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# The Language of Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur'

Keiji Saito

## Part I Introduction

For four and a half centuries the works of Sir Thomas Malory have been accepted under the title, 'le Morte Darthur' derived from William Caxton's colophon which was written by Caxton's own hand in printing them at Westminster in 1485. All the editions published from the fifteenth century to the present day had to depend either directly or indirectly on Caxton's edition 'enprynted and fynysshed in thabbey of Westmestre the last day of Juyl the yere of our Lord MCCCCLXXXV'. Only two copies of Caxton's print are extant: one is in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the other in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. The end of the nineteenth century the word-for-word reprint of the Rylands copy appeared. This was Sommer's monumental work,<sup>(1)</sup> which has since been used by the vast majority of Malory's editors.

In the early summer of 1934, however, a startling discovery was made in the Fellows' Library in Winchester College by the then Librarian, Mr. W. F. Oakeshott. Presently it was demonstrated that although this manuscript is neither Malory's own copy nor the one used by Caxton, it is in many respects more complete and authentic than Caxton's edition. We term the manuscript 'The Winchester MS.'.

Since an epoch-making edition based on the Winchester MS. appeared,<sup>(2)</sup> the traditional view on Malory as well as on Caxton has been compelled to change. To give an instance, - one of the most important,<sup>(3)</sup> the old history of literature used unduly to neglect Sir Thomas Malory. The critic found no room for Malory in the lineage of English writers and left him in complete isolation.<sup>(4)</sup> This may be not a fallacy as long as it is thought that Malory began his work with a translation from the French. But Vinaver's theory of the eight separate romances and his new opinion that the 'Arthur and Lucius'<sup>(5)</sup> is Malory's *étude*, which was concluded from the separate romances theory, revolutionized the literary ancien régime. Once it is realized that Malory's first experience as a prose writer was

an adaptation of an English Poem,<sup>(6)</sup> the appreciation of Malory ought to be more deepened.

Recently appeared successively some influential conflicting views with the supposition of the separate romances from which Vinaver derived his conclusions,<sup>(7)</sup> and yet against his argument that Malory's first work is the 'Arthur and Lucius', no protest has been made. Then we may think that his view on the sequence of Malory's works has generally been accepted, and if it be so, the possibility of elucidating the progress or the growth of Malory as a writer will be far less remote. Before the discovery of the Winchester MS. there was no possibility like that. "The most obvious merit of this text" (= 'the Winchester MS.'), writes Prof. Vinaver, "is that it brings us nearer to what Malory really wrote", and "it enables us to see Malory's work in the making—not as a single book such as Caxton produced under the spurious and totally unrepresentative title of 'Le Morte Darthur', but as a series of separate romances each representing a distinct stage in the author's development."<sup>(8)</sup>

About Malory's own intention we shall be able to form nothing but a conjecture. The certainty we can reach is only the result that Malory achieved. We may read the works of Malory as a series of separate romances while we have read them as a long, voluminous work. On this question it is to the point to induce that although originally Malory intended the separate romances, yet finally he compiled the whole into one, designing that the readers might read them as a serial piece.<sup>(9)</sup> We can draw the inference with certainty from the last colophon of the Winchester MS., i. e. 'I praye you all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his knyghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge.....'.<sup>(10)</sup>

"A comparison of the Winchester MS. with Caxton's printed text of the 'Morte Darthur'," writes Sally Shaw, "might raise hopes of finding striking differences between versions", but "apart from the treatment of Book V, few are striking, and conclusions must be drawn warily."<sup>(11)</sup> This remark is right. In fact few are striking differences between versions as my analysis in the Second Part will explain. It may be said that conspicuous differences are but those of spelling habit. At any rate, Caxton's Book V exceptionally presents a remarkable contrast to the corresponding part of the Winchester MS. (ff. 71r—96r). Making a comparison of both the texts with their common source,<sup>(12)</sup> we find that the Winchester MS. reveals greater resemblance to the source than Caxton's text, and consequently the former represents the closer approximation to what Malory actually wrote while the latter discloses Caxton's deliberate rewriting. The source, the alliterative 'Morte Arthure', being in the North-West Midland dialect in the second half of

the fourteenth century, and Malory being himself a Warwickshire man, it is most likely that the Winchester MS. does represent rather more closely than Caxton's the actual language of the author.

Why did Caxton rewrite the 'Arthur and Lucius' exceptionally and so broadly? To this question making an exact answer, Professor Kuriyagawa explains that one of the most important reasons consists in the language and the style of the 'Arthur and Lucius'.<sup>(13)</sup> The 'Arthur and Lucius' is Malory's 'first timid attempt at imaginative narrative',<sup>(14)</sup> and vitally affected by the alliterative poem.<sup>(15)</sup> The alliterative poem might have sounded too provincial to Caxton, a cultured Londoner, but it should have appealed to Malory, a Warwickshire knight, and hence to Malory it was worth adapting. The alliterative 'Morte Arthure' exerted a decisive influence on the formation of Malory's style.<sup>(16)</sup> This fact must be of great importance not only to the history of English prose but also to observing the progress of Malory as a writer. Before adapting the various French romances Malory had completed the ground work of his own style through rewriting the alliterative poem in a form accessible to the fifteenth century readers. The secret of Malory's style is mostly concealed in the 'Arthur and Lucius'. A key to Malory's style is within the grasp of Professor Kuriyagawa or Ján Šimko.<sup>(17)</sup> The secret may escape analysis, but it is at least tangible in the light of these masters' researches.

Next after the 'Arthur and Lucius' comes the 'Tale of King Arthur'—a retrospective account of the early history of Arthur's Kingdom, 'from the maryage of Kyng Uther unto Kyng Arthure that regned aftir hym and ded many batayles', and this is the material for my analysis whose report will be made in the following Part. Not only the 'Tale of King Arthur' but also its succeeding works arouse more interest in Malory's method of the treatment of narrative, or in his technique of the prose tale than in his style—in a word, the theme is of structure, not of style. The structure was, in brief, his attempt to substitute for the mediaeval method of 'inter-weaving' which has often been analogized with the technique of tapestry, a more modern treatment of narrative, in which Malory's most successful and historically most significant contribution to the technique of the prose tale existed. In the light of the French sources Malory adapted the essentials of his structure will come in sight.<sup>(18)</sup> For an inquiry into the structure it is indispensable that we are learned to a great extent in the French romances in the middle ages, and considering it, we may say, it was favourable that a French researcher was given. No one is so competent as Eugène Vinaver though he modestly says, "I know that I leave whatever lies beyond my grasp in better

hands than mine.”<sup>(19)</sup>

Now I intend to approach the style of Malory through his language, and ‘gauge the distance between the beginning and the end of the process’<sup>(20)</sup> of Malory’s growth as a writer, and ‘observe not merely what he achieved but how he achieved it’.<sup>(21)</sup> Two important points can be presumed in the process of his development; one is the French effect upon his language, the other the penetration of London dialect into it.<sup>(22)</sup> The ‘Tale of King Arthur’ proved by Vinaver to be the second work of Malory will be taken up and the dialectal features of the language will be examined in the next Part. The method of my analysis does not claim originality; it being only a report of the test made faithfully after the method of the predecessors, the outcome of examination is collated in detail with that of the predecessors’ researching.<sup>(23)</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 H. Oskar Sommer (ed.), *Le Morte Darthur* by Sir Thomas Malory: The Original Edition of William Caxton now reprinted and edited with an Introduction and Glossary, 3 vols., London, 1889-1891.
- 2 Eugène Vinaver (ed.), *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3 vols., Oxford, 1947; reprinted with corrections, 1948.
- 3 See ‘The Works of Sir Thomas Malory’ by Fumio Kuriyagawa in ‘The Rising Generation’, Vol. CIX-No. 9, (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 510-511. Prof. Kuriyagawa summarizes the most important conclusions that were drawn by E. Vinaver from a comparison of the newly discovered text, Caxton’s edition and Malory’s sources, setting six items in the treatise.
- 4 For example: G. Saintsbury, *A First Book of English Literature*, 1914.  
R. W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and his School*, 1932.
- 5 I use this simplified name after the example of Prof. Kuriyagawa. (cf. F. Kuriyagawa *English Literature and Language in the Middle Ages*, Tokyo, 1951; 5th ed. 1959, pp. 214). The full title is ‘The Tale of the Noble Kynge Arthure that was Emperoure hymself thorow Dygnyté of his Hondys’ (The Winches ter MS., ff. 71r-96r), which corresponds to Caxton’s Book V.
- 6 ‘Morte Arthure’, an English alliterative romance in the second half of the fourteenth century.
- 7 We find Mary E. Dichman, R. M. Lumiansky, and D. S. Brewer among them. (vid. for details, ‘The Language of Malory’s Tale of Arthur and Lucius’ by Fumio Kuriyagawa in ‘Studies in English Literature’, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2. (Tokyo, 1958), pp. 253-255; ‘The Rising Generation’, Vol. CIX-No. 9. (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 510.: J. A. W. Bennett (ed.), *Essays on Malory* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 41-63.
- 8 Eugène Vinaver (ed.), *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, (reprint, 1948), Vol. I, Preface, pp. vi.
- 9 See ‘The Works of Sir Thomas Malory’ by F. Kuriyagawa in ‘The Rising Generation’, Vol. CIX-No. 9. pp. 511.
- 10 E. Vinaver (ed.), op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 1260.

- 11 Sally Shaw, 'Caxton and Malory' in *Essays on Malory* (ed. by J. A. W. Bennett), pp. 114.
- 12 'Morte Arthure', an English alliterative romance in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Another romance titled 'Le Morte Arthure' about the end of the fourteenth century is a stanzaic poem, not an alliterative long-line.
- 13 'The Language of Malory's Tale of Arthur and Lucius' by F. Kuriyagawa in 'Studies in English Literature', Vol. XXXIV, No. 2., pp. 256-7.
- 14 This phrase is a quotation from Prof. Vinaver's words. cf. E. Vinaver (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Preface pp. vi.
- 15 F. Kuriyagawa, *English Literature and Language in the Middle Ages* (5th ed., 1959), pp. 213.
- 16 F. Kuriyagawa, *ibid.*, pp. 213-214.  
F. Kuriyagawa, *The Language of Malory's Tale of Arthur and Lucius*. (*Studies in English Literature*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2. Tokyo, 1958.) pp. 253-269.
- 17 Ján Šimko, *Word-Order in Winchester Manuscript and in William Caxton's edition of Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur* (1485), A Comparison. Halle, 1957.
- 18 On Malory's technique: vid. E. Vinaver (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I. Introduction, ch. II, (2).  
On Malory's sources: vid. Vinaver, *ibid.*, Vol. III. Commentary.
- 19 E. Vinaver, *ibid.*, Vol. I. Preface, pp. viii.
- 20 *do.*, *ibid.*, pp. xlvii.
- 21 *do.*, *ibid.*, pp. vi.
- 22 I owe this supposition to Prof. Kuriyagawa's suggestion.
- 23 Fumio Kuriyagawa, 'The Language of Malory's Tale of Arthur and Lucius' in *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2. (1958), pp. 253-269.  
Shigeji Ogawa, 'The Language of the Winchester MS. of Malory's Tale of the Morte Arthur' in *The Geibun-Kenkyu*, No.9., pp. 21-36.

## Part II The Language of Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur'

The examination of the dialectal features of the language of the presumptive second work of Malory, 'Tale of King Arthur' (Winchester MS., ff° 9<sup>r</sup>-70<sup>r</sup>) is made here, and the result of it is compared with that of Caxton's text (Book I. II. III. IV.) and that of 'Arthur and Lucius' (Winchester MS., ff. 71<sup>r</sup>-96<sup>r</sup>; Caxton, Book V) and also that of 'Tale of the Morte Arthur' (Winchester MS., ff. 449<sup>r</sup>-484<sup>r</sup>; Caxton, Book XX, XXI).

### List of Abbreviations

W.: The Winchester MS., ff° 9<sup>r</sup>-70<sup>r</sup> (Tale of King Arthur)

E. Vinaver (ed.), *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (3 vols., Oxford, 1947;

- reprinted with corrections, 1948), I, pp. 5-180.
- C.: Caxton's Malory, Book I. II. III. IV.
- H. Oskar Sommer (ed.), *Le Morte Darthur* by Sir Thomas Malory: The Original Edition of William Caxton now reprinted and edited with an Introduction and Glossary, 3 vols., London, 1889-1891. I. pp. 35-159.
- A. L.: The Winchester MS., ff. 71<sup>r</sup>-96<sup>r</sup> (Arthur and Lucius); Vinaver's edition, Vol. I, pp. 185-247.
- Caxton's Malory, Book V; Sommer's edition, Vol. I, pp. 160-183.
- M. A.: The Winchester MS., ff. 449<sup>r</sup>-484<sup>r</sup> (The Tale of the Morte Arthur); Vinaver's edition, Vol. III, pp. 1161-1253.
- Caxton's Malory, Book XX chs. i-xxii, Book XXI chs. i-ix.; Sommer's edition, I, pp. 797-855.
- Kuriyagawa's Arthur and Lucius: 'The Language of Malory's Tale of Arthur and Lucius' by Fumio Kuriyagawa in 'Studies in English Literature', Vol. XXXIV, No. 2. (Tokyo, 1958), pp. 253-269.
- Ogawa's Morte Arthur: 'The Language of the Winchester MS. of Malory's Tale of the Morte Arthur'-Growth and System of Malory's English, by Shigeji Ogawa in 'The Geibun-Kenkyu' (Journal of Art and Letters of the Keio), No. 9. (Tokyo, 1959), pp. 21-36.
- S. Shaw: 'Caxton and Malory' by Sally Shaw in 'Essays on Malory' (ed. by J. A. W. Bennett), pp. 114-145.
- Wyld: Henry Cecil Wyld, *A Short History of English*, 3rd ed. London, 1927. ch. ix, pp. 222-287.
- W. 54/33=Vinaver's edition, Vol. I, pp. 54, ll. 33.
- C. 140/23=Sommer's edition, Vol. I, pp. 140, ll. 23.
- V: Vinaver's edition
- S: Sommer's edition

#### (A) SPELLING

Of the unstressed syllable 'e' a comparison of W. with C. is made because in Northern dialect the unstressed syllable 'e' is often spelled 'i' or 'y'.

#### Scope of the Inquiry

- (1) The Last Part of 'Merlin'  
V. pp. 54-56: C. Book I, ch. XXVII-XXVIII, S., pp. 74-75.
- (2) The Last Part of 'Balyn le Sauvage' (except the lacuna of W. MS.)  
V. pp. 91-92; C. Book II, ch. XVIII-XIX, S., pp. 97-99.
- (3) The Beginning of 'Gawain, Ywain, and Marhalt'  
V. pp. 157-159: C. Book IV, ch. XVI-XVII, S. pp. 139-141.

(1) Nouns, Pl. :-

—Winchester—

-es beard-es 54/33 kyng-es 54/35 kne-es 55/11 lady-es 55/27 158/34, 37 159/1  
knight-es 55/30 158/20. 24 159/8. 12. 21 barown-es 56/6 sonn-es 55/31 yer-  
es 92/5 day-es 92/25 mass-es 158/21 hors-es 158/24

Total 19

-is kyng-is 54/31 berd-is 55/1 lond-is 55/3 lord-is 55/26. 30 wek-is 55/33  
astat-is 158/18 hond-is 158/33 plac-is 159/1

-ys sonn-ys 55/30 lord-ys 56/6 col-ys 157/37 monk-ys 158/15

-is, -ys Total 13

-s elder-s 55/10 damesel-s 158/24. 25. 27. 31 159/10. 19

Total 7

Mutation jantylwomen 158/34 jantyllwomen 158/37 159/1

Irregular Pl. brethirne 92/23 children 55/25 56/7

Total 6

Pl. Grand Total 45

Percentage of using -is, -ys 28.9%

cf. A. L. 23.5%

M. A. 34.3%

—Caxton—

-es kyng-es 74/23 berd-es 74/27 land-es 74/29 lord-es 75/11. 12 lady-es 75/11  
140/32. 34 141/1 son-es 75/14 wek-es 75/17 hand-es 140/31 knight-es  
99/36 (twice), 38 140/19. 22 141/7. 11. 19 col-es 140/1 monk-es 140/15  
mass-es 140/20 hors-es 140/23 estat-es 140/18 plac-es 141/1 yer-es 99/23

Total 27

-is 0 -ys berd-ys 74/25 kne-ys 74/36

Total 2

-s elder-s 74/35 baron-s 75/22 syr-s 140/29 damoyse-s 140/22. 23. 25. 29  
141/9. 17

Total 9

Mutation gentylwymmen 140/32 141/2 gentilwymmen 140/34—35

Irregular Pl. bretheren 99/37—38 childrē 75/10 children 75/23

Total 6

Pl. Grand Total 44

Percentage of using -ys (no ' -is ' in C.) 4.4%

cf. A. L. 6.4%

M. A. 3.0%



As W. represents the closer approximation to Malory's original, it is inferrable that Caxton altered -is, or -ys into '-es'.<sup>(1)</sup> "This hint of a more northerly origin for the MS. (= "W. MS."), remarks S. Shaw, "is strengthened by the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective."<sup>(2)</sup>

(2) Adjectives, Endings of CPV. and SPL. :-

W. CPV.		C. CPV.
lenger 159/14..... 1 .....		lenger 141/12-13
W. SPL.		C. SPL.
Lewd-iste 55/6	} 3	lewd-est 74/32
shamefull-yste 55/13		shamefull-est 74/37
grett-ist 92/19		grett-est 99/35

W. SPL. -ist or -yst is all altered to '-est' in C.

The common CPL. form in both W. and C., 'lenger' is the same in M. A.

(3) Verbs, Pres. Ind. 2 Sg. :-

W. may-ste 55/7..... 1 .....	C. may-st 74/33
cf. Accidence (1)	

(4) Pres. Ind. 3 Sg. :-

W. know-yth 55/18	C. know-eth 75/4
rehers-ith 56/4. 12	reherc-eth 75/21
	reherc-yth 75/27
folow-ith 56/13	folow-eth 75/28
lov-ith 91/32	lou-eth 141/1
lov-yth 159/1	
end-ith 92/22	end-eth 99/37
banysh-yth 158/13	bannyssh-eth 140/13
ow-yth 158/32	ow-eth 140/30
hat-yth 158/33	hat-eth 140/31
besem-yth 158/36	bysem-eth 140/33-34
methinke 159/10 (impers.)	me thynk-eth 141/9
W. -ith, -yth 11	C. -eth 10
zero ending 1	-yth 1

cf. Accidence (2)

(5) Pres. Ind. Pl. :-

W. speke 159/3	C. speke 141/8
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cf. Accidence (3)

(6) Weak Pret. and Pret. Ptc. :-

W. Pret.	C. Pret.
----------	----------

depart-ed 55/17 158/14 159/16  
hov-ed 92/4

confess-ed 158/16  
enchev-ed 92/10  
enchev-yd 92/11-2  
salew-ed 158/29  
ask-ed 158/30  
dress-ed 159/22. 26

contracted pret.  
answerde 55/19  
fostird 56/3  
purveyde 56/11  
assayde 91/25  
Total 15  
(-yd 1)

W. Pret. Ptc.

aspy-ed 55/14  
destroy-ed 56/1  
distroy-ed 158/5. 8  
displeas-ed 56/7  
rehers-ed 92/12  
bury-ed 92/18  
call-ed 92/7  
excus-ed 158/9  
discharg-ed 158/11  
logg-ed 158/16  
depart-ed 158/17  
arm-ed 158/24  
belov-yd 159/2  
prev-ed 159/7  
dishonour-ed 159/15

contracted form

gadird 159/8  
purfilde 54/35

depart-ed 75/3 140/14 141/14  
hou-ed 99/22  
lou-ed 99/12  
confess-yd 140/7  
encheu-ed 99/29  
  
salew-ed 140/27-28  
ask-ed 140/28  
dress-id 141/19  
dress-yd 141/23

ansuerd 75/5  
nouryssh-ed 75/20  
puruey-ed 75/27  
assay-ed 99/7  
Total 15  
(-yd 2, -id 1)

C. Pret. Ptc.

aspy-ed 75/1  
destroy-ed 75/18 140/5. 8  
lack-ed 74/28  
displeas-yd 75/23  
reherc-ed 99/29  
bury-ed 99/34  
  
excus-ed 140/9  
discharg-ed 140/11  
lodg-ed 140/15  
depart-ed 140/14-5  
arm-ed 140/22-3  
lou-ed 141/2  
preu-ed 141/6  
dishonour-ed 141/13

gader-ed 141/7  
purfyl-ed 74/27

zero ending

W.

discomfite 54/31

Total 19

(-yd 1)

W. W. Pret. & Pret. Ptc.

Grand Total 34

(-yd 2)

C.

discomfyte 74/23

Total 19

(-yd 1)

C. W. Pret. & Pret. Ptc.

Grand Total 34

(-i)yd 4)

Percentage of using -yd W. 5.9% ; C. 12%

Charles S. Baldwin calculated lower : he reports 7-8% in C.<sup>(3)</sup>

In any other case of W. i (y) forms are prevailing, but an inverse state is marked here.<sup>(4)</sup>

(7) Strong Verbs, Pret. Ptc. :-

W.

begot-yn 55/26

to-ryven 56/1

contracted form

borne 55/26 (twice), 28 92/23

sene 157/24

-n omitted form

founde 55/30

smyte 159/28

zero ending

overcom 54/31

Total 10

(-yn 1, -en 1)

C.

begotē 75/11

to ryuen 75/18

borne 75/13

born 75/10. 11 99/38

sene 139/26

founde 75/14

smyten 141/25

ouercome 74/23

Total 10

(-en 2)

Roughly speaking, the forms of both strong and weak verbs show little significant variation between W. and C.

cf. Accidence (5)

(8) Miscellany :-

W.

othir 55/2

(or other 55/11, nother 157/25)

ellis 55/2. 11 91/30

entir 55/2

nevir 55/3

C.

or 74/29

els 74/29

entre 74/29

neuer 74/30

(or never 55/14, etc.)	
evir 55/7 92/17	euer 74/32 99/33
(or ever 92/19. 24)	ouer 99/35
※ fostird 56/33	nourysshed 75/20
aftirward 56/4	afterward 75/21
attir 56/12. 13 92/14	after 75/27-8. 28 99/30
(or after 157/37)	
handyll 91/24. 25. 29	handel(d) p.p. 99/6-7
	handle (infin.) 99/7. 9
watir 92/5. 11	water 99/23. 28
togydirs 92/16	to gyders 99/32-3 141/20-1
togedyrs 159/23	
brethirne 92/23	bretheren 99/37-8
W.	C.
Northumbirlonde 92/23	northüberlād 99/38
sistir 158/2 (or sister 157/29)	
hir 157/35 (Fem. Pers. Pron.	her 139/35
Gen. Sin.)	
wondirly 158/1	wonderly 140/2
dyspyte 158/35	despyte 140/32-3
dispyse 158/37	despyse 140/34
onys 159/7 (=“once”)	ones 141/6
lytyll 159/17	lytel 141/14
gadird (Weak Verb Pret.	gadered 141/7
Ptc.) 159/8	

※ Caxton shied away from an unfamiliar Northern word.

The W. text ‘i’ or ‘y’ is almost always replaced with ‘e’ in the C. text.

(to be continued)

## NOTES II

- 1 Kuriyagawa's Arthur and Lucius, pp. 259-260.
- 2 S. Shaw, pp. 144.
- 3 Kuriyagawa's Arthur and Lucius, pp. 260.
- 4 Kuriyagawa, *ibid.*, pp. 260.  
Ogawa's Morte Arthur, pp. 26.