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Editing the *Polychronicon* Based on the *Chronicles of England*

— Caxton's Editorship Reconsidered —*

Masako Takagi

As scarcely any printer's copies used by William Caxton are extant today, it is difficult to form a theory related to his use of copy-texts.(1) Nevertheless, it is possible to assume that throughout his printing career, Caxton dealt each time according to each text's unique, specific traits or problems because his own access to the manuscripts was limited. Some texts such as the *Reynard the Fox* or the *Dicts of Philosophers* were translated from the original languages at the print shop, while others such as the *Golden Legend*, or the *Morte Darthur* were partly modified by Caxton from the original versions, although in the case of the *Morte Darthur*, there is one extant manuscript, the Winchester manuscript, and its relation to Caxton's edition have been the subject of academic discussion throughout the last thirty years. If Caxton had to prepare a translation from the original manuscript, it is easily presupposed that there was at least one intermediate copy between the original and the final product. Yet, more often, Caxton probably made additions or deletions to his copy-text by directly writing on the manuscript of his choice. A few pieces of evidence remain which indeed suggest this, and it is of much interest how Caxton prepared each new text from the already existing texts.

The focus of this article is Caxton's editing of the *Polychronicon*. In this work, there is a good amount of addition towards the end. Largely,

Caxton seems to have used his own printed copy of the *Chronicles of England* rather than preparing any new printer's copy. I would like to take a closer look at this part's particular making in order to see his handling of a copy-text.[2]

The added part, the *Liber Ultimus* (the 8th book) of the *Polychronicon* comprises 33 chapters in all. In comparison with the *Chronicles of England*, its first and second half are of a very different nature. Norman Blake first mentioned the possibility that the latter "part of *Liber Ultimus* was set up directly from the *Chronicles of England*".[3] Lister Matheson also noted the same possibility in 1998, more specifically identifying the *Chronicles of England* as the printer's copy:

> The second part of the *Liber ultimus*, however, could perhaps have been set up from a marked-up copy of the *Chronicles of England*. Some short passages are deleted and some minor additions and corrections are made that are occasionally paralleled in the chronicles of London, but the text is essentially the same as the corresponding section of the *Chronicles of England* continuation, with spelling changes and minor verbal alterations made by the compositor.[4]

This is incompatible with the fact that Caxton does not talk about his use of the *Chronicles of England* in his own preface to the *Liber Ultimus*. Norman Blake has pointed out on several occasions that Caxton was seldom articulate in describing his editorial procedure.[5] In this case, too, Caxton seems to be intentionally hiding the name of the *Chronicles of England* as a source of information. The impression is particularly strong because he instead mentions *Aureus de Universo* and *Fasciculus Temporum*, which in fact have little to do with the added

section. Following are Caxton's own words on this subject:

> ...I have not ne can gete no bokes of auctoryte treating of suche cronykes, except a lytel boke named *Fasciculus Temporum* and another callyd *Aureus de Universo*, in whiche bookes I fynde right lytel mater syth the sayde tyme.[6]

The two books may have served as a pretext for Caxton to avoid the subject of the *Chronicles of England*. Whatever the reason was, he purposefully obscures his use of the book. Interestingly, this type of rhetoric is similar to the that in the *Morte Darthur* (1485). In its preface Caxton mentions the *Polychronicon*, Bochas' *De Casu Principum*, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* as credible sources of the historical King Arthur, while leaving Arthur in the *Chronicles of England* untouched. Nevertheless, Arthur in the *Chronicles of England* most resembles the Arthur of the *Morte Darthur*. It is fairly clear that the *Chronicles of England* was an important reference for Caxton in each work, but in both cases, Caxton intentionally seems to avoid citing this source. It is thus reasonable to suspect that something more than convention kept Caxton from referring to the *Chronicles of England* by name, perhaps something relating to the political situation of the period.

As the *Polychronicon* was officially dedicated to Edward IV, it was destined to bear the York seal from the beginning. The original *Chronicles of England* on which Caxton based his work terminated in the year 1419, and it already exhibited "proper Yorkist sentiments."[7] Whether written by Caxton or not, the section from 1419 to 1461 deals with historical events as far as the reign of Edward IV, and it was this part that was added to the *Polychronicon*. No matter how it went, it was

plainly dedicated to Edward IV, openly seeking the favor of the York court. However, 1481 to 1485 was extremely bad timing for Caxton to manifest his loyalty to Edward IV. Painter points out:

> The continuation shows proper Yorkist sentiments, but had to stop at 1461, for—although chronicles continued to be written for private circulation and posterity during Edward's reign—everything after Edward's coronation was still dynamite.[8]

This was the political situation Caxton faced in 1482. The *Polychronicon* was published only one year before Edward IV's death. The next year, under Richard III, Caxton continued to work in the same line until 1485, presumably completing the order which he had received from the York allies.[9] A host of publications during this unstable period which saw no major trouble seems to suggest Caxton's wiliness side as a businessman, and he may have known through experience that especially the *Chronicles of England* was one of the books with which he would clearly like to avoid association due to political considerations.

Though this was the general situation he was in, Caxton also faced more pressing practical problems. The original Latin *Polychronicon* which Trevisa had translated finished in the year 1357. From that year up to the contemporary period, the history was missing. This had to be resolved immediately. Luckily, for the *Liber Ultimus*, Caxton obtained a source different from the *Chronicles of England*, covering 1357 to 1419. It seems probable that Caxton had in his possession several sources covering 1333 or 1370, to sometime up to his day. The *Anglo-Norman Brut* ended in 1333 and the rest to 1370 was added when it was translated into English, so Caxton may have obtained several different versions of texts from this period. Even if it was Caxton himself who

wrote the added section, he must have had ample sources to refer to. Matheson describes the general trait of the first part of *Liber Ultimus*:

> The chapters of the *Liber ultimus* are numbered from 1 ("Capitulum Primum") to 33 ("Capitulum Trisesimum Tercium"). Apart from the natural chapters provided by the beginnings of the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V, the divisions in the text to 1419 do not correspond to those in the *Chronicles of England*.[10]

Their chapter divisions do not correspond, and the order of sequences and the events chosen do not always correspond, either. Nevertheless, this part of the *Liber Ultimus* seems to rely heavily on the *Chronicles of England*, hence leaving the possibility that Caxton himself was the compiler of this particular part.[11]

Caxton makes a curious mistake at the beginning of the *Liber Ultimus* about the date Higden finished the work. Caxton thought Higden had ended the book in 1357. Caxton states so at the end of the *Liber Septimus* (the seventh book) and continues in the preface to the *Liber Ultimus*, "to contynue the sayd werk bryefly....from the tyme that he lefte, that was in the yere of Oure Lord a thousand three honderde and seven and fifty." This date is wrong, however. Higden in fact goes as far as the incidents of 1460, from the contemporary historians' point of view. This error, however, is somewhat understandable because it arises from the fact that in the last section of the original *Polychronicon*, 1357 is the last year mentioned.[12] After the mention of 1357 in the *Liber Septimus*, textual indications of dates are rather hard to translate into years. The language used is as follows: *Also the same yer; This yere aboute the asumpcion of our ladye; announciacion of our*

lady; In the mene tyme; This yere aboute saynt dunstans feest; Saynt lamasse nexte; the xviii day after ester; and *about mychelmasse.*[13] The Assumption was on August 15, 1357; the Annunciation March 25, 1358; Saint Dunstan May 19, 1358; Saint Lammas, August 1, 1359; 8 days after Easter, 1360; and Michaelmas September 29, 1360. Presumably Caxton simply judged that Trevisa occasionally mixed up the dates since it was not uncommon that different chronicles aligned dates differently.[14]

Textually, it seems clear that Caxton did not base the first half of the *Liber Ultimus* on the *Chronicles of England*, at least not verbatim. The copy-text for this section has been lost. Thus, when the *Liber Ultimus* is compared with the *Chronicles of England*, the best description one can make is as follows:

Table 1 : Conjunction between the *Liber Ultimus* and the *Chronicles of England*

Polychronicon Liber Ultimus	*Chronicles of England*	
Chapters 1-14 (1358-1419)	Chapters 234-244 (1358-1419)	Loose conjunction as a copy-text
Chapters 15-33 (1419-1469)	Chapters 245-263 (1419-1469)	Strict conjunction as a copy-text

Though there is not much to be said about the former half of the *Liber Ultimus*, Caxton used several interesting devices when he prepared the latter half of it. For the rest of this paper, I would like to focus on the editorial devices used by either Caxton himself or the compositors who set up the latter half, to see how the division of labor proceeded at Caxton's workshop. In this way, the type of work strictly undertaken by the compositors can be identified, thus illuminating the type of work the compositors could do versus the work they could not do. I have divided the setting up process into four categories according to

their differences: 1. Changes to enhance the textual coherence to the entire *Polychronicon*; 2. Changes to emphasize the differences from the *Chronicles of England*; 3. Changes which bring in different words and phrases for copy-fitting; 4. Spelling changes.

The last two changes were probably more results of workers' discretion than conscious devices, and presumably fell within the compositor's range of business, but the first two changes keenly reflect Caxton's editorial intention. First, Caxton changed the king's name Henry in the *Chronicles of England* to Harry in the *Liber Ultimus*, since in the *Polychronicon*, King Harry dominates instead of King Henry. Secondly, while most of the numbers which appear in the *Chronicles of England* are transcribed in Roman numerals, Caxton employed as much English as possible in the *Liber Ultimus*, as it was more commonly done in the *Polychronicon*. Table 2 below gives examples of this device used by Caxton:

Table 2 : Caxton's Intentional Changes

Chronicles of England	*Liber Ultimus* (*Polychronicon*)
Kyng Henry IV (1399-1412), V (1413-1422), VI (1422-1461)	Kyng Harry IV, V, VI
M. CCCC. L. Viij	one thousand foure hondred eight and fyfty

While the above change has nothing to do with the content itself, it helped the readers to transition smoothly from the *Liber Septimus* to the *Liber Ultimus*. Had Caxton not applied these changes, the original spellings would certainly have appeared on the pages of the *Liber Ultimus*. This may be a small change, but it was within the range of activity of someone who could take a broad overview of the book.

The second category of changes is more related to the content.

Interestingly, they indicate that Caxton actually wanted the *Liber Ultimus* to be slightly different from the *Chronicles of England*. In some cases, totally new sentences were added, but in most cases Caxton keeps the original passages. On the other hand, the only section excised from the *Liber Ultimus* was the following first four lines:

> And anone after that rone was goten Depe & many othir tounes in baas normandie yaf them our withoute strok or seiege whan they vnderstode that the kyng had goten rone /(15)

This is the beginning of Chapter 265 of the *Chronicles of England*, located just above the first line where verbatim correspondence between the *Liber Ultimus* and the *Chronicles of England* begins. The next table indicates what passages are new additions to the *Polychronicon*, and what passages of the *Chronicles of England* were transferred to other sections of the text.

Table 3 : Contextual Differences between the *Liber Ultimus and the Chronicles of England*

Chronicle of England	*Liber Ultimus*
Chapter 245	Chapter 15
it was wurshipfully buried, & after was leid on his tombe a rial ymage like to hymselfe of siluer and gylt which was made atte cost of quene katerine, And thus ended & is enterid & buried the noble kyng henry the fyfte (u5)	On whoos Tombe is a Ryche ymage lyke hymself of Syluer and gylt/ Where he is dayly remembrid and praid fore / (53. 2^{v})
No identical passage	Chapter 21 In this yere was the kynge of scottys murthred in his chambre by nyght pytously whiche kynge had be prysoner xv yere in englonde / And they that slewe hym were taken afterward & had

	cruel justyce (54. 2r) Chapter 22
No identical passage	¶ Also this yere the lord Talbotte had leyde syege to dyepe / but the Dolphyn rescowed it / and whan the bastyle that Englysshmen had made ¶ (54. 3v) Chapter 23
No identical passage	for by the mene of the marquys of Suffolke it was broken (53. 4v)
Chapter 254	Chapter 25
¶ Aboute this tyme the cite of Constantinople whiche was imperiall cite in all grece was taken by the turkes infidels, whiche was betrayed as somme holde oppinion & the Empour taken and slayne, And that riall chyrche of sancta sophia robbed and despoiled and the reliques and ymages and the Rode drawe aboute the stretes whiche was done in despite of cristen feith / And sone after alle cristen faith in grete parisshed & cessid Ther were many cristen men slayne and innumerable sold & put in captivite, by the takyng of this toune the turke is gretely enhauced in pride, And it is a grete losse vnto all cristendome (x6v)	This yere a Squyer of englod named chalons dyde armes with a knyght of Fraunce named Syre lowys de buyel tofore the Frensshe kynge, and ranne the Frensshe knyght thurgh with a spere and slewe hym in the felde (53. 6r)
	Chapter 26
No identical passage	¶ This yere Syre thomas cryell was ouerthrowen at fermyngny and many Englysshemen slayne and taken prysonners / (53. 7r) Chapter 27
No identical passage	In the yere of oure lorde a thousand four honderd and thre and fyfty the cyte of Constantynople themperyal Cyte of Grece was taken by the turke / the Emper

our slayne / and innumerablecrysten pe
ple destroyed and put in Captyuyte / by
whiche pryse Crystenfeyth perysshed in
grece / and the turke enhaunced gretely
in pryde
(54. 8^{v})

That Caxton incorporated several different passages from other chronicles is not surprising, but how he moved one incident in the *Chronicles of England* to a different place in the *Liber Ultimus* reveals the fact that he was doing more than copying one book from another. The Turkish takeover of Constantinople is described as an incident occurring during the 27th year of King Henry VI in the *Chronicles of England*, but appears in the *Liber Ultimus* as an incident of 1453, the 32nd year of Henry's reign. It shows Caxton was interested in historical accuracy, and occasionally this kind of juggling is part of the printer's business.

Other incidents in the *Liber Ultimus* are likely to have been added from the copy-text Caxton used to prepare the former half of the *Liber Ultimus*. Though this is speculation, if the text Caxton used for the first half of the *Liber Ultimus* was long enough to cover the latter period, he would certainly have made use of the rest as well.

The additions and omissions are significant because they suggest that there was a strict division of labor between the compositors and the printer. It seems unlikely that the compositors would have transferred sections of text for any reason in this case, because they had nothing to do with copy-fitting technique, which would have hindered their work. Furthermore, if it had not been for copy-fitting device, the compositors would have preferred to leave the text as they were. To make this point clearer, I have examined below how Caxton left the work to the hands of the compositors as it became more detailed.

The next minute additions and omissions are of a different nature than from those we have already looked at. They are most likely the work of compositors because they are done without changing the content or the meaning of text. They may have occurred sometimes due to carelessness, and sometimes due to the typographical need to fill in one or two more words in the same line. I have picked out all of these minor differences, which were relatively few. Their limited number indicates that the compositors followed the process of editing quite faithfully, and the freedom of changing the content for copy-fitting device was limited to instances where there was no effect on context, or general meaning. In order to illustrate the different nature of this category compared with interventions by the editor, I indicate all the changes below:

Table 4: Typographical Changes

Chapter 15
at → whanne
[blank] →&c
[blank] → was sayd
of → as
on theven → atte euen
by the way → [blank]
resteth → lieth
Chapter 16
[blank] → moche
[blank] → and
[blank] → that
[blank] → that he hadde
[blank] → soo
[blank] → it
Chapter 17
and → [blank]
[blank] → this
heme → boheme
[blank] → he
same → [blank]
same → [blank]
Jhesu crist → [blank]
holy and deuoute → deuoute
forsaid → sayd
he → [blank]
same → [blank]
with his meyne → [blank]
Chapter 18
&c → [blank]
king → [blank]
same → [blank]
[blank] → Amen
[blank] → there
the → [blank]
forsaid → sayd
were → [blank]
&c → [blank]
same → [blank]
almyghty → [blank]
same → [blank]
of → at
humble → lowe
Chapter 25
&c → [blank]
grete → hole
he → [blank]
all his → this
same → [blank]
Chapter 19
same → [blank]
the king of Frensshe → the Frensshe kynge
many grete → grete many of
[blank] → rule and
[blank] → longe
Chapter 20
Scotland → scottys
she → [blank]
wurshipfully buried → buryed worshipfully
And → [blank]
same → [blank]
same → [blank]
Chapter 21
&c → [blank]
the → [blank]
the which kine → whiche
wurshipfully → [blank]
goone euer → euer goone
anone after he → [blank]
in → [blank]

and hooly
Chapter 22
[blank] → dame
[blank] → Margarete
Chapter 23
forsaid → sayd
afaire myracle → myracles
so many that → that
and in conclusion →[blank]
Chapter 24
anone → v or vj dayes
on the morne → [blank]
amen → [blank]
[blank] → not
on → and
a → [blank]
the Reame of → [blank]
of Glocestre → [blank]
for it → [blank]
Almighty → [blank]
aforesaid → sayd
in no manner wise →[blank]
graunte → sende
&c → [blank]
here → see
Chapter 26
in → of
[blank] → same
[blank] → with
[blank] → a
[blank] → he
the baron of duddly → [blank]
&c → [blank]
these → the
in his name → his
Almighty → [blank]
pity → [blank]
about the → at
[blank] → same
& toke away much good → [blank]
Almighty → [blank]
Chapter 27
and → with
a → the
and stronge → [blank]
on → to
wolde → shold
[blank] → And
[blank] →&c
chapt
Chapter 28
and → [blank]
he → [blank]
the → [blank]
[blank] → in
Chapter 29
[blank] → of
Chapter 30
[blank] → good
Chapter 31
[blank] → see
Chapter 32
[blank] → on
[blank] → the
[blank] → ageyne
a grete meyne of → many
from thens → [blank]

As one can see, these changes seldom affect the general meaning or the flow of the text. Omissions or deletions of "same" and "and" are frequent, and there seems to have been a conventional deletion which occurred in prayer, when it came to address "Almighty God" or simply "God."

Apart from this copy-fitting device, the only other job left to compositors was the spelling corrections, which could have happened more out of lack of attention, not to mention recurrent eye-skips, which often caused them to finish the page one line shorter, and to fill the blank with more words and spaces later. The spelling changes of the *Liber Ultimus* indicate the compositor's particular way of preferring "y" and sometimes are indicative of a larger shift in spelling in the history of the English language. These issues are interesting in themselves, but are not of major significance for this paper. Rather, the division of labor

between editor and compositors is of most interest.

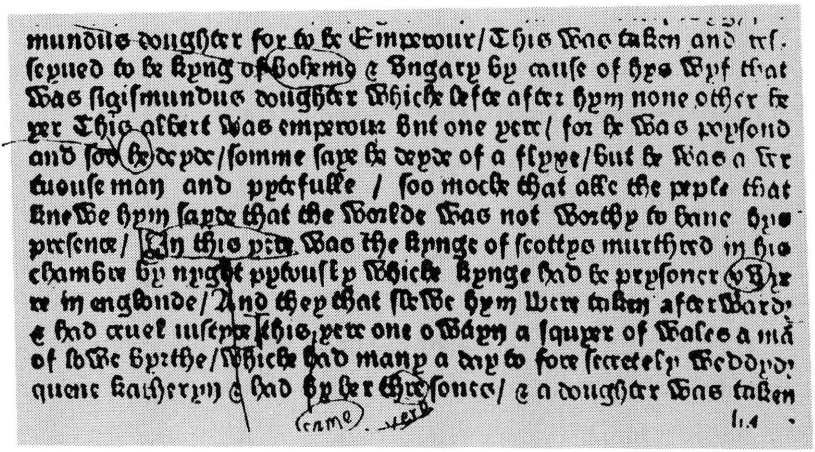
One cannot ignore the fact that the printed text of the *Chronicles of England* was on the basis of the *Liber Ultimus*, and that it meant for compositors the ease of copy-fitting at firsthand.[16] Still, it seems clear that there was only a limited range of freedom compositors could enjoy concerning textual variations. From this point of view, I would like to question Lotte Hellinga's theory concerning relations between the Winchester manuscript and Caxton's editions of the *Morte Darthur* onec again.[17] The Winchester manuscript was at Caxton's printing shop at least from 1482 to probably as late as 1489, and is now generally assumed to be the manuscript Caxton at least consulted in order to print his own edition.

The nature of textual variations between the *Morte Darthur* and the *Liber Ultimus* are different, but if one may compare the two, using the changes in the *Liber Ultimus* as the prototype for changes Caxton's compositors made, it is possible to a certain extent to distinguish the work done by compositors and that done by others. The key point is: from the examination of the *Liber Ultimus*, it is clear that the compositors did *not* want to change the copy-text if the fitting device was working fine.

Hellinga has argued that based on the mistakes in Caxton's *Morte Darthur*, it is possible to reconstruct the text which had existed as the printer's copy. Her theory applies to the cases where frequent eye-skips and mis-calculations of page breaks by the compositors are recorded, but not to the changes such as those which follow. In the Quest of the Holy Grail in the *Morte Darthur*, where Galahad encounters a monk, the Winchester manuscript reads:

Where ys such a noyse that who hyryth hit veryly shall nyghe be

Chart 1: Examples of Compositors' Insertions : *Polychronicon* Chapter 21 (54. 2r)



madde other lose hys strengthe.[18]

On the other hand, Caxton's edition reads:

> Where that was suche a noyse that who that herd hit shold veryly nyghe be madde other lose hys strengthe.[19]

Caxton's sentence is corrupted through the insertions "that was" and "that". It is apparent that the explanation of the compositors wanting to increase the number of words in order to fit the text to the given page does not work very well in this case. Looking back on similar cases in the *Liber Ultimus*, this is at best an unusual measure for the compositors to take. While they changed some word orders in some cases, they seldom made such a mistake as to corrupt the sentence structure. Stranger still is the word order between "veryly shall nyghe" and "shold veryly nyghe." It is simply puzzling to think of compositors doing such a thing as if he were a rewriter of some sort. In fact, it is

most unlikely that this change of word order hardly made any difference to the compositors. The most likely guess would be that the compositors mostly put down what they thought they saw, even if one allows the exception of "that."

It is true that many textual variants between the Winchester manuscript and Caxton's *Morte Darthur* can be explained using Hellinga's theory, but too many variants remain which cannot be explained away only as the work of compositors. I think that other changes were probably brought about by the original differences between the Winchester manuscript and Caxton's copy-text. Although it was Malory who created the original text, presumably, different scribes would have copied the original independently, and they would have likely added new elements to their own copy. Though small, these elements would have included both errors and changes because a scribe was indeed allowed more freedom in copying his text than compositors, and it must be these changes that stand out so peculiarly when the two are compared.

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the measures taken by the compositors to modify the text are not quite so irrational as they may appear at first. Even setting aside the case of Book V, which was obviously rewritten by Caxton, there are more irrational changes than can be attributed to the compositors of the *Morte Darthur*, which Hellinga's theory alone cannot explain. As Hellinga and Takamiya suggests, the *Morte Darthur* contains more changes by the compositors toward the end of the page where the page break closes in,[20] and this is the same with the *Liber Ultimus*. Further research on the *Liber Ultimus* should benefit this textual study, and shed a new light on the true process of evolution from manuscript to print.

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(1) There is only one known copy, which is *Nova Rhetorica* by Laurentius Traversanus, which is now preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

(2) The Book V of the *Morte Darthur* is thought to have been abridged and modified by Caxton, and Yuji Nakao and myself think that the *Chronicles of England* was used as a reference.

(3) N. F. Blake, *Caxton's Own Prose* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1975) 15.

(4) Lister Matheson, "Printer and Scribe: Caxton, the *Polychronicon*, and the *Brut*," *Speculum* 60 (1985): 606.

(5) N. F. Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon, 1991) 200-201.

(6) Blake, *Caxton's Own Prose* 133.

(7) George Painter, *William Caxton* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976) 105.

(8) Painter 105.

(9) Painter 150.

(10) Lister Matheson, *The Prose Brut: the Development of a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998) 167.

(11) Matheson, *Prose Brut* 166.

(12) Matheson, "Printer and Scribe" 602.

(13) William Caxton, print., *Polychronicon*, (Microfilm, STC No. 13438) 49.7^{r-v}.

(14) For example, the original author of the *Polychronicon*, Ranulf Higden criticized the inaccuracy of other chroniclers of his period, and that because of them, it was hard to form a theory that one king live during the time of one Pope.

(15) William Caxton, print., *Chronicles of England: Westmynstre, 1480* (New York: Da Capo, 1973) $u4^{r}$.

(16) Takako Kato argues that if Caxton's copy-text was illegible, the

possibility that the compositors made mistakes while casting off the pages was greater, causing them to use more copy-fitting device as a result.

(17) Concerning this topic, I have submitted an article supporting Hellinga's theory that the two texts may have a direct lineage. Masako Takagi, "Malory's Two Texts of *Le Morte Darthur*: a Support to Hellinga's Direct Lineage Theory," *Colloquia* 19 (1998): 109-120.

(18) Eugène Vinaver, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967) 882.

(19) Vinaver 882.

(20) Lotte Hellinga, *Caxton in Focus: the Beginning of Printing in England* (London: the British Library, 1982) 94; Toshiyuki Takamiya, "Chapter Divisions and Page Breaks in Caxton's *Morte Darthur*," *Poetica* 45(1996): 63-78.

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