other hand, Fanni Bogdanow defends the idea that such a book did not exist, but that "the episodes found in the Spanish versions are only ellaborations of references in the French *Suite du Merlin*" (Bogdanow, 396). Against this theory, Bohigas believes that there was a French or Spanish source from which the Spanish translators took these episodes.

As it has been said before, Malory makes no reference to this cry, obviously due to his dislike for supernatural elements and so, after the brief reference to Merlin, he shifts immediately to Arthur's battle against the five kings. The adventure of King Arthur, Uriens and Accolon, which takes place after the battle, serves Malory as a narrative device to present Arthur and Accolon together and so introduce the next episode, that of Morgan's plot to

kill Arthur. This plot is basically the same as that of D (CCXXVI-CCXXVIII), which has been explained above.

After Uwain leaves the court with Gawain, we are introduced to the adventures of these knights and of Marhaus. In the first place, Gawain's adventure contains another love story, that of Pelleas and Ettard. The only account of this story is to be found in Ms B.N 112, but according to Whitehead, Malory's concept of chivalry was quite different to that of the French source; he intended to be didactic and so he makes Pelleas a more resolute knight than he was in the French story; he also changes the end, punishing Ettard instead of rewarding her –in the French text she marries Pelleas instead of dying.

The last five chapters in M (24-28) are also taken from Ms B.N 112, but Malory's account differs in that he presents Marhaus' and Uwayn's adventures in sequence and in a period of time of twelve months, and at the end of the book they return to court with Gawain. The final gathering around Arthur is definitely meant to round off the book. The final chapter, being Malory's own invention, reinforces the idea of his building the story around Arthur and so concludes the *Tale of King Arthur*.

In sum, this study has intended to show the main differences between Malory's Tale and the Spanish version of 1535. Though the differences are many, there is little doubt that there was a common source derived from the *Suite du Merlin* which both translators knew. Thus, it seems clear that Malory's main purpose in translating the story was to focus on the figure of King Arthur as ruler and so his account is essentially the early history of his kingdom. On the other hand, D centers around Merlin's story, beginning with the decision of the devils to beget him and ending with his death.

With regard to narration, I have tried to focus on the different styles of the two texts; whereas D is remarkably long and rich in details, Malory omits superficial elements when possible, since the aim of his translation was clarity and didacticism. Another striking difference is that the Spanish version is much more religious than Malory's. First, Merlin's words and actions characterize him as a good Christian and also every important event in the narration takes place when there is a religious feast. Malory, in turn, seems to be more concerned about characterizing Arthur and his men as good knights, and though we also find Christian motifs, he excludes references to extraterrestrial elements, being specially careful to suppress mentions to magic and witchcraft; hence the different approach to Merlin's figure.

In conclusion then, it is worthwhile saying that Malory's handling of his source seems more free than the Spanish translator's. Though he remains quite faithful to it, he omits, reduces or adapts the episodes in order to his achieve his main purpose: a clear and sequential account of the early history of Arthur's kingdom.

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