# *Lestoire de Merlin*: Intratextual, Intertextual, and Transfictional Aspects of a Prequel

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# Text Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Text title | Reference information |
|---|---|---|
| *AM* | *Of Arthour and of Merlin* | |
| *Brut* | Wace's *Roman de Brut* | |
| *Historia* | Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* | *The History of the Kings of Britain*, transl. by Neil Wright, ed. by Michael D. Reeve |
| *LeM* | *Lestoire de Merlin* (consisting of the *Roman* and the *Suite*) | Parenthetic references provide the page numbers of the translation (Pickens) first and of the Old French text (ed. by Sommer) second, separated by a semicolon. |
| *LG* | *Lancelot-Grail* (consisting of *Lestoire del saint Graal*, *LeM*, *Lancelot en prose*, *Queste dou Graal*, *Mort Artu*) | |
| *Roman* | *Roman de Merlin en prose* | |
| *Suite* | *Suite-Vulgate de Merlin* | BnF fr. 9123 or BnF fr. 105 used to reference the unedited α version of the *Suite*. |

# Introduction

> To be a whole [story] is to have a beginning and a middle and an end. (Aristotle 14)

Aristotle's understanding of what makes a whole story still corresponds to what one might intuitively understand as a story today. On closer consideration, however, things are not quite that simple; a glance at the current landscape of mass entertainment highlights this. In cinema and television, recent years have seen a proliferation of sequels, prequels, spin-offs, and reboots.[1] As a result, stories are continued, are retold, and spun off, making them function at once as whole in themselves and as part of larger stories. Many successful franchises set several of their productions in the same fictional universe, make them canonically coherent with one another, and showcase this continuity. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is a particularly prominent example of this, with a five-phase production plan involving dozens of films and a growing set of television series continuing to expand the shared fictional universe.[2]

Projects such as the MCU scratch an itch felt by a large audience, namely the desire for a collective story that is "deliberate" and follows an "original plan" (Loh). Navigating such a collective story is challenging, both for producers of new stories within these collectives and for their audiences. As such, recent superhero movies are so closely interlinked that their producers "seemingly start from the assumption that people have come not to see an individual story but a long series of teases for other ones" (St. James),[3] thus leading to modes of composition and reception that differ markedly from how one might go about producing or watching a standalone movie. Research on such collective stories is thus faced with particular challenges: analysing any story produced as part of this "intertextual aesthetic" means taking into account this intertextuality and accepting that

[1] See Gunter, ch. 10.
[2] See Sandwell and Longridge.
[3] See also Tyler Weaver's more critical comment on the movies' efforts to signal continuity: "[It] serves no dramatic purpose, rather, it is an arm-waving reminder that the film you are watching is part of a larger universe, a limp promise to the viewer that the best is either yet to come or came before, just not in the movie you're watching."

another addition to such an "open network of texts" may change the meaning of the individual stories contained within it, in addition to that of the collective story formed by them all (James Taylor).

The current popularity of interwoven clusters of stories stands in a long tradition. One of the most famous examples of a network of texts from the Middle Ages can be found in the stories about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, which brought forth dynamics of fandom comparable to modern trends of cosplay, conventions, and – one might argue – fanfiction in the form of Arthurian romances.[4] The Arthurian romances are a particularly interesting case with which to analyse the "intertextual aesthetic" of medieval literature. Just as there are many similarities to how modern megaprojects like the MCU work, there are also many differences. One of the key similarities is the idea of a shared fictional universe. A core principle of Arthurian romances is that the storyworld of each individual romance deliberately aligns itself with those of other Arthurian romances, thus invoking the idea of a shared fictional universe which "gives the impression that it exists independently of the individual romances, as if it was there first, while the romances only tell parts of it."[5] From the very beginnings of Arthurian romance, the Arthurian universe was defined by a stable core and flexible boundaries, making it at once coherent and infinitely expandable (Kern 92-4).[6]

Unlike the MCU, however, there were no agents controlling all the works produced within this Arthurian universe: Stories were freely invented, adapted, continued, and circulated in a broad variety of circumstances. For modern researchers,

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[4] For example, a number of Round Table tournaments were held throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, in which participants sometimes dressed up as Arthurian knights (Loomis; Lacy, "Round Tables"). For Arthurian romance as fanfiction, see Deonn; McKee.

[5] My (loose) translation. "Diese Erzählwelt erweckt den Eindruck, als bestände sie unabhängig von den einzelnen Romanen, ja, sie scheint das primär Gegebene zu sein, von dem die einzelnen Romane nur in Teilausschnitten Kunde geben" (Kern 97).

[6] Numerous terms are used in the research literature in English, French, and German – the languages with which I have worked – in order to describe the fictional worlds invoked by individual texts and those shared by multiple texts. This study will refer to the fictional world of an individual text as a storyworld. References to an Arthurian universe are not meant to suggest that all Arthurian texts share a perfectly coherent fictional world, but simply to address the central *idea* of a shared world that Arthurian texts in principle invoke (see Kern, esp. 92-7). For a discussion of a number of English and German terms adjacent and equivalent to "storyworld", see Pierstorff, esp. 3-4, 94-5.

additional challenges are posed both by the sheer amount of material that survives (but is often difficult to access) and by the gaps left by material that has been lost. The "intertextual aesthetic" with which Arthurian romances create links to other Arthurian romances thus stands side by side with defining traits of medieval literature in general, placing them in an entirely different context than modern networks of stories.[7]

## *Lestoire de Merlin* and Its Research Context

This study does not attempt to cover the entirety of Arthurian literature. Its focus lies on the Old French *Lestoire de Merlin* (*LeM*), a roughly five-hundred-page prose romance written in the early thirteenth century with a particularly complex and interesting background. It is one of five texts of the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle (*LG*), which presents itself as a gapless account of the Arthurian legend from the beginnings of the Grail to Arthur's death. *LeM* was composed in two stages. The first section, the *Roman de Merlin en prose* (*Roman*) is older, and large parts of its ninety-page story about King Arthur's predecessors can be traced back to older sources. The second section, the *Suite-Vulgate de Merlin* (*Suite*) is slightly more recent and considerably longer. It tells the story of Arthur's early reign.[8] Both sections of *LeM* survive in two distinct versions each: an older and better attested α version, and a more recent β version.[9] In the case of the *Roman* section, the main difference between the versions lies in the fact that the β version displays greater coherence with the other *LG* texts.[10] In the case of the *Suite* section, the β version is shorter overall.[11] *LeM* is likely the last text to have been added to the *LG*.

These complex circumstances of composition contrast with how *LeM* was read in the Middle Ages. First, there is no visual, paratextual, or other indication in its

[7] See Nichols; Kwakkel; Johnston and van Dussen; Henvey et al.
[8] A summary of *LeM* is included at the end of this introduction.
[9] Typically, an α version of the *Suite* is combined with an α version of the *Roman* and a β version of the *Suite* is combined with a β version of the *Roman* (Trachsler, "Pour une nouvelle édition" 134). Other than these two main versions of each section, a number of redactions survive which are attested in only one manuscript each.
[10] See Micha, "Les manuscrits du *Merlin*".
[11] A number of the differences between the α and β versions of the *Suite* have to do with cyclical coherence, yet the principle of shortening is, in this section, more prevalent and consistently followed than that of coherence. See Trachsler "Pour une nouvelle édition", Fabry-Tehranchi, *Texte et images* 227-55, and Koble, *Les suites* esp. 83-6.

manuscripts that the *Roman* and *Suite* sections should be considered as two separate texts, meaning that *LeM* was likely read as a single text.[12] Second, although it is the second text in the *LG*, it was also the last to be added to it: it functions as a prequel to the three texts that follow it in the cycle.[13]

From its beginnings, research on *LeM* has shown particular interest in the interface between *LeM* and the *LG* cycle – that is, in the interface between a single, "whole" work, to use Aristotle's words, and a collective in which it is embedded. The earliest generation of researchers on *LeM* were particularly interested in its status within the *LG* cycle. For example, Ferdinand Lot argued for the unity of the cycle but excluded *LeM* from it.[14] Research from this early period focused especially on the *LG*'s intertextual connections; in light of this interest, *LeM*'s *Roman* section was considered a late addition to the cycle that had barely undergone changes to adapt it to its new cyclic context. The *Suite* section, by contrast, was thought to have been written specifically to complete the *LG*, and was thus considered a massive connecting link between the *Roman* section and the *Lancelot en prose*.[15] Whereas the *Roman* was thus not considered a 'proper' *LG* adaptation, interest in the *Suite*'s supposed connective function was so prevalent that there was little consideration of the text in its own right; indeed, it was generally perceived as "intolerably commonplace, prolix, and monotonous" (J. Bruce 313). Eugène Vinaver goes as far as to suggest that the intertextual functions of *LeM* should have taken priority over its plot in its own right – precisely the opposite of the criticism levelled against modern superhero movies by Emily St. James:

> But its author, swept away by too vast a subject, failed to reach the goal he had set for himself: Instead of announcing [the last three texts of the *LG*], he turned his story into a chronicle of military campaigns that bear no

[12] See Fabry-Tehranchi, *Texte et images*, ch. 1, esp. 80-9. Fabry-Tehranchi notes two exceptions in manuscripts that present the two sections as separate texts: BnF fr. 747 and Tours 951. A third manuscript, Bodmer 147, separates the two sections clearly by visual means as well as by interpolating another text.
[13] Not all readers of the *LG* necessarily read it in its entirety and in chronological order, however. See Moran, *Lectures cycliques* 332-8.
[14] See Lot; see also Frappier.
[15] See, paraphrasing other scholarship, Koble, *Les suites* 17-8; Trachsler, "Quand Gauvainet" 205.

> relation to the subject matter and spirit of chivalric romances and forgot the great romance that was to follow his own.[16]

Even though the monotony and sheer length of *LeM*, alongside its reduction to an appendix to the *Lancelot*, has discouraged research on the text, the character of Merlin, which also appears in numerous other works than *LeM*, has enjoyed considerable attention in research, the first major study of the character being Paul Zumthor's 1943 monograph *Merlin le prophète*. Moreover, from the 1950s onward, francophone research developed considerable interest in the *Roman* section; foremost here was Alexandre Micha's 1956 *Étude*.[17] During this time, the *Suite* portion of *LeM* still enjoyed little favour in research, and while Micha drew attention to the existence of two distinct versions of the *Suite* and published several papers on it in the 1950s, his studies of selected scenes of the *Suite*

> only aggravate [the *Suite*'s] case; because they attempt to cast a spotlight on those episodes that are not boring, repetitive, and forced in style, thus admitting that the rest of it – its vast majority – is just that.[18]

An increased interest in the *LG* in anglophone research has made itself felt from the 1990s onward, in the course of which *LeM* has received some attention. This is in part due to an interest in medieval intertextuality and the "fundamental medieval aesthetic of rewriting" (Busby, *Codex* 348), with Arthurian literature offering itself particularly well to the study of such themes.[19] Another factor was access to the texts: a Modern English translation of the entire *LG* was edited by Norris J. Lacy between 1992 and 1996, making the *LG*'s texts, among them *LeM*, considerably more accessible to researchers and audiences who did not understand Old French.

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[16] My translation. "Mais son auteur, entraîné par un trop vaste sujet, manqua le but qu'il s'était proposé: au lieu d'annoncer le Lancelot-Graal, il orienta son récit dans le sens d'une chronique de campagnes militaires sans rapport avec la matière et l'esprit des romans de chevalerie, et en vint à oublier le grand roman qui devait faire suite au sien" (Vinaver 296).

[17] For further works on the *Roman*, see Baumgartner and Andrieux-Reix; Hüe; Bazin-Tacchella et al.

[18] My translation. "ne font qu'aggraver son cas, dans la mesure où elles s'efforcent de mettre en lumière les épisodes qui ne seraient pas fastidieux, répétitifs et contraints, admettant du coup que tout le reste, c'est-à-dire l'immense majorité, l'est" (Trachsler, "Quand Gauvainet" 205). A similar tendency to revisit the same handful of scenes from the text can still be observed today, not least of all because they are fascinating objects of study. See e.g. Roche-Mahdi; Fabry, "Le festin" and "'I en i ot'"; Paton.

[19] For studies on intertextuality, see e.g. Lacy, *Text*; Sturm-Maddox and Maddox. For studies on rewriting see e.g. Tether; Tether and Busby; Jane Taylor; Kullmann and Lalonde; Dietl et al.; Griffin, *Transforming*.

A renewed interest in the *LG* has thus produced a number of publications written in English which focus at least partially on *LeM* and somewhat redeem its literary quality.

While recent anglophone research has thus become more active again, it remains preoccupied with *LeM*'s intertextual, cyclical contexts. In the meantime, further nuances have emerged, especially in francophone research on both the *LG* in general and *LeM* in particular, that have yet to be recognized in anglophone research. The excellent recent studies by Richard Trachsler, Patrick Moran, Irène Fabry-Tehranchi, and Nathalie Koble have directed greater attention at the *Suite* portion of *LeM*, raising the possibility of a non-cyclical version of *LeM* as well as comparing its *Suite* portion to other continuations of the *Roman*.[20] They have also revisited the complex relationship between cyclical romances and the cycles of which they are part:

> … each romance contains within its own textual boundaries all the information that may be required for understanding it, even if it simultaneously aspires to be completed by the rest of the cycle. In this sense, the relationship that a cyclical romance has with the whole of the cycle into which it is integrated is not unlike the relationship that a non-cyclical Arthurian romance has with the matter of Britain: an Arthurian romance never unfolds in total autarky but always refers … to the rest of the Arthurian material. … The cycle simply offers a concretization of this material: the reader of a romance of the *LG* is also presented with a wider set of data than just the *fabula* of the individual text he is reading, but the evocative potential of the characters and objects does not refer to the indefinite and infinite mass of [Arthurian] material, but to the other romances of the cycle … .[21]

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[20] See Trachsler, esp. "Merlin empilé", "Pour une nouvelle édition", "Quand Gauvainet", and "Merlin empilé"; Moran, *Lectures cycliques*; Fabry-Tehranchi, *Texte et images*; Koble, *Les suites*. See also the volumes published in 2006 by Denis Hüe and Christine Ferlampin-Acher and in 2007 by Koble, and Endress, "From Alpha to Beta" and "Missing Links".
[21] My translation. "… le principe de redondance informationnelle était essentiel à l'autonomie des romans qui composent la *Vulgate*; chaque roman contient à l'intérieur de ses propres limites textuelles toute l'information qui peut être requise pour sa bonne compréhension, même s'il aspire simultanément à être complété par le reste du cycle. En ce sens, le rapport qu'un roman cyclique entretient avec l'ensemble du cycle auquel il est intégré n'est pas sans analogies avec le rapport qu'un roman arthurien non-cyclique entretient avec la matière de Bretagne: un roman arthurien ne procède jamais en totale autarcie mais renvoie toujours … au reste de la matière arthurienne. … Le cycle offre simplement une concrétisation de la matière: le lecteur d'un roman de la *Vulgate* se voit aussi présenter un ensemble de données plus vaste que la seule fabula du texte individuel qu'il lit, mais le potentiel évocateur des personnages et des objets ne renvoie pas au

In addition to the intertextual relationship between a cycle and its parts, Moran here draws attention to the intratextual dimension of cyclical romances, i.e. the significance they develop if they are read in isolation.

Despite this understanding of the autonomy of cyclical romances, there is, at the time of writing, no study dedicated entirely and exclusively to *LeM*, meaning that the intratextual study of this text has yet to be pursued in detail. Another aspect that has not received much attention to date is *LeM*'s relationship with Arthurian literature overall. Moran suggests, in the quotation above, that the relation between a cyclical romance and the cycle of which it is part is analogous to the relation between a non-cyclical romance and the fictional universe in which it is set, but this comparison does not cover the relation between a cyclical romance and the fictional universe with which it is aligned. This relationship may be particularly important where *LeM* is concerned – first, because of the existence of several translations of *LeM* that did not circulate in cyclical contexts,[22] and second, because of its status as a prequel within the *LG* cycle.

## Aims and Structure of this Study

This study will analyse *LeM* by distinguishing between three aspects of the text: first, the intratextual aspect, which refers to everything in *LeM* that can stand in its own right without the immediate context of other works; second, the intertextual aspect, which encompasses connections drawn in *LeM* to specific other works, in particular to the *LG* cycle;[23] and third, the transfictional aspect, which comprises the connections drawn by *LeM* to the Arthurian universe and the position it carves out for itself within it.[24] By distinguishing between these three aspects, and by

creuset indéfini et infini de la matière, mais aux autres romans du cycle …" (Moran, *Lectures cycliques* 337-8).

[22] Some translations circulate alongside a translation of the first text of the *LG* cycle, such as Jacob van Maerlant's *Boek van Merline* and Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*. Others stand entirely alone, such as the Middle English *Prose Merlin* and *Of Arthour and of Merlin*.

[23] The use of the term "intertextuality" in this study thus corresponds to Gérard Genette's narrow (and rather practical) definition of it as a "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts" (*Palimpsests* 1), and not to broader definitions such as that of Julia Kristeva, which emphasizes the ubiquity of intertextuality in all texts and suggests that texts cannot be read as self-sufficient (Kristeva, esp. 65-7; Alfaro).

[24] The term "transfictionality" follows Richard Saint-Gelais, who uses it to describe the relationship between texts when "two (or more) texts … share elements such as characters, imaginary locations, or fictional worlds" ("Transfictionality" 612; for the

addressing them all equally, this study not only responds to the need to read *LeM* in contexts other than the *LG* cycle that has been outlined in francophone research; it also introduces this need, and other current themes in francophone research, to English-speaking researchers without knowledge of French.[25] Picking up the particular interest in *LeM*'s relationship to other Arthurian works in existing research, this study will centre on the intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional ways in which these relationships present themselves.

This study begins with an analysis of *LeM*'s *discours*; the term "subsumes the literary mediation of a set of happenings in its entirety" (Scheffel para. 11).[26] By considering selected properties of *LeM* that are particularly relevant for the analysis of textual relationships, chapter 1 builds on existing research on the *discours* of Arthurian romances and grants particular attention to *LeM*'s status as a prequel.[27] This status as a prequel draws attention to Merlin's role in the text, a role that is explored at more length in chapter 2. This chapter focuses on *LeM*'s characters and how they function within the text, thus focusing mostly on intratextual aspects of *LeM*. In doing so, it makes a valuable addition to existing research on the character of Merlin, which focuses primarily on diachronic studies and comparisons between texts. By comparing the character of Merlin, both in the

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original quotation in French, see *Fictions transfuges* 7). Genette's concept of the architext (see *The Architext*, esp. 83) and Manfred Pfister's system reference (Systemreferenz, see Pfister, esp. 53; see also Hempfer) are similar concepts but considerably broader. Saint-Gelais's term of "transfictionality" appears particularly suited to Arthurian literature: In his monograph *Fictions transfuges*, Saint-Gelais discusses transfictionality in the light of fictional universes (see also Ryan), prequels, fanfiction, and coherence, thus overlapping with the interests of the present study.

[25] This is, in part, in order to avoid perpetuating ongoing issues concerning English as an academic lingua franca and the decreased visibility of publications in languages other than English (see Neylon and Kramer; Weijen; Rubel, "Die letzte Bastion" and "Quo Vadis"). The implications this has for access to opportunities should be mentioned here as well, as should the often inevitable loss of complexity and clarity that researchers have to accept when publishing in a second language.

[26] Scheffel here paraphrases Tzvetan Todorov, whose distinction between *histoire* ("the events reported" 5) and *discours* ("the manner in which the narrator makes them known to us" 5) has become widely accepted.

[27] There is, to my knowledge, no separate term for a work whose temporal position precedes not one other work, but – transfictionally – a fictional universe, or for works which intratextually present themselves as the beginnings of something else. Hence, the use of the term "prequel" in this study encompasses all three aspects of *LeM* alike. The term "prequel" is revisited in the conclusions to this study.

*histoire* and in the *discours*, with other characters in *LeM*, this chapter explores the connection between the character of Merlin and *LeM*'s status as a prequel. Chapter 3 continues this investigation by turning to Merlin's role as *LeM*'s source fiction as well as the fictional chain of transmission that *LeM* describes for itself. This chapter highlights *LeM*'s transfictional connections to the Arthurian universe in general, while building on previous researchers' insights into the narrative voices and source fictions of other Arthurian works.

The inherent mobility of medieval texts means that the contexts in which they were read were continuously changing, and medieval narratives were constantly adapted to these new contexts. This study therefore concludes with chapter 4, a case study of an adaptation of *LeM*, the Middle English *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (*AM*). The chapter revisits the observations and results of the first three chapters and investigate how they pertain to *AM*, which is entirely removed from the context of the *LG* cycle. This case study compares different versions of *AM* with one another and with *LeM* and throws into stark relief the extent to which the same narrative can elicit different effects and meanings in different contexts.

## A Note on References to *LeM*

A few notes regarding the references to *LeM* in this study are in order. There are two editions of the entire *LG*, which are also the only editions of *LeM* to date: Hans Oskar Sommer's *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances* from the early twentieth century, in which *LeM* forms the second volume, and Daniel Poirion et al.'s *Le livre du Graal* from the early twenty-first century, in which *LeM* is part of the first volume.[28] There are two complete translations of the *LG*, and *LeM* has been translated as part of them. It was translated into Modern English by Rupert T. Pickens as part of the Norris Lacy et al. translation of the *LG* cycle in the 1990s. Pickens based his translation on Sommer's edition. The Poirion et al. edition of the *LG* includes a translation into Modern French; the *Roman* section of *LeM* was translated here by Anne Berthelot, the *Suite* section by Berthelot and Philippe Walter.[29] In general, parenthetical citations to *LeM* refer to page numbers in

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[28] Sommer's edition is based on BL Add. 10292-10294. Poirion et al.'s edition is based on Bonn 526.

[29] The *Suite* is referred to as *Les premiers faits du roi Arthur* in the Poirion et al. edition.

Pickens's Modern English translation followed by Sommer's edition; where necessary, emendations to quotations are made on the basis of the Poirion et al. edition and its Modern French translations, paying close attention to its extensive annotation apparatus.[30]

The access to *LeM* one would expect from the existence of these editions and translations is, unfortunately, deceptive. They all work with β manuscripts of *LeM* and do not, in general, take the α version into account. While there is an edition of the α version of the *Roman* section by Alexandre Micha,[31] there is, to date, no edition or translation of the α version of the *Suite*, though Sommer did transcribe some passages from it in his edition.[32] This means that the older and better-attested version of *LeM* is, for now, underrepresented both when it comes to editions and translations of the text and in research on it. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide comparisons of the α and β versions throughout, but it does cast a spotlight on the differences between them using selected scenes. References to the α version of the *Roman* section are to Micha's edition. Quotations of the α version of the *Suite* section have been transcribed and translated by me, using the manuscripts BnF fr. 9123 and BnF fr. 105.[33]

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[30] This decision to use the earlier edition and translation is largely aimed at reducing the need for translations by me, a researcher whose native language is not English, to a minimum. While the present study is not closely concerned with spelling and punctuation, it must be mentioned here that Sommer's edition is problematic. Sommer's choice of BL Add. 10292 as his base manuscript was made for practical reasons, and he freely emended its text using other manuscripts. While the emendations are marked in square brackets, there is no information about which other manuscript inspired them. See *Lestoire del Saint Graal*, Introduction, esp. xxviii-xxix.

[31] See Robert de Boron, *Merlin*. Further editions of the *Roman* section exist but were not used in this study: BnF fr. 24394, another β manuscript, was edited by Caroline Füg-Pierreville in 2014 (as Le Roman de Merlin *en prose*). The α version of the *Roman* was edited in 1883 by Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich as part of the Post-Vulgate Cycle (*Merlin*), using BL Add. 38117 as the base manuscript. Finally, Bernard Cerquiglini has edited a redaction from Modena E. 39 (as *Le roman du Graal*). For editions of fragments, see the appendix.

[32] An edition of the α version of the *Suite* is under way under Richard Trachsler as part of the SNF-funded project "Logres au printemps" (data.snf.ch/grants/grant/204652). Trachsler is also working on a critical edition of the β version with Annie Combes, which will be published 2025 by Éditions Classiques Garnier (see [*Critical Edition*]).

[33] It has been argued that these two manuscripts, which belong to the group $y^3$ in Micha's classification of α manuscripts of the *Roman* section in his "Les manuscrits du *Merlin*", are closely related to the manuscripts that formed the respective sources of the Middle English *Prose Merlin* and, possibly, *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and Lovelich's *Merlin*

*Summary of LeM*

The following summary covers *LeM*'s plot with regard to what can be called the main storyline. Both of its sections, the *Roman* and the *Suite*, also feature episodes that tell stories of their own and do not directly or indirectly contribute to the main story. They are not addressed or pointed out here, but it should nonetheless be noted that they are a substantial part of *LeM*. The following summary also does not reflect the relative length of the episodes, as I do not describe battles in detail.

The *Roman* section begins with Merlin's birth and ends with Arthur's coronation. In an attempt to create an Antichrist figure, a demon conceives Merlin with a noblewoman after creating the necessary conditions by ruining her life and killing most of her family. However, the priest Blaise instructs her, and her subsequent piety saves Merlin's life: when he is baptized, God takes pity on him and grants him free will while allowing him to keep his demonic supernatural abilities and granting him new ones as well. As a result, Merlin knows both the past and the future. As becomes clear later, he also knows the thoughts of other people, can change his shape, and is able to disappear into thin air. On three specific occasions, he performs telekinesis, creates a magical taboo, and transforms the bodies of other characters.

Merlin's birth does not pass without consequence, and his mother is accused of unmarried intercourse. Merlin is only two and a half years old when he saves his mother from a death sentence. In this episode, further traits of Merlin's character emerge. He achieves his mother's acquittal by proving the judge's own mother guilty of adultery by using his supernatural knowledge. the one hand, he demonstrates his supernatural heritage by revealing secrets from the past and prophesying the future, and thus proves his mother's innocence in the events that resulted in his own conception. On the other, he forces the judge to acquit his mother, whether he believes him or not, because he would otherwise risk public

(Finotello 108-9; Mead, "The French Manuscripts" clxxvi-clxxxiv); they were thus a suitable choice, especially for chapter 4 of this study. Fabry-Tehranchi also uses them as control manuscripts alongside BnF fr. 747 in her monograph, and Sommer supplied several passages missing from the β version from these two manuscripts. The manuscript transcriptions in this study retain paragraph divisions but do not bold rubricated letters. Expanded abbreviations are marked in italics.

shame for himself. This establishes a trend that prevails throughout *LeM*: Merlin's will becomes reality, or, vice versa, whatever happens turns out to benefit Merlin's agenda in one way or another. The priest Blaise approaches Merlin and is soon convinced to make a book of everything Merlin tells him henceforth. Later on, Blaise will set out to a secluded abode in Northumberland to continue his work.

It is at this point that the *Roman* abruptly switches to a second narrative strand set a few years prior to the first. The British king Constant dies, and his son, Moyne, is incompetent. Constant's seneschal, Vortigern, refuses to help Moyne, whose failures soon earn him the disdain of his own people. Vortigern seizes the opportunity to have Moyne killed and becomes king himself. When he refuses to reward Moyne's killers, conflict ensues and soon escalates into civil war. To protect himself, Vortigern forms an alliance with the Saxons led by Hengist. In the meantime, Vortigern's enemies have smuggled Constant's other two sons out of the country. Vortigern fears the return of these sons, Pendragon and Uther, and tries to build a tower for his own protection. When this tower keeps collapsing for unknown reasons, Vortigern's search for answers earns him the advice of the sages he gathers: he should find a fatherless child and spill its blood on the tower's foundations.

Vortigern thus sends out messengers to seek such a child, and the narrative jumps back to Merlin, who is about seven years old when he is brought before Vortigern. During his journey to the tower, Merlin has convinced his escort of his usefulness and soon demonstrates it to Vortigern as well. He reveals the real reason for the collapsing tower, and helps set free the two dragons beneath it. The dragons fight, and Merlin interprets their battle as a sign of Vortigern's death and the return of Pendragon and Uther. After this, Merlin disappears. The rightful heirs to the throne, Pendragon and his brother Uther, arrive shortly after. They kill Vortigern, and Pendragon claims the throne; however, Pendragon is unsuccessful in ridding the land of the Saxons whom Vortigern had invited in. Eventually, he hears about Merlin and seeks his help. After Merlin convinces Pendragon of his powers, as well as solving his problem by helping to kill the Saxon leader Hengist, Pendragon makes Merlin his official advisor and promises to obey him in everything he says.

The Saxons eventually return to avenge Hengist, and Pendragon dies in the battle that ensues. Merlin remains in his position at court when Uther becomes Pendragon's successor as king. Having helped the brothers on a number of occasions, Merlin asks Uther to create the famous Round Table, and Uther grants Merlin the authority to carry everything out according to his own wishes. Later, Uther falls in love with Igraine, a married noblewoman. He asks Merlin to help him sleep with her and agrees to Merlin's request to be given the fruit of their night together. While Uther is getting his way with Igraine, her husband dies. She is convinced to marry Uther while the daughters she had with her previous husband are married to Uther's barons. When the son of Igraine and Uther is born, Merlin claims the child, baptizes him Arthur, and brings him to a foster-family. Uther eventually dies, and since almost no one is aware of Arthur's existence, the line of succession for the British throne is seemingly disrupted. When asked for advice, Merlin announces a divine sign that will help find the next king, and the famous sword in the stone appears soon after. Only Arthur – barely more than a child at this point – is able to remove it. Despite the repeated protestations of Uther's barons, Arthur is eventually proclaimed king.

The second section of *LeM*, the *Suite*, begins here. The barons refuse to acknowledge Arthur's legitimacy and rebel. Merlin, who has reappeared at court, helps Arthur to chase them out of the kingdom of Logres. He then advises him on how to proceed against the rebellious barons, but also against the Saxons, who have returned to Britain. First, Arthur is to gather three key allies: the brothers Ban and Bors, who control the territories of Benoic and Gaunes on the Continent, and Leodagan, who controls Carmelide, a neighbouring kingdom to Logres.

With the beginning of the *Suite*, the structure of *LeM* changes drastically. The episodic structure of the *Roman*, which covers a lot of time but little space, is replaced with a slow-paced, interlaced narrative of multiple strands: those of Arthur, Merlin, Arthur's various allies, and Arthur's various enemies. The same transition brings with it a much more nuanced spatial arena: with the rebellion, Arthur's kingdom is split into a number of contested regions while Arthur's interests, at the same time, lie both in unifying his own kingdom and in extending

his control to regions on the Continent. Finally, the transition from the *Roman* to the *Suite* brings with it a much expanded cast of characters.

Arthur follows Merlin's instructions closely. Thus, he forms an alliance with the brothers Ban of Benoic and Bors of Gaunes. While the rebellious barons regroup and plan their defence against Arthur as well as the Saxons who are beleaguering their lands, Arthur, Ban, Bors, and Merlin leave Logres to help Leodagan in an ongoing conflict against a Saxon army led by Rion. Leodagan promises Arthur the hand of his daughter, Guenevere, in return. In the meantime, several youths flock to Arthur's court to defend his kingdom in his absence; they later become his knights. Chief among them are Gawain, accompanied by his three brothers, and Sagremor, the nephew of the emperor of Constantinople. Many of these recruits are the sons of rebellious barons and betray their fathers in joining Arthur.

While Arthur secures his position in Britain, Merlin occasionally leaves his side to guarantee his success. Thus, he helps gather the young recruits and instructs Ban and Bors' representatives on the Continent to prepare for an approaching invasion. In this respect, the character of Merlin undergoes some changes relative to his depiction in the *Roman*. Most obvious are his expanded magical skill set and his direct involvement in the *Suite*'s many battles. His relationship with Arthur also seems closer: instead of asking for rewards for his help and disappearing from court when nothing relevant is happening, Merlin is considerably more involved, both in prescribing what Arthur is supposed to do and in making it happen. Another major development is his love for Nimiane, whom he frequently visits and to whom he teaches his magic.

Arthur quickly has major successes during his reign. While the rebellious barons and the Saxons weaken each other, Arthur defeats Rion. Leodagan grants him the hand of his daughter, Guenevere, in marriage. Arthur's victory over Rion also secures him the help of the Knights of the Round Table, who have been at Leodagan's court since Uther's death. Arthur then meets and recruits Gawain and the other youths as his knights, and with their help secures Ban and Bors's territories from the invasion.

A period of relative calm ensues, in which Arthur and Guenevere marry. Lot is convinced by his son Gawain to swear homage to Arthur, after which the two of them, accompanied by Gawain's brothers, set out to convince the other rebellious barons to do the same. After surviving the perilous journey, they persuade the barons to meet with Arthur on the Plain of Salisbury, where Merlin is arranging for Arthur's allies to assemble. After lengthy discussions between Arthur, his allies, and the rebellious barons, a temporary alliance is formed and the Saxons are defeated. The barons then agree to a permanent peace with Arthur, after which they and his allies return to their respective lands. In the meantime, the Saxon threat has returned to Leodagan's kingdom, and Arthur takes his forces there and crushes the enemy with his large army.

At this point, Britain has been unified under Arthur and the Saxons have been expelled from it. However, Arthur is now threatened from outside his kingdom's borders: he is challenged by the Roman emperor Lucius and resolves to go to the Continent to take the fight to him. During his campaign on the Continent, Arthur and his knights prove themselves in a variety of ways and make good progress in taking lands from the Romans. Their campaign ends when they learn that Leodagan has died and they return to Logres. With no immediate threats to Arthur's reign left, Merlin leaves Arthur's side for the final time and travels to Nimiane, who imprisons him in a magical tower. Merlin's extended absence soon worries Arthur, who sends out his knights to search for him. Only Gawain succeeds in locating Merlin, but cannot free him. The *Suite* ends after informing the reader that Ban and Bors have three sons between them (one of them is Lancelot) and briefly relating how their conflicts with the Saxons and Romans develop on the Continent.

# 1. Continuity and Rupture in *LeM*

## 1. Introduction

This first chapter of my dissertation will dive straight into an analysis of *LeM*'s *discours* while laying the foundations upon which the subsequent chapters will build. In this analysis, I will take intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional approaches to the *discours* into account. I will thus shed light on selected aspects of *LeM*'s *discours* and how they work within the text and in the context of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (*LG*), as well as the extent to which they align with Arthurian works more broadly.

The intertextual approach will focus on *LeM*'s context in the *LG*: *Lestoire del saint Graal*, which precedes *LeM*, and the *Lancelot*, *Queste dou Graal*, and *Mort Artu*, which follow it. The redactions of each narrative that in the *LG* are believed to have been made within a relatively short time of one another. The scope of the transfictional approach to the *discours* will need to be limited for practical purposes because the *discours* of Arthurian literature is so diverse. The works belong to, and can also combine, various genres (primarily romances, with various influences from epics, folklore, and hagiography; in the case of *LeM*, ties to historiography and prophetic texts should not be neglected either);[34] they vary considerably in length and survive in verse or prose; they can take a satirical or serious tone and be episodic or interlaced in structure; and so on. As Patrick Moran summarizes in a study of the formal features of Arthurian romance: "There is no doubt that the fundamental characteristic of 'Arthurian romance' is its diversity and adaptability" ("Text-Types" 74). Given the heterogeneous nature of the *discours* of Arthurian works, not all comparisons make equal sense. Comparing the 500-page *LeM* to the 2500-line *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would certainly yield similarities and differences with regard to the *discours*, but these results would be difficult to interpret, since the texts belonged to different production and reception contexts. Instead of selecting isolated primary texts for my transfictional approach, therefore, I will make use of existing research on the *discours* of Arthurian chivalric

[34] See Maddox.

romances in general. This will make it possible to consider a wide variety of effects and interpretations that would have been experienced by and available to a diverse readership of *LeM*.

My discussion of the *discours* of *LeM* aims to address a recurrent statement about the text in the critical literature, namely that it functions primarily as a prequel to the three texts that follow it in the *LG* and establishes continuity with them. By complementing this intertextual approach with others, I will show that there is an intratextual continuity in the *discours* – a set of patterns that guide readerly expectations about *LeM*. In particular, *LeM*'s text-internal aesthetic presents it as a story of beginnings, even when viewed separately from other texts. I will also demonstrate that the continuities that *LeM* establishes with the Arthurian universe extend beyond the *LG*, allowing for an open reading of *LeM* as a story of origins for Arthurian romance in general. *LeM*'s status as a prequel is thus, I argue, not exclusive to its intertextual connections with the *LG* but inherent to the text and applicable to its connection to Arthurian works in general.

As my analysis is not focused on the exact continuities between *LeM* and the rest of the *LG*, I avoid having to negotiate the difficult question of whether the *LG* was the work of a single unifying architect.[35] Each text of the *LG*, including *LeM*, has an older form that was rewritten for cyclification. Whether any textual material in *LeM* that is incongruent with the rest of the *LG* should be seen as evidence of oversight on the part of such a unifying redactor or as evidence against the existence of one is not a problem to be addressed in this chapter. I will also steer clear of the questions about the historical reception of the *LG* which are raised by its manuscript context.

In the first part of the chapter, I will show the extent to which *LeM* makes use of conventional aspects of Arthurian spatiality. My discussion will focus on the fixity of some spaces and how it contrasts with the instability and incoherent description of others. In addition, I will explore the ways in which these spaces are interconnected by the movement of characters and, finally, how the characters' journeys are directly connected to the emergence and disappearance of "spatial

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[35] See Frappier.

windows" (Störmer-Caysa). All of these aspects interact with a prioritization of plot function over logical coherence or objectivity, which allows the Arthurian universe to exhibit a high degree of recognizability and adaptability from one text to another: between the familiar and conventional structures of Arthurian literature, there is room for innovation and variation.[36]

I will continue with three discussions loosely related to *LeM*'s temporality, which is particularly important because of *LeM*'s temporal position before most Arthurian romances and its status as a prequel for the second half of the *LG*. With regard to temporality, *LeM* has much in common with Arthurian romance in general and the *LG* in particular, but its temporal setting also explains some of its own unique properties. First, I discuss intertextuality and transfictionality, which are the main means by which *LeM* aligns itself with the Arthurian universe, and intratextuality, which is a central method for establishing internal continuity in *LeM*. As I go on to show, the positioning of all three kinds of reference in *LeM*'s storyline contributes to the significance of both the narrative present and the future. Second, I will explore the ways in which *LeM* employs repetition. A comparison of two lengthy and similar tournament scenes will serve to show how different kinds of repetition create ties within *LeM* and how the parallels between both scenes create meaning in a way neither scene could have achieved alone. Third, I will turn to *LeM*'s causality, which is, I argue, quite unusual for Arthurian romance: whereas Arthurian narratives generally tend to rely heavily on coincidence and the inexplicable to relate the adventures of their knights, *LeM*'s plot is entirely predetermined.

I will then conclude the chapter with an analysis of how *LeM* exploits its unique temporal setting and protagonist to modify the continuity between it and other Arthurian texts. By using predetermination and Merlin as an orchestrator of the plot, *LeM* claims truthfulness and importance for itself. As I will show, *LeM*'s

[36] It should be noted that the line between conventionally used mechanisms and particularities of *LeM* is not set in stone. Even conventional uses of a mechanism are to some extent adapted to the text in which they occur, and in order for a mechanism to stand in direct contrast to conventions, it must at least become clear to which convention(s) it does not correspond. Thus, there is always a degree of individuality and a degree of conventionality; see Jauß ch. 1.

*histoire* can be read as creating the conditions for Arthurian romance in general instead of only being understood in the context of the *LG*. It not only tells the beginnings of Arthur's reign but indicates that all narratives set in the Arthurian universe take place only because the conditions for it are created beforehand in *LeM*.

## 2. Unstable and Plot-Dependent: *LeM*'s Spatial Arena

*LeM*'s spatial arena is vast, with the text featuring spaces as remote from Britain as Jerusalem and Constantinople. In her 2007 monograph, Uta Störmer-Caysa identifies two tendencies of medieval literature in constructing spaces, which she discusses primarily with reference to Arthurian romance. On the one hand, romances have fixed spaces, such as Arthur's court, which may or may not be connected to real-world geography and evoke a sense of objectivity for the text's spatial arena. On the other hand, spaces can be inherently unstable and should not be understood as existing before the hero's arrival. As such, "the characters' movements are barely conditional on spaces; instead, the opposite can be seen on several occasions: the plot requires spaces to be a certain way and immediately creates them to be so".[37] The spaces of a text do not form a continuous spatial arena but are connected to each other by the characters' movements. Often, the hero's movements open a spatial window which exists only for one adventure and then disappears again.

Arthurian prose romances often revolve not just around a single knight and his path, like most verse romances do, but concern several characters or character groups. The movement of these characters is more complex, and there are more spaces. When these spaces are visited by one or more characters, can be reached in more than one way, and appear more than once in a text, their properties become even more heterogenous. The result is a spatial design comparable to a set of islands, the distances and connections between which vary, creating a relatively unstable, gap-ridden mental map. *LeM* is one such prose romance, and many of the

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[37] My translation. "Die Bewegungen der Figuren werden kaum in nennenswertem Maß von Raumverhältnissen bedingt, wogegen sich der umgekehrte Zusammenhang, nämlich daß eine zu erzählende Handlung augenblicklich passende Raumverhältnisse voraussetzt und damit zu schaffen scheint, mehrfach findet" (73).

same mechanisms that constitute Arthurian spaces are at work in this narrative. In the following, I will discuss four mechanisms of Arthurian spatiality which *LeM* employs and then briefly discuss the effect these techniques have.

*Fixed Spaces*

With most characters constantly on the move and Arthur's court only being fully formed at the very end of *LeM*, fixed spaces in this text are rare, but certainly present. One example is Blaise's abode in Northumberland. Early in *LeM*, Blaise becomes Merlin's personal scribe and Merlin relocates him to Northumberland:

> … tu ne uendras mie auoeques moi ains i vendras a par toi & demanderas por vne terre qui a anon northomberlande . & cele terre est plaine de grans fores & si est moult estraigne as gens del pais mismes . Car il i a tels parties ou nus na encore este . & la conuerseras . & iou uenrai a toi & te conterai toutes les choses qui tauront mestier au liure faire que tu as commenchiet … (*Lestoire de Merlin* 27)

> … you won't come with me, but you'll go off by yourself and ask the way to a land called Northumberland. That land is full of great forests and it is forbidding even to those who belong there, for there are places where no one has yet been. And you will live there. And I'll come to you and tell you the things you will need to make the book you have begun. (*The Story of Merlin* 30)[38]

Blaise's abode is immediately associated with remoteness, isolation, and obscurity, and these traits remain unchanged throughout *LeM*.[39] Henceforth, Blaise never leaves Northumberland, and only Merlin moves to and from his abode. When Pendragon and Uther seek Merlin in Northumberland, they are unable to find him. Only when Merlin leaves Blaise's abode and meets one of their messengers on his terms is the search successful (40; 36). As such, Blaise's abode is functionally inaccessible for all the characters in *LeM* except Merlin. In addition, Blaise only learns of the events of the plot through Merlin and is otherwise completely cut off from it.

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[38] All subsequent references to *LeM* will be from the edition and translation quoted here unless otherwise indicated.

[39] The latter aspect is strongly connected to the obscurity of Blaise's book until it is finished and combined with the story of Joseph of Arimathea (21; 19-20). For a more detailed discussion of Blaise and his task, see ch. 3, section 5.

His abode in Northumberland is thus doubly fixed. On the one hand, its location is objective, meaning that it is consistently described as being in Northumberland.[40] While this may not be noteworthy from a modern point of view, it does differ noticeably from other recurring spaces in *LeM*, as the example of Saxon Rock below will demonstrate. The objectivity that is evoked by the mention of a real-world place such as Northumberland is particularly striking because it first appears in the *Roman* section of the text, in which almost no other real-world places are referred to. On the other hand, the function of Blaise's abode for the plot is stable throughout *LeM*: it is unaffected by the events which the book he is writing there records. The spatial remoteness thus mirrors the separation of Blaise's abode from the plot: Blaise is isolated both from the world he inhabits and the time in which he lives. Only Merlin bridges this distance, enabling Blaise to record the events of his lifetime for posterity. The stable properties of remoteness, isolation, and obscurity for Blaise's abode thus serve to highlight the metanarrative status of Blaise's book as a bridge between the plot and the reader.

Finally, the location of Blaise's abode in Northumberland and its connection to *LeM*'s text story are related. The location of Blaise's abode suggests objectivity, and the connection to a real-world place creates another tie to the reader's reality. The remoteness and unreachability of Blaise's abode at the same time explain why no such abode can be found in the real-world Northumberland. Just like Blaise's book, his abode in Northumberland thus conveniently provides a loose continuity between the plot of the past and the reader of the present.[41]

While Blaise's abode occupies a special status in terms of its distance from *LeM*'s plot, it has the typical characteristics of a fixed space in the narrative: it is recognizable and helps the reader to navigate the text's spatial structure as well as its structures of meaning.[42]

*Instability*

[40] See e.g. 39; 35, 192; 179, 221; 206, 402; 275.
[41] I conduct a detailed analysis of *LeM*'s text story in ch. 3.
[42] See Störmer-Caysa 51.

Blaise's abode is an example in which both the location and the function of a narrative space are stable. However, the above-mentioned idea that spaces are constituted by the plot can, and often does, take priority over any fixed location or property of a space. Two examples will demonstrate that the function of spaces for the plot takes priority over objective and consistent description, and facilitate consideration of what this contributes to the text's spatial arena.

An example of what might be called a wandering space is the stronghold Saxon Rock (la roche as sesnes). Saxon Rock makes four appearances in *LeM*, and its location is described in three of them. It is first mentioned during a meeting in Gorre, a region controlled by the rebellious baron Urien. The King of the Hundred Knights informs his allies that there is "a very strong castle the Saxons have in this land" and that an important Saxon leader who is besieging various castles in the country is related to the castle's lady, "who will surely help them out if we don't take the castle quickly" (136).[43] It is thus established as a threat that must be taken care of. In its second appearance, Saxon Rock is located more specifically. The Saxons are able to reach it within one night when they retreat from a battle at the borderland of Estrangorre, which is the region controlled by the rebellious baron Brandegorre (185; 172). When it appears for the third time, the Saxons are bringing supplies from Saxon Rock to the siege at Clarence. On their way, they pass Arundel, which is a city in North Wales, the region controlled by the rebellious baron Tradelmant, and join the ongoing battle there (213-4; 199-200).[44]

The location of Saxon Rock near or within Gorre, Estrangorre, and North Wales provides several anchor points for the reader to use in placing it. Yet these anchor points are quite unstable themselves. For example, Arundel is not always located in

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[43] ". j . moult fort chastel que li sesne ont en cest pais"; "par qui il auront moult grant secors se nous ne prendons hastif conroi" (126).

[44] In the fourth appearance of Saxon rock, a Saxon leader informs Arthur that the latter's father had killed the Saxon Hengist there (248; 231). This information was not supplied during the narration of Hengist's death earlier in *LeM*. This may well be explained by the fact that the earlier passage belongs to the *Roman* section of the text. The *Roman*, adapted from Robert de Boron's *Roman de Merlin en vers*, only created transfictional references to the Grail narrative, whereas Saxon Rock is more closely connected to the *Lancelot en prose*, in which Lancelot attacks Saxon Rock and frees Arthur (*Lancelot: Parts I and II* 429-44). This retroactive localization of Hengist's death at Saxon Rock can be understood as an attempt to highlight the might of Saxon Rock.

North Wales but variously placed in Northumberland, Scotland, and Cornwall.[45] As a result, the geographical placement of Saxon Rock remains quite unclear.

The fact that Saxon Rock is not consistently connected to any one spatial node, but that it seems to pop up in relation to a different space each time, can be explained with reference to its function for the plot. It takes the above-mentioned key principle of Arthurian space, namely that space has to adapt to the demands of the plot and its characters, to an extreme. Saxon Rock is an important military base occupied by the Saxons (and their only fortification in *LeM* as a whole). The Saxons can get supplies and reinforcements from Saxon Rock and can retreat there if needed. The Saxons' ubiquity in *LeM* entails the many locations of Saxon Rock: it can appear wherever the Saxons fight. As such, while the locations of Saxon Rock may be incoherent or even contradictory, its function for the plot remains stable.

Further examples can be found in which the function of a space takes even clearer precedence over logical plausibility. Arthur's capital, Logres, is one such case and demonstrates that these logical ruptures can extend beyond the geographical location of a space. In this case, contradictions arise instead in the properties of Logres. Arthur's arrival there after his marriage to Guenevere exemplifies this. Upon his arrival, Logres is described as follows:

> il i auoit moult grant plente de gent & acroisoient de iour en iour . Car tout li paisant i uenoient por les sesnes qui destruisoient la terre tout enuiron . si i ot si grant plente de gent quil les conuenoit logier es pres . (319)
>
> There were a great many people there, and the number was growing daily, for all the peasants were coming there because of the Saxons, who were laying waste the land all around, and there were so many people that they had to be encamped on the meadowlands. (343)

When a tournament is hosted on the very same meadowlands shortly afterward, the refugees are not mentioned (346-58; 322-34). Another discontinuity occurs after the tournament scene, when Arthur and his allies "went into a room by themselves to one of the windows through which they could see the meadows and river, and the view was wondrously beautiful and health-giving" (360).[46] Neither

[45] See Sklar 53.
[46] "sen alerent en vne chambre tout seul a seul a vne des fenestres par la ou il pooient bien ueoir les pres & la riuiere . si i auoit a merueilles bel esgart & sain" (335).

the refugee camps nor the aftermath of the exceedingly violent tournament are mentioned here. The blood and weapons, which were previously mentioned as scattered on the meadows and floating down the river, are gone, even though the tournament took place earlier that same day.[47]

As the example of Logres shows, not all spaces have fixed functions for the plot. In three successive scenes, the meadows before Logres serve as a safe space for refugees, a tournament site, and as a visual backdrop for a private conversation between Arthur and his allies. These functions are more important than logical plausibility, as the meadow of Logres morphs from a refugee camp to a battlefield to untouched nature within merely two days. Even where spaces fulfil different functions for the plot, then, these functions can take precedence over spatial stability or continuity.

*Movement*

Another key property of Arthurian space is the difference between cultural spaces, such as cities, and what is between them, such as forests and nature.[48] Characters must cross these regions to move from one cultural space to another. These journeys, however, are spatialized rather differently from the actions of characters that are not tied to their movement through space. The nature that is traversed "is without spatial depth … . The distance that is travelled is a mere line that connects insular spaces of culture."[49]

*LeM* contains relatively little description of spaces and their properties overall, and the movement of characters is usually summarized to compress narrated time. This ties the question of movement to a question of eventfulness, meaning that the space that is traversed gains depth only if there is a noteworthy milestone – in the

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[47] For a more detailed discussion of this tournament scene, see section 4 below.
[48] See Ramin, esp. 35-94. For Arthurian literature specifically, see Simon 22-34.
[49] My translation. "… ohne jede räumliche Tiefe … . Reisestrecken sind bloße Linien, die insulare Kultur-Orte miteinander verbinden" (Schulz et al. 302). Schulz et al. here convincingly show that Bernhard Jahn's findings in *Raumkonzepte in der frühen Neuzeit* apply to medieval literature as well. Further observations I make in this section align with what Schulz et al. observe in their discussion on pages 301-3, especially regarding the summarizing of journeys and lack of description.

form of plot – during the journey.[50] This matches Tilo Renz's observation that paths are "not depicted as continuous spatial units" but as "subdivided into sections … . Moving between milestones at once separates and connects spaces where plot happens."[51] Two examples from *LeM* will illustrate the connection between the spatial depth of journeys and eventfulness.

First, summarized journeys often evoke place names and, sometimes, fixed stages. For example, when Gawain seeks Merlin, his journey is summarized as follows:

> Et quant il ot le roialme de logres cerquie amont & aual & il vit quil ne troueroit riens . si apensa quil passeroit mer & iroit en la petite bertaigne & il si fist … . (460)
>
> And after he had looked up and down throughout the kingdom of Logres, he saw that he would find nothing there, so he took it into his mind to cross over the sea and go to Little Brittany. And so he did. (491)

Three milestones of his journey are put in relation to one another and consistently related in this manner in the rest of *LeM*: Logres is in the British Isles and separated from Little Brittany by the sea. However, none of the three milestones are described at all; they do not affect Gawain, who travels through Logres and across the sea to Little Brittany unimpeded, either.[52] When his journey is

[50] The connection to the concepts of eventfulness and tellability, i.e. the question of how the importance of events is asserted in literature, is particularly interesting: as I suggest here, the depth of Arthurian spaces depends on the eventfulness of what happens in them. In narratology, an event is understood as a "change of state", making it inherent to the narrative's temporality. See Hühn; Baroni.

[51] My translation. "… wird der Weg nicht als kontinuierliche räumliche Einheit dargestellt [sondern] unterteilt in einzelne Wegstrecken … . Durch Bewegung zwischen den Stationen werden Orte, an denen Handlung stattfindet, voneinander getrennt und zugleich miteinander verbunden" (568-70).

[52] The sea between the British Isles and the Continent is crossed many times in *LeM*. It is often specifically mentioned as part of the journey between them (e.g. 121; 111, 321; 298, 434; 406) and can be considered a "geographical invariant" of the text ("geographische Invariante", Störmer-Caysa 74). Some passages directly point out that the journey does not pose any dangers (e.g. 112; 101). This is unusual insofar as the sea in other romances fulfils a similar function to the forest, making it a site for adventure (Schnyder). The depiction of the sea between Britain and the Continent in *LeM* might be a reflection of the strong connection between the British Isles and France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: at the time when *LeM* was written, the Isles and France were united as "one sovereign territory … which made the canal seem unimportant" (my translation; "ein Herrschaftsraum … , der den Kanal unwichtig erscheinen ließ" Störmer-Caysa 44).

summarized in two sentences, the spaces that he traverses evidently do not function as spaces in which plot happens.[53]

This becomes even clearer when something eventful *does* happen during a character's journey. In these cases, the events that are narrated create the corresponding space around them, and the nondescript line along which the character travels is replaced by a space with depth until the character continues their journey. For example, when the knights Ulfin and Bretel are on an errand between Trebe and Benoic, their path is not described or narrated at all until they are ambushed, at which point a plastic space emerges.

> … si pristrent congie a la dame elaine & sen partirent de trebes … . Et quant il orent erre entour . v . lieues si virent . vij . cheualiers de la maisnie le roy claudas . qui venoient de la deserte & aloient espiant si poroient riens gaaignier mais li pais estoit si widies de tous biens quil ne trouerent riens que prendre car toute la gent sen estoient fui ens es cites & es for chastiaus a tout ce quil auoient . (99)
>
> … they took leave of lady Elaine and left Trebe … . And when they had ridden about five leagues, they saw seven knights … who were coming from the wilderness, and they were going about looking for anything they might win for themselves, but the countryside had been so stripped of anything of worth that they found nothing to take, for all the folk had fled into the cities and strongholds with everything they owned. (109)

When Ulfin and Bretel begin their journey, we know nothing about their surroundings yet, and we likely would not have learnt anything about them if they had reached Benoic without incident. Only when the ambushers appear "from the wilderness" do some details emerge: not only does the route of Ulfin and Bretel lead through "wilderness", which might be expected, but the whole countryside has been ravaged, there are no people, and there is nothing of worth anywhere. The nondescript path of Ulfin and Bretel takes them, we learn, through a country laid waste by war. These descriptive details are given only because they are connected to the motivation of the ambushers.

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[53] See Störmer-Caysa: "In these storyworlds, there is no guarantee that two spaces in which the hero stays are connected by any path at all. The distance between them can be covered in the blink of an eye" (my translation; "Selbst daß zwischen beiden Punkten, an denen sich der Held nacheinander aufhält, überhaupt ein Weg liegt, scheint in diesen fiktionalen Welten nicht gesichert zu sein. Die Wege können geradezu im Handumdrehen zurückgelegt werden", 66).

During the skirmish that ensues, *LeM* provides detailed descriptions of the characters' movements. One ambusher "rode away from his companions after the messengers", then Bretel "spurred his horse toward him" and, after killing the attacker, "galloped away after Ulfin", and so on (110).[54] The path along which the characters travel thus gains further depth as the characters move toward and away from one another. Immediately after the battle ends, however, this plastic space becomes a line again, as Ulfin and Bretel continue their journey without further incident: "The two messengers then made their way until the evening, when they came to the castle of Benoic" (111).[55]

The connection between traversed spaces and eventfulness thus becomes apparent. When a character's journey is described, narrated time is typically skipped. Traversed spaces are named, but not described unless it is relevant for an event during the journey. Only if any action is described – and only *as long as* it is described – does the character's path gain depth. Then it turns into a space, by becoming a site of battle, as this example demonstrates, or of rest and conversation (e.g. 269-70; 251, 376; 350-1).

*Spatial Windows*

In *LeM*, the characters' paths often lead them to spaces which appear only once in the entire text. These spaces can be considered spatial windows: they open up only because the character moves there, and close again behind them.[56] These spatial windows have a distinctive connection with eventfulness, for they are associated in particular with the idea of adventure. The ambush of Ulfin and Bretel during their journey demonstrates this to some extent; an even better example is Thornbush Forest (le forest de lespine).

[54] "sen part de ses compaignons & sen ua criant apres les messages"; "si fiert le cheual des esperons vers lui"; "sen vait les galos … apres ulfin" (99-100).
[55] "lors errent li doi compaignon tant quil uindrent al soir al chastel de benoyc" (100).
[56] In the following, I focus on an example that closely reflects Störmer-Caysa's concept of a spatial window. Other spatial windows in *LeM* deviate from this pattern in that they are not connected to adventure in the narrow sense (e.g. the Grisandole episode; see 302-15; 281-92). These deviations can be explained by the relative rarity of adventures in *LeM* overall; see the discussion of the work's causality in section 5 below.

Thornbush Forest appears rather late in *LeM* and is located near Logres (401; 374). A first indicator of its status as a spatial window is that it has not been mentioned before, despite its proximity to Arthur's capital, Logres, which figures frequently in *LeM*. One day, three of the Queen's Knights ride out into Thornbush Forest:

> li soir deuant auoient il deuise quil iroient deduire … lors distrent par enuoisure quil en iroient cherkier la forest & le pais por sauoir sil i troueroient alcune auenture dont il fussent proisie & ame & loe . (374)
>
> The evening before, they had decided to go play, … and then they said for the sport of it that they would go looking through the forest and countryside to see if they could find some adventure for which they might be esteemed and loved and praised. (401)

The motivation of these knights connects their journey to the idea of adventure, which evinces, among other things, "destiny in all its uncertainty, … a voluntary test, … a demonstration of virtue, a means of self-actualization".[57] While their excursion is primarily connected to the idea of fun and enjoyment here, the knights are aiming to improve their reputation and leave their journey to chance, thus further aligning the excursion with ideas of adventure.[58]

The Queen's Knights are followed by a second group, three Knights of the Round Table, who are seeking to achieve precisely the opposite:

> … ne uoloient estre conneu . si desiroient moult a trouer des cheualiers la roine por els esprouer les uns as autres … lors dist minoras a ses compaignons alons esbanoier en ceste forest por sauoir se nous y troueriemes auenture . … piecha ont oi dire que la forest est auentureuse si se mistrent tantost en la forest de lespine por ce que plus auentureuse estoit que tout les autres . (374)
>
> … they did not wish to be recognized, for they yearned to find any of the Queen's Knights to test themselves against them. … Then Minoras said to his companions, "Let's go wander through this forest to see if we can find adventure." … some time before, they had heard it said that the forest was full of adventure, so at once they set out for the Forest of the Thornbush, for it offered greater adventure than all the others. (402)

Here, too, the idea of adventure is heavily emphasized; the word is used three times in direct connection with Thornbush Forest. The knights of the second

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[57] My translation: "destinée en ce qu'elle a de hasardeux, … épreuve volontaire, … démonstration de vertu, moyen d'épanouissement personnel" (Zumthor, *La mesure* 386).
[58] The knights plan to "sesbatre", which means "to amuse themselves, relax, have fun". See "sesbatre", *DMF*.

group, too, wish to prove themselves, in this case with the specific expectation of encountering the Queen's Knights.[59] The adventure they seek is thus personally motivated. When the groups encounter each other, they have found their respective adventures and fight. However, neither adventure is brought to completion: when the two parties fight, casualties are narrowly avoided thanks to Merlin's warning and the timely intervention of another three knights (406-10; 378-82). Once again, then, the absence, and then arrival, of Merlin is the factor upon which the resolution of a conflict depends.

After the fight is interrupted and the knights return to Logres together, Thornbush Forest is never mentioned again, even though Logres reappears several times afterward. The spatial window of this adventure has thus closed behind the knights. In terms of space, then, *LeM* employs spatial windows in a way that resembles other Arthurian romances. The spatial window of adventurous Arthurian settings is used here in a recognizable way, which raises the expectation of knightly adventure on the part of the reader, an expectation that is validated when the knights themselves speak about finding adventure in the forest. This expectation is then frustrated when neither group of knights brings their adventure to a close.[60]

*Conclusions*

*LeM*'s spaces vary, both when compared with one another and when analysed for internal consistency. Somewhat paradoxically, this aligns with the spatiality of Arthurian romance more broadly, which is characterized by vagueness, instability, and contradictoriness. Although I will discuss an example of unusual spatiality in *LeM* below, the spatiality of the work largely corresponds to the conventions of Arthurian romance.

Arthurian spatiality, overall, is highly dependent on the plot. Spatial windows only exist when the story leads a character to them. More broadly, spaces only gain depth if something happens in them, as is exemplified by the spaces traversed during journeys. Spaces in general tend to be rather unstable in order to allow

[59] For the grudge between these two factions, see section 4 below.
[60] I will return to Thornbush Forest and the frustration of expectations in section 5 below.

them to fulfil different purposes in the plot, and even the stability of fixed spaces, too, can be dependent on fulfilling a fixed function for the plot.

These and other mechanisms allow for a flexible spatial arena of which *LeM* makes ample use. It is convenient because it allows for a limited number of spaces in a vast amount of text: rather than navigating three different Saxon strongholds, for example, one recurring military base is easier to recognize and more useful for guiding readers' expectations about Saxon reinforcements. *LeM*'s spatial arena features considerable overlap with Arthurian literature, both in the appearance of certain spaces, such as Camelot, and in their design on the *discours* level. The flexibility of Arthurian spaces allows them to be recognizable across different texts yet fulfil different purposes within them. The configuration of and distances between these spaces and their spatial properties vary; this allows them to be both recognizable for the reader and adapted to the plot of the text in question. Arthurian literature thus evokes the sense of a huge and ever-changing world. The spatiality of Arthurian romance thus contributes to the inherent transfictionality of Arthurian works in that their storyworlds can overlap and contradict one another without disrupting readerly expectations and permit easy expansion and modification in the creation of new texts.

## 3. The Future in Focus: *LeM*'s Intratextuality, Intertextuality, and Transfictionality

Arthurian romance is one of the most innovative medieval genres with regard to temporality.[61] The *LG*, of which *LeM* forms the second book, is no exception. The romances attributed to the *LG* are temporally layered and weave together the past, present, and future of the narrative that is told. This is achieved through a multitude of analepses and prolepses, which are usually, but not always, signalled by repeated formulas such as "voirs fu" (148; "In truth", 159), "dont ie vous di" (208; "[that] I am telling you about", 224), "si vous dirai" (133; "[and] I will tell you", 143), "il vous conuient dire" (164; "it is right to tell you", 177), and individual words such as "puis" (124; "then", 134).[62]

[61] See Störmer-Caysa 238-9.
[62] For further examples, see 140; 129, 142; 132, 176; 164.

In these formulas, the narrative pauses to give information about something that happened in the past or will happen in the future. This information can be narrated at length (e.g. 299-300; 279) or provided in a single clause (e.g. 143; 133).

The references to events of another time can be 1) intratextual, thus connecting the narrative present to events that are narrated at a different point in the same text. Intratextual references like these amplify the internal coherence of *LeM*. Moreover, these formulas can introduce 2) intertextual references which connect *LeM*'s storyline to events narrated in other texts of the *LG*. Such references can be understood as amplifying the internal coherence of the *LG*. The same formulas can also introduce 3) transfictional references to events that are narrated elsewhere in the *LG* as well as in numerous other Arthurian texts. A reader who is not yet familiar with the particular version of events narrated in the *LG* is still likely to contextualize prolepses about the achievement of the Grail Quest (e.g. 359; 335, 372; 346) or Arthur's downfall (e.g. 284; 264-5) for what they are, as the specific versions of those events in the *LG* still adapt elements familiar from numerous and pre-existing Arthurian works.[63] Finally, these formulas can be 4) "empty" references to events that are not narrated anywhere else, at least not in any surviving text.[64] It is useful to keep the variety of these references in mind, yet their effect is essentially the same, namely that they

> consistently interrupt the development storyline, turning our gaze away from the tale at hand to one of many intertexts. … we confront the image of a text that weaves in and out of time, alluding simultaneously to present, past, and future narrative moments … . (Burns 42-3)

It is also worthy of note that the same formulas are also used in *LeM* to interlace episodes in the *Suite* section. The linear storytelling of simultaneous events

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[63] Thus, for example, the achievement of the Grail Quest by the best knight in the world is found in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, as is the idea of a question to be asked by said knight. Guenevere's affair with Lancelot is narrated in Chrétien's *Lancelot* or adaptations thereof, and her adulterous tendencies are an even older tradition. Mordred's betrayal of Arthur is found as early as the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (see Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History*, liber x, para. 176).

[64] While it is thus impossible to know for certain whether such a reference without a referent was ever truly *intended* as not having a referent, it nevertheless reflects how medieval readers, too, did not have unlimited access to the corpus of Arthurian literature. The performed openness of Arthurian literature further suggests that empty references may well have been deliberate (see Burns ch. 2, esp. 42).

occurring in multiple narrative strands often requires jumps in time and location; these switches are usually signalled quite clearly to guide the reader through the mass of narrative material.[65] The formulas quoted above are among those used for this purpose. An overarching effect achieved by these formulas is thus "to undermine the headlong progression of narrative time in the *Estoire* [*LeM*]" (Burns 43).

In *LeM*'s case, prolepses outweigh analepses by far. This is not surprising given the work's temporal setting at the beginning of Arthur's reign and its prophetic protagonist. As such, Merlin's prophecies about Arthur's future alongside other prolepses announced by the formulas quoted above stage *LeM* as a story that not only tells but determines the future of Arthur and his knights. In doing so, *LeM* grants further significance to its *histoire*: it matters not only in itself but bears important consequences for the future. In their density, these references to events outside of *LeM*'s *histoire* matter in and of themselves, but the point at which the storyline is interrupted for this purpose can be just as important, as this can add to or modify its meaning. To illustrate this, I will discuss the episode of Arthur's Wedding in some detail, beginning with the position of the episode in the overarching plot of *LeM*.

The episode of Arthur's Wedding takes place at a moment of calm in *LeM* (321-39; 298-313). The last episodes involving Arthur before the Wedding episode contain the longest battle scene in the text, which culminates in an important victory for Arthur over the Saxon Rion (234-60; 218-42). After the battle, Leodagan asks Arthur to marry his daughter Guenevere, which would seal their formal alliance, but Merlin intercedes and states that Arthur must first go to Benoic, Ban's country (261-2; 244). During their journey there, Arthur meets Gawain and the other young recruits. The recruits are dubbed knights before they all continue their journey to the Continent together. There, they fight in the Battle of Trebe and save Ban's and Bors's wives before returning to Leodagan and Guenevere (276-97; 256-

[65] In those cases where formulas are missing, the jumps forward and backward in time can be very disorienting. An example is the episode of Guinebal in the forest (263-5; 244-6), which is set in a different relationship to the development storyline in *LeM* and Lovelich's translation (ll. 24959-25212) respectively.

76). The two episodes directly preceding the Wedding then involve none of these characters. Instead, the reader follows Merlin's excursion to Rome in the famous Grisandole episode and a few short battles between two of Arthur's enemies, the Saxons and the rebellious barons (302-15; 281-92; 315-21; 293-8).

Several indicators in the preceding fifty-or-so pages evoke a sense of optimism and calm by the time the episode of Arthur's Wedding begins. Arthur has won two important battles (one against Rion and one at Trebe) and recruited the most valiant and popular knights (Gawain and his company) into his army. Merlin's excursion to Rome also evokes a sense of safety: as a rule, Merlin only leaves Arthur's side when it is safe to do so, or if he can at least return in time to solve any problems that may arise in his absence. While Merlin is away, we can thus assume Arthur to be safe from any immediate threats. The episode directly preceding that of Arthur's Wedding shows Arthur's enemies weakening one another, and while Arthur and his allies are not aware of this, the reader's knowledge of it furthers the impression of the relative safety of Arthur and his retinue during what otherwise tends to be a conflict-ridden period of war.

The Wedding episode itself becomes the turning point in this optimistic tone for *LeM*. The main way in which this is achieved is the contrast that emerges between the present wedding and Arthur's future troubles. The wedding celebrations are interrupted and undermined at several points to anticipate and allude to problems in the future. This episode also presents the first case in which an enemy emerges from within Arthur's own ranks. Lastly, a tournament that is meant to celebrate the union of Arthur and Guenevere escalates into an all-out battle and hints at the troubling division that is appearing within Arthur's ranks. Table 1.1 summarizes the plot while showing where the significance of events lies in relation to the storyline.

| Content | Pa | Pr | Fu |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leodagan repeats marriage proposal in Carhaix (321-2; 298-9) | | X | |
| Lot's motivations and plans for abducting Guenevere (322-3; 300) | X | | X |
| Narrative voice comments: Lot will fail (323; 300) | | | X |
| Merlin, aware of Lot's plan, appears in Carhaix (323; 300-1) | | X | X |
| The False Guenevere's motivation and plans to abduct Guenevere (323-4; 301) | X | | X |
| Merlin warns Ulfin and Bretel of her plan (324; 301) | | | X |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The wedding ceremony takes place (324-5; 301-2) | | X | |
| A celebratory tournament escalates into battle (325-30; 302-7) | | X | X |
| Narrative voice comments: there will be an even worse tournament in the future (330-1; 307) | | | X |
| Wedding celebrations continue (331; 307-8) | | X | |
| The False Guenevere fails to abduct Guenevere (331-3; 308-10) | | | X |
| Arthur spends wedding night with Guenevere (333-4; 310) | | X | |
| Narrative voice comments: the False Guenevere will abduct and replace Guenevere in the future, with the help of Bertelay (334; 310) | | | X |
| Bertelay's motivations and murder of another knight during the wedding celebrations (334-5; 310-11) | X | | |
| The False Guenevere and Bertelay are exiled and plan their revenge together; narrative voice comments: future trouble because of this (335-7; 311-3) | | X | X |
| Arthur and Guenevere celebrate their marriage for another week (337; 313) | | X | |

Table 1.1. The plot outline of the Wedding episode and its distribution across past (*Pa*), present (*Pr*), and future (*Fu*).

The two abduction plans at the beginning of the Wedding episode (322-4; 299-301) twice disrupt the narrative present– the Wedding preparations in Carhaix – to direct the reader's attention toward future threats. Both are intratextual references; the first abduction is attempted in the same episode (339-43; 315-9), the second in the episode that follows (331-3; 308-10). Two points are particularly relevant here with regard to temporality. On the one hand, the homodiegetic prolepsis about characters planning and preparing the abductions is supplemented with a heterodiegetic prolepsis about their failure.[66] Even while Lot and the False Guenevere secretly plan to abduct the real Guenevere, the reader already knows that they will both fail. As a result of this, the reader's interest in the abduction attempts, when they are narrated, is neither the question "What are they trying to do?", which the reader might ask if the plans had not been revealed before the abduction attempts happened, nor "Will their plans succeed?", which might be the question if the reader had learned only of the abduction plans but not of their outcome. Instead, the reader is invited to ask "*How* will their plans be foiled?" The layered prolepses of the abduction plans and their outcomes are deliberate choices that shift the focus from a matter of "What?" or "If?" to that of "How?" – a shift that is typical for prequels, which create a tension between an unknown present and a

[66] For the distinction between and discussion of homodiegetic versus heterodiegetic analepses and prolepses, see Genette, *Narrative Discourse* ch. 1.

known future.[67] The prolepses at the beginning of this episode can thus be seen as intratextual signals of *LeM*'s status as a prequel.

On the other hand, the inclusion of these plans at this exact point in the narrative is significant. As I have shown above, the Wedding episode begins with a sense of achievement, optimism, and peace – an atmosphere that is soon undermined. Lot's motivations are connected to Arthur's recent successes, which are narrated in some of the preceding episodes. The plotting of the False Guenevere has a particular impact. With her, another threat emerges, and for the first time, Arthur is threatened from within his own ranks, since she is part of the household of Cleodalis, Leodagan's seneschal.[68] The placement of the two passages thus serves to show that success does not equal safety and that the elimination of some threats will always spawn new ones. It also undermines the optimism that precedes Arthur's Wedding, turning the celebrations instead into a locus of betrayal.

The safety of Arthur's court is further destabilized in the middle part of the episode (325-30; 302-7). The Wedding ceremony is summarized in brief before the narrative continues with a long tournament scene. This tournament escalates into a violent battle between the two parties, the older generation of the Round Table knights, and the newly recruited knights surrounding Gawain, who will later be called the Queen's Knights.[69] This tournament highlights the fact that internal threats can also exist without any disloyalty or ill will directed at Arthur himself. His growing retinue (and thus, his growing military might) is here connected to weakened internal unity and fellowship. Arthur's knights no longer exist solely in relation to him but also foster friendships and animosities among themselves. This divide between the two factions can also be understood as representing Arthur and Guenevere: the Knights of the Round Table belong to Arthur, whereas Gawain's company will become the retainers of Guenevere. The divide between Arthur's

[67] Davies, esp. 33-4.
[68] It should be noted, however, that the False Guenevere is, at this point, trying not to hurt him but Leodagan. The repercussions of her abduction attempt then cause her grudge toward Arthur.
[69] This scene is discussed in detail in section 4 below.

knights and those of Guenevere thus stands in a troubling contrast to the union between the newly-weds.

The same divide within Arthur's army can be understood as an intratextual prolepsis, as it becomes a problem again several episodes later in *LeM*, when the next tournament between the same factions ends in even more bloodshed than this one. Most importantly, perhaps, this divide between Arthur's knights causes ripples that extend beyond *LeM*: it prefigures the many cases of infighting at Arthur's court which occur elsewhere in Arthurian literature generally and in the *LG* in particular, and which contribute to Arthur's downfall. This parallel can thus be read as intertextual in nature (forecasting the *LG*'s trajectory), or as transfictional (referring to the conditions of Arthur's downfall more broadly).

In the last part of the Wedding episode (330-337; 308-313), the False Guenevere carries out her abduction attempt but fails and is banished alongside Bertelay. The case of Bertelay is particularly interesting: Bertelay first appears in a prolepsis, in which a narrative voice informs the reader that the False Guenevere will have his help in the future. The ensuing explanation of his background and how he will end up becoming Arthur's enemy is thus functionally an analepsis to that prolepsis: Bertelay has for a long time held a grudge against another knight but kept silent about it. Then,

> le nuit que li rois espousa sa feme … auint que bertolais encontra cel cheualier … . Et quant bertholais le vit si li corut sus & lochist … & li doi escuier qui estoient auoec le cheualier ochis lieuent le cri … & il dient que ce auoit fait bertholais li rous … & li fisent ausi comme on doit faire a mort cheualier … . (311)
>
> on the night that King Arthur wed his wife, … Bertelay happened to see his enemy. He ran him down and killed him … and the two squires who had been with the slain knight raised the cry … and they said that it was Bertelay the Red … and they did to [the victim] as was fitting for a dead knight. (334-5)

The day after Arthur's wedding, Bertelay is condemned to exile, shortly after which the episode ends. The only appearances of this character in *LeM* are thus located outside the storyline. Even though Bertelay commits a murder during Arthur's wedding night, it is separate from the other events narrated as the plot of this

episode.[70] The example of Bertelay thus illustrates perfectly the degree to which *LeM* can be oriented toward the future of the plot.

The fact that Bertelay and the False Guenevere are exiled on the same day in the same place and then team up against Arthur seems to suggest, even though this is not made explicit in the text, that that they are only able to form an alliance *because* they previously met at Arthur's court. An implication of this, in turn, is that Arthur's ever-expanding army and allies make not only him more powerful, but also his enemies. The prolepses about Bertelay's collaboration with the False Guenevere are detailed and create direct intertextual ties to the *LG*'s *Lancelot en prose*. For example, *LeM* mentions that the False Guenevere's deception will be successful and the real Guenevere will leave court for "a good three years", and that Arthur's realms will be under interdict during this period (334).[71] These details correspond to the *LG*'s version of the *Lancelot* but not, for example, to the non-cyclic version of the text, *Lancelot do Lac*.[72]

All in all, the episode of Arthur's Wedding takes place at a moment in the narrative that evokes optimism, peace, and stability. These initial expectations are disrupted by the sudden influx of internal conflict. Unlike his previous encounters with outside threats, Arthur fails to resolve these internal ones: the tournament is interrupted, but no peace is made between the knights; Bertelay and the False Guenevere are exiled but meet up in exile and will come back even stronger. [73]

At several points in this episode, a narrative voice comments on the negative consequences these conflicts will have for Arthur in the future. The prolepses in this episode are realized variously within *LeM* or at later points in the *LG*, or correspond to generalized facts about the Arthurian universe, and thus reinforce *LeM*'s intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional continuity. In Arthur's Wedding,

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[70] Despite its proximity to its chronologically appropriate place in the storyline, it should thus be understood as what Genette calls a completing analepsis, which "comprises the retrospective sections that fill in, after the event, an earlier gap in the narrative" (*Narrative Discourse* 51).
[71] "pres de . iij . ans" (310).
[72] See esp. *Lancelot: Parts III and IV* (69-80) for the *LG* version and the corresponding passage in the non-cyclic *Lancelot do Lac*, in which the False Guenevere's plan fails (606-8).
[73] *Lancelot: Parts III and IV*, chs 77-80.

the contrast between the optimistic beginning of the episode and the bleak outlook for Arthur's future at its end, between a narrative present of peace and calm and a future of betrayal and tragedy, leads to two effects. On the one hand, the perspective on Arthur's successes changes: success is shown to directly produce new conflicts and animosities, just as the growing number of his supporters is shown to weaken the internal unity among them. The juxtaposition of Arthur's present success and future hardship strongly implies that peace is merely temporary and that stability cannot last.[74] On the other hand, the contrast between Arthur's view of these conflicts and the comments on their consequences by the narrative voice depicts Arthur's inability to prevent the tragedy ahead of him. His downfall is just thus as predetermined as the success of his early reign.[75]

This predetermination is crucial to *LeM*. The majority of the *histoire* works for Arthur's benefit, and the success of his early reign is highly dependent on Merlin's help. In particular, Merlin shares vital knowledge with Arthur, often instructing him how to deal with problems of which he would not even have been aware without his help. Merlin is always at Arthur's side to help him resolve acute problems but – and this begins to emerge more and more strongly from this episode forward – this dependence on Merlin has its downsides. Thus, for example, Merlin does not share knowledge with Arthur in this episode, neither about the future actions of the False Guenevere and Bertelay nor about Lot's upcoming ambush. This makes it impossible for Arthur to prepare for or deal with these problems; in the case of Lot's ambush, he is saved by his nephew Gawain, and in the case of the False Guenevere and Bertelay, his situation is hopeless until the two of fall ill. The theme of knowledge is thus emphasized again and again as vital to Arthur's success, and Arthur's ignorance or short-sightedness as an important factor in his downfall.[76] Merlin's absences from Arthur's side are henceforth moments in which the seeds of

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[74] Given this contrast, it seems curious that this episode contains no allusions to Guenevere's affair with Lancelot. This may be explained by the fact that the future aspects of this episode are centred on Arthur and are related to Arthur's power. Guenevere's affair with Lancelot may be another blind spot of Arthur, but cannot be (as) directly related to his power and would thus distract from the contrast.
[75] This, in turn, neatly matches the medieval idea of the wheel of fortune, which is often associated with Arthur. See e.g. Bogdanow "La chute"; Echard.
[76] For example, Arthur does not even recognize Bertelay when they meet again in the *Lancelot*; see *Lancelot: Parts III and IV* 44.

conflict germinate: he is away when the above-mentioned second tournament scene takes place, and he is away when Arthur's knights set out for Thornbush Forest. While neither of these episodes has lasting consequences within *LeM*, they establish a pattern, namely that Merlin's absences become increasingly dangerous for the stability of Arthur's court.

## 4. Central to De-centralizing the *Histoire*: Repetition

Repetition is a feature of *LeM*'s *discours* that is typical of Arthurian romance in general and the *LG* in particular. Early *LG* editors and researchers found it difficult to reconcile the repetitions in the narratives at hand with their assumptions of what a planned and skilfully composed text should look like (Stern 118-9). As such, repetition was understood as contradicting literary artistry rather than being part of it, and the texts of the *LG* were deplored as "endless and desultory babbling" (Mead, "The Literary Value" ccxliv). These views continued well into the twentieth century, during which researchers "tended either to undervalue repetition in the Vulgate texts as a mark of the cycle's 'disunity', or … attempted to cover it up, arguing that the texts are in fact 'unified' despite apparent and abundant indication to the contrary".[77] More recently, acknowledgement of the *LG*'s plurality as intentional (Burns) and of retelling, adaptation, and continuation as tendencies in medieval literature more broadly (Jane Taylor; Tether; Kullmann and Lalonde; Ferlampin-Acher) has facilitated an understanding of repetition as part of the aesthetic of medieval literature.[78] This development is a crucial step for *LG* research because it replaces modern understandings of repetition as redundancy and lack of originality with repetition and familiarity as a central part of the medieval aesthetic.

This means that repetitions within the *LG* are now regarded primarily as intratextual, meaning that they strengthen the internal coherence of one of its component texts, or as intertextual, meaning that they strengthen the connections

[77] Burns 82-3. Late medieval adaptations of Arthurian prose romances tend to remove repetitions and shorten source material for the benefit of readability (see Arrigo; Moran, "Text-Types"). Thus, works such as Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* reflect principles of composition which are closer to modern aesthetics of repetition than to those of the Arthurian prose romances that constitute their sources. See Burns 83-4; Stern 119.
[78] See also Burns's discussion of artful repetition (81-2).

between the texts of which it is composed. Clear examples of both can easily be found in *LeM*. For example, most of Merlin's prophecies are intratextual repetitions, as they tend to become true within *LeM* and are crucial in guiding the reader's expectations for any given episode. They fall into the category of repetitions because both the prophecy of an event to come and the event itself are narrated, rather than the latter being skipped.[79] Other intratextual repetitions are not direct repetitions of the same events but apply the same narrative to different sets of characters. For example, most of the Queen's Knights in *LeM* share the same backstory: after hearing recent news, they decide to abandon the futures that had been planned for them and ask Arthur to make them knights. This background story is provided, at varying lengths and with few differences, no less than seven times.[80] *LeM* abounds with this kind of repetition: for example, two kings both imprison a married servant and conceive a child with her (159-60; 148-9, 177-8; 165), both Gawain's mother and his aunt are abducted by Saxons and saved by Gawain (218-20; 203-5, 421-3; 393-4), both Merlin and Guinebal create a magic space for their lovers (225-8; 209-12, 263-4; 244-6), and so on. Beyond the structural repetitions, many repetitions of smaller narrative units occur frequently in *LeM*. Most notably, the large number of battle scenes, which make up about half of the text, all seem to work with the same stock of motifs, phrases, and formulas, while adding little to the progression of the story.[81]

These cases of repetition are relatively self-contained and easy to trace. In the following, I will discuss two tournament scenes in *LeM* which occur in close proximity to each other and are closely connected. The first tournament is dedicated to Arthur's Wedding and covers about six pages (325-31; 302-308); the second tournament takes place when Arthur holds his first official court and is about twice as long (346-58; 322-34). Both scenes deliberately reinforce the link between tournaments and open battle, as my discussion of verbal repetitions will show. Moreover, the two tournament scenes are not only echoes of battle, but also of each other. A discussion of these two scenes will, first, demonstrate the variety

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[79] See Genette's distinction between completing and repeating analepses and prolepsis in *Narrative Discourse*, ch. 1.
[80] See ch. 2, section 1.
[81] See Fabry-Tehranchi, "La 'Suite Vulgate'" para. 18; Combes, "Le vol" paras 30 and 38.

of associations created by repetitions in them, and second, discuss their potential intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional effects.

### 4.1 The Association of the Tournament Scenes with Battles

To an extent, the tournament scenes will have corresponded to the expectations of contemporary audiences in that they reflect real-world tournament practices. For example, the participants are divided into two sides and equipped with blunted weapons.[82] Other occurrences of martial entertainment in *LeM* correspond to common practices in the Middle Ages, too. This includes, for example, jousting matches and quintains (Crouch 89, 111-3), *commençailles* to open tournaments (Crouch 83-4), and the capture of opponents in tournaments (Crouch 96). The various shorter references to tournaments and the longer scenes in focus here all reflect these historical practices (e.g. 417; 389), thus evoking a set of expectations in the reader, namely that the tournament will follow an established pattern and rules.

These expectations are vital because they are disrupted in the tournament at Arthur's Wedding, and again when he first holds court. The outline of the two scenes is quite similar, and the circumstances correspond to other mentions of tournaments in *LeM*. Both tournaments take place between the Knights of the Round Table and the Queen's Knights at a moment of peace and celebration at Arthur's court.[83] Gawain, who leads the Queen's Knights, takes measures to ensure that both tournaments begin fairly, and they go well for a while. The evocation of battle begins once the tournaments are well under way: both sides initially fight according to the rules, but the Knights of the Round Table grow increasingly bitter when they experience setbacks. As the fighting continues, the violence and mutual disdain of both sides for each other gets out of control. Both tournaments

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[82] In general, a shift was taking place around the time *LeM* was written: during the thirteenth century, it became common practice to use blunt weapons for tournaments, whereas before, the same weapons were used for war and tournaments alike (Crouch 78-9).

[83] Note that in the first tournament scene, the Queen's Knights have not yet started serving under Guenevere. Since it is the same group of characters, however, I call them Queen's Knights throughout this chapter to avoid confusion. Further knights are involved in the tournament, but their actions are not mentioned. Only Lot's knights, who join Gawain's side in the second tournament, occasionally surface to comment on the fighting.

eventually have to be interrupted, but Arthur himself fails to gain control of his men. The interruption of the tournaments hinges on Gawain, who is the strongest fighter, being appeased, which takes several attempts by different characters in both cases. In both scenes, the opposition between the two factions carries over into a conflict that continues after the interruption of the tournament. The overview in table 1.2 already shows that the additions of the second tournament scene and the differences from the first are aimed at emphasizing this conflict even further.

| | First scene | Second scene |
|---|---|---|
| A | Peace at Arthur's court | |
| B | Gawain ensures fairness of tournament | |
| C | | Arthur asks Gawain to prevent escalation, Gawain refuses |
| D | Tournament initially goes well | |
| E | The Knights of the Round Table (KRT) experience setbacks and grow increasingly violent, to no avail | |
| F | Both sides observe the rules | Both sides fight unfairly, initiated by the KRT |
| G | | Gawain's negotiations fail |
| H | | Nascien and Adragain react to escalation |
| I | | Gawain informs Arthur of escalation |
| J | | Gawain seriously wounds Douglas, who is believed dead |
| K | Gawain gets Nascien to surrender/change sides | Gawain refuses to accept Nascien's surrender |
| L | | Fighting shifts into the city |
| M | | Gawain takes Arthur's intervention party to be an ambush by the KRT and becomes more violent |
| N | | Gawain refuses to accept Hervi of Rivel's surrender; Hervi's negotiations fail |
| O | Arthur fails to interrupt the tournament | |
| P | Another character appeases Gawain | |
| Q | Grudge persists | Reconciliation? |

Table 1.2. Outline of similarities, differences, and additions in the two tournament scenes. The table largely follows the chronology of both scenes, but F and K in the first scene are listed next to their equivalents in the second.

Both tournaments thus begin as simulations of battle but turn gradually into all-out battles as their participants turn to excessive violence "as if it were a deadly war" (349; "comme de guerre mortel" 329).[84] The two tournament scenes are aligned with all-out battles on the *discours* level as well. This includes motifs such as the

[84] This is not without historical precedent either, but is made explicit within the framework of *LeM*. Real-world tournaments were, in their time, harshly criticized for their excessive violence (Crouch 153-6), with injuries being relatively common and death a small but real risk for the participants (Crouch 98-101).

description of moving divisions (e.g. 114; 103 and 258; 240), the arrival of reinforcements (e.g. 353; 329 and 340; 316), duels within larger skirmishes (e.g. 283; 263-4 and 326; 303-4), and the prowess of particular knights against numbers of unnamed opponents (328-9; 305-6 and 164-5; 153-4). Another point in common is the use of focalization, as both these two tournament scenes and a number of battle scenes focalize on spectators on occasion (e.g. 388; 268 and 329; 305-6).

The use of formulas and imagery furthers this alignment with battle (see table 1.3). As is usual for formulas, they appear in particular at moments of narrative pause or transition because they serve as guidance for readers. In the two tournament scenes, the formulas used at such moments are the same formulas as those used in *LeM*'s many battle scenes. The replication of battle formulas for such transitions is particularly noticeable, as they appear in places where the reader would expect a formula or some form of guidance. At a moment when the reader's immersion has thus already been interrupted – when they have already been reminded of the fact that they are reading – the tournament scenes thus additionally convey the fact that they are reading about battle.

| | Battle | Tournament |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1. There the battle was wondrous and the jousting deadly … (283; La ot estor merueilleus & mortel tournoiement … , 263)<br>2. There the fighting was quite wondrous and very heavy … (285; iluec ot vn estor moult meruelleus & durement ferus … , 265) | 1. There the fighting was fierce and hard … (328; Illuec ot estor fier & fort … , 305)<br>2. Then the hitting began … (329; si commencha li caples … , 306)<br>3. Then the fighting began to get heavier … (348; lors commenche li tournoiemens a enforcier …, 323) |
| 2 | 1. The uproar was very loud, and the fighting was deadly before the city of Aneblayse, for all on one side were doing their utmost to bring harm to those on the other. (242; Moult fu grans la noise & li estors mortex deuant la cite de danebloise . car moult se penerent de adamagier lun lautre, 226)<br>2. Very heavy was the fighting in the meadows beneath Trebe, and the knights of the Round Table did wonders. (294; Moult fu grans la mellee es pres desous | 1. The fighting was very heavy and the battle was hard, before the gate to the city of Carhaix, between those of the Round Table and the newly knighted … the companions of the Round Table were defending the gate against them so that they could not break through. (329; Moult fu grans li estors & dure la mellee a lentree de la porte de la cyte de karoaise de ceaus de la table roonde & des nouiaus adoubes … li compaignon de la table roonde lor desfendoient lentree si kil ne les pooient desrompre ne perchier, 306) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | trebes si firent merueilles[85] de lors cors li cheualier de la table reonde … , 274) | |
| 3 | 1. … there was such a great din that no one could have heard God thundering, and they raised so much dust that the sun, which was high in the sky, was dimmed. (284; … i ot grant noise com ni oist mie dieu tounant . si font leuer la poudriere que li solaus qui haus estoit en fu tous troubles, 264)<br>2. There you would have seen one dead man falling over onto another and many a good, running warhorse flying through the fields with their reins between their legs because their masters lay dead on the ground … (160; la ueist on uerser lun mort sour lautre & fuir par les chans maint boin courant destrier lor renes entre lor pies dont li signor gisoient mort a terre … , 149) | 1. And then the hue and cry rose so loud around them that no one could have heard God thundering (348; lors lieue li hus & li cris si grans sor els si que on ni oist pas dieu tounant, 323)<br>2. You would have seen lances and shields floating downstream in great numbers, and you would have seen horses without their masters, reins dragging behind them, [swimming][86] from one bank to the other. (352; si ueissies floter lances & escus aual la riuiere a grant foison & cheuaus sans lor signors lor renes trainant noier de riue a autre, 328) |

Table 1.3. Examples of verbal repetitions and echoes of battles in the two tournament scenes.

For example, the formulas in row 1 of table 1.3 are transitions to a panoramic view of the battle or tournament, thus evoking a sense of monumentality. Another formula, examples of which can be found in row 2, reminds the reader of the overall encounter, while simultaneously evoking its location. The two tournaments are fought outside Carhaix and Logres respectively, and the broader developments are repeatedly connected with proximity to and distance from cities: 2.1, for example, locates the fighting at the "gate to the city of Carhaix". This is very much in line with the historical location of tournaments (Crouch 50-5), and it replicates formulas used in siege battles in *LeM*.

Both tournaments also work with the imagery of battle. For example, they describe the noise of combat and address the reader's senses to create a similar effect of momentousness (row 3).[87] This imagery aims, for both battles and tournaments, to virtually place the reader on the scene. This is achieved by addressing the reader directly ("you would have seen"), and by moving past the visual sense, for example

[85] I have here emended *Lestoire de Merlin*, in which Sommer places a full point after "merueilles". Sommer's base manuscript has no punctuation here, only a page break, and no kind of punctuation is warranted here syntactically. See BL Add. 10292 157v-158r.
[86] Pickens translates the verb as "drowning"; my emendation follows Berthelot and Walter's reading (*Les premiers faits* p. 1336, para. 540).
[87] See also Crouch 90.

to descriptions of noise, as the metaphor "no one could have heard God thundering" illustrates. The similarities far outweigh the differences in detail. In 3.2, the image of riderless horses in the tournament scene does not mention their riders, but it is made explicit that they are dead in the example taken from a battle. The image of riderless horses itself, an image that is evoked in the same way, already implies that their riders are, at the very least, injured or defeated. The association with battle and its casualties is arguably an even stronger one because a less sinister explanation for the missing riders – i.e. defeat or injury – is not made explicit.[88]

The two tournament scenes in question are thus doubly aligned with battle, first, like all other tournament scenes, because of their mimetic use of real-world tournaments as simulations of battle, and second because their *discours* is aligned with battle scenes within *LeM*. In these two scenes, the line between tournament and actual battle is thus increasingly blurred when Arthur's knights fight amongst themselves, and while these confrontations are interrupted before anyone dies, this has troubling implications for stability within Arthur's ranks. These two tournament scenes are the only ones in *LeM* to highlight such similarities with battles. The only other tournament that is narrated at length takes place when Ban and Bors visit Arthur to pay homage much earlier in the text (113-6; 102-5). That tournament, while being superficially similar to battle in the above-mentioned ways, does not escalate into serious fighting. Instead, the opponents admire and praise one another, and friendships are forged during the event. The tournament ends when the Arthur, Ban, and Bors realize that both sides are equally strong, and prizes are given to the most valiant knights. No grudges against the winning knights, or any injuries or future implications of this tournament, are mentioned. By contrast, the two tournament scenes considered here feature excessive violence and result in lasting animosities between Arthur's knights. The opposition of the two factions within the tournaments thus persists after them.

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[88] The similarities in imagery are particularly striking in some manuscripts, which reuse the same image both for the tournament scenes and for actual battles. For example, BnF fr. 9123, 179r shows a battle between Gawain's company and the Saxons, and 241v depicts the second tournament scene with practically the same image. The same image design also occurs several times in other battle scenes in this manuscript.

## 4.2 Escalation: The Association of the Two Tournament Scenes with Each Other

Before I turn to the consequences of this conflict, I will discuss how repetitions connect these two scenes with each other. Several indications that they should be read together can be found. A first indicator of this is the close proximity of the scenes in *LeM*: they are separated only by one short episode (337-43; 313-9). Second, there are a number of verbal repetitions, likely deliberate, that are specific to these two scenes.[89] Third, and most obviously, the first tournament scene explicitly alludes to the second one twice. One of these references occurs right at the beginning of the first tournament:

> … grant enuie lor en porterent li cheualier de la table roonde ki moult chier dut estre conparee a cel tournoiement a la hatine ki puis en fu faite a logres la ou mes sires Gauaine fu clames sire & maistre por le bien fait kil i fist ausi com li contes le vous deuisera cha en auant apres che kil fu deuenus cheualiers a la roine genieure . (303)
>
> … the knights of the Round Table bore them a grudge that was to prove most costly in the quarrel that arose at the tournament in Logres where Sir Gawainet was hailed lord and master for his valiant deeds there, as the story will reveal it to you later, after he had become the knight of Queen Guenevere. (326)

Even before the first tournament begins, *LeM* thus informs the reader of the grudge that takes root now and the fact that it will be "most costly" later. A key point of comparison that is established between the first tournament scene and the second, then, is that the second tournament will be a serious "quarrel", thus representing an escalation of the conflict depicted in the first. The prolepsis is also – and this is rare for prolepses in *LeM* – connected to a further point in the textual chronology: the second tournament will take place after Gawain becomes a knight of the Queen. Thus, when Guenevere takes him and his companions as her retinue merely two episodes later, the reader expects the celebratory tournament to take a turn for the worse.

This expectation of a costly quarrel gains more specific dimensions because of the second allusion, which occurs at the end of the first tournament scene:

> Ices paroles que mes sires Gauaine disoit tint il bien . car il fu bien aparissant li quel furent li millor cheualier li iour quil pristrent le

[89] I will give examples of these repetitions in what follows.

> tornoiement ensamble es pres de hors logres quant li noule cheualier tournoierent encontre cels de la table roonde dont il en i ot asses de blecies & de naures ensi comme li contes le vous deuisera cha en auant . (307)
>
> Sir Gawainet kept to the words he spoke, for it was very clear who the best knights were on the day they won together the tournament in the meadowlands outside Logres, when the new knights fought against those of the Round Table. There were many wounded and maimed then, just as the story will recount it for you later. (330-1)[90]

The somewhat vague reference to costs in the first prolepsis is here made specific as extensive physical harm, preparing the reader for increased violence.

Several repeated elements that are exclusive to the second tournament scene can be connected to the same idea of escalation. For example, the second tournament scene contains two key words that do not occur in the first and are repeated over and over, namely "aatine" and "folie".[91] "Aatine" is a word for a joust, but can also denote a challenge, defiance, or opposition on a more official level.[92] Thus, the opposing sides of the tournament are depicted as real enemies outside it, and the conflict is no longer confined to the tournament in the second scene. The word "folie" (madness) is used on various occasions to describe the conflict between the two sides. It thus embodies the escalation of anger and violence to a point where it is out of control. Interestingly, the word "folie" is applied to different sides in the course of its repetitions: initially, it is the escalation of violence on the part of the Knights of the Round Table that is seen as madness, but when Gawain refuses to interrupt the tournament and becomes increasingly violent, their madness pales in comparison with his "cruaute" (cruelty) and "maltalent" (wrath, 331).[93]

A third factor that contributes to the sense of escalation is the structure of both tournament scenes, which deserves to be discussed in some detail. As described

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[90] Another verbal repetition occurs when Hervi, in his attempt to appease Gawain, confronts him for having "wounded and maimed" so many contestants (356; "de blecies & de naures" 331).
[91] "Aatine" occurs three times on p. 326 and twice on p. 331 in *LeM*. There is one occurrence in the first tournament scene when it alludes to the second and the "quarrel" (326; "hatine", 303) that arises then. Mentions of "folie" can be found on pp. 323 (twice), 325, 326, 327 (three times), 328, 331 (six times), 332, and 333.
[92] For a collection of examples and meanings, see "aatine".
[93] The motif of mad knights who behave out of character, often for extended periods of time, is well attested but not necessarily connected to bloodlust. See Ménard.

above, the second tournament scene repeats the structure of the first but makes a number of additions and differs from it in a few ways. Most of these changes can be understood as different types of repetition which, together, turn the escalation of violence and conflict into a central effect of the second tournament scene.

| | First scene | Second scene | Comparison |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Peace at Arthur's court | | Repetition |
| B | Gawain ensures fairness of tournament | | Repetition |
| C | | Arthur asks Gawain to prevent escalation, Gawain refuses | *Addition (refusal to de-escalate)* |
| D | Tournament initially goes well | | Repetition |
| E | The Knights of the Round Table (KRT) experience setbacks and grow increasingly violent, to no avail | | Repetition |
| F | Both sides observe the rules | Both sides fight unfairly, initiated by the KRT | Inversion |
| G | | Gawain's negotiations fail | *Addition (refusal to de-escalate)* |
| H | | Nascien and Adragain react to escalation | Addition |
| I | | Gawain informs Arthur of escalation | Addition |
| J | | Gawain seriously wounds Douglas, who is believed dead | *Addition (misunderstanding)* |
| K | Gawain gets Nascien to surrender/change sides | Gawain refuses Nascien's surrender | Inversion<br>*Addition (refusal to de-escalate)* |
| L | | Fighting shifts into the city | Addition |
| M | | Gawain takes Arthur's intervention party to be an ambush by the KRT and becomes more violent | *Addition (misunderstanding)* |
| N | | Gawain refuses Hervi of Rivel's surrender; Hervi's negotiations fail | *Addition (refusal to de-escalate)* |
| O | Arthur fails to interrupt the tournament | | Repetition |
| P | Another character appeases Gawain | | Repetition |
| Q | Grudge persists | Reconciliation? | Inversion? |

Table 1.4. Table 1.2, supplemented with categorizations of the repetitions. Those additions to the second scene that create repetition structures within it are marked by italics.

Various elements from the first tournament scene are inverted in the second. Inversions are a kind of repetition where the instances of the repeated element stand in opposition to each other.[94] Two pointed inversions draw attention to the tournament rules in particular. Even though the violence in the first scene becomes more and more excessive, it stays within the boundaries of the tournament. By contrast, both sides fight unfairly in the second tournament. For example, the Knights of the Round Table kill their opponents' horses (349; 324); Gawain

[94] See Schulz et al. 175.

considers the behaviour unchivalric but retaliates in the very same way (353; 329). When the Knights of the Round Table exchange their tournament lances for "stout, straight lances" early on, the narrating "I" leaves no doubt that this is against the rules:

> cest la plus grant cruaute quil puissent faire car tournoiemens doit estre fais sans felounie . & il murent por els ferir comme de guerre mortel . (325)
>
> That was the most evil thing they could do, for tournaments ought to be fought without treachery. So they made ready to strike their opponents as if it were a deadly war. (349)[95]

Gawain, too, exchanges his tournament sword for Excalibur. This is particularly noticeable because he is pointedly mentioned not to be fighting with it in the first tournament scene (329; 306).[96] His choice of weapon leads to a bloodbath in the subsequent fighting and is harshly criticized by one of his opponents. As a result of these inversions, the violence in the first scene still comes across as fair, particularly in retrospect, and despite the heated tempers on both sides, nobody is seriously injured or killed. In the second scene, however, both sides abandon their good behaviour in pursuit of advantage in the fight. The characters themselves evaluate one another's behaviours as violating the code of tournaments, thus cementing the impression that the fighting has morphed into a battle.

The importance of the impressions voiced by characters in achieving this effect is exemplified by another inversion, which is found in a conversation between Gawain and Nascien. In the second tournament scene, this conversation develops in a manner quite opposite to its counterpart in the first (K). In the first scene, Gawain defeats Nascien and tries to take him prisoner in a way that conforms to the rules of tournaments. Nascien refuses to surrender, however, and his fervour impresses Gawain. Since Gawain now no longer wants to hurt Nascien because of

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[95] After exchanging their lances, they also put them in their holders. If a holstered lance was levelled horizontally during a charge, a hit would have the weight of both the knight and the horse behind it, rendering it considerably more lethal (Crouch 91).
[96] Gawain also instructs his company to take the best "armes" they have (326). While Pickens's translation (350) interprets this as meaning only armour, it is more likely that "armes" here refers to weapons, as Gawain has already mentioned hauberks in the same sentence. Anne Berthelot and Philippe Walter's translation supports this reading (*Les premiers faits* p. 1330, para. 537), as does the Middle English *Prose Merlin* (*Merlin* [Wheatley] 489).

his being "of great heart" (327),[97] he instead symbolically surrenders to him by offering him his sword; Nascien recognizes the "great nobility" (327)[98] of this gesture and gives Gawain his sword instead. However, Nascien's response is not merely a surrender, since henceforth "Nascien took Sir Gawainet's side, for that was right and just" (328).[99] The exchange between Gawain and Nascien in the first tournament is a moment of friendship and mutual respect against a backdrop of growing conflict. The characters respond positively to each other's behaviour, and it is clear that Nascien's changing sides is within the rules of tournaments. Gawain's strict adherence to the rules of tournaments is foregrounded, as is both Gawain's and Nascien's nobility. This is why Gawain's inverted behaviour is particularly noticeable when the same two characters encounter each other again in the second tournament scene.

In the second tournament scene, their conversation takes place after both sides have already gone over to using real weapons instead of ones for tournaments and are fighting bitterly. The tournament has thus already escalated to a point which the first tournament never reached. Nascien, when he is about to be attacked by Gawain, criticizes him thus:

> vous nestes mie si courtois ne si preudomme comme len tesmoigne . Car vous uous estes ensi garnis de vos armes comme se vous fuissies en guerre mortel qui aues uostre boine espee aportee . & bien sacies quil vous sera encore reproue aillors que chi . (327)
>
> You are not so courtly or so worthy a gentleman as they say. You are bearing arms as if you were fighting a deadly war, for you have brought along your good sword. And you can be sure that you will yet be rebuked for that … . (352)[100]

In a stark contrast to their encounter in the first tournament, Nascien comments negatively on Gawain's behaviour and points out that he is breaking the rules of the tournament. Nascien then acknowledges the error of his own companions as well and begs Gawain to separate the combatants. Unlike the first tournament scene, he

[97] "de grant cuer" (304).
[98] "grant frankise" (304).
[99] "si se tourna nasciens deuers monsignor Gauaine car ce estoit drois & raison" (305).
[100] Note the verbal repetition of "deadly war" ("guerre mortel") here and in the narrative voice's comment on the weapons of the Knights of the Round Table.

here submits to Gawain, and in yet another inversion, Gawain refuses to accept this admission of defeat and follows his response up with threats and taunts:

> … iou ausi uolentiers nel commenche encontre els … & serai tous li premiers . & por tant que ie uoel que vous lor dies naues vous garde de moi a ceste fois . & bien lor dires que ia ne sen mele li rois ne la roine . Car nous sommes tel compaignon qui asses lor trouerons mellee ia si bien ne sen sauront garder ne loing ne pres . (328)
>
> I will gladly start fighting them … , and I'll be the very first in! That is why I want you to tell [your companions], "Shouldn't you beware of me now?" And you'll also tell them that the king and queen may not interfere. For we companions will gladly meet them in battle, and sooner or later they won't be able to help themselves. (352)

Gawain is here shown to be at a point he never reached in the first tournament and is willing to pursue this quarrel after the tournament ends. Seeing Gawain's vengefulness, Nascien reminds him of their last conversation, thus creating another explicit tie to the first tournament scene: "Once before you have behaved lovingly to me and did me a good deed" (352).[101] He adds that Gawain's side is clearly stronger than his, making an indirect appeal to the nobility Gawain has displayed to him before. *LeM* thus creates a contrast between the noble Gawain in the first tournament scene and the vengeful, bloodthirsty Gawain in the second. Nascien's appeals remain unsuccessful, as Gawain suddenly rides off without answering.

Lastly, the motif of breaking and adhering to the rules is brought to the fore at the end of both tournaments. In the first tournament scene, Gawain is too "bent on inflicting pain" ("entalentes de mal faire") to listen to Arthur's straightforward demand to stop fighting, but then Merlin

> li uint al encontre & le prent par lune des mains & al autre main li prent lespaire & li dist en riant estes sire cheualiers uous estes prins si vous rendes a moi car asses en aues fet la uostre merchi .
> Quant mesire Gauaine voit que cest merlins si li dist moult deboinairement que prins est il puis quil li plaist . (307)
>
> rode over to him and grabbed him with one of his hands and with the other took his staff away, and he said to him, smiling, "Hold still, sir knight, for you have been caught. Surrender to me, if you please, for you have done enough fighting."
> When Sir Gawain saw that it was Merlin, he told him with great courtesy that he was indeed his prisoner … . (330)

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[101] "autres foi maues vous fait amor & bonte" (328).

Thus, Gawain's anger in the first scene does not outweigh his chivalry, and when Merlin takes him prisoner in accordance with the rules of tournaments, Gawain immediately stops fighting. In the second tournament scene, however, Gawain is more bloodthirsty than in the first and Merlin is absent. Several people have died and many more have been injured by the time Lot, Ban, and Bors together manage to calm Gawain down.

What the escalation of violence conveys is that the conflict between the Knights of the Round Table and the Queen's Knights is growing out of control: what starts as a contained simulation of a battle turns into real animosity and a lasting grudge. This is further highlighted by the internal repetitions during the second tournament scene. One example consists in several misunderstandings that take place during the fighting and escalate it further. First, Gawain injures another knight so badly that he is believed dead, which aggravates the grudge held by his opponents (J). Second, when Arthur sends squires to interrupt the tournament, Gawain mistakes them for an ambush by the Knights of the Round Table and begins slaughtering them (M).[102] As elsewhere, these misunderstandings draw attention to the importance of information, and arguably, the absence of Merlin in the second tournament scene, with the implication that he might have been able to prevent these casualties. In addition, the episode mirrors the hectic pace of *LeM*'s battles and the misunderstandings that occur within them (e.g. 366; 341-2).

Another set of repetitions exclusive to the second tournament scene further conveys how the conflict between the two parties escalates out of control and outgrows the boundaries of tournaments. It consists in no less than three refusals to de-escalate the ongoing violence. The first takes place when the Knights of the Round Table exchange their tournament lances for lances that are intended for war. Gawain sends messengers to them in an effort to de-escalate, but these messengers are rudely rebuked (G). The refusal of the Knights of the Round Table to de-escalate

[102] Infantry was used by tournament hosts to secure towns and police the tournament field, and could challenge or arrest participants if the fighting moved into the town. At the same time, ambushes were common practice in grand tournaments, and while it was perceived as unfair, having infantry join a tournament belatedly to gain an advantage was not unheard of, either. In terms of historical context, Arthur's decision to have his squires intervene when the fighting moves into Logres thus makes as much sense as Gawain's misunderstanding of it (Crouch 86, 102).

is particularly worrying as it is directly followed by Nascien and Adragain's fear that it will lead to casualties (H):

> biaus signors nous auons moult malement erre … . Car li neueu au roy artu & lor compaignon nous feront damage de si le sacies ne il ne puet remanoir sans grant perte . & par auenture il en iaura des mors si seroit boin que la chose remansist atant . (326)
>
> Dear lords, we have made a very bad mistake … . For King Arthur's [nephews] and their companions will do us great harm, you can count on it, and it cannot end without great loss; perhaps there will be deaths, so it would be best if it stopped right now. (350)

The first tournament was interrupted, thanks to Merlin, thus preventing serious losses. The words of Nascien and Adragain, by contrast, point to the lethality of the second tournament; indeed, Gawain in his frenzy goes on to kill several squires and injure a number of knights to the point that they will never be able to fight again (L, M, N). The response of Nascien and Adragain's companions to their concerns also highlights the pointlessness of the fighting: they are aware that they cannot win but want to fight anyway, "every man … for himself" (350).[103]

The fact that the Knights of the Round Table want to continue fighting even though their defeat is clearly inevitable renders their refusal to de-escalate particularly frustrating. Their stubbornness and willingness to die for their cause is emphasized on various levels throughout. Another interesting example can be found in a repeated proverb in the second tournament scene. When Gawain angrily calls the Knights of the Round Table traitors for (he thinks) setting up an ambush, they realize how much he hates them. They are unable to make things right, and

> si se repentissent moult uolentiers sil peussent car ore est lor honte doublee . & por ce dist li sages en reprouier que **tels quide bien sa honte uengier qui lacroist** . & por ce furent cil honteus & mat . (330; my bolding)
>
> They would very gladly have set that right, if they could, for now their shame had doubled; thus the wise man says in a proverb that **some thinking to revenge renew their shame**, and this is why they were ashamed and downcast. (355; my bolding)

The same proverb appears in an earlier scene, in which King Amant, an enemy of Arthur's ally, Bors, decides not to engage in battle with Bors immediately because

[103] "ore se gart qui a garder sen a" (326).

his own army is weakened.[104] He instead decides to ambush Bors, and the passage concludes:

> Ensi deuise li rois amans sa uolente dont il se peust bien souffrir sil lui pleust mais **tels quide sa honte bien uengier qui lacroist** . (244; my bolding)
>
> Thus King Amant said his wishes, and he had better abstained from them if he had wanted to, but **he who wishes to revenge his shame renews it**. (my translation and bolding)[105]

When Bors rides out later, he discovers the ambush, and Amant is killed in a duel with him. In this passage, the proverb is used as a prolepsis for Amant's defeat. His decision to pursue his strife with Bors even though his army is weakened is criticized as unwise. Several parallels emerge between the two scenes in which this proverb is used. The Knights of the Round Table, too, have fought dishonestly and continue to fight even though they are at a disadvantage. This decision is commented on by other characters in the scene as mad and unwise, and the use of the proverb here further confirms this evaluation of their behaviour. In both scenes, the characters are offered a chance to de-escalate the conflict but decline to do so: when Bors defeats Amant in single combat, Amant refuses to accept Arthur as his lord to save his own life. Amant's death is "a great shame" and brings Bors much sorrow (268; 249). The Knights of the Round Table, too, refuse to de-escalate at first and then can no longer do so; their needless conflict with the Queen's Knights is the source of their shame in this scene. Furthermore, the proverb connects cause and consequence, and can be read as a prolepsis for the violence against the Knights of the Round Table that ensues, thus mirroring the foreshadowing function it has in the scene involving Amant. The use of a proverb which references vengefulness in a proleptic function like this makes the negative outcomes for the characters in question appear set in stone. Both for the Knights of the Round Table and for Amant, the needlessness of their "shame" is highlighted.

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[104] See also my discussion of this scene in section 5 below.

[105] My (rather literal) translation follows the reading offered by Anne Berthelot and Philippe Walter in their Modern French translation (*Les premiers faits* p. 1138, para. 334). Pickens interprets this passage as being about Amant's men disagreeing with his wishes (*The Story* 262), which is a syntactically rather free and, in my opinion, unfounded reading of the sentence in Old French. For the proverb itself, see "Honte" in Randle Cotgrave's *Dictionarie*.

As a result, their suffering is at once depicted as inevitable and as caused by the sufferers themselves.

Similar failures to de-escalate are found on Gawain's part. In two similar conversations, one with Nascien (K) and one with Hervi (N), Gawain refuses to take responsibility for the violence he inflicts on his opponents. He says to Nascien: "I do not know what people will do" and "I do not know what harm will come from it" (352).[106] He makes a similar statement to Hervi: "I do not know what they'll do" (355).[107] These refusals to de-escalate the violence and interrupt the tournament tie in with an addition at the beginning of the second tournament scene (C). Before the fighting begins, Arthur asks Gawain not to let the tournament get out of hand like the first one did, but Gawain refuses and states that it is Arthur's job to do this, claiming that he himself is too biased to fulfil Arthur's wish. On the one hand, this harks back to Arthur's failure to interrupt the tournament in the first scene; on the other, it foreshadows his failure to do so in the second (O).

The ties between C, K, and N highlight Gawain's repeated decision not to de-escalate; in this, he resembles the Knights of the Round Table. However, he is set apart from them by the fact that he is clearly and repeatedly understood by several characters to be the only one who can end the fighting. Arthur's failure to interrupt the tournament underlines that the end of the fighting depends entirely on Gawain's behaviour. This is in line with numerous battles in *LeM* in which Gawain is depicted as the character on whom the success of battle hinges. In contrast to these real battles, however, Gawain cannot end the fighting in the tournament by eliminating every last opponent; instead, he must be persuaded to de-escalate.[108] Thus, Gawain is depicted as the one character capable of preventing negative consequences, which undermines Arthur's authority over his retinue. Yet, while

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[106] "ie ne sais con fera," "Ie ne sai … quel damage il en auendra" (327-8).
[107] "Iou ne sai quil feront" (331).
[108] A central pattern in *LeM*'s many battles involving Gawain is that where he goes, he and his companions succeed, and where he is absent, his companions are beaten back by their opponents (329; 306). For an example of a battle scene in which this happens, see the Battle of Trebe (281-97; 262-76). Gawain's unwillingness to stop fighting is, to an extent, anticipated in earlier skirmishes where, after beating his opponents, he is stopped from launching a pursuit by Merlin, who instead advises him to retreat before the arrival of enemy reinforcements. See e.g. 197; 183.

Arthur wants to de-escalate but his attempt to do so misfires, Gawain could de-escalate but does not care to do so; he even begins slaughtering Arthur's squires (albeit due to a misunderstanding). The impression is that the tournament is out of control and that de-escalation is impossible.

### 4.3 The Intertextual and Transfictional Dimensions of the Tournament Scenes

The conflict between the factions of knights resonates with the numerous cases of infighting elsewhere in Arthurian literature that eventually contribute to Arthur's downfall. Within the *LG*, the conflict between Arthur's knights thus culminates in the *Mort Artu* but is referenced at other points as well. It should be noted that no explicit prolepsis of this tragic outcome is made in either tournament scene in *LeM*. The dissent within Arthur's ranks that emerges in these two tournaments, however, must appear all the more inevitable to those readers familiar with the causes of Arthur's downfall.

Interestingly, the conflict results simply from the chivalric code, the knights' pursuit of honour, their desire to prove themselves in front of their retainers, their desire to prove their superiority, and so on. There is no evil mastermind deliberately stirring up this conflict; it occurs simply because of the nature of the characters and the interactions between them. Depicting the emerging dissent in Arthur's ranks as such, and making the sufferers of the negative outcome its cause, means that the conflict between Arthur's knights acquires tragic dimensions.[109]

The same effect can be observed at the end of the second tournament scene, in which the reconciliation between the Knights of the Round Table and the Queen's Knights is described (Q). At first glance, this seems like an inversion of the ending of the first tournament scene, in which the Knights of the Round Table are overheard planning to avenge their defeat during supper. However, a certain uneasiness persists even after the factions are reconciled. Right after the second tournament, Ban advises Arthur to forbid any tournaments between his knights. Arthur agrees: Henceforth, his knights will fight only against noblemen from the borderlands of his realm (360; 336). This discussion implies that neither Ban nor

[109] See esp. Aristotle's concept of tragic flaw (*hamartia*) in ch. 13 of his *Poetics*.

Arthur trusts the two factions to fight fairly if they were to compete in another tournament. The conditionality of the peace between them is another difficult point:

> … sentasaierent … par tel conuent que onques puis ne tournoierent les vns encontre les autres . se cheualier seul a seul non qui esprouer se voloient & en emble quant il se deguisoient & il ne voloient estre conneu tant quil eussent este renoume de grant proece . Et quant li compaignon de la table roonde les metoient en lor compaignie . (334)

> … they swore that they would never again turn against one another, except when knights by themselves wished to be tested and were in disguise and did not want to be recognized for who they were before they had won renown for deeds of great knightly skill and the knights of the Round Table let them into their company. (358)

This can be read simply as a transfictional explanation for the many cases in Arthurian literature where Arthurian knights fight without recognizing each other, or as an intertextual explanation for that motif in the *LG* specifically. However, this promise is soon broken by the Knights of the Round Table in another episode of *LeM*: when three Queen's Knights ride into Thornbush Forest, they are ambushed by three Knights of the Round Table in disguise. They cannot justify their actions with a desire to join the order they are already part of. Their aggression remains motivated by a personal grudge and is described as "unwise" and "thoughtless" (406).[110] As in the first tournament scene, casualties can only be prevented by a timely intervention on Merlin's part.

The conflict between the two factions within Arthur's army is one of the first internal conflicts to arise in *LeM*, but far from the only one. Henceforth, further cracks appear in the unity of Arthur's court. For example, the second tournament episode is directly followed by a scene featuring Morgan le Fay which ends with an announcement of her future hatred of Guenevere (362-3; 338-9). Soon after, Gawain and his brothers fight among themselves while on a mission, resulting in particular in the alienation of Agravain, who will side with Mordred and reveal Lancelot's affair.[111] A central effect of both scenes within the larger framework of

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[110] "fol", "de fol pense" (378).

[111] See 376-8; 350-2, 383-6; 357-9. Guerrehet is on Agravain's side in these passages but not consistently so in the rest of the *LG*. The four brothers, and their half-brother Mordred, are divided along into various alliances in later episodes of the *LG*. Both Agravain and Guerrehet eventually die at the hand of Lancelot. See also Trachsler, "La naissance".

*LeM* is thus to exemplify the internal instability of Arthur's power. The change in tone that begins with Arthur's Wedding, during which the first tournament scene occurs,[112] is taken further in the second tournament scene, which takes place during Arthur's first official court, and makes it impossible to dismiss the division among Arthur's knights.

The impression of a lasting, serious conflict between Arthur's knights, the sense of escalation, and the resulting worries about Arthur's future could not easily all have been written into a single tournament scene. By instead distributing their origins across two scenes and making those scenes as similar as they are, the text turns a one-off event into a sequence and implies that a further iteration might be possible. The reader is invited to track the different behaviours of characters, such as Arthur's inability to work against internal conflict and Gawain's unwillingness to do so, and speculate about the future impact this may have. The direct contrast between the two scenes imparts a sense of importance to the problem of internal strife, both for *LeM* and beyond.

## 5. Opposing the Conventions of Arthurian Romance: Causality in *LeM*

It is hardly surprising that the interaction between present and future is often in focus. This theme has been discussed so far in connection with intertextuality, transfictionality, and intratextuality, as well as with repetition, and it has become clear that many events that occur in the present of *LeM* have consequences that unfold elsewhere in the *LG* or in Arthurian literature in general. This cements *LeM*'s role as a story of origins and beginnings – essentially, of causes. In the context of the *LG* specifically, *LeM* is often described as a prequel because the majority of it was composed after all the other texts that make up the LG but set chronologically before three of them. In this light, the many prolepses in *LeM* that anticipate events in other texts of the *LG* provide causes for them retroactively.

These causes could potentially have been quite diverse, ranging from coincidence to previously unspecified agents or supernatural interventions. However, all events

[112] See section 3 above.

in *LeM* are orchestrated, or at least allowed to happen, by Merlin. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter 2, which is concerned with characters, but I will here focus on what it means for the causal structure of *LeM*.[113]

The fact that Merlin plays an active and central role is unique to *LeM* within the corpus of Arthurian romances. While he is mentioned in other Arthurian romances as well, he does not play a major role in them.[114] Merlin's prophetic and magical abilities are alluded to in other Arthurian texts and functionalized in various ways in *LeM*. Most importantly here, Merlin's prophecies combine particularly well with *LeM*'s chronological position before other Arthurian romances. Beyond this transfictional connection, Merlin's prophecies often serve as intertextual references, especially to the *Lancelot*.[115] The extent of Merlin's power and knowledge is furthermore functionalized to create a continuity between *LeM*'s *histoire* and the book in the reader's hands.[116]

Merlin's behaviour and knowledge follow certain rules, and one of them is that everything that happens in *LeM* is either part of his plan or directly caused by him. Given the knowledge and power of its protagonist, the causality of *LeM* can thus be described as entirely predetermined. The same applies to many events occurring later during Arthur's reign: Merlin's actions and prophecies on occasion directly foreshadow events that do not take place in *LeM* itself.

In depicting its own *histoire* as predetermined, *LeM* stands in stark contrast to Arthurian romance, which is characterized by the prominence of chance rather than transparent cause-and-effect relations. Chance events are not perceived as caused by something; they simply happen. This makes chance an important tool for

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[113] See ch. 2, section 4.
[114] The only exceptions, to my knowledge, are the other continuations of the *Roman de Merlin*: the *Didot-Perceval*, which survives in only two manuscripts and in which Merlin remains an active character until after Arthur's downfall, and the *Livre Dartus*, surviving in BnF fr. 337, and the *Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin*, in both of which Merlin features prominently for part of the text. Neither the *Roman de Silence* nor the *Rheinischer Merlin* fragment, in which Merlin plays an active role, is set in the Arthurian universe. In general, then, the character of Merlin is intricately connected to the time span covered in the texts, Arthur's early reign.
[115] The roles of Galehaut and Lancelot are good examples for this. For a detailed discussion of Merlin's prophecies concerning both characters, see Fuertes-Regnault.
[116] See ch. 3, section 5.

narratives, allowing them to play with the unexpected and unknowable. Almost all stories

> will contain a mixture of chance, fate, the gods and so forth. … This "suddenly" is normalized, as it were, in chivalric romances, it becomes something generally applicable, in fact almost ordinary. … The entire world is subject to "suddenly", to the category of miraculous and unexpected chance. (Bakhtin 152)

The example of Thornbush Forest above has demonstrated the extent to which knightly adventure is dominated by the idea of chance.[117] The first group of knights, three Queen's Knights, set out to find "some adventure" (401),[118] whatever it may be, and improve their reputations. The second group of knights set out into the forest hoping to find some Queen's Knights and test themselves against them. The connection to chance in the case of the second group is less obvious, but there is no mention of them having seen the first enter the forest or of any method to their search – they just ride out and hope to find adventure. This mindset is typical of Arthur's knights.[119]

One crucial difference sets *LeM* apart from other Arthurian romances, however: while the questing knights themselves understand the events they experience as coincidences, the reader knows more than them. While both groups understand their encounter in Thornbush Forest as a chance adventure, the reader has previously followed the actions of both groups and been led to expect they would meet. It is also no surprise to the reader that the combat between the two groups of knights is interrupted by the appearance of a third group: the reader has been shown this group being sent there by Merlin, who knew of the encounter taking place (406; 378).

The Thornbush episode in *LeM*, then, differs from typical adventure stories about Arthurian knights in terms of the three kinds of focalization. Arthurian romances, when describing adventure, tend to feature internal focalization, meaning that the reader knows as much as the character in question and thus perceives the same things as coincidence and chance as the questing knight does. The Thornbush

[117] See section 1 above.
[118] "alcune auenture" (374).
[119] See Störmer-Caysa 162-79.

episode in *LeM*, however, is a case of zero focalization, meaning that the reader knows more than any of the characters involved. The third kind of focalization is external focalization, which applies when the reader knows less than the character in question.[120] A mixture of focalization types can be found in most of *LeM*. The reader generally knows more than all the characters in *LeM*, apart from Merlin, so zero focalization is present when he is not in focus.[121] Most characters in *LeM* have to rely on explanations provided by Merlin to understand the causes and consequences of what happens around them, about which they otherwise remain ignorant.[122]

Overall, then, *LeM* does not present its *histoire* as chance. This can be explained in part by its temporal position before other Arthurian romances:[123] it is not surprising that a text that concerns itself so much with the beginnings of Arthur and his knights should devote a lot of narrative space to explanations, origins, and causes. This means, however, that the temporal structure of the text often becomes quite complex: the text largely works toward the future beyond its own plot, but its causality looks backward.[124] In the episode of Arthur's Wedding, for example, the reader learns of Lot's, the False Guenevere's, and Bertelay's reasons for bearing grudges against Arthur, yet these motivations serve to explain not primarily things the characters do in the present when they are stated but something that they will do in the future. Thus, when Lot plans Guenevere's abduction, we are told that he does so in response to Arthur's successes; the effect paired with this cause (the

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[120] See Genette, esp. 188-9. Genette's distinction of focalization types serves to describe the relationship of a character's knowledge to that of a narrator figure. I use focalization instead to analyse the relationship of character knowledge and the reader's knowledge. The main reason for this is the complex combination of narrative voices in *LeM*. For another study that applies focalization to the reader's knowledge, see Hiergeist, esp. ch. 3.1.

[121] For a more detailed discussion, see ch. 2, section 5.2.

[122] In the episode of Thornbush Forest, for example, Merlin briefly explains why the fight between the knights happened – after they return to Logres (410; 382). Such erasures of chance in retrospect are typical in other romances, where the ultimate explanation for knightly adventure is God; see Schulz.

[123] There is a clear connection between causality and temporality (see Scheffel et al.). Temporal succession is a requirement for causality: in order for one event to cause another, they must happen one after the other. Causal structures modify the temporal sequence of events by adding connections between them that go beyond chronological order alone, for example in the form of cause-and-effect relations.

[124] See section 3 above.

abduction attempt and his consequent truce with Arthur) will take place only a few days later (339-43; 315-9). The explanation for Lot's grudge is given neither when it first takes root nor when it has an impact on anyone else, but in between and with no connection to its immediate narrative surroundings. On the one hand, this makes parts of *LeM*'s structure feel out of time, which might mirror the reading experiences of those who already know what will happen afterward. On the other hand, this emulates, to an extent, how Merlin experiences time, and allows for unique ways to interconnect episodes both within and beyond *LeM*. The temporal and causal structures of *LeM* acquire a degree of complexity because of its focalization and omniscient protagonist.

The example of Thornbush Forest has shown how zero focalization is instrumental in setting up a contrast between the perception of events as coincidence by characters in *LeM* and the reader's awareness of the circumstances that actually cause them. Merlin's role in this episode is a minor one and consists, as elsewhere, in a timely appearance to avert impending catastrophe. I will now turn to another pattern frequently attested in *LeM*, namely those instances in which the narrative focalizes on Merlin while he orchestrates the course of events. Two examples will serve to illustrate how, and to what effect, the focalization interacts with Merlin's omniscience in such cases.

**Example 1: Merlin brings down Hengist**

The very first episode in *LeM* in which Merlin is the orchestrator of a complex set of events provides a good starting point for this analysis of causality. Merlin twice changes the course of events with minimal interventions on his part, which in both cases consist in sharing information.

*Summary*

After having reclaimed the throne, Pendragon unsuccessfully besieges the Saxon Hengist. He sends messengers to seek out Merlin, who meets them in disguise. They are, he says, to tell Pendragon that the siege will not end until Hengist is dead, and that he is to come all the way to Northumberland to meet Merlin. The messengers return to Pendragon, who goes to Northumberland, leaving the siege to his brother Uther. After a while, Merlin meets Pendragon in disguise and informs

him that Uther has killed Hengist since he left.[125] Having confirmed this information, Pendragon swears obedience to Merlin when they meet again, upon which Merlin reveals his identity and tells Pendragon more details about Hengist's death at Uther's hand: Merlin was aware of a plot by Hengist to assassinate Uther in Pendragon's absence and travelled to the siege in disguise to warn him. Because of this, Uther was ready to fight back when Hengist snuck into his tent alone, and killed him. Pendragon is impressed and asks Merlin to become his counsellor; Merlin agrees and announces he will join Pendragon and Uther in eleven days.

In this episode, Merlin is entirely in control of events, and this control is intertwined with his omniscience: his knowledge of what will make other characters behave in certain ways means that only two minimal interventions on his part are needed to steer the plot. First, his message to Pendragon about the siege sets the episode in motion, and second, his warning to Uther provides it with a resolution. Both interventions are minimal but have far-reaching consequences, leading to complex cause-and-effect chains which are not obvious at first glance. For example, Merlin's message about the siege causes Pendragon's men to identify Merlin despite his disguise. Pendragon determines to comply with the instruction to travel to Northumberland only when he is told that it comes from Merlin. Merlin's renowned infallibility thus impacts on the choices Pendragon makes. Pendragon's absence from the siege in turn causes Hengist's attack on Uther, which in turn (thanks to Merlin's second intervention) causes Hengist's death and the end of the siege. Without doing much himself, Merlin 1) helps Pendragon with his siege by 2) creating an opportunity to attack for Hengist and 3) then foiling Hengist's plan by warning Uther.

In order to be able to orchestrate events with such minimal interventions, Merlin must be aware of the cause-and-effect relationships of which he makes use. For example, Merlin knows that Pendragon's absence from the siege will provoke Hengist to attack. While *LeM* does not make this explicit, Merlin's omniscience implicitly includes knowledge of cause-and-effect relations not only when the cause has happened (e.g. when Pendragon has already left) but even before that

[125] This simplified summary does not consider other aspects of Merlin's identity, for example his shapeshifting, that are also of interest in this episode.

(e.g. when he asks Pendragon to leave in the first place). As such, he experiences the *histoire* before it happens, and is able to disrupt or establish cause-and-effect relations as his plans dictate. This renders the temporal and causal structure of *LeM* even more complex and highlights the extent of Merlin's ability to control the course of events.

Merlin's control of *LeM*'s plot becomes particularly apparent in the many cases where the reader is told what would have happened had it not been for Merlin. In the Thornbush Forest episode, for example, *LeM* informs the reader that Arthur and his company at court "did not know anything about [the knights in the forest] until Merlin happened upon them" (405).[126] Merlin then arrives and informs them of the approaching fight between the groups and tells them what will happen if they do not send help: he asks them to "send someone after them … for [if] there is no one to break up the fight [men] will be killed, and it will be a great shame" (406).[127] Were it not for Merlin's intervention, the encounter between the two groups of knights would have ended in tragedy. In *LeM*, the reader is often made aware of what would happen if Merlin did not intervene, thus cementing Merlin's role as all-powerful orchestrator of the plot.

Compared to the other characters of *LeM*, Merlin himself speaks much more than he acts, and most of his interventions in the course of events consist of sharing knowledge and giving orders. His assistance in the episode discussed above gains him the position of advisor at Pendragon's court, and he maintains this position during Uther's and Arthur's reigns. His role as advisor secures him an easy and steady influence on the behaviour of *LeM*'s central characters, and their obedience to him means that his interventions can remain minimal and verbal, while the kings carry out his orders, often by fighting battles. As a result of this, a chronological and hierarchical relationship is established between Merlin's words and other characters' actions. This, too, feeds into the impression that everything that happens is somehow foreseen or caused by Merlin.

[126] "nen sorent onques … mot tant que merlins sen bati sor els" (377).
[127] My emendations. "enuoies après … car sil nont qui les departe il en i aura de mors & ce seroit moult grant damage" (378).

This chronology and hierarchy also lead to a shift in emphasis away from the action, which becomes secondary, both in the temporal sequence of events and, often, in length, and toward Merlin's verbal interventions. Merlin frequently prophesizes events before they happen, thus turning the plot as it unfolds into a mere confirmation of his knowledge.[128] In the episode discussed here, this becomes particularly clear in the resolution of the siege itself. Hengist's attack, failure, and death could have been central to the episode:[129] this is where Merlin is directly involved, and it constitutes the main event which resolves Pendragon's problem, the siege. Yet Hengist's death is never recounted directly when it happens in the chronology of the episode; instead, it is reported only after the fact by Merlin (42; 38) and then repeated by various characters (43-5; 38-41) in passing the information on. The repeated references to Hengist's death draw further attention to how Merlin had planned his demise from the beginning and how he instrumentalizes it to gain Pendragon's trust, as well as highlighting the importance of information and knowledge in *LeM* in general. They also make it impossible to read Hengist's attack on Uther as chance, as the first thing we learn after being informed of Hengist's death is that Merlin had warned Uther in advance. Instead of being at the centre of the episode as a surprise attack (and as a surprise to the reader), Hengist's attempt to assassinate Uther is presented to the reader only in retrospect and together with an authoritative explanation provided by Merlin.

The extent of Merlin's knowledge has a particularly strong effect because it contrasts with Pendragon's knowledge. In this episode, the narrative is consistently internally focalized on Pendragon, meaning that the reader knows as much as him. For example, the reader learns of Hengist's death not when Uther kills him but when Merlin informs Pendragon of it. When Pendragon meets Merlin in disguise, the reader, too, does not recognize him and understands that it was Merlin all along only when Merlin reveals this information to Pendragon.[130] The example discussed

[128] For a good example, see the episode of the Battle of Salisbury (54-8; 48-51).
[129] And, indeed, they are adapted to this purpose in some versions of the Middle English adaptation of *LeM*, *Of Arthour and of Merlin*; see ch. 4.
[130] The reader is, however, informed about Merlin's true identity when he meets Pendragon's messengers in disguise (42; 38).

here is the first case in *LeM* where Merlin orchestrates events to such an extent. By restricting the reader's knowledge to Pendragon's experience in this early episode, *LeM* powerfully conveys the extent to which Merlin will henceforth control the knowledge and actions of the king. As the reader follows Pendragon's confusion and aimlessness in Northumberland and subsequent amazement and respect for Merlin, they themselves experience Merlin's control over events and over knowledge and, thus, over the interpretation of events.

Henceforth in *LeM*, the reader's knowledge is situated between that of Merlin and all the other characters. On the one hand, the reader knows more than most characters, which leads to zero focalization when the narrative focalizes on those characters. The interlaced structure necessarily means that the reader knows more than any single character, who can only be in one place at one time. Moreover, while Merlin's actions often remain unknown to all the other characters, the reader follows Merlin when he leaves court and can draw causal connections that are not open to the other characters. On the other hand, readers know less than Merlin, as they do not usually learn his motivations until the consequences of his interventions unfold, and are sometimes unaware of his identity when he shapeshifts.[131] When the narrative focalizes on Merlin, this can go hand in hand with external focalization. With regard to *LeM*'s causality, this means that, even though the reader – in contrast to the characters – rarely perceives things as coincidental, they do not necessarily know Merlin's reasons for orchestrating events the way he does.

**Example 2: Merlin Brings Down Amant**

The second example to be discussed here, taken from the *Suite* section of *LeM*, features a different kind of intervention. Here Merlin uses his magic abilities to manipulate the outcome of several battles. This is in line with Merlin's changed role in the *Suite* overall: his magical repertoire is much expanded here and often used to lend Arthur and his allies an advantage in battles.[132] The interlaced structure of the

[131] However, even when Merlin's identity is not made explicit, several suggestions of who is involved can be found; see ch. 2, section 5.2.
[132] See e.g. 103; 93, 242; 225, and 281; 261. See also the summary of *LeM* in the general introduction.

*Suite* interweaves Merlin's orchestrations and its consequences with Arthur's pursuit of the Saxons and the movement of several armies over several days (255-68; 237-49). As this example will show, the structure and narrative interests of the text may be different from the *Roman* part, but Merlin's interventions work together with them to produce the same effect: Merlin controls the course of events.

*Summary*

When Rion's Saxons are beaten after a long and hard battle, they disperse in the forests near Carhaix, pursued in groups by Arthur and his allies. Merlin stops the Saxon Galahad and his men by creating a river and generating fog, forcing them to camp overnight. In the meantime, Amant – an enemy of Arthur who is seeking to reclaim Charroie Castle – has heard of the battle. Knowing that the pursuit renders Arthur unable to defend Charroie, he seizes the opportunity and sets out to attack the castle. On his way there, he stumbles upon Galahad and his men, and they fight. At this point, *LeM* turns to the pursuit of the other Saxons: Merlin has since returned to Arthur's side, and the Saxons eventually flee. Merlin stops Arthur and his men from further pursuing them, stating that they will "suffer enough grief at the hands of the people who they will encounter later".[133] The next day, Bors rides to Charroie Castle, where he rests for a week. *LeM* returns to Amant and Galahad, who fight each other all day. Galahad is joined by the Saxons who previously escaped, but they are weakened because they were not able to rest the previous night; both sides suffer heavy losses and retreat.[134] Amant camps on a heath overnight; the Saxons move on. When Bors later sets out to meet Arthur and his

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[133] My translation. "… car par tans lor feront duel & anui asses tel gent quil encontreront" (242). Pickens (*The Story* 260) reads "encontreront" (they will encounter) as "en contreront" (they will tell about), which results in a confusing mistranslation of the passage. Berthelot and Walter's translation and the Middle English *Prose Merlin* read the passage as I do (*Les premiers faits* p. 1135, para. 331; *Merlin* [Wheatley] 357).

[134] The two β manuscripts used for the Modern French translation and for Sommer's edition state that it is Amant who is defeated (1137-8; 243). The two α manuscripts of *LeM* that I have used for comparison tell instead of Galahad's defeat (BnF fr. 9123, 209v; BnF fr. 105, 244r). For Merlin's orchestrations and the causality of this scene, the fact that both sides wear each other down is more important than the question of who wins. For a more detailed discussion of textual variation, see ch. 2, section 3. For a discussion of similar examples, see Morato, "Textual Entropy", esp. 296.

own brother, Ban, he encounters Amant lying in ambush.[135] Given the weakened state of his men, Amant proposes a duel and loses. Refusing to surrender, Amant is killed by Bors.

In this example, Merlin's first intervention is far less subtle than in the resolution of the siege of Hengist discussed above. He drastically changes space when he

> fist venir vne aigue si grant & si bruiant au deuant de lor chemin par la ou il deuoient aler qui descendoit des costures des montaignes si roidement que onques ni ot si hardi que toute paour nen eust . & quant il vaudrent arriere retourner si virent uenir vne bruine si grant & si merueilleuse quil ne sorent quel part tourner … . (237)
>
> made a wide, roaring river well up before them in the way they had to go, and it fell so swiftly from the mountainsides that even the boldest among them took fright; and when they tried to turn back, they saw a fog coming in so thick and so fearsome that they did not know where to go … . (256)

This can be explained with the fact that Merlin is here manipulating the movement of the enemy, not his allies, to whom he could in theory give orders instead. His second intervention – stopping his allies from pursuing the rest of the fleeing Saxons – confirms this: when he can, Merlin will not resort to magic or direct action of any other kind himself, preferring instead to influence other characters by verbal means.

Just as in the first example, Merlin's intentions remain unclear until the consequences of his interventions unfold. In this case, Merlin is engaged in managing Arthur's resources, allowing him to prevail even though his enemies outnumber him. As such, Merlin lets thousands of Saxons escape rather than having Arthur's men wear themselves down pursuing them. These thousands of weakened Saxons run into Galahad's division, which has been stopped in its tracks by Merlin, and together they encounter Amant and his men, who in turn are decimated to the point where Amant prefers a duel with Bors over a fight between the remainder of his men and the forty rested fighters on Bors's side.[136]

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[135] This part of the episode includes a digression about Bors's brother Guinebal and the Forest of No Return. Since its relation to the storyline varies between versions, and because it does not impinge on the discussion of causality here, I have omitted it from the summary for the sake of simplicity.

[136] That Bors and his men are able to fight so soon after the same battle from which the Saxons escaped is not addressed. Overall, the timeline is somewhat confusing: Galahad and

Much of what happens in this episode is not directly controlled by Merlin. First, Amant's movements, for example, are a consequence of circumstance, that is, his invasion of a territory that is suddenly undefended because of the battle. While no direct intervention of Merlin is visible here, he is evidently aware of Amant's movements and intentions, however, as he would otherwise have no reason to stop Galahad's division specifically where he does. Second, there is no explanation for why the escaping Saxons stumble into the fight between Galahad and Amant. Merlin makes no attempts to control the direction of their escape but is clearly aware where they are going when he stops Arthur from pursuing them. It becomes clear that Merlin's awareness of the motivations and actions of all the characters allows him to turn circumstance or even coincidence to his own advantage. This is, most of the time, how Merlin orchestrates *LeM*'s plot: his interventions depend on his knowledge of what happens elsewhere, and of what other characters plan, know, and do.

In this second example, Merlin's omniscience is mirrored by the frequent changes in perspective that are facilitated by the interlaced structure of *LeM*'s *Suite* section. Just as Merlin is aware of the complex movements of all characters, so too the reader is made aware of these things developing simultaneously on a vast scale. Unlike the other characters, only the reader sees the connections between Merlin's interventions and their consequences, which happen elsewhere and sometimes days later. The characters involved remain oblivious to Merlin's interventions: neither Galahad nor Amant are aware of how they ended up encountering each other, and Arthur and his men never learn that letting the Saxons escape was connected to a larger plan on Merlin's part. It becomes clear that Merlin not only keeps his interventions minimal but generally shares only as much knowledge as necessary with other characters. The characters, then, perceive events as

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Amant fight, and the Saxons have not been able to rest since the battle, and Bors and Amant fight after Bors has been resting in Charroie for a week. However, Amant's men, who should have had several days to recover by the time they encounter Bors, are still too weak to fight. The complex back and forth of the interlaced structure of *LeM* obscures these and many other incongruities to a point where they are only noticeable upon rereading.

coincidental, whereas the reader is able to see the connection between Merlin's interventions and how they change the course of events.

Both examples demonstrate the extent to which the causal structures of *LeM* are built around its protagonist. Merlin's influence reaches from direct interventions – usually sharing knowledge, sometimes the use of magic – to using circumstances and coincidences for his purposes. Merlin's control over the plot is possible because of his knowledge of the past, present, and future. More specifically, he knows how characters will respond to certain impulses, and he knows various alternative future outcomes at the moment he intervenes. While the reader is aware of the extent of Merlin's control over the plot, the other characters are not. They are frequently depicted as unable to draw the connection between Merlin's interventions – if they even know of them – and their consequences. As long as Merlin remains present in *LeM*, the reader is consistently shown that nothing is left to chance. Thus, it seems that chance cannot exist where Merlin is involved, or at least, that it cannot function as chance in a text that lets the reader take part in his machinations.

The impossibility of chance resulting from Merlin's presence in *LeM* clashes strongly with its prominence in other Arthurian texts, especially chivalric romances. Whereas a romance telling of a knight's adventures is built on the premise that he subjects himself to chance by becoming a knight errant and seeking adventure, *LeM* has at its centre a character who knows everything and who controls events rather than being controlled by them. Merlin's control over events is thus a major difference from the romances about Arthur's knights.

## 6. Bridging the Gap: *LeM*'s Ending as Transition to Arthurian Romance

The contrast that has now emerged between *LeM* and Arthurian chivalric romance is particularly interesting if *LeM*'s intertextual and transfictional connections to these texts are considered. The effect of predetermination and its temporal position before other Arthurian texts cements *LeM*'s role as a collection of origin stories and beginnings. In the following, I will show in more detail how this potential is taken further in *LeM*. My interest lies in *LeM*'s ending, which can be

read at once as intertextual, specifically in continuity with the *Lancelot*, and as more loosely transfictional and connected to Arthurian chivalric romances. As I will argue, *LeM* resolves some of its contrasts with chivalric romance and features more typical elements of chivalric romance toward its ending. In connection with the *histoire*, *LeM* lends itself to being read as creating the conditions for chivalric romance in the first place. Together with the ongoing sense of predetermination, this means that *LeM* makes its narrative a requirement for those of chivalric romance, thus cementing the possibility of a transfictional reading of the text.

A common point of most Arthurian chivalric romances is that they are set during Arthur's reign, in the twelve-year period of peace before the Grail Quest is achieved and Arthur betrayed and killed.[137] They revolve around one or more Arthurian knights, while Arthur himself is a passive side-character, and said knights often undergo an adventure that resolves a conflict between Arthur's court and a perceived threat outside it.

Other than the obviously different temporal position of *LeM*, *LeM*'s interest in its knights is limited, and they are soldiers at war rather than questing for adventure.[138] There is thus quite a marked gap between the temporal position and protagonists of chivalric romance and those of *LeM*. This gap is present from the beginning of *LeM* but widens while the plot unfolds. The *Suite* section, in particular, is far removed from chivalric romance.

The *Suite* gains its historical effect by multiple means. What is most often noted about its "historical flavour" is its focus on the military exploits of its characters.[139] In doing so, its focus has more affinity with the epic tradition than with chivalric adventure stories.[140] Research has observed this in particular in comparison to the Post-Vulgate *Suite de Merlin*, another continuation to the *Roman* which is much more focused on the exploits of individual knights and thus aligned more with chivalric romance. The *Suite* aligns itself with the epic tradition by employing motifs such as certain weapons, certain kinds of trees, and character names that

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[137] See Koble, *Les suites* 34.
[138] See ch. 2, section 1.
[139] See Kennedy, "The Narrative Techniques".
[140] See Koble, *Les suites* 37-47; Vinaver, esp. 296.

are particularly typical of genres such as the *chansons de geste*.[141] More broadly, the *Suite* employs a number of forms and narrative techniques which are shared by the romance genre and epic narratives but distinct from chivalric romance.[142] The use of these motifs, forms, and techniques lends the *Suite* an overall effect of momentousness, truth, and importance. This effect is well suited to *LeM*'s self-presentation as a story of origins.

This historical effect of the *Suite* contrasts not only with other continuations of the *Roman* section and with the expectations attached to chivalric romance, but also with the *Roman* section itself. The *Roman* is centred on Merlin and tells episodes of his life that span several decades. The structure of these episodes is circular: something happens at court, then Merlin comes to the court, contributes to resolving a problem, and returns to Blaise's remote abode afterward. This pattern is applicable, with some variations, to all episodes of the *Roman*, irrespective of their source or centrality for the plot. It also neatly mirrors the movements of knights in chivalric romance:

> There are just two spaces, Arthur's court and its exterior, and the knight is the one who acts in both. The plot begins with the transgression of the border between them and ends when it is reversed. … Everything is defined in relation to Arthur's court, and all action flows back into it.[143]

Typically, the knight is at court and is made aware of an issue outside of it, departs to resolve that issue, and returns to court. Merlin's movements in the *Roman* follow the same structure but are exactly inverted.

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[141] Many examples are collected in the annotations to *Les premiers faits*: weapons (p. 1883, para. 540.1; p. 1890; para. 635.1), tree species (p. 1889, para. 619.2; p. 1896, para. 697.1), and names (p. 1829, para. 20.2; p. 1839, para. 117.1; p. 1841, para. 143.2; p. 1849, para. 215.1; p. 1885, para. 566.1; p. 1887, para. 588.1; p. 1890, para. 632.3; p. 1896, paras 695.1, 698.1, and 699.1; p. 1897, para. 706.1; p. 1901, para. 744.2; p. 1907, para. 783.2). See also p. 1857, para. 285.1; p. 1876, para. 460.1; p. 1896, para. 695.2; p. 1909, para. 803.1.
[142] See Fabry-Tehranchi, "La Suite 'Vulgate'" esp. paras 36-8. See also *Les premiers faits* p. 1857, para. 293.1.
[143] My translation. "Es gibt nur zwei Räume, den Artushof und das Außerhalb, und der Ritter ist der, der in beiden Räumen agiert. Die Handlung beginnt mit der Überschreitung der Grenzen und steht still, wenn die Überschreitung wieder rückgängig gemacht wurde. … Im Verhältnis zu ihm [dem Artushof] wird alles definiert, und jede Aktion fließt in ihn zurück" (Simon 22-3).

By contrast, the *Suite* is a monumental interlaced account of the first three to four years of Arthur's reign and the role of all the characters involved in it.[144] Some episodes recount the simultaneous actions of many characters in different countries and with no immediate relation to one another, whereas others are self-contained units with no impact on the plot and focused on a single character. Structurally, the *Suite*'s episodes do not follow a single pattern of movements and can be quite complex. For example, the eight to nine highly repetitive pages about the fortifications undertaken by the rebellious barons describe how each baron respectively travels to his territory and how several knights depart from various regions for Arthur's court (135-43; 124-33). The characters' movements do not directly succeed one another, and they stand in a complex network of causes and effects spanning multiple episodes that are not always juxtaposed in *LeM*. As such, the *Suite*'s episodes often derive their primary function from their connection to the larger whole of the overarching plot. The transition from the *Roman* to the *Suite* is thus also one of form, from an episodic to an interlaced narrative.

This contrast between the two sections cannot be explained in terms of their respective *histoires*. By and large, both the *Roman* and the *Suite* tell the story of one or several of Britain's kings as they were assisted in their wars and battles by a supernatural advisor. Yet in the *Roman* section, battles are summarized or skipped, while they are narrated at length in the *Suite*. A case in point is the conflict with the Saxons in the *Roman*. They invade the British Isles early in the text, during Vortigern's reign, engage Pendragon and Uther in battle on several occasions, and are a recurrent thorn in the side of both kings. However, these battles are never the main focus. Even the most prominent battle in the *Roman*, the Battle of Salisbury, is summarized in just a few sentences (57-8; 51). Meanwhile, in the *Suite*, the numerous battles occupy anywhere between a handful and dozens of pages.

The *Roman* and the *Suite* not only have wars against the Saxons in common. Just like the *Suite*, the *Roman* also features rebellious barons, here during Vortigern's reign. However, their rebellion is merely mentioned in brief to explain Vortigern's decision to allow the Saxons into the country – it provides a motivation rather than

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[144] See Micha, "La composition" 219.

being a major part of the plot in its own right (24; 22). The same things that are in the forefront of the *Suite* are present in the background of the *Roman*.[145]

A final point of difference is the amount of granular detail in the *Suite* compared to the sparse stock of information provided in the *Roman* section. The *Suite* relatively frequently introduces its characters in a way that means they must have lived in Britain during the decades already narrated in the *Roman*, yet they do not make an appearance until the *Suite*. For example, Uther had good relations with the kings Ban and Bors just as Arthur did, but this is not mentioned in the *Roman*; the *Suite* provides this information in retrospect (108; 98 and 256; 238). The Knights of the Round Table served under Uther, too, but they remain nameless and in the background until Arthur meets them in the *Suite* (153; 143). Similarly, many of the places and regions in Britain mentioned in the *Suite* make no appearance in the *Roman*, even though they must logically have existed during the decades in which it is set. We know, for example, that Britain contains twelve territories of now-allied barons and many other places between them and the borderlands, and we know that Britain has allies and enemies on the Continent. As a result of this, the Britain in the *Suite* appears much vaster than that in the *Roman*, even though it is logically the same realm.

While the two sections could, potentially, have told similar stories in similar ways, they thus prioritize rather different things. The *Roman* focuses on isolated moments in which Merlin intervenes in the course of events, ultimately culminating in Arthur's coronation. The sparse information and limited perspective of the *Roman* is replaced in the *Suite* with a vast and detailed account of the actions of many characters. While the *Roman*'s plot seems quite fragmentary, the *Suite* seems to recount everything that happened at all, which drastically changes its effect: especially in comparison to the decades before it, Arthur's early reign is rooted in history, it feels like history.

The *Suite*'s "historical flavour" thus stands in contrast to its immediate context – the *Roman* and the *LG* more broadly – and to chivalric romance. It is thus an effect

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[145] My discussion of *Of Arthour and Merlin* includes a case in point, as this Middle English adaptation expanded the battles in the *Roman* section as well as the role of Vortigern's barons. See ch. 4, section 4.

that unfolds intratextually, intertextually, and transfictionally alike. The contrast is levelled out at the end of *LeM*: in addition to the numerous intertextual references to the *Lancelot en prose* that can be found throughout *LeM*, *LeM* concludes with a short episode describing Lancelot's birth and thus stands in direct temporal continuity with the *Lancelot*. The gap between *LeM* and Arthurian chivalric romance is bridged somewhat differently and deserves further discussion. Here, too, there is temporal continuity, as *LeM* ends at the beginning of the twelve-year period of peace in which the chivalric romances are typically set. Moreover, many knights who are the protagonists of chivalric romances written before *LeM* appear in it. What is particularly interesting, however, is the shift in the *discours* of the *Suite* section to approximate and prefigure the *discours* of chivalric romance.

The abundant cast of characters, their territories, and the narrative strands about them accumulate steadily in the first half of the *Suite*. In the second half, this development is reversed.[146] As Arthur recruits allies and makes peace with the rebellious barons and expels the Saxons, the multiple narrative strands drop away or merge until there is just one, and the chaotic, complex movement of its many characters ends with a configuration that is similar to that in the *Roman* – one king and his loyal retinue fighting outside enemies – yet considerably more complex beneath the surface, with incipient inner conflicts, nascent treacheries, and Merlin's approaching imprisonment. By the time Arthur has achieved a truce with his barons and defeated the Saxons, the storyworld, which has had such granular detail throughout, begins to fold back in on itself as the *histoire* moves between fewer and fewer narrative strands, characters, and places. The rebellious barons are a case in point: after they have made peace with Arthur and defeated the Saxons together, their departure is described in a single sentence, without any distinction between the barons, who occupied multiple narrative strands in the course of the *Suite*: "The princes left him and went back to their countries" (429).[147] When Arthur later summons them to court, their arrival is immediate,[148]

[146] This is a gradual process, but I suggest it can be seen as beginning with the scene in which Gawain and his companions are dubbed knights, since this is the first case in which two narrative strands are merged into one (269-73; 251-4).
[147] "si sen partirent li prince de lui & sen ala chascuns en son pais" (401).
[148] "and they came to court just as the king had ordered" (435); "sen uindrent a cort ensi comme li rois lauoit commande" (407).

and when they leave, "each one went back into his own country" (447).[149] Henceforth, the barons are not mentioned unless they are in Arthur's proximity: their activities are effectively subsumed under those of Arthur.

By the time *LeM* ends, Arthur's realm is secure and all invaders expelled. After his final fight against Rion, Arthur becomes an increasingly passive character, merging with his court as the tale of his early reign is wrapped up. The spatial arena of *LeM* thus returns to a distinction of court and not-court, inside and outside. The beginning of the twelve-year period of peace in which most chivalric romances are set is accompanied by the imprisonment of Merlin. The final lengthy episode of *LeM* completes the transition to the *discours* of chivalric romance (482-96; 452-65). In it, Gawain and other knights ride out in search of Merlin. Notably, the structure of this episode reproduces that of chivalric adventures: the knights depart, quest, and return to court.[150]

*Summary*

Merlin has, unbeknown to all, been imprisoned by his lover, Niniane, and Arthur is worried about his long absence. Gawain, Sagremor, and Yvain, accompanied by twenty-four other knights, depart from court to seek Merlin, and soon split up into three groups. After a short digression about the knight Evadeam, who has been turned into a dwarf and is travelling home from Arthur's court, *LeM* reports on their quest: Sagremor and his party meet a hermit, then split up and unsuccessfully seek Merlin before they return and report to Arthur. Yvain and his group stumble upon Evadeam and interrupt a fight between him and some knights. They then scatter, seek unsuccessfully for Merlin, return, and report to Arthur. Unlike the other two groups, Gawain's party splits up immediately. Gawain broods over his quest and neglects to greet a lady whom he happens to encounter on his travels. This lady curses him: after Gawain rides on and chances upon Evadeam, he is transformed into a dwarf. In spite of this, Gawain continues his search but remains unsuccessful. When it is almost time for him to return to the court, he is torn between taking responsibility for his failure or using his changed appearance as an

[149] "sen ala chascuns en sa contree" (419).
[150] See section 5 above.

excuse not to return to Arthur and face his shame. He resolves to do the right thing and turns back. On his way, he happens to find Merlin's prison and learns that Merlin cannot be freed. Gawain continues his journey back to Arthur's court and encounters two knights and a lady in the same spot where he was cursed earlier. *LeM* informs the reader that it is the same lady and that she has asked the two knights to pretend to assault her to test Gawain. Gawain attacks the two knights, but the lady intervenes. Now that Gawain has proved himself, his curse is broken, under the condition that he behave more courteously toward women in the future. Gawain returns to Arthur's court having successfully completed his quest and reports Merlin's fate. Shortly after, Evadeam arrives, confirms that his own curse was broken thanks to Gawain, and is made a Knight of the Round Table, after which the episode soon ends.

A striking difference emerges between this episode and the rest of *LeM*. The quests of Sagremor, Yvain, and Gawain abound with unexplained circumstances and encounters. Unlike elsewhere in this text, they appear as coincidental not only to the characters involved but to the reader as well. Except for the fact that the reader knows Merlin's fate whereas the knights do not, the episode is focalized internally throughout, contrasting with the zero focalization on Arthur's knights elsewhere. For example, Yvain's encounter with Evadeam and his lady is a coincidence. Earlier in this episode, an adventure of Evadeam is interpolated (484-7; 453-7), after which Evadeam and his lady continue their journey home. Meanwhile, Yvain and his knights search the entire country for Merlin and encounter the two of them during their quest (488-9; 457-8). This encounter was possible, but highly unlikely, a fact obscured by its textual proximity to Evadeam's adventure. Gawain's first encounter with the lady is presented as another coincidence; it is neither foreshadowed, nor are her motives explained at any point. At no point does the reader learn who the lady is or why she is there in the first place, why she curses Gawain in this particular way, how she is able to do so, or why she sets him up for a test when they meet again. The expectation of a full explanation, for example by means of a prolepsis or retrospective explanation, has been set up throughout *LeM*, but it is not fulfilled here.

Gawain's quest illustrates the absence of causal explanations particularly well, as it is narrated at the most length and in the most detail. The milestones of his quest cannot be explained causally but are linked instead to his personal failure and recovery from it. Thus, Gawain's chance encounter with the lady, in which he fails to behave courteously, leads him to Little Brittany. There he finds Merlin because of another coincidence, yet this coincidence takes place immediately after he overcomes his personal crisis by taking responsibility and deciding to stay true to the oath he made. Unlike most other episodes in *LeM*, in which characters come across almost as figures being moved across a chessboard by Merlin, this final episode has Gawain undergo character development, and that development appears necessary for him to achieve his quest. This connection of quests and crisis is well attested in other chivalric romances, as well as elsewhere in the *LG*.[151] The episode thus marks an abrupt switch from the causal logic of *LeM* to the prominence of chance and the hero's journey as familiar from other Arthurian romances.

Many other typical elements of chivalric romance are also to be found in this episode. For example, Gawain twice receives guidance for his quest – first, when the lady tells him that "you'll find no one in the kingdom of Logres who can tell you anything about what you're seeking; rather, you'll hear some news about it in Little Brittany" (490),[152] and second, when Merlin confirms to him that he will be back in his human shape before he returns to Arthur's court (493; 462). As a neutral character who tests Gawain, the lady is comparable to fairy characters from various romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Eger and Grime*, or *Sir*

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[151] The crisis and its overcoming are particularly prominent and narrated in remarkable depth in Chrétien de Troyes's romances (see e.g. Kennedy, "Failure"; Warning, esp. 85-6; Wolfzettel, "Doppelweg"), which one can assume were significant examples of chivalric romance at the time of the *Suite*'s composition. Such observations about Chrétien's works are often applied to romance more broadly; however, a closer look at these statements often reveals that the examples are in fact all taken from Chrétien's romances because they are considered the "classical" examples of Arthurian romance (see e.g. Nykrog). While other research shows clearly enough that moments of crisis are pivotal to the romance genre (see Simon 39; Schulz et al. 244-5), I am cautious of extending this observation to the psychological depth with which the crises are depicted. It seems worth noting that medieval literature more broadly, and this includes romance, generally features relatively little psychological depth or character development (Contzen, "Why" 10-11).

[152] "ne trouueras qui noueles te die el royaume de logres . mais en la petite bertaigne en orras aucunes enseignes" (459).

*Launfal*.[153] Sagremor's encounter with a hermit and the parallel quests of the three knights are further common motifs of romance.[154] None of these elements play a major role elsewhere in *LeM*; they stand out in particular because they are so densely clustered in this episode. This episode thus makes the transition to the time of adventures – and, that means, to the *discours* of Arthurian romance – very clear and connects it to Merlin's disappearance.[155]

The quest of the knights in this episode corresponds to the typical framework of chivalric romance. The knights have a temporal frame (a year to achieve their quest), a spatial frame (departure from and return to Arthur's court), and an obligation to record the truth of what happened to posterity. This framework for chivalric quests is also established in an earlier episode in *LeM* (344-6; 320-2).[156] A reminder of these rules is explicitly included at the beginning of this final episode, as the knights make an oath to Arthur before they set out on their quest:

> vous iur par le sairement que ie vous fis le iour que vous me fesistes cheualier que iou le querrai . j . an & . j . iour . ou iou en saurai uraies nouueles … et sen partirent de la cite de logres … et se mistrent tout en queste pour me[r]lin . (453)[157]
>
> "And I swear to you on the oath I gave you the day you made me a knight that I will look for him a year and a day or until I have truthful news of

[153] See Wade, esp. ch. 3. Berthelot and Walter confirm this parallel to fairy-like characters (*Les premiers faits* pp. 1910-1, para. 824.1) and speculatively raise the possibility that the lady Gawain encounters might in fact be Nimiane (p. 1911, para. 824.2). See also Koble, *Les suites* 113-4.
[154] See Leclercq; Kelly.
[155] Another connection of Merlin's disappearance with the emergence of adventures is, perhaps, offered in the α version of *LeM*. During an earlier visit to Blaise, Merlin alludes to his disappearance, then has Blaise write a letter which Merlin then distributes across the country. While two changed words render the letter meaningless in the β manuscripts underlying the published editions of *LeM* (402-3; 375-6, see also *Les premiers faits* p. 1892, paras 651-2), the two α manuscripts I use for reference read thus: "Cest yci li commencemens des auentures dou pais par qoi li merueillous lions fu aterre et que filz de roy et de roynne destruira et couuendra quil soit chaastes . et li mieudres chevaliers qui lors sera ou monde" (my transcription of BnF fr. 105, 306r, see also BnF fr 9123, 266r): "This is the beginning of the adventures of the country [in which] the wondrous lion [Merlin] was interred and which a prince will destroy. [This prince] must be chaste and the best knight in the world" (my translation). This reading suggests that the beginning of the adventures thus consists in Merlin's imprisonment and its ending in Britain's destruction because of Lancelot. A more detailed study of this passage is unfortunately not possible within the scope of this dissertation. See also my discussion of this passage in the conclusions to this study.
[156] I discuss the scene in question in detail in ch. 3, section 6.
[157] Sommer's emendation.

him." … And they rode out of the city of Logres … , and they undertook their quest for Merlin. (483)[158]

By reminding the reader of the knights' oath to Arthur, the text aligns the quest that ensues with knightly adventures in other Arthurian romances, while at the same time rooting these conventions in LeM's own *histoire*. The novelty of the knights' quest that stands in continuity with Arthurian chivalric romance on the *discours* level thus displays continuity with *LeM* on the *histoire* level.

The quest for Merlin takes place at the very end of *LeM*. After Evadeam's arrival, only a few more paragraphs are left. They summarize Lancelot's birth and the fate of Ban and Bors (496-7; 465-6), and serve as a transition to the *Lancelot*.[159] The position of this episode at the end of *LeM* and directly following Merlin's disappearance is significant: it is Merlin's disappearance that triggers the very first quest of Arthur's knights, and many more will follow henceforth – those quests that are recounted in the chivalric romances. The twelve-year period of peace which begins toward the end of *LeM* is the time in which most Arthurian chivalric romances are set, and the tradition that is established by the Queen's Knights earlier in the text is repeated in those romances. The gap between the *discours* of *LeM* and chivalric romance is bridged, on the one hand, by chronological continuity between them and, on the other hand, by noteworthy changes in *LeM*'s *discours* that can be understood as a transition in form accompanying that in the *histoire*.

The contrasts between *LeM* and chivalric romance serve to stage the former as laying the foundations for the latter. The existence of chivalric romance becomes conditional on Arthur's achievements: if there were no peace and unity in Arthur's

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[158] The Old French word for "quest" (queste/quete) appears only a very few times in this text overall, making each occurrence significant. The word appears six times in a lengthy prolepsis about future quests of Arthur's knights (358-9; 334-5), and once when the Queen's Knights establish the tradition of questing and recording their adventures at Arthur's court (345; 321). Another seven occurrences of the word can be found in the episode discussed here. Beyond that, it appears only once more, during the Grisandole episode (305; 283). Interestingly, Grisandole's mission is another quest for Merlin. The word might here simply be read as "search", or it can be read as a deliberate verbal repetition that creates a parallel between the two quests for Merlin; in either case, no explicit questing takes place on the part of Arthur's knights until the very end of *LeM*.
[159] This transition is particularly obvious in those manuscripts that add the first words of the *Lancelot* ("En la marche de gaule") to the end of *LeM* (e.g. BnF fr. 747, 229r; Tours 951, 441v).

realm, and if Arthur had not recruited the best knights in the country, these knights would not go on adventures. The era of chivalric romance finds a clear beginning and cause in Merlin's disappearance, which removes the omniscient and omnipotent orchestrator from Arthur's court and allows for the emergence of problems that his knights must solve.

## 7. Conclusions

It was the aim of this chapter to illuminate *LeM*'s *discours* in intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional contexts. As my analysis has shown, *LeM*'s *discours* bears a number of similarities with the other texts of the *LG* as well as with other Arthurian works more broadly. As is common for works set in the Arthurian universe, its spatiality is determined largely by its plot, meaning that the location and properties of its spaces can change depending on what happens in them. *LeM*'s continuity with other Arthurian texts, both intertextually (with specific other texts) and transfictionally (with narrative facts shared by multiple Arthurian works), is also established in a complex web of prolepses. Such prolepses, as well as analepses, also serve to create intratextual ties between *LeM*'s own episodes. The abundance of prolepses in *LeM* goes hand in hand with the view to the future in the Arthurian universe; there are many points of connection to other Arthurian works that are set after *LeM*.

Another means by which *LeM* fosters all three kinds of connection is repetition, which plays with familiarity and readers' expectations in particular. In the two scenes discussed with regard to repetition, I have shown how these same modes of connection, together with the temporal setting of *LeM* before other Arthurian works, evoke a sense of predetermination. This is a central effect of *LeM*, as my discussion of the causal structures underlying the text has demonstrated. It goes hand in hand with *LeM*'s open-endedness and focus on the future: even if one considers this text in isolation, its *discours* stages it as a story of beginnings. The effect of predetermination interacts with the knowledge that readers may bring from other Arthurian works in that it presents the time period in which *LeM* is set as the era in which the stories they know were prepared. It thus at once connects to and makes use of pre-existing Arthurian works and grants *LeM* primacy over them.

In presenting its *histoire* as entirely predetermined, even orchestrated by its omniscient protagonist, *LeM* stands in stark contrast to other Arthurian chivalric romances. This contrast is significant because they stand in direct temporal continuity: *LeM* not only ends right before the *Lancelot* begins; its ending is also the beginning of the twelve-year period of peace in which the chivalric romances are set. The contrast is most noticeable where causality is concerned, as the predetermination of *LeM* clashes with the prominence of chance that shapes chivalric romance. Moreover, the contrast is reinforced by *LeM*'s use of epic-influenced motifs and its overall focus on war and battle, lending *LeM* a "historical" feel, whereas chivalric romances tend to draw more on aspects of the romance genre. The rift between chivalric romance and the monumental story of the creation of Arthur's world that is *LeM* is finally bridged toward the end of the text: after the second half of the *Suite* section has paved the way, *LeM* ends with a relatively conventional episode which is triggered directly by Merlin's imprisonment. Overall, *LeM* appears as a predecessor of, even a condition for, chivalric romances, which combines with predetermination, historicity, and monumentality in staging the significance of the work.

With regard to the continuities established by *LeM*, I argue strongly against a reading of the text exclusively through the lens of intertextuality. It is certainly an important property of this text, but it should not overshadow the fact that many references *LeM* makes can also be read in a transfictional light, and that these same references are not merely links to other texts but serve to modify the effect of the narrative present in which they are placed. *LeM* unfolds as a predetermined story of beginnings just as well when read independently of the other texts of the *LG*. By reading *LeM* and the other texts of the *LG* in isolation on the one hand and in a more general context on the other, intratextual and transfictional approaches will complement the findings of intertextual analyses and build on existing research in illuminating the network of connections crafted by these works.

I will continue to analyse *LeM* with an interest in its intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional dimensions in the chapters that follow. It is with intratextuality in mind that I aim to add to the many existing studies of Arthurian characters, which tend to focus either on the perceived classics of Arthurian literature, among which

*LeM* is not generally included, or on the diachronic development of characters from an intertextual or transfictional perspective. I will instead, in chapter 2, conduct a study of *LeM*'s characters within the text. In chapter 3, I will turn to a transfictional reading of *LeM*'s text story, that is, of how it narrates its own creation and transmission as a narrative work. Text stories are common and often elaborate in Arthurian literature, and a reading of *LeM* in this light lends itself to examining in more detail its self-presentation as an Arthurian work. In chapter 4, I consider a Middle English adaptation of *LeM*, namely *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which stands independently of the other texts (or adaptations thereof) in the *LG*. I will examine how this narrative was rewritten for its new context and how it evolved in the course of adaptation.

# 2. *LeM*'s Characters: Characterization and Character Design

## 1. Introduction

The character of Merlin has received considerable and instructive attention in research on *LeM* and its adaptations. Some studies are concerned with the sources of this figure and how it developed throughout the Middle Ages and beyond,[160] or with differences in characterization across roughly contemporary texts;[161] others analyse particular traits of Merlin.[162] In light of *LeM*'s overall *discours*, I have already drawn attention to Merlin's role as orchestrator of events and the connections between this omniscient character and the text's causal structure and continuity.[163] In contrast to the many points of interest brought forth by *LeM*'s Merlin, its other characters have received only cursory attention. Just like Merlin, they have been investigated primarily in comparison to other texts and not in their own right.[164] As such, there has not yet been any study of *LeM*'s characters from an intratextual angle, meaning how they are depicted and characterized solely within this text.

One reason why *LeM*'s characters are rarely studied in their own right is that the majority of them are introduced in the *Suite* section and familiar from other Arthurian texts.[165] The characters of the *Suite* section, then, offer themselves particularly well to intertextual or transfictional readings, especially alongside the other continuations to the *Roman* section. Such readings aim to trace the evolution of the Arthurian universe, its narratives, themes, and characters. In comparison to

[160] See e.g. Padel; Gollnick; Lawrence-Mathers; Combes, "Du *Brut*"; Rider; Martin; Petrovskaia; Thomas; Stewart; Markale; Berthelot, "Merlin, or, a Prophet".
[161] See e.g. Zumthor, "Merlin"; Macdonald.
[162] See e.g. Roche-Mahdi; Malcor; Goodrich.
[163] See ch. 1.
[164] See e.g. Fanny Bogdanow's publications on Arthurian characters in thirteenth-century French prose romances ("The Character", "Morgain's Role"), and the chapters in the section on character in Nathalie Koble's edited volume, *Jeunesse*. For a notable exception, and the only one of which I am aware, see Trachsler, "Quand Gauvainet".
[165] Alexandre Micha estimates the characters introduced in the *Suite* as around two hundred in number ("Les sources" 312).

other Arthurian texts, however, the *Suite*'s own literary qualities tend to be overlooked. As Richard Trachsler puts it:

> It would certainly be to our advantage … not to measure the *Suite* too much according to our modern aesthetic criteria. And … we might also do well not to regard the *Suite* simply as a vast reservoir of remnants of ancient and lost episodes: … we lose sight of the overall design and probably also of what made it interesting to a medieval audience that read the text for different reasons.[166]

Next to its perceived lack of quality, the *Suite*'s plot is replete with military encounters between groups of characters rather than the quests and adventures of individuals,[167] setting it some way apart from the interests that are typically brought to bear on the characters of Arthurian romance.

Given that no intratextual study of any of *LeM*'s characters has previously been carried out, this chapter aims to provide an overview that will cover the majority of them as well as its protagonist in particular. As a consequence, this chapter will largely pass over the intertextual and transfictional status of *LeM*'s characters. It will be discussed where necessary, but my focus will lie on how they are characterized on the *histoire* level and depicted on the *discours* level.

A few terms and concepts will be particularly useful for my discussion and are mostly taken from Fotis Jannidis's seminal monograph *Figur und Person*. First, a differentiation between characterization and character design (*Figurenentwurf*) will serve to better distinguish between narrative levels. Characterization is defined by Jannidis as "the sum of all relevant character-related facts in the storyworld",[168] meaning it is located on the *histoire* level. Character design is a matter of the *discours* level and describes patterns in the depiction of specific

[166] My translation. "À coup sûr gagnerions-nous … à ne pas trop mesurer la *Suite* à l'aune de nos critères esthétiques modernes. Et … nous pourrions aussi avoir intérêt à ne pas considérer la Suite seulement comme un immense réservoir de vestiges d'épisodes anciens et perdus: … nous perdons de vue le dessein d'ensemble et vraisemblablement aussi ce qui faisait son intérêt pour un public médiéval qui lisait le texte pour d'autres raisons" ("Quand Gauvainet" 205).
[167] See my summary of *LeM* in the general introduction and my discussion of the *Suite*'s genre in ch. 1, section 6.
[168] My translation; "die Summe aller relevanten figurenbezogenen Tatsachen in der erzählten Welt" (207).

characters that may differ depending on which character is being described.[169] Fotis Jannidis's distinction between character information and character-related facts is also useful.[170] Character information is ascribed to a character on the *discours* level. When this happens, the character information becomes a character-related fact on the *histoire* level, in the storyworld. There can be a direct correspondence between the character information and the character-related fact, but is also possible for the character-related fact to result from an inference drawn by the reader if indirect characterization is at play. The relation between character information and character-related facts can be one-to-one or more complex. For example, the ascription of character information to one character on the *discours* level can lead to several character-related facts about different characters on the *histoire* level. A distinction between character-related facts and character information is therefore vital when analysing a text such as *LeM*, whose *discours* relies heavily on repetition.

My discussion of *LeM*'s characters will distinguish between two characterizations and character designs, namely those of Merlin on the one hand and those of most other characters, who are largely male and fight in Arthur's war, on the other. I will begin with the latter group and focus in particular on the connection between character information and character-related facts. As I will show, character information ascribed to any of these characters almost never leads to character-related facts about one character alone. Instead, the repetition of character information forms patterns that correspond to the character collectives that are the driving force behind most of *LeM*'s plot. The sameness that is established between these characters on the *discours* level reflects their concern with belonging and collectivity on the *histoire* level. The same preoccupation is apparent in their interactions with one another, where concern for one's image is consistently the priority.

I will supplement the findings of my analysis of the *discours*, namely that *LeM*'s characters have little to set them apart from one another, with an investigation of

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[169] The term "character design" is not taken from Jannidis but drawn from Reuvekamp, M. Stock, Zudrell, "Gawain". It seems to me to be a useful counterpart to "characterization".
[170] Here and in the following, I paraphrase Jannidis, ch. 6, esp. 198-9.

manuscript variation and translation errors. My analysis of situations in which characters are interchanged in different manuscripts and translations will show how different characters can fulfil the same function in the *histoire*.

I will then conclude my discussion of these characters with the intriguing case of Leodagan and Cleodalis's character relationship. It is a highly individual one that develops throughout the story and displays some surprising and wide-ranging variation between manuscripts. A discussion of it will serve to show the extent to which intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional aspects of *LeM* can interact and influence characterization.

In the final part of the chapter, I will turn to Merlin, whose characterization and character design stand in contrast to that of most of the other characters. I will first discuss those aspects of his characterization on the *histoire* level that are of particular importance specifically in *LeM* and discuss how they set him apart from other characters. I will then do the same for his character design on the *discours* level and show that the differences between him and other characters mirror those on the *histoire* level. I will then turn to two instances in which Merlin's character design takes on particular significance. First, I examine some instances of shapeshifting in *LeM* and show that these scenes, while at first glance centred on Merlin, characterize those who encounter him rather than him himself. I will conclude the chapter with an analysis of Merlin's relationship with Nimiane and demonstrate that Merlin's character design is applied to her during their encounters.[171]

## 2. We Long to Belong: Patterns of Character Information

I have already shown in my first chapter the extent to which *LeM* makes use of repetition. Characters are no exception, with the majority of *LeM*'s characters having little but their names to set them apart from one another. The case of character exposition is particularly fertile ground for this discussion of repetition because it is here that a modern reader might expect the most individuality – in a

[171] Merlin's imprisonment at her hand has received quite some attention in existing research, but it has been studied primarily in comparison to other versions of the same narrative. See Griffin, "The Space"; Berthelot; Lendo.

character's background or their first appearance in a given text. By contrast, *LeM* is primarily concerned with attributing characters to groups rather than establishing traits that set them apart from others, reflecting its overall focus on sameness rather than individuality. Given the huge cast of characters within the text, this often means that a character's membership of a group makes up most of what the reader learns about them. As a result, their actions, words, and behaviour tend to have the effect of representing a group: rather than deepening the understanding of that particular character, they carry meaning for the group or groups to which the character in question belongs. Setting Yvain's first appearance in *LeM* in the context of that of other characters who essentially share the same character information as him will illustrate this.

*Repetition of Character Information: Collectivity and Knighthood*

Yvain is one of many recruits who join Arthur in the course of *LeM*. In his first appearance, Yvain resolves to become Arthur's knight and sets out to Arthur's court with his brother, who is also called Yvain. At this point, a number of other characters, namely Galescin, Gawain and his brothers, and Sagremor, are already on the same path, and Dodinel, Kay of Estral, and Kehedin, as well as many other youths, will follow in their footsteps in later parts of the story.[172] Just like some of these characters, that of Yvain may have been familiar to the reader as the protagonist of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, in which he is already a member of Arthur's court. In *LeM*, the story of his recruitment is recounted together with the recruitment of many other knights who will form Arthur's retinue. Rather than emphasizing any of their future roles as the heroes of their own adventures, *LeM* consistently blends each of these characters in with the others and establishes a sense of homogeneity and sameness.

Yvain's first scene immediately and primarily establishes connections to other characters. For example, other than the fact that he is a "good and worthy lad"

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[172] See 137-8; 127-8 (Galescalain), 140-1; 129-31 (Gawain and his brothers), 141-2; 131-2 (Sagremor), 186-7; 173-4 (Dodinel, Kay of Estral, and Kehedin). Yvain is introduced after Sagremor and before Dodinel (177-80; 165-8). Later in *LeM*, two new knights, Eliezer and Evadeam, are introduced using similar backgrounds, long after the other young recruits have joined Arthur (371; 346 and 451; 422).

(177),[173] his heritage is the first thing we learn of him: he is the son of a rebellious baron, Urien, and a sister of Arthur,[174] and has a bastard half-brother who is also called Yvain. Yvain the Bastard is "big and handsome" (178) and loved by his father,[175] but even in comparison to him, Yvain – "Yvain the Great" – is superior: he is the rightful heir, and he is older (178; 165). From this first introduction onward, the two Yvains have the same motivations:

> mais onques puis quil oirent parler del roy artu ne vaurent il que lor peres les fesist cheualiers . ains disoient souent en leur estroit conseil car moult sentramoient que iamais ne seroient cheualier deuant ce que li rois artus les fesist . (165)
>
> But never, after they had heard tell of King Arthur, did either Yvain want his father to make him a knight; rather they often said to each other when they were alone together – for they greatly loved each other – that they would never be knights before King Arthur made them so. (178)

Everything we learn from Yvain's exposition concerns his relationship to others: his family, which forms his starting point, and his desire to join Arthur, which is his goal.

The connection to other characters is developed further by the scene's place in *LeM*: Yvain is not the first knight to ride out in order to join Arthur – the scene in which Yvain is introduced and in which he departs is a repetition of the introductions and departures of several other characters. Thus, just like the other young knights, Yvain has a conversation with a close relative and gains their support before leaving. In addition to the familiar outline of his introduction scene, Yvain's kinship with Arthur and a rebellious baron parallels that of several other recruits. By repeating various elements of other knights' departures to join Arthur's side, the text thus aligns Yvain with other important and familiar knights of Arthur (see table 2.1). The repetitions extend further: each of these knights is accompanied by other young recruits who remain largely nameless. Yvain thus joins other named knights who form part of a larger group, but stand out among

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[173] "moult … boins enfes & preus" (165).
[174] In other Arthurian texts, such as the *Lay of Tyolet*, the *Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin* (edited as *La suite du Roman de Merlin*), and the *Tristan en prose* (translated as *The Romance of Tristan*), this is Morgan. The *Roman* section matches this, but the *Suite* replaces Morgan's role as Neutres's wife and Yvain's mother with Blasine. See also ch. 4, section 6.
[175] "biaus & grans" (165).

the others, at the centre of attention. Yvain's importance is thus signalled, on the one hand, by the fact that he is aligned with other familiar named characters, and on the other, by the fact that he is supplied with a background of unnamed knights who are his followers.

| | Father is rebellious baron | Mother is Arthur's sister | Gains relative's support before leaving | Motivated by Arthur's renown | Motivated by departure of other young knights | Coordinates with other characters while leaving | Leads a group of knights |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Galescalain | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| Gawain and his brothers | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sagremor | ~ | ~ | ✓ | ✓ | X | X | ✓ |
| Yvain and his brother | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ |
| Dodinel | ~ | X | X | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Kay of Estral and Kehedin | ~ | X | X | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ |
| Eliezer | X | X | ✓ | ~ | ~ | X | X |
| Evadeam | X | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X |

Table 2.1. Repeated elements in the depiction of Arthur's young recruits. Note that some of the information tabulated here is provided not on first appearance but at later points. ✓: the corresponding character is attributed with this character information; ~: the character information is not the same but a recognizable variation; *X*: the character information is not attributed to this character.

It is an important prerequisite for *LeM*'s *histoire* that the majority of the young recruits share the same background and goal. Because so many of them are sons of

rebellious barons and nephews of Arthur, the recruitment of these knights prefigures the truce that will be arranged between the barons and Arthur and that is crucial for *LeM*'s overall trajectory: first the sons join Arthur, and then the barons follow.[176] The recruitment of the young knights enables Arthur to secure his position of power within Britain, and the truce with their fathers, the rebellious barons, enables him to defeat his enemies on the Continent.

The overview of repeated elements in table 2.1 reveals, on the one hand, that the homogeneity of this character group stands in the foreground; indeed, the young recruits usually act as one and rarely split up once they have joined the others. On the other hand, however, with each new character introduction, fewer elements are repeated, and the passages in question grow shorter and shorter. Galescin, Gawain and his brothers, and Sagremor are introduced almost back-to-back, and Yvain's later introduction is closely followed by that of Dodinel and Kay of Estral. Eliezer and Evadeam appear only at later points in the *Suite*, when the other young knights have already been dubbed by Arthur.

The repetition of fewer elements as *LeM* progresses when new knights are introduced may be explained by a diminished need for recognizable elements to organize them into one group. This is evidenced in a particularly telling passage which clusters many of the elements listed in table 2.1 together in order to introduce a handful of new recruits all at once:

> Car du chastel estoit issus yuonet as blances mains & yuones de lionel & yuones li esclarois & gosonains destrangoire . si estoient remes illuec pour le roy artu atendre . car il ne voloient mie estre cheualier adoube de nului fors de la main le roy artu si estoient tout haut homme & poisant comme fils de rois & de contes & de dus . si estoient bien prochain parent au roy loth dorcanie & au roy brangoie . & sen estoient tout venu de lor terres & de lor pais al plus coiement que il porent . (199)
>
> … for out of the stronghold had ridden Yvonet of the White Hands, Yvonet of Lionel, Yvonet the Shining, and Gaswain of Estrangort, and they had stayed there to await King Arthur, for they were not willing to be dubbed knights by any but the hand of King Arthur. They were all men of high birth and very powerful, for they were the sons of kings, earls, and dukes, and they were close kinsmen of King Lot of Orkney and King Brandegorre,

[176] This connection is epitomized in the recruitment of the first rebellious baron, Lot. He ambushes Arthur and is defeated by Gawain, his own son, who then convinces him to join Arthur. The two then ride out together with Gawain's brother to convince the other barons to do the same (339-43; 360-2).

> and they had all left their homelands as stealthily as they knew how.
> (214)

These recruits' motivations are the same as those of the characters before them. Only a few sentences are needed to align these new recruits with the familiar knights whose origins are recounted in the *Suite*. In addition, their names repeat those of the "main" Yvain and Gawain, thus reinforcing the sameness of Arthur's recruits without giving it too much space.

In addition to the fact that less and less length is dedicated to the introduction of new knights, the adaptation and addition of repeated elements is worthy of note. Thus, Yvain's introduction adds a motivation for his departure that is not present in the introduction of the knights who set out before him. Yvain is driven to join Arthur not only because of Arthur's exploits but also because of Gawain and the others. When he addresses his mother, he begins with the information that his cousins have already done the same thing he intends to do. Yvain is worried that it would be "very cowardly indeed if I stayed behind where I couldn't do anything worthwhile and help him keep his lands as my cousins are doing" (180),[177] indicating that Yvain is not establishing or exceeding expectations here but scrambling to meet a bar which Gawain has set. Thus, Yvain is guided by the same motivations as the first group of recruits, but he is also secondary to them, as his initiative comes later and he needs more reasons to set out. There is no mention of Dodinel, later, being motivated by Arthur's renown at all, and Eliezer does not even desire to be dubbed a knight by Arthur himself – just by his best knight. This gradual shift in motivation parallels the evolution of the young recruits from a group of teenagers keen to prove themselves into the Queen's Knights who themselves bear renown.

Other differences between the introductions of the young recruits allow for a reading of the Queen's Knights as organized around a centre. The order in which the knights depart evokes this centre because it begins with those who will be most important later in *LeM*. Moreover, the motivations behind several of the knights' departures revolve around Gawain. For example, by having Yvain be

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[177] "moult seroie recreans se ie chi demoroie en lieu ou ie ne puis nule proece faire . & se iou ne li aidoie sa terre a maintenir autre si comme mi cousin font" (167).

motivated by Gawain's departure, the text depicts Gawain as superior to Yvain. Dodinel and Kay, in turn, are motivated both by Gawain's and by Yvain's setting out, thus confirming that Gawain and Yvain are superior to them. Eliezer will later be dubbed knight by Gawain, and throughout the *Suite*, Gawain is the uncontested leader of the recruits who later become the Queen's Knights. Another factor supporting the idea of a centre and a periphery within this character group lies in the family relations of the knights. Gawain, Galescin, and Yvain are Arthur's nephews and sons of rebellious barons. These relations change for the knights who set out after them: Dodinel is a rebellious baron's nephew, and Kay of Estral works at the court of one; Eliezer is the son of Pelles, who is a neutral party, and Evadeam is a knight at Pelles's court; and none of these knights are related to Arthur on their mother's side.

My discussion so far has shown that the introduction of Yvain as a character cannot be viewed independently of those of the other young recruits in *LeM*. By means of repetition, Yvain is firmly placed in the character group that will later become the Queen's Knights, and the extent of the repetition and the amount of space dedicated to his character already hint at his importance in future events both within *LeM* and beyond it. These same repetitions have another effect: whenever they are reiterated for a new character, they reiterate the properties shared by every individual who is part of the group, thus increasing the effect of sameness and the importance of belonging to a collective.

In *LeM*, the prominence of any individual fades once they cease to have agency that sets them apart from those around them. As I have already shown, the narrative strands of Arthur's enemies disappear when they form a truce with Arthur; the same happens for the young recruits when they become part of Arthur's army.[178] The same is the case for every individual who becomes one of the young recruits. For example, Yvain is introduced when he separates from his family and acts independently of it, and his narrative strand merges with that of Gawain when the two of them meet and Yvain joins his side (211; 197). Henceforth, Yvain and his followers act as part of Gawain's group. Yvain appears only occasionally now,

[178] See ch. 1, section 6.

especially in battle, to return briefly to the spotlight as one of the new recruits, while his brother virtually disappears from *LeM*, except for name lists (e.g. 282; 262 and 286; 266). The tendency of narrative strands to merge with others as soon as their characters stop having an agency of their own is thus confirmed in both Yvains as well.

The example of Yvain's introduction has shown how character information is repeated in *LeM* to underline belonging to a group and homogeneity. The same character information is attributed to different characters, making their characterizations overlap considerably, even before they begin acting solely as a collective. The character information attributed to the young recruits largely serves not to set them apart from one another but to show how alike they are as characters. Another finding of this first analysis is that *LeM*'s characters rarely act as individuals, being characterized instead through their belonging to a collective, and that their actions are largely representative of the motivations and goals of that collective.

*The Structural Functions of* Fremdbilder

It has by now become clear that belonging to a collective is central to the depiction of most characters in *LeM*. Similarly to the young recruits who will become the Queen's Knights, the rebellious barons, the Knights of the Round Table, and even the Saxons, who all occupy separate narrative strands at some point in *LeM*, are characterized as homogeneous groups, with the same character information being repeatedly attributed to their different members. Interactions and character relationships are another way in which the importance of belonging is brought to the fore in *LeM*. Throughout *LeM*, almost any insight into the thoughts and motivations of the characters is focused on *Fremdbild* (their image of others or the image that others have of them) rather than *Selbstbild* (self-image, which would emerge from self-reflection). Most cases of internal focalization in *LeM* thus consist in at least one character thinking about at least one other character.[179] This gains further complexity through the characters' persistent interest in what other characters think of them, including attempts to reconstruct the *Fremdbild* other

[179] See Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 188-9.

characters have of them. Given that such character insights involve multiple characters, a single piece of character information is bound to lead to multiple character-related facts on the *histoire* level, which allows for the reader to be guided through intricate passages of the text in a nuanced manner.

The example of Yvain's introduction above has shown to how deeply characters can be motivated by the actions of others in *LeM*: the motivation *LeM* gives for Yvain forsaking his heritage is Arthur's renown, and Yvain articulates the fact that he feels pressurized by the fact that Gawain has done the same thing already. What kind of *Selbstbild* Yvain has is never made explicit, yet his concern with the image others have of him is evident when he expresses worries about being thought of as a coward. This concern with what others think ties in with some key concepts of chivalry. Reputation, shame, honour, honesty, and loyalty are all, at their core, concerned with the knight's image and his relationship and interaction with others. By attributing Yvain and the other knights with a desire for fame and a sense of competitiveness, the text characterizes them as chivalric in nature, as being good at what they aim to do.

Besides depictions of chivalric thought, internal focalization also serves to string actions together. The many battles in *LeM* are good examples of this; entire paragraphs are sometimes structured around the reactions of characters. Passages focalized on a single knight in combat thus often link sentences together in the following manner: "When Gawainet saw that … . Then he came … . When Gawainet saw that … . When the Saxon saw that … . Gawainet took his horse" (149).[180] More complex uses of character information also occur in battle scenes, for example when characters mistakenly believe an ally to be dead (e.g. 149; 138, 366-7; 243, 369; 342) or when they are ashamed of their performance after another character has responded to it (e.g. 245; 227-8, 291-2; 271-2, 424; 396). In such cases, the reader's knowledge and that of the focalized character stand in contrast, since the reader knows that the fallen comrade never actually died or that the other character's reactions are not genuine and instead aimed to elicit precisely the response that they do. Even in battle scenes, the internal focalization on specific

[180] "Quant gauainet voit quil … lors vint … . Et quant gauainet le voit … & sil voit quil … & gauainet prent le ceual" (139).

knights thus serves not only to establish a causal link between the actions of multiple characters but to highlight the frenzy that surrounds those characters. Overall, however, the use of internal focalization, and especially the depiction of emotions in battle scenes, serves its primary purpose on the *histoire* level, where it establishes a causal link between otherwise unconnected actions.[181]

The use of internal focalization, and of *Fremdbilder* in particular, is also employed to tie larger elements of the narrative together. A dinner scene in *LeM* will serve as my main example, as it uses internal focalization with much greater density than elsewhere in the text. The scene in question revolves around Arthur and King Leodagan of Carmelide. Previously, Leodagan has accepted the help of Arthur and his companions, who have anonymously appeared at his court to offer their assistance. Leodagan is curious about who they are from the start and constantly worries that he is not treating them according to their true standing. When he accepts their help, he asks them to reveal their identities when they can because "you could be such that I might be ashamed for not having served you as fittingly as you deserve. For perhaps you are higher men than I am" (152).[182]

The dinner scene itself takes place after their first battle together and shows a shift in Leodagan's attitude. Arthur has saved Leodagan twice in this battle and proven himself an extraordinary fighter, and while Leodagan was previously puzzled by the entire company serving him, he is now especially curious about Arthur. The dinner scene features a lengthy passage in which Leodagan analyses seating arrangements and the interactions between Arthur and his companions:

> Et li rois leodegans sen prinst garde qui se sist coste a coste dels a la table si pensa bien en son corage a lonor qui li portoient & al seruice quil li faisoient quil estoit sires deus . si se merueille moult durement qui il pooit estre . (157)
>
> And King Leodagan took notice of who was sitting beside whom at that table, and in his heart he thought, from the honor they bore Arthur and the service they did him, that he was lord over them all, and he wondered mightily who he could be; he would have given anything to know who he was. (169)

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[181] See also Friede 218.

[182] "vous porries teus estre que ie porroie auoir honte de che que ie ne vous auroie mie si bien serui comme a vous afferroit . Car vous estes par auenture plus haut homme que ie ne soie" (142).

After coming to the conclusion that Arthur must be the leader of those who have come to his aid, Leodagan considers his actions in battle, deciding that only a very noble man could be this worthy, despite his young age:

> Et pleust ore a vous fait il biau sire diex quil eust ma fille espousee . Car certes ie ne quideroie mie que en nul si iouene enfant fust si haute cheualerie en bataille comme il est en lui . & ce ne puet mie auenir quil li fesist sil ne fust moult haus hom outreement . (157)
>
> "And may it please to you now, Lord God," he said, "that he should wed my daughter! In truth, I would not have believed that such a young lad could have the worthy knighthood there is in him, and he could not have it at all unless he were a very highborn man indeed!" (169)

His obsessing continues, as he elevates Arthur in his mind from a very noble man to an emissary of God:

> ou ie croi quil soit chose espiritex que nostre sires ma enuoiet por cestui roialme tenser & garantir . non mie por lamor de moi mais pour la crestiente & sainte eglize essauchier & garantir dont issirent il hors de ceste uille sans le gre al portier . (157)
>
> And I might just as well believe that he is a spiritual being whom Our Lord has sent to me to fight for this kingdom and keep it safe, not for love of me, but to raise up Christendom and Holy Church and keep them, and that is how they were able to leave this city against the gatekeeper's will. (169)

Leodagan's train of thought has several important effects. First, after readers have followed Arthur's exploits from the beginning, it is an important reminder of how extraordinary he is. For the reader, his prowess and nobility may at this point be entirely expected; getting to see Arthur through the eyes of another character who does not know who he is therefore brings Arthur's capabilities to the fore again. Second, Leodagan is only able to perceive Arthur's extraordinariness at all because of interactions. In the earlier arrival scene, when there have not yet been any interactions between Arthur and his companions in front of Leodagan, Leodagan's curiosity is directed at the entire group rather than Arthur alone. In the course of the dinner scene, however, the reader partakes in Leodagan's observation that his companions consider Arthur their superior. Arthur's martial deeds have further established him as a better fighter than his enemies and his allies, so his "worthy knighthood" emerges here, too, through comparison. Less straightforwardly, Leodagan's idea that Arthur might have been sent by God results from the fact that Arthur and his companions rode into battle before he had allowed the gates to be

opened. With the knowledge Leodagan has, this unexplained fact can only have been caused by God. However, the reader knows that this “miracle” was performed by Merlin (154; 143). Leodagan’s thoughts about Arthur’s extraordinariness, therefore, confirm the extent to which Arthur is elevated to this position by other characters.

Lost in thought, Leodagan “pondered so hard that he half forgot himself and stopped eating, and Hervi of Rivel took notice of this and was greatly distressed by it” (169).[183] By rendering Leodagan’s thoughts at such length, in the middle of an ongoing social event, *LeM* signals the passing of time. Medieval readers may well have expected Leodagan’s pondering to become noticeable the longer it went on. The motif of pondering is used in other Arthurian romances in particular in moments of loneliness, for example, when a knight gets lost in thought while questing and loses his way or endangers himself because of it.[184] In those cases, too, the passing of time is implied, as the knight journeys on without paying attention to his surroundings. Medieval thought, then, does not take place independently of and simultaneously to actions, but takes up time of its own and is visible to other characters.

In this scene in *LeM*, the passage of time becomes problematic in a different way, bringing *Fremdbilder* once more to the fore. Hervi’s reaction illustrates this:

> & sen ala a li tous corechies al chief de la table si sacosta de les li & li dist que onques mais ne li uit si grant uilenie faire ne si esbahi . Car vous deusies ioie faire a ces preudommes & vous penses & soignies el point ou vous leur deusies faire toute ioie . si mesmerueil moult de uoustre grant sens quil est deuenus . … ore le laissies a tant ester & y penses quant tans sera & liex car li liex ni est ore mie … . (158)

> He went angrily up to the head of the table, moved in beside King Leodagan, and told him that he had never seen him do anything so discourteous, and he had never been so upset, “for you should be bringing gladness to those worthy men, but instead you are worried and lost in thought, *and you are dreaming when you should show them your joy,* and I wonder what has happened to your mind. … for now, let it be, and think

[183] “y pense tant que tout sentroblie & en lasse le mangier . de che se prinst garde herui de riuel si len pesa moult” (157).
[184] See Wolfzettel, “Artusrittertum”. *LeM* features one such case in Gawain’s quest for Merlin; see 489-91; 458-61; and my discussion of this scene in ch. 1, section 6.

> about it when and where you ought to, for this is not the right time or place". (169)[185]

By falling silent while hosting Arthur and his companions, Leodagan has not treated them well, and Hervi perceives him as outright rude. Hervi's reaction illustrates that Leodagan has done exactly what he was worried about from the start, which is to fail to serve his guests appropriately. Following Hervi's criticism, Leodagan adjusts his priorities and, ashamed of his behaviour, resumes his role as host. The image other characters have of Leodagan thus matters more to him than his own image of Arthur. Nevertheless, no other characters are shown to respond to Leodagan's behaviour, and it triggers no further action, rendering his breach of etiquette a side effect rather than the main purpose of this lengthy depiction of his thoughts.

The focalization on Leodagan here ties in with other elements of the episode. Most noticeably, it shows similarities to Arthur's behaviour in the scene. Arthur has fallen in love with Guenevere after the battle, and she serves him during dinner. Arthur cannot help but stare at her, and a lengthy description of her appearance follows in which Guenevere's body is described in femininizing and sexualizing ways which mirror Arthur's male gaze (169-70; 157-8).[186] The *discours* here, in its interruption of the ongoing dinner scene for the benefit of a long description, mirrors Arthur's fascination and his inability to turn away from Guenevere. Like Leodagan's pondering, Arthur's staring is depicted as inappropriate toward the end of this descriptive passage:

> si la regardoit moult uolentiers . Car adont … li uenoient les mameles dures & roides comme poumetes . & ele auoit la char plus blance que noif negie si ne fu trop crasse ne trop megre si le couoita li rois artus tant quil en fu tous pensis & en laissa son mangier . si tourne dautre part sa ciere car il ne veut que … autre gent nen sen aperchoiuent de riens . (158)

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[185] The italicized text is my addition, following *Les premiers faits* (p. 935, para. 126). Pickens's translation is inexplicably missing this passage.

[186] Descriptions of characters' appearances at length are quite rare in *LeM*, otherwise mostly involving descriptions of Merlin's shapeshifted body (see my discussion of this in section 5.3 below). The great variety of ways in which medieval literature speaks of women and their bodies cannot be discussed in the scope of this dissertation project; this includes the uncomfortable description of Guenevere in this passage. For discussions of women in medieval literature, see Fenster, Wheeler and Tolhurst, Classen, and the many publications by Carolyne Larrington related to this topic.

> He was very eager to look at her, … because her breasts were firm and hard like little apples, and her skin was whiter than new-fallen snow, and she was neither too plump nor too thin. And King Arthur so yearned for her that he lost himself in thought and stopped eating, and he turned his face away because he did not want … anyone else to notice anything. (170)

Unlike Leodagan, however, Arthur is quick-witted enough to avoid anyone noticing his staring at Guenevere.[187] Even though he cannot stop his inappropriate behaviour, he can ensure his impoliteness is not noticed by others. This also demonstrates that he is, again, worried about other characters' image of him and gives it priority over his own image of Guenevere, just as Leodagan did when thinking about Arthur.

This episode's *discours*, then, depicts Arthur's and Leodagan's thoughts in similar ways during the dinner scene, suggesting that there is a connection between what occupies them. This connection is confirmed elsewhere in *LeM*, when both of their obsessions are brought up together again: later in *LeM*, Arthur is betrothed to Guenevere, right after which Merlin reveals Arthur's identity to Leodagan (231-4; 215-7). The betrothal is prepared in this dinner scene, first by showing how preoccupied Leodagan and Arthur are – and will be – until something changes, thus suggesting the importance of the solution to come. Second, elsewhere in this scene, Guenevere's marital status is brought to the fore in a conversation between Leodagan and Ban, which allows Leodagan to verbalize his wish for Arthur to marry her:

> se iou … trouuasse . j . preudome cheualier qui peust … ma guerre maintenir iou li donroie ma fille & toute ma terre … certes ele seroi enre chi & tierch iour mariee a . j . iouene bacheler & a . j . bel & a . j . preu & si quit por uoir quil soit plus haus home que iou ne sui . (158-9)

> … if I could find a worthy knight … who would keep up my war for me, I would give him my daughter and all my land … in truth not three days would go be before she would be wed to a young knight, handsome and worthy, and I truly believe that he is of higher birth than I. (171)

Leodagan's wish is phrased indirectly but immediately understood by Merlin, who is also present; he smiles but changes the topic. The rest of the scene describes

[187] Guenevere interprets this behaviour as shyness. When she addresses him, Arthur can barely get a word out before resorting to drinking to make his silence less noticeable (170; 158).

both Leodagan's continued efforts to learn more about Arthur's identity by watching the group's behaviour and Arthur's continued infatuation with Guenevere. Thus, the dinner scene uses insights into Leodagan's and Arthur's minds to establish two problems, to connect them with each other, and thus to prefigure their later resolution by a single solution. The thoughts of Leodagan and Arthur here align with Merlin's prophecies and instructions elsewhere in the text and thus provide guidance for readers' expectations.

## 3. A Symptom of Sameness: The Interchangeability of *LeM*'s Characters

So far, I have shown that most of *LeM*'s characters are characterized through belonging, that is, as part of character groups. This is evident in character expositions, which usually allow characters to be assigned immediately to a collective, together with most of their thoughts and actions, which follow patterns that either confirm their status as part of a group or, more broadly, highlight their constant concern with what other characters think of them. Most characters' place in society, or their desired place in society, is the crucial link between their own actions and thoughts and those of others in relation to them.

The repetition of character information, whether it is applied over and over to the same character or whether it is applied to several characters in turn, is, as Fotis Jannidis observes, one of the main factors contributing to the perceived relevance of character information (204-5). The relevance of character information, according to Jannidis, allows characters to perform their functions in a given text, for example in the plot or as part of thematic and aesthetic patterns. In light of these observations, it is highly significant that the repeated information that contributes to the emergence of stable character-related facts and patterns of behaviour in *LeM* is so concerned with the characters' belonging to groups and hardly at all with what sets them apart from one another.[188] The belonging of characters to groups and their adherence to the chivalric code, their courtly

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[188] See also Jannidis 208.

behaviour, and the diplomatic interests that are conveyed by the character information all form patterns that match major themes on the *histoire* level of *LeM*.

It should be noted that there are, on occasion, individualizing depictions of characters. Examples of this include Gawain's strength being dependent on the time of day, Yvain the Bastard's adulterous conception, and Dodinel's wildness, all of which are described during the first appearances of the characters in question. However, unlike the fact that each of them belong to Arthur's young recruits, and unlike their chivalric development, these traits are not mentioned again in *LeM*, and nor do they have an impact on the *histoire* at any point.[189] It is possible to understand these individualizing traits as intertextual or transfictional in nature, as serving as points of connection with the reader's familiarity with other Arthurian texts. Perhaps it is also possible to read the mention of such traits as similar in nature to *LeM*'s digressions and empty prolepses: they can be read as opening the boundaries of the narrative to include material that is not needed for the story that is told, thus creating an effect of open-endedness.

The relevant information – in Jannidis's sense – about *LeM*'s characters is thus what makes them the same, whereas the information that sets them apart from one another is not relevant. This translates to character-related facts on the *histoire* level: it is important that the characters that form a group are part of this group and have things in common, and it is not important they are also individuals in their own right. Relating this, now, to Jannidis's definition of characterization as "the sum of all relevant character-related facts in the storyworld" (207),[190] the obvious, yet surprising consequence is that all characters within a given collective share the same characterization.

This begs further questions about what it means for *LeM*'s *histoire*. In the following, I will discuss an important implication of the way *LeM*'s characters are characterized, namely that they are interchangeable: any character that belongs to

[189] Although one might argue that the battles involving Gawain are an implicit reminder of his changing strength, the changing time of day is a common motif in *LeM*'s battle scenes, and at no point is this explicitly connected to Gawain's near-mythical prowess.
[190] My translation; "die Summe aller relevanten figurenbezogenen Tatsachen in der erzählten Welt" (207).

a certain character group can represent that group, and any character that follows a certain behavioural pattern can be replaced with another character who does the same. I will test the validity of this implication by examining different variations and versions of *LeM*, both medieval and modern, and looking for cases in which characters are indeed interchanged or replaced. Many details of who does what in this text diverge between its many versions, yet, as I will show, this does not affect the plot in any major way. A discussion of some erroneous replacements of characters in translations of *LeM* will show that even in those cases where character replacements do not make sense, the disruption of the text's meaning is limited. Finally, I will discuss the only extended example in *LeM* of a character replacement that does affect the plot, and explore the factors that distinguish the scene in question from others where the plot is not affected. These discussions will allow me to establish the extent and limitations of the interchangeability of the characters in *LeM* and interpret this in light of the text's aesthetic.

*Variation*

| | Version edited by Sommer (BL Add. 10292) | Variant version |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | li rois **bohort** feri si marganant parmi le hialme quil le fent tout iusques as dens . & li rois **artus** feri si sinelant quil li abat . j . quartier de son hiaume . (*The Story* 162; *Lestoire de Merlin* 151) | And the kynge **Arthur** hitte Margalyuaunt thourgh the helme euen down to the teth; and the kynge **Boors** smote so Selenuaunt that he slitte a quarter of his helme … (*Prose Merlin*: *Merlin* [Wheatley] 217) |
| 2 | quant artus lentendi si rougist tout de honte … & li rois **bans** en commence a sousrire dessous son hiaume & le monstre au roy **bohort** son frere . (245; 228) | And whanne kyng Arthewr vndirstood al this, / Fulsore aschamed he wax, j-wys, / … / And wha*n*ne kyng **boors** beheld al this, / Ful smothely vndir his helm he Lowh, j-wys, / and there Made a signe to Kyng **Ban** / of the cuntenau*n*ces of kyng Arthewr than. (Lovelich's *Merlin*: Lovelich ll. 23235-46) |
| 3 | mal deshait ait fait agrauains qui ensi sen ira puis que nous sommes chi . deuant ce que nous aurons sesnes abatus & ocis . voire a foy fait mesire **Gauaine** . (368; 343) | mal dehais ait fait agrauain qui sen yra puis que ci sommes ta*n*t que il ait sesne occis voire ainfoi fait **Guerrehes**. (BnF fr. 9123, 253v) |
| 4 | Illuec fu grans la bataille & li caples cruels si i furent abatu agrauains & **guerrehet** de leur cheuaus & mesire Gauaine & **gaheriet** ne sen prinstrent warde … . (395; 368) | Et la fu la bataille dure *et* granz li chaples morteux. Ilec fu abatus **Gaheriet** de son cheual et agrauainz. … mesires Gauuains ne ***gue*rehes** ne sen prenoient garde (BnF fr. 9123, 263v) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | de ce prinst garde **galescin** si lor demande por coi il rient & il se tardent de dire . & il les couiure autres fois . (199; 186) | de ce se prist garde **Galleschi*ns* et Gauuenes** si leur demandent pour quoi il rient et il se gardent du dire et il les couiurent autre fois durem*en*t (BnF fr. 9123, 182r)<br><br>**Gaweyn & Galachym** that vndirstood, / and of her*e* lawghinge M*er*veyllede in her*e* Mood. / hem he axede why they lowen so, / and of her*e* answere they taryeden tho. / anon **Gaweyn** axed hem ageyn, / why they so lowghen to telle*n* hym pleyn. (Lovelich's *Merlin*: Lovelich ll. 18575-80) |
| 6 | A Tant monta li rois artus & en mena auoec li le roy ban de benoyc & le roy bohort son frere & saigremor de constantinoble & keu le senescal & yuain le grant le fil au roy vrien & **guerrehet & ghaheriet** & merlin (414; 385) | A noon the kynge lepe on his horse and ledde with hym the kynge Ban of benoyk, and the kynge Bohors of Gannes, and kay, and Segramor, and Ewein, and **Galashin, and Galescoude**, and Merlin. (*Prose Merlin*: *Merlin* [Wheatley] 568) |
| 7 | & lors dist **merlin** a mon signor **Gauaine** que moult lauoit bien commenchiet li nouiaus cheualiers . voire fait me sire **Gauaine** encore le fera il miex. (419; 391) | Et lors dist me sires **Gauuains** a **merlin**. moult a bien commencie n*ostr*e cheualier nouuel voire fet **merlin** . mais encore le fera il miex que li commencieme*ns* ne moustre. (BnF fr. 9123, 272v) |
| 8 | mes sires **yuaine** uesti . j . haubergon double maille & teile estoit sa coustume tous iours . (325; 302) | et uesti mesires **Gauuain** .i. porpoint dessouz sa robe a double maaille. car telle estoit sa coustume. et la maintint toute sa vie (BnF fr. 9123, 237r) |

Table 2.2. Selected differences between versions of *LeM*. The β manuscript edited by Sommer and used in the left-hand column should be understood not as a centre from which the versions quoted in the right-hand column deviate, but simply as an easily accessible point of reference. No equivalents to the variations in the Middle English translations exist in the α version manuscripts I use for reference, which are believed to be closest to the versions underlying those translations (BnF fr. 9123 and BnF fr. 105). Bolding and transcriptions from BnF fr. 9123 are my own.

Many variations can be found between the numerous manuscripts of *LeM*, most prominently so if one compares manuscripts from the α and β families. Most often, such variations concern pieces of dialogue, descriptions of reactions, or simple, self-contained actions. The examples in table 2.2 above gather cases in which one character is replaced with another, listing some variations both between manuscripts of *LeM* and between *LeM* and its closer translations. They show that smaller units of plot can be performed by any of a selection of characters.

The first example of this is the character cluster of the three kings Arthur, Ban, and Bors. The brother kings Ban and Bors appear and act together with Arthur through most of the *Suite* section of the text. At several points in *LeM* when any of them

could have done a certain thing, a different character performs the action, depending on the version involved. During Arthur's first fight for Leodagan, the battle description of the Middle English *Prose Merlin* swaps Arthur and Bors (see table 2.2; example 1); here, Arthur kills Margenant and Bors kills Sinelant, not vice versa. Arthur and Bors are interchangeable here because they are the leaders of the knights whose actions are described subsequently. It is an established pattern of *LeM*'s battle episodes that the descriptions begin with the (perceived) leaders, before moving on to the other fighters. Margenant and Sinelant are Saxon leaders, and in adherence to another pattern in *LeM*'s battle episodes, they are killed by the leaders they face. Exactly who kills whom does not typically matter, and this is no exception. Even if one attaches importance to which character is named first, both characters make equal sense. Naming Bors first makes sense insofar as the previous section discusses his brother, Ban; but naming Arthur first works just as well, since Arthur is more important than Bors in the big scheme of things. Another example of the same pattern of replaceability is the two brothers' reaction to Merlin successfully inciting Arthur to fight harder in another battle. The brothers are swapped in Lovelich's *Merlin* here (2): it does not matter which brother is mentioned first, but it does matter that their reaction is given before that of the Knights of the Round Table, which is described in the next sentence.

Further examples can be found in which characters are replaced by others belonging to the same group. In particular, these replacements also occur for Gawain and his brothers (e.g. 3, 4), or between Gawain and his siblings and other new recruits (e.g. 5, 6). What emerges from these examples is that the representation of interaction between Gawain and his brothers is more important than exactly who does what. Each part of these interactions could be performed by any of them, or even any of the other young recruits present. That such character switches affect Gawain and his brothers in particular can be explained, first, by their frequent appearances in *LeM*: as one of the first groups of recruits to set out to Arthur's court, and with Gawain as the young recruits' leader, they are particularly prominently mentioned in battle when the actions of the young recruits are described. A second factor may be the similarity of their names: most of them begin with the letter *G*, and Guerrehet and Gaheriet are very similar in

some spelling variations. The similarity of names may also explain why examples 5 and 6 involve exchanges of Gawain and his brothers with other young recruits whose names start with the letter *G*.[191]

Example 7 shows that the switching of characters does not have to be restricted to characters belonging to the same collective. Here, Gawain and Merlin switch roles in praising a new knight, Eliezer. What is most important here is that two authorities – Gawain, who has dubbed Eliezer knight and who leads the young recruits, and Merlin, whose words are infallibly true – agree on his prowess, thus elevating Eliezer in the eyes of the reader.

Example 8, taken from the episode of Arthur's Wedding,[192] is an interesting case in which character information which sets a character apart from others is attributed to different characters. In BL Add. 10292, the one described as always wearing a hauberk for protection in case he is betrayed is Yvain, whereas in BnF fr. 9123, the same character information is attributed to Gawain. As is the case for the other examples, this switch does not make any difference: here, as elsewhere, the individualizing character information does not become relevant within *LeM* again. The fact that Yvain or Gawain always wears a hauberk, even during tournaments, is never mentioned before or after this particular moment, nor does it affect the tournament at hand. No other character, it seems, knows of Yvain's habit or responds to it, and it does not give Yvain an advantage in the tournament either. The mistrust or worry that this description hints at does not, therefore, seem particularly bound to Yvain and has no impact on the *histoire*. Instead, it contributes to the overarching effect of the Wedding scene, which frequently hints at future troubles on Arthur's part and betrayal within his ranks. As such, the idea of mistrust in this passage could as well be attached to any of the characters involved, since it is the representation of mistrust alone that supports the episode's foreshadowing function.

*Errors in Translation*

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[191] Gawain's brothers are Agravain, Guerrehet, and Gaheriet. Galescin is another young recruit, and Galesconde is Bors's squire. Galesconde, while not strictly a member of the young recruits led by Gawain, is closely connected to him; see also 351; 327 and 356; 332.
[192] For a more detailed discussion of this episode, see ch. 1, section 3.

All of the examples in table 2.2 have in common the fact that they replace or swap characters in isolated actions without it affecting the meaning, logic, or coherence of the plot. The three kings perform good deeds in battle in example 1, no matter which one does what exactly, and two characters with authority praise the deeds of the new knight Eliezer in example 7, no matter which of them says what exactly. In the examples discussed so far, the variations are logically possible without disrupting the *histoire* or the effects achieved by the *discours*. The same is not the case for the examples of what I call errors in table 2.3. It should be noted, however, that there may well be no difference in the intentionality – or lack thereof – involved in the examples discussed so far and the ones to follow; the difference between variation and errors is likely to come down to a subjective judgement on how well the exchange of characters works in context. The examples of errors are all taken from translations of *LeM*, medieval and modern alike, but that is not to imply that such cases are not also to be found in variations between the Old French manuscripts.[193] The errors that present themselves when comparing the medieval translations with their closest surviving source may equally well have occurred earlier, in the unknown source copies underlying the translations.[194]

| | Closest available source version | Translation |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | quant Gauaine uit les enfans si lor demande qui il sont . & yuones as blances mains li dist quil sont au roy artu si estiemes issu de cest castel pour rescoure ces enfans la . si lor monstre cels que li sesne auoient assailli . & qui estes vous biaus amis qui le demandes & qui tel mestier nous aues eu . Et **il** se noume & dist quil estoit iluec uenu entre lui & sa compaignie por lui aidier . & quant **il** lentent si en est tant lies que nus plus sen aeure dieu & merchie del secors qui venu lor est . (*Lestoire de Merlin* 200) | And when Gawainet saw the youths, he asked them who they were. Yvonet of the White Hands told him that they were King Arthur's men, "and we had come out of the stronghold to rescue those young men," and he showed them the ones the Saxons had fallen upon.<br>"And who are you, dear friend, who ask about them and were so helpful to us in our need?"<br>**Yvonet** gave him his name and said that he had come there with his companions to help him out. And when **Gawain** heard that, he was happier than anyone could be, and praised God and thanked Him for the help that had come to them.<br>(Pickens's translation: *The Story* 215) |

[193] For example, BnF fr. 9123 renders the passage in table 2.2, example 2 effectively nonsensical by naming Bors twice: "et li roys boors commence a rire dessous son hyaume et le moustre au roy boort son frere" (202r, my transcription)
[194] See Guillaume, esp. 6-8.

| 2 | Et quant ele reuint si ieta . j . souspir & li reuint la color en la fache . **& gauaine demanda de liaue** por lui lauer la fache quele auoit toute soillie de sanc & on en li aporte a grant plente . **si li laua le vis** & la fache si souaifment comme **il** pot .[195] (*Lestoire de Merlin* 205) | and whan she com a-gein from swownynge she yaf a sore sigh, and with that the coloure com a-gein in to her visage, **and than she asked Gawein watir to waisshe hir face**, that was all soilede with blode, and oon it brought in an hatte of stiele, and than **she** wossh hir visage as softely as **she** myght (*Prose Merlin*: *Merlin* [Wheatley] 183) |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | … et ot non Guiomars *et* nauoit q*ue* .xv. ans daage *et* par lui ot puis li **royaumes de logres** moult de tribous (BnF fr. 9123, 196v) | And Gwiomarȝ hihte þ*a*t worthy Man, / whiche but xxv wynt*e*r of age hadde þan. / (and this was the same worthy knyht / That **kyng Awmes of logres**, that london*e* hyht, / be him was browht in trowble … . (Lovelich's *Merlin*: Lovelich ll. 21875-9) |
| 4 | **Gauuenes** enuoia une espie pour sauoir et p*or* veoir comment li saisne le faisoient … et lors sen retourna et conta **a Gauuenet** que tuit li saisne que li saisne sen estoirent ale … . (BnF fr. 9123, 189r) | and on the morowe erly **Gawein** sente a spie for to se what the saisnes diden … and than he returned and tolde to **Agrauain** how thei were alle gon … . (*Prose Merlin*: *Merlin* [Wheatley] 290) |

Table 2.3. Selection of translation errors, compared to the source or the closest available manuscript. Bolding and transcriptions of BnF fr. 9123 are my own.

In example 1, Rupert T. Pickens replaces the Old French pronoun "il" with the names of the characters in the scene to clarify their roles in the dialogue at hand, but accidentally swaps them: in his translation, it is Yvain who says he came to rescue Gawain, and Gawain is thankful, even though in the directly preceding scene, Gawain and his companions have rescued Yvain and his men. While this switch renders the brief exchange nonsensical, it is not overly noticeable in the reading process, as the dialogue simply serves to introduce the characters briefly to each other. The main point is that they now know each other, and that they join sides.[196]

In example 2, the Middle English *Prose Merlin* interprets the ambiguous Old French syntax differently from the other translations considered. Here, Gawain's badly wounded mother asks for water and then washes her face herself, while in the

[195] Although the *Prose Merlin* is overall closer to BnF fr. 9123 and BnF fr. 105, in this and a number of other instances, it is closer to BL Add. 10292, edited by Sommer, and the error more easily explained with that manuscript, which I have therefore used here instead. For the corresponding passages, see BnF fr. 9123, 192r and BnF fr. 105, 226v.

[196] It should also be noted that Pickens's replacement of pronouns with names is common practice and usually correct, providing much help in navigating the text.

other translations, it is Gawain who asks his brothers for water and then washes his mother's face for her. In the preceding and following sentences, Gawain and his brothers are shown to take the initiative and actively care for their passive and weakened mother. As a result, the reading in the other translations fits the context better; moreover, the rest of the Old French sentence directly states that Gawain ("il") washes her face, while the *Prose Merlin* says "she" does it herself. If the translator of the *Prose Merlin* noticed the mismatch in pronouns they had introduced, they did not correct it; and indeed, the change makes no major difference. The washing and caring primarily emphasize the extent of the mother's injuries, which were previously described in some detail, and the overall impact of the violence and effect on the reader remain unchanged, even if ever so slightly mitigated.

In examples 3, Lovelich reads the noun "royaumes" (kingdom) as "roy aumes" (king Aumes) and thus translates the second part of the word as a proper name, creating a new character. Given the high number of characters in the *Suite* section of *LeM*, and the high number among them that only make one appearance in the entire text, this new character barely stands out unless one compares the translation with the closest surviving source. The surprise of encountering an unfamiliar character may even be further mitigated by the fact that it appears in an intertextual passage, many of which mention characters that make no appearance elsewhere in *LeM*.

In example 4, the translator of the *Prose Merlin* misreads "a Gauuenet" (or, more likely, a spelling variant with a lowercase letter such as "a gauain") as "agrauain", so that the spy who was sent out by Gawain returns to report not to him but to his brother. However, it makes no difference who exactly Gawain's spy reports to; what matters is the information he gathers.

All of the examples discussed in tables 2.2 and 2.3 involve character information that is not repeated or stable; they are self-contained speech acts or actions that contribute to a larger picture or effect. In all cases, the relevant character-related facts of the characters who are interchanged are the same, and this logically means that switching them is inconsequential. That is to say, Arthur, Ban, and Bors are interchangeable because they are the leaders of the armies who are described in battle; Gawain and Merlin are interchangeable when praising Eliezer because they

have in common the trait of authority; Gawain and Yvain are interchangeable because they are both involved in the tournament at hand, during which mistrust and grudges begin to fester; and so on. The same is the case for the errors, where at first glance either Gawain or Yvain could be the one to introduce himself first because they are both present and meeting for the first time, or where Gawain or one of his brothers could be the one to hear the report of Gawain's spy because they are all present and of similar importance.

These observations made with reference to variations and errors align with some of Nicola Morato's observations in his paper "Textual Entropy". A few interesting parallels emerge between the variations concerning character names discussed here and the lexical variations listed by Morato (292-6). Morato's variations can be more or less synonymous and are on occasion connected to graphic or phonetic similarity, and often belong to the same semantic field. However, they can also be antonyms or otherwise mismatched but "perfectly acceptable in the narrative" (295) if the context in which a variation occurs allows it. Similarly, the variations and errors involving character names in tables 2.2 and 2.3 tend to involve characters that are characterized the same way, belong to the same character group, and, sometimes, bear similar names. They can also fulfil none of these criteria but still be exchanged without it clashing with the context of the scenes.[197] In explaining the substantial variations he identifies, Morato suggests that such variations work because they are "perfectly equivalent" (296) in terms of their function or effect.

These ideas of context and functional equivalence, when applied to *LeM*'s characters, once more bring to the fore the extent to which their characterization – the sum of relevant character information – is tied to collectivity and sameness. In almost any context on the *histoire* level, the majority of characters involved are functionally equivalent to at least a few others. This is because they share the same characterization or at least overlap insofar as it is relevant to the context at hand.

[197] Morato also discusses an interesting case of repeated interchangeability involving Bohort and Lionel in the conclusions of this paper, albeit in light of how an analysis of such variations may help the establishment of stemmata.

The effect that pervades *LeM* as a consequence of this is a heightened awareness of patterns such as leaders killing leaders, leaders being described before their retinues, higher-ranking characters being represented more than lower-ranking ones, and so on. Many actions of *LeM*'s characters, especially in battle, can, indeed, be understood as variations expressing the same pattern, as it is repeated throughout with different characters involved. For the *histoire* of *LeM*, this means, too, that the plot feels like it is carried out less by individuals and more by the collectives which they form, as most of its characters act and behave almost exclusively on behalf of and as part of a collective to which they belong.

*Characters as Representatives*

As I have shown, characters are interchangeable for considerable parts of *LeM*'s *histoire*, and this is connected to correspondences in characterization. Especially where a character's belonging to a collective is concerned, their sameness with others, and thus interchangeability with them, is noticeable; indeed, many characters' actions in *LeM* consist in their entirety of ones another character could have performed just as well. This means that a key property of most characters in *LeM* is that they frequently act as representatives of a collective. When new character information is given about a specific character on the *discours* level, more often than not, it leads to a character-related fact on the *histoire* level that is attributed not only to this one fictional entity but to the group of which they are part as well, thus directing attention away from the individual and onto the group.

This begs the question of why so many different characters are introduced in *LeM* in the first place. I would argue that the abundance of characters, especially in the *Suite*, leads to a similar effect to the abundance of locations, digressive analepses and prolepses, and so on. As with other aspects of its *discours*, *LeM* introduces its characters in ways similar to other Arthurian texts: a good number of the characters introduced in it are only named in one of the lists of knights belonging to certain army divisions or present at certain events (e.g. 159; 148, 190; 177, 320; 297), and, as I have shown, even more of them do nothing that sets them apart

from others in the text. This is, albeit to a lesser extent, apparent in a variety of Arthurian texts and often serves to place a text firmly in the Arthurian universe.[198]

The intertextual and transfictional priorities of *LeM* thus affect its characters. Names often serve as intertextual or transfictional references while characters are only very loosely tied to the plot through the group to which they belong. The appearance of their names triggers associations in the reader: "All characters, in particular intertextual ones, evoke expectations in the recipient that are based on pre-existing information about the character and that generate meaning in the respective text without the character necessarily having to act."[199] In the case of *LeM*, the reader's expectations regarding characters they recognize consist in things those characters will do in the future, because *LeM*'s *histoire* takes place chronologically before most other Arthurian stories.

It is perhaps not surprising that *LeM* makes use not only of the transfictionality of the characters introduced in it, but also of some established character-related facts from other stories. With its purpose as a story of origins, it may have responded to "the fascination with origins", aiming "not only to explain everything, but also to show everything".[200] Known facts about Arthurian characters are, in *LeM*, provided with context.

This desire may well explain the individualizing but functionless properties of some characters, such as Gawain's changing strength, Dodinel's wildness, and the

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[198] Outside of the *LG* itself, good examples of this can be found in a number of shorter Arthurian tales. Examples of similar name lists can be found in shorter Middle English Arthurian tales (e.g. *The Marriage* 116-23; *Sir Gawain* 34-66). Another example is the Breton lai *Lanval*, which is Arthurian already in its oldest extant version but features only a few named characters; the two Middle English adaptations of the tale add a number of Arthurian names and repeat them more often (e.g. *Lanval* 398, *Landevale*, 316, *Launfal* 814; *Lanval* 223-4, *Launfal* 637-8; see also *Launfal* 13-24; 37-40 for another added name list). Further examples can be found by searching for words such as "mentioned" or "listed" in the online version of Christopher Bruce's *Arthurian Name Dictionary*. For a discussion of name lists in *LeM*, see Koble, *Les suites*, 39-41. See also Plet-Nicolas.
[199] My translation. "Jede Figur, in bedeutend höherem Ausmaß die textübergreifende Figur, weckt in der Rezeption bestimmte Erwartungen, die auf den bisherigen Informationen zu dieser Figur basieren und im jeweiligen Text Bedeutung generieren, ohne dass die Figur zwangsläufig handelt" (Zudrell, *Historische Narratologie* 34). *LeM* reinforces this effect through its heavy use of intertextual and transfictional prolepses; see ch. 1, section 3.
[200] My translation. "la fascination pour les origines", "Il ne s'agit donc pas simplement de tout expliquer, on veut aussi tout montrer" (Trachsler, "Quand Gauvainet" 205).

conception story of Yvain the Bastard, which I have briefly discussed above. All of these aspects are established in other Arthurian texts and, while they fulfil no purpose for *LeM*'s *histoire*, they reinforce its many transfictional and intertextual links to other Arthurian texts.[201] The transfictionality of character-related facts can go beyond mere mentions, sometimes extending to explanations of them. Besides the story of Yvain the Bastard's conception, *LeM* renders a brief explanation of Kay's humour and foul-mouthedness (114; 104) and provides an extended origin story for Gawain's courtesy toward women (489-95; 459-64), for example.

In her 2020 monograph, Lena Zudrell observes a connection between the familiarity of Arthurian characters and their function in Arthurian romance, directly relating a character's recognizability to how closely their characterization interacts with the plot. Thus, she observes regarding Kay's role that the Pleier's texts "paint … a relatively stereotypical, and thus very functionalized picture of the character".[202] The texts which Zudrell examines feature Kay

> in exactly those situations for which the character is (in)famous. Kay is the first to joust …, a defeated Kay hangs from a tree at the story's beginning … and is characterized as a likeable mocker at its end … . In doing so, the narrative refers to a number of established traits of this character and so constructs the genre frame [of the text].[203]

Kay's arrogance and mockery become part of the patterns of other Arthurian texts, making Kay a figure of contrast and, often, a necessary failure who highlights the success of whoever takes on a challenge after him. By contrast, the two instances in *LeM* where Kay misbehaves do not elicit shameful exposure of his flaws or have any consequences at all. When Kay jokes about the Knights of the Round Table, this

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[201] Gawain's waxing and waning strength at different times of day can be traced back to the Celtic tradition and is also mentioned in the *Mort Artu* (see *The Death of Arthur* 102); Dodinel's wildness is first mentioned in Chrétien's *Erec*, as is the bastard status of Yvain (see *Erec and Enide* 24).
[202] My translation. "… zeichnen … ein vergleichsweise stereotypes und damit äußerst funktionalisiertes Bild der Figur" (*Historische Narratologie* 222). It should be clarified that Zudrell is referring here not to stereotypes with regard to Kay's role as seneschal but to his role in all the texts in which he appears.
[203] My translation. "… in eben jene Situationen, aufgrund derer die Figur berühmt-berüchtigt ist. Keie tjostiert als erster …, Keie bleibt zu Beginn der Erzählung sieglos am Ast hängen … und wird an deren Ende als sympathischer Spötter charakterisiert … . Damit referiert die Erzählung auf eine Handvoll etablierter Eigenschaften der Figur und stiftet so den generischen Rahmen" (222).

happens right at the end of an episode and triggers no further action (409; 381), and when Kay jokes about a dwarf who wants to be knighted at Arthur's court, it is not taken as an offence (451; 422-3). At no point in *LeM* does Kay challenge an opponent stronger than him, and nowhere is he ridiculed or called out by other characters. Therefore, in those few examples of characters that do have individualizing traits, those traits are not typically functionalized for *LeM*'s *histoire* and certainly do not become part of its narrative patterns. Instead, the use of recognizable character-related facts serves, it seems, primarily the purpose of *being* recognizable, of establishing continuity.

Be it merely because they are mentioned or because of references to character-related facts, many of *LeM*'s characters are representative in two ways: first, within *LeM*, they often represent character collectives when carrying out the plot, and second, beyond it, they are connected to potentially familiar versions of themselves in other Arthurian texts. Most of *LeM*'s characters, then, are not truly in focus when character information is attributed to them.

## 4. Excursus: The Relationship of Leodagan and Cleodalis

As I have shown, the most important information about most of *LeM*'s characters is usually concerned with connections: character descriptions directly repeat what happens elsewhere in the text; characters are constantly thinking about one another and are driven by the image they think other characters have of them. This non-individuality of *LeM*'s characters shapes the majority of their depictions and actions in the text, as a consequence of which they tend to be interchangeable in many situations. In addition to representing a collective or redirecting the narrative focus to other characters, many of *LeM*'s characters have correspondences in other Arthurian texts and stand in some degree of continuity to these other versions of themselves. *LeM*'s characters undergo changes insofar as they relate to a collective. For example, Yvain leaves his rebellious father to join the young recruits, who in turn join Arthur's side. Together with the other young recruits, Yvain eventually becomes a Queen's Knight, develops a rivalry with the Knights of the Round Table, and is reunited with his father when the rebellious barons make peace with Arthur. Roughly the same development can be applied to other young recruits in *LeM*, as the development of character relationships is not

an individual one but represents how the status of a collective changes as the plot progresses. Even the blooming of friendships and similar one-to-one relationships tends to be depicted in the same way, namely with characters observing one another's prowess in battle and gaining respect for one another.[204]

This does not, however, mean that *LeM*'s author or authors were not in a position to write complex and developing characters in ways that set them apart from others. In the following, I will explore one such case, the character depictions and relationship of King Leodagan and his seneschal, Cleodalis. As neither character plays a major role elsewhere in Arthurian literature, the character information attributed to them is not transfictional in nature. King–seneschal relationships are depicted elsewhere in *LeM*. For instance, Vortigern, once a seneschal himself, has his king killed and replaces him and becomes a tyrant. Arthur's seneschal, Kay, is also his foster-brother and has been given his position because their father has demanded it.[205] While this type of character relationship is amply represented in *LeM*, its depictions vary rather than giving rise to a repeated pattern. In the following, I will describe Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship and analyse how it interacts with *LeM*'s plot, before providing possible explanations for this unusual depiction of characters in the context of the overall narrative patterns of repetition and sameness in *LeM*.

As I have done above, I will consider variations at some length because the depiction of Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship varies surprisingly widely. I will compare two Old French versions that are particularly far apart, namely that presented in the β manuscript BL Add. 10292, edited by Sommer, and that presented in the α manuscript BnF fr. 9123.[206] While the course and outcome of the

[204] See e.g. Ulfin and Bretel (110-1; 99-100) and Lucan, Kay, and Girflet (115; 104-5).
[205] Both of these king–seneschal relationships are mentioned in other Arthurian texts and are to a degree transfictional. Further king–seneschal relationships in *LeM* consist in Amant (265-9; 247-50) and Nabunal (404-5; 377) and Ban and Anselm (277-8; 258). In those cases, the king and seneschal never appear in the same scene, thus drawing attention to the seneschal's role as the king's representative.
[206] It was not possible in the scope of this chapter to investigate whether the difference lies systematically between all α and β manuscripts or at least some of their families. BnF fr. 105, another α manuscript, corresponds to BnF fr. 9123 in the passages discussed, and Bonn 526, the β manuscript edited by Daniel Poirion et al. in *Le livre du Graal*, corresponds to that of BL Add. 10292. However, a brief examination of BnF fr. 747, another α

episodes concerned remain the same, these differences allow for different readings of the character relationship in question.

*The Introductions of Leodagan and Cleodalis*

Leodagan's depiction in *LeM* is centred on his role as king of Carmelide, and from the beginning, he is described as unable to perform this role well. He is first mentioned early in *LeM*, when Merlin advises Arthur to take his companions to Carmelide to serve Leodagan:

> & sen sont ale el roialme le roy leodegan de carmelide & sa feme est morte & il est viex homs si na de tous enfans que vne fille a qui li roialmes doit eskair apres le roy son pere . & li rois leodegans a moult grant guerre au roy rion qui … li fait grant damage en sa terre . & cil leodegans marchist a ta terre & a ton roialme & saces bien que sil pert sa terre tu perderas la toie apres & li rois eust piecha perdue sa terre si ne fuissent li compaignon de la table roonde qui li maintienent sa geuerre car il est des ore mais de iors . Et por ce te loe iou que tu ailles seruir le roy leodegan vne piece & il te donra sa fille a feme a qui li roialmes apent . (92)
>
> And they [the Knights of the Round Table] went to the kingdom of King Leodagan of Carmelide. His wife is dead, he is an old man, and his only child is a daughter to whom the kingdom will go after her father. King Leodagan is fighting a very great war with King Rion, who is … wreaking havoc in his land.
> Now, Leodagan's land borders on your kingdom, and you can be certain that if he loses his land you will lose yours soon after. And he would have lost his land some time ago had it not been for the companions of the Round Table, who have kept up the war for him, for he is very old. That is why I advise you to go serve King Leodagan for a while, and he will give you for a wife his daughter, who stands to inherit the kingdom. (102-3)

Leodagan's inability to keep the Saxons at bay endangers not only his own people but also Arthur's kingdom, and helping him is – at least from Merlin's perspective – a strategic necessity. This introduction of Leodagan sets up readers' expectations for Arthur's time in Carmelide: Arthur will meet the Knights of the Round Table, he will defeat Rion, and he will marry Guenevere, thus confirming Merlin's predictions. The themes of marriage and diplomacy are immediately connected to Leodagan, as is the underlying idea that he needs Arthur's aid. Leodagan, while at the nexus of all these matters, is not an active player in any of these milestones, and his depiction as helpless is reiterated when Arthur first meets him (152; 141).

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manuscript (see Koble, *Les suites* 503), represents a hybrid of the two versions I analyse here.

While Leodagan and Arthur prepare for their first battle together, Cleodalis is introduced. He is Leodagan's seneschal and the leader of Leodagan's knights, but does not bear his standard as usual because a Knight of the Round Table, Hervi of Rivel, has taken on this task. Cleodalis instead carries a smaller banner into battle (153-4; 143). Even before the first battle Leodagan and Arthur fight together, then, the introductions of Cleodalis and Leodagan suggest an imbalance between them: Leodagan is a powerless king, and Cleodalis has been relieved of one of his duties as seneschal but stubbornly carries it out in some capacity anyway. The two characters separate as soon as the fighting begins: Leodagan rides with the Knights of the Round Table, while Cleodalis leads Leodagan's knights.

In the course of the battle episode that follows, Leodagan is captured, given up as lost by the Knights of the Round Table, and saved by Arthur with Merlin's help (155-6; 145-6). For the rest of the episode, Leodagan rides with Arthur and marvels at the strength of his anonymous supporters (158; 147); this later feeds into the dinner scene I analysed above. Eventually, Merlin stops the pursuit of the fleeing Saxons and directs Arthur and his men, together with Leodagan, to Cleodalis, who, despite being in grave danger, "was holding the standard straight up, for he would not willingly let go of it or lose it" (158).[207] The contrast between Leodagan as a victim of violence and passive admirer of others during battle and Cleodalis's heroism is stark. This contrast established between the two characters' capacity to perform their roles is supplemented by a contrast between their morality. The narration of battle is interrupted by an analepsis about Leodagan and Cleodalis, which is introduced as follows.

> … cleodalis li senescal de carmelide … moult fu preudom & loiaus cheualiers & hardis & bien i parut que por nule mesproisure que li rois ses sires eust mesfait enuers lui ne le vaut guerpir en nul meschief ou il fust . ains en fist tant que autres ne le fesist mie ains leusent laisiet si vous dirai por coi . (148)

> … Cleodalis, the seneschal of Carmelide, … was a very worthy gentleman, a faithful and fearless knight, and it was very clear that, for any base deed his lord the king may have wrongfully done against him, he would not willingly forsake him, whatever trouble he might be in; rather, he bore himself in such a way that others did not leave him who otherwise might have done so. And I will tell you why. (159)

[207] "tenoit lensenge toute droite quil nel uoloit mie deguerpir ne laisier" (147).

The transition is a telling one: Cleodalis, the “faithful and fearless knight”, is loyal to his king despite a “base deed” the latter has done to him. This reflects the imbalance between Cleodalis, who inspires loyalty in the men at his side, and Leodagan, who is given up for lost by the Knights of the Round Table until Arthur saves him.[208]

In the analepsis that follows, their relationship is explained in more detail: Leodagan has kept Cleodalis's wife prisoner for years and fathered a daughter with her the same day he conceived Guenevere with his own wife. Although not explicit here, it emerges at a later point that this False Guenevere was raised by Cleodalis as his daughter. The analepsis concludes that Leodagan refuses to release Cleodalis's wife: “He told them [Cleodalis's kinsmen] that the seneschal would not have her as long as he was [at war], yet for all that, the seneschal never stopped serving him” (160).[209] The contrast between Leodagan and Cleodalis is thus deepened when Leodagan is portrayed as directly unjust toward Cleodalis, while the latter's servitude continues. The transition to this analepsis quoted above, and the Old French conjunction “ne onques por che” (149; “yet for all that” 160), further clarify that Cleodalis's loyalty continues *in spite of*, not *because of* his wife's captivity. The motivation ascribed to Cleodalis in *LeM* is not the hope of setting her free or the fear of what Leodagan might do to his wife if he did not serve him; his loyalty in itself is his only motivation.

The introductions of Leodagan and Cleodalis differ from the character introductions discussed above in that a conflict is established between Leodagan's

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[208] Furthermore, when Arthur and Leodagan's alliance is sealed and Arthur leaves, so many of Leodagan's knights want to come along (including those of the Round Table) that Leodagan would not have been able to defend his kingdom. Arthur has to turn down some of the pledges in order to not leave Leodagan defenceless (260-1; 242-3).

[209] My emendation. “… il lor dist quil ne lauroit pas tant comme il fust en guerre au roi . ne onques por che li senescaus ne le laisa a seruir” (149). The source manuscript for Pickens's translation, which is also the base manuscript for Sommer's edition, is garbled here, suggesting that Leodagan and Cleodalis are at war with each other; the reading I offer corresponds instead to the Modern French translation of Bonn 526 (*Les premiers faits* p. 916, para. 108; see also the translators' discussion of Leodagan's reasoning on p. 1838, para. 108.1). The same source manuscript also clarifies that Leodagan is still keeping Cleodalis's wife prisoner at the time of the story. Leodagan began his affair with Cleodalis's wife while Cleodalis was away in battle, too; the connection of war and affair is thus twofold.

shortcomings as king and Cleodalis's excessive and unmotivated loyalty. While the fact that they belong to a particular collective does matter for their exposition too, the comparison between them raises questions about Leodagan's competence and signals an upcoming change to their relationship.

*Leodagan's Change of Heart*

Cleodalis is saved and the battle is eventually won. During the ensuing scenes at court, Cleodalis does not make an appearance; instead, Leodagan takes advice from Hervi, the Knight of the Round Table who has replaced Cleodalis as standard-bearer.[210] By the time the battle against Rion himself comes, however, Arthur has been betrothed to Guenevere and his identity has been revealed to Leodagan. In the course of these events, the Knights of the Round Table have sworn allegiance to Arthur, and so Leodagan and Cleodalis end up leading a division together (234; 218). In this relatively long battle scene, Leodagan and Cleodalis do not act much,[211] but when the Saxons are beaten and flee, the two become separated from their men during the pursuit and end up in grave danger (254; 236). This leads to another chance for their relationship to evolve. When Leodagan is struck down, Cleodalis "got down from his horse and put [Leodagan] on his own horse, and he told him to ride away and he would stay behind there" (254),[212] effectively sacrificing his life for his king. In response to his seneschal's unwavering loyalty, the reader is informed of Leodagan undergoing a change of heart:

> Quant li rois leodegan vit la loiaute de son senescal si souspire moult durement desous son hiaume & se repent moult en son cuer de ce quil estoit tant forfais enuers lui & dist en son cuer que ceste bonte li voldra il rendre & gueredoner sil uit longement . (236)
>
> When King Leodagan saw his seneschal's faithfulness, he sighed deeply inside his helmet and sorrowed in his heart that he had wronged him so much, and he said in his heart that he wished to repay him for this good deed and reward him for it, if he should live so long. (254)

Leodagan's change of heart here overshadows the question of whether or not he takes Cleodalis up on his offer; it appears to be the more important narrative

[210] See my discussion of the relevant scene in ch. 4, section 2.
[211] Leodagan does rally his men once (244; 227).
[212] "descendi a terre & le fist monter sor le sien si li dist quil sen alast & il remaindroit iluec" (236).

consequence of Cleodalis's gesture. However, Leodagan's feelings remain invisible to Cleodalis, as Leodagan's helmet masks his facial expression. Leodagan's decision to reward his seneschal is thus shared only with the reader and does not become a turning point in the dynamic between them as characters at this time. Instead, the reader's awareness of Leodagan's state of mind creates the expectation that he will express it to Cleodalis at some point.

The narrative now follows other knights in their pursuits until Merlin leads Arthur and his men to the aid of Leodagan and Cleodalis. Leodagan has apparently not left Cleodalis's side, and although both are still alive, Leodagan is too exhausted to fight and Cleodalis is defending him alone.[213] This is where the versions of *LeM* considered here first diverge with regard to these two characters: BL Add. 10292, edited by Sommer, gives a relatively short rendition of the rescue, but in the two α manuscripts, Cleodalis's heroic defence of his fallen king is expanded considerably, including details of substantial injuries he suffers. Just as in the earlier passage, Leodagan witnesses Cleodalis's loyalty; where the parallel situation previously made Leodagan feel regret, this time it makes him outwardly ask for Cleodalis's forgiveness:

> si li prent m*ou*lt g*ra*nt pitie de cleodalis son senechal qui si met son cors en habandon pour le sien rescourre. si li dist une parolle qui moult bien apartient a ho*m*me de g*ra*nt pitie. Ahi. Cleodali sire ie sai bien que ie sui a ma fin venus. Et pour dieu ge*n*tilz homs ie te pri merci des mesfes dont ie ai enuers toi mespris plus que nul ho*m*me ne[.] Lors se lest aler a la terre a ienous. et li tent lespee co*m*me forfet. et li prie que so*n* droit en prengne. Quant cil uoit son seingneur si humeliant uers lui. et quil se tenoit en sa merci du tout pour fere en sa uolente si pleure m*ou*lt tendrement et len lieue par la main et li clai*m*me quite de touz les mesfes q*ui*l a fes. (BnF 9123, 208r, my transcription)
>
> And he felt much pity for Cleodalis his seneschal, who sacrificed his body in this way to save his own. And he said something very befitting for a man who felt such pity: "Ah, Cleodalis, sire, I know I have come to my end. And, my good man, I beg you in God's name for mercy for the misdeeds which I have undertaken against you, worse than any done by any man ever born." And he sank to the ground on his knees and held his sword to him as in defeat. And asked him to make use of his prerogative.
> When he [Cleodalis] saw his lord abasing himself toward him in this way, and that he put himself in his mercy to do whatever he wished, he wept

[213] Note the curious illumination of this scene in BnF fr. 9123, 208r, in which Leodagan lies on the ground, unarmoured, head on a pillow, with his hands folded, while Cleodalis stands over him.

> very softly and raised him by his hand and acquitted him of all the misdeeds he had done. (my translation)

The presence of these two paragraphs makes a considerable difference: while Leodagan's regret is made explicit to the reader in both versions, Leodagan expresses it to Cleodalis only in one of them, which leads to a moment of reconciliation and forgiveness, a development in their relationship as characters. In BnF fr. 9123, Leodagan has articulated his state of mind, thus fulfilling the expectations of the reader shortly after they were created; in BL Add. 10292, this has not yet happened and Leodagan – one must assume – continues carrying feelings of guilt and regret around without doing anything about them.

*The Diverging Banishment Scenes*

The relationship between Leodagan and Cleodalis culminates during Arthur's Wedding, where both characters make their last major appearance. During Arthur's Wedding, the False Guenevere plots to abduct and replace the "real" one.[214] Her and her kinsmen's motivation is their hatred of Leodagan "for the great shame he had brought to Cleodalis of his wife, whom he had kept for so long in spite of them all", yet *LeM* points out specifically that "Cleodalis was not at this meeting and he knew nothing about it" (323).[215] The characterization of Cleodalis is reiterated here. On the one hand, this scene implies that Cleodalis, more than any of the traitors, would have reason to hate Leodagan, since it is his wife who is being held prisoner.[216] On the other hand, his ignorance of the meeting renders him innocent of involvement in his relatives' plot. This allows *LeM* to let the consequences of Leodagan's unjust behaviour play out without compromising the depiction of Cleodalis as unwaveringly loyal.

When the False Guenevere is captured, her abduction attempt is kept secret, even from Arthur. The knights whom Merlin had asked to thwart her plot, Ulfin and Bretel, dispose of the bodies of her kinsmen and accomplices and then keep her in

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[214] See my discussion of this scene in ch. 1, section 3.

[215] "por le grant honte kil auoit fait a cleodalis de sa feme kil auoit tenu si longement en souentage malgre aus tous" (301); "A cel parlement ne fu mie cleodalis car il nen sot riens" (301).

[216] The use of tense in this passage is unclear, yet there is no mention in either version of *LeM* of Leodagan releasing Cleodalis's wife.

their lodgings (333; 309). They send for Cleodalis the next morning in order to decide what to do, and it is at this point that the two versions of *LeM* strongly diverge once more. In BL Add. 10292, in which there is no moment of forgiveness, Cleodalis arrives and Ulfin and Bretel tell him about what happened. Cleodalis now vehemently denies that the False Guenevere is his daughter, "'for if she were my daughter, she would never have done it no matter who might have begged her to" (335).[217] Soon after, Merlin arrives with Leodagan and the five of them discuss what to do. Leodagan now addresses Cleodalis at length:

> senescal sire senescal ie vous aim moult & moult uoldroie porcachier vostre honor & acroistre & ausi ferai iou se ie uif longement car moult maues bien serui & loialment . ne iou ne vaudroie mie faire chose ne porcachier dont vous eusies honte ne reproche por coi ie vous en peusse destorner . Saues vous por coi ie le di vees chi uostre fille qui moult a bien deserui con face iustice de li . Mais vous aues este tant loiaus enuers moi que bien li doi pardouner por lamor de vous vn plus grant mesfait que cis ne soit . mes por chou quil conuient que iou en prenge ueniance en aucune maniere si conuient il que vous lenmenes hors de cest roialme en tel maniere que iamais ni soit ueue domme ne de feme qui le connoisse car ensi me plaist il & ie le uoeil . (311)
>
> Seneschal, sir seneschal, I love you very much indeed, and I would gladly do anything for the sake of your honor; I would willingly increase that honor, and so I shall, if I live long enough, for you have served me faithfully and well. And I would do nothing or strive for nothing that could bring you shame or dishonor if I could shield you from them. Do you know why I say this? Look, this is your daughter, who has surely deserved to be condemned by the law. But you have been so faithful to me that, for love of you, I would have to forgive her for an even greater misdeed than this. But, as it would nevertheless be fitting for me to take vengeance in some way, you must take her out of this kingdom so that no man or woman who sees her will know who she is; for that is my pleasure and my will. (335)

To this, Cleodalis responds by once more denying fatherhood of the False Guenevere, even saying that he would gladly see her publicly executed. Leodagan insists, however, and Cleodalis follows his command and escorts his foster-daughter out of the country.

Leodagan's speech to Cleodalis is difficult to read in Leodagan's favour in this version. This is the first time the unjust Leodagan expresses his thoughts about Cleodalis's loyalty; unlike the version represented in BnF fr. 9123, he does not

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[217] "Car sele fust ma fille … ia ne leust fait por homme nul qui len priest" (311).

reward Cleodalis, and nor does he address Cleodalis's errors – his fatherhood of the False Guenevere, for example – even in a relatively private situation such as this. Instead, he charges Cleodalis with removing the problem, even framing this as a kindness he is doing for his seneschal as a reward for his faithfulness. The frustration of readers' expectations in this scene is underlined by the verbal repetition of the phrase "se ie uif longement" from Leodagan's earlier change of heart. By establishing a direct connection with Leodagan's earlier appreciation of Cleodalis's loyalty and decision to reward him "if he lived long enough", Leodagan's rhetorical instrumentalization of his appreciation and twisting a reward into the self-serving banishment of the False Guenevere appear as a direct undoing of the earlier change of heart. Unlike the earlier scene in BnF fr. 9123, in which Leodagan addresses Cleodalis's faithfulness together with his own guilt and with no ulterior motive in mind, Leodagan's acknowledgement of it here is mere rhetoric serving to motivate his judgement and save face. Leodagan's speech is focused on honour, guilt, and shame, thus showing once again the importance of *Fremdbilder*, but crucially deflects these notions from himself onto Cleodalis.

The negative depiction of Leodagan in BL Add. 10292 is reinforced by Cleodalis's reaction to the speech. Cleodalis's repeated denial that the False Guenevere is his daughter implies that he sees through Leodagan's attempts to deflect his faults onto him. Cleodalis's reaction here serves to confirm Leodagan's fundamental dishonesty: Leodagan's earlier feelings of regret remain unexpressed and are even undermined by his self-serving acknowledgement of Cleodalis's loyalty in this later scene. While an internal change may have taken place on Leodagan's part, the relationship between the two characters ultimately remains the same, with Leodagan's unjustness unchanged.

By contrast, the version of this scene presented in BnF fr. 9123 is quite different. Here, too, Cleodalis is summoned to Ulfin and Bretel's lodgings. Upon seeing his daughter, Cleodalis is confused, but Ulfin and Bretel confront him about the False Guenevere's scheme and insinuate that he came up with it in the first place. This passage repeats the idea that Cleodalis would be expected to hate Leodagan and work against him, and that his continued loyalty stands in conflict with his circumstances. Cleodalis then insists that he knows nothing about any of this:

> sire bien sachiez que ie ne soi onq*ue*s ne son alee ne sa venue ne son courage. et se elle a bien fait ce mest bel. et se elle a de riens mespris ce poise moi. et ie len harai a touz iours mais. En seur que tout elle ne fait mie dou tout a mon vouloir si comme il me samble. car elle va et vient si comme ele veult et il lui plaist. (BnF fr. 9123, 240r, my transcription)
>
> Sir, you should know that I never know where she goes or comes from or what she is thinking. And if she has done something good, that makes me happy, and if she has done anything bad, that makes me sad, and I will hate her forever because of it. Above all, it seems to me that she does nothing according to my wishes, since she comes and goes how she wants and how it suits her. (My translation)

Cleodalis's speech expresses frustration and hints strongly at a poor relationship between him and the False Guenevere, a relationship that remains unexplored in BL Add. 10292. Cleodalis's response also, however, reveals something about his attitude toward the False Guenevere: stating that he would be happy if she did something good and sad if she did something bad, he is characterized with fatherly feelings of responsibility for his foster-daughter. Unlike BL Add. 10292, where Cleodalis denies his fatherhood as soon as the False Guenevere betrays his lord, his character behaves quite differently here: he shows a willingness to take responsibility for her actions. This could be read in line with his earlier acquittal of Leodagan: in BL Add. 10292, Leodagan has not expressed his regret to Cleodalis, and when Leodagan brings up Cleodalis's loyalty to save face, Cleodalis in turn denies responsibility for the False Guenevere in an attempt of his own to do the same. In BnF fr. 9123, however, the added scene of forgiveness consequently means that Cleodalis and Leodagan's relationship has recovered, which may serve as an explanation for Cleodalis's apparent willingness to continue his role as self-sacrificing servant.

The episode continues with the knights' realization that Cleodalis is unaware of what happened and then their report to him. Merlin and Leodagan arrive soon afterward. Unlike BL Add. 10292, in which only the reader knows that the False Guenevere will become a problem in the future, Merlin here informs the others that she will do very bad things wherever she goes, and that all of Logres will suffer because of it. In contrast to his lengthy speech in BL Add. 10292, Leodagan says little in this scene, only stating that there must be some sort of vengeance for the False Guenevere's abduction attempt, with his unwillingness to see her dead being repeated even after he learns of the troubles lying in the future. In addition, the

version in BnF fr. 9123 provides an explanation for this: "'I can in no way let it happen that she receives the death penalty, in part because of my love for her, and in part because I have raised her.'"[218] Leodagan in this version appears torn: even when faced with authoritative confirmation that she will threaten his new overlord, Arthur, in the future, he cannot bring himself to have her killed because he thinks of her as a daughter. While Leodagan does not acknowledge his fatherhood of the False Guenevere, he does express fatherly feelings. Together with his earlier asking for forgiveness, this leads to a more positive depiction of his character.

Leodagan's despair is the reason provided for Cleodalis's suggestion of bringing the False Guenevere out of the country. Everyone agrees to the proposal, and Cleodalis carries it out. In this crucial difference from BL Add. 10292, Cleodalis is not ordered against his will to escort the False Guenevere out of the country but offers to do so himself.

| BL Add. 10292 (edited by Sommer) | BnF fr. 9123 |
|---|---|
| - | Cleodalis has previously forgiven Leodagan for his unjust behaviour. |
| Private meeting with Ulfin, Bretel, Cleodalis, Leodagan, and Merlin | |
| - | Cleodalis has a difficult relationship with the False Guenevere |
| Cleodalis refuses to take responsibility for the False Guenevere | Cleodalis takes responsibility for the False Guenevere |
| - | Merlin prophesizes that the False Guenevere will cause much trouble in the future |
| Leodagan uses Cleodalis's loyalty to save face | Leodagan expresses a conflict between his duties and his feelings |
| Cleodalis unwillingly complies | Cleodalis takes the initiative in resolving this conflict |
| The False Guenevere is escorted out of the country by Cleodalis | |

Table 2.4. Overview of the main common features and differences in the scene of the False Guenevere's banishment.

While the cornerstones of this short scene, its location, characters, and endpoint, remain the same, several differences in Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship arise because of the variations in the two versions. In both versions, one of the characters behaves in continuity with a relevant character-related fact established

[218] My translation. "en nule maniere ie ne souffreroie quele prest mort lune partie pour lamour de lui. lautre p*ar*tie pour ce q*ue* nourrie lai." BnF fr. 9123, 240v, my transcription.

about him previously. In BL Add. 10292, Leodagan continues to be unjust by protecting himself and instructing Cleodalis to escort the False Guenevere out of the country. Leodagan's regret at his transgressions remains internalized and is overshadowed by his concern with *Fremdbild*, as he uses his authority and knowledge of Cleodalis's loyalty to force Cleodalis into repeating the pattern of saving him. Leodagan and Cleodalis are in conflict here, and both are depicted negatively, with Leodagan openly using his authority and Cleodalis openly rejecting responsibility for and fatherhood of the False Guenevere. In BnF fr. 9123, on the other hand, Cleodalis continues to loyally protect Leodagan voluntarily. Leodagan's depiction is more positive here, given his earlier expression of regret to Cleodalis and his affection for the False Guenevere. Nevertheless, Leodagan's prestige is saved because Cleodalis voluntarily falls back into his habit of saving his king. In this version, the scene demonstrates the characters' healed relationship: Leodagan openly expresses his inner conflict, and Cleodalis is willing to resolve it.[219] Both versions put the interacting feelings of shame, regret, loyalty, and forgiveness in the foreground but have the relationship between an unjust king and an unreasonably loyal seneschal play out in different ways.

Overall, the relationship of Leodagan and Cleodalis barely impacts *LeM*'s *histoire*, but where it does directly motivate an event, namely in the banishment of the False Guenevere, the impact is the same in both versions, despite the differences in how their relationship develops. In their different ways, both versions use the relationship of Leodagan and Cleodalis to provide a backstory for the False Guenevere and her future vengeful return from exile. In the *Lancelot*, the False Guenevere will direct her revenge at Arthur, who inherits Leodagan's enemies just as he receives his kingdom and the Knights of the Round Table as Guenevere's dowry. Despite the different ways in which their relationship develops, the endpoint of the characters' relationship in *LeM* is the same, and this may be explained by its intertextual relevance for the *LG*.

[219] The same differences affect the characterization of the False Guenevere too: in the BL Add. 10292 version, both characters deny responsibility and fatherhood, and in the BnF fr. 9123 version, both characters are shown to have a fatherly attitude toward her. No reaction on her part is described in this scene, however.

This is not to say, however, that the intertextual trajectory of the False Guenevere's banishment explains how Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship is depicted in either version of *LeM* analysed here. None of the details in either version appear as such in the *Lancelot* or elsewhere. Instead, a possible inspiration for the character relationship may lie in the stock of motifs used in medieval narratives more broadly. There are some similarities between their relationship and the motif of the shamed ruler, which was used in Old French *chansons de geste* and romances around the time of *LeM*'s composition.[220] The texts using this motif often correlate it with the banishment and vengeful return of one of the ruler's vassals.

The influence of folklore and medieval motifs is also apparent in some characterizations of individual characters in *LeM*. A notable example is the character of Danguenes, who is described as a coward: he pretends to have fought other knights, but flees whenever such encounters take place, and falsifies evidence for duels by hanging his shield in a tree and striking it himself (346; 322). This description of Danguenes, who makes no appearance outside of the episode in question, is strongly reminiscent of parts of the Old French fabliaux *Berenger au long cul* and *Trubert*, and may be understood as an instantiation of the motif of the sham brave man.[221]

The culmination of Leodagan and Cleodalis's interactions in the banishment of the False Guenevere is interesting in this light, for the motif may have provided Merlin's prophecy of her future misdeeds with further weight. The two versions considered here connect the relationship between Leodagan and Cleodalis and the banishment of the False Guenevere in different ways. BL Add. 10292 has Leodagan's continued abuse of his power directly feed into the False Guenevere's banishment. In BnF fr. 9123, the False Guenevere is spared in an act of affection and in an attempt to save her life, suggesting that Leodagan's change of heart came

[220] See Frenzel, "Herrscher, Der beschämte".
[221] See *Berenger*, Douin, *Les premiers faits* p. 1882, para. 427.1, and Thompson K1953. Outside of characterization, another example of non-Arthurian narratives being referenced in *LeM* may consist in Arthur's duel with the demonic cat of Lausanne (*Les premiers faits* p. 1908, para. 792.1).

too late or that the False Guenevere's wickedness is not caused solely by his misdeeds.[222]

*Conclusions*

Throughout *LeM*, characters and their relationships are typically internally similar: all barons rebel against Arthur for the same reason (lineage), all the knights set out to find him for similar reasons (renown), and so on. The similarity, and often the interchangeability, of *LeM*'s characters is reinforced by their relative simplicity. And, indeed, the patterns of foreseeable emotions serve to tie the similarly patterned plot together. It is common in *LeM* that any given piece of character information has correspondences elsewhere, as such repetitions serve to highlight the relevance of the character-related facts in which they result and establish patterns of meaning throughout the text.

Where character information does not constitute repetitions within *LeM*, there is often a correspondence between character-related facts in *LeM* and other Arthurian texts instead. My analysis of Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship sheds light on the intertextual and transfictional quality of such character-related facts. The point of connection to other Arthurian works lies in those facts as they stand at the endpoint of *LeM*, for the majority of Arthurian lore plays out after it. I have discussed examples such as Gawain's strength and Dodinel's wildness already; for character relationships, further examples include the deteriorating relationship between Agravain and his brothers, and Merlin's imprisonment.[223] What matters is not the intertextually fixed estrangement between Agravain and his brothers at the end of *LeM*, but the way in which it comes about. Similarly, Merlin's imprisonment by his lover is also an intertextual given, but the beginnings and development of their relationship are filled in independently by *LeM*. And while the False Guenevere is banished in *LeM* in continuity with the *Lancelot*, the connection of this to Leodagan and Cleodalis and the nuances of their relationship adds information not provided in the later work. The depiction of developing character

[222] It is frustratingly unsurprising that the origin story of a female protagonist renders her relatively passive while focusing on the male characters surrounding her, as *LeM* overall features little female action.
[223] See Trachsler, "La naissance", and Berthelot, "Merlin and the Ladies".

relationships in *LeM* thus shows perfectly how the intertextuality and transfictionality inherent to the text only go so far in explaining its details. In filling gaps in the form of stories that lead to known endpoints, *LeM*'s intratextual characterization and character design go far beyond simply being links to other works.

## 5. Singling Out the Protagonist: The Difference of Merlin

The character design of most of *LeM*'s characters is marked by repetitions that establish 1) sameness with other characters, 2) sameness with the same characters in other Arthurian texts, and 3) connections with motifs of medieval narrative. Consequently, most characters in *LeM* go hand in hand with a sense of familiarity, of knowability. Few actions or developments of a single character are exclusive to that character. Once a character joins a group, they work as part of it without conflict and are characterized mainly by the trait of being part of the group. This way of writing characters interacts with *LeM*'s plot, which is made up to a large extent of the actions of groups. The barons declare war on Arthur as a group, and he in turn rallies various factions to his side: Ban, Bors, and their armies, the Knights of the Round Table, and the young recruits under Gawain, for example. Toward the end of the text, all these factions fight as one against the Saxons before campaigning on the Continent. Especially in battle, which makes up about 40-50% of the text, the actions of individual knights reflect the faction for which they fight. Outside of battle, characters are concerned with their *Fremdbilder*, thus demonstrating a similar interest in representation and belonging to a group. The central relevant character-related fact of belonging to a group is mirrored by the character design shared by most of *LeM*'s characters, namely the fact that the same character information is attributed to a given set of characters. The sameness of most characters in the same character group means that most characters in *LeM* are interchangeable most of the time with at least some others, rendering them identifiable only by their name, without repeated mannerisms or traits to set them apart.

By contrast, the character of Merlin is marked by difference both within and beyond *LeM*, his character standing out among all the others in all circumstances in the text. Unsurprisingly, then, *LeM*'s protagonist warrants a detailed analysis in his

own right. I will begin with the relevant character-related facts attributed to Merlin on the *histoire* level – his characterization.[224] Unlike most characters in *LeM*, Merlin is characterized not by group belonging but by difference and distance from others, making him an unfamiliar, unknowable factor in the text. At the same time, Merlin is the character who controls *LeM*'s *histoire*; his role as its orchestrator lends the text an element of predetermination. Overall, his characterization is unique within *LeM*, meaning that he cannot be exchanged for another character for most of the text.

I will then turn to the character information attributed to Merlin on the *discours* level. Here, too, differences from most other characters in *LeM* emerge. Much of the character information attributed to Merlin is attributed only to him, making him an easily recognized character even when he is not mentioned by name. Moreover, *LeM*'s focalization on Merlin differs from that on other characters, which contributes to his characterization as all-controlling and distant. Finally, I will analyse Merlin's relationship with Nimiane, where Merlin's characterization and character design differ from the rest of *LeM*.

### 5.1 Free Rei(g)n: The Characterization of Merlin

Most characters in *LeM* share their background, social standing, and motivations with others. Thus, for example, Yvain is the high-born son of a rebellious baron and leaves his family behind to pursue knighthood at Arthur's court; to varying degrees, these things are also true for the other young recruits whom he joins. By contrast, Merlin's background is unique to him, as he is conceived by a devil and freed from his demonic agency by God. This ambiguous heritage is the origin of his supernatural abilities, which render Merlin near-omniscient and capable of various kinds of magic. Merlin himself occasionally brings up the story of his birth to legitimize his requests:

> nostre sires qui est poissans seur toutes choses il ma doune sens & sauoir de connoistre & sauoir des coses qui sont a uenir . & par cele souuraine virtu mont perdu li dyable que iou se dieu plaist ne serai ia a lor uolente . Sire ore saues vous dont li pooirs me vient des choses que ie fais . si vous dirai ce que ie sai que nostre sires veut que vous facies . & quant vous le

[224] For the purposes of this discussion, I do not distinguish between the *Roman* and *Suite* sections. For a characterization that distinguishes between the sections, see Koble, *Les suites* 62-79.

> saures si gardes que vous loneres selonc sa uolente . … Et se vous me crees vous feres encontre ces coses ce que ie vous lo . & se vous le faites & vous me voles croire vous en seres encore moult lies . (53-4)

> Our Lord, who is powerful over all things, has given me the intelligence and the knowledge to recognize and to know things that are to come. And thanks to that sovereign power, the devils lost me, for I will never, God willing, be subject to their will. Sir, now do you know where my power to do the things I do comes from? I will tell you what I know Our Lord wants you to do. And when you know it, be sure to honor Him according to His will. … If you believe me, you will do what I advise you to do about these things. If you do this, and if you will believe me, you will be very glad indeed. (60-1)

Merlin's omniscience and omnipotence are proven time and again whenever he appears in *LeM*: unfailingly, Merlin's words turn out to be true and his abilities sufficient to solve whatever problem is at hand. His character is thus cast as utterly reliable with regard to both knowledge and power. Among the character-related facts that can be inferred about Merlin, this is arguably the most relevant one, as it matches the importance which *LeM* grants to information and truth throughout. A discussion of how Merlin's infallibility shapes his interactions with other characters and his role as orchestrator of events is thus in order.

Many of *LeM*'s characters have correspondences elsewhere in Arthurian literature, and Merlin is no exception to this. All three character-related facts mentioned above – his ambiguous heritage, supernatural abilities, and near-omniscience – have textual predecessors: all three are attributed to Merlin in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*. The fact that Merlin never lies is a particularly consistent part of his characterization in earlier textual sources as well, though here this trait serves very different narrative functions. The *Vita Merlini* (edited as *Life of Merlin*) has Merlin state seemingly impossible truths, leading to him being ridiculed or doubted by other characters. The entertainment value of the narrative results from reading about the events which "proved the prophet a true one" (73).[225] Cases such as these show that the infallible truth of Merlin's words is, in some earlier sources, one of the most basic premises of the stories in question.[226]

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[225] "fecit vatem … verum" (l. 415).

[226] The reliability of Merlin's words continues to be a stable character-related fact after *LeM*'s composition as well. For example, the *Rheinischer Merlin* fragment, which recasts

Two episodes in the *Roman* section of *LeM* follow the same outline as parts of the *Vita Merlini* and establish the infallibility of his prophecies in the same way.[227] More commonly, however, Merlin's predictions lend Arthur and his allies vital advantages over his enemies in a relatively straightforward manner, and his instructions to Arthur unfailingly work to the benefit of the latter as well. The truth of Merlin's predictions within *LeM*, of course, also extends to his intertextual and transfictional prophecies, which do not become true within *LeM* but are automatically assumed to be truthful because of the authority of Merlin's words within this text. Merlin's infallible omniscience, then, contributes to the effect of predetermination – a future set in stone long before it happens – that pervades *LeM*.

Another pattern of character information that reiterates the reliability of Merlin's prophecies lies in the statements of other characters about him. Merlin's characterization as infallible is thus reflected in other characters' *Fremdbild* of him. Other characters repeatedly state that he never gives wrong information. An example of this occurs early in *LeM* after Merlin has used his knowledge to establish his authority, following which those present say amongst themselves that "anyone who does not believe Merlin in everything he says is mad, for it seems to us that all his words are true" (53).[228] When Merlin announces that Arthur will never see him again and leaves for the final time, Arthur is devastated because he does not doubt his words for one second: "He never lied in anything he told me" (483).[229] *LeM*'s characters and readers alike witness Merlin's predictions, which

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Merlin as a saint-like figure, also focuses primarily on the truth of his words: "No one ever heard him tell a lie. Nevertheless, they tried to make him lie. When he died, Merlin had in no way lied or done any misdeed" (my translation; "It inhoirde neiman dat gesagen, / Dat einge logen were. / Ey doch pinde mans dicke sere, / Dat si it loigene deiden sagen. / Hey verscheit also van den dagen, / Dat hei, Merlin, in loig noch in misdeide / An in geiner hande steide", ll. 4-10). See also the *Roman de Meliadus*, in which a knight recounts a conversation with "Merlin, whom we have never heard tell a lie" (my translation; "Merlyns, que nos n'avom mie encore trové mençongier en parole", p. 491, para. 371), to which his addressee responds: "since Merlin has said it, it is not possible that it will not happen" (my translation; "puisque Merlyns le dist, il ne puet estre qu'il n'aviegne", p. 494, para. 374).

[227] See the episode of the jealous baron's threefold death (50-3; 45-8) and the broken taboo of the empty seat (60-5; 54-8).

[228] "moult est fols qui ne croit merlin de quanquil dist que il nous samble que toutes ses paroles sont voires" (47).

[229] "quar il ne menti onques de riens" (453).

are then confirmed by the unfolding plot, leaving no room for doubt as to the infallibility of Merlin's knowledge.[230]

The characters' acknowledgements of Merlin's reliability are tied to obedience to him, since other characters are shown to trust that following instructions given by Merlin is the best course of action. Early in *LeM*, and for each consecutive king alike, Merlin uses his reliability to secure himself a position at the king's side. In these scenes, the transactional nature of Merlin's relations with the kings comes into focus. Rather than helping simply in return for an official position as advisor, he consistently negotiates something in return for his help, making a *covenaunt* with the respective king (e.g. 33; 31, 55; 49, 74; 66). Although there are sometimes specific rewards in the *Roman*, Merlin more usually demands absolute obedience in return for his help throughout, as a result of which he lives "like a lord" over the kings (54).[231] With Merlin's control over other characters, he stands above, not with them. Merlin's infallibility ensures that the obedience he demands is consistently granted in return for his assistance or instructions.

[230] However, Merlin is occasionally depicted refusing to give or deliberately obscuring knowledge which other characters are not supposed to have. So, for example, he refuses to tell Arthur who the best knight in the world will be, but the information he does provide about that knight – partially in the form of obscure animal prophecies – is true (e.g. 230-1; 214, 269; 250). This, too, has parallels in other texts about Merlin, such as the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in which Merlin refuses to prophesize when asked (liber viii, para. 128) and in which the prophecies that he does make in the text are obscure enough to have sparked numerous attempts at interpretation in the Middle Ages (see liber vii; Veysseyre and Wille).

[231] The Old French has "tous sires" (48), and Berthelot and Walter translate similarly with "domina entièrement" (*Les premiers faits* p. 679, para. 111). Here and where other characters are concerned, the translations treat the word as an officially higher position such as that of master, lord, or overlord. The same phrase is translated differently elsewhere in both modern translations. In another passage early in *LeM*, for example, where Merlin is "tous sires & del conseil le roy" (45), the translations treat him as the leader of the king's council (*The Story* 50, *Les premiers faits* p. 671, para. 102). The phrase is repeated and translated similarly shortly afterward (58; 52 and *Les premiers faits* p. 688, para. 117). This limits the authority the phrase conveys to a somewhat official function. When Arthur rewards Merlin much later in the text by making him his and his country's "sires", Merlin's status is translated as "lord" (405; 378). The hesitation in translating this phrase as "lord" is understandable in that there is no context surrounding any of these passages to clarify what Merlin's status as "sires" entails, but the inconsistent translations do obscure the consistency with which Merlin regains and maintains this status in each king's reign.

While Merlin usually relies only on knowledge and words to exert control over other characters and orchestrate the plot through them, he occasionally intervenes more directly by using his magic abilities, which appear to be limitless and multiform. Most prominently, Merlin shapeshifts and magically disappears on multiple occasions and is able to move impossibly fast between far-apart places. Beyond this, there are numerous abilities that are mentioned only once. For instance, he lifts Stonehenge and transports it to Britain (59; 53); he changes the weather by creating firestorms (281; 261), dust storms (242; 225), or wind and fog (124; 114); he transforms the landscape around him by creating a magic orchard (226; 210) or a river (256; 237); he forces other characters to sleep and fall in love with one another (432-3; 404-5); and more. *LeM* equips Merlin with magic skills to fit any situation or problem that needs to be solved. As with his predictions, Merlin's performances of such magic never fail and are met with other characters' amazement, wonder, or bewilderment (e.g. 103; 93, 226; 210). Moreover, some of Merlin's magic performances are so miraculous that characters explicitly confirm that only Merlin or God would have been capable of such a deed (e.g. 59; 53). The focalization of such scenes on other characters amplifies the marvellous effect of his supernatural abilities.[232] Merlin's abilities and other characters' reactions to them thus place him above them and even beyond the realm of humanity itself.

With regard to Merlin's characterization in *LeM*, then, the most important pattern surrounding this character is his infallibility. Leaving nothing to chance, *LeM*'s protagonist directs the events of its *histoire* either through use of magic or by controlling, manipulating, and instructing other characters with his words.[233] This puts Merlin in a fundamentally different position in the plot than other characters. His knowledge, plans, and instructions precede the actual events as they are brought to pass by other characters. While all other characters respond to events when they happen and with limited insight, Merlin knows everything long before it becomes reality. While all other characters are concerned with finding and maintaining their place in a collective, Merlin stands above and beyond them,

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[232] For similar examples in medieval literature, see Fludernik 96-7, Zudrell, *Historische Narratologie* 26-7. For more on focalization where Merlin is involved, see section 5.2 below.
[233] See also ch. 1, section 5 for examples of Merlin's orchestrations.

guiding others and intervening only when he sees fit. Indeed, Merlin spends much of the narrated time of *LeM* away from court, returning to the king's side only to solve an acute problem and disappear again.

Only Merlin's physical distance from court allows problems to surface in spite of the existence of his omniscient character. Merlin's absences are explained with different character-related facts. Thus, Merlin himself explains his absences to Pendragon and Uther by citing his nature and his knowledge of the future, immediately following up this revelation with the first demand he makes of the brothers:

> il me conuient par force de nature estre a la fie hors de la gent . … mais itant i a se vous uoles auoir ma compaignie quil ne vous encaille ia quant iou men irai & toutes les fois quant iou reuenrais si me faites grant ioie deuant les gens si men ameront de miex li preudome qui vous ameront . & li maluais & cels qui vous haront me haront . & se vous me monstres bele chiere il nen oseront ia faire samblant . (43)
>
> I must, by the force of my nature, be away from people at times. … you must not be upset whenever I go away, and whenever I come, show everyone how glad you are to have me back, so that the worthy people who love you will love me all the more. The evildoers and those who hate you will hate me, but if you show me a cheerful face, they will not dare do otherwise. (48)[234]

Henceforth, Merlin only appears in public in disguise, and he soon refuses to openly prophesize in public as well (53; 48). His avoidance of the public is explicitly explained with the *Fremdbild* the public has of him. This *Fremdbild*, he states, mirrors the public's attitude toward the king. Elsewhere, Merlin clarifies to Pendragon that "the sooner I [come to your court], the sooner your barons will be upset about it" (45),[235] suggesting that his appearances at court are sufficient to cause trouble among the king's ranks. As expected in *LeM*, Merlin's observations ring true, as is evidenced in the rebellious barons' treatment of him, for instance.[236] His anonymous appearances in public thus serve in part to stave off the seemingly inevitable rebellion of the barons. After this rebellion has taken place at the beginning of the *Suite*, Merlin continues to disguise himself "because there were

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[234] Merlin repeats this information to Arthur in a similar passage early in the *Suite* section; see 108; 97.
[235] "plustost iroie & plustost sen courceroient ostre baron" (40).
[236] See 102; 91, 121; 111.

many people in the country who wanted him dead" (134).[237] Throughout *LeM*, Merlin thus appears in public in an unspecified disguise for his own protection (49; 44, 134; 123). Implicitly, this means that "the likeness in which people knew him" is an unspecified disguise, a persona which he assumes when he has to face the public.[238] Many of Merlin's appearances in *LeM*, then, have this character deliberately increase his distance from other characters, remove himself from society whenever possible, and conceal his identity. This behaviour is starkly different from the other characters in *LeM*, who are focused on becoming or being a part of a larger collective.

Merlin controls whether and how he is perceived by other characters, allowing him to shape the *Fremdbild* that other characters have of him. While his disguises often simply serve to render him anonymous to others, he also frequently assumes shapes exclusive to certain collectives, appearing variously as a noble, knight, beggar, and so on. In doing so, he freely crosses societal boundaries in both directions whenever he wants, gaining access to different collectives in the process. Another aspect of this lies in Merlin's ability to teleport, which makes other characters lose sight of him on many occasions: "Then Merlin left the king, and when he was away from the army he disappeared so [quickly] that no one knew what had happened to him" (297).[239]

Crucial character-related facts in Merlin's characterization overlap with other Arthurian texts which mention him. Further, innovative aspects of his characterization combine with these pre-established facts and emphasize his

[237] "por ce quil a moult de gent el pais qui le uoldroient auoir mort" (123).
[238] "la samblance en quoi les gens le connoissoient" (44). Somewhat confusingly, this appearance is also called his "his true likeness" (49; "droite semblance" 44). In this and other contexts, however, it becomes clear that only a handful of trusted characters ever see Merlin's true form. The fact that neither Merlin's true nor public likeness are ever described in *LeM* posed an interesting problem for the manuscript illuminators. Typically, Merlin is depicted as unarmoured and cloaked (see e.g. BnF fr. 95, 268r). Some illuminations stray from this; for example, BnF fr. 9123 depicts Merlin as hairy and naked (see e.g. 96r, 116r, 143r), and BL Add. 38117 depicts him as child-sized (see e.g. 48r, 111v, 161v; note that this is a *Post-Vulgate Suite* manuscript). In any case, even when Merlin's appearance is not specified in the text, he is still usually easily identifiable in the illuminations.
[239] My emendations. "Atant sen parti merlins du roy & et quant il fu hors del ost si sesuanui tantost que on ne sot quil fu deuenus" (260).

uniqueness as a character. When compared to *LeM*'s other characters, who are characterized by sameness and collectivity, Merlin thus stands out as unique. The status of "lord" over the kings is his alone, yet Merlin often leaves this position behind either to leave court or to insert himself into society while transformed. Impossible for other characters to track, *LeM*'s protagonist crosses societal boundaries unnoticed. This grants him a relatively open relationship to society. Unlike most of *LeM*'s characters, Merlin is not concerned with the desire to prove himself, nor is he worried about misbehaving. His absolute control over other characters' knowledge – or even recognition – of him, as well as his unrivalled status at court, further single him out as different. This uniqueness, this difference, ties in with his role as the orchestrator of events in *LeM*: his ability to control the plot goes hand in hand with his supernatural abilities. Overall, then, Merlin is not attributed to any character collective, and is depicted as unconcerned about the *Fremdbild* other characters have of him. In these aspects, he is already completely different from the characterization of most of *LeM*'s characters.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that there is, to my knowledge, only a single case where Merlin is interchangeable with other characters (see table 2.3 above). Even when Merlin is in the company of others, his actions differ from those of other characters, and he does not typically act on the behalf of others either. This extends to cases such as battle scenes, where he performs a unique role while most other characters represent their army or division, or their standing within it. As I have shown above, battle depictions usually follow a hierarchy in describing various representatives of groups performing deeds in battle. Merlin, however, does not fight himself but guides the various divisions to where they need to be (e.g. 292; 272) and criticizes various leaders in battle for their decisions, provoking them to fight harder (e.g. 424; 396). His role in this martial context, then, mirrors the guidance and instruction he provides outside of combat. Since Merlin does not act on behalf of those who surround him, this means that, unlike most other characters in *LeM*, his actions are not typically representative of a collective to which he belongs. Instead, he has a role of his own within the groups into which he inserts himself.

The majority of *LeM*'s characters are defined primarily by chivalric values and courtly etiquette, which is a major theme of the text. Merlin's characterization instead interacts with another recurring theme of *LeM*, namely the contrast between nature and nurture.[240] This theme often appears when a character does not behave according to his lineage, and in particular when characters do not grow up with their family. The general tendency in *LeM* is that whatever happens after one's birth outweighs one's ancestry. For instance, Merlin intervenes in Arthur's "nurture" when he removes Arthur from his parents to have him grow up with Kay's family instead (85-6; 76). Kay's foul mouth is explained by the fact that he was suckled not by his own mother but by a nurse (114; 104). The False Guenevere and Yvain the Bastard are both adulterously conceived by a king with his seneschal's wife, yet what makes the False Guenevere evil and Yvain the Bastard good is what happens after their birth: the False Guenevere grows up in the context of an ongoing conflict involving her mother, who is kept imprisoned by Leodagan (159-60; 149), while Yvain the Bastard is, from what one can infer, treated the same as his brother, Yvain the Great, and his mother is released (177-8; 165-6).

Merlin, who is conceived by a devil but given free will by God, occasionally brings up his own background to gain other characters' trust. While he clearly works to help Arthur, his actions are often questionable.[241] Despite his God-given motivations, which justify his orchestrations and the control he exerts over other characters, his use of this control can be uncomfortable. A good example is the conception of Hector, who will be a great asset to Arthur in the future. Merlin brings this about by casting a love spell, essentially forcing Ban, who is married, and the underage virgin daughter of his host to have sex (432-3; 404-5).[242] In other

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[240] The following discussion applies to the *Roman* section more than to the *Suite*. With its extensive extratextually predetermined outcomes, the *Suite*'s themes and lessons are harder to identify than those of the shorter *Roman*, where the "seams" between the sources are much less obvious and source material is combined for an evidently new purpose.

[241] It should be noted that ambiguous depictions of Merlin extend back to oral tradition, which also emphasizes entertainment, whereas Merlin's conception by a devil traces back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The combination of both traits and the resulting connection to the theme of nature versus nurture is thus a novelty in *LeM*, even though the character-related facts themselves are not.

[242] Beyond the perhaps anachronistic concerns with consent and legal age, the scene creates this effect of discomfort by repeatedly referring to the characters' distress,

instances, Merlin accepts the deaths of unimportant characters in order to establish his authority. For example, the father of a judge who doubts Merlin kills himself, thereby demonstrating the truth of Merlin's words; Merlin even tells the judge beforehand: "This way you can prove that I know the things that are to come" (19).[243]

What is noticeable about this contrast between questionable methods and good results is that the focus lies clearly on the latter. Thus, when the judge's father dies, the judge is amazed ("sesmeruella moult" 18) and has no second thoughts about the man's death, even though he was related to him. In such cases, the characters who die are unnamed and introduced specifically so they can die in the scene at hand. In the case of Ban and the girl whom he impregnates, she falls in love with him after an initial and obligatory moment of shame (434; 406). Ban, in turn, never thinks about his adultery again and does not mention it to his wife. While Merlin's methods are thus reminiscent of his demonic heritage, they advance his plans for Arthur's gain.

### 5.2 Strictly Inscrutable: Merlin's Character Design

Most characters in *LeM* have overlapping characterizations, whereas Merlin's characterization sets him apart from others. The same can be said about their character designs. The overlapping characterizations in *LeM* are not simply a matter of the same character-related facts resulting from different character information; instead, the same character information is repeated and attributed to different characters. The sameness of *LeM*'s characters is thus found in the *histoire* and *discours* alike. The character information attributed to Merlin, however, stands out just like his characterization does.

Some character-related facts, albeit few in number, overlap with the characterization of other characters and should be addressed in brief before I move on to Merlin's character design. Most strikingly, Merlin is not the only character with supernatural abilities in *LeM*. Morgan le Fay, Guinebal, and Nimiane acquire magic from Merlin, and Nimiane's exposition involves supernatural beings and

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confusion, and shame. Despite their magically induced feelings, they are aware that their love is wrong and are powerless to help themselves.

[243] "par ice pues tu esrpouer que iou sai les coses qui sont a uenir" (17).

their plans for her, as is the case with Merlin.[244] Given that they are all Merlin's pupils, the immediate effect is more to align these three characters with one another through their similar relationships with Merlin than to approximate Merlin with them.[245] Moreover, the status of Merlin's pupils in *LeM* is rather different from Merlin's own status: while Merlin is intricately involved in the plot, Merlin's pupils are not, their actions in *LeM* primarily serving to draw intertextual and transfictional connections. For example, Guinebal appears only twice in *LeM*. In his first appearance, he meets Merlin and learns magic from him (116-7; 105-6), and in the second, he uses his magic to woo a lady and create a magic chessboard for her. This magic chessboard reappears in the *Lancelot*.[246]

The similarities in characterization between Merlin and other characters are thus few in number, and the same applies to character design. Many of the differences between Merlin and most of the other characters are obvious: Merlin speaks considerably more than other characters do, for example, and is given more space in *LeM* overall. The character information attributed to Merlin is not attributed to other characters, meaning that any patterns it forms by repetition remain bound only to this one character. Other major differences in character design between Merlin and *LeM*'s other characters lie in focalization, that is, the relationship between the reader's knowledge and that of the character on which the narrative focalizes.

Characters' internal states of mind are a first point of interest. Most of *LeM*'s characters react similarly and in unsurprising ways to what happens around them, and their motivations, reasoning, and decision-making are transparent to the

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[244] Another loose parallel to Merlin's birth worthy of note concerns fatherhood. Merlin has three father-like figures in his father demon, God, and Blaise, and Arthur has three father-like figures in Uther, Merlin, and Antor. Both Merlin and Arthur were conceived through trickery. It should be noted, however, that the basic framework of both characters' births is taken from older sources and adapted in *LeM*; the parallel, while expanded and more noticeable in *LeM* compared to its sources, is thus not original to this text.
[245] However, the three never meet or act as one in *LeM*; while their role within and, in part, beyond *LeM* is similar, I do not understand them as a character group in *LeM* because of this.
[246] Guinebal's magic here bears similarities to Merlin's elaborate illusions when wooing Nimiane (263-4; 244-6). For the chessboard scene in the *Lancelot*, see *Lancelot: Parts V and VI*, ch. 154. Note that there are a number of discrepancies between the versions told in *LeM* and the *Lancelot*.

reader. In such cases, the reader often knows more than the character in focus, making the passage involved a case of zero focalization. For example, when Gawain defeats Clarion, *LeM* provides information which neither Gawain nor anyone else involved in the battle at hand could have, namely that Clarion "fainted from the agony he felt" (366) at Gawain's strike.[247] Clarion's men, however, upon finding Clarion, "gathered all around him, because they believed he was dead, and they were weeping and wailing so loudly that Sir Gawain heard the screams from where he was" (366).[248] The mismatch in knowledge between the reader and the Saxons is emphasized by the distancing phrase "they believed he was dead", which highlights that their reaction – abandoning their pursuit of Gawain – is caused by a mistaken understanding.

Merlin's characterization as omniscient, by definition, pre-empts any misunderstandings on his part. His infallibility is a pattern in *LeM* which leads to the assumption throughout that he cannot be deceived, distracted, or manipulated. Interestingly, direct confirmations of Merlin's train of thought or reasoning are exceedingly rare in *LeM*, and the exact extent of his knowledge remains inaccessible to the reader most of the time. When passages focalize on Merlin, this results in external focalization: the reader knows less than Merlin because they do not know what Merlin knows, thinks, or feels.

Uther's dying moments are a case in point. In the scene in question, Uther has been ill for some time and has grown so weak that he can no longer speak. Merlin arrives at court and tells the public that he will make Uther speak a final time. When he encounters Uther in his pitiful state, he does just that:

> li rois regarde merlin & quant il lot auise si se tourna deuers lui a son pooir & fist samblant quil le conneust . & merlins dist as barons qui illuec estoient & as prelas de sainte eglize . qui voldra oir la parole deraine que li rois dira si se traie pres . … lors se tourne dautre part dales son cauech & li conseille moult bas en loreille tu as fait moult bele fin se la conscience est tele comme la samblance . & si te di que tes fiex sera chief de ton regne apres toi par la uertu de ihesu crist & il sera acomplisables de la table roonde que tu as fondee . Quant li rois oi ce si se traist vers lui & lui dist por dieu prie lui quil prieche ihesu crist por moi . & lors dist merlins a cels

[247] "se pasme de langoisse quil a" (341).
[248] "savnoient tout enuiron lui car bien quidoient quil fust mors si en faisoient si grant duel que mesires Gauaine en oi clerement les cris de la ou il estoit" (342).

> qui illuec estoient ore aues vous oi ce que vous ne quidies pas que estre peust . & tant sachies que cest la daaraine parole que li rois me die iamais . lors sen ala merlins & tout li autre … . (79)
>
> The king looked at Merlin, and when he caught sight of him, he turned toward him as best he could and gave a look of recognition.
> And Merlin said to the barons who were there and to the prelates of Holy Church, "Anyone who wishes to hear the last words the king will speak, let him draw near." …
> Merlin then turned around to the head of the king's bed and whispered quietly in his ear, "You have come to a very beautiful end, if your conscience is as your looks say it is. And I tell you that your son will be head of your kingdom after you through the power of Jesus Christ, and he will perfect the Round Table you have founded."
> When the king heard this, he pulled toward him and said, "For God's sake, bid him pray to Jesus Christ for me."
> Then Merlin said to those who were there, "Now you have heard what you did not believe could be. And you may be sure that these are the last words the king will ever say."
> Then Merlin went away along with all the others … . (88-9)

*LeM* describes no emotions or thoughts, internalized or verbalized, on Merlin's part for a king whom he has served for his entire reign. Merlin even uses the occasion of Uther's death to perform a "miracle" for the grieving bystanders: by sharing knowledge with Uther which he had previously refused to give, he makes him speak for a final time. The immediate result is that the barons and clerks, who thought Uther had already passed on, marvel at this and admire Merlin, and they soon ask him what to do next (88-9; 78-9).

The reasons for Merlin's behaviour are opaque, but it may be possible to infer them from its outcome. As elsewhere, because of Merlin's omniscience, everything that happens must be part of his plan, and by the end of the episode, all the pieces have fallen into place and his scheme makes sense.[249] In this case, the miracle of Uther's final words before the barons and the Church increases their respect for Merlin, such that he is later asked for advice in the search for a successor for Uther.

There are a few isolated instances in *LeM* where Merlin's state of mind is internally focalized. These consist primarily in mentions of Merlin's love for the kings he serves. What stands out about this love is that it usually stands in the transactional context of *covenaunts* or, more generally, a demand for absolute obedience in

[249] See ch. 1, section 5.

return. Thus, for example, the sentences that introduce Merlin's proposal to set up a Round Table directly connect Merlin's love to something he wants from Uther:

> & merlins sen vint au roy uterpandragon si le serui moult & ama . si auoit lonc tans passe quil sauoit bien ou il auoit mise samor & quil le kerroit de ce quil diroit .
> A vn ior auint que merlins sen uint au roy si li dist a conseil . il couendroit que ie me descourisse a vous des plus haus consaus que ie sace . … por ce que ie vous aim vous uoel iou dire vne chose . Ne vous souient il mie que augis eust mort si iou ne fuisse . & por ce mest il bien auis que vous me deusies bien croire & amer . (53)

> … and Merlin came back to Uther Pendragon; he served him a great deal and loved him. A long time had gone by since he had come to understand in whom he had put his love, and he knew that he would believe him in everything he said.
> One day it happened that Merlin came to the king and said to him privately, "I must talk to you about the highest secrets I know. … It is because I love you that I want to tell you something. Don't you remember that Hengist would have killed you if it hadn't been for me? Thus it seems to me that you ought well to believe me and love me." (59)

In this brief passage, the reader learns that Merlin perceives his love for the king and the king's trust in him as connected. When the right time comes, he uses his love to ensure that Uther agrees to his next demand. Merlin thus mentions his love and servitude before reminding Uther that he owes him his life. When Merlin asks for Uther's trust and love, Uther agrees without hesitation to do anything Merlin wants and to believe anything he says, as a direct result of which he gives all control over the construction of the Round Table and the election of its members to Merlin.

One effect of such exchanges is that Merlin's love toward the kings tends to come across less as a genuine emotional attitude than as a conditional part of a *covenaunt*, especially since there are no descriptions of how Merlin expresses his love in such passages. This becomes even more evident when a king does doubt Merlin. For example, when Merlin is about to leave Arthur, Ban, and Bors for a while and Ban worries what will happen in his absence, Merlin answers, "do you then believe that I won't be back? Take care never to think of such a thing or you will lose my love" (192).[250] Merlin's love for the kings is, it seems, utterly

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[250] "quidies vous dont que ie ne reuiegne mie . ore gardes que iamais ni penses car vous auries mamor perdue" (178). For a similar threat, see 324; 301.

conditional on their behaviour. The kings are acutely aware of this conditionality, and in their obedience to Merlin against their own reasoning, they prove this over and over again.

Where most of *LeM*'s characters are concerned, it is common for depictions of characters to describe states of mind both internally and externally. The internal state of mind of characters and their expressions of it usually match.[251] This is the case, for example, when Leodagan and Arthur are too obsessed about someone to continue eating, or when knights fight with new fervour to avenge someone. This congruence of internal and external character information yields another pattern concerning *LeM*'s characters, namely that they are fundamentally straightforward in their behaviour.

This is not quite the case for Merlin, as I will show with a discussion of outward expressions of his state of mind. I have already established the pattern that Merlin does not lie in *LeM*, and that other characters are aware of this. This is a fundamental pattern which governs many exchanges between Merlin and other characters. Thus, when Merlin provides information to other characters, such information is categorically true. When Merlin provides directions for the Battle of Salisbury, for instance, there is little reason to doubt his words. After asking Pendragon and Uther to gather their forces for the upcoming battle against the Saxons, he provides them with a strategy and explains it in detail:

> & eslongier loins de la riue si ne sauront ia que vous aies uo gent assamble . & quant il seront esloigniet vous enuoieres de uostre gent par deuers les uaisceaus por faire samblant que vous ne uoles mie quil repairent . & quant il verront ce si sen esmaieront moult & li vns de vous . ij . i uoist auoec uos gens . & si ales si pres que vous les facies logier malgre aus ensus de la riue . & quant il i seront logiet si auront grant disete daigue si esmaieront li plus hardi diaus & ensi les feres tenir . ij . iors & au tierch iour vous combateres a aus . & si vous les faites ausi ie vous di tout uraiement que les gens de uostre regne auront la uictoire . (49)
>
> And you will let them get a long way in from the water, and they will not yet know that you have gathered your forces. After they have gone in quite a way, you will send some of your men to their boats to make it seem that you want to stop them from getting back. When they see that,

[251] The relevant distinction in Jannidis's catalogue of types of character information is that between the "point of attribution" (Ort der Bindung) as internal or external (206-7).

> they will be disheartened. Then one of you two must go there with your army, and you will move so near them that you will force them to camp away from the water. When they have set up their encampment, they will suffer from a lack of water, and the boldest among them will be distraught. You will hold them there two days, and on the third you will fight them. And if you do just this, then I tell you truly that the people of your kingdom will have the victory. (55)

No contingency plans are needed in Merlin's scheme, as he anticipates every step taken by the Saxons and every reaction of theirs to the strategy he has devised. Explanations of this kind from Merlin occur primarily before battles in *LeM*, but at the beginning of Arthur's reign, Merlin also explains to him the benefit of the next steps he has in mind for the young king (102-3; 92-3, 106-7; 96-7). This stands in particularly stark contrast to the frequent misunderstandings that arise in battle for the other characters in *LeM*, and underlines Merlin's reliability.

By contrast, expressions of emotion on Merlin's part work to a different effect. In this case, there is no pattern that might contextualize the character information involved as genuine or not, because Merlin's emotions are not typically described internally. What does stand out, however, is that Merlin's expressed emotions always achieve something to his benefit. For example, Merlin insults Arthur in battle, asking him, "Who is this coward? Why don't you do quickly what you have started out to do? Everyone can see that you are afraid!" (166).[252] Reacting to the danger of being perceived as a coward, and believing that Merlin already sees him as one, Arthur is "deeply ashamed" and immediately charges at the enemy, winning the battle shortly after. In other cases, Merlin's expressions of emotion are non-verbal. For example, when Pendragon shows disrespect for Merlin by helping a baron test the truth of Merlin's prophecies, Merlin gives the prophecies as requested, but "looked upset" (51; 52)[253] and criticizes Pendragon for his behaviour in private. Later, Pendragon "believed that Merlin was upset, and he was very sorry about it …" (53) and renews his efforts to please him.[254] Merlin's expressions of negative emotions – his disdain for Arthur and his anger at Pendragon – directly influence these characters in these scenes. While Arthur's

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[252] "que est che recreans que ne faites vous tost che que vous aues empris a faire ore pert bien que vous aues paor eue" (154).
[253] "fist samblant quil fust iries" (46); "fist samblant com sil se courechast" (47).
[254] "quida quil fust corecies si len pesa moult" (48).

desire to redeem himself is connected with chivalric values and the ever-present concern with *Fremdbilder* more broadly, Pendragon's worry about Merlin's anger in particular shows how afraid he is of losing Merlin's love, underlining the transactional nature of their relationship.

The use of phrases such as "looked upset" (sembla) is striking in moments such as these because it signals a difference between how things appear to be externally and what they really are internally. Unlike other characters, whose internal states of mind and external expressions thereof are usually aligned, there is no such confirmation of Merlin's anger from an internal perspective. As a result of the external focalization on Merlin, the reader is invited to question Merlin's inaccessible state of mind: is he really angry, or is he merely using his external expressions to manipulate other characters? Notably, the descriptions of Merlin's outward emotions tend provide an impulse for other characters to act. These impulses function particularly well in cause-and-effect relations because of other characters' concern with external image (*Fremdbild*) and their fear of losing Merlin's love, but they are also evident in Merlin's laughter, which causes other characters to ask him about the reason for his joy, upon which he typically makes a revelation he wishes to share (e.g. 31-33; 28-30).[255]

It is in instances such as these that the difference between the reader's knowledge and that of the characters who encounter Merlin becomes significant: because of the external focalization of such passages – meaning that the reader does not know Merlin's state of mind – an inference must be drawn from the description of his external expressions of emotion. The reader's knowledge of Merlin is thus largely the same as that of other characters, yet the wording of these descriptions, using phrases such as "looked as if", draws attention to them in a manner that implies they may not be genuine.

[255] See Zumthor, "Merlin", and *Les premiers faits* p. 1873, para. 430.1: Merlin's laugh "draws the attention of other characters to an event that deserves his commentary" (my translation; "… attire l'attention des autres personnages sur une occurrence qui mérite d'être commentée"). Merlin's laughter has attracted considerable attention in research of Merlin narratives. For further interpretations of its meaning and functions, see Roche-Mahdi, Thorpe, Bloch.

Overall, Merlin's expressions of emotions slot into a different narrative pattern than the descriptions of the internal emotional states of other characters. Other characters experience emotions in reaction to their surroundings, and their outward expressions of them match their feelings and explain their subsequent actions. Their outward and inward emotions typically match up. In Merlin's case, his expressions of emotion consistently stand in a cause-and-effect relationship which ultimately benefits him. However, Merlin's expressions of emotion are not followed by actions of Merlin but by actions of other characters, and there are hints that Merlin's internal state of mind differs from what he expresses. As such, the manipulative potential of Merlin's behaviour is consistently brought to the fore in his interactions with other characters. Moreover, Merlin's role as orchestrator of events and his distance from other characters are highlighted.

### 5.3 Tests and Simulations: Merlin's Shapeshifting as Characterization of Others

Focalizations on Merlin tend to be external, while focalizations on other characters tend to be internal or zero focalizations. Having discussed how this affects the perception of characters' behaviour as genuine or manipulative, I will next turn to Merlin's shapeshifting. In shapeshifting scenes, focalization and recognizability interact closely. As I have stated above, Merlin's ability to shapeshift allows him to control whether he is recognized by other characters. Moreover, he can choose his disguises to manipulate other characters' perception of him. Notably, he does not assume the shape of specific characters but is described more as disguising himself as a type. This means that he disguises himself, variously, as a noble, a knight, a beggar, and so on.[256] External focalization factors into this insofar as Merlin is sometimes, but not always, identified by name to the reader. When Merlin's identity is revealed only in retrospect, the shapeshifting scenes in question are

[256] The only exception can be found in the episode in which Uther conceives Arthur, where Merlin disguises himself and two others as specific named characters (75-7; 67-8). It can be disregarded in this context since it is also the only case of shapeshifting that can be traced back to the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (liber viii, para. 137; see also Wace ll. 8565-8822). Merlin also transforms into an animal, becomes a disembodied voice, and, possibly, two beings at once in the *Suite* section (see 304; 283, 449; 420-1, and 436-7; 408-9); unfortunately, for reasons of space, these puzzling instances must be disregarded in this chapter.

focalized internally on the characters who encounter Merlin. Nevertheless, the *discours* amplifies his recognizability to the point where the reader is able to recognize Merlin even when he is disguised, while the focalized character does not always recognize him.

One major factor in recognizability lies in the patterns in *LeM* that apply uniquely to Merlin. Even when in disguise, Merlin continues to act more or less as usual. Depictions of Merlin's interactions outside of combat are usually concerned with the sharing of knowledge and the guiding of characters, for instance, and neither of these behaviours is adopted consistently by other characters in *LeM*.[257] Merlin often performs these unique interactions in disguise in order to remain anonymous. For example, when Gawain hears of an adventure from a mysterious knight, and when this knight guides Gawain to his mother, who is being kidnapped by Saxons, it is fairly obviously that this is Merlin even though *LeM* does not identify him until a later point (217-8; 202-3, 220-1; 205-6).

In terms of characterization, only Merlin would have both an interest in doing this and the knowledge to do so. In terms of character design, *LeM* briefly breaks the internal focalization on Gawain to interject that the knight "knew Gawainet's heart and mind so well" (217),[258] character information that is exclusively ascribed to Merlin elsewhere (e.g. 50; 45). This depiction is followed shortly after with a statement of the knight that is typical of Merlin as well: "The adventure is such that no one who undertakes it will fail" (217).[259] Further aspects of character design emerge that are unique to shapeshifting scenes and thus unique to Merlin because only he can transform his body. First, while *LeM* features almost no descriptions of appearance throughout, Merlin's appearance when in disguise – identified or not – is usually described. So, for example, while we do not learn any details about Gawain's appearance in his encounter with the mysterious knight, Merlin's disguise is described as that of

[257] When Merlin is absent, other characters rarely take on these functions. One of the few examples can be found when Aces provokes Yvain into fighting harder in a fashion similar to Merlin's role in battles (209; 194).
[258] "qui bien connoist son cuer & sa pensee" (202).
[259] "lauenture est tele que ia nus ni faudra qui i aille" (202).

> vins vns cheualiers moult bien armes sor . j . grant destrier liart tout tresue si auoit son escu troe & perciet & son hauberc desront & desmailliet en pluseurs lieus . (202)
>
> a knight in well-made armor [who came] riding a great dappled warhorse that was soaked in sweat. His shield was dented and full of holes, and his hauberk was broken through and the links had come undone in many places. (217)[260]

The absence of a name is another indicator. Almost all actions in *LeM*, no matter how insignificant they are, are attributed to named characters, even if these characters make only one appearance in the entire text.[261] Thus, when a nameless knight addresses Gawain, it immediately stands out that he is not named, which leads to a suspicion that this is actually Merlin, whose disguises do not normally reproduce specific characters but represent roles, jobs, or social standings.

Merlin's recognizability thus extends so far that the reader can identify him even when the *LeM* does not explicitly name him. This is a stark difference from most other characters, who have little but their name to distinguish them from others. Merlin's uncanny behaviour is supported on the *discours* level with a character design that makes him stand out further even when anonymous.

What is noteworthy about these shapeshifting scenes, however, is that Merlin continues his normal role as guide or orchestrator of events under different circumstances. In the exchange between Merlin disguised as a knight and Gawain, Merlin manipulates Gawain into acting by calling him a coward, makes a *covenaunt* with him, offers supernatural knowledge, and so on. This behaviour stands in contrast to his disguise as a knight but goes unquestioned by other characters.[262] The various shapeshifting scenes add little nuance to his characterization.

Instead of characterizing Merlin, it can be argued that the shapeshifting scenes characterize those who encounter him. Two examples will demonstrate that the shapeshifting scenes can be read as tests of other characters, as simulations of

[260] See also *Les premiers faits* p. 1848, para. 212.2, and p. 1850, para. 233.1.
[261] e.g. the pair who host Arthur and his men upon their arrival in Carhaix, called Blair and Leonelle (153; 142).
[262] In other cases, Merlin adopts mannerisms of his disguise but maintains his role as orchestrator of events. The mannerisms hardly lead to character-related facts about Merlin other than, perhaps, a sense of humour.

situations without real-world consequences that allow *LeM* to explore establish character-related facts without having to tie them to the overarching plot.

Most of the more elaborate instances of shapeshifting are quite similar to one another. Merlin adopts a disguise, usually one representing a lower social class, and encounters a high-born character, usually the king. In their ensuing interaction, his behaviour clashes with what one would expect from the difference in standing between the two characters. The other character's response to Merlin's behaviour varies depending on whether they recognize him and how worthy they are. After unveiling his identity, Merlin uses their behaviour to teach them a lesson. It is crucial for this structure that at least one character does not recognize Merlin: while most characters treat Merlin with respect when they recognize him, his disguises force them to show him how they behave toward others. Merlin's shapeshifting can thus be read as simulating interactions in which other characters are confronted with their own behaviour.

The first time Merlin appears to Arthur in disguise is a good example of this (132-4; 122-4). Arthur, Ban, and Bors encounter Merlin, who looks and behaves like a bird-catcher and is identified to the reader from the outset. The other characters do not recognize Merlin, and Arthur asks him how much he wants for the ducks he has with him. Merlin falls silent, and the narrative at this point describes his appearance:

> il ot chaucies vns grans solers de vache & ot uestu cote & surcot de burel & caperon si fu chains dune coroie neuee de mouton . & sesoit gros & lons & noirs & hirechies si samble bien cruel & felon . (122)
>
> The freeman had great cowhide shoes on his feet and was dressed in a tunic and coat of burlap and a cape, and around his waist was a knotted sheepskin belt. He was big and tall, black, and hairy, and he looked ruthless and evil … (133)

Merlin's evident low social standing then clashes with his rude response:

> iou ne prise mie roy qui trop aime son tresor & qui est regretiers . Et mal dehait ait rois regretiers qui nose faire dun poure homme riche quant bien le puet faire . Iou vous doins … les oisiaus … vous naues pas cuer de douner la tierce partie de vostre auoir qui en terre pourira anchois que vous laies trait … . (122)
>
> I do not respect a king who loves his treasure too much and brings sorrow. Curses on a woebegone king who does not make a poor man

> wealthy when he can! I'll give you the birds … . You don't have the heart to give a third of your wealth, which, in any case, will rot in the ground before you dig it up! (133)

Faced with criticism for lacking generosity, and curious about the suggestion of buried treasure in his lands, Arthur attempts to engage with the bird-catcher, but with little success.

The first part of this scene thus draws attention to Arthur's generosity, or, at present, the lack of it. The fact that Arthur asked the freeman's price for his birds means, according to Merlin, that he is only willing to give as much as necessary instead of giving as much as he deems right, or even as much as he can. As this exchange between Merlin and Arthur has shown, Merlin's disguise allows for interaction that is representative in nature. Rather than being stingy toward a particular person of lower social standing, the exchange can be read as pointing to Arthur's broader lack of generosity, which Merlin immediately points out. At the same time, the fact that it is indeed Merlin, and not an actual bird-catcher, with whom this exchange takes place, allows Arthur's error to become a learning experience for him without his misbehaviour bearing negative consequences.

In the ensuing exchange between the three kings and Merlin, Merlin's depiction corresponds to other shapeshifting scenes. Thus, he announces a visit while in disguise, as he has done in other shapeshifting scenes. Moreover, Merlin's typical exchanges of knowledge for a reward surface in this scene as well when he states: "If you want to, … believe me; if you don't want to, don't believe me! I have got nothing from you, so let's say we're even" (133).[263] Because Arthur did not freely give away his wealth, Merlin does not freely share information, and no exchange takes place. The same sentence also contains a pun, likewise typical for Merlin, that is based on the similarity of the words "croire" (believe, trust) and "croître" (grow), and "accroire" (borrow, loan, also persuade) and "accroître" (grow, esp. in wealth). The second part of Merlin's statement could therefore also be read as "I don't believe you in anything either, so let's say we're even", implying that generosity is fertile ground for trust and lack thereof fosters betrayal.

[263] "Se vous uoles … si men crees & si non si ne men crees pas car ie nai riens acreu a vous si soions quite & quite" (123).

Unlike other *discours* patterns, Merlin's speech can be perceived as such by other characters as well. While Arthur does not recognize Merlin for who he is, Ulfin, who has joined the scene in the meantime, recognizes Merlin immediately upon overhearing his conversation with the kings (133; 123).[264] Instead of revealing Merlin's identity to Arthur, he joins the farce together with Bretel, another knight. When they eventually reveal Merlin's identity to Arthur and Merlin transforms back into his true likeness, they "began to laugh at the way he had looked and the words he had spoken" (134).[265]

This second part of the episode thus defuses the problem of Arthur's generosity and presents the confrontation as a joke. Within this framework of everything being a mere a pretence, two characters in particular are further characterized. A contrast is established between Ulfin, whose recognition of Merlin allows him to partake in a practical joke at the expense of Arthur, and Arthur, who is shocked speechless when Ulfin reveals Merlin's identity to him. Ulfin immediately recognizes Merlin and tells Arthur that this is something he should be able to do as well. Ulfin's recognition of Merlin allows him to be temporarily superior to Arthur because he knows something Arthur does not. The failure of characters who know Merlin to recognize him at once emphasizes the extent to which other characters who do recognize him know him, and the extent to which others are mistaken in thinking that they know him. With this pattern, *LeM*'s shapeshifting episodes develop a theme of their own, namely that of semblance versus truth. This theme becomes particularly apparent when Ulfin comments on Arthur's failure to recognize Merlin: "You do not know him so well as I would like. You can see people two or three times and not recognize them, I am amazed!" (134).[266] This statement resonates with another shapeshifting scene, in which Pendragon first meets Merlin. Here, Merlin asks "how can people who don't know themselves know another?" (43) and later states "those who think they know me do not know anything about

[264] Ulfin has previously encountered Merlin in disguise (72-4; 65-6).
[265] "commenchent a rire del trait quil li auoient ueu faire & des paroles quil auoit dit" (124).
[266] "vous ne le connoisies pas si bien comme ie vaudroie car vous uees la gent . ij . fois ou . iij . & si ne les connoisies mie si men merueil moult" (123).

[my being]" (43).[267] When characters who had previously encountered Merlin fail to recognize him in a different shape, Pendragon comments that they "knew Merlin badly" (44).[268] Merlin's elusiveness is emphasized through this theme, which ties in with the overarching value of information in *LeM* and the singular status of Merlin's infallible knowledge.

Both of Arthur's failures – his lack of generosity and his failure to recognize Merlin – remain without consequence. Arthur's failure to recognize Merlin is overwritten by his surprise when Merlin reveals himself, and the entertainment value of Merlin's successful disguise is, it seems, more important than any lack of insight on Arthur's part here. With regard to generosity, Arthur is further characterized when he proves that he has learned his lesson before his lack of generosity could have a negative impact on the plot. Thus, he addresses Merlin, "Now I am certain that you love me, for you willingly gave me your birds, and I will eat them for love of you!" (134).[269] Arthur here acknowledges that Merlin's help is not unconditional and that he has to be worthy of it. Arthur's acceptance of Merlin's help in this way evokes the expectation that he will more be generous henceforth. And he does indeed become exceedingly generous, which earns him the loyalty of many a knight (e.g. 260-1; 243).

Arthur's encounter with Merlin as a bird-catcher follows the pattern of *LeM*'s shapeshifting episodes by playing with the motif of recognition, the theme of semblance versus truth, and the contrast between Merlin's disguise and behaviour. This shapeshifting episode contributes little of permanence to Merlin's characterization but is focused on that of Arthur, who gets to know Merlin better and who learns the value of generosity. This latter aspect is important for *LeM*'s plot henceforth, as it factors into Arthur's popularity with his retinue. Moreover,

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[267] My emendation. "comment puet connoistre autrui qui ne connoist soi misme" (39); "ceste gent qui me quident connoistre ne seiuent riens de mon estre" (39).
[268] "connoissies maluaisement merlin" (40). The interest in changing appearances is expanded upon in the α version of the *Roman* when it adds: "You do not know a man if you only know his appearance" (my translation; "Ne conoist pas bien home qui ne conoist que la semblance", Robert de Boron para. 34 l.32). Note also the lengthy addition to this in Vatican 1517, 147v; for a transcription, see Robert de Boron pp. 133-4n32.
[269] "or sai iou bien que vous mames car vous me dounastes volentiers vos oisiaus & iou les mangerai por lamor de vous" (124).

this episode, in mentioning hidden treasure, prefigures a later episode in which that treasure is unearthed and distributed. Arthur's lesson on generosity in this scene thus has underlying and specific resonances elsewhere in *LeM*.

Encounters between Merlin in disguise and other characters are often tied simply to Merlin's desire to remain anonymous. In other cases, the encounter can serve to characterize the characters who encounter Merlin. In the example discussed here, Arthur is thus characterized as (newly) generous. In another instance, Merlin meets Gawain and his brothers, and their different treatment of Merlin establishes Gawain's moral superiority over his brothers (195-200; 181-6). Merlin never sheds his role as orchestrator of events in these scenes, but crucially, he does not exert direct control over the other characters by instructing or commanding them. Instead, Merlin's disguises momentarily remove him from the calculations behind other characters' behaviour, allowing these episodes to add further nuance to their characterization.

### 5.4 A Borrowed Character Design: Merlin's Relationship with Nimiane

As I have established, Merlin occupies an unparalleled position of power in *LeM*, as he governs all the other characters and orchestrates the plot and is completely reliable. At the same time, he is emotionally and, often, physically disconnected from others, often staying anonymous or manipulating them to his own gain. Merlin's character design stands out among *LeM*'s characters as well: Merlin is almost exclusively externally focalized, with the reader gaining little to no insight into his emotions or thought processes unless he expresses them.

Notably, the patterns of Merlin's character are broken, in both *histoire* and *discours*, where Nimiane is concerned. Merlin and Nimiane's relationship begins partway through the *Suite* section. After making a *covenaunt* with Merlin (224-9; 208-12), she learns all of Merlin's magic in the course of their subsequent meetings. Merlin's visits to Nimiane are interspersed with the developing plot, with him returning to his usual role as orchestrator of events as soon as he leaves her side. Merlin sees his lover, who lives in Broceliande Forest, whenever he is on the Continent.[270] Thus,

[270] This observation goes somewhat against that in *Les premiers faits* that the meetings between Merlin and Nimiane follow a "rigorous calendar" (pp. 1901-2, para. 727.2). I

he sees her before his journey to Rome (301; 280), after gathering allies for Arthur on the Continent (404; 376), after escorting Ban and Bors home (435; 406), and after travelling to Jerusalem (450; 421). None of *LeM*'s other characters are aware of Merlin's relationship with Nimiane, with the exception of Blaise, who is removed from society in order to record the *histoire* of *LeM* in writing.[271]

Eventually, Nimiane uses the magic she has learned from Merlin to imprison him (481-2; 451-2). Merlin's imprisonment has textual a predecessor in the *Lancelot*, where Nimiane is mentioned as imprisoning and replacing Merlin as Arthur's advisor (see esp. *Lancelot Part I* 19-21). A few elements of the *Lancelot* and *LeM* versions of their relationship stand in contradiction. With regard to character, the description of Merlin as "deceptive and disloyal", and as possessing "false and perverted knowledge" (*Lancelot Part I* 21), paints a rather different picture of Merlin than *LeM* does with its repeated confirmations of his omnipotence and reliability. In the *Lancelot*, Merlin is imprisoned on the British Isles, in the forest of Darnantes, whereas in *LeM*, he is imprisoned on the Continent, in Broceliande Forest. Here, too, it may be prudent to consider *LeM*'s depiction of Merlin and Nimiane's relationship in connection with other potential influences, not just the *Lancelot*. The motif of an old man who is fooled by a young woman is attested well before *LeM*'s composition.[272] Around the time *LeM* was composed, this motif was employed in the popular story of Aristotle and Phyllis, where it took the more specific shape of an old and wise man who surrenders power to a charming young woman by letting her ride him.[273] Merlin's imprisonment at the hands of a woman, too, has a long history, it seems,[274] suggesting overall that a number of known and unknown influences could have had an impact on the depiction of his relationship with Nimiane in *LeM*. Merlin's uncharacteristic loss of control in these scenes may well be explained by these influences from other medieval narratives. However, the

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believe the meetings to be more intimately connected to Merlin's movements than to the temporal framework of *LeM*'s plot.

[271] See ch. 3, section 5.

[272] See Frenzel, "Alte, der verliebte".

[273] See Henri de Valenciennes's Old French *Lai d'Aristote* (edited as *Lay of Aristote*), composed in the early thirteenth century.

[274] See Berthelot; Larrington ch. 5, esp. p. 99.

changes to be observed in *LeM*'s *discours* when the interactions are described cannot be explained in this way and deserve further discussion.

Even before Merlin's first meeting with Nimiane, his power is undermined. During Nimiane's exposition, the goddess Diana prophesizes the relationship to Nimiane's family (224; 209), as does Merlin to Blaise (222; 206-7). The proximity of these predictions draws attention to a rather unexpected change, namely that Merlin is no longer the only character who makes true statements about the future. The idea that the future is known and controlled by Merlin and only by him, as it is established earlier in *LeM*,[275] is called into question here, as is his role as orchestrator of events in *LeM*.

In Merlin and Nimiane's first encounter, the *discours* paints Merlin in a very different light from his previous appearances in *LeM*. When he first sees Nimiane, Merlin says to himself

> si dist que moult seroit fols se il sendormoit en son pechie quil en perdist son sens & son sauoir por auoir le deduit dune damoisele & lui honir & dieu perdre .
> Qvant merlins ot asses pense si sauanche & la toutes fois saluee . (209-10)

> that he would be most unwise to fall asleep in sin and lose his mind and his knowledge just to know the delights of a young lady, to shame her and to lose God.
> After Merlin had long been deep in thought, he went forward and greeted her nevertheless. (225)[276]

Even though it is quite short, this is the only soliloquy Merlin makes in *LeM*, and the internal focalization is striking, given that Merlin is elsewhere externally focalized. By rendering the usually inaccessible thought processes of Merlin transparent to the reader as they happen, the text makes Merlin appear at once more human and less in control. Elsewhere, Merlin's emotions and reasoning only become accessible when he expresses them to other characters. Given Merlin's role as orchestrator of events, such expressions go hand in hand with the expectation that they are aimed

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[275] In line with the depiction of Merlin as reliable, the *Roman* section elaborately makes this point in a scene in which devils show Vortigern's advisors a false future (37; 33-4).
[276] The Old French "sendormir" can mean "fall asleep" or "become passive"; see "endormir". The latter meaning is more likely here, but the ambiguity of the word also foreshadows the sleeping spell Nimiane later uses on Merlin. All translations I am aware of, medieval and modern, have rendered "endormir" literally, as "fall asleep".

at controlling the other characters in some way. Here, however, the reader's access to Merlin's thoughts is not filtered through Merlin's words or body, and Merlin is alone and not concerned with controlling or avoiding others. Merlin's own ulterior motives, for once, do not factor into the representation of his state of mind. As a result, his soliloquy appears at once completely genuine and uncontrolled.

Despite the transparency signalled here, however, Merlin's actions are as inscrutable as they are elsewhere: After Merlin's thoughts draw the reader's attention to the sinfulness of what he is considering, he simply does it "nevertheless", with no reason or excuse provided. Elsewhere in *LeM*, the absence of Merlin's reasoning simply evokes the expectation that the reader will have to wait to see the outcome of his plans in order to understand what he was pursuing all along retrospectively. By contrast, the absence of a reason here, despite the reader's access to Merlin's thought processes, implies that Merlin himself does not know why he is reaching out to Nimiane.

As in the other instances of internal thought processes discussed above, Merlin's soliloquy signals the passing of time. In this case, this is all the more significant as Merlin's thoughts show him, for the first time in *LeM*, as indecisive. This element of hesitation has important implications for the scene and, by extension, his relationship with Nimiane: for the first time, the reasons for Merlin's actions are utterly inexplicable, and for the first time, the reader witnesses Merlin having to decide on a course of action. This disrupts the idea of Merlin as orchestrator of events which pervades the rest of *LeM*. While Merlin and Nimiane's relationship is predetermined, since it is predicted by both Merlin and Diane, it is not entirely under Merlin's control, and the extent to which it is part of his overall plans is unclear. The prophesized endpoint of their relationship, Merlin's imprisonment, thus has an uncertain status: is it what Merlin wants, or is it an inevitable consequence of Merlin's apparent powerlessness?

Even before Merlin reaches out to Nimiane, then, his character design on the *discours* level differs from the rest of *LeM* and signals the importance of their relationship. These differences extend to the *histoire*, as Merlin behaves very differently than usual during their first encounter. As elsewhere in *LeM*, Merlin

disguises himself as a "most handsome youth" (255) to meet her,[277] yet this disguise does not, as elsewhere, clash with his behaviour, nor does it serve to teach Nimiane a lesson or test her character. If it is to be read in line with his disguises for the simple purpose of anonymity, it is conspicuously aligned with Nimiane's age and beauty; and, just as she is not a figure of authority but the daughter of a vavasour, Merlin aligns his pretended social status with hers by saying that he has a master who taught him magic and whom he is looking for. The fact that Merlin invents a backstory for his disguise is highly unusual, as is his admission of having magic abilities while in disguise. Shortly after, Merlin shows off his magic when he makes a number of claims about the things he can do. Reflecting the urge of "shaming" "a young lady" that is mentioned in his soliloquy, Merlin's behaviour here seems unusually concupiscent; rather than pursuing ulterior motives which nobody but he can understand, he aims to satisfy an immediate, physical need.

Merlin's powerlessness remains in the foreground when he makes a *covenaunt* with Nimiane, since it is not him but her who suggests their pact and its details (226; 210). This is not to suggest that Nimiane is in control of their relationship either. *LeM* informs us that she negotiates the *covenaunt* "without seeing or understanding [Merlin's] cunning" (226).[278] Just as the reader does not know how to judge their relationship but knows it will end in Merlin's imprisonment, so Nimiane does not understand the song which the dancers Merlin has summoned are singing, apart from the refrain, which foreshadows the trajectory of their relationship: "Love begins in happiness and ends in grief" (226).[279] While *LeM* clarifies from the beginning how their relationship will end, it thus leaves its meaning and implications open to interpretation.

While their relationship begins with a lack of clarity, *LeM* later characterizes it in more detail. The depiction of Merlin and Nimiane's relationship corresponds in

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[277] "moult biau uallet" (209).
[278] "garde ne se prent de son barat" (210).
[279] "amors a ioie commenchies & finissent a dolor" (210). Pickens interprets this as a comment from the narrative "I". I follow the more common reading, shared by the Modern French translation (*Les premiers faits* p. 1060, para. 258), as well as the Middle English *Prose Merlin* (*Merlin* [Wheatley] p. 310) and Lovelich's *Merlin*, that this is part of the song; Lovelich further clarifies that the rest of the song must have been in another language (ll. 21413-20).

broad outline to the motif of the old man fooled by a young woman. Thus, for example, Nimiane does not hesitate to arouse Merlin in order to get him to teach her (301; 280), and Merlin, despite knowing what she will do with the magic she learns from him, cannot help himself and complies. Nimiane is faced with Merlin's sexual advances but keeps their relationship chaste through trickery (e.g. 450; 421). Furthermore, the asymmetry of their relationship remains unchanged, as the narrative "I" informs us that "in the end [Merlin] could count himself a fool" (450).[280]

Interestingly, this depiction of their relationship shifts aspects of Merlin's character design to Nimiane instead. Notably, Merlin's love for her is internally focalized, whereas there are no internally focalized statements about her emotions in *LeM*. Nimiane is instead focalized externally, as Merlin is elsewhere in *LeM*. As a result, her expressed affection has a similar manipulative effect to Merlin's outward expressions of emotion in *LeM*. Their second meeting will serve as a good example:

> Et quant ele le vit si en ot grant ioie … & cele li demande moult de choses & enquist & il len aprist moult car il lamoit si durement ca poi kil nesragoit . Et quant ele uit quil lauoit cuelli en si grant amor si li pria quil li ensegnast a faire dormir . j . homme … . (280)
>
> And when she saw him, she was very glad to see him … . She asked him many things she sought to know about, and he taught her quite a lot, for he loved her so deeply that he nearly went mad. And when she saw that he had welcomed her greeting with such great love, she begged him to teach her how to put a man to sleep … . (301)

The beginning of this passage may hint at affection or, just as well, happiness at the opportunity to learn Merlin's magic. In addition, emotions of joy on a character's arrival have a near-formulaic status in *LeM* and are very often of a performative character. Otherwise, Nimiane makes demands of Merlin here, and he complies. This description is internally focalized on Merlin, who is utterly infatuated with Nimiane. The reader learns that she notices this and that this prompts her to make further demands.

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[280] "il sen pot tenir por fol al daarain" (421).

The other meetings between Merlin and Nimiane are similar. A brief note is in order here about a passage in which Nimiane does seemingly come to reciprocate Merlin's love:

> [Merlin] went straight to his lady love.
> She was very glad to see him, for she loved him with a deep love, because of the great nobility **she** had found in him, and he loved nothing so much as her. (435, my bolding)

This is, I believe, a mistranslation, although the passage is translated the same way in *Les premiers faits* (p. 1525, para. 717) and in the *Prose Merlin* (*Merlin* [Wheatley] p. 612). The sentence in Old French, in three versions, reads like this:

> sen ala a samie qui moult grant ioie li fist car moult lama de grant amor por la grant deboinairete **quil** auoit en lui trouee . & il namoit nule riens tant comme il faisoit lui . (BL Add. 10292, edited in *Lestoire de Merlin* 406, my bolding)

> s'en repaira a s'amie qui molt grant joie li fist, car molt l'ama de grant amour pour la grant debonaireté **qu'il** avoit en lui trouvee. Et il n'amoit riens autant conme il faisoit lui … (Bonn 526, edited in *Les premiers faits* p. 1525, para. 717, my bolding)

> et sen vint tout droit a nimiais samie qui moult grant ioie li fist car moult lamoit de grant maniere pour la grant deboinairete **quil** auoit en li veue et trouuee . Il namoit tant que il namoit rie*n*s nee autant comme il faisoit li et bien yparut (BnF fr. 9123, 279r, my transcription and bolding)

In all three versions of this sentence, it is "he" ("il") who finds nobility in someone else, "lui" being applicable to both genders. The manuscripts that underlie the Modern English and Modern French translations respectively both refer clearly to Merlin's love for Nimiane here, not vice versa, as the translations do. The same is the case in BnF fr. 9123 from the α family of *LeM*.[281] An emended translation of the passage would thus be:

> [Merlin] went to his lover (who was very glad to see him) because he loved her with a deep love, because of the great nobility he had found in her, and he loved nothing so much as her.[282]

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[281] The variation in which it is Nimiane who finds nobility in Merlin is, however, attested in BnF fr. 105, in which this passage is slightly garbled: "et sen vint tout droit a nymaie samie qui molt grant ioie li fist quar m*ou*lt lamoit de grant maniere pour la grant debonnairete **quele** auoit en lui veue *et* trouuee. Il lamoit tant quil namoit riens nee autant riens nee comme li et bien yp*ar*ut" (BnF fr. 105, 320v, my transcription and bolding).

[282] Besides the fact that the context allows both readings, the translators' oversight with regard to the pronouns in this sentence likely results from the tacit assumption that causal clauses modify the clause that directly precedes them; see also Diessel and Hetterle.

If we read the passage in *LeM* like this, there is no mention of Nimiane's emotions with internal focalization in any of her and Merlin's encounters. The air of mystery and control that elsewhere surrounds Merlin as a result of external focalization thus becomes, to an extent, just as typically associated with his lover.

The reasons for Nimiane's seduction remain opaque as the story unfolds, and there are few other signals in *LeM* to guide the reader in interpreting her relationship with Merlin as it develops. The only other character who knows of their relationship is Merlin's friend and scribe, Blaise. Blaise, who leaves society behind early on in *LeM* to record its *histoire* in writing, is privy to more details about the future than *LeM*'s other characters are.[283] Blaise is suspicious of Nimiane (275-6; 256) and heartbroken when Merlin announces his final departure before his imprisonment (481; 451). Blaise's *Fremdbild* of Nimiane heavily implies that Merlin's relationship with her is a bad thing – a rare case of the reader being invited to trust Merlin's stance on something less than another character's. This consequently increases the ambiguity of Merlin and Nimiane's relationship.

There are some similarities between Nimiane and Blaise in *LeM*. Merlin's last two visits to Nimiane before his imprisonment are directly juxtaposed with his visits and reports to Blaise. Moreover, both characters record what he tells them in writing (e.g. 450; 421-2), and they are both in contact exclusively with Merlin and are remote from other characters and the unfolding events. Merlin's shared knowledge with both characters is related to the future in some way: Blaise's book will transmit the story of *LeM* to posterity, and Nimiane will, to an extent, replace Merlin as Arthur's advisor. In this light, Merlin's disappearance from the narrative and his imprisonment at Nimiane's hands is clearly an ending, but can also be understood as metaphorical death or as retirement.[284]

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[283] See ch. 3, section 5.

[284] In some preceding narratives about Merlin, he retires to a house in the woods (*Vita Merlini* 82) or to an "esplumoir", the meaning of which is unclear (*Didot Perceval* 278). The *Didot Perceval* further clarifies that Merlin cannot die until the world ends ("ne poroit morir devant le finement del siecle" 278). In the *Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin* (edited as *La suite du Roman de Merlin*), composed shortly after *LeM*, Nimiane kills Merlin; see Griffin, "The Space".

By the time of their final scene, the transactionality underlying their relationship emerges more clearly once more as their relationship culminates in Merlin's predicted imprisonment. Merlin has taught Nimiane everything he can, and their *covenaunt* – his teachings for her love – has technically been concluded. However, Nimiane "began wondering how she could keep him forever" (482) and asks Merlin for a final lesson, how to magically imprison a man.[285] Merlin points out that he knows where this will lead, but that he must oblige anyway.[286] At this point, Nimiane, whose expressions of love up to this point have been part of her *covenaunt* with Merlin, now states that her love for him is genuine, before suggesting that henceforth "he had to belong to her, for she was his" (482):[287]

> en uous est ma pensee & mon desirier . Iou nai sans vous ioie ne bien . iai en uous mise toute mesperance . ne iou nateng ioie se de uous non . Et des que ie uous aim . et uous mames . nest il dont bien drois que vous fachies mes volentes . et iou les vostres . (452)
>
> All my thoughts, all my longing are for you. Without you I have no joy or happiness; all my hopes are in you, and I can find happiness only in you. And since I love you and you love me, isn't it right that you should do my will and I yours? (482)

This confession, genuine or not, is still fraught with transactional thinking, and it offers itself to various interpretations.[288] For example, it could be interpreted as a desire for an equal-footed relationship, but equally well as the suggestion of a new *covenaunt* centred on mutual love and mutual obedience. Where Merlin previously fulfilled Nimiane's desire in return for her love, Nimiane might here be suggesting that she will do Merlin's will as well, because she knows he loves her, too.

[285] "sapensa comment elle le porroit detenir a tout iours mais" (451).

[286] The Old French here says "et iou sui si souspris de uostre amour que a force me conuient faire uostre uolente" (452) and can be read in several ways. The translation in *The Story* and *Les premiers faits* has Merlin explain his compliance with his being "overcome by love of you" (482), yet the more common phrasing for this meaning would be "souspris damor de uos" or something similar. By referring to "uostre amour", literally "your love", Merlin may also be addressing their *covenaunt* again: it is because of Nimiane's love, not his own, that Merlin must oblige and teach her the spell she demands. The word "souspris" can be read as "seduced" or "swept away", suggesting that Merlin is powerless to undo their *covenaunt* from his side (see "souspris"; the word is used together with "amour" in both meanings).

[287] "bien doit il estre siens . des que elle est sieue" (452).

[288] For an interpretation of this confession as genuine, see Koble, *Les suites* 111-2.

What is, perhaps, more important here is that Merlin has already agreed to teach her by the time Nimiane makes this suggestion. As such, there is no immediate or obvious manipulative motivation behind what she says. When Merlin enthusiastically agrees to her proposal, she reveals her intentions to imprison him and promises that "we'll stay there, you and I, in joy and delight whenever we wish" (482).[289]

The idea of a (new) *covenaunt* surfaces once more after Merlin is imprisoned. He addresses Nimiane, saying that "you have indeed tricked me if you do not stay with me" (482).[290] It is notable here that Merlin claims not that he was tricked by being imprisoned, but that any deception on Nimiane's part would consist in leaving him behind. He is thus concerned with her promise to stay with him. *LeM* then explicitly confirms that "she kept her oath to him faithfully, for few days or nights went by when she was not with him" (482).[291]

Overall, then, Merlin's imprisonment in *LeM* is cast not as a betrayal but as an agreement between Merlin and Nimiane, one that also entails love and loyalty. Merlin is granted a relatively happy ending, one that is in line with his positive depiction and his omniscience. While this interpretation of Merlin's imprisonment differs from the rather negative version provided in the *Lancelot*, the conditions for her replacing Merlin as Arthur's advisor are created: Nimiane moves around freely while Merlin cannot, and she has learned all of Merlin's magic.

Nimiane's replacement of Merlin is prefigured throughout their encounters. Before they meet, Merlin's imprisonment at her hands is prophesized. During their encounters, Nimiane takes on aspects of his characterization – his control, knack for *covenaunts*, and magic abilities – as well as aspects of his character design, in particular in terms of focalization.

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[289] "serons illec moi & vous quant il nous plaira en ioie et en deduit" (452). Note that Bonn 526, edited in *Les premiers faits*, transcribes what is here "nous" as "vous", rendering the joy and delight as only Merlin's (p. 1631, para. 809).
[290] "deceu maues se vous ne demoures auec moi" (452).
[291] "elle li tint moult bien conuent . quar poi fu de iours ne de nuis . que elle ne fust auec luj" (452).

## 6. Conclusions

The majority of *LeM*'s characters are characterized primarily by chivalry and belonging to groups. On the *discours* level, this is reflected in their character design: the same character information is repeated and reattributed to different characters, thus fostering a sense of homogeneity and collectivity. Further patterns emerge in representations of thoughts and emotions through internal focalization; these thoughts and emotions are primarily concerned with other characters and reflect a concern with *Fremdbild* typical of chivalric values. Thus, individual characters of *LeM* display considerable overlaps in terms of characterization and character design, which renders them interchangeable in many narrative situations. In those situations where such exchanges occur, it does not impact detrimentally on the scene at hand because the interchanged characters are functionally equivalent. With their identical characterization comes an identical function on *LeM*'s *histoire* level; indeed, the *histoire* is primarily driven by character collectives – composed of identically characterized members – rather than individual characters.

The unique role which Merlin occupies in *LeM* goes hand in hand with a unique background, social standing, and motivation. The most central aspect of Merlin's characterization is his difference from all other characters. Neither is he a consistent member of any character group, nor does he show particular concern for his *Fremdbild*. Instead of acting with other characters or on behalf of character groups, Merlin occupies the unique role of an orchestrator of events who acts independently even when accompanied by others. Another important part of Merlin's characterization consists in his various supernatural abilities. Because of them, Merlin's body, movements, and knowledge know no restrictions, allowing him to freely choose when and in what capacity to take part in societal activities.

Merlin's difference from other characters is mirrored on the *discours* level, as his character design is markedly different from most other characters in *LeM*. Other than taking up more space overall, especially with speech, the aspect that stands out most in comparison with other characters is that of focalization. Merlin's mental states and decision-making remain largely inaccessible to the reader, unlike those of other characters. As a result, Merlin's interactions with other characters

appear less genuine and sometimes outright manipulative, thus highlighting the control that he exerts. The distinctive nature of Merlin's character design arguably stands out the most when he is shapeshifted. In the episodes concerned, new patterns and themes emerge, rendering Merlin recognizable on the *discours* level even when he is not explicitly identified. Just as is the case for most of *LeM*'s characters, Merlin's characterization and character design are closely connected. This is particularly obvious in his interactions with Nimiane, during which she takes on aspects of both, effectively prefiguring her capture and replacement of Merlin at the end of the text.

This intratextually oriented analysis of *LeM*'s characters has brought to light a number of patterns that form two distinct character designs. Within *LeM*, these repeating patterns lead to expectations concerning characters on the part of the reader that are usually fulfilled. The tendency to guide the reader through the plot using familiarity and repetition, which applies to *LeM*'s *discours* in general, can thus be observed specifically for characters as well. Whether or not they should be seen as anthropomorphic entities inhabiting the storyworld, they are certainly part of the text's *discours*, and their characterizations and character designs serve structural and aesthetic purposes and enhance the effects of the narrative.

For most of *LeM*'s characters, this effect relates to the monumentality conveyed by *LeM*. The sheer number of characters, as well as their organization into groups on the *discours* level, furthers *LeM*'s self-presentation as a reliable and complete account of Arthur's early wars. With its use of *discours* elements from the *chanson de geste* and epic traditions, and the amount of narrative space dedicated to battles, the homogenizing characterization and character design of the many combatants in *LeM* reflects the idea that these wars are carried out by collectives rather than individuals. The significance of these wars for the Arthurian universe is conveyed by the transfictional familiarity of the characters involved in them.

In Merlin's case, meanwhile, the effect of characterization and character design is that of predetermination. His role as the orchestrator of *LeM*'s *histoire* goes hand in hand with his open relationship with society and gains superhuman connotations in his distance and difference from other characters and the way they are depicted. The supernatural control of this protagonist is signalled, too, on the *discours* level,

which increases Merlin's difference from other characters and denies even the reader access to his thoughts and decision-making. While it is thus clear that Merlin controls everything that happens as well as all the other characters, question marks remain, gaps to be filled by interpretation and speculation, the answers to which lie exclusively in the mind of Merlin.

Both character designs retain an openness that allows *LeM* to be read alongside other Arthurian texts or with knowledge of them in mind. The majority of *LeM*'s characters are only characterized insofar as it pertains to the plot and beyond, primarily to establish transfictional continuity. This continuity consists, for example, in simply naming transfictional character-related facts, such as Gawain's increasing and waning strength, or in establishing character-related facts in an episode that narrates their origins, such as the enmity between Agravain and his brothers. Merlin, for his part, disappears at the end of the story, and the continuity with other Arthurian works lies mostly in his prediction and preparation of events that happen outside *LeM*. The openness to other works here lies in Merlin's reasons for his orchestrations and the varying awareness of them on the part of other characters, both generally and in specific instances, allowing for continuity with other Arthurian works.

Merlin's omniscience and orchestrations make him appear as the cause/origin of almost everything within *LeM* and, implicitly, beyond it. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Merlin's status as the cause of plot is mirrored by his metanarrative status as *LeM*'s homodiegetic source. On multiple levels, then, *LeM* emphasizes the difference between Merlin and its other characters in terms of temporality. Both in these overarching ways and whenever he makes predictions that become true or gives instructions that are carried out, Merlin has primacy. He is associated with causes, origins, originality, and authorship, and disappears at the end of *LeM*. By contrast, *LeM*'s other characters have familiar and significant futures, and their individual significance in this text is relatively limited – it is largely concerned with preparing the way for their adventures to come. The difference between Merlin and the other characters can thus be described as Merlin appearing, even within *LeM*, as a figure of the past, whereas *LeM*'s other characters will thrive in the future.

# 3. *LeM*'s Text Story: Narrative Voices and Homodiegetic Storytellers

## 1. Introduction

In my first chapter, I covered the distinctive features of *LeM* with regard to its *discours* using intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional approaches. A recurrent interest of my discussion has been the continuity of *LeM*'s *discours* with the *LG* and Arthurian literature more broadly. Continuity on the *histoire* level is a given thanks to the shared setting in the Arthurian universe and the numerous intertextual and transfictional references in *LeM*. My discussion of the *discours* level has shown continuities in form with other Arthurian prose romances and, especially, with the *LG*. What is markedly different from those texts is *LeM*'s causality, in particular the complete absence of chance, which is related to Merlin's role as the orchestrator of its plot. As I have shown in chapter 2, Merlin's unusual role in *LeM* is further brought to the fore by the numerous differences between him and most of the other characters, both in the *histoire* and the *discours*. The special status of *LeM* as an origin story of the Arthurian universe and Merlin's unique role as the harbinger of a preordained future have thus been established. This chapter will supplement those findings with a discussion of the way in which *LeM* explicitly stages itself as a written and transmitted text, and of Merlin's role in this self-presentation. I will focus on what Peter Strohschneider calls text stories (Textgeschichten), that is, "stories which medieval vernacular literature tells of itself and which can be shown to be significant with regard to the mediality and textuality of narration".[292] My approach to *LeM*'s text story will be transfictional, meaning that I analyse how it aligns with Arthurian literature more generally rather than specifically with the *LG*, but I will also work closely with Jane E. Burns's *Arthurian Fictions*, which conducts a thorough analysis of the text stories of the *LG*.

Strohschneider's interest in text stories is sparked by his focus on the mediality of courtly literature of the twelfth century. It is in this period that, for the first time in

[292] My translation. "*stories*, die mittelalterliche volkssprachige Dichtung von sich selbst erzählt und die sich als im Hinblick auf Konzepte von Medialität und Textualität des Erzählens aussagekräftig erweisen lassen" (12).

the Middle Ages at least, vernacular literature is not only recorded in writing, which is a matter of medium, but composed and conceived as written text from the outset. Following Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher, this marks it as literate in conception and medium.[293] This key innovation of the twelfth century did not become normality quickly; instead, such literature has a tendency to confront its readers with "instances of the unexpected, irritating, possibly provocative".[294]

Even though the idea of conceiving literature as literate was new for vernacular literature, there were Latin predecessors that could serve as models for its "mythologizing self-designs".[295] Most notably, this concerns religious texts, and Scripture in particular (Strohschneider 7). The *LG*, compiled in the early thirteenth century, lends itself to being read in this context. Accordingly, Burns hypothesizes that the *LG* develops an elaborate mode of self-authorization that rivals Scripture. As a result, Burns suggests,

> a rivalry between two competing concepts of textuality … is played out on the field of Arthurian romance as the notion of the Divine text that copies sacred truth struggles against the tendency of literary texts to invent their own truths. (3)

The idea of the *LG* as a counter-model to Scripture is at once accurate and misleading. As Strohschneider explains, courtly romances more broadly "are forced to situate themselves as the Other to Scripture, because there is no proper alternative to the model it represents, yet they cannot do so, because of the sacrality of this model".[296] Thus, the status of the *LG* relative to Scripture is not necessarily that of a counter-model. I believe a more general interest in conceptional literacy makes a more promising backdrop to my analysis.[297]

[293] See Koch and Oesterreicher. For a comprehensive study of this development in connection with literary culture, see B. Stock.
[294] My translation. "Momenten des Unerwarteten, Irritierenden, womöglich der Provokation" (4).
[295] My translation. "mythisierende Selbstentwürfe" (7).
[296] My (rather free) translation: "können nicht und müssen zugleich aber ihren Status als das ganz Andere zur Heiligen Schrift in Szene setzen, weil es zu deren Model im Grunde keine rechte Alternative gibt und weil sie zugleich doch qua Sakralität als Modell nicht in Frage kommt" (Strohschneider 7).
[297] The term "conceptional literacy" is taken from Oesterreicher's English article on "Types of Orality in Text".

My analysis will work with Burns's observations and, to some extent, with those of Minnis, but will focus in particular on Strohschneider's concept of text stories. Rather than drawing further comparisons with Scripture and its system of authority, I will analyse the distinctive features of *LeM*'s text story and discuss their orality and literacy, while also distinguishing between medium and conception where necessary. Moving beyond the context of the *LG*, I discuss *LeM*'s text story in terms of how it aligns or contrasts with those of other Arthurian works.

In the following, I distinguish between two aspects of *LeM*'s text story. I will first analyse its transmission fiction, a term which I suggest in analogy to the familiar idea of source fiction in order to describe *LeM*'s fictional chain of transmission. The key to *LeM*'s transmission fiction lies in the existence and interplay of several narrative voices, which, as Burns has already observed, "generate overlapping narratives which echo and augment one another; as the tale is constantly recast, so too is the voice that recounts it" (3). I will introduce these narrative voices one by one in order to discuss how they situate *LeM* as an Arthurian work, and how they contribute to depicting Arthurian texts in general as offshoots of a single corpus that is rooted in the past. I will then turn to *LeM*'s source fiction and the contributions of Merlin and his scribe, Blaise, to it. While I argue that *LeM*'s transmission fiction is aligned with Arthurian literature, and the *LG* in particular, I will show that its source fiction exhibits some key differences from other Arthurian narratives. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the special status which *LeM* occupies within the *LG* as a result of Merlin's role as a source fiction.

## 2. "Li contes"

Both Strohschneider and Burns discuss in some detail the effects evoked by the narrative voice with which I will begin my discussion. The texts of the *LG*, its adaptations, and other Arthurian texts have in common the narrative voice which I will call "li contes" (literally: the story). It appears numerous times in *LeM*, and the passages in question are typically quite short, as a random selection of passages shows:

> Mais ore se taist li contes que plus nen parole daus a ceste fois ains retourne a parler del … . En cheste partie dist li contes … . (206)
> But now the story falls silent about them, and it will say no more about

> them at this time; rather it begins to speak again about … . In this part the story says … . (221)
>
> Mais a tant se taist li contes de merlin … et retourne a parler del roy artu . Chi endroit dist li contes … . (260)
> But now the story falls silent about Merlin … and returns to King Arthur. Here the story says … . (280)
>
> si se taist ore . j . poi li contes dels … . Li contes dist chi endroit … . (268)
> So the story now falls silent about them for a while … . The story says here … . (288)[298]

With their brevity, the appearances of "li contes" are also quite formulaic in nature. These formulas appear in between episodes in particular, serving as transitions.[299] "Li contes" usually connects episodes which take place at the same time or directly after one another but involve different characters. In the following example, the episode preceding the transition deals with the kings Ban and Bors, who were recruited by two of Arthur's knights, Ulfin and Bretel. They then leave together for Britain. At this point, "Li contes" switches to the next episode:

> Mais atant laisse ore li contes vne piece a parler diaus si dira del roy artu . Chi endroit dist li contes que quant li message sen furent parti … . (101)
>
> But now the story stops talking about them for a while and will tell about King Arthur.
> Here the story says that when the messengers had left … . (112)

The transition jumps back in time to when Ulfin and Bretel departed in order to explain what another set of characters did while they were on their recruitment mission. An effect of zooming out is achieved using deixis: the distance from the homodiegetic characters ("diaus"/"them") is increased, while references to the "here" ("chi endroit") and "now" ("atant") of the reading situation are made. As a result, the reader is made aware of the reading situation.

Moreover, the difference between narrated time and narrating time comes into focus: "li contes" stops speaking about Ulfin and Bretel "for a while" ("vne piece") and speaks of what has happened in the meantime at Arthur's court after Ulfin and Bretel "had left" ("sen furent parti").[300] "Li contes" has to be linear and tell events that take place simultaneously one after another, and as a consequence, its content

[298] For further examples from the *LG*, see Burns 13; for examples from the Middle High German *Prosa-Lancelot*, see Strohschneider 253-4.
[299] Strohschneider calls them hinge formulas ("Scharnierformeln").
[300] For the concepts of narrated time and narrating time, see Müller.

is not chronological. It is typically combined with deixis and references to narrating time and narrated time in order to navigate the inevitable anachronisms and tie the plot together.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that appearances of "li contes" are particularly frequent in the *Suite* section of *LeM*. The key difference between the *discours* of the *Roman* and the *Suite* is that between episodic and interlaced storytelling. The *Roman* is largely made up of episodes between which long periods of time elapse.[301] The cast of characters is quite small, as are the locations in which episodes are set. The narrative follows Merlin; whenever it moves away from him, it does so to establish a problem he then goes on to solve. The *Suite*, by contrast, is interlaced: the narrated episodes are not self-contained stories scattered across an extended period of time but often simultaneous and distinguished primarily by location or by the characters involved. A lot more action is covered in a much shorter span of narrated time, and "li contes" is the primary tool for tying these disparate episodes together into a complex, interconnected whole.[302]

"Li contes" is thus, at least partly, a metanarrative tool that helps the reader navigate the structure of *LeM*, and the *Suite* in particular. As a result, "li contes" is associated with narrative order. However, interlacing in *LeM* is not only employed to interweave different narrative strands by alternating between episodes from them. It is also employed within individual episodes in order to focalize on different characters involved in the same storyline. Here, too, "li contes" appears when the focus shifts to a new character or character group. The following example describes the turning point of a lengthy battle between Arthur, Ban, Bors, and Leodagan on the one hand and the Saxons on the other.

> lors auint que li rois leodegans fu abatus moult laidement si le prinstrent
> & le menerent en prison . …
> … si fu moult grans li cris & la huee des . vijm . & de . ijc . & . l . cheualiers
> de la table roonde qui mout sont dolant del roy leodegan quil ont perdu …

[301] Even within episodes, rather than in between them, a lot of time can pass before the plot progresses, as is indicated by phrases such as "Time went by and …"/"ensi passa li termes & …" (56; 50) or "… for a long time afterwards. At length, he happened to …"/"… lonctans puis . si auint quil …" (86; 77).
[302] "Li contes" does occasionally appear in the *Roman* as well, e.g. "En ceste partie dist li contes …"/"In this part the story says …" (20; 22); "Chi endroit dist li contes …"/"Here the story says …" (35; 39).

> Et quant genieure la fille au roi leodegan en uoit mener son pere de ses anemis si en es tant dolente en son cuer que par . j . poi quele ne sochist . Mais atant ore . j . poi li contes se taist de lu[i] & de son duel . si vous dira del roy artu & de ses compaignons comment il ont esploitie en la bataille encontre les . vijm . hommes . (145)

> Then it happened that King Leodagan was struck down very dreadfully, and they took him and led him off to be imprisoned. …
> Very great indeed was the hue and cry from the seven thousand fighting men and the weeping and wailing from the two hundred fifty knights of the Round Table mourning for King Leodagan, whom they had lost. …
> And when Guenevere, King Leodagan's daughter, saw her father being taken away by his enemies, she was so stricken by the sorrow in her heart that she nearly killed herself.
> But right now, for a while, the story falls silent about her and her sorrow, and it will tell you about King Arthur and his companions and how they fared in the battle against the seven thousand men. (155-6)

Leodagan is taken captive and removed from the battlefield. A lengthy description of the "hue and cry" and "weeping and wailing" of the knights who witness this follows, underlining how the tide of battle has just turned for the worse. The narrative focus then moves from the knights directly surrounding Leodagan on the battlefield to the people watching the battle from the castle; his daughter, Guenevere, is among them. Her reaction is similar, but even more extreme: she is "so stricken by the sorrow in her heart" upon losing her father that she "nearly killed herself". Through this literary pan shot of character reactions, the reader is prompted to consider that the consequences of Leodagan's imprisonment will extend far beyond this battle, affecting who leads his realm; Guenevere is Leodagan's only daughter and still unmarried, and becoming an orphan at this point in time would seriously destabilize the already threatened kingdom of Carmelide. As soon as the reader has been led to realize how bad the situation is, "li contes" breaks the immersion: "Right now, for a while, the story falls silent about her and her sorrow." The focus then moves to another division of knights, that of King Arthur and his companions, and what they have been doing in the meantime.

An obvious interpretation of this might be that *LeM*, in interrupting the narrative here, generates suspense about Leodagan's rescue by creating a cliffhanger. However, it seems unlikely that suspense was the main aim here. First, the aesthetic of *LeM* in particular barely engages with suspense, instead focusing on the pleasure of the expected. Second, the exploits of Arthur and his companions are

not narrated at length but briefly summarized before they learn of Leodagan's predicament and hurry to his recue.[303]

Rather than creating an unanswered question (will Leodagan be rescued?) and suspense by making what happens next unforeseeable for the reader, I would argue that the use of "li contes" and interlacing here establishes and guides the reader's expectations. When Leodagan is captured, the focalization moves to Guenevere, and the reader is reminded of the wider consequences for her and the kingdom of Carmelide. At the same time, the reader already knows that Arthur will marry her as a reward for helping Leodagan. This has been prophesized by Merlin (102-3; 92), and so there is no doubt that Leodagan will be rescued one way or another. When "li contes" then moves on to Arthur and his companions, it is clear – and unsurprising – that it is they who are going to save Leodagan. The reader may even anticipate that Arthur's rescue of Leodagan is going to become a turning point in the relationship between the two characters. And, indeed, Leodagan grows increasingly interested in Arthur as a result of this battle, and Guenevere falls in love with Arthur because of his heroism in it.[304] The changes in focalization in this battle thus serve not to create suspense but to highlight the importance of the battle in Merlin's orchestration of Arthur's success. The impression that the battle is important is created not least by its sheer length (thirteen pages in Sommer's edition) and its constantly changing focalization. "Li contes" makes similar appearances in other battle scenes and adds to the effect of monumentality that the lengthy descriptions of combat evoke.[305]

The examples above have shown that "li contes" typically appears in transitions between narrative strands and sometimes serves to guide readers' expectations. The contexts in which it appears also include digressive material. In these cases, "li contes" is depicted as a source of information. The following passage appears in the

[303] As I discuss in ch. 1, sections 4.2 and 5, knowledge is often a more decisive factor for success and failure in battles and wars than the prowess of armies or individual fighters. This once again underlines how crucial a role the omniscient Merlin plays from a strategic point of view.

[304] See ch. 2, section 2.

[305] See, for example, the pursuit scene directly following the first battle between Arthur and King Rion (246-60; 229-42). "Li contes" is used here to navigate the parallel actions of five sets of characters.

middle of a lengthy description of a tournament in which Kay plays a major role. While he is leading a charge against his opponents, the narrative suddenly pauses in order to provide information on a "bad trait" of his, "his slanderous speech".

> kex vint apoignant deuant tous ses compaignons … si fu a meruelles boins cheualiers se ne fust . j . poi de parole dont il auoit trop . dont li mesdires li toli la grace de ses compaignons & des estraignes gens qui parler en ooient qui puis refuserent a aler en sa compaignie as auentures el roialme de logres si comme li contes deuisera cha en auant .
> Cele teche dont li contes dist que kex auoit prinst il en sa norice … . Et quant il vint al tornoiement issi comme vous aues oi si encontra ladinas … (103-4)

> Kay came spurring his horse ahead of all his companions … . He was a wondrously good knight – if only he had been a man of few words! He spoke too much and his slanderous speech kept him from the good graces of his companions and strangers who heard about him and later refused to go with him on the adventures of the kingdom of Logres, as the story will explain farther on.
> Kay received the bad trait, which the story says he had, from the nurse who suckled him … .
> And when he came to the tournament, as you have just heard, he met Ladinas. (114)

The source of this information on Kay is "li contes". Furthermore, "li contes" will later say more about how other knights "refused to go with him [Kay] on the adventures of the kingdom of Logres". Neither the past cause of Kay's slanderous speech nor its future consequences – and nor, in fact, the slanderous speech itself – have any impact on the tournament scene that is being narrated. It is the appearance of Kay alone that triggers this particular interruption of the story. Unlike the appearances of "li contes" between episodes, at natural moments of pause in the narration, appearances like these interrupt the narration for relatively long digressions that have no obvious connection to the plot of an episode beyond a character that appears in it.[306] Furthermore, the reference to a future episode in which other knights refuse to go on adventures with Kay on account of his bad trait

[306] For further examples, see the information about the past and future of the knight Nascien in the middle of a battle (238; 221-2). Similar interruptions are provided by the narrating "I"; see, for example, the digression on Leodagan and Cleodalis's relationship in the middle of a battle scene (159-60; 148-9).

is an empty prolepsis: no such episode takes place in the *Suite* itself or, to my knowledge, elsewhere in the *LG* or surviving Arthurian literature.[307]

Cases such as these depict “li contes” as a vast source of material that extends beyond the events and information included and narrated in *LeM* itself. With “li contes”, the narrative order is therefore prescribed by an authoritative source that exists independently of its retellers. Thus, “li contes” “selects events, resolves simultaneous action into successive linear narration, and constantly reminds recipients that everything they learn is restricted by a horizon of as-yet withheld information”.[308]

On the one hand, the relatively sudden flurry of background information on a character in the middle of an episode is in line with the repeated breaking of immersion in battle scenes discussed above: instead of building suspense or allowing easy enjoyment of an action-laden scene, *LeM* draws the reader’s attention to its own artificiality, thus valuing and emphasizing its *discours* over its *histoire*. On the other hand, empty prolepses such as that about the knights that refused to accompany Kay on adventures in the future present *LeM*’s *histoire* as merely a subset of all the narrative material contained in “li contes”. By extension, “li contes”, which is itself depicted as a selection and linearization of all possible narrative material of the Arthurian universe, contains more information than *LeM* does. While reading *LeM*, the reader is thus constantly reminded that the lives of its characters extend into the past and future of the story they are reading, and that its plot is just one of very many that take place in the Arthurian universe, many of which are also told by “li contes”.

This leads to a twofold effect of continuity. On the one hand, “li contes” is introduced as a fictional textual predecessor of *LeM*, thus establishing a

[307] The only case that I am aware of in which Kay is left behind is at the beginning of Heinrich von dem Türlin’s *Diu Crône* (ll. 3264-72). While Gawain secretly leaves court with “von dem hove die besten” (ll. 3263), Kay is one of three knights to stay behind with Arthur. Even if this is adapted from narrative material that may have been familiar to the composer/s of the *Suite*, it thus seems unlikely that this is what this reference is directed at. For empty prolepses, see ch. 1, section 3.
[308] My translation. “… selegiert Geschehen, sie löst Handlungssimultaneitäten in lineare Erzählsukzession auf und sie hält den Rezipienten bewusst, dass, was sie wissen, stets von einem Horizont zumindest einstweilen noch vorenthaltenen Wissens begrenzt ist” (254).

transmission fiction between the *histoire* of *LeM*, "li contes", and the *discours* of *LeM*: "The implication is that this narrative omits certain passages that have been included in previous versions of it, or that could be related on subsequent occasions" (Burns 42). Further nodes along this line of transmission are introduced in *LeM* and will be discussed below. A key result of this transmission fiction is that *LeM*'s readers are constantly reminded of the inherent instability of the *discours* of the text they are reading: *LeM*'s particular form is simply the latest stage of textual evolution, and its (fictional) previous forms shine through in moments of narrative pause. Moreover, the many transfictional and intertextual references to events that do not take place in *LeM* but involve the same fictional universe and characters position it in continuity with Arthurian literature. As a result of this "circular process of self-reference" (Burns 42), meaning that all the intertextual references are to texts in the same fictional universe, the corpus of Arthurian literature becomes relatively self-sufficient and self-contained, and *LeM* is placed firmly within it.[309] *LeM*'s transmission fiction thus establishes a continuity between the fictional past and the present of the reading situation, and between *LeM* and the corpus of texts set in the Arthurian universe.

References to "li contes" evoke the sense of a vast corpus that encompasses much more story material than is retold in *LeM* itself. Whether intended or not, this allows for another reading, namely that "li contes" encompasses any and all Arthurian tales that employ it as a narrative voice. The constant references to "li contes" as something fixed in form even give the effect that these stories might once have been a coherent, collected whole, whereas now, in the present of reading about them, fragments of the adventures, quests, and events are all that survive.[310] The Arthurian universe expands beyond singular tales and manuscripts and is depicted as a once coherent story or collection of stories that now survives only in scattered parts. The tales set in the Arthurian universe are connected by "li contes", implying that they are one corpus.[311]

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[309] Similarly, Strohschneider addresses the idea of a fictional Arthurian archive (258).
[310] This effect may admittedly be much stronger for us as modern readers of medieval romance, who can never know how much of the medieval corpus we are missing.
[311] Burns argues that empty prolepses lead to the same effect: "instead of citing other independent narratives to guarantee their authenticity, these romances simply refer to

## 3. The narrating "I"

In order for "li contes" to tell itself, another narrative voice needs to tell us about "li contes" speaking, and to repeat what it says.[312] Insertions such as "as you have just heard" (114) are clearly not uttered by "li contes" itself, and neither are assertions that it is the ultimate source of information and narrative order of events.[313] This is where another narrative voice that frequently emerges in *LeM* comes into play, namely its first-person narrative voice. The narrating "I" often appears together with "li contes":

> Ore dist li contes que quant merlins se fu departis del roy artu quil sen ala es fores de romeni conuerser … . Sest bien drois que ie vous die por coi il y ala . voirs fu ce dist li contes ke … . (281)
>
> Now the story says that when Merlin had left King Arthur, he went to dwell in the … forests of the country about Rome … and it is right that I should tell you why he went there. In truth, so says the story, … . (302)
>
> & li contes dist que li cheualier la roine nestoient a cel iour que . lxxx . mais puis crurent tant & li contes le vous deuisera que il furent . IIIJc. … & en maintes autres questes se trauaillierent il maint iour . si vous dirai biein por coi il le firent .
> Voirs fu que … . (334)
>
> And the story says that the queen's knights that day were only ninety strong, but their numbers grew afterwards until, as the story will relate it to you, there were four hundred of them … . And many a day they tried hard to undertake many other quests, and I will tell you why they did it.
> It was true that … . (358-9)
>
> Si sen taist ore li contes que plus nen parole i chi endroit anchois vous dirons del roy artu … . (113)
>
> Now the story falls silent about them and does not say anything more right here; rather we will tell you about King Arthur … . (123)

The immediate effect of such passages is that the narrating "I" appears as a mere echo of "li contes". This is brought to a head in passages like the third example above, in which the narrating "I" and "li contes" merge to a "we" that will tell the next episode.

other portions of a single, lengthy corpus of tales. The texts … all are said to form part of the very narrative we are reading" (41).

[312] See also Strohschneider 255.

[313] "comme vous aues oi" (104).

At the same time, however, the narrating "I" fulfils a function different from "li contes" in that it evokes proximity to the reader: the narrating "I" thus addresses a "you" and, unlike "li contes", is thus clearly situated in a specific storytelling situation rather than existing independently as a source corpus. In this respect, *LeM*'s narrating "I" corresponds to what A. C. Spearing hypothesizes about medieval narrating "I"s more broadly, namely that they function "less as a pronoun referring to an individual who can be defined as either autobiographical or fictional than as a deictic serving to evoke proximality and experientiality as free-floating textual effects" ("What is a Narrator?" 70).[314]

The same examples also show that the narrating "I" typically references "li contes" rather than presenting its own version of events. This depiction of the narrating "I" as a mere reteller is in line with the medieval understanding of narrators: they are "external to the *narratio*" and their function is "merely to transmit what comes to [them] from elsewhere" (Spearing, "What is a Narrator?" 67-8). Rather than claiming authority over *LeM*, then, the role of the narrating "I" is to transmit the story to the reader and their present.

There are a small number of cases scattered across *LeM* in which the narrating "I" announces changes it has made to its source material. In all these cases, it interrupts the storyline in order to comment on the selection of narrative material. For instance:

> sen ai tant oi parler que ie nel vous puis mie tout retraire . Mais tant vous en puis ie bien dire que … . (22-3)
> I have heard so much said about this that I cannot tell you everything, but I can tell you this much … . (24)
>
> Ie ne vous puis dire ne tout conter ceaus qui a cele court furent . Mais chaus ie vous doi de chaus dire & retraire dont mes contes parole les vns apres les autres . (58)
> I cannot begin to tell you who all the people at that court were. But I must tell you about those my source story speaks of one after the other. (65)
>
> si vous dirai comment . Car ausi vaudra miex lestoire se iou vous fais entendant en quel maniere il fu engendres de lui . car maintes gens len priseroient mains qui la uerite nen sauroient . (128)

[314] See also Contzen, "Narrative and Experience". For a more comprehensive study of medieval narrating "I"s, see Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*. Spearing's hypothesis has also informed my decision to refer to *LeM*'s narrating "I" as "it" instead of using the personalizing pronoun "they".

> And I will tell you how, for the history will be more worthwhile if I make you understand how Mordred was sired by him, for many people would find King Arthur less worthy because of it if they did not know the truth. (138-9)

> si ne fait mie a parler de mes ne des uiandes dont il estoient le ior serui car ce seroit anuis de rertraire & parole gastee . (254)
> … it is not fitting to speak of the foods they were served that day, for it would be tiresome to put it all down, and it would be a waste of words. (273)

It becomes apparent that the omissions made by the narrating "I" are not explained by a lack or loss of knowledge but are rather depicted as an attempt by the narrating "I" to reduce an abundance of information to what pertains to the story it is retelling. Conversely, its inclusion of information is justified by it being "worthwhile" ("vaudra miex"). Here, too, an interpretation of "li contes" as encompassing much more material than what the reader is presented with suggests itself. The transmission fiction of *LeM* thus gains further nuance through the voice of the narrating "I": in the fictional chronology of transmission, "li contes" comes first and *LeM* last, with the narrating "I" somewhere in between them. Those passages in which both "li contes" and the narrating "I" appear at the same time, in particular, invoke this transmission fiction. As a result of this, *LeM* itself is staged as a version that tells everything that actually matters, as a streamlined version of the story in comparison to its more extensive but perhaps also more chaotic (fictional) predecessors, in particular "li contes".

The alignment of the narrating "I" with the reader might create the expectation that it will guide the reader through the *histoire*. However, the examples considered so far are quite limited when it comes to such guidance for the reader: they exclusively address the structure and selection of narrative material. *LeM*'s narrating "I" does not, by contrast, give much indication of how the reader is supposed to respond to what happens in the plot. Consequently, emotional expressions or moral judgments from the narrating "I" are rare throughout the text.[315] The limited engagement of the narrating "I" with the plot becomes

[315] For two examples, see the condemnation of the Knights of the Round Table in a tournament (349; 325, see also ch. 1, section 4) and the prayer for Eliezer's safety during a pursuit (375; 349). These and other cases tend to be relatively brief and reflect the expectations already established in the surrounding text.

particularly apparent when an emotional response would be expected but does not ensue. An example of this is the Battle of Salisbury, in which Pendragon, a central character in the story so far, dies:

> … si commencha la bataille de salesbieres . Ie ne vous puis mie tout conter qui bien le fist ne qui non . mais tant vous puis ie bien dire que li rois pandragons i fu ochis & moult des autres barons . & lestoire conte que uter uenqui la bataille … . (51)[316]
>
> Thus began the Battle of Salisbury. I cannot tell you everything, who fought well there and who poorly, but I can tell you this much: King Pendragon was killed there and many other barons. And the story says that Uther won the battle … . (57)

Rather than expressing regret or grief, and rather than letting Pendragon enter the limelight one last time in his final battle, the narrating "I" instead shortens this climactic and potentially emotional scene to three sentences and proceeds with a relatively sober description of the burial of the fallen and Uther's coronation: "After Pendragon died, Uther was left lord of the kingdom. He had all the bodies of the Christians brought together on one plot of ground …" (58).[317]

This contributes, I would argue, to two effects. On the one hand, it reinforces the depiction of *LeM*'s *histoire* as entirely predetermined. Merlin had foretold Pendragon's death ahead of the battle, and the reader is thus aware of the outcome of the Battle of Salisbury before it is narrated. By summarizing the battle itself and putting more focus on the prophecy of it, the text emphasizes Merlin's role as

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[316] The status attributed to "lestoire" as distinct from or identical to "li contes" varies in research (see e.g. Ferlampin-Acher 12-3; Burns 39-40). In *LeM*, references to "li contes" vastly outweigh references to "lestoire"; for the purposes of my discussion, I subsume the few instances of "lestoire" under "li contes", as I believe references to a story as an independent link in the transmission chain to be more relevant than the specific phrase used to refer to it.

[317] "Apres ce que pandragons fu mors remest uter sires du regne si fist tous les cors des crestiens assembler en vne piece de terre" (51). By contrast, the rendering of Pendragon's (Aurelius's) death in Wace's *Brut* is briefly commented upon by its narrating "I": "God, what agony! He had to die" (p. 209; "Deus, quel dolur! murir l'estut", l. 8277). Another good example is the scene in which Vortigern usurps the throne. In the entire scene in which he has his king, Moine, killed, there is no comment by any narrating voice in *LeM* (23; 21). The narrating "I" of Wace's *Brut*, by contrast, variously calls Vortigern a "wicked man" (p. 165; "ume de mal art", l. 6554), "full of deceit" (p. 167; "de grant feintise" l. 6579), and "false … and speaking falsehood" (p. 167; "Fals … e fausement parla", l. 6640) while he sets up his betrayal.

orchestrator and presents the *histoire* as set in stone. Pendragon's death is a fact before it happens.[318]

On the other hand, the narrating "I" contributes to a central effect of the text story of *LeM*: it consistently draws the reader's attention to the story's *discours* rather than its *histoire*. By commenting only on the material included and its order, and by appearing mostly as a reteller that rarely intervenes in its source material, the narrating "I" draws attention to the (fictional) age of the story and its roots in the past. This also reinforces the impression that the *histoire* exists on its own, independently of the specific versions that exist of it.

## 4. Robert de Boron

The invention of fictional predecessors of *LeM* has interesting consequences for its treatment of its historical sources. The *Roman* section of *LeM* is adapted from Robert de Boron's *Roman de Merlin en vers*. This text survives only in a fragment in BnF fr. 20047, in which it is preceded by the only other text known to have been composed by Robert, namely the *Joseph d'Arimathie en vers*.[319] The *Joseph en vers* was itself prosified as the *Joseph en prose*, which was in turn adapted as *Lestoire del saint Graal*. One or the other of these two adaptations usually precedes *LeM* in the manuscripts in which *LeM* survives.[320] It is not surprising that Robert de Boron's name appears several times in his *Joseph en vers* and in a passage serving as a transition between it and the *Roman de Merlin en vers*. Nor is it unusual that his name appears in the corresponding passage between the adaptations of the two texts, *Lestoire del saint Graal* and *LeM* respectively.[321] This is an example of how the names of historical authors, whether they actually composed a text or not, could be mentioned as *auctores* to grant that text authority.[322]

However, treating Robert de Boron as the sole author would no longer have been compatible with the elaborate text stories of *LeM* and *Lestoire del saint Graal*

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318 See ch. 1, section 5, and ch. 2, section 5.
319 Edited as *Le roman du Saint-Graal* by Francisque Michel.
320 See appendix.
321 Robert de Boron is, it seems, not typically mentioned in the parallel transition passage between the *Joseph en prose* and *LeM*, except in BnF fr. 748. For a transcription of the passage from that manuscript, see Sommer 11.
322 See Burns ch. 2, esp. 41.

(which is not discussed here). A comparison of the two paratextual passages in which his name appears will illustrate how his role as *auctor* was rewritten in the course of the adaptation of his works. The paratextual passage which can be assumed to have been written by the historical Robert de Boron appears between the *Joseph en vers* and the *Merlin en vers*. It begins with the appearance of Robert's name, thus breaking immersion and signalling the story's ending:

> Messires Roberz de Beron
> Dist, se ce ci savoir voulun ,
> Sanz doute savoir couvenra
> Conter là où Alains ala … (3461-5)
>
> Messires Robert de Boron says that if anyone wants to know [more], then one must know and tell about where Alain went … (my translation)

There follows a list of four plot points that remain unresolved and about which Robert intends to write at another stage. The passage then continues with Robert's wish to bring all these stories together and his intention to tell another story, that of the Grail, first:

> Ces quatre choses rassembler
> Couvient chaucune , et ratourner
> Chascune partie par soi
> Si comme ele est; meis je bien croi
> Que nus hons ne 's puet rassembler
> S'il n'a avant oï conter
> Dou Graal la plus grant estoire ,
> Sanz doute , ki est toute voire.
> A ce tens que je la retreis
> O mon seigneur Gautier en peis ,
> Qui de Mont-Belyal estoit,
> Unques retreite esté n'avoit
> La grant estoire dou Graal
> Par nul homme qui fust mortal ;
> Meis je fais bien à touz savoir
> Qui cest livre vourrunt avoir ,
> Que , se Diex me donne santé
> Et vie, bien ei volenté
> De ces parties assembler
> Se en livre les puis trouver. (3481-3500)[323]
>
> These four parts are supposed to be joined together and presented, each part as it is; but I believe that no man can join them together without having first heard the greatest story of the Grail, which is true without any doubt. At the time that I related it to Monseigneur Gautier, who came from

[323] Both transcriptions are taken from Francisque Michel's edition entitled *Le Roman du Saint-Graal*.

> Mount Belyal, the great story of the Grail had not yet been related by anyone. But now I will make it known to anyone who wants to have this book: if God grants me the health and lifespan, I intend to bring these parts together, if I can find them in a book. (my translation)

In this passage, Robert states that the Grail story, of which he will speak next, is being made newly accessible by him. Thus, he is not the inventor of a narrative but a reteller. This, in itself, is not unusual, as rewriting was at the heart of medieval literature. Another illustration of this in Arthurian literature is the famous example of Chrétien de Troyes's prologue to his *Erec et Enide*. In it, he claims credit for the *discours* of his work, calling it a "mout bele conjointure" (beautifully ordered composition), while crediting the *histoire* to a "conte d'avanture" (tale of adventure) which is accessible to other storytellers as well:

> Por ce dit Crestiiens de Troies,
> Que reisons est que totes voies
> Doit chascuns panser et antandre
> A bien dire et a bien aprandre,
> Et tret d'un conte d'avanture
> Une mout bele conjointure
> …
> D'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,
> Que devant rois et devant contes
> Depecier et corronpre suelent
> Cil qui de conter vivre vuelent.
> Des or comancerai l'estoire
> Qui toz jorz mes iert an memoire
> Tant con durra crestiantez;
> De ce s'est Crestiiens vantez. (Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec und Enide*, ll. 9-26)

> And so Chrétien de Troyes says that it is reasonable for everyone to think and strive in every way to speak well and to teach well, and from a tale of adventure he draws a beautifully ordered composition … .
> This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac, which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts.
> Now I shall begin the story that will be in memory for evermore, as long as Christendom lasts – of this does Chrétien boast. (Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide* 37)

An important aspect that Robert de Boron's and Chrétien de Troyes's self-presentations have in common is the fact that they do not directly address their readers. Robert's readers are indirectly referred to as "anyone [who] wants to know more" and "anyone who wants to have this book", and the storytelling situation is described as "the time that I tell it", implying that the time of the reading situation is distinct from the time the story is being told by Robert.

Chrétien, too, does not address a reading audience directly but states that his tale will be remembered forever. Both authors describe themselves as retellers that are disconnected from any particular audience. This hints, on the one hand, at the conceptional literacy of courtly romance which I addressed above. It could be argued that Robert's and Chrétien's texts are conceived (and staged) as written retellings rather than oral ones, and so do not address a particular audience at a particular time. Chrétien's prologue to his *Erec* makes this abundantly clear when the lesser quality of oral retellings is directly contrasted with his own version of the same story. On the other hand, both authors depict their texts as the only, or best, available version of the stories they contain. These two aspects frame Chrétien's and Robert's texts as source material, thus inviting further adaptation and situating them explicitly as links in an ongoing chain of transmission.

Much of this self-presentation of Robert de Boron in his verse texts fits the text story of *LeM*. The evocation of a chain of transmission and the importance of retelling over invention, in particular, work just as well in the new context of *LeM* as they do in Robert's own works. Nevertheless, the paratextual passage between *Lestoire del saint Graal* and the beginning of *LeM* recasts the role of Robert de Boron, reducing his appearance to a relatively brief mention:

> Si se taist atant li contes de tout les lignies qui de celydoine issirent . & retorne a parler dune estoire de merlin quil couient a fine force adiouster a lestoire del saint graal . por ce que la brance i est & i apartient . Et commenche messires robers en tel maniere comme vous porres oir sil est qui le vous die . (*Lestoire del saint Graal* 296)
>
> Now the story is silent about all the lineages that came from Celidoine and returns to another branch called the Story of Merlin, which [must be joined] with the History of the Holy Grail because it is a branch of it and belongs to it. And my lord Robert de Boron begins this branch in the following way [as you can hear it if there is someone who will tell it to you]. (*The History* 308)[324]

Particularly interesting in this passage is the deixis "like this" ("en tel maniere"), which marks the beginning of *LeM* and credits it directly to Robert de Boron. At the same time, Robert is a voice of the past: his work will be retold by someone else.

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[324] Chase's translation of *Lestoire del saint Graal* translates Hucher's base manuscript rather than Sommer's. I have thus made two emendations here by cross-referencing the Modern French translation by Gérard Gros, titled *Joseph d'Arimathie* (p. 567).

Curiously enough, this someone else is hypothetical, and whatever narrative voice it is that mentions "li contes" and Robert de Boron here is apparently not the one that will tell the story of Merlin next. The multiple narrative voices which coexist in *LeM*, and in the *LG* in general, are directly juxtaposed in this passage. We move from a story told by "li contes" to a story that was once told by Robert de Boron and will be retold by someone else, and yet another voice guides the reader through this paratext. Passages such as these, in which several narrative voices appear at once, evoke the sense that the *histoire* of the texts at hand has its roots far in the past and will be retold forever; in this, it is consistent with the transmission fiction of *LeM*.

This polyphony forms a central effect of *LeM*, and the *LG* more broadly, but is not of comparable interest in Robert de Boron's own works. As such, Robert's (fictional) contribution to *LeM* is downplayed in comparison to the *Joseph en vers* and the *Merlin en vers*. For example, the transmission of *Lestoire del saint Graal* and *LeM* together is described as a necessity ("couient a fine force"), rather than, as in the passage quoted above, being put down to Robert. The more dominant voice of Robert de Boron in the *Joseph en vers* is here pointedly reduced to another link in the transmission fiction. He thus becomes one of several narrative voices that have contributed to the version of the story we are reading.

While it does not make other appearances in most manuscripts of *LeM*, Robert de Boron's name appears in a variant reading in two manuscripts, namely BnF fr. 747 and BL Add. 32125. The passage in question is the abrupt jump from the narrative strand about Merlin to that about Vortigern in *LeM*'s *Roman* section. The treatment of narrative voice in this jump in BnF fr. 747 and BL Add. 32125 is distinctive:

> "… je ne puis pas dire ne retraire, ne droiz n'est, les privees paroles de Joseph et de Jhesu Crist." Einsi dist mes sires Roberz de Borron qui cest conte retrait quil se redouble, et einsi le dita Mellins, que il ne pot savoir le conte dou Graal.
> En cel contemple dont je vos ai parlé et dont je vos parole encore estoit novelement venue crestientez en Engleterre, n'il n'i avoit encore gaires rois crestienz euz. Des rois qui i avoient esté ne me tient riens a retraire, fors tant com a cest conte amonte. Un roi ot en Engleterre qui avoit non Costanz … (Robert de Boron, p. 76, paras 16-7)

> "… I cannot say or recount the intimate words between Joseph and Jesus Christ, nor would it be right to do so." This is what mylord Robert de

> Boron said who told this story so that it would be repeated, and this is what Merlin said, as well as that he could not know the story of the Grail. In this time of which I have told you and of which I will tell you more, Christianity had only just arrived in England, and there were had only been few Christian kings. There is no reason for me to tell you about those kings that lived then unless they pertain to this story. There was a king in England who was called Constance … (my translation)

In this variant of the passage, Robert's heterodiegetic storytelling and Merlin's homodiegetic speech are overlaid, thus directly evoking the idea of two voices telling the same story. This makes an important contribution to Merlin's role as a storyteller, to which I will return below. Within the passage, it also means that there is a clear endpoint to Merlin's direct speech. In the next paragraph, the narrating "I" takes over and introduces the narrative strand about Vortigern to the reader.

Other manuscripts of *LeM* are less clear in this regard. Thus, some α manuscripts provide the following reading:

> ie ne te puis pas dire ne retraire ne droiz nest les priuees paroles de Joseph . *et* de jesucrist . *et* en engleterre nauoit rois encore crestiens gaires . euz . i des rois qui iont este . de uant ne mie tient aretraire fors tant con acest conte en monte
> [U]n en iot qui auoit non constans … (Tours 951, 182v)[325]

> … I cannot tell you or recount the intimate words between Joseph and Jesus Christ, nor would it be right to do so. And in England there had only been few Christian kings. And I have no reason to tell you about those kings that lived then unless they pertain to this story.
> There was one of them who was called Constance … (my translation)

Notably, Robert de Boron is not mentioned in this version, and the paragraph division is different. There are three ways of positioning the passage in relation to Merlin's speech. First, one could see Merlin's speech as ending with the paragraph break. This, however, creates an issue with the adverbial pronoun "en" (translated here as "one of them"), which suggests that the speech context of the first paragraph continues in the second. A second option – which I have taken here – is not to include any quotation marks at all, thus interpreting the narrative strand

[325] My transcription, with a missing rubric letter supplied in square brackets. Tours 951 belongs to the $x^3$ group of the α version proposed by Micha. Another $x^3$ manuscript, Rome 1517 (136v-137r), and an $x^4$ manuscript, BnF n. a. 4166 (32r-v), offer almost the same reading and the same paragraph division. For the classification of manuscripts, see Micha, "Les manuscrits (suite)".

about Vortigern as Merlin's narration to Blaise. In terms of context, this is possible: Merlin moves from the omission of one type of content (the conversation between Joseph and Christ) to the omission of another (English kings who do not matter for Blaise's book), and then picks up the story with the first king that does matter. This would have the rather significant consequence that the next narrative strand begins as a story within a story, that is, as a story told to Blaise by Merlin. That embedded narrative would have neither a clear endpoint nor a clear transition back to the framing story. A third option consists in ending Merlin's speech after his comment on Joseph and Christ. This, however, would render the paragraph break later in the quotation unmotivated; it would make more sense to have it at the end of Merlin's speech. Each reading thus presents its own issues and makes the already abrupt transition from one narrative strand to another more difficult to navigate.

There is little evidence to show whether any of the readings suggested above were favoured by medieval readers. However, the β manuscripts of the *Roman*, which contain a more recent redaction of the text that is generally believed to be adapted from the α redaction, may reflect a contemporary attempt to resolve matters. BL Add. 10292 and Bonn 526, the two manuscripts edited by Sommer in *Lestoire de Merlin* and Poirion et al. in *Le livre du Graal* respectively, both feature the same paragraph division but introduce a third narrative voice into the mix.

> … ne puis pas dire ne retraire les priuees paroles de ihesu crist & de ioseph . ne en engleterre nauoit onques este rois crestiene . Et des rois qui i auoient este deuant ne me chaut a retraire fors tant comme a cest conte amonte.
> En ceste partie dist li contes qui lot vns rois en engleterre qui ot anon constans … (*Lestoire de Merlin* 20, see also *Merlin* [*Le livre du Graal*] pp. 612-3, paras 41-2)
>
> "… I cannot say or recount the intimate words between Jesus Christ and Joseph.
> In England there had not yet been a Christian king, and about those who had come before, I do not care to tell anything except what has bearing on this story."
> In this part the story says that there was a king in England named Constant … (*The Story of Merlin* 22)

In this version, too, Robert de Boron is not mentioned, and the paragraph division is the same as in the example from Tours 951. However, the second paragraph is

here introduced by "li contes", and the adverbial pronoun "en" is replaced by a repetition of the necessary context. Consequently, it is possible to read the two paragraphs – and the corresponding narrative strands – as clearly separate and on the same narrative level rather than as slotted into each other. This permits a relatively easy navigation of the transition between narrative strands.

The variations between manuscripts in this passage show that Robert de Boron's name was not associated with any particular authorizing or authorial function here.[326] In the version of the passage where he does appear, he takes on the role as a reteller, as in the transition passage to *LeM* discussed above. As in that passage, too, the mention of him is quite short and combined with the appearance of other narrative voices. A similar layering of narrative voices is at play in the other two versions quoted here. As is the case with moments of transition elsewhere, all versions of the transition between the two narrative strands here bring the artificiality of *LeM* to the fore by making reference to its *discours* and to its transmission fiction in particular.

## 5. Merlin and Blaise

So far, I have discussed in some detail the transmission fiction evoked by the (often simultaneous) appearances of multiple narrative voices in *LeM*. The source fiction of *LeM* will now be analysed. A source fiction addresses not how a narrative text ended up in the reader's hands but how it became a story in the first place. The *histoire* itself, then, provides an explanation for its own existence as a text. In *LeM*, this source fiction consists in Blaise's book.

This source fiction for *LeM* is established early in the story. *LeM* begins with a thirteen-page-long episode in which Merlin's conception, birth, and youth are narrated.[327] Blaise is a confessor who has helped Merlin's mother and contributed

[326] BnF fr. 747 and BL Add. 32125 do, though, make another mention of Robert de Boron's name at the end of the *Roman* section, where Robert de Boron is depicted as a reteller of the "Livre dou Graal" in a longer and more elaborate passage (pp. 290-1 in Micha's edition of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*). The status of the passage and its placement in these particular manuscripts has been hotly debated (see Micha, *Étude* 17-9). Because it is situated at a boundary between two texts, many factors are at play that would distract from the focus of my discussion; I have, therefore, not included it in my analysis.
[327] Page range taken from Sommer's edition, here and in the following. For a summary of *LeM*'s beginning, see the general introduction.

to saving Merlin’s soul. Before *LeM* switches rather abruptly to a new narrative strand about Vortigern,[328] the narrative pauses in order to include a lengthy conversation between Merlin and Blaise. Merlin convinces Blaise to equip himself with everything he needs in order to write a book:

> si li commencha a conter les amors de ihesu crist & ioseph darithmathie tot ausi com eles auoient este … . Apres li dist des diables comment il orent parlement de ce quil … auoient porpale quil feroient . j . homme. & disent quil me feroient & tu las bien oi … . Ensi deuisa merlins cest oeure & le fist faire a blayse . & moult sesmerueilla blayses des meruelles que merlins disoit . & neporquant li sambloent eles uraies & boines & beles si i atendoit moult a faire . (19)
>
> Merlin began to recount the love between Jesus Christ and Joseph of Arimathea, just as it had been … . Afterward he told him about the devils, how … they had conspired to make a man. “And they said they would make me. You heard all about it … .”
> Thus did Merlin set out the plan for the work that he ordered Blaise to undertake. And Blaise was amazed at the wonders that Merlin told, but they seemed to be nonetheless true and good and beautiful, so he devoted himself to writing them down … . (21)

The first things which Merlin tells Blaise to record in writing have parallels in the beginning of *LeM* itself: the story of Merlin’s conception and birth is part of the story Merlin tells. It thus becomes clear that Blaise’s book is the source for the story the reader is reading, *LeM* itself.

This scene also displays interesting connections to matters I have addressed above. On the one hand, Merlin’s audience consists of Blaise alone, who listens to Merlin’s report not for the sake of entertainment but with the specific purpose of recording it in writing for posterity. As is the case of the narrative voices of *LeM*, the focus lies not on the content of the story but on its recording in the form of a story. On the other hand, this source fiction plays with the idea of conceptional literacy. Merlin is at the oral origin of *LeM*, but Blaise is the first to record the story in writing. In addition, Merlin tells Blaise about the events of the story with the specific purpose of having Blaise record them. Interestingly, then, the first version of *LeM*’s *histoire* is an oral report by Merlin, but conceptionally literate because he is dictating it to Blaise.

[328] See section 4 above.

The unusual status of *LeM*'s fictional source is further complicated by the theme of authority. Merlin prophesizes the future reception of his book to Blaise:

> atous iors mais sera ta paine & tes liures retrais & uolentiers ois en tous lieus mais il ne sera pas en auctorite . & por ce que tu ne pues estre des aposteles car il ne misent onques riens en escrit de nostre segnor quil neussent ueu . & oi & tu ni mes riens que tu aies ueu ne oi se ce non que iou te di . & aussi comme ie serai oscurs fors deuers chaus oui e me uoldrai esclairier ensi sera tes liures celes . & poi auenra que ia nus ten face bonte . & tu lenporteras auoec toi quant iou men irai auoec cels qui me venront querre . (19-20)
>
> Forever thereafter, your work and your book will be retold,[329] and your book will be gladly heard everywhere. But it will not have authority, because you cannot be among the apostles, who never put anything down in writing about Our Lord that they had not seen or heard, and you do not put down what you have seen or heard except as I tell you to. And just as I will remain obscure except concerning those things wherein I wish to reveal myself, so your book will remain hidden. In a short while it will come about that no one will thank you for it, and you will take it away with you when I go off with those who are to come for me. (21)

A contrast is established here between the lasting popularity of Blaise's book and its lack of authority. While the former can be read as a relatively simple way of creating (fictional) popularity for *LeM*, the latter aspect can be read in light of Merlin's and Blaise's role in this source fiction. The reason for the lack of authority of Blaise's book is, according to Merlin, the fact that Blaise will not be a direct witness to the events he will record like the Apostles were. This connection of witnesshood, orality, writing, and truth creates a complex network of sources of authority.

Given that empirical verifiability was only rarely an option, witness testimonies and written evidence enjoyed a high status in the Middle Ages in general. However, *LeM* values witnesses specifically if they write: the fact that Merlin, who is the oral source for Blaise's book, is an eyewitness to the events he tells does not grant it

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[329] My emendation, following Anne Berthelot's Modern French translation of "retraire" as "raconter" (*Merlin* [*Le livre du Graal*] p. 630, para. 59). Pickens's translation in *The Story* renders it as "told about". In the context of this sentence, translating the verb as "retold" seems to me to make more sense than taking it to mean that the book will be spoken about. Lovelich's Middle English translation (ll. 1663-6) and that in the *Prose Merlin* (*Merlin* [Wheatley] p. 23) support an understanding of "retraire" as Blaise's book being read aloud to an enthusiastic audience.

authority.[330] This, on its own, may have provided an easy fictional explanation for the intended reception of *LeM*: it is supposed to be popular, enjoyed, and read aloud. This hints at the intended reception of *LeM* as romance: the concern with being popular addresses the boom of Arthurian literature in the decades preceding *LeM*'s composition, and the idea of the written text being read aloud is in line with what we can assume about its reception.[331]

However, the comparison drawn with the Apostles disturbs this simple reading somewhat: by contrasting Blaise with them, Merlin's status in the paradigm of authority becomes ambiguous. In the thirteenth century, when *LeM* was composed, the distinction between the divine *auctor* and human *auctores* became a central interest.[332] For religious texts, "God was regarded as the first *auctor* or the unmoved mover of such a book, whereas the human *auctor* was both moved (by God) and moving (in producing the text)" (Minnis 79). A similar hierarchy between Merlin's plans and Blaise's book can be observed: Blaise is a secondary *auctor* to Merlin. Another distinction between divine and human *auctores* furthers this connection between Merlin and God: "God is the sole *auctor* of things … , whereas human *auctores* are *auctores* of words" (Minnis 73). I have already discussed Merlin's role as orchestrator of events – as *auctor* of things – as well as his apartness and singular status among the other characters of *LeM*.[333] I would like to suggest here that this function of Merlin can be read such that he is a twofold *auctor* of *LeM*: he makes the *histoire* happen in the first place, and he gives it its first narrativized shape when dictating it to Blaise. Thus, Merlin at once grants

[330] A close connection between pieces of writing and eyewitnesses is apparent elsewhere in *LeM*. For example, the time and date of Arthur's conception is recorded in writing on Merlin's demand (76; 68). When Arthur's legitimacy is questioned and Merlin defends him in front of his barons, Ulfin produces a written account of what Merlin has just revealed about Arthur's conception, made by Uther on Merlin's request (101; 90-1 – note that Pickens here mistranslates the syntax; the Old French sentence suggests quite clearly that it was Merlin who requested the sealed letter, not Uther). These two pieces of writing might be thought to be one and the same thing considering their similar context, were it not for the fact that the description of their content differs. It is clear, however, that both pieces of writing must have been written by eyewitnesses to what they contain because of the secrecy concerning Arthur's conception.
[331] For the oral reception of Arthurian literature, see Busby, "*Mise en texte*" esp. 61. See also Vitz; Trachsler, "Orality".
[332] See Minnis, ch. 3. Note also that medieval concepts of authority were closely tied to ideas of truth and significance (Minnis 10).
[333] See ch. 2, section 5.

authority to Blaise's book and undermines it: he himself says it will have no authority, but there is hardly a more authoritative source imaginable than the character who orchestrated everything it contains, ordered it to be written, and dictated its exact content. As a result, the statement that Blaise's book will have no authority because Blaise is not an eyewitness almost reduces the matter of authority to a technicality.[334] Merlin's oral report is as infallible as it could be, because he is omniscient and it was he who orchestrated the events which he reports in the first place. By contrast, had Blaise simply recorded what he had seen, his book would arguably be less likely to reflect the truth, even though it would bear authority. With this treatment of authority, *LeM*'s source fiction can be read as an example of how courtly literature experimented and played with conceptional literacy from the twelfth century onward.

This source fiction that is established through Blaise's book goes on to add more details. Besides the beginning of *LeM* itself, Merlin's report to Blaise includes the story of Joseph of Arimathea. This connection between Merlin's story and that of Joseph is continued when Merlin gives Blaise further instructions:

> si ten iras es parties doccident si sera li liures ioseph adiouste au tien . … si sera la chose bien esprouee de ma paine & de la toie … . Et quant li doi liure seront ensamble si iaura . j . biau liure & li doi seront . j . misme chose fors tant que ne puis pas dire ne retraire les priuees paroles de ihesu crist & de ioseph . (20)
>
> You will go to Western parts, and the book of Joseph will be put together with yours … , and everything will have been proved true concerning my labors and yours … . And when the two books are put together, there will be one beautiful book, and the two will be one and the same thing, except that I cannot say or recount the intimate words between Jesus Christ and Joseph. (21)

Interestingly, this passage makes reference to *LeM*'s manuscript context by addressing the combination of Blaise's book with the "book of Joseph". *LeM* typically follows either the *Joseph en prose* or *Lestoire del saint Graal* in the manuscripts in which it survives.[335] In addition to creating a connection between Blaise's book and *LeM*, the passage quoted above creates a connection between the

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334 For a similar reading, see Burns 17-8.
335 For a list of *LeM*'s manuscripts, see the appendix. For an overview of the most frequent combinations of the *LG*'s texts more broadly, see Moran, *Lectures cycliques* 660-1.

"book of Joseph" and whichever text precedes *LeM* in the manuscript in front of the reader. In a later passage, this combined book is also called *The Book of the Grail* (30).[336] The attention given to the co-circulation of texts and their belonging together creates a source fiction even on the material level of the book the reader is holding. This at once legitimizes the text as a version that has been transmitted from the past and the manuscript as adhering to Merlin's instructions for the book.

Further evidence for this attention to the connection between Blaise's book and *LeM*, as well as an interest in its combination with the story of Joseph, can be found in manuscript paratexts. The passage that serves as a transition between the *Lestoire del saint Graal* and *LeM*, which I quoted in the discussion of Robert de Boron above, is a good example. It is a major concern of this transition that *LeM* "[must be joined] with the History of the Holy Grail because it is a branch of it and belongs to it" (*The History* 308).[337] Some manuscripts containing both *Lestoire del saint Graal* and *LeM* even call themselves the "liure dou grail" or "liure du saint grail".[338]

The position of Merlin and Blaise at the fictional origin of *LeM* is thus brought in connection to tangible, material "evidence" found outside the text itself. This leaves the impression that the manuscript the reader is holding is a window onto the past, not just through the text it contains but also through the simple fact of its existence. This link between the narrated past and the reader's present works in two directions. The real manuscript transmits *LeM* and points to the past in which the text originated; conversely, Merlin – who is part of that past – foretells the future of Blaise's book, which is reflected in the reader's present situation of reading.

After the creation of Blaise's book is set up, Blaise, who has so far been involved in the plot and positioned in relation to characters other than Merlin, disappears from the narrative. Merlin, who continues to be involved in the plot, becomes his only

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336 "li liures du graal" (28).
337 "estoire de merlin quil couient a fine force adiouster a lestoire del saint graal . por ce que la brance i est & i apartient" (*Lestoire del saint Graal* 296).
338 See BnF fr. 747, 102v, and Arsenal 3350, table of contents. This title is applied far from consistently across manuscripts, however. BnF fr. 748, 18r, and BnF fr. 9123, 95v, for example, use the same title to refer only to *Lestoire del saint Graal*.

source of information and interaction.[339] After this point in the story, Merlin frequently departs from court and visits Blaise, staying with him for weeks, months, sometimes even years, and telling him what happens in the past, present, and future. While Merlin remains involved in the story, these are the only passages in which Blaise makes an appearance and in which Merlin switches from his role as an involved orchestrator of events to his role as distant storyteller. Merlin's visits to Blaise thus acquire a metanarrative status. These short scenes are quite similar to one another. A typical example is this:

> Lors prinst merlins congie al roy pandragon & sen ala a blayse si li dist ces choses . Et blayses les mist tout en escrit & par ce le sauons nous encore . Et pandragons cheualcha tant par ses iournees quil troua uter son frere. (41)
>
> Then Merlin took leave of King Pendragon and went off to Blaise, and he told him these things. And Blaise put them all in writing, and this is how we still know them.
> Pendragon rode until, after many days, he found his brother Uther. (45)

Such passages appear in particular between narrative episodes and gain a structuring function comparable to appearances of "li contes". For example, Merlin's visits to Blaise are also used throughout *LeM* to break the reader's immersion and draw attention to their present reading situation. Thus, at the end of the episode, Merlin goes to Blaise and tells him "these things", that is, the events that have just happened. The distance from the story is increased through the use of deixis; the reader is reminded of their present time by the conclusion "and this is how we still know them".

Another interesting factor is the passage of time. Blaise's book is not created in one go but an ongoing work in progress while *LeM*'s *histoire* unfolds. This time-consuming process is also referenced in these scenes, since they often state that Merlin's visits to Blaise cover "many days". In this light, the time it takes him to report to Blaise takes on a particular purpose with regard to *LeM*'s structure. Since Merlin is a homodiegetic storyteller, his reports to Blaise mean that time also passes at court. Given the occurrence of these scenes between episodes, Merlin's

[339] See also ch. 1, section 1.

visits to Blaise serve a secondary purpose as contractions in narrated time, in particular for skipping certain periods.[340]

This function of Merlin's visits to Blaise is particularly prominent in the episodic structure of the *Roman* section. In the *Roman*, Merlin moves exclusively between the royal court and Blaise's abode and stays at Blaise's abode as long as there is no problem at the court that demands his attention. By contrast, in the interlaced *Suite*, Merlin's movements cover much more space and generally do not serve to skip narrated time. Instead, Merlin's visits to Blaise happen simultaneously with other events:

> si vent al soir meismes a blaise son maistre en norhomberlande … . & merlins li conta toutes les auentures qui estoient auenues … puis quil sen parti de lui … . cil le mist tot en escrit mot a mot . & par li en sauons nous encore che que nous en sauons . … & cel soir que merlins parla a blaise si fu la maisnie oriels logie sour la riuiere de hombre … . (179)
>
> And the same evening he went straight to Blaise, his master, in Northumberland … . And Merlin told him all the adventures that had happened … since he had left him … . He [Blaise] put it all in writing, word for word, and it is through him that we still know what we do know about those things. … And on the very evening that Merlin spoke to Blaise, Oriel's company encamped on the river Humber … . (192)

In this example from the *Suite*, Merlin's visit to Blaise is part of an uninterrupted sequence of events. The events that occur at court and elsewhere during Merlin's absence are narrated rather than contracted or skipped, and the passage makes sure to situate Merlin's visit to Blaise in this succession of events and narrative strands. While it retains its structural function as a transition between episodes in the *Suite*, it loses the function regarding narrated time described above.

A closer look at this passage also reveals connections between *LeM*'s source fiction and its transmission fiction. For example, the phrase "through him we still know what we do know" alludes to the impression given by the transmission fiction that *LeM* contains merely a whittled-down selection of story material. Similarly, other passages about Merlin and Blaise address differences between Blaise's book and *LeM*. A good example of this takes place at the end of the episode in which Merlin

[340] See Müller, esp. 77.

founds the Round Table, where Merlin tells Blaise "these things, the founding of that table and many other things which you will hear in his book" (62).[341] Here, Merlin's report to Blaise contains things that will be told at a later point in *LeM*: the narrative order of Blaise's book, which records Merlin's words "word by word" (192),[342] is evidently different from that of *LeM*. As discussed above, the idea of omitted and rearranged material is conveyed by the narrative voices of *LeM* as well and is a consistent part of its transmission fiction.[343] It becomes clear that *LeM*'s source fiction does not extend to the *discours* level but applies only to the *histoire*. The source fiction serves to establish a continuity between Blaise's book and *LeM* on the *histoire* level and a discontinuity between them on the *discours* level. The transmission fiction of *LeM* corresponds to these ideas of sameness and difference by outlining the existence of multiple versions that echo one another without saying exactly the same thing.

## 6. The Problem of (Un)reliable Narration

Much of what I have suggested so far for *LeM*'s text story also applies to that of the *LG* as a whole. "Li contes" and the narrating "I" appear in its other parts as well, as does another pseudo-author, namely Walter Map.[344] In all parts of the *LG*, the coexistence of multiple narrative voices interacts with the abundance of transfictional references on the *histoire* level to create the impression of a narrative that "omits certain passages that have been included in previous versions of it, or that could be related on subsequent occasions"; the result is a self-authentication that results "simply from the insistence that the tale has been told before and that it will be told again" (Burns 42).

I would like to argue, however, that *LeM*'s source fiction grants it a different status than the other texts of the *LG* and of Arthurian literature more broadly. Of particular interest here is Merlin's role as the source of *LeM*'s *histoire*. The idea of characters as source fictions is widespread in Arthurian literature. The usual and

[341] "ces choses & ces establisemens de cele table & maintes autres coses que vous orres en son liure" (56).
[342] "mot a mot" (179).
[343] For a more detailed discussion of Merlin's influence on the *histoire*, see ch. 1., section 5, and ch. 2, section 5.
[344] See Smith, esp. ch. 6.

familiar examples of this consist in the practice whereby Arthur's knights tell of their own adventures at court. In early Arthurian literature, the practice of narrating adventure is inextricably bound up with the experience of adventure itself: stories of adventures generate experiences of adventure which, in turn, generate adventure stories.[345] As the origins of *LeM*, Merlin and Blaise thus have numerous correspondences elsewhere in the *LG* and Arthurian romance in general;[346] the idea that Arthurian romances are derived from the accounts of their protagonists is a common feature of the genre.

Given its temporal setting before most other Arthurian romances, it is perhaps not surprising that *LeM* features a three-page-long scene that accounts for the origin of knightly storytellers. When Arthur holds his first high court – peace with King Lot has just been made, and the tournament between the Knights of the Round Table and the Queen's Knights is about to begin – he announces that he will henceforth only sit down for dinner after hearing about an adventure:

> ie uoel establir a ma cort por moi esleechier toutes les fois que ie porterai corone iou veu a dieu que ia ne serrai al mangier deuant que aucune auenture i sera auenue de quel part ke che soit . par tel conuent que sele est bele & tele quele fait adrechier par les cheualiers de ma cort qui por pris & por honor conquerre i uaudront repairier & estre mi ami & mi compaignon & mi parent . (320)
>
> I wish to found a custom in my court to gladden me every time I will wear my crown: I swear to God that I will not sit down to eat before news of some adventure comes from wherever it may have happened, provided that it is a fair adventure and one to make the knights of my court go after it – knights who would win glory and honor and be my friends, my companions and my kinsmen. (344)

This habit of Arthur is another familiar trope from Arthurian literature.[347] His refusal to eat without adventures establishes adventures and adventure stories as vital to him and his court, and as vital for the progression of the story at hand.

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[345] See Strohschneider, esp. 235.
[346] Burns lists further examples of knights' tales being recorded (182n5) in the *LG*. See Strohschneider for selected examples from Arthurian literature in Middle High German (ch. E.3).
[347] See Guerreau-Jalabert for a brief discussion and selected examples from Arthurian literature in Old French (579, esp. n68) and Strohschneider for examples from Arthurian literature in Middle High German (242-51).

Prompted by Arthur's vow, the Knights of the Round Table in turn swear to help any maiden asking for Arthur's help. Gawain and his followers swear allegiance to the queen, becoming the Queen's Knights, and commit to accepting any adventure that comes their way. Some rules about quests are established on Gawain's initiative, including the custom that upon his return, a knight must truthfully report his adventures, successes and failures alike:

> & quant il seront repairie a court si dira chascuns lun apres lautre toutes les auentures qui auenues li seront queles queles soient ou boines ou maluaises . & iureront sor sains que de riens nen mentiront ou al aler ou al uenir & tout ensi le uolons nous . (321)
>
> And when they [the knights] are all back in court, they will each tell, one after the other, about the adventures that have happened to them, whether they are good or bad, and they will swear on the saints that they will lie about nothing in their going out or coming back. (345)

In this scene, Arthur's desire to have challenges brought to him and his knights leads to the knights' oath and mindset of pursuing adventure whenever possible and reporting truthfully about it on their return. On Guenevere's initiative, four clerks are then found who

> ne sentremetront dautre chose fors de metre en escrit toutes les auentures qui auendront a vous & a uos compaignons si que apres nos mors soient amenteues[348] les proeces des peudomes de chaiens . (321)
>
> will undertake to do nothing but put into writing all the adventures that happen to you [Gawain] and your companions so that after our deaths the deeds of prowess by the worthy gentlemen from here will be remembered. (345)

Guenevere thus establishes the custom that these adventures be recorded. As a result, a source fiction for the Arthurian chivalric romances as a whole is established in *LeM*. There is now a direct link between the knight who experiences an adventure, his oral report at court, and the recording of it in writing and the preservation of it for posterity.

The impulse to record chivalric adventures is similar to that expressed by Merlin when he orders Blaise to write his book: the "auentures" are written down to be remembered "after our deaths" – here, too, the afterlife of the books is in focus.

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[348] Unlike elsewhere in the text, the Old French word here is not "remembrance" or "souvenir" or one of their cognates but "amentevoir", which connotes narration at length in addition to remembering. See "amentevoir".

This scene in the *Suite* thus establishes a fictional explanation for the origin of (other) Arthurian romances; in doing so, it strengthens *LeM*'s connection with them. Furthermore, both Merlin and the knights are direct witnesses to the events they tell, and their reports are recorded by someone who was not an eyewitness, primarily for posterity. Merlin's statement about the authority of Blaise's book thus resonates in this scene about the origins of chivalric romance.

Some differences also emerge, however, when comparing Merlin and the knights as homodiegetic storytellers. Most importantly, Merlin's omniscience stands in contrast to the imperfect knowledge and insight of the storytelling knights. The fallibility of the knightly protagonist is, one could argue, central to the inner workings of many an Arthurian romance that builds on the knight's crisis, often following a lapse in judgement.[349] It is thus crucial for Arthurian romances that knights are easily deceived in their adventures and have to rely on information from other characters.

The situation is very different in *LeM*. Far from being built around a character's crisis and subsequent development, *LeM*'s plot is constructed on, and by, an omniscient and infallible protagonist. The consistent interest in knowledge and frequent mistaken assumptions of other characters about Merlin highlight his reliability even more.[350] The difference between Merlin and the storytelling knights is reinforced by the knights' oath to tell the truth: the knights must "swear on the saints [to] lie about nothing", which makes the truthfulness of their stories an honourable choice – a choice that could potentially be revoked in a moment of crisis or confusion.[351] The choice is also relativized by the fact that the knights themselves might not know the truth. By contrast, Merlin's revelations are always true, as *LeM* frequently emphasizes. This trait of his is central to the *histoire* and thus further underlines his value as a source for *LeM*.[352] Casting Merlin as the infallibly reliable source of *LeM* implicitly calls the reliability of other Arthurian

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[349] See, for example, Kennedy, "Failure" 18-9.
[350] See ch. 2, section 5.
[351] Thus, for example, Gawain is tempted to break his oath when he is transformed (491; 460-1; see also ch. 1, section 6).
[352] One of very many examples is Merlin's first dialogue with Pendragon and Uther (48-9; 43). Some adaptations insist even more on the fact that Merlin never lies; see ch. 2, section 5.1.

romances into question. While not of immediate interest when reading the other romances,[353] the contrast serves within *LeM* to elevate its claim to truth above theirs.

## 7. Conclusions

The narrative voices of *LeM*, while functioning differently in detail, are combined to outline a transmission fiction. “Li contes” is a mine of information that appears to exist independently of a specific storytelling situation. The narrating “I”, by contrast, evokes such a situation but takes little to no credit for its retelling of the story of Merlin. Similarly, Robert de Boron, the author of *LeM*’s historical source, appears in this adaptation of it as just another reteller of Merlin’s story. The existence of more storytellers and other distinct versions is strongly implied. All of these narrative voices engage primarily with *LeM*’s *discours*: they are employed to draw attention to narrative order as well as to (fictional) omissions of narrative material or the insertion of digressions. They do not typically comment on or engage with LeM’s *histoire*.

The close interaction of *LeM*’s narrative voices with its *discours* extends to their function for its structure. The narrative voices appear in particular at moments of narrative pause, in order to support switches in place or character. Notably, in these instances, several narrative voices tend to appear in the same passage, making reference to one another. This creates the impression that the same story is being told by several voices at once. Together with the (fictional) existence of several slightly different versions leading up to *LeM*, this creates a temporal continuity for *LeM*. The transmission fiction of *LeM* thus connotes plurality: no recounting of *LeM*’s *histoire* is ever the last one, and it will continue to be told just as it has been transmitted from Arthur’s time to the reader’s present. The importance of *LeM*’s *discours* is thus downplayed to the benefit of the transmission of its *histoire* for posterity, granting it importance as a possible source for future retellings.

Merlin and Blaise, in turn, are at the heart of *LeM*’s source fiction, with Blaise’s book being depicted as the source for *LeM*. The recurrent descriptions of Merlin

[353] See Strohschneider 257n118.

dictating the events that took place in previous episodes to Blaise, and Blaise writing them down, are connected to the inclusion of these episodes in *LeM* itself. This source fiction for *LeM* tends to be invoked in the same passages as its transmission fiction, and often together with it. The narrative voices echo not only one another but also, on occasion, Merlin as an implied storyteller. Moreover, Merlin and Blaise, too, can have structural functions, appearing in particular in order to allow narrated time to be skipped.

In the source fiction, Merlin occupies the ambiguous role of an author who does not write. This is not an innovation of *LeM* but aligns it with the older texts of the *LG* and other Arthurian works, in which the adventure stories of knights are used as source fictions to grant the texts a "quality of transmittedness".[354] In the case of *LeM*, Merlin's status as omniscient prophet has further implications for the authority of Blaise's book, which is compared to the authority of Scripture. Merlin's omniscience is a crucial factor in elevating *LeM*'s claim to truth above that of the other parts of the *LG* and other Arthurian works more generally. The function of Merlin and Blaise as a source fiction for *LeM* both mirrors and contrasts with a familiar source fiction for other Arthurian works, namely the idea of knights who experience adventures and recount them at court to have them recorded for posterity. Merlin's omniscience and role as an orchestrator of LeM's *histoire* imbue his role as a storyteller with a higher authority, thus emphasizing the truth value of *LeM*'s *histoire*. This use of Merlin's character traits mirrors the way in which he is depicted as the orchestrator of events both within and beyond *LeM*, and how his prophecies about the future of Arthur's reign create transfictional links to other Arthurian romances: "Thus Merlin not only acts in the story, or foretells the story; he writes the story as well" (Cawsey 96).[355] The character of Merlin serves as a central connection between *LeM* and other Arthurian works, while at the same time elevating his deeds and significance above those of everyone else. Viewed independently of other texts and in an intratextual light, Merlin renders the relationship between the past and the future bidirectional. The prophet of the past

[354] My translation, "Qualität der Überliefertheit" (Strohschneider 251).
[355] Cawsey's illuminating article centres on the Middle English *Prose Merlin* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, but many of her findings overlap with mine.

shapes the future to become what he knows it must be, and this includes the existence and transmission of *LeM*. Similarly to other purposes he fulfils in *LeM*, Merlin's role as its source fiction, in contrast to the source fictions of other Arthurian texts, interacts with the work's temporal setting and serves to stage it as an anthology of beginnings.

The text story of *LeM* can be interpreted as reflecting an interest in conceptional literacy that Strohschneider has noted for courtly literature more broadly. I briefly discussed in the introduction to this chapter how his suggestion that the *LG* experiments with conceptional literacy stands somewhat at odds with Burns's suggestion that it presents an oral, vernacular, dynamic model of authority as opposed to the written, static, Latin authority of Scripture. I would like to conclude by suggesting an adaptation of Burns's observation that takes Strohschneider's analysis into account in order to capture the specific characteristics of *LeM*.

I agree that the system of authority in the vernacular *LG* could be read as contrasting with Latin Scripture, which was the main model for conceptionally literate works at the time of the *LG*'s composition. For example, "li contes", a term that is neither clearly oral nor clearly written in nature, evokes the idea of a *histoire* that exists independently of and prior to any specific oral or written *discours*, and in doing so evokes a similar effect to formulas used in exegesis such as "Scripture says".[356] The repeated references of the narrating "I" to "li contes" as its source support this interpretation. What is of particular interest with regard to conceptional literacy are the similarities that Burns observes between Merlin's authority and God's: just as God's oral words to the Apostles grant their writing a particular authority, so Merlin's words to Blaise lend authority to Blaise's book. Up to this point, there is no direct contradiction between Strohschneider's and Burns's views. However, Burns argues that the orality of Merlin's words contributes to the plurality that is a central effect of the *LG*, and that this plurality contrasts with the

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[356] Burns 48-50. One contention with Burns's arguments about *LG*'s "fiction of orality" is her interpretation of various formulas as entailing orality. Her examples include "dire", "parler", "conter", and "raconter", all of which are actually applied variously to oral and written texts in Old French. As Burns herself shows, the application of these verbs to texts is not an innovation of the *LG*, and has a long tradition in exegesis, which is centred on written texts.

static quality of Scripture. I would contest both these arguments. On the one hand, Merlin's alignment with God goes beyond the orality of his words to Blaise. Both Merlin and God address their respective scribes only to utter conceptionally literate but oral speech: the entire purpose of their speech is that it be recorded in writing as closely as possible. There is little room in this parallel for plurality; indeed, the plurality that is evoked in *LeM* results entirely from the fictional transmission that takes place after Blaise records Merlin's words in writing. While I agree that plurality is a central effect of *LeM*, and the *LG* in general, I would argue that it cannot be connected to the orality of Merlin's words but solely to the variance that is characteristic of the written transmission of vernacular texts in manuscript cultures.[357]

Another argument Burns makes is that Merlin's authority in *LeM* and its alignment with God are connected to the orality of his words. Here, too, I disagree, and would argue that Merlin's orality should be seen in a wider context. On the one hand, the fact that Merlin himself does not write in *LeM* is a relatively consistent property of his character across the many narratives that were circulating about him at the time *LeM* was composed.[358] This is particularly evident in those cases where Merlin's words are recorded by another character. In the *Vita Merlini*, Merlin demands his prophecies be recorded in writing.[359] While no act of writing is mentioned explicitly, Merlin has an extended friendship with a hermit to whom he tells stories in Layamon's *Brut* (60-1). The orality of Merlin's words was thus a familiar trait by the time *LeM* was composed.

On the other hand, the configuration of Merlin and Blaise as a source fiction is not specific to *LeM* either. While the *Roman* section is the oldest surviving text that mentions Blaise's book, its continuation with the *Suite-Vulgate* to yield *LeM* is a later development, and Blaise's book functions as a source fiction before the *Suite*

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[357] Consider Cerquiglini's concept of variance (esp. 42 and 120n19) in contrast to Zumthor's related *mouvance*, which Zumthor explains as a product of medieval oral culture (*La lettre*, esp. 160-8). If there is any contrast between Blaise's book and Scripture, it may make more sense to view it as one between the Latin language and the vernacular rather than one between the oral and written medium.
[358] The only exception in *LeM* is the Grisandole episode – in many ways an outlier within this text – in which Merlin magically inscribes a doorway (302-15; 281-92).
[359] *Life of Merlin* 80-1.

was added to the *Roman*, and before the two texts together were combined with the rest of the *LG*. This is demonstrated by the *Didot-Perceval*, which predates the *Suite*. In the two manuscripts in which it survives, the *Didot-Perceval* was combined with both what would later become the *Roman* section of *LeM* and the *Joseph en prose*. This combination is believed to form an earlier literary cycle, the *Petit Cycle du Graal*. In the *Didot-Perceval*, too, Blaise continues writing his book and, very much unlike the *Suite*, he even finishes his process: "When Blaise had finished his writing he bore it to Perceval who had the Grail in keeping … ."[360] Thus, the connection between Merlin and the oral authorship of texts is not an innovation made in *LeM* to support a particular system of authority in the *LG*. Instead, if anything, it is a familiar property of Merlin as a character that is incorporated into the *LG*'s system of authority. When the prophetic texts circulating about Merlin are taken into consideration, his status as a prophet seems to be a more central factor in his singular authority in *LeM* than the orality of his prophecies and words to Blaise.[361]

My analysis of *LeM* in this and the two previous chapters concludes with three main findings. First, *LeM*'s status as a prequel does not derive solely from its intertextual context in the *LG*. It is also signalled intratextually in the *discours* of the text, which connects it not only to the *LG* but also to Arthurian literature more generally, as well as giving it a transfictional dimension. *LeM* thus presents itself as a story of beginnings that can be approached in itself, or in the context of the *LG*, or in light of the Arthurian universe as a whole. Second, the character of Merlin is crucial to the status of *LeM* as a prequel in that he is the orchestrator of its plot as well as a prophet who prepares the ground for narratives beyond it. Third, Merlin's contribution to *LeM*'s focus on the future as well as the primacy of its claim to truthfulness over that of other Arthurian works is established in *LeM*'s text story, in which he plays a prominent role.

[360] *The Romance of Perceval* 93. "Quant Blayses ot fait sen escrit si l'en aporta chiés Perceval qui le Graal gardoit …" (*The Didot* Perceval 278, only in MS E).
[361] On the relationship between authority and medium (orality or writing) in prophecies, see Köbele; Stell 411.

In the fourth and final chapter, I will turn to one of the later adaptations of *LeM*, the Middle English *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. I will revisit many of the aspects of *LeM*'s *discours* that I have discussed so far in a comparative study of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*'s versions with one another and with *LeM*. This analysis will serve to set the findings of the dissertation in a broader context and to investigate how *LeM*'s status as a prequel and the various ways of approaching it intratextually, intertextually, and transfictionally change when it becomes a text that stands independently of the *LG*.

# 4. The Middle English *Of Arthour and of Merlin*: A Case Study

## 1. Introduction

The previous chapters of this dissertation have analysed the *discours* of the Old French *LeM*. As I have shown, *LeM*'s *discours* evokes its status as a prequel, a story of origins, in intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional respects. Its intertextual connection to the *LG*, in which it precedes and prepares the ground for the *Lancelot*, the *Queste dou Graal*, and the *Mort Artu*, is thus one of several perspectives from which the text can be approached. It also aligns itself transfictionally with other works set in the Arthurian universe. In terms of its *discours*, it conforms to the conventions of Arthurian romance, and especially prose romances. In terms of its *histoire*, it stands in direct temporal continuity with Arthurian chivalric romances, which are generally set in the twelve-year period of peace which begins when *LeM* ends. Intratextually, finally, *LeM* signals its status as a story of beginnings through a complex combination of causality, an omniscient protagonist who is focalized externally, and a text story that emphasizes its value as a source of information.

Various translations of *LeM* preserve it largely unchanged. For example, Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, the anonymous Middle English *Prose Merlin*, and Jacob van Maerlant's *Boek van Merline* can be considered close translations, though there are numerous differences in detail that deserve attention in their own right. Interestingly, Lovelich and Maerlant also translated *Lestoire del saint Graal*, the text which precedes *LeM* in most manuscripts, as the *History of the Holy Grail* and the *Historie van den Grale* respectively. Those translations precede their translations of the Merlin narrative in the manuscripts: the connection of the Old French *LeM* with *Lestoire del saint Graal* is thus maintained. This shows that the intertextuality and connectivity of *LeM* worked in translation as well, at least to some extent. The

appeal of these three translations to medieval audiences is difficult to determine because each text survives in only one manuscript.[362]

By contrast, the oldest surviving Middle English translation, the verse *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (*AM*), is a relatively free adaptation of *LeM*. It survives in multiple manuscripts and was often copied together with other verse romances. The oldest manuscript in which it is preserved is the Auchinleck manuscript (A); it also survives in Lincoln's Inn, Hale 150 (L), the seventeenth-century Percy Folio (P), an early print version by Wynkyn de Worde (W), and in the fragment Douce 236 (D).[363] The considerable differences between each of these textual witnesses suggest that *AM* was continuously readapted to new contexts and that it circulated in at least three distinct versions . Similarly, the marginalia in A and L, and the fact that W was reprinted at least twice, suggest that *AM* was continuously read or listened to by interested audiences throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.[364]

*AM*'s lasting popularity, and the continued transmission and engagement with *LeM*'s narrative in other adaptations more generally, show that *LeM*'s intertextual connection to the *LG* was not of primary interest to medieval audiences. *AM* adapts *LeM* independently of the *LG*, and the many differences between *AM*'s versions show that the potential purposes and effects of the Merlin narrative are manifold. This chapter aims to discuss what the Merlin narrative became in these different versions, and will consist in large part in a comparison of these analogues with one another and with *LeM*. The aspects of *LeM*'s *discours* discussed in the three previous chapters will be central to this analysis as well. The chapter will

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[362] Cambridge, Corpus Christi, Parker Library 80; Cambridge, University Library, Ff.3.11; Schloss Burgsteinfurt in Steinfurt (Westf.), Fürstliche Bentheim-Steinfurtische Schlossbibliothek, Hs. 28 (B37). Another single-leaf fragment of the *Prose Merlin* survives on folio 43 in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D.913.
[363] The complete designations of the textual witnesses are as follows: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates, 19.2.1 (A), London, Lincoln's Inn Library, 150 (L), London, British Library, Additional 27879 (P), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 236. For W, see footnote 4. There are also two post-medieval transcriptions, the fragment contained in London, British Library, Harleian 6223 (H) and London, Bodleian Library, Douce 124 (Walter Scott's transcription of A), which will not be considered in this chapter. For a description of all the textual witnesses, see Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 35-44.
[364] See Clifton, "Early Modern Readers", and Horobin and Wiggins. The early print editions are ESTC S96176 ([Westminster] after 1498), S100757 (London 1510), S123823 (London 1529).

illuminate the adaptors' awareness of and attitude to its potential functions. This applies both to the different treatments of particular scenes and to overarching patterns such as intertextual and transfictional references. The results of my analysis of *LeM* will figure throughout this chapter, serving as the basis for a comparative analysis. Beyond this, however, I will consider my findings regarding the versions of *AM* in terms of how *LeM*'s *histoire* and *discours* are mutated when the immediate intertextual context of the *LG* is not a factor. At the end of the chapter, I will revisit my discussion of *LeM*'s status as a prequel in this light.

*State of the Art: The Versions and Textual Witnesses of* AM

The relation of *AM*'s textual witnesses to one another is an unresolved problem. The similarities are strong enough to say with confidence that all the textual witnesses are clearly derived from a single lost source in one way or another. However, the similarities and variations between these textual witnesses permit different models of the affiliations between them.[365] On the basis of the main tendencies of agreement and disagreement, the textual witnesses are usually subdivided into two classes: a longer version – preserved only in A – and a shorter version – preserved in all other textual witnesses.[366] Even this distinction does not work perfectly. Manuscript D and Wynkyn de Worde's early print (W) both have more in common with A than L and P do, and there is evidence of cross-fertilization between the longer and shorter version more generally (Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 45-6). Moreover, the relationship between the longer and shorter versions is unclear. In his edition of *Arthour and Merlin*, Eugen Kölbing suggests that the longer version is also the older one (cliii-clxxii), and that the shorter version is derived from it. In his comparative edition of the longer and shorter versions, O. D. Macrae-Gibson in turn suggests that the shorter version may have

[365] See Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 44-60.

[366] Given that the shorter version ends before Arthur is born, it might seem inappropriate to refer to it with the title of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which is taken from A. No title is given in L, though its explicit calls the text *Merlyn*, and P's title for this text is *Merline in nine parts or Cantos*. Horobin and Wiggins call the shorter version *Merlyn*, after L's explicit. They and Kölbing also describe it as the "later version" (Horobin and Wiggins 30, Kölbing cliii). While this chronology is likely, I prefer to use the more neutral distinction between "longer" and "shorter versions".

derived directly from A rather than the longer version, but also acknowledges that these findings are inconclusive (*Introduction* 51-60).[367]

The most obvious difference between the longer and the shorter versions lies in length: A, the only surviving manuscript believed to be representative of the longer version, breaks off after about 10,000 lines in the middle of a folio, with no explicit. The text ends after Arthur defeats the Saxon Rion, thus securing the fealty of an important ally, Leodagan. The end of the text thus coincides with the end of a battle, which does mean this "ending" has an element of closure. However, many loose ends remain. Most obviously, Gawain and the other young recruits never complete their mission of becoming Arthur's knights, no peace is made with the rebels, and the Saxons are not driven out of England. Thus, as Calkin points out, the scribe of A "makes no effort to conclude the tale more decisively – that is, by adding an account of a final rout of the Saracens or a couplet resolving the conflict" ("Endings" 173). Even setting aside the absence of a more rounded ending to the narrative of A, it should be noted that the text of A anticipates a coming episode not that long before the text ends without it having taken place.[368] In the passage in question, Merlin sets up a fight between two of Arthur's enemies by delaying Galahad's escape. In *LeM*, Merlin's efforts and the fight itself are spread out across several separate passages, depicting him in his usual role as the orchestrator of the plot.[369] In A, the first of these passages is compressed as follows:

> For he [Merlin] was went wiþouten lesing
> After king Galat of miȝti hond
> Lord-ouer of herdene lond,
> Wiþ ten þousand þat was aschape,
> Sarraȝins wiþ gret rape,
> For to make enchauntement
> Hem tofore verrament;
> He made alle a valaye
> Also it were a brod leye
> Þat Galaþ no non of his
> Þat niȝt no miȝt oway, ywis –

[367] Note that Macrae-Gibson is here primarily concerned with the question of whether the shorter version's manuscripts can be used to emend A where it is corrupt or unclear. See also *An Edition* lxiii-lxiv.
[368] Macrae-Gibson considers the passage with the original adaptor's techniques in mind but does not consider why it would be preserved in A, as I do here (*Introduction* 158).
[369] See also ch. 1, section 5, and ch. 2, section 5.

> Herafter sone in þis write
> Whi he it dede ȝe schul it wite. (A9469-81)

The text's promise to tell more about Merlin's plans is never fulfilled, and the passage is confusing in its isolation: the reader never learns why Merlin created this valley or what happens to Galahad and his men. The longer version likely included the episode about Galahad and Amant after the point at which A breaks off. Other passages like these occur in A, leading to a lot of loose ends in it. Various explanations for this are possible. Perhaps the scribe's source copy was incomplete, or they lost access to it during the copying process. Other suggestions about Auchinleck's ending include a change of plans during the copying process.[370] Whatever the reason, there is no evidence that A's narrative trajectory was rewritten to match its ending after Rion's defeat.

The shorter version's textual witnesses can tentatively be subdivided further. P and W end after about 2000 lines with the Battle of Salisbury, which marks the end of Pendragon's reign and the beginning of Uther's. Another endpoint is found in L, which ends a few hundred lines earlier, after Vortigern's death. L's wording and details are very similar to W and P up to this point, which has sparked some discussion among the editors of *AM*. For one thing, L likely preserves an earlier abridgement of a longer source.[371] William E. Holland, who also published a critical edition of L, independently came to the same conclusion as Macrae-Gibson, namely that P, which is very similar in wording to L, must have been copied in stages, "plainly … deriving from a different source" after the point at which L ends.[372] Holland was unaware of W during the creation of his edition, but its existence had been brought to Macrae-Gibson's attention, though he had only limited access to parts of its text. After a preliminary analysis, Macrae-Gibson suggests the same copying process for W: the part corresponding to L was copied from an abridged version that was close to L and to the first part of P, and the remainder from a second source, perhaps even the same text that underlies the second part of P (*Introduction* 47-8). In his edition of W, a few years after Macrae-Gibson's edition

[370] See Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 161. This does not explain why there is no explicit even though the text ends in the middle of a folio. Calkin suggests that A here offers a deliberately open ending that the reader can complete as they wish ("Endings" 172-5).
[371] Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 47.
[372] Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 47. See also Holland, "Formulaic Diction" 92-3 and 105.

and study of the other textual witnesses, David Gerard Cylkowski conducts a more detailed study of W's wording. He shows that the second part of P is not closer to W than the first part.[373] Although the parts of P and W that follow the point at which L ends are thus not directly related, they both differ from L's text in similar ways, that is, by featuring a greater amount of "supportive detail and embellishment".[374] Holland, Macrae-Gibson, and Cylkowski, while working with different access to material and focusing on different analogues, thus all suggest that P and W are representative of a combined version, the first part of which corresponds to the abridged version and the second part of which is derived from the shorter version. The text of L preserves an abridgement of the shorter version which was the source for the first parts of P and W; the second parts of P and W were also copied from sources deriving from the shorter version.

A visualization of the assumptions, knowns, and unknowns regarding the relationships between *AM*'s versions and textual witnesses might look roughly like figure 4.1.

[373] See Cylkowski lxxi.
[374] Cylkowski lxi; see also lvii-lx. Cylkowski's analysis here focuses largely on the differences between versions P and W on the one hand and A on the other, but is supported by a study of the relative length of episodes in P, W, and L on pp. lxx-lxxii. Macrae-Gibson also notes that the second part of P has "enormously more additional matter than any of the [shorter version's] texts have earlier presented, matter moreover of much superior imaginative quality".

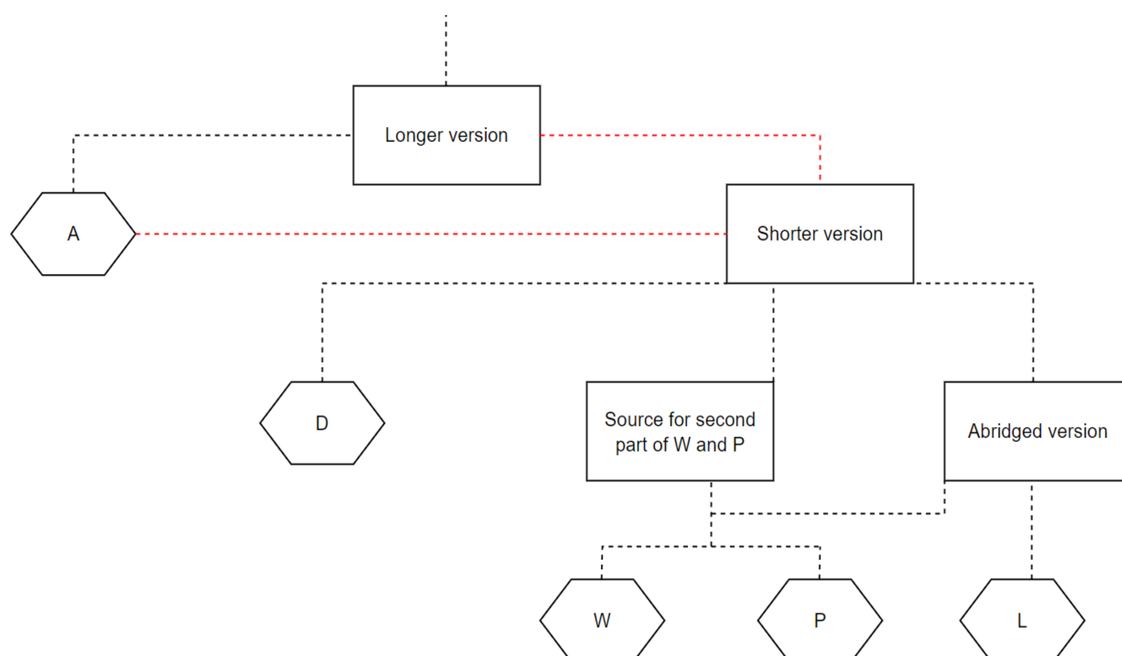


Figure 4.1. Visualization of the relationships between *AM*'s versions and textual witnesses. The dashed lines indicate that this is not intended as a reconstruction of direct connections (e.g. one being copied directly from the other); the red lines indicate conflicting suggestions about manuscript relations. The rectangular nodes represent hypothetical versions of *AM*; the surviving textual witnesses are represented by hexagonal nodes.

It is crucial to note that any visualization of a text's versions and textual witnesses in a stemma is somewhat problematic. The arrangement of versions from the top down automatically suggests a hierarchy. This impression is reinforced by modern understandings of the status of the original and of translations as corruptive and derivative.[375] Moreover, no stemma can account for the inter-influences of *AM*'s textual witnesses. It is thus important to note that the stemma above is not intended to suggest a hierarchy between the surviving versions; nor does it imply direct relationships between the nodes. It serves only as an approximation for highlighting some key issues that will be picked up in this chapter.

This chapter aims to continue the discussion of the affiliations between the versions of *AM* by taking the strategies pursued by their adaptors into account. My approach will not be focused on casual alterations and differences on the level of words and individual lines in the textual witnesses, which have already been considered in detail by the various editors of *AM*. Instead, it assumes that several

[375] For an overview of the different attitudes toward and issues faced by medieval and modern translations respectively, see Guillaume; Pym; Dueck.

layers of adaptation principles can lie behind a given version. I will thus look for patterns in the differences between the versions of *AM* and interpret those patterns in light of what they might say about when and why they emerged. In particular, I will clarify the relation of the shorter version to the longer version and to version A by establishing three sets of adaptation principles: first, the principles underlying the longer version, which adapted the Old French *LeM*; second, the principles underlying version A, which adapted the longer version; and third, the principles underlying the shorter version, which was adapted either from the longer version or from version A.

Before establishing the patterns in the differences between *AM*'s versions, I will begin with a discussion of the adaptation principles that have already been established by the editors of *AM*. These principles underly all the textual witnesses to some extent and can thus be assumed to originate in the longer version. This will provide a foundation for the analyses that follow, where I will establish further adaptation principles by comparing a set of episodes in which the differences between A and the textual witnesses of the shorter version are the most pronounced. This will lead to preliminary findings about the shorter version's source and the adaptation principles employed by the adaptor of the longer version and the adaptor of the shorter version. These results will then be fleshed out with further discussions focusing on selected aspects of each version. I will first discuss the shorter version, in particular with regard to its ending and changes made to the text to match it. I will then investigate an aspect of version A that is frequently raised in current research: its concern with English identity. Finally, I will turn to the longer version and to the question of continuity.[376]

## 2. The Basics: The Adaptation Principles of the Longer Version

The popularity and longevity of *AM* may well have been due to the relatively free treatment of the source by the original adaptor. In the notes accompanying his

[376] No complete comparative edition of all the texts exists. Henceforth, I will cite each text using the following editions: L from Macrae-Gibson, P from Hales and Furnivall, W from Cylkowski, D from Kölbing, and A from Burnley and Wiggins. A new edition of P was published by John Withrington and Gillian Rogers in 2023 but was not available to me when writing this dissertation.

edition of *AM*, O. D. Macrae-Gibson describes the original adaptor's guiding principles:

> The general tendency, in the first part [the *Roman* section] as in the second part [the *Suite* section], is for AM to be made more direct than LeM, whether by the total suppression of digressive material, or by simplification in the course of contraction, or by rearrangement of order. Merlin's part is somewhat reduced … . Occasionally motivation is lost in the course of contraction; quite often subtlety and delicacy is lost. (*Introduction* 33-4)

With these changes, the *discours* of the Merlin narrative is transformed into one that is in line with the straightforwardness that Middle English audiences might have expected and appreciated in an English verse romance.[377] The same is the case for the focus on action in *AM*:

> In such scenes AM is often little shorter than its source, and there are long passages of fluent, skilful, but quite close translation. Sometimes the poet seems even to have expanded … . Passages, necessary to the plot, linking these scenes are in contrast heavily (and often expertly) compressed, as are passages of personal description. The effect is to produce a story close-packed with action, which the poet no doubt knew would appeal to [English audiences]. (Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 9, see also 32)

The consensus about the original adaptor of *AM*, then, is that they were just as skilled at creating close translations of passages they wanted to translate closely as they were capable of creating freer adaptations of others. Numerous passages in the various textual witnesses of *AM* can be read as evidence of the skill of the longer version's adaptor. A comparison of a brief passage in *AM* with *LeM* and Lovelich's closely translated *Merlin* will serve to illustrate the adaptor's close translation style.

| | |
|---|---|
| *LeM* (*The Story* 157)[378] | While he was bent on breaking his way through the fray, Kin Arthur happened to meet King Caelenc, who was striving mightily to rout the companions of the Round Table. As soon as King Arthur saw him, he ran at |

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[377] See Pearsall. For the adaptation of prose romances into verse, see also Moran, "Text-Types" 72. For an alternative interpretation of these changes as catering specifically to young audiences, see Clifton, "*Of Arthour*".

[378] "Endementiers quil entendoit a la prese desrompre & departir auint que li rois artus encontra le roy caelenc qui moult se penoit des compaignons de la table roonde descomfire . & si tost comme li rois artus li voit si li cort sus . & cil estoit si grans & si fors que li contes dist quil estoit . xiiij . pies de lonc a la mesure des pies qui adont estoient . & li rois artus li vint ataignant si li iete vn meruelleus cop descremie par desus lescu entre . ij . espaules . si le fiert si durement descalibor sespee quil le fent tout iusqual nombril . & li cheuaus tourne en fuie parmi la bataille a tout le cors" (*Lestoire de Merlin* 146-7).

| | |
|---|---|
| | him. He was very big and strong, and the story says that he was fourteen feet tall, in the feet they used then to measure. And King Arthur bore down on him and landed a fearsome blow with his sword between his shoulders right above his shield, and he struck him so hard with his sword Excalibur that he split him through down to the navel, and his horse turned in fright and flew away with the body. |
| Lovelich (ll. 14225-40) | Tha*n*ne, whilles they fowhte*n* Jn this Man*e*re,<br>happede, kyng artheur ȝit neyghede hym Nere<br>and Mette wit*h* on that hyhte caunlent,<br>that hem of þe Round table anoyede, verament,<br>and þ*er*to dide he his power tho.<br>but Artheur, as hit happede so,<br>Mette with this caunlent, j ȝou Ensure,<br>whiche chef was of passyng Mesure:<br>xiiij fote long he was, j wene,<br>of swich Man*er* feet as now þ*er*e bene.<br>And wha*n*ne kyng Artheur there him Mette,<br>a wonderful strok þ*er*e on him he sette:<br>besides his Scheld he smot hym so,<br>that thorwh bothe scholdres calibrand gan go.<br>And ano*n* he fyl a-down, with-owte*n* les,<br>and his hors forth Ran thorwh-out þ*a*t pres. |
| Longer version (A5967-84) | Þer was an heþen king hiȝt Canlang<br>Fiftene fet he was lang.<br>He & anoþer þat strengest were<br>Of alle þe paiems þat were þere.<br>Þis dede his miȝt saun fable<br>To stroie þe kniȝtes of þe rounde table.<br>¶ King Arthour mett Canlang,<br>Togider þai made fiȝting strang<br>& so strong was Canlang verrament<br>Þat king Arthour miȝt fest no dent<br>To him haue bot bihinde,<br>Bot ones he him hitt, kerueinde<br>Vnder þe scheld, þe scholder on<br>Þurthout armes & flesche & bon,<br>Vnto þe nouel he him carf,<br>Þe misbileueand paiem starf,<br>A boþe half his hors he hing<br>Þat ernne forþ crudand in þat þring. |

While the two translations are about the same length, it is clear that even the passages translated relatively closely in *AM* are much freer than Lovelich's translation. Lovelich retains every single detail, no matter how irrelevant or distracting it is, and keeps them in the same order. Thus, like *LeM*, Lovelich's *Merlin* first describes what Caelenc is doing when Arthur meets him in battle, then describes Caelenc's physical appearance and has Arthur kill Caelenc. The adaptor of *AM*, by contrast, begins with the description of Caelenc, thus highlighting his status as an imposing opponent. The text then continues with what Caelenc is doing and only then brings Arthur into the mix, who now implicitly fights this giant because he was threatening his allies. An easily understood causality is thus established simply by rearranging some details. Arthur's defeat of Caelenc is then turned into a bigger achievement by the addition of three lines at the beginning of

the battle and an amplification of the fatal blow, which cuts through first the shield, then the shoulder, then the arms, flesh, and bone all the way to the navel. By contrast, Lovelich uses an entire line to announce a "wonderful strok", after which the killing of Caelenc with a single blow appears even more anticlimactic than in *LeM*. Even the closely translated passages in *AM*, then, still show that the adaptor assessed the relevance of the details they were translating and carefully considered the amount of space to give them in the adaptation.

A similar intuition for detail is evident when the adaptor takes more liberties. Notably, departures from the source text do not have to involve simple cases of, for example, omission, expansion, transformation, or changes in narrative order. More often than not, these means of adaptation interact. An example of this is the treatment of Merlin's baptism in *AM*. *LeM* presents the plan to baptize Merlin separately from the baptism itself. Blaise tells Merlin's mother during her pregnancy: "When your child is born, have it baptized as soon as you can" (13).[379] There follows the scene of Merlin's birth, God's salvation of his soul, and the reactions of his mother and the midwives to his appearance, before Merlin's mother has her son baptized:

> ele lor dist . auales le aual si commandes quil soit bautisies . Et eles li demanderent comment voles vous quil ait non. & ele respont si comme mes peres ot non . & lors le misend en . j . panier si laualerent aual a vne corde puis commandent quil soit baptisies & quil ait le non de son taion par sa mere & cil preudoms ot non merlins . Ensi fu cis enfes baptisies & fu apeles merlins par son aiol . (13)
>
> She said to them, "Send him down and have him baptized."
> They asked her, "What do you want him named?"
> And she answered, "The same as my father's name."
> Then they put him into a basket and sent him down with a rope, then they gave orders to have him baptized: "let him bear the name of his grandfather on his mother's side; that good man was called Merlin by his father."
> Thus the child was baptized and named Merlin after his grandfather. (13-4)

In *AM*, by contrast, Blaise does not articulate such a plan in advance. Instead, knowing the child's due date (W1104), he asks how the birth went, and a midwife

[379] "quant tes enfes sera nes si le fai baptisier al plus tost que tu poras" (12).

tells him of Merlin's strange appearance (W1108-13).[380] Hearing this, Blaise asks her to give him the child so that he can baptize it and then performs the baptism himself:

> Now take it me, he sayd than,
> I shall make it a crysten man
> And wheder it dye lyue or abyde
> The better chaunce shall hym betyde.
> Full glad was the mydwyfe
> And toke the chylde also b[l]yue
> And by a corde lete hym downe;
> And blasy gaue hym his blyssynge
> And bare hym home with mylde mode
> And baptysed hym in the f[l]ode
> And called hyn to his crysten name
> Marlyn to hyght in goddes name. (W1114-25)

This example neatly shows how changes to details and narrative order tie *AM*'s narrative together more closely. In *LeM*, Blaise's reasons for suggesting baptism immediately after birth are not inherent to the scene in which he offers this advice, whereas in *AM*, the move is a spontaneous reaction to learning about Merlin's otherness. Moreover, in *AM* Blaise also explains what he hopes to achieve by baptizing Merlin (W1115-7). The juxtapositioning of the proposal and action of baptism makes the narrative more cohesive in this adaptation, and the addition of an explicit motivation also makes it more direct.[381]

In this respect, the adaptor's treatment of Merlin's baptism is both close to the source and nuanced, as was also the case in the battle-scene example above. In this case, however, even such minimal changes to narrative order are accompanied by changes to details in the story that transform the overall purpose of the scene. To begin with, by clustering these previously separated or implicit elements of the narrative together, the narrative dwells on the baptism for longer. This increased length goes hand in hand with the fact that it is Blaise himself who baptizes Merlin: the baptism is now the action of a named character rather than half a sentence in

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[380] For this part of the chapter, in which I compare elements common to all versions of *AM* with *LeM*, I have chosen to quote from W, referencing the A text only where relevant differences are present. The new edition of P by Elizabeth Darovic, Gillian Rogers, and John Withrington was not available to me when writing, and L and D cover only parts of the text discussed here, thus leaving W with the most suitable edition.

[381] Blaise's reasons are not made explicit in *LeM* but can be assumed to result from the report of Merlin's miraculous conception he receives from Merlin's mother.

the passive voice. Both in length and in its treatment of characters, *AM* signals that the baptism is important.

This importance is confirmed by changes to further details in the events preceding and following the baptism. In *LeM*, it can be argued, the baptism does not matter much: Merlin's salvation follows not from the baptism but from the divine intervention that occurs before it, right after his birth, and is a consequence of his mother's piety. After this intervention, Merlin's baptism appears almost as an afterthought which has no immediate consequences. In *AM*, by contrast, the divine intervention is omitted. Instead, the following lines are added after the baptism:

> Thorowe that name I you tell
> All the fendes that were in hell
> Were agreued full sore therefore
> For theyr spouse was forlore
> And he was crystened so. (W1126-30)

With the addition of the devils' reaction here, the baptism gains the significance which the divine intervention, now omitted, previously had. The cause of Merlin's salvation is not his mother but the baptism performed by Blaise.[382] Rather than being connected to the good deeds of his mother and an exception made by God, Merlin's salvation is here linked to a Christian ritual which is always aimed at cleansing the soul from sin. Although Merlin's salvation remains pivotal for the story, this change reduces it to a common ritual, which is a factor in reducing his role in *AM*. It also ties in with a more negative depiction of Merlin's mother in *AM*.

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[382] D even features a transformation scene, thus turning the baptism into a miracle:

> And anon as he was fulled so,
> Al his heer from hym gan go,
> Þat he hadde aȝens reson,
> Wente a way þrouȝ hys c*ri*stendom,
> And al þe blaknesse of his hyde
> Went a way in þat tyde,
> And he was as fayr of hewe
> As eny child, þat þey eu*er*e knewe (D871-9).

By contrast, L retains Merlin's dark skin colour, which is mentioned after his baptism (L1276), and versions P and W follow L in their wording but replace the word "blak" with "cursed" (P1221) and "foule" (W1434). Whether these lines are specific to D or whether there is an omission in L which P and W follow is impossible to know for certain (Kölbing suggests the former but provides no arguments, clxx-clxxi). D sadly has a lacuna after the baptism in the passage quoted.

The contribution of these changes to wider effects thus points to the structured approach the adaptor took to changing their source.[383]

Even individual passages like these demonstrate the skill with which the adaptor of *AM* treated their source material. By adjusting the length and order of some narrative elements, while at the same time altering a few details and making minor additions, the adaptor alters the significance of Merlin's baptism and its contribution to the changed characterizations, all the while rewriting the scene with a view to making it more direct.

The adaptor's competence extends beyond their skill at making the narrative their own. The adaptor of *AM* is known to have used other sources besides the Old French *LeM* in creating their text, which suggests that they were well read and proficient in languages other than Old French and Middle English. The use of additional sources is particularly apparent between the beginning of the story and Arthur's coronation; this part of the text corresponds to the *Roman* section in *LeM* and is covered in recognizably similar terms in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Wace's *Brut*, and adaptations of both.[384] In a number of cases, *AM* follows details of these texts that are not found in *LeM*. Thus, for example, Merlin's mother is a nun in *AM* (W1415-20), a detail not found in *LeM* but provided in the *Historia* and in Wace's *Brut*.[385]

The overall impression given by *AM*, then, is that its adaptor was skilled: their knowledge of their source text, the Old French *LeM*, was very good, allowing them to make complex and wide-ranging changes to narrative order, and they knew their target audience's tastes well and were able to rewrite the text accordingly.

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[383] See Walton 69-71.

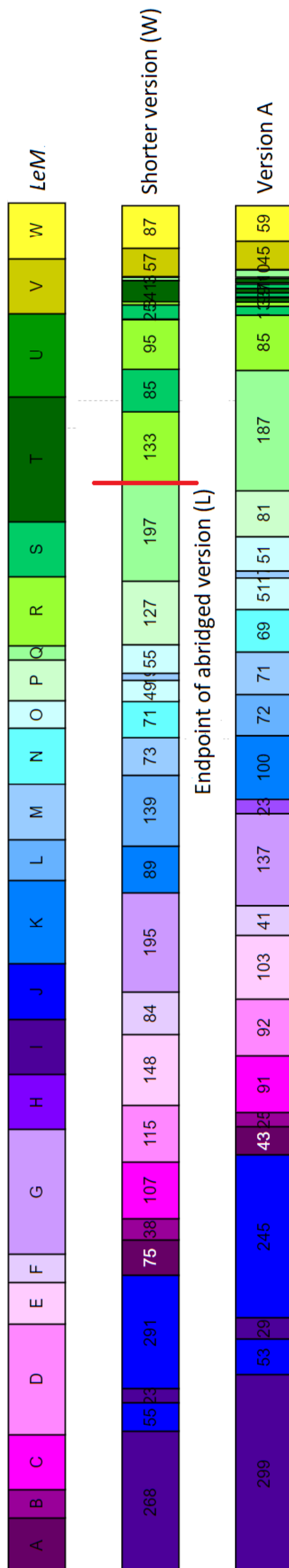
[384] The *Roman* section of *LeM* was probably adapted from the *Brut*.

[385] See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History* liber vi, para. 106, and Wace ll. 7396-7400. See also Macrae-Gibson 23-32 and Cylkowski xix-xxxiv for further examples. Beyond the addition of such details, the adaptor occasionally reconciles information of *LeM* with information from the historical tradition where they contradict each other. While I assume these reconciliations to originate in the longer version, they survive only in Auchinleck, to my knowledge. Further examples of reconciliation will be discussed in section 6 below.

Moreover, the adaptor was familiar with the historical tradition of the Merlin narrative and thus likely a proficient reader of Latin and Anglo-Norman French.[386]

These adaptation principles just described are apparent in numerous passages and in all the textual witnesses of *AM*, meaning that they must belong to the common source of all the textual witnesses, namely the longer version. The next section of this chapter compares version A with the shorter version in order to establish whether specific adaptation principles can be identified for either of them.[387] The visualization in figure 4.2 will help to make the detailed discussion of affiliations between the versions of *AM* easier to follow.

[386] Material from the historical tradition is mostly found in the part of *AM* that corresponds to the *Roman* section of *LeM*, that is, the story up to Arthur's coronation. This is largely because the *Suite* section of *LeM* shares few elements with the historical tradition.
[387] The differences between the longer and shorter version cannot be readily attributed to matters of oral transmission and performance; instead, they point to a "deliberate plan of action" (i.e. distinct adaptation principles) behind the shorter version (Finotello 85-87).




| A | The demons plan to create Merlin. |
|---|---|
| B | A demon ruins Merlin's ancestors, except for his mother and her two sisters. |
| C | The demon deceives the two sisters. |
| D | The demon conceives Merlin with Merlin's mother. |
| E | Her pregnancy and Merlin's birth. |
| F | Merlin's childhood in the tower. |
| G | Merlin proves his mother's innocence. |
| H | Merlin asks Blaise to write the Grail book. |
| I | Vortigern's putsch, eruption of civil war. |
| J | Vortigern's tower and the search for Merlin. |
| K | Vortigern's messengers find Merlin. |
| L | Encounters during Merlin's journey to Vortigern's court. |
| M | Merlin meets Vortigern and confronts his mages. |
| N | Merlin explains why Vortigern's tower falls, the dragons are discovered. |
| O | The dragons fight. |
| P | Merlin explains the meaning of their fight. |
| Q | Pendragon and Uther's return, Vortigern's death. |
| R | Merlin meets Pendragon. |
| S | Merlin proves himself to Pendragon, Hengist's death. |
| T | Merlin meets Uther in disguise and becomes the brothers' advisor. |
| U | The threefold death of the jealous baron. |
| V | Merlin predicts the Battle of Salisbury, the brothers prepare. |
| W | The Battle of Salisbury, Pendragon's death. |

Table 4.1. Episodes in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Episode length in relation to text length. Note that both *LeM* and version A continue after the shorter version's ending.

The numbers for the shorter version and version A are the numbers of lines allocated to each episode. Note that the episode boundaries are subjective. For a description of the episodes, see table 4.1.

Figure 4.2 shows the length and order of episodes in the part of *LeM* that is shared by version A and the shorter version (represented by W) of *AM*. The episodes concerned thus cover the story up to the end of W; both *LeM* and the longer version continue for longer, but the section up to the end of W is the only one allowing for a direct comparison of *LeM* with version A and the shorter version of *AM*. The visualization does not reflect the fact that both versions of *AM* are considerably shorter than *LeM*, where the section involved here is about fifty-two pages long in Sommer's edition. The shorter version of *AM* is only 2786 lines long in W, and version A is even shorter at 2160 lines. For the same part of *LeM*, Lovelich's close verse translation covers 4218 lines.

In terms of the order and length of the episodes, the illustration reflects what was said above about the adaptation principles of the longer version. First, the text begins with episodes I and J (Vortigern's putsch and his tower) rather than with episodes A to G (Merlin's conception, birth, youth, etc.). This demonstrates, on the one hand, the adaptor's free treatment of narrative order and, on the other hand, the shift in focus away from Merlin and onto events as they unfold. Second, the relative length of the episodes is different. For example, T (Merlin's first meeting with Uther and his pact with the brothers), which is one of the longest episodes in *LeM*, is shortened in *AM* and mixed with the two preceding episodes (Merlin meets and proves his powers to Pendragon).

Figure 4.2 also shows some differences between version A and the shorter version. While both combine episode T with episodes R and S, for instance, the exact ways in which they do so and their respective lengths are quite different. Moreover, the shorter version is missing episode H (Merlin asks Blaise to write the Grail book) entirely, and it renders other episodes (such as L) at considerably more length than version A.

## 3. Taking Things Further: The Adaptation Principles of the Shorter Version and of Version A

Overall, the adaptation principles described so far apply to all surviving textual witnesses and can be assumed to originate in the longer version of *AM*. There are already some indications that version A and the shorter version developed

independently from the longer version, rather than the shorter version being adapted directly from version A. For example, the case of Merlin's baptism discussed above is largely the same in both versions; however, version A does not render any plans on Blaise's part, whereas the shorter version does. If one assumed, following Macrae-Gibson, that the shorter version is derived directly from A, this would mean that the shorter version's adaptor restored a detail that was omitted from A. This is not impossible, since the principle of directness pervades the entire text, but it seems unlikely. As with the rest of Macrae-Gibson's list of narrative details missing or corrupted in A but preserved in the shorter version's textual witnesses, a development of the shorter version from the longer version is already starting to seem more likely.[388]

In the following discussion, I will analyse the three episodes that differ the most markedly between version A and the shorter version. I will compare the two versions with each other and with *LeM* in order to discuss what a number of narrative details might say about the affiliation of version A and the shorter version. The episodes in question are R, S, and T, which are differ considerably between the two versions in terms of length, and to a lesser degree in terms of narrative order as well. A comparative outline of the content covered in these three episodes might look like table 4.2.

<table>
<tr><th>LeM (39-48; 35-43)</th><th>Version A (A1903-2034)[389]</th><th>Shorter Version (W2249-2616)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Pendragon and Uther are unsuccessful in besieging Hengist and send messengers to seek Merlin. Merlin meets these messengers in disguise and demands that Pendragon come to meet him himself. Convinced that the messengers had met Merlin, Pendragon departs, leaving Uther behind to continue the siege of Hengist.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>Merlin meets Uther in disguise and warns him that Hengist plans to attack him. Uther makes preparations and kills Hengist in battle.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Merlin meets Pendragon twice. First, he is disguised as a herdsman and sends</td><td>Merlin meets Pendragon in three disguises: a herdsman, a merchant, and a swain.</td><td>Merlin meets Pendragon in three disguises: as a</td></tr>
</table>

[388] See *Introduction* 53-7.

[389] In the discussion of this scene, I disregard the fact that version A swaps Pendragon's and Uther's roles in these episodes, and that Pendragon is called Aurelius here. For a discussion of the likely reasons for this, see Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 27-32 and 57-60.

| Pendragon to a nearby town. Second, he meets Pendragon there as a nobleman and reveals that the herdsman was Merlin. | | herdsman, a merchant, and a swain. Each encounter includes information about Merlin's apparent whereabouts. |
|---|---|---|
| The nobleman then reveals to Pendragon that Uther has killed Hengist. Merlin leaves and Pendragon sends messengers to confirm this information. Pendragon then meets Merlin, now disguised as a different nobleman, again. | | |
| Merlin reveals himself to Pendragon and his advisors and promises to do the same to Uther in two weeks' time. | The swain reveals that he is Merlin. | |
| | Merlin reveals that Uther has killed Hengist. | |
| Pendragon returns to his brother and learns the details of what has happened. | Pendragon, joined by Merlin, returns to his brother and learns the details of what has happened. | |
| After another set of appearances in disguise, Merlin reveals himself to both brothers and becomes their advisor. | Uther learns Merlin's identity, and Merlin becomes their advisor. | |

Table 4.2. Comparison of episodes R, S, and T in *LeM*, version A, and the shorter version.

Both version A and the shorter version clearly have simplification of *LeM*'s outline of events in common. Pendragon does not confirm the information of Hengist's death, and Merlin does not leave only to reappear shortly afterward, for example. Despite the generally similar outlines of events in version A and the shorter version, however, the difference in length is striking: the rendition of Hengist's death added to the short version is eighty-two lines long, and Pendragon's encounters with Merlin in disguise that follow cover merely twenty-two lines in version A as opposed to ninety-three lines in the shorter version.[390] Moreover, in its longer rendition of these encounters and addition of a direct narration of Hengist's death, the shorter version includes details that are remarkably different from *LeM*.

I will discuss these differences in detail and, drawing on them, outline sets of adaptation principles for the transmission of version A and for the shorter version,

[390] See also figure 4.2 above.

both of which are distinct from the adaptation principles underlying the longer version. By distinguishing between these three sets of adaptation principles, I will describe the possible decisions underlying the versions of *AM* as well as the relationship between version A and the shorter version. I will also make some suggestions about what the episodes considered may have looked like in the lost longer version.

*The Encounters with Merlin in Disguise*

In the depiction of Pendragon's encounters with Merlin in disguise, version A is shorter than *LeM*, while the shorter version is more than four times as long as version A. Version A's rendition of this passage compared to *LeM* is as follows.

| | |
|---|---|
| LeM (*The Story* 42-3)[391] | And he took the king to the place where he had found the peasant and he was still there … . And he said, "I know for a fact that you a looking for Merlin, but you can't find him until he himself wishes you to. But go off to one of your towns near here, and he will come to you as soon as he knows you are waiting for him." …<br>So the king rode off to his town nearest the forest. After he had settled in there, it happened one day that a highborn man, well dressed and well shod, came to his lodging. … When he came before the king, he said to him, "Sir, Merlin sends me to you. And he declares that he was the herdsman who spoke to you in the woods, and the proof is that he told you he would come to you when it was his will. He told you the truth, but you still do not need him, and he has never wanted to see any great man unless that man had something for him to accomplish. … he sends you some very good news by me: Hengist is dead, and Uther your brother has killed him." …<br>Thus the king waited for Merlin; then one day the king happened to be leaving the church when a very handsome, well-dressed man came along who certainly looked like a gentleman. |

[391] "& cil mena le roy au lieu ou il auoit le vilain troue si iestoit encore . … Et cil dist ie sai bien que tu quiers merlin mais vous ne le poes mie ensi trouer deuant ce quil mismes le ueut . Mais ales vous ent en aucune de uos uilles pres deci & il venra a vous quant il saura que vous latendes . … Ensi sen ala li rois a vne de ses uilles au plus pres quil pot de la forest . & quant il i soriornoit auint il a . j . ior que vns preudoms uint a son ostel moult bien uestus & cauchies . … & quant il vint deuant le roy si li dist . sire melin menuoie a vous . & si vous mande que ce fu cil qui parla a vous el bois cil qui gardoit les bestes . & ces enseignes quil vous dist quil vendroit a vous quant il voldroit & il te dist uoir mais tu nen as encore pas mestier . ne il not onques talent de si grant homme ueoir sil neust a faire de lui . … il te mande par moi vnes boines noueles que augis est mors . & uter tes freres la ochis . …
Ensi atende li rois merlin tant que a . j . iour auint que li rois sen uint du monstier . & lors uint vns moult biaus hons & bien uestus que bien sambla preudons & sen uint deuant le roy si li dist . Sire que atendes vous en ceste uille . & li rois respont iou atendoie merlin quil uenist parler a moi . sire fait il vous nestes pas si sages que vous le saues connoistre quant il parole a vous" (38-9).

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">And he came straight before the king and said to him, “Sir, whom are you waiting for in this town?”<br>And the king answered, “I was waiting for Merlin to come speak to me.”<br>“Sir, he said, you are not so clever that you can recognize him when he is talking to you!” …</td></tr>
<tr><td>Longer version (A1975-96)</td><td>& sir Vter Pendragon<br>To þe forest went anon<br>Where þat Merlin dede him se<br>In o day in þre ble:<br>In o day an hogges herd<br>Þat þe prin[c]e þe way lerd,<br>& eft a chapman þat bar his pac<br>& long wiþ þe prin[c]e spac<br>& seyd of Merlin openliche<br>He wald him telle neweliche,<br>& afterward a fair swain</td><td>Þat þe king com ogain<br>& seyd him þat ich niȝt<br>He schuld of Merlin han a siȝt.<br>¶ Þo it was wel fer in niȝt<br>Merlin com to him ypliȝt<br>In þe gise of a swain<br>Þat he hadde arst ysain<br>& seyd so we finde in boke<br>To þe prince “God þe loke.<br>Icham Merlin, leue sire,<br>Wiþ whom to speke þou hast desire.”</td></tr>
</table>

What covers roughly two pages in *LeM* – the quotation above has been shortened considerably – is condensed into a mere twenty-two lines in version A. This is partly achieved by the omission of direct speech during the encounters. As a result, Merlin’s encounters with Pendragon are much shorter and simpler in structure. For example, the first encounter in *LeM* contains a negotiation with one of Pendragon’s men and the assertion that Pendragon will not find Merlin unless he wants to be found, before Pendragon is sent on his way. These exchanges in *LeM* show how Merlin exerts his power over Pendragon and his men. By contrast, this same encounter is reduced to merely two lines in version A of *AM*: “In o day an hogges herd / Þat þe prin[c]e þe way lerd.” There is no description of Merlin’s behaviour here.

The rest of this passage in version A follows a similar pattern. In *LeM*, Pendragon first learns of Hengist’s death in his second encounter with Merlin. Version A does not contain this information during the encounter. Instead, Merlin is described as speaking with Pendragon for a long time before announcing that he will meet Merlin soon, which may be a trace of an omission in which Merlin shares the information about Hengist’s death. In a third encounter added to version A, Merlin – in the disguise of a swain – tells Pendragon that he will meet him that same night and duly reappears in the same disguise to reveal his identity. The addition of this third encounter may be another side effect of simplification: in the page leading up

to Merlin's revelation of his identity in *LeM*, Merlin switches back and forth between his disguise as a nobleman and the appearance he had when he previously met the barons who now accompany Pendragon. This switching back and forth is omitted from A, probably for the sake of simplicity, yet version A still retains the information that Merlin is in a familiar disguise when he reveals his identity to Pendragon. Overall, a result of this much shorter rendition of the encounters is that *LeM*'s focus on Merlin's position of power over Pendragon disappears entirely.[392] Instead, A's account briefly evokes wonder before moving on. It then has Uther summarize Hengist's death before moving on to the Battle of Salisbury.[393]

The shorter version's rendition of the scene is over four times longer than that of version A. Like A, it also features three encounters with Pendragon, and the simplification of these meetings is evident in the shorter version as well, despite the length at which they are treated. Crucially, the shorter version also features some details it shares with *LeM* that are absent from version A. For example, Merlin tells Pendragon that "To fynde hym it is strounge / Thoughe ye seke hym neuer so longe" (W2547-8), which roughly corresponds with Merlin's self-description in *LeM* but has no correspondence in A.[394] This supports the hypothesis that the shorter version and version A both derive from the longer version rather than the shorter version deriving from version A. Another major difference between version A and the shorter version is the shorter version's caesura between the third encounter and Merlin's return in the same disguise:

> Now may ye here in this ryme
> How Marlyn came the [fyfth][395] tyme
> And how he the prynce mette
> And how he hym grete
> And how Pendragon was kynge
> And how Marlyn without lesynge
> Dwelled with hym and his meyne
> And wyst all his preuyte
> And how he was his counceylere
> Fyll the cuppe and ye shall here. (W2565-74)

[392] See ch. 2, section 5.
[393] Episode U is omitted from *AM* (see figure 4.2).
[394] Note, however, that this remark by Merlin has been moved from the first to the third meeting and stands in a changed context.
[395] The emendation follows Cylkowski's suggestion (123).

The addition of this transition signals that Merlin's three encounters with Pendragon on the one hand and revelation of his identity on the other belong to different parts of the text. Unlike version A, which moves immediately from Merlin's third appearance in disguise to Pendragon learning his identity, the shorter version presents the encounters with Merlin in disguise as a separate part of the narrative.[396]

The main factor accounting for the difference in length between version A and the shorter version is the treatment of the meetings with Merlin in disguise. While in version A, each of these meetings is summarized in a few lines, they are given much more space in the shorter version. Unlike *LeM*, however, in which each meeting features complex dialogue, they are quite similar to one another in the shorter version.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ye syr, he sayd, by saynt Richere<br>Ryght now marlyn was here<br>Had ye come or ye dyde<br>Ye had hym founde in this stede<br>And yf ye coude marlyn knowe<br>He is not yet ferre goo<br>And therfore ryde on thy way<br>Also fast as thou may …<br>Wherby without wene<br>There shalte thou marlyn sene. (W2483-96) | Ye syr, he sayd, by saynt Martyn<br>A lytell here before thy sight<br>I was there he was nowe right<br>And yet he sayd by sayne Jhone<br>He is not yet ferre gone;<br>Therfore ryde forth bylyue<br>As faste as ye may dryue<br>And thou shalte fynde hym in a whyle<br>Or thou haue ryden halfe a myle<br>With Marlyn thou shalte speke than<br>Or thou speke with ony man. (W2512-22) | Syr, he sayd, by saynt Myghell<br>Marlyn I knowe very well.<br>Ryght nowe he, sayd, sekerly<br>Marlyn was here faste by<br>Haddest thou ryden a lytell bet<br>With Marlyn thou myghtest haue met …<br>Thou must do as I the reche;<br>The nexte towne here by syde<br>There thou must Marlyn abyde<br>And certainly chylde marlyn<br>Shall come to your ynne<br>And speke with the this nyght. (W2539-57) |

The similarities are obvious: in each encounter, Merlin mentions a saint, tells Pendragon he has just missed Merlin, urges him to ride on, and encourages him that he will find him soon. These speeches have little, if anything, in common with *LeM*, since they leave out Merlin's measures to establish control over Pendragon.

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[396] Indeed, there was also a transition before the first encounter with Merlin in disguise: "Now lete we be of all this reason / And tourne we agayne to Pendragon / That was gone to the forest syde / To speke with Marlyn in that tyde" (W2469-72). The encounters in the shorter version thus function like an episode in its own right.

They have more in common with version A, which also mentions Merlin giving Pendragon directions and announcing their upcoming meeting in each case.

The fact that the shorter version's details correspond largely to those of version A but feature some elements missing from A provides further evidence that the shorter version cannot have been adapted directly from A. It also supports the view that version A is relatively close to the longer version. An outline of each adaptor's treatment of their respective source might be as follows. The original adaptor of the longer version streamlines each encounter. They likely introduce a clear section break after Merlin's third visit, perhaps guided by *LeM*'s textual signal of a narrative caesura by using the phrase "ensi" (43; 39).[397] At some point in the transmission, from which version A results, the encounters are shortened further so that each of them shrinks to a few lines. The section break is no longer signalled textually in version A, but a pilcrow (¶) in line 1989 remains. By contrast, in the adaptation process leading to the shorter version, the shortened rendition of these encounters in the longer version is expanded again. The adaptor of the shorter version creates three similar encounters, all of which contain Merlin giving Pendragon directions and brief conversations between the two characters. In these encounters, Merlin delays the revelation of his identity to Pendragon multiple times and does not appear to take Pendragon's endeavour seriously. The reader is invited to laugh at Pendragon's unthinking obedience and complete lack of insight. By adopting this tone, the shorter version creates entertainment and humour.

The main tendency in version A in these encounters is that it takes the simplification and compression of the longer version further. This explains why version A is missing details with respect to which the shorter version corresponds to *LeM*. The shorter version tends more strongly to expansion, in this case for the purposes of entertainment. An analysis of Hengist's death in version A and the shorter version will serve to confirm these adaptation principles.

*Hengist's Death*

[397] Visual markers of a new section also occur at this point in the α manuscripts I use for reference; see BnF fr. 105, 142r; BnF fr. 9123, 112r. The β manuscripts I have checked for comparison do not have a section break at this particular point; see BL Add. 38117, 44r; BL Add. 10292, 86v.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *LeM* (*The Story* 44)[398] | And Hengist stole into the midst of your army, in front of your brother's pavilion, to kill him. … At last Hengist came carrying the knife to kill him with. When Hengist went into the tent, your brother began to stalk him; then, when he did not find him there, he went to the tent's opening. There your brother fell upon him and fought with him. He had him quickly; he was wearing armor and Hengist was not for he had come only to kill your brother and then to get back out as quickly as possible. | |
| Longer version (A2010-26) | & amorwe went hom, ywis,<br>& founden Angys yslawe,<br>His heued vp set his bodi todrawe,<br>Al his folk so was schilt<br>& neuer on þer nas spilt.<br>. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .<br>"A swain com to me ful riȝt<br>& hastiliche warned me | Þat Angys com me to sle,<br>Vp ich stirt & him met<br>& to þe grounde ichim stet.<br>Y not who him on brouȝt<br>No what Deuel he here souȝt<br>Ac wiþ mi swerd scharp of egge<br>His liif y dede him þere legge." |
| Shorter version (W2423-66) | Whan it was within the nyght,<br>Kynge angys anone ryght<br>Dyde army his men all preste<br>Three thousande of the beste<br>And sayd how a spye hym tolde<br>How Pendragon the prynce bolde<br>In to the co[ntr]e was I fare<br>And Uther was lefte there.<br>Therfore he sayd with grete hete<br>On hym he wolde be a wreke<br>And swore by his god mahon<br>He wolde hym sle in his pauylyon.<br>And whan he hath Uther slayne,<br>In to his castell he wolde agayne.<br>. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | But Uther was redy there oute<br>With many men stronge and stoute<br>And Uther was a stronge man<br>To kynge angys anone he ranne<br>And gaue hym suche a stroke<br>That he flewe tayle ouer toppe<br>And toke hym by the hede anone<br>And smote it fro the necke bone.<br>Whan the sarasyns that dyde see,<br>Sone anone they gan flee<br>In to the castell all bydene<br>And lete theyr lorde without bene<br>But or they myght come home agayne<br>Fyue hondred of them were slayne |

*LeM* features multiple descriptions of Hengist's death in the course of episodes R, S, and T, and all of them come in the form of later reports by other characters.[399] In the longest of these reports in *LeM*, quoted above, Merlin describes Hengist's death as resulting from a failed attempt to assassinate Uther: he had snuck behind enemy lines alone and unarmed, only to be killed by Uther after not finding him in his tent.

By contrast, the only summary of Hengist's death in version A comes not from Merlin but at a slightly later point in the story, when Uther reports it to

[398] "& il se vint en lost deuant le pauillon uostre frere por lui ochire . … & tant que augis i vint & aporta le coutel pour li ochire . Et quant augis fu entres el pauillon uostre frere si le cerca . & quant il nel troue si vint a lisue del pauellon . & uostre freres li uint au deuant & se combati alui si lot tost car il estoit armes & augis desarmes . Car il nestoit venus fors por lie ochire & tantost refuir arriere" (40).

[399] I provide a more detailed discussion of this scene in ch. 1, section 5.

Pendragon.[400] Some of the details in *LeM* are not contained in version A, for example the characters' armour and Hengist's failure to find Uther in his tent. Uther's report in A is also vaguer than that of Merlin in *LeM*. Version A makes no explicit mention of an assassination attempt, but it is still implicit in Uther's report. Only Hengist's aggression and Uther's reaction are mentioned, and no armies are involved. Other details can be found in A that are not in *LeM*. For example, Hengist's decapitated head and his dismembered body are put on display in an addition that is followed by two curious lines: "Al his folk so was schilt / & neuer on þer nas spilt" (A2012-3). The typical understanding of "schilt" as "unharmed" is somewhat confusing here, since "Uter's people are hardly in need of protection" in this instance (Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 97, para. 2013). As a solution, Macrae-Gibson suggests that "schilt" should be read not as meaning "unharmed" but as deriving from Old English "scylian" and meaning "deprived of their leader", thus referring to Hengist's men, not Uther's. This solution works well insofar as Hengist is the character in focus in the immediate context; the reading can also be understood as another implicit depiction of what happened as an assassination attempt.

The shorter version (represented by W) turns Hengist's lone assassination attempt into a night-time attack by his army. Hengist's attack is described directly by the narrative voice rather than retrospectively by a character. New details emerge in the shorter version: Hengist prepares for battle (which suggests that he is wearing armour) and brings three thousand men, five hundred of whom die after he is killed. The agreement of the shorter version with version A against *LeM* is also notable in several other instances: in both versions of *AM*, but not in *LeM*, Uther topples Hengist before killing him and Hengist is decapitated. However, the shorter version again has a piece of information in common with *LeM* that is missing from version A, namely Hengist's plan to attack Uther in his tent specifically and to return immediately afterward.

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[400] *LeM*, too, has a report by Uther, but it is much shorter: "[Merlin] told me something that was not to be believed, for Hengist behaved foolishly when he tried to kill me in the midst of our army and in my own tent" (45; "Car il me dist tel chose qui ne faisoit mie a croire . car moult fist augis fol hardement qui en mi nostre ost & en mi mon pauillon me voloit ochire", 41).

Several conclusions can be drawn from the differences between *LeM*, version A, and the shorter version. The detail about Hengist's decapitation in version A and the shorter version likely originates in the longer version because it is reminiscent of the *Historia* and the *Brut*, in which a defenceless Hengist is executed by decapitation (liber viii, para. 125; ll. 7888-90). The longer version's adaptor frequently adds details from the historical tradition and likely did the same here. Hengist's attack plan is likely an addition by the longer version's adaptor, who made explicit what is between the lines in *LeM*, and was then readapted in the shorter version but omitted from version A. The reason for this omission from A may have been the position of the report: in *LeM*, Merlin has insight into Hengist's plans with his supernatural knowledge; in the shorter version, these insights are given by the narrative voice. However, version A describes Hengist's death from Uther's perspective, and it would make no sense for Uther to have an understanding of Hengist's plans. Instead, Uther even says "Y not who him on brouȝt / No what Deuel he here souȝt", which may have been added as a result of the omission.

The shorter version shares most details with version A but also shares some details with *LeM* that are missing from A. The relationship of the shorter version to A in the case of Hengist's death is thus similar to what was observed for the encounters with Merlin in disguise. The adaptation principles established there can be applied equally well to the treatment of Hengist's death. In *LeM*, there are four retrospective reports of Hengist's death, all of which serve to characterize Merlin and exemplify his supernatural knowledge. The adaptor of the longer version of *AM* did not preserve all of these reports; it is likely that the longer version retained Uther's report to Pendragon; it may also have retained Merlin's report to Pendragon, in which Merlin explains Hengist's reasons for attacking Uther. The longer version's adaptor also uses secondary sources when adding that Hengist was decapitated.

During the transmission process resulting in version A, the longer version's text is made even more direct and its redundancies are reduced. As such, the remaining summaries of Hengist's death – if there were still more than one – are condensed into a single passage. Of the four reports of Hengist's death in *LeM* that of Uther to

Pendragon was chosen as the most suitable one to retain. Keeping the report of Hengist's death here means that it is more clearly connected to the swain's warning – and immediately after Uther's report, Pendragon reveals that this swain is Merlin. This supports the directness of version A. Placing the analepsis here, however, also means that Hengist's plan has to be omitted, because it would otherwise contradict the focalization through Uther. This explains the addition of Uther's perplexed admission that he has no idea what led Hengist to do what he did. The confusion arising from the word "schilt" may be caused by lines 2013-4 having previously belonged to another report in a different location and being repositioned in the condensation process.

By contrast, in the shorter version, the diffuse information about Hengist's death is clustered together and recounted directly, keeping as many details as possible. As a result of the direct narration of Hengist's death, Uther's now-redundant report to Pendragon is compressed in the shorter version: it begins similarly to that quoted above for version A but breaks off with a summary: "And he answered hym agayne / How he was warned through a swayne / And tolde hym without lesynge / How he slewe the hethen kynge" (W2598-2606). Just as Uther's admission that he does not understand Hengist's plan can be understood as reflecting an omission in the transmission behind version A, so the summary of Uther's report in the shorter version is further evidence for its reordering of narrative material.

It is impossible to tell at what point in the transmission process these changes occurred in version A and the shorter version. The changes in the shorter version may have been the work of the original adaptor. Since the episodes in question occur in the second part of P and W, it is also possible that the changes were made at some point between the composition of the shorter version and the composition of the second part of P and W.[401] However, it still seems more likely that the adaptation principles can be traced back to the work of the original adaptor of the shorter version. The shorter version is longer than version A while not being much richer in content or complexity. A case in point from the first part of the shorter version is episode L. This episode is almost twice as long in P, W, and L than it is in

[401] This would also raise the question of whether the second halves of P and W have an intermediate shared source or are independently derived from the shorter version.

version A, but the substantial increase in length is largely due to the addition of dialogue and the creation of parallels within the episode. Similarly to the three episodes discussed here, the shorter version does not add details or content, and the adaptation principle suggested here – that the adaptor of the shorter version expanded a rendition in their source for the sake of entertainment – works for episode L as well.[402] It thus seems more likely that the tendency to expand and embellish was part of the lost shorter version itself. Any scribe in the transmission chain could have made the relatively minor changes observed in version A. The tendency in version A to shorten the longer version may account for a number of incomprehensible passages in this version where Macrae-Gibson suggests that the shorter version may help restore the "original sense".[403]

This discussion suggests, in line with what the editors of *AM* believe, that version A overall made few changes to its source, and that those changes consisted mostly of omissions. The shorter version, which is usually longer than version A, embellishes and expands, especially where the narrative material has the potential to entertain.[404] Both the changes in the transmission chain behind version A and those made in the adaptation of the shorter version continue to cater to the medieval English taste for directness and action. Version A continues to apply the adaptation principles that have been suggested for the longer version by making further isolated simplifications. The shorter version's adaptor takes more liberties in expanding and embellishing episodes for the sake of entertainment.

## 4. Cutting Ties: How *AM* Curtails *LeM*'s Connections

As I have shown, it is likely that version A and the shorter version are both derived from the longer version of *AM*. Version A tends to shorten the longer version further, while the shorter version expands and embellishes it. This was particularly clear in the varying treatments of episodes R, S, and T, in which Pendragon meets Merlin and in which Hengist dies. Whereas version A probably reflects the longer version in summarizing his death in an analepsis, the shorter version adds a full

[402] See also Finotello 100-1.
[403] Macrae-Gibson discusses isolated cases of suspected abridgement in version A on pp. 55-6, as well as in his notes about ll. 378, 782, and 1997.
[404] This is in line with what Horobin and Wiggins suggest (35-8).

and direct account of Hengist's failed attack. The shorter version's expansion of Hengist's death is telling. Any battle or violent encounter has some potential to serve as entertainment, but the adaptor here not only chooses to narrate it directly and at length but also makes some changes to Hengist's death itself. In *LeM* it is the result of his failed attempt to assassinate Uther, and the same idea underlies version A; in the shorter version, the assassination attempt is transformed into a night-time attack by Hengist and his army. Consequently, Hengist's death is turned into an overwhelming victory for Uther and his men over the Saxons in general. Hengist's death thus becomes a seminal event in the shorter version.

These and many other changes are related to the shorter version's earlier ending point after Pendragon's death.[405] I will next consider the adaptation principles that contribute to the open-ended intertextual and transfictional *LeM* becoming a self-contained narrative in the shorter version of *AM*. As I have discussed in more detail in the previous chapters, *LeM*'s openness is one of its central characteristics and, at least to some extent, connected with its status as a prequel.

The longer version of *AM*, from which both version A and the shorter version are adapted, likely contained these elements as well. Thus, a number of passages in version A retain intertextual or transfictional references found in *LeM*. The allusions to the future of Loholt, Galehaut, and Nascien create ties to the *Lancelot en prose* and *Lestoire del saint Graal* (A4190-94, A8923-6, and A8883-8918).[406] Some references to the Grail Quest are so unspecific that I would count them as transfictional – the only information given is that the knight who will find the Grail has not yet been born (A2222, A2750, and A4294). An empty prolepsis can even be found in the reference to Waldin/Gaudin (A6806-10).[407] While considerably fewer in number, version A – and likely the longer version as well – thus retains points of connection with other Arthurian works.

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[405] In the following discussion, I assume that the shorter version's ending point corresponds to that of P and W. The ending point of L is representative of a version that was abridged from the shorter version (see Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 47-8). The text of the shorter version was not substantially changed in the course of this abridgement. For that reason, L will not be considered in the following discussion of how the shorter version's text and ending point are connected.
[406] Note that Loholt remains nameless.
[407] See ch. 1, section 3.

Matters are more complicated where *LeM*'s text story is concerned. Version A features a compressed rendering of episode H, in which Merlin orders Blaise to make a book. Some of Merlin's regular visits to Blaise remain in A (A1287-8, A1692-1704, and A8572-6), reflecting a reduced preservation of *LeM*'s source fiction that resembles the treatment of its intertextual and transfictional references. By contrast, noticeable differences can be found where the transmission fiction is concerned. First, "li contes", depicted as an independent mass of source material in *LeM*, virtually disappears in all versions of *AM*. Second, the narrating "I" stands more in the foreground and directly references oral performance situations. Even in those few instances where "li contes" does appear, the combined effect is starkly different from *LeM*. Compare, for example, the following transition, in which both narrative voices appear:

| | |
|---|---|
| But now the story falls silent about the youths and the Saxons, and it speaks about the peasants whom the youths had sent back to the city of Logres with the plunder and the wagon train they had won back. (148; 137) | Listneþ now gret & smale<br>Hou ȝou seiþ here þis tale:<br>(A5075-6) |

More often than not, "li contes" is not mentioned at all, with the narrating "I" claiming responsibility for AM's structure instead:

| | |
|---|---|
| Now the story falls silent about the youths right here and about their companions, and it goes back to King Arthur, King Ban, King Bors, and their companions, who were going into the kingdom of Carmelide to serve King Leodagan. (151; 141) | Lete we hem þer soiour<br>& wende oȝain to king Arthour.<br>(A5347-8) |

In *LeM*, "li contes" appears as the source used by the narrating "I". In *AM*, this role is sometimes assigned to the "brut" instead (L32, A538, A2730, A3486, A3675, A4218, A5604, A5228, A5633). This may reflect the use of the historical tradition as an additional source by the adaptor of the longer version. Interestingly, a passage in D, corresponding to W2014-5, turns Blaise's book into the *Brut*: "For Merlyn tolde hit & sayde / And in þe Bruyt he hit layde" (D1223-4). This is likely

original to D and constitutes a recreation of a text story in which a continuity exists between Blaise's book and the source used by the narrating "I".[408]

The changed text story of *AM* is clearly in line with the conventions of its new reception context.[409] Some points of connection with the Arthurian universe and remnants of *LeM*'s text story remain, but *LeM*'s characteristic plurality and openness are joined by characteristics of Middle English verse romance in *AM*. *LeM*'s self-presentation as a story of origins, as a prequel to other Arthurian stories, is more opaque in *AM*. *LeM*'s direct links between present events and future ones in the Arthurian universe are almost entirely omitted, and *AM*'s text story no longer establishes a hierarchy between it and other Arthurian works. As stated above, the longer version focuses more on political events in *LeM*'s plot than on Merlin, and so his orchestration of events outside of *LeM* is largely omitted as well. The focus on causes rather than consequences that pervades *LeM* is rebalanced in favour of consequences in *AM*, for example by means of narrative reordering, which juxtaposes previously separated passages. Some aspects of *LeM*'s *discours* that contribute to the sense of a prequel are thus lost in the longer version, while some remain. The combined effect of a story of origins, however, has disappeared in the longer version, which appears much more as an open-ended Arthurian story that is neither a precursor to other texts nor superior to them in terms of its claim to truthfulness.

The shorter version takes some of these developments further and makes some general changes, becoming an entirely self-contained story as a result. As Arthur has not even been conceived by the end of the shorter version, the connection of the shorter version to the Arthurian universe is a relatively loose one, and its self-sufficiency leaves no immediate points of connection to other stories.

The shorter version ends before any of the intertextual or transfictional references that are found in version A are made. Thus, none of the immediate points of connection to other Arthurian works or the fictional universe they share play a role

[408] No mentions of the *Brut* are found in the two most recent surviving textual witnesses of *AM*, namely P and W.
[409] Another case in point, which has been amply discussed elsewhere, consists in the addition of seasonal headpieces in *AM* (Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* 69-72).

in the part of the narrative that remains. Moreover, the shorter version omits all but one reference to Blaise creating his book, including all of episode H, in which the elaborate book-writing framework is set up in the first place.

The one reference to Blaise's book that remains in the shorter version is considerably longer than its counterpart in *LeM*, where it consists in merely one sentence informing the reader that Merlin goes to Blaise and that Blaise records everything that happened. In version A, which is likely representative of the longer version, this passage is longer and contains a summary of the events Merlin reports. The reference to Merlin's obscure prophecies is moved to this scene from elsewhere in *LeM* and may involve the use of additional sources, as is characteristic of the longer version's adaptor (A1703-5).[410] As in *LeM*, Blaise's record of these events in A is part of the book he has already started.

In the shorter version, this passage is even longer and Blaise's book is described differently:

Marlyn wente hastely
To the hermyte Blasy
And tolde him without lesynge
How he had serued the kynge
And tolde hym without wronge
The fyghtynge of the dragons stronge,
Of the rede and of the whyte
A grete boke he dyde wryte
And sayd that the rede dragon
Betokeneth grete dystruccyon
Thorowe Uortygers kyn ywys
And thorowe the hethen kynge angys
And thorowe theyr kynge withouten wene
In Englonde shall it bene
Stronge ware and batayll kene
And many a man shall slayne bene.
For as Marlyn tolde and sayd
In scrypture he it layde
Of all the aduentures I vnderstonde
That sholde be fall in Englonde.
But derke it is and wonder thynge
That Marlyn made in his shewynge
But fewe men without wene
Coude vnderstonde what it myght bene
And for it was so derke wrought

[410] This is likely an example of the original adaptor using Wace's *Brut* as an additional source. The *Brut* signals the omission of Merlin's prophecies about the dragons' fight and explains this omission with the obscurity of the prophecies (ll. 7535-42). With the exception of two manuscripts, this explanation in the *Brut* replaces all of book 7 from the *Historia*. French commentators of the *Historia* had a considerable interest in the obscure prophecies (see Veysseyre and Wille, and Wace p. 191n1). *LeM* includes a similar explanation at a later point in an episode omitted from *AM* (53-4; 47-8), and in version A this explanation is placed instead in the context of Blaise's book. It seems possible that the original adaptor of *AM* moved the reference to the obscurity and omission of Merlin's prophecies from the omitted episode to a more suitable context. The position in the *Brut*, in which Merlin makes obscure prophecies to Vortigern, makes less sense in *AM*, where Vortigern has threatened Merlin's life and where Merlin has no reason to provide more prophecies than he is asked for; the report to Blaise is the closest possible interaction in which to relocate these obscure prophecies.

Of that scrypture I tell nought. (W2000-24)

In the shorter version, this is the first and last mention of Blaise's book. The passage indicates that Blaise's book narrates *only* Merlin's encounter with Vortigern, together with the fight of the dragons and obscure prophecies about England's future, whereas *LeM* and version A depict Blaise being updated regularly about the ongoing events of the story itself and recording them in his book. The source fiction of the shorter version is thus changed substantially, and there is no clear congruency between Blaise's book and the text the reader is engaging with. The shorter version is thus a self-contained narrative: no references to other Arthurian stories are made, and no connection is set up between Blaise's book and the text the reader is reading.

While this transformation of a performatively open and plural narrative into a self-contained one is largely achieved by omission, the shorter version also becomes a rounded-off story. Unlike the longer version, which adapted the entire sprawling narrative of *LeM*, the shorter version has a much earlier ending and rewrites its characters and the details of its narrative to match it. Creating a rounded-off and self-contained adaptation was thus one of the priorities of the shorter version's adaptor.

Some of the changes that match the shorter version's earlier ending can be traced back to the longer version but are skilfully readapted to a new purpose. The character of Hengist is good example of this. I have already described above how one of the innovations of the shorter version consists in a direct narration of his death, making it a seminal event. The increased importance of Hengist itself is, however, not an innovation of the shorter version but already to be found in the longer version. This becomes evident from Hengist's earlier appearance in all versions of *AM*: unlike *LeM*, in which Hengist is introduced during Vortigern's reign as one of the Saxons Vortigern recruits to defend himself against his own men (24; 22-3), Hengist is already at war with Vortigern's two predecessors, Constantine and Moyne, in *AM*. He also fights Vortigern, Pendragon, and Uther, before he dies at Uther's hands. Some of these battles are added entirely; others are expanded and

take up a significantly larger part of the episodes in question than they do in *LeM*. Hengist himself does not explicitly fight a single battle in *LeM* but becomes the opponent of four successive kings in *AM*. It thus appears that the adaptor of the longer version had already amplified Hengist's role.

The increased presence of Hengist in the longer version may well have been inspired by the *Historia* or the *Brut*, in which Hengist is an overall more present character. Thus, for example, Merlin's explanation of the dragons' fight in episode P is overall close to *LeM* but corresponds to the *Historia* in mentioning Hengist.[411]

| | |
|---|---|
| *Historia* (liber viii, para. 118) | Beware the fire of Constantinus' sons, if you can. Even now they are preparing their ships, leaving the shores of Armorica and setting their sails for the crossing. They will land on this island, attack the Saxons and conquer that wicked race; but first they will besiege your tower and burn you in it. … Tomorrow they will come ashore at Totnes. The faces of the Saxons will be red with blood, and Hengest will be killed and Aurelius Ambrosius crowned. … His brother Uther Pendragon will succeed him, but his days will also be cut short by poison. Your offspring will have a share in this treason, before the boar of Cornwall devours them.[412] |
| *LeM* (38-9) | That you saw the white [dragon] burn the red one with fire coming out of its body means that the youths will burn you with their fire. … They are at sea, and they have gathered a great army to invade their kingdom and bring you to justice. And they say in truth that you had their brother murdered. I will tell you that they will come ashore three months from now in the port of Winchester.[413] |
| A1655-80 | Þat þe white drof oȝain<br>Þe rede riȝt to þe plain<br>& him þere adoun cast<br>& al tofrust him wiþ his blast<br>Bitokneþ þe air of þis lond<br>Þat schal þe keuer into his hond<br>& into þi castel driue;<br>Wiþ þine children & þi wiue<br>& mani noble of þine menne<br>Þat schal com out of þi kin<br>& of þi wiues fader Angys Þat schal be ded & lesen his pris;<br>His kin & eke þin<br>Schal don wo to Bretouns kin.<br>Þe heued of þe white tayle<br>Signifieþ gret conseyle<br>Þat schul held wiþ þe kinges blod<br>Of þe gentil men & gode. |

[411] The *Brut* is similar to the *Historia* but crucially does not mention Hengist in this passage (ll. 7548-82). In this particular case, then, it is clear that *AM* was inspired directly by the *Historia*, whereas *LeM* may have followed the *Brut* by not including Hengist.
[412] "Ignem filiorum Constantini diffuge: si diffugere ualueris. Iam naues parant, iam Armoricanum litus deserunt, iam uela per aequora pandunt. Petent Britanniam insulam, inuadent Saxonicam gentem, subiugabunt nefandum populum; sed te prius infra turrim inclusum comburent. … Rubebunt sanguine Saxonum facies, et interfecto Hengisto Aurelius Ambrosius coronabitur. … Succedet ei germanus suus Vther Pendragon: cujus dies anticipabuntur ueneno. Aderunt tantae proditioni posteri tui, quos aper Cornubiae deuorabit."
[413] "Et ce que tu ueis que li blans argoit le rous del feu qui issoit de son cors senefie que li enfant tarderont de lor feu . … il sont en mer & ont porcachiet grant gent por uenir en lor terre & por faire iustice de toi . & dient por uoir que tu fesis lor frere murdrir . Et saces quil arriueront de hui en . iij . iors al por de Wincestre" (35).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | He schal wiþ þe þerin brenne.<br>Þe tayle of þe dragoun rede<br>Þat is so long & so vnrede<br>Signifieþe þe wicke stren | Sir, forsoþe þis is þe tokening<br>Of þe dragouns fiȝting,<br>Puruay þe now, ich þe rede,<br>Þer is comen gret ferrede. |
| Shorter version (W1941-70) | The whyte dragon as I you say<br>Recouered his strength in the valay<br>And droue the rede agayne<br>Tyll he came in to the playne<br>And to the grounde he hym cast<br>And brente hym there with his blast<br>That bytokeneth the eyres so yonge<br>Which haue s[o]coure fonde<br>And redy with many a knight<br>Agayne the to holde fyght<br>And come in to Englonde<br>For to dyue the to shame and shonde.<br>Into a castell they wyll the dryue<br>Bothe thy chyldren and thy wyue<br>And all that euer be with the thenne | In to the grounde they wyll them brenne.<br>The redes tayle that was so longe<br>Betokeneth warre stronge<br>Whiche shall come after thenne<br>Of thyne owne wyues kynne<br>And the hethen kynge angys;<br>He shall be slayne and lese the pryse<br>His kynred and thyne also<br>Shall do Englonde moche wo.<br>The hede of the whytes tayle<br>Bekoneth withouten fayle<br>That eyres bothe true and good<br>Shall destroye all th[y] blood<br>And certes syr that is the tokenynge<br>Of the dragons stronge fyghtynge. |

The inclusion of Hengist in this prophecy is a crucial contribution to the amplification of his role in *AM*. The importance of the prophecy is signalled by descriptions of the bystanders' reactions before Merlin is asked to explain the meaning of the dragons' fight: "'It bitokneþ' þai seyden alle / Sum tokening þerafter schuld falle; / … / It bitokned sumwhat hem þouȝt" (A1605-10, see also L1680-4). The fight itself, too, is of much greater intensity than in *LeM*:

> Swiche batayl nas neuer non,
> Þai kest fer on swiche maner
> As al þe cuntre were afer,
> Wiþ mouþe wiþ clowes & wiþ tayl
> Þer þai maden a gret batail
> Þe erþe quaked vnder hem þo,
> Þe weder chaunged abouen also;
> Þai biten & smiten & fer cast,
> Þai fellen & risen & fouȝten fast.
> Almest a day þis fiȝting
> Last wiþouten ani resting (A1514-24)

With this much attention and importance resting on the dragons' fight and its meaning, the reader is invited to pay close attention to the content of Merlin's prophecy. The addition of Hengist to the prophecy is tied closely to Vortigern's approaching death: both of them will be killed by Pendragon and Uther, as will all

their kin.[414] The adaptor of the longer version thus turns Hengist into an opponent of some importance.

Hengist's increased importance supports comparison between the English kings in *AM*, where he is present in all the encounters between the English and the Saxons. This creates parallels between these encounters and thus allows for a direct comparison between the various English kings.[415] For example, Hengist is defeated in battle by all the kings except Moyne, as a result of which the text singles Moyne out as a "conjoun" (A206, L178, D184), a "coward" (W167), and a "fool" (L190, P182, D196). Hengist's function as a canvas onto which the differences between the kings are projected is particularly evident in the contrast between Vortigern on the one hand and Pendragon and Uther on the other. Both factions besiege Hengist and make a truce with the Saxons, who are obliged to leave the country (A341-54; A2035-44). However, Vortigern undoes his own achievement when he invites Hengist back to England. In doing so, Vortigern effectively turns his former "foman" Hengist into an ally in order to keep at bay who those were formerly his allies, which characterizes him as a treacherous hypocrite.[416]

The contrast between the kings takes on a new significance in the context of the narrative trajectory of the shorter version. Vortigern's fraternization with the enemy seals England's downfall, both by fanning the flames of civil war and initiating a time of interfaith marriages in the country. While this is true for all versions of *AM*, the period also marks the low point of the whole narrative in the shorter version. Pendragon and Uther restore England to what it was before, an achievement which stands in even starker contrast to the betrayal perpetrated by Vortigern because the shorter version ends after that restoration is complete. They recruit the men who were betrayed by Vortigern, reclaim their birthright to the

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[414] The reference to Vortigern's and Hengist's offspring together ("His kin & eke þin") allow them to be read as a collective, namely the Saxons in general: Vortigern's marriage to Hengist's daughter undoes any distinction between Vortigern's and Hengist's descendants.

[415] In this, his encounters with the kings display similarities with Merlin's disguised encounters with other characters in *LeM*, see ch. 2, section 5.3.

[416] Two passages in which Vortigern asks Hengist to help him defeat his new "fomen" underline this irony by repetition; see W394-9 and W2081-6.

English throne from him, and kill Vortigern, then Hengist, then their kinsmen.[417] While a number of the changes made in the shorter version are thus prefigured in the longer version, they interact with the earlier ending of the shorter version to create a rounded-off story that is centred on downfall and restoration.

Because the shorter version ends after the Battle of Salisbury, the defeat of the Saxons by Pendragon and Uther appears conclusive: the Saxons are, once and for all, expelled from England. The contrast between Vortigern, who leads England to its downfall, and Pendragon and Uther, who restore it by expelling the Saxons, serves to create a rounded-off narrative in the shorter version. Its ending after Pendragon's death, which entails the defeat of Hengist's kin, is prefigured neatly by the prophecy of Merlin quoted above, the fulfilment of which creates the effect of closure.[418] No questions are left unanswered, no prophecies unfulfilled, and no problems remain by the time the shorter version ends. Overall, then, the shorter version does not share *LeM*'s self-presentation as a prequel, which the longer version had already begun to suppress. It also does not feature *LeM*'s characteristic openness and plurality, being transformed instead into a shorter, rounded-off and self-contained narrative.

This discussion has shown that no particular importance was attached to *LeM*'s characteristic openness and status as prequel in the adaptation processes that led to *AM*. They were neither closely retained nor deliberately and systematically suppressed. Where the sense of a prequel is missing, it is primarily as a consequence of wider adaptation principles of the adaptor of the longer version. That the narrative could matter in its own right, independently of its links to other Arthurian works or its status in the Arthurian universe, is further highlighted in the shorter version, in which a portion of the narrative is turned into a self-contained, standalone story.

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[417] Another such contrast between the three characters is created by their treatment of Merlin: Vortigern wants Merlin dead, and tries to manipulate and threaten him (W1426, W1717-28, W1897-8, W1983-7), whereas Pendragon and Uther aim to reward him for his help and bear no ill intentions (W2279-86, W2621-36).
[418] No contradiction arises in version A, in which more of Hengist's kin continue appearing afterward (A4085-7, A4279, A6935).

## 5. The Focus on England: An Adaptation Principle Underlying Version A?

While the shorter version is well attested, no complete manuscript representing the longer version of *AM* survives. The closest textual witness to the longer version is version A, which ends after about ten thousand lines. The Auchinleck manuscript, in which it is preserved, is one of the most important surviving witnesses of Middle English literature, especially of the romance genre. It is thus not surprising that this textual witness of *AM* in has received considerable research attention. In particular, version A's focus on Englishness and English identity has been addressed by numerous scholars.[419] Recent articles by Elizabeth Sklar, Siobhain Bly Calkin, and Karen Haslanger Vaneman all provide arguments and evidence for *AM*'s Englishness in general – but they work exclusively with version A and make only passing reference to the other textual witnesses of *AM* or to *LeM*.[420] The following analysis will extend the discussion of Englishness from version A to include *AM*'s other textual witnesses as well as *LeM*.

### 5.1 The Originality of The Focus on England: Comparing Version A to *LeM*

Much of the material used for arguments about *AM*'s Englishness is not original to it but adapted from *LeM*. This has been acknowledged where the general facts of the story, such as the level of violence, the story's setting in Britain, and the invasion by a foreign force, are concerned (Calkin, "Violence" 17). The similarities go further, however. Quite a few of the apparent inventions ascribed to *AM* can actually be traced back to *LeM* – they are simply implemented more consistently in its adaptation. The various means with which *AM* exoticizes the enemy are one example of this. Calkin argues that

> the Saxon invaders of the Old French *Estoire* [*LeM*] become Saracens. Although the invaders still originate from Saxony, Ireland and Denmark, they … worship the god "Mahoun", and they are led by "amirails" and "soudans" …, identifications reflecting European contact with Arabic military and governmental titles. … Indeed, the poet celebrates [Arthur's] martial accomplishments in terms that evoke crusade. ("Violence" 22)

[419] See Haslanger Vaneman, *Interpreting*; Riddy; Turville-Petre; Butler; Finotello ch. 1.
[420] See Sklar; Calkin, "Violence"; Haslanger Vaneman, "*Of Arthour*".

The alignment of the English–Muslim conflict with crusades in turn contributes to the national identity of the English.[421] The same is the case in a number of other texts copied in the Auchinleck manuscript, which has consequently been called “the handbook of the nation” (Turville-Petre 112). However, the exoticization of the enemy is not original to *AM*. *LeM* aligns Arthur’s war against the Saxons with medieval crusades by the same means. So, for example, the Saxons are twice called “Saracens” in *LeM* (470; 441, 448; 420), and the Saxons occasionally have admirals among them (429; 400, 260; 242), accompanied by further exoticizing elements such as elephants (246; 228). With these and many other details, *LeM* – as is typical of its *Suite* section – aligns itself with the *chansons de geste.*[422]

*AM* thus presents its narrative as a crusade story with largely the same means as those used in *LeM*. Nonetheless, Calkin’s argument remains pertinent, since *AM* makes more widespread use of them. *LeM* mentions “Saracens” only twice, and it is primarily in the second half of the *Suite* that the war between the Britons and the Saxons turns into a war between Christians and non-Christians. By contrast, *AM*’s allusions to the enemy’s otherness are considerably more frequent, especially at the beginning of the text. The Saxons are consistently called “Saracens”, for example, and their different religious beliefs are brought to the foreground much more often. As a result, Englishness resulting from an “us against them” narrative is much more prominent than it is in *LeM*. This contributes to one of the key differences that Sklar observes between *LeM* and *AM*: while *LeM* is “not primarily political, and certainly not primarily English”, *AM* turns “the achievement of national unity” into a major theme (54).

Up to this point, the arguments made for the Englishness of version A also apply to the longer version of *AM*. This is not always the case, however. One of Calkin’s main arguments about the hybridity of English identity in *AM* is a case in point. The

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[421] The term “Saracen” is typically understood as referring to Muslims but carries broader (exclusively negative) connotations of “almost any non-Latin Christian” (Cohen 134). Even when it does not refer specifically to Muslims, the term is, at its core, derogatory and Islamophobic, as are the medieval texts in which it is used. Following Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh’s suggestion, I will henceforth use the term “Saracen” only when discussing the use of the word itself and otherwise refer to “Muslims”.
[422] See Fabry-Tehranchi, “La ‘Suite-Vulgate’”; Hogenbirk; Kennedy, “Intertextuality”. See also ch. 1, section 6.

hybridity begins during Vortigern's reign, in which the king himself marries Hengist's non-Christian daughter, and a period of interfaith marriages ensues. This hybridity is criticized, and *AM* expresses "the idea, and hope, … that English identity can be re-purified" (Calkin, "Violence" 29). According to Calkin, this disentanglement of identities turns out to be impossible because of the "inevitability of a continued Saracen presence in England": after all, version A ends after one of many battles against the Muslims, without any closure or indication that the battle was in any way decisive.

Calkin's argument can be questioned from several angles. For example, Calkin argues that version A suggests that a Muslim presence in England is inevitable ("Violence" 29). It is true that *AM*'s narrative, as it survives in version A, never fully restores a "pure" English identity, if one assumes the expulsion of all Muslims as a prerequisite for this. This means, however, that the enduring hybridity of the English population is specific to version A: the longer version probably adapted the entire *LeM*, which does end with a decisive victory over the Saxons, and the shorter version, too, presents Uther's victory over the Muslims in the final episode as decisive. That the unresolved conflict in version A contributes to the prospect of a hybrid population is clear, but this was not necessarily an intentional modification: as I discussed above, it is generally assumed that the copying process of version A was interrupted at short notice and that it was not supposed to end where it does.[423]

These are not the only changes between *LeM* and *AM* that increase the perceived Englishness of the latter without necessarily being made primarily with that effect in mind. The streamlining in the longer version of *AM* has a similar effect, for it results in the conflict between England and the Saxons being foregrounded. The focus on the invasion of England by Muslims is inseparable from the adaptor's wider priority of streamlining the French narrative for medieval English audiences.

A final factor contributing to *AM*'s Englishness is the obvious and frequent use of denotations for England and the English in *AM* where *LeM* remains vague or refers to Britain and the Bretons. While most numerous in version A, as it is the longest

[423] See the introduction to this chapter.

textual witness of *AM*, references to England and the English are also found in *AM*'s other textual witnesses, suggesting that this, too, can be traced back to the longer version.[424]

This initial discussion has shown that much of the apparent evidence for *AM*'s focus on Englishness must be reframed. Rather than proving a focus on English identity specific to version A, much of the evidence can be traced back either to *LeM* or to the adaptor of the longer version. The connection between Englishness and the adaptation principles underlying the longer version may also not be as intentional as has been suggested: some of the changes may have simply been made with a view to prioritizing narrative over description, dialogue, and characterization – the focus on Englishness thus presents itself as a side effect of wider adaptation principles. Other factors contributing to the Englishness of version A were likely due to external circumstances, namely the disruption of the copying process.

**5.2 The English–Muslim Conflict: Comparing Version A to the Shorter Version**

As has been established above, much of the evidence that has previously been used for establishing the Englishness of version A is not specific to it. This is one reason why the argument that version A in particular reinforces Englishness is questionable. In order to further investigate how focused version A is on Englishness, it is necessary to compare it to the shorter version of *AM*.

In the shorter version, the period of interfaith marriages takes a more central position than it does in version A: the hybridity produced by the Muslims' intermingling with the English is framed in the shorter version as the central crisis which is then resolved by Pendragon and Uther. Some of the textual witnesses of the shorter version show a notably stronger concern with this hybridity than version A. For example, D's account of this period with its interfaith marriages is far more negative than that in A.

& Fortiger for loue fin
Hir tok to fere & to wiue,
& was curssed in al his liue

And Fortiger hur*e* to louy bigan,
So þat he wold han hur*e* to wyf,
And þe kyng*es* acorded weren fu*l* blyue.

[424] See esp. A117-9, L83-6, D75-8, P79-83, W66-9. See also A4108, A4488, A7420, A8580, and many more examples. See also Sklar 52.

For he lete Cristen wedde haþen
& meynt our blod as flesche & maþen.
Mani þousand was swiche in weddeloc
As we finde writen in bok
Þer was wel neiȝe al þis lond
To þe deuel gon an hond,
Festes he made gret & fele
& hadden al warldes wele
& held no better lawe
Þan þe hounde wiþ his felawe;
Þis last wel fel ȝere. (A480-93)

Fortiger was cr*is*ton man
And ȝhe a hethen womman,
And so her*e* blood was medlyd yfer*e*,
of Cr*is*t no mor*e* kepte þy her*e*,
So þat almost al Englond
Was t*ur*ned in to hethene hond,
What þoruȝ þe kende of þe kyng*es* blood
And þoruȝ þe blood of þe heþene mood;
For M*er*lyn seide in his book,
Þat many a þousand other took,
As fader w*iþ* þe dowt*er*
And sone w*iþ* þe modyr,
And helden no beter*e* C*ris*t*es* lawes,
Þan houndes doþ w*iþ* her*e* felawes;
In wey ne street sparede þei nouȝt,
No mor*e* þan houndes þ*a*t buþ to gederis brouȝt,
And so þei leueden many a ȝer, (D478-97)[425]

A direct comparison with the corresponding passage in D shows that A's criticism of Vortigern's worldly lifestyle is much less harsh than the allusions made about the interfaith marriages in D.[426] The concern about interfaith marriages in A relates to culture, religious practice, and everyday life. D, by contrast, is concerned about genetic purity and the mixing of blood lines. Moreover, version A's concern with Englishness is less consistently voiced than in the shorter version. In the passage quoted above, for example, D specifically mentions England, whereas A refers to "al þis lond". Another example consists in Merlin's self-introduction. He states that he has been sent by God to save England in the shorter version,[427] whereas in A, Merlin describes himself as an "extraordinary" (ferly) messenger with no explicit connection to God who, again, has come to save "al þis lond" (A1119-20).

It seems, then, that the shorter version is more clearly concerned with the hybridity of English identity than version A is. This is primarily due to the shorter

[425] Here and below, I have arranged the quotations for easier comparison. The white space is not found in the editions or manuscripts involved.
[426] D's rendition of this passage is different from the other textual witnesses of the shorter version; see P413-20, W461-70. L has a lacuna at this point. The wording in D might be a case of cross-fertilization with the longer version, which could even imply that version A shortened its source here. However, it is also possible that this passage was expanded in the transmission process resulting in D.
[427] "But god hath torned me to good / And nowe I am at goddes sonde / For to helpe all this londe" (W1268-70). L, D, and P all mention England specifically, rather than "all this londe" (L1138, D976, P1087).

version's earlier ending point: its narrative is arranged around England's downfall because of Vortigern and its restoration thanks to Pendragon and Uther. Even individual passages, however, show that the shorter version deliberately maintains its focus on England's downfall and salvation, whereas version A is less consistent in signalling such an interest.

The case of Merlin's self-introduction and the reference to interfaith marriages suggests that the focus on Englishness in the shorter version can be traced back to the longer version and is, in fact, diluted in version A. Merlin's introduction of himself as having been sent by God is similar to statements he makes in *LeM* and thus more likely to have originated in the longer version and been omitted from version A than to have been added by the shorter version's adaptor (see esp. 19; 17). No reference to interfaith marriages besides Vortigern's is made in *LeM*, but there is a parallel in the *Historia*, which mentions that the Britons' faith "had fallen into decline" (liber vi, para. 101).[428] It thus seems likely that the longer version took the reference to interfaith marriages from this additional source. Nevertheless, the extent to which the details shared by A and D in this passage trace back to the longer version is impossible to determine, as is the originality to the shorter version of the frequent references to England by name.

Overall, a comparison of version A with *LeM* and with the shorter version suggests that no changes were made to A with the intention of focusing any more on Englishness than was already the case. The evidence even suggests the opposite, namely that the focus on Englishness was elided alongside many other things in the streamlining of the narrative that underlies version A. There is, however, one set of differences between the shorter version and version A that does contribute to a focus on England specifically in A.

| | Shorter version (W) | Version A |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | And whan angys worde had<br>Therof he was ryght glad.<br>He sente after messagers in that tyde<br>Ouer all his londe on eche syde<br>For many a stoute man and stronge<br>Of genus and of danes londe, | ¶ King Angys sone herd it telle,<br>He gadred him folk wel felle<br><br><br><br>Of Danmark & of Sessoyne |

[428] "Corrupta … fuerat."

| | An hondred thousande and many mo<br>On hors and on fote also<br>Came to hym there letted none<br>For to warre on the yonge kynge Moyn.<br>Kynge angys wolde not abyde<br>Unto shyp he wente in that tyde<br>And brought in to Englonde syn<br>Many a doughty sarasyn. (54-61) | For to wer oȝaines Moyne,<br>He filled ful mani dromouns<br>Of kinges erls & barouns,<br>Vp þai sett sail & mast<br>& into Jnglond com an hast – (109-116) |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Kynge angys there before<br>Sawe his folke many lore,<br>Sone he sente his sonde<br>Home ayen in to his londe<br>For all that myght wepen bere<br>Sholde come to englonde for to were;<br>Of warre wolde he not blynne<br>For toures and castelles he dyde wynne<br>And wrought them all moche wronge. (108-116) | Angis tok in a þrowe<br>Mani castels & tounes arowe<br>& put þerin his men<br>For to stonden our oȝen<br>& sent after eld & ȝing<br>For to help in his fiȝting. (147-52) |
| 3 | Tho wente the kynge to the se<br>And saylled forth to his countre. (324-5) | Þus þai wenten to þe strond<br>& ferden ouer to her lond. (353-54) |
| 4 | And sente hym ouer the se ywys<br>In to denmarke to kynge angys<br>And bad hym come and helpe at need …<br>Than was the kynge blythe<br>And sent messagers also swythe<br>To duke erle baron and knyght<br>All tho that wepen myght bere.<br>In to shyp they gan dryue<br>And ouer the se they cam bylyue<br>And cam in to this londe with hym<br>Many a sarasyn stoute and grym. (394-407) | Letters he made to Angys þe welp<br>& bad he schuld cum him to help …<br>Angys þerof was bliþe<br>His message he dede swiþe,<br>Mani þousand he tok wiþ him<br>Þat were boþe stout & grim. (415-22) |
| 5 | They wente to the see stronde<br>And passed them to theyr londe. (2635-6) | & so þai deden bi Godes sond,<br>Alle þai wenten to her lond. (2043-4) |
| 6 | It befell in Denmarke<br>Two sarasyns that were sterke<br>That were of kynge angys kyndrede<br>And of his blood they were descended;<br>The one was come of the brother<br>And of the syster came the other<br>Stronge men they were and fell<br>Full well I can theyr names tell.<br>The one was called syr Gamoure<br>And the other Metradoure<br>Grete lordes they were of londe<br>Metrador helde in his honde<br>Two ducheys and Gamor thre<br>Agayne them durst no man be.<br>Whan they herde that kynge angys<br>In Englonde was slayne ywys, | Of Danmark Sarraȝins<br>Þat were of Angys lins |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | As soone as they dide togyder speke | |
| | Theyr [emmys][429] deth to a wreke. | |
| | They gadred them stronge myght | Þat hem souȝt gret helping |
| | Duke/Erle/baron/and knyght | About hem of mani king – |
| | So grete an hoost togyder they brought | So michel pople wiþ hem com |
| | The nombre can I tell nought. | Þat it no miȝt telle no man – |
| | In to shyppe they wente than | Wiþ fele schippes & gret ynowe |
| | And to sayle they fast began | |
| | So the wynde gan them blowe | |
| | They aryued vp at brystowe. (2646-72) | Vp þai comen at Bristowe. (2067-74) |

Table 4.3. Muslims and their movements in the shorter version and version A.

The passages in table 4.3 are concerned with Muslims and their movements in particular. In most cases, the shorter version is longer or more detailed than version A. In this respect, the two versions correspond to my observations above: version A tends to contain fewer details than the longer version must have had, shortening and streamlining it, whereas the shorter version probably embellishes and expands its content.[430] In these examples, too, the shorter version makes specific reference to countries more often than version A: the shorter version mentions Denmark and England three times each (rows, 1, 2, 4, and 6), whereas version A mentions Denmark twice and England only once (rows 1 and 6). A similar difference in the detail supplied can be observed in the cases where the shorter version mentions that the Muslims reach and leave England but version A does not (rows 2 and 4), or includes the detail that, in leaving England, they cross the sea but version A does not (row 5). Overall, then, the conflict between the English and the Muslims in version A is not so clearly a conflict between two countries: fewer journeys by the Muslims are described, the descriptions are shorter and vaguer, and the countries between which they journey are mentioned less often.

Before discussing these differences and what they mean for version A’s focus on Englishness, I consider whether they arise from systematic shortenings in the transmission chain behind version A or are systematic additions by the shorter version’s adaptor, and examine the extent to which they can be traced back to the longer version. The passages quoted are all present to some extent in both version A and the shorter version, so it is likely that they all originate in the longer version.

[429] “enemys”, emended following Cylkowski p. 123.
[430] See ch. 4.3 above.

Several of these passages have no correspondences in *LeM* and are thus likely to be additions made by the longer version's adaptor while amplifying the roles of Hengist and the Muslims. In *LeM*, the Saxons' first arrival is relatively vague and occurs later than that of the Muslims in *AM*: Vortigern simply has messengers search for the Saxons, and the Saxons are glad that he is requesting a truce. The only other depictions of Saxon movements in *LeM* occur after their truce with Pendragon and Uther and when they return for the Battle of Salisbury; in both cases they are said to cross the sea (50; 45 and 56; 50). As a result, it is at first implicit where the Saxons come from, but when they are later sent "home", they cross the ocean. This in itself may have prompted the original adaptor to describe the Muslims' movements more clearly so as to avoid confusion.

Further evidence for the decision-making process followed by the longer version's adaptor can potentially be found in the *Historia* and the *Brut*. In both texts, Hengist plays a greater role than in *LeM*, and some of the details with which *AM* amplifies his role may have been inspired by these sources. The *Historia* and the *Brut* contain several references to him and the Saxons crossing the sea. For example, Hengist and his army arrive on ships during Vortigern's reign (liber vi, para. 98; ll. 6704-10).[431] Henceforth, Hengist repeatedly summons reinforcements from Saxony. The first case of this corresponds to row 4 in table 4.3: Hengist convinces Vortigern that he is still threatened by his enemies and is consequently permitted to "send messengers to Germany to summon knights" (liber vi, para. 99; ll. 6893); these knights arrive together with Hengist's daughter (para. 100; ll. 6025-8). After Vortigern has married Hengist's daughter, their alliance continues: "With their help he continually beat his enemies and was victorious in every battle. Little by little Hengest invited more ships, increasing his numbers day by day" (para. 101; ll. 7059-62). There is one case where Hengist leaves England: he is defeated by Vortigern's son, and he and his men "boarded their warships and returned to Germany" (para. 101; ll. 7123-30), before Hengist "prepared a fleet and returned to Britain" (para. 103; ll. 7197-7200). Each of these references clarifies that the Saxons have to cross the sea to reach Britain. Given the original adaptor's frequent

[431] Hengist is not the only leader of the Saxons in the *Historia* and the *Brut* but accompanied by his brother Horsa.

use of the *Historia* and the *Brut* as additional sources, it is very possible that the increased movements of the Muslims and the consistent references to them crossing the sea were inspired by these texts.

The language of the passages in table 4.3 provides another argument in support of the view that the shorter version is closer to the longer version than to version A. The shorter version's rendition of these passages features a number of formulas and rhymes that appear frequently in all textual witnesses of *AM* and likely originate in the longer version. A case in point is the formulaic references to "duke erle baron and knyght" in lines 402 and 2667 of W (table 4.3, rows 4 and 6). The formula, with variations, appears elsewhere in version A, for example in lines 1735 ("To erls, doukes & to kniȝtes"), 2229 ("Doukes, kniȝtes, erls & king"), and 2767-8 ("Of kinges, erls, baroun & kniȝt / Princes, doukes mani, ypliȝt"). Significantly, it also appears in *King Alisaunder*, which may also have been composed by the adaptor of the longer version of *AM*:[432] "Prince & douke baroun & kniȝt" (7300) and "On kinges, doukes, princes, erls, / On barouns, kniȝtes, squiers & cherls" (7804-5). While it is possible that the shorter version's adaptor independently decided to extend the use of formulas that they found elsewhere in the longer version, it is more likely that the formulas in the shorter version originated in the longer version to begin with.

Finally, the passage quoted in row 6 of table 4.3 can also be read as reflecting truncation in version A rather than an addition of the shorter version. The shorter version's rendition of the passage departs quite a bit from *LeM*, where Hengist's revenge-seeking kinsmen remain nameless (54; 48). This would at first glance suggest that version A follows the longer version and that the shorter version added the details about Hengist's kinsmen. However, the shorter version does not feature character names missing from version A anywhere else, which makes it unlikely that its adaptor would have come up with them here.[433] Interestingly, the *Historia* and the *Brut* both feature a son and a kinsman of Hengist who do not

[432] See Smithers (40-55, esp. 41) and Kölbing (lx-cv). Macrae-Gibson casts some doubt on this, however (65-75).
[433] Macrae-Gibson's index of proper names includes names and spellings from the shorter version's textual witnesses (except W) was helpful in establishing this fact; see *Introduction* 244-57.

appear in *LeM*: Octa and Eosa. In the *Historia* and the *Brut*, Pendragon has died from poisoning when they engage Uther in battle twice and are eventually killed (liber viii, para. 141; ll. 8891-8916). Although the names of Gamor and Metradoure/Malador do not feature in the *Historia* or the *Brut*, it is possible that the fact that they are related to Hengist and their appearance in the final battle of Pendragon and Uther were inspired by the historical tradition.[434] This would, again, suggest that this passage can be traced back to the longer version's adaptor, who frequently included details from the *Historia* or the *Brut*.[435] During the transmission of version A, these names might have been omitted in line with the overall tendency to shorten and simplify the text.

Two factors affect the presentation of the Muslim invasion in the part of *AM* that is included both in version A and in the shorter version. First, the longer version's adaptor increased Hengist's role and the Muslims' presence in England by introducing them earlier in the text and by adding battle scenes and details about their movements, among other things. Second, the details of their movements were then shortened and simplified in the transmission chain leading to version A.

The combined effect of the truncations in A is quite surprising. Row 2 in table 4.3 above is particularly telling: in the shorter version, Hengist sends for reinforcements from the Continent to make up for the losses in his last battle, whereas in version A, he places his men in fortifications so that he can send for their help in the future. As a result of these changes, the English war against the

[434] In *LeM*, Uther fights a final time against the Saxons in an episode resembling *Historia* liber viii, paras 140-1. This episode is omitted from version A, and the shorter version ends before this point, with the result that the Battle of Salisbury is Uther's final battle in both these versions of *AM*, not just Pendragon's.

[435] The names Gamor and Metradoure/Malador remain puzzling. A tentative explanation may be that the names were added by the longer version's adaptor themselves, be it because they did not remember the names of Octa and Eosa, or because their source manuscript was corrupted, or because they had some other reason not to use them. Both names bear strong similarities to Saxon or Saracen names in Arthurian literature. For example, a Saracen called Gamur appears in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* (l. 22646), and a Saxon called Ganor plays a major role in *Aye d'Avignon*. In *AM*'s *Suite* section alone, no less than six Saracens have names starting with Mal- (6184, 6283, 8133, 8137, 9145). It seems possible, then, that the longer version's adaptor added names that sounded fitting for two enemies who they knew existed in the historical tradition and would make no further appearance after the episode in question. For a more detailed list of names similar to Gamor and Malador, see Langlois 253 and 420-6. Unfortunately, I can offer no explanation for the replacement of Malador with Metradoure in W.

Muslims is different in version A than it is in the shorter version and, presumably, than it was in the longer version: in version A, the Muslims no longer invade England from the outside but have taken hold of England after not even two hundred lines of text. The fighting against the Muslims continues not because they keep bringing more men from the Continent but because they live on English soil. Thus, the conflict between the English and the Muslims no longer takes the form of an invasion: the Muslims are simply present in England while being vehemently rejected by its people. Even though the concern about a mixing of English and Muslim identities and cultures is toned down in version A in comparison to the shorter version, the Muslim presence in England has consequences for the way Englishness is constructed in it.

The Muslim presence must be seen in the complex context of the Englishness constructed in version A. The scholarship considered earlier focuses on how England's national identity is constructed by means of boundaries: the Muslims are, ultimately, the national and religious Other in contrast to which the English become a nation of their own.[436] However, recent research has increasingly focused on the fact that medieval national identity is not as homogeneous as modern understandings of the nation; medieval English identity is no exception and is defined by constant negotiation with the various regional identities with which it interacts.[437] Regional identity is an important theme of other romances of the Auchinleck manuscript. Discussing the figures of a regional knight and national king, Robert Allen Rouse convincingly argues for the complexity with which Englishness is contrasted with regional identity in *Sir Bevis of Hampton* (122-4).[438] *AM*'s narrative, too, is clearly concerned with regional identity: the rebellion of Arthur's barons, who hold various territories in Britain, forms the beginning of the *Suite* section of *LeM* and is adapted and, albeit in shortened form, of similar importance in version A.

[436] See Speed.
[437] For the importance of regional identity for medieval romance, see Rouse, *The Idea*, esp. 85-92, and Dolmans, esp. ch. 4.
[438] For a discussion of the composition of the Auchinleck manuscript and the contrast that emerges between the provincial and London origins of the texts it contains, see Hanna.

In *LeM*, the conflicts between Arthur and the Saxons and between Arthur and his barons are characterized quite differently. One is an invasion from the outside, and Arthur has to defeat the Saxons to protect his kingdom, thus fulfilling his role as king. The other is an insurgency which Arthur must resolve in order to gather the forces necessary to defeat the Saxons. The clear message of the text is that an internal unity – a homogeneous nation, in terms of allegiance at least – is needed to form a nation that can enforce its difference from others.[439]

A distinction is in order for *AM*. The shorter version ends before the barons' rebellion, and the Muslim conflict with the English is depicted as an ongoing invasion. As a result, English identity is exclusively established through conflict with an Other. The shorter version centres on the interfaith period in England and the restoration of English identity through the expulsion of the Muslims. Version A, by contrast, does include the rebellion of Arthur's barons. Both the conflict against the Muslims and the barons' rebellion are unresolved by the end of version A. In this version, the Muslims already live in England rather than invading it, but their intermingling with the English population covers a relatively small amount of text and does not affect the rest of the plot. This vision of England is starkly different from the black-and-white narrative of the shorter version: rather than the Christian Englishmen overcoming the non-Christian "Saracen" threat, the Englishmen of version A are but one faction among many that inhabit Britain, all of which are in conflict with the others. The "English", from the point the barons rebel onward, are simply the king and the men who are loyal to him, rather than being associated with geographical connotations. This would correspond to the king's role as a symbol of the nation and of national identity in *Bevis* (Rouse, "For King" 122-3). However, version A's text breaks off; at the point at which it ends, there is no English nation, only an English army. Just as the period of interfaith marriages is detrimental to the English nation in the shorter version, the civil war between the king and his barons and the Muslim presence in England prevents any understanding of England's inhabitants as united.[440] The conflict with the Muslims

[439] The homogeneous characterization and character design of most of *LeM*'s characters may also contribute to this impression. See ch. 2, section 1.
[440] Much more could be said about the negotiation between national and regional identity in version A and the Auchinleck manuscript more broadly, but this would lead beyond the

is rewritten so that their status as Other becomes less self-evident: they become a part of England just like the rebellious barons, and Arthur is here threatened exclusively from within English soil.

The implications of this analysis for the hybridity of English identity are far from clear-cut. As I have discussed above, the shorter version's narrative trajectory – that is, its structure of England's downfall and restoration and its earlier ending – allows for a stronger focus on the period of interfaith marriages than is the case in version A. The conflict with the Muslims, here, appears as a black-and-white altercation with an external Other. By contrast, in the transmission of version A, details of the Muslims' movements were systematically rewritten to depict their war against the English as an internal English affair, thus touching on the understanding of hybridity expressed by Calkin. Moreover, the continued presence of the Muslims in England erodes the boundaries between external and internal conflict overall, which, in turn, has wider implications for the interplay between national and regional identity. What the comparison between version A and the shorter version does show is that the longer version, the shorter version, and version A all display an awareness of the English–Muslim conflict and treat it in their own distinctive ways. The longer version's adaptor increases its importance early in the text, probably taking inspiration from the historical tradition. The shorter version's adaptor centres the text on the downfall and restoration of England, thus giving the conflict an earlier and more definitive resolution. In the transmission process behind version A, the Muslim invasion of England is turned into an ongoing presence there. Since version A is incomplete, it is difficult to determine how systematic or deliberate the changed depiction of Muslim movements is here, but there is at least some evidence of a distinctive approach to the English–Muslim conflict.

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scope of the chapter. The contrasting views of *Bevis* and *AM* would be of particular interest, since the two texts succeed each other directly in the Auchinleck manuscript. While *Bevis* prioritizes regional identity over national identity, presenting the king as an impotent figure, *AM* presents the barons as the party at fault and national identity as the desirable goal to be achieved. It would also be worth considering the status of the "Saracens" as a nation and the extent to which regional and national identity is connected to the different ideologies of the older and younger generations of characters in *LeM* and in *AM*.

## 5.3 Shifting the Stage: Version A and What the Longer Version May Have Contained

As stated above, version A's premature ending affects the treatment of Englishness because it leaves the English–Muslim conflict unresolved. There is also another way in which its ending establishes England as the centre of the narrative. Compared to *LeM*'s *Suite* section, in which the narrative frequently jumps to the Continent and eventually moves there entirely, the part of *AM* that survives in version A barely moves to the Continent at all. Version A's text breaks off almost right before Merlin tells Arthur to travel to the Continent himself (corresponding to 262; 244 in *LeM*). In *LeM*, Arthur and his men then defeat Claudas – the enemy of Ban and Bors – before returning to Britain. Later, Arthur campaigns against Rome on the Continent in an extensive set of episodes. In version A, however, these Continental episodes are missing because the text ends earlier.

Moreover, several parts of the story set on the Continent in *LeM* before version A's ending point are shorter in version A, too, or omitted entirely.[441] For example, the recruitment of Ban and Bors from Little Britain is much shorter and simpler in structure than in *LeM* (108-17; 98-107, A3439-3634), and when Merlin later travels to their territories to obtain reinforcements needed in England, version A omits all the place names mentioned in *LeM* (119; 108-9, A3672-92). The absence of a set of episodes corresponding to about five pages of *LeM* is even more striking.[442] In these episodes, among other things, Merlin announces to Blaise that Claudas has allied with Rome. He then goes to Ban's kingdom and instructs those defending his capital on how to prepare. After an analepsis describing Nimiane's origins, a lengthy episode narrates how Merlin first meets Nimiane while he is in Little Britain. As a result of all these omissions, the content that remains in version A is almost entirely set in England; the exceptions are few and far between.

Many of these omissions from the *Suite* section of version A interact with one another or with changes made to *LeM* elsewhere. Other than Merlin's first

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[441] Sklar makes similar observations, see esp. 52-4. Sklar does not make a distinction between version A and the longer version of *AM* for the purposes of her analysis; my following discussion will focus especially on this distinction to provide more insights into the insular focus that Sklar observes and its background.

[442] 222-8; 207-12. These episodes are missing between lines 8576 and 8577 in A.

encounter with Nimiane, to which I shall return briefly below, all episodes set in Little Britain that are omitted from or abbreviated in version A are concerned with the conflict between Ban, Bors, and Claudas. In *LeM*, Ban and Bors become Arthur's allies soon after he becomes king and the rebellion of the barons begins, and continue to aid him throughout the text. Claudas is one of their long-time enemies. The ongoing struggles between Claudas and Ban and Bors on the Continent are very important to *LeM* overall. First, Ban and Bors's unwavering aid for Arthur appears all the more impressive considering what they risk to lose by staying away from their homes for so long. The reader is first confronted with the war of Ban and Bors against Claudas from the point of view of Arthur's messengers, who cross the ravaged country where Claudas, in the course of the war, had "inflicted great damage, taking plunder throughout the land, and set fire to the towns he found without walls and left charred ruins" (108).[443] Although the brothers have, at this point, managed to defeat Claudas for the time being, the damage is already done, and the narrative "I" immediately informs the reader that "then he brought very grievous harm to the two brothers, as you will hear in the story farther along" (109).[444] Claudas is thus introduced as a dangerous opponent of Ban and Bors. Second, it comes as no surprise that Arthur later has to reciprocate loyalty shown by Ban and Bors by fighting Claudas with them. Matters between Ban, Bors, and Claudas thus lend nuance to the relations of various characters and culminates in a climactic battle in *LeM*.

In *LeM*, then, these three characters are intricately connected to one another, which is clear from the very first time they are mentioned. Soon after meeting Arthur for the first time, Merlin reveals to him the situation on the Continent:

> Et dautre part en la petite bertaigne a . ij . rois qui sont frere & ont a feme . ij . serors germaines cil doi roy aront enfans & seront cil boin cheualier qui en nule terre en trouera on millors . li aisnes des . ij . freres qui roy sont a a non li rois bans de benoyc . & li autres a anon behors de gaunes si on . j . moult felon uoisin qui est rois & qui encore lor fera asses paine & trauail par enue & par ce quil ne les puet ore iustucier . & por ce quil sont si preudome & si loial voldroie ie bien que tu les mandasses si lor

[443] "li fist moult grant damage des proies quil prinst parmi la terre . & les uilles quil troua sans murs mist il tous a fu & en charbon" (98).
[444] "puis greua il les . ij . freres moult durement si comme vous orres dire al conte cha auant" (98).

manderas que tu les veus ueoir . & … lor diras ton conseil que tu ten veus aler a carohaise en carmelide seruir le roy leodegan … . (97)

Across the water in Little Brittany are two kings who are brothers, and their wives are sisters. Those two kings will have sons, and they will be good knights; no one could find better anywhere. The elder of the brothers who are kings is called Ban of Benoic, and the other's name is Bors of Gaunes. They have a very wicked neighbor, also a king, who will yet bring them trouble and grief out of envy and because he cannot overpower them. Since they are such worthy and faithful men, I would like very much for you to send them word that you wish to see them and … you will tell them in trust that you are set on going to Carhaix in Carmelide to serve King Leodagan. (107)

Ban and Bors are introduced as potential allies who have an enemy who needs to be defeated. As is typical for *LeM*, Merlin's revelation provides additional information. In this case, he also predicts the brothers' future offspring and the next ally Arthur is going to gain after recruiting them. By contrast, version A first introduces the characters in question in a passage that is added to Uther's reign and summarizes his military achievements (A2163-94).[445] The details about Ban's and Bors's sons are omitted, and Leodagan first appears much later. In addition, Claudas is introduced separately from Ban and Bors, and is overcome by Uther as one of the many achievements made during his reign. From this scene onward, Claudas's importance is systematically downplayed in version A. After he is defeated by Uther, he makes only one further appearance:

Wiþ Claudas hadde werred oȝan
Þe king Bohort & þe king Ban;
Claudas was þo ouercome,
Priueliche & went to Rome
Him to puruay sum socour
To wreke him of his deshonour (A3493-8)

Claudas is clearly not a threat: he is out of the picture for the time being, and Ban and Bors have been able to defeat him without Arthur's help. Although his return is possible, it is not a constant and immediate threat to Ban and Bors. Since version A breaks off before Arthur would have fought Claudas, the references to this character become one of the many loose ends in version A.

The fact that Claudas's importance is downplayed seems to stand at odds with the mention of him in the summary of Uther's reign, which is a relatively extensive

[445] This passage is discussed in detail in section 6 below.

addition laboriously compiled from various sources, including parts of *LeM*, by the longer version's adaptor.[446] It thus begs the question of whether the reduction of Claudas's importance happened during the transmission process leading to version A or whether it can be traced back to the longer version. The latter seems the more likely possibility if one considers version A's premature ending and the original adaptor's propensity to modify narrative order. The fact that Claudas's character is not omitted and his appeal to Rome is also still part of the text contributes to anticipating a battle between Arthur and Claudas. The main difference from *LeM* is one of urgency: the conflict between Arthur and Claudas is a can of worms of its own that remains unopened in version A, whereas *LeM* contains constant reminders of the ongoing problems in Little Britain. As in other respects, the longer version's adaptor may have moved the preparations for this conflict so that they immediately preceded it, not necessarily reducing Claudas's importance but moving it to where it mattered.

This hypothesis is supported by the case of Nimiane. As stated above, the episodes missing from version A would also have contained Merlin's first meeting with her. In *LeM*, Merlin henceforth seeks out Nimiane whenever he is in Little Britain. The longer version's adaptor may have followed their practice elsewhere and clustered all of these meetings together in a summary right before Merlin's imprisonment by Nimiane. Unlike Claudas, Nimiane makes no appearance in version A, except for one mention of her name, which is useful evidence for her appearance in the part of the longer version that is lost in version A. The passage in question is a description of another character, the witch Camille, who is compared to Morgan and Nimiane. In *LeM*, she is introduced as follows:

> si se deffendi des sesnes au miex que il pot qui moult li greuerent p*ar* deuers le chastel que caruile la suer hardogobran tenoit en sa baillie . … ancois le*ur* venoit viande et secours p*ar* ce chastel … et par lenchantement dont caruile sauoit tant co*n*ques nule femme nen sot tant fors que morgain la suer le roy artus . et vianne q*ue* merlins ama tant quil li aprist toutes les merueiles dou mo*n*de que li contes uo*us* deuisera ca auant quant ma matere mi aportera … . (BnF fr. 105, 185v)[447]

[446] See section 6 below.
[447] My transcription. This passage is not contained in either of the β manuscripts of *LeM* that have been edited. BnF fr. 105 is a manuscript of the α family and believed to be close to the version with which the longer version's adaptor worked.

… and defended himself as much as he could against the Saxons who grieved him much near the castle that was controlled by Camille, Hardogabran's sister. And food and rescue came to them [the Saxons] from this castle … and from the magic of which Camille knew more than any woman ever did except for Morgan, the sister of Arthur, and Nimiane, whom Merlin loved so much that he taught her all the marvels of the world, about which the story will tell you more when my material directs me to it. (my translation)

In this winding and syntactically complex sentence about the support given to the Saxons by Camille, Nimiane is merely a point of comparison. Her relationship with Merlin is brought up only briefly, and details are put off until later. The corresponding passage in version A is as follows:

For vnneþe fram hem fiue mile
Woned a wiche hete Carmile -
Hir broþer hiȝt Hardogabran,
A swiþe riche soudan.
Of wichecraft & vilaine
& eke of nigramace
Of þis warld sche couþe mast
Wiþouten Arthours soster[448] abast –
Morgein forsoþe was hir name
& woned wiþouten Niniame
Þat wiþ hir queint gin
Bigiled þe gode clerk Merlin. (A4437-48)

Here, too, Morgan and Nimiane appear in a comparison with Camille. However, Nimiane is understood to be a place in which Morgan lives, and it is Morgan who beguiles Merlin. Macrae-Gibson suggests that this was a translation error by the original adaptor, who "was not, it would seem, familiar with her story" and would have misread "fors que" (except) as "fors de" (outside of). Only a minor addition is needed to explain this change as a mistranslation:

… et par lenchantement dont camile sauoit tant comme nule femme nen sauoit tant fors que morgains la suer le roy artus et [fors que] vianne que m*er*lins ama tant …

… and from the magic of which Camille knew more than any woman ever did except for Morgan, the sister of Arthur, and [except for] Nimiane, whom Merlin loved so much … (reading with addition suggested by Macrae-Gibson)

A consequence of Macrae-Gibson's explanation of this error would be that the original adaptor did not recognize Nimiane as a character and thus may not have

[448] Emendation taken from the edition. The manuscript reads "sone"; see also below.

included her and Merlin's story later in the text. However, Macrae-Gibson's explanation is implausible. First, it would mean that the original adaptor read "fors que" correctly the first time, when it precedes Morgan's name, but misread it the second time, when it precedes Nimiane's name, and that the adaptor did not correct their mistake after they encountered Nimiane later in their source. However, it is still possible that the Old French source manuscript itself said "fors de" instead of "fors que", and that the story of Nimiane was so unfamiliar that the error went unnoticed. Second, and more importantly, the explanation contradicts the changes made to the lines following the error. The *LeM* passage here says only that Merlin loves Nimiane, but version A's rendition also adds that Nimiane (or Morgan, if one follows version A's misreading) fooled Merlin. This is in line with what happens later in *LeM*, and this change is only possible if the adaptor was aware of the passages in *LeM* where Nimiane fools Merlin and understood that Nimiane is a character, not a place.

How, then, did Nimiane get turned into a place? Since a translation error seems unlikely, one must consider the possibility that this is a scribal error rather than a mistranslation. Assuming the adaptor made no error, the lines in question would still interpret Nimiane as a character in the longer version. My suggestion is that the longer version's adaptor added the second "wiþouten" (whose meanings cover both "except" and "outside of") for syntactic clarity, or that they correctly translated Macrae-Gibson's suggested repetition of "fors que" from their source manuscript. It seems more likely that the error originated somewhere in the transmission process between the longer version and version A: whatever word preceded "wiþouten Nimiane" in line 4445 in the longer version was misconstrued by a scribe as "woned". It is telling that Morgan is called Arthur's son, not sister, a few lines earlier, and that this error is not corrected despite how obviously wrong it is, even in the immediate context of this passage. The clustering of errors in so little space may be evidence of a damaged source manuscript or, perhaps, a part rather sloppily copied by a scribe.[449] While it is impossible to tell whether this

[449] I have no definitive suggestion as to what word or words the scribe may have misread as "woned". It is worthy of note that this line does not need a verb unless it is understood to be about Morgan. Perhaps the scribe of version A misread a preposition like "as well as" for something like "dwelled", which they use exclusively in the meaning of "delay" (e.g.

error was made by the scribe of version A scribe or by another scribe earlier in the chain of transmission, the misunderstanding of Nimiane as a place clearly does not originate in the original adaptor of the longer version. Given the changed details in this passage, it seems likely that the adaptor of the longer version recognized the reference to Merlin and Nimiane's relationship in this passage and narrated it in the part of the text that is missing from version A.

Both the example of Ban, Bors, and Claudas and the misreading of Nimiane as a place instead of a character show that the elements of *LeM* that take place on the Continent were likely present in the longer version of *AM* as well. Version A retains allusions to these episodes, making it seem even more unlikely that it was intended to end where it did. The hypothesis of a short-notice change of plans or loss of access to a source copy thus remains the most likely explanation for the point at which version A ends.

The English-centredness of version A is a mixed bag. In part, it results from a set of systematic but relatively self-contained changes to the way the Muslim invasion is depicted. In part, it is a by-product of the longer version's rearranged narrative material and version A's premature ending. Previous researchers have identified English-centredness as a property of *AM* but have worked almost exclusively with version A in the process. My discussion has shown that this trait is found not only in version A but also in the shorter version of *AM*, where it is achieved in different ways and with different priorities. Furthermore, my analysis of version A with a focus on the chain of transmission behind it has shown that the English-centredness is, at least to some extent, a by-product of other priorities. Therefore, many of the arguments made about version A's Englishness still hold, but it must be understood that they are equally true of *AM* in general including, speculatively, the longer version. Interpretations of the point at which version A ends should, I argue, be kept carefully apart from arguments concerning an intentional focus on England and Englishness. The focus on Englishness precedes A, and version A was probably not planned to end where it does. The Englishness of version A is indisputably there, but it is not likely to result from adaptation specifically for this manuscript.

A101, A1832, A4974, A8091), and so decided to replace it with "woned". The word "woned" also appears a few lines earlier, which may have influenced the word choice here.

Instead, it seems that *AM* was selected for inclusion in the manuscript because it already exhibited this focus on Englishness.

## 6. Intratextual Continuity: Another Principle of the Longer Version?

The adaptation principles of the longer version discussed at the beginning of this chapter were established because they are evidenced in all the textual witnesses of *AM*. As I have shown in the preceding discussion, the same is the case for the text's focus on Englishness, which can largely be traced back to the longer version. This interest in English identity may well be related to the importance the adaptor attached to making their text appealing to medieval English audiences.

Having established three distinct sets of adaptation principles underlying the longer version, the shorter version, and the transmission of version A respectively, I now turn in more detail to the adaptation principles of the longer version. I have shown that in the transmission chain behind version A, details were shortened and the narrative sometimes simplified further. The suggestion of the editors of *AM* that A is closest to the longer version remains valid, though many details may have changed in the transmission process leading to version A. It is thus often impossible to determine whether a detail from *LeM* is missing because the longer version's adaptor omitted it in the first place or because it was shortened in the transmission chain behind version A. Large-scale differences from *LeM*, however, can tentatively be ascribed to the longer version's adaptor.

It is with this in mind that I now turn to lines 2163-3172 of A.[450] This part of the text covers Uther's reign. It begins with the ending point of the shorter version, that is, Pendragon's death and the expulsion of the Muslims, and ends roughly with the rebellion of Arthur's barons, that is, at the transition from the *Roman* to the *Suite* section in *LeM*. The level of proximity to *LeM* varies considerably in this part of the text.

| *LeM* | A (representative of longer version) |
| --- | --- |

[450] In the following discussion, I will quote from version A – since it is the best source to use for evidence – while referring to the longer version. I do not wish to suggest that the differences from *LeM* are associated specifically with version A here.

| Stonehenge | Omitted |
|---|---|
| | Added: Uther's achievements during his reign |
| Creation of the Round Table | Summarized and rewritten |
| Arthur's conception and birth | Close adaptation |
| Uther's final battle and death | Drastically abridged |
| The sword in the stone | Merged and simplified |
| Arthur's coronation | |
| The rebellion of Arthur's barons | |

Table 4.4. Overview of the longer version's treatment of the final episodes in the Roman section of *LeM*.

It is notable how different the account of Uther's reign is between *LeM* and the longer version of *AM*. The longer version's adaptor omits the creation of Stonehenge, adds a lengthy passage about Uther's political achievements during his reign (mentioned briefly above), and then summarizes and rewrites the creation of the Round Table before continuing with a closer adaptation of Arthur's conception and birth. The longer version changes Uther's death by omitting his final battle and condenses the account of the sword in the stone, Arthur's coronation, and the barons' rebellion into a single episode. Although the adaptor, as elsewhere, combines various methods in this rather free treatment of Uther's reign, a pattern emerges on closer inspection. The first step to establishing it consists in determining the extent to which the adaptation reflects the adaptor's usual priorities.

To begin with the use of additional sources, the adaptor's knowledge of the *Historia* and the *Brut* may have influenced the omission of Stonehenge and the abbreviation of the Round Table's creation. In the *Historia* and *Brut*, Stonehenge is created earlier, during Pendragon's reign, not Uther's (liber viii, paras 128-30), and in the *Brut*, it is Arthur, not Uther, who creates the Round Table (ll. 9750-2). Moreover, both of these episodes are centred on Merlin in *LeM*: by creating Stonehenge, Merlin proves the value of brains over brawn, and the Round Table is created by him. The adaptor may have chosen to omit these episodes because they were not of particular interest for the political plot revolving around the kings in the main source and because various details in the historical tradition contradicted the information in *LeM*. However, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory, since the adaptor retained other episodes centred on Merlin.

The fusion of three episodes into one can be explained largely in terms of the adaptor's tendency to simplify. These episodes are quite lengthy in *LeM* because of the transition between sections here: Arthur's coronation is the ending point of the *Roman* section and thus built up to in some detail. The barons' rebellion, in turn, connects to this while also initiating the *Suite* section, and a certain amount of narrative "padding" is needed to establish this connection. As the two sections are not typically demarcated as two separate texts, Arthur's coronation likely appeared as merely another milestone to the longer version's adaptor and thus did not merit the narrative space devoted to it in *LeM*.

What remains to be explained is the added summary of Uther's achievements. This passage introduces several characters.

Here he liued seþþen ȝeres fele
In miche pride & gret wele,
Fer & neiȝe, wide & side,
His fomen durst him nouȝt abide.
Bi Merlins red euer he wrouȝt
Þat into gret power him brouȝt.
He ouercom king Claudas
Þat so strong & stern was,
Þurth his miȝt also he wan
Þe douhti king Harinan
& of him he hadde first Gascoyne
& Normondye & Boloyne
& al þe marche to Paito
& Chaumpeine & eke Ango.
Þis ich king Harinan
To wiue had a fair wiman,
Sche hiȝt Ygerne wiþouten no,
Þe fairest lif þat liued þo.
Þe douke Hoel of Cornewaile
Spoused hir after him saun fayl
Þurth whom seþþen his liif he les
-
ȝe schul seþþen here in pes.
¶ ȝete hadde Vter Pendragon
Wonne to him þe king Ban
& Bohort his broþer also -
Better bodis no miȝt non go.
King Ban hadde to his demeyne
Þe cite of Benoit of lasse Breteyne
Wiþ cites & borwes, castels & pleyns,
& Bohort hadde þe cite of Gaines
Wiþ al þe riȝt þat longed þerto
& þus þai hadde schift atvo.
(A2163-94)

As discussed above, Ban, Bors, and Claudas are all important figures in the *Suite* section of *LeM*, and in *LeM*, they are only introduced at the beginning of Arthur's reign. Hoel and Igraine reappear during Uther's reign (65; 58), though Hoel is identified by name only in the *Suite* section (137; 127). The conquests of the named Continental territories by Harinan and Uther cannot be traced back to other parts of *LeM* at all. Here, too, the adaptor's use of additional sources plays an important role.

Since the longer version's adaptor frequently implements details from their additional sources, it is not surprising that some of the details can be traced back to the *Brut*. In the *Brut*, Hoel is a contemporary of Arthur and rules Berry, Tourraine, Anjou, Auvergne, and Gascony, and is assigned Poitou by Arthur (ll. 10113-16). Gascony, Poitou, and Anjou are mentioned as well in the passage quoted above.[451] The adaptor of the longer version of *AM* identifies the Hoel who is Igraine's husband in *LeM* with the Hoel who is mentioned in the context of Continental conquest in the *Brut*.

This does not account for all the additions and changed details, however. Unusually, the longer version's adaptor is not just compromising between *LeM* and the *Brut* in this passage. They also appear to take the *Lancelot en prose* into account here as well. The details in question are taken from a passage near the beginning of the *Lancelot*:

> [Ban's] neighbor was named Claudas [whose land] had been laid waste by Uther Pendragon and by Aramont, known as Hoel, who at that time was lord of Brittany. Aramont was overlord of Gaunes and Benoic and all the land down to the borders with Auvergne and Gascony, and he should have been overlord of [Claudas's kingdom]. But Claudas did not recognize the claim … .
>
> When Aramont saw that Claudas rejected his lordship, he went to war against him; but Claudas had the help of the king of Gaul and all his forces, and so Aramont lost much in a lengthy struggle. Then Aramont came to Uther Pendragon, who was king of Great Britain, and became his liegeman on the condition that he take command of his war. (*Lancelot: Parts I and II* 3)[452]

[451] In the *Historia*, Hoel is tasked only with conquering Poitou and marches on Aquitaine and Gascony (liber ix, para. 155). Inspiration from the *Brut* thus seems more likely, though it should also be noted that some of these regions may also have been added by the adaptor without the need for a specific source, simply by naming contested territories of fourteenth-century France.

[452] "li siens voisin auoit non claudas … . La terre del regne claudas … estoit desertie . par uterpandragon . & par aramont qui a chel tans estoit sires de bertaigne la menouor . que les gens apeloient hoel en sornon . Chil aramons auoit desous lui gaule & benoich & toute la terre iusque a la marche dauuergne & de gascoigne . & deuoit auoir desous lui le regne de boorges Mais claudas ne li counisoit mie . …
Quant aramons vit que claudas li renoioit sa signourie si lacuelli de guerre & chil auoit en aide le roie de gaule & tout son pooir . Si perdi moult aramons en la guerre qui trop dura . Lors vint a vterpandragon qui rois estoit de la grant bertaigne . sie deuit ses hons par couent que il li menast sa guerre" (*Le livre de Lancelot del Lac* 3-4).

The longer version's adaptor was clearly acquainted with this part of the *Lancelot en prose*. The same characters appear in context with one another, with Uther, and with the Continental conquest. Moreover, the same regions that are mentioned in this passage from the *Lancelot* – Auvergne, Gascony, Benoic, and Gaunes – also appear in the passage added to the longer version of *AM*.

*LeM*, the *Brut*, and the *Lancelot en prose* provide plenty of information but are irreconcilable with one another. Hoel becomes an ally of Uther in the *Lancelot* but is Igraine's husband in *LeM* and a subject of Arthur in the *Brut*. The most obvious problem is the time frame: for Hoel to be Igraine's husband, he would need to be a contemporary of Uther, which corresponds to the *Lancelot* but not the *Brut*. Moreover, in *LeM*, Hoel is killed on the same night as Arthur is conceived, so he cannot be Arthur's ally as he is in the *Brut*. Another problem is spatial information: Hoel is clearly a Continental vassal of Uther in the *Lancelot*, whereas he is based at Tintagel in Cornwall in *LeM*.

If they wanted to use the information in these texts, the adaptor of the longer version of *AM* would thus have to get creative in negotiating a path through the contradictions. They did so by splitting Hoel (also known as Harinan in the *Lancelot*) into two characters: Hoel is Igraine's husband and dies a few episodes later, and Harinan is an enemy whom Uther overcomes on the Continent and from whom he gains a number of territories, including those named in the *Lancelot* and the *Brut*.[453] The two characters remain connected through the character of Igraine: Harinan is Igraine's first husband, but after his death Hoel becomes Igraine's second husband.[454] Unlike the *Lancelot*, Harinan is here not a predecessor to Ban and Bors but their contemporary; Benoic and Gaunes are under the control of Ban and Bors all along. Claudas is part of the same generation and is defeated by Uther during his reign. The easy recruitment of Ban and Bors by Arthur now makes more sense: they were "schift atvo" (2194) – perhaps because of the distance between

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[453] Not all the place names in this passage in A have exact correspondences in any of its sources. It is possible that the longer version's adaptor added territories to Uther's successes in order to further highlight England's superiority over France; this would not be too surprising, given that the adaptation was probably composed during a period of Anglo-French conflict and the adaptor overall focused on Englishness.
[454] In a contradiction, a third husband, Tintagel, appears in A2242. See Macrae-Gibson, *Introduction* p. 100, para. 2239.

England and Little Britain – and later explain that they had not been aware of Uther's death. Their involvement in helping Arthur is no longer a matter of risk assessment and persuasion, but one of a simple messaging trip.

As these examples show, the arrangement of the passage seems to serve primarily to reconcile contradictory passages in various sources. Moreover, the passage is placed in its chronologically "correct" position, in contrast to *LeM*, in which some information about Uther's reign is found exclusively in analeptic passages in the *Suite* section. This leads to a different kind of continuity in *AM*. In *LeM*, the continuity of Uther's reign in particular is retroactive. This is largely due to the fact that *LeM* was written in two stages, and that the *Roman* was initially joined with another text, the *Didot-Perceval*. While the *Suite* section thus occasionally adds retrospective information about Uther's reign to explain current events, the *Roman* barely anticipates the content of the *Suite*. Several events in the *Suite* are consequences of things that would chronologically have taken place in the *Roman* section, yet they are not mentioned in the *Roman* at all but referenced analeptically in the *Suite*. This concerns, among other things, the friendship of Ulfin and Bretel with Ban and Bors (108; 98), Uther's control of various territories on the Continent and how he manages and distributes them between his liegemen (256; 238), Mordred's conception (139; 128-9), and details on the siege of Hengist (248; 231). In all these cases, narrative facts are established in hindsight.[455]

The longer version of *AM* is different. By introducing Ban, Bors, and Claudas earlier than *LeM* does, for example, it establishes a continuity between the reigns of Uther and Arthur that works in both directions. The longer version increases this forward and backward continuity in other episodes of Uther's reign as well. A similar interest underpins the adaptation of Uther's wedding to Igraine in the longer version of *AM*; this account is also expanded with information taken from the *Suite*. *AM* thus provides much more information on the weddings of Igraine's daughters than *LeM* does at this point.

[455] For an introduction to retroactive continuity, see Friedenthal ch. 1.

| *LeM* (*The Story* 82)[456] | And of the lady's elder daughter and King Lot were born Sir Gawain, Agravain, Guerrehet, Gaheriet, and Mordred. And King Neutres of Garlot took the other daughter, a bastard named Morgan. |
|---|---|
| Longer version (A2601-16) | ¶ King Nanters of Garlot<br>Þer nam Blasine, God it wot,<br>Ygerns douhter bi Hoel,<br>Hir lord was bifor Tintagel,<br>In whom he biȝat Galaas<br>Þat strong & hardi & noble was.<br>¶ King Lot þer nam Belisent<br>Also Ygerns douhter gent<br>In whom he seþþe biȝat Wawein<br>& Guerehes & Agreuein<br>& Gaheriet þat was so fre,<br>For better kniȝtes no miȝt non be.<br>King Vriens þe þridde nam<br>Þat was king of Schorham<br>In whom he biȝat Ywayns<br>Hende & noble & kniȝt certeyns – |

The longer version again establishes greater continuity with the *Suite* section of *LeM*: not only do Gawain and his brothers appear here, but also Galescin and Yvain. As in the added passage about Uther's reign, the adaptor reconciles contradictory information. Later in *LeM*, Neutres is married to Blasine, not Morgan (137; 127); the longer version of *AM* replaces this information accordingly and adds the name of their son as well. The addition of Urien's marriage to Igraine's third daughter also adds information found in the *Suite* section of *LeM* (A7625-30).[457] The adaptor even changes the order in which the marriages of the barons are listed so that Neutres comes first and Lot second. As a result, a parallel structure to two later parts of the *Suite* emerges:[458] Neutres prepares his defence against the Saxons before Lot, and Neutres's son rides out to meet Arthur before Lot's sons (A4373-4400 and A4549-4650).

[456] "& de la fille a la dame & del roy lot issi messires gauuains & agrauains & gerehes & gaheries et mordres . & li rois nextres de garloc ot . j . autre fille . & il li ot vne autre qui ot anon morgain" (73). Pickens here inexplicably supplies the information about Morgan from Micha's edition of selected α manuscripts (para. 72); the β text edited in Sommer distinguishes between the bastard daughter whom Neutres marries and Morgan, as does that edited in *Le livre du Graal*. The changes made by *AM*'s adaptor are thus all the more interesting, as they are believed to have worked from an α manuscript.
[457] Another loose contradiction is avoided with regard to Mordred. In *LeM* it sounds as if Mordred was Lot's son; this information is retrospectively revised in the *Suite*, and he becomes Arthur's son instead. This episode of the *Suite* is omitted in version A, and Mordred remains a son of Lot. Since Lot is married to Arthur's sister, that makes Mordred Arthur's nephew, which corresponds to the *Historia* and the *Brut* (liber x, para. 164; ll. 11173).
[458] See ch. 1, section 4.

Neutres, Lot, and Urien make no further appearance in *LeM* until they reappear quite suddenly when they rebel against Arthur at the beginning of the *Suite* section. By contrast, the longer version of *AM* keeps these characters present in the reader's mind. The barons who fail the test of the sword in the stone remain nameless in *LeM*, but in the longer version, Lot, Neutres, and Clarion (another of the rebellious barons) are among them (A2826-32). Merlin also predicts the barons' rebellion almost immediately before the named barons arrive at court (A3041-3105), and the initial resistance of nameless barons in *LeM* becomes that of Lot and Neutres in the longer version of *AM*, just before the rebellion finally breaks out (A3134-6).

Overall, then, the earlier introduction of characters and their continued appearances are the main means by which the longer version's adaptor creates greater continuity in this part of the text. The longer version's adaptor thereby resolves incongruences between the *Roman* and *Suite* sections in *LeM*. To a degree, the complex and wide-ranging changes made to the final episodes of the *Roman* section support the overall principle of simplifying the text and rendering it more direct. The establishment of continuity that works in both directions is thus not an adaptation principle in its own right but simply one way of implementing the principles that were outlined earlier.

## 7. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed adaptation principles of the longer version, shorter version, and version A of *AM*. The adaptation principles of the longer version are those already established by the editors of *AM*: the adaptor simplifies, streamlines, and shortens the Old French *LeM* while shifting the narrative's focus away from Merlin and toward the kings and the action. When moving away from their main source, the adaptor often takes inspiration from the *Historia* and the *Brut*. In the discussion of the treatment of the final episodes of the *Roman* section, I have shown that the adaptor also uses the beginning of the *Lancelot en prose*.[459] This

[459] Further unidentified sources cannot be completely ruled out. This concerns especially the crossdressing passage in episode L, which is of unclear origin. Various similar stories are attested, some of which are associated with Merlin. Ultimately, an oral origin seems the most likely explanation here, though a direct adaptation of *LeM*'s Grisandole episode cannot be completely ruled out. See Paton, esp. 240, and Kölbing cxviii-cxx.

adaptor also takes particular inspiration from the historical tradition in their treatment of Hengist.

In the transmission leading to version A, I suggest, the longer version was further shortened and simplified, but not changed dramatically. The particular focus on English identity that has been suggested for version A can largely be traced back to the longer version or understood as an unintended side effect of the premature ending of A. If one accepts that the Auchinleck manuscript was particularly concerned with English identity, it is more likely that *AM* was chosen for inclusion because it already met this need, rather than being specifically adapted to fulfil this purpose in this manuscript.

The shorter version is, I argue, adapted from the longer version and not from version A. The adaptor takes many liberties in their treatment of their source. In particular, they exploit the narrative's potential for entertainment, sometimes embellishing and expanding scenes that had been shortened by the adaptor of the longer version. The shorter version is also adapted with a completely different narrative trajectory in mind: rather than telling the story from Vortigern's putsch up to Arthur's early reign, the shorter version ends after Pendragon's death and centres on the downfall and restoration of England during the Saxon invasion before Arthur is even born. The treatment of Hengist, in particular, shows that the adaptor approached their source with this ending in mind. The shorter version's ending closely interacts with numerous other changes made to the text, as a result of which it is self-contained: no loose ends remain in this rounded-off story. With a rewritten text story and the omission of all intertextual and transfictional references, the shorter version stands entirely on its own, unfolding its effects solely through intratextual means.

The abridgement of the shorter version, represented only by L, has not been discussed in this chapter. Given its similarity to the first halves of P and W, it is clear that the changes made to this text do not interact with its earlier ending point. The abridged version leaves quite a few questions unanswered when it ends after

Vortigern's death.[460] It is difficult to determine what changes may have been made in the abridgement process, since P and W closely follow the abridged version in their first halves. A comparison with fragment D may provide further insights but treads on thin ice. On the one hand, in those cases in which D agrees with A against L, P, and W, one would have to decide whether one is dealing with cases of cross-fertilization with version A (or manuscripts close to A) or as independent changes in the abridged version. On the other hand, in those cases in which D disagrees with versions L, P, and W without agreement with version A, one would have to make decide whether the changes were made in the transmission chain leading to D or in the abridgement process of L. Such an analysis would not have been feasible in the scope of this chapter. As a result, the adaptation principles underlying the abridgement represented in L must remain obscure. Since my analysis of the shorter version has centred on P and W, which were copied in part from L, this is also means that some of the adaptation principles I have identified for the shorter version could also originate in L. This is, however, unlikely: the tendency to expand and embellish is observed in the first and second parts of P and W alike, and rewriting the text to make it self-contained would not make sense in relation to the ending point of L.

If the visualization in figure 4.1 is updated to reflect my conclusions and the adaptation principles discussed for each strand, it appears as in figure 4.3.

[460] Clifton goes as far as to state that its text lacks "connective tissue" ("Early Modern Readers" 79).

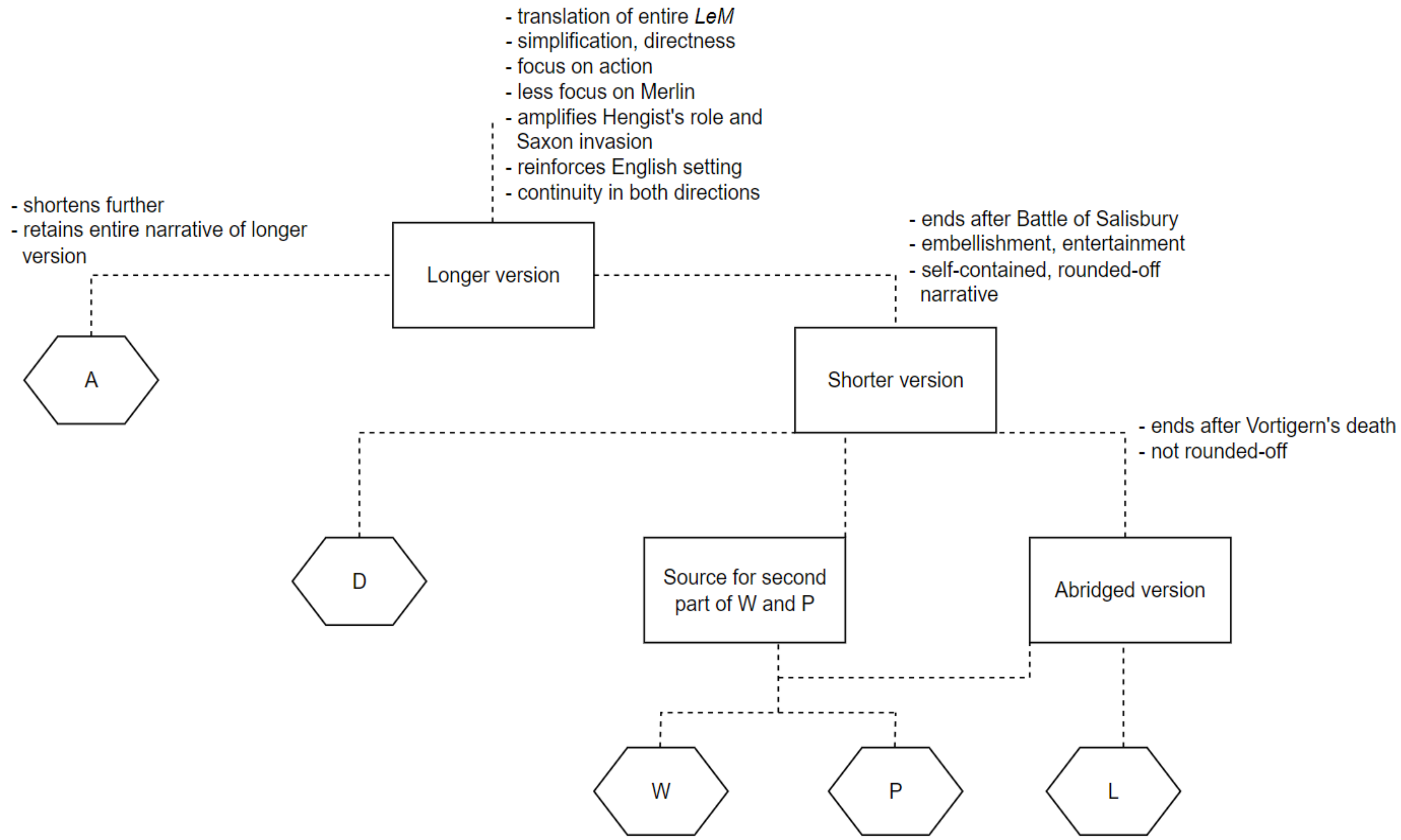


Figure 4.3. Revised visualization.

It remains important to note that this visualization does not take into account the many cases of cross-fertilization on the level of individual lines, words, or rhyming tags in the manuscripts and early print version that survive. The diagram is based solely on the suggestions of the editors of the versions of *AM* and my discussion of systematic and large-scale differences between the longer version, the shorter version, and version A. In this chapter, I have referred to hypothetical adaptor figures in the case of the longer and shorter versions but to the preceding transmission chain in the case of version A. The main reason for this is that the adaptation principles suggested for version A are largely not distinct from the longer version; they are not as wide-ranging or consistently observable either. Especially in those cases where the longer version was shortened further, it is just as possible that the abridgements were conducted by several successive scribes in the transmission chain leading to A as it is that they were all made by a single scribe. In either case, the placement of the respective adaptation principles near the different versions in figure 4.3 represents the fact that we cannot know how many intermediate stages exist between the surviving textual witnesses and the different versions of *AM*.

The adaptation principles underlying the different versions of *AM* are not independent of one another – but any assumptions about the principles behind a given version feeding directly into further adaptations of that version should be made carefully. For example, the longer version's adaptation principles strongly overlap with those underlying version A. Version A, while making few changes in general, largely continues what the longer version had likely done already: in the transmission process resulting in version A, then, the text was further shortened, simplified, and focused on Englishness. However, this was likely due to the fact that both sets of adaptation principles – those of the longer version and of version A – stick to what is conventional for Middle English verse texts, namely streamlining the narrative and shortening or simplifying what does not directly pertain to the story at hand.

There are, however, instances in which choices made by one adaptor were caused by what a previous adaptor had done. Numerous instances of this have been discussed in this chapter; their impact can be significant. In the shorter version, for

instance, a connection can be drawn between the choice of ending point and the longer version's changes to the continuity of its source. Because the longer version's adaptor reinforces the continuity between Uther's and Arthur's reigns, the end of Pendragon's reign becomes a relatively intuitive moment at which to end the story. The beginning of Uther's reign in the longer version, in particular, may have been unappealing to the shorter version's adaptor, since it is a summary rather than a narrative episode in the longer version, and because it introduces a number of new characters.

The intertextual context of *LeM*, namely the *LG* cycle, plays no role in the adaptation processes of *AM* and its versions. The longer version's adaptor attached no importance to it, retaining only a few, apparently random, intertextual references here and there and rewriting the text story into a more conventional storytelling situation with references to the historical tradition instead. As a result of this adaptor's interest in action and the political storyline at hand, the focus on the future and, subsequently, the self-presentation as a prequel is not to be found in *AM*. Nevertheless, the longer version's adaptor may have had access to the *LG*. Their use of the beginning of the *Lancelot* in their summary of Uther's reign strongly suggests that they had a version of it to hand. Several surviving manuscripts of the Old French *LeM* also contain the beginning of the *Lancelot*. There are also examples in which the texts were copied in different manuscripts but as part of one commission, so they may have circulated together.[461]

What is particularly interesting with regard to the use of additional sources by the adaptor of the longer version is the fact that they work with the *Lancelot* but not *Lestoire del saint Graal*. In almost all the surviving manuscripts, *LeM* is preceded by a version of the story of how the Grail came to be in England – either a version of the *Joseph d'Arimathie* or, more commonly, *Lestoire del saint Graal*. It is therefore likely that the adaptor of the longer version of *AM* had access to *Lestoire del saint*

[461] The surviving manuscripts or manuscript collections of the entire *LG* tend to postdate version A. There is, however, Bonn 526 (from 1286), which contains the entire *LG*. BnF fr. 105 from the early fourteenth century, only contains *LeM* but announces the entire *LG* on 1r. Late medieval examples worthy of note are BnF fr. 117-10, BnF. Ars. 3479-80, BnF fr. 98, and BnF fr. 113-116. See Patrick Moran's thorough study of all these manuscripts in "Cycle".

*Graal*, which makes the lack of references to the Grail's past in any version of *AM* puzzling. This might be explained by the fact that the content preceding *LeM* did not match the adaptor's other sources, the *Historia* and the *Brut*, in which the Grail is not mentioned. It is impossible to determine which version of the narrative about the Grail reaching England preceded the longer adaptor's source copy, but one was very likely present nonetheless. In addition to the statistical likelihood of this in view of the surviving manuscripts, the adaptor's rearrangement of the beginning of *AM* may have been influenced by a text preceding *LeM* in their source copy. Macrae-Gibson suggests that "Boron opened with the story of Merlin's birth [because] this made an effective link with the 'Joseph' which 'Merlin' was intended to follow, a reason which did not, of course, weigh with the AM poet" (*Introduction* 27). This would mean that the longer version's adaptor recognized the connection between the two texts and, aiming to adapt only one of them, pointedly removed the link between them by beginning with Vortigern's putsch, which was much more central to their principles of adaptation.

Overall, then, it appears that the longer version's adaptor had access to other parts of the *LG* at least, and possibly all of it, and recognized the connections between those parts – but adapted *LeM* in isolation. The long afterlife of *AM* – its continued adaptation and engagement for centuries after – is telling. *LeM*'s narrative thrived, even without its status in the Arthurian universe and without its purpose within the *LG*. It becomes clear that the adaptors and audiences of *AM* enjoyed the narrative at hand not primarily as a source of information with which to contextualize other Arthurian works but as a story in its own right.

# Conclusions

This study has centred on three categories of textual relationships. The connection between two or more passages within the same work is articulated by intratextual relationships. Intertextual relationships are at play when a work is connected to one or more specific other works. Finally, transfictional relationships involve the relationship between a work and its fictional universe, where that universe is shared by multiple other works. The application of this distinction to the textual relationships of the Old French *LeM* has been enriched by focusing in particular on its internal continuity, its cyclical connections, and its setting. *LeM*'s intratextual relationships were analysed by considering the network of continuities that weave the various parts of *LeM* together. The investigation of *LeM*'s intertextual relationships involved examining the cyclical connections that it draws to the other texts of the *LG* cycle. Turning to transfictional relationships, the analysis centred on the relationship between *LeM* and the shared fictional Arthurian universe that provides the backdrop to Arthurian literature overall. This distinction between three kinds of textual relationships provided a useful approach to understanding *LeM*'s status as a prequel, a term provisionally adopted to cover any way in which *LeM* serves as a predecessor to other Arthurian narratives that chronologically succeed it.

The central conclusions that have emerged from this study are as follows:

1. *LeM*'s status as a prequel emerges from intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional relationships alike. Numerous passages that cast *LeM* as a prequel draw on several kinds of textual relationship at once.

2. Merlin's role as orchestrator of events in *LeM* is central to establishing its status as a prequel and reinforces all three kinds of textual relationship.

3. *LeM* does not present itself as being derived from another work but claims instead to have a higher authority than other Arthurian works and lays the foundations for their stories. Its narrative presents itself as a pre-history of the Arthurian legend in which the contents and outcome of the legend are (pre)determined.

A central aim of this study was to give the intratextual and transfictional relationships of *LeM* an equal amount of attention as the intertextual ones, on which considerable research has already been done. In this context, a key implication of the findings listed above is that the use of the term 'prequel' in connection to *LeM* must be revisited. One reason for this is the usual definition of the concept as referring to a work that was written after another work but is positioned before it in terms of narrative chronology (Parey 3). This definition is intertextual: it focuses on the relationship between the prequel and the work on which it is based. The most important aspects of this definition rely heavily on extratextual knowledge on the reader's part about the order in which the prequel and the work which inspired it were written. Crucially, this definition does not take into account the content of the prequel itself, for example whether or not it foregrounds its intertextual relationship to another work in any way. In the case of *LeM*, this definition lends itself well to the way in which modern researchers approach the text, but it, crucially, does not account for the way in which medieval readers perceived it. Most medieval readers would likely not have known the order in which the texts of the *LG*, or even most Arthurian works in general, were composed. Since the text of *LeM* does not stage itself as a work based on another work, the effect of *LeM* on medieval readers may thus have been quite opposite to that of a prequel. From the medieval reader's point of view, *LeM* did not necessarily retroactively fill gaps established by the *Lancelot*, for example, and instead created expectations to be fulfilled in the *Lancelot*.

Another issue with this definition is that its reliance on order of composition fails to take into account the fact that a series of texts can be expanded further after the prequel is composed. It thus does not include the transfictional relationship of the prequel to subsequent works set in the same fictional universe. This is particularly relevant for *LeM* because the Arthurian universe continued to expand throughout the Middle Ages, yet the composition sequence of the texts did not correspond to their narrative chronology (and would probably not have been known to, or considered relevant by, medieval audiences anyway). Overall, then, the definition of a prequel does not do justice to several aspects that are central to medieval literature in general and Arthurian literature in particular.

Describing *LeM* as a prequel is thus not only technically inaccurate but also misleading, because the term suggests that *LeM* was composed to be read as a prequel and that it was indeed read as such by its intended readership. This is not the case, however. *LeM*'s production context may suggest that *LeM* is a prequel, a retroactive predecessor added to an already existing narrative, but the text itself asserts that *LeM* is an ancient story of beginnings which came first and is continued by other Arthurian works. Because of this contrast, it seems particularly important to distinguish more clearly between what we as modern researchers know about *LeM*, how medieval readers may have approached this narrative, and what information the text itself makes known.

*LeM* thus constitutes an intriguing example of the impact that differences in knowledge can have. Modern researchers know more than (most) medieval readers did about the contexts of *LeM*, with the production context receiving more attention and interest in modern research than it was likely granted by medieval readers of *LeM*. This difference in knowledge between medieval readers and modern researchers points up a second desideratum with regard to *LeM*, namely the need to decentralize the β version of the text as the frame of reference for research on this narrative. Unlike medieval readers, who would typically have limited access to the different versions of a text and would likely read only one of them, modern researchers are in a position to compare several versions of it, yet this is rarely done on account of how time-consuming such comparisons are. Consideration of the α version of *LeM*, in particular, is warranted as it is the better attested version in surviving manuscripts and was the basis for most of the medieval adaptations of the text.

Comparison of the α and β versions of *LeM*, while time-consuming, brings with it several key advantages. A first and general benefit is that a comparative reading effectively counteracts anachronistic notions of the text as singular and stable, rather than plural and moving, a pitfall for modern researchers of medieval literature that would, naturally, never have affected medieval readers. A comparison of the two versions thus precludes mistaken assumptions about any 'original intentions' behind a non-existent singular text. A comparison of *LeM*'s two versions draws attention to passages that differ particularly strongly, thus keeping

the continued evolution of this text throughout the Middle Ages in the foreground. Thus, much of the knowledge that can be gained from a comparative approach to *LeM* is attached to its production contexts. The consideration and comparison of variants, versions, and adaptations can thus provide insights into possible reasons for changes made in the circulation of the text, and into the relationship between its versions.

Second, a comparative approach to *LeM* impinges on its status as a prequel. Recent francophone research has shown the potential of this line of enquiry: Nathalie Koble has suggested that the high level of coherence between *LeM* and the *Lancelot* is a later development than is usually assumed, arguing that the α version of *LeM* asserts an autonomy and authority that is reduced in the reworked β version (*Les suites* 83-101). Findings such as these demonstrate not only that the comparative study of *LeM* has much to offer where its production contexts are concerned, but also that they shed more light on its status as a prequel: a modern understanding of prequels, sequels, and so on tends to automatically assume that coherence and continuity are of key importance to these kinds of text, but Koble's analysis shows that this may not necessarily have been the case for *LeM*.

Finally, a comparative reading facilitates the identification of ambiguities and passages that medieval readers struggled to understand. It is a given that scribes and translators read and interpreted their source text before or while producing their own versions,[462] and the existence of variants allows specific versions to be considered as documents of the medieval reception of *LeM*. Evidence for passages that offered themselves to interpretive changes consists, for example, in different translation strategies and manuscript variants, including both deliberate attempts to clarify the wording or accidental changes to the meaning of the text. The same principle applies to the interpretive changes or simple errors introduced in modern translations of medieval works. Reading comparatively is thus a useful safety net in that it prevents garbled details or translation errors in any single version of a work from going unnoticed. While such passages and errors cannot

[462] For medieval scribes and close translators as readers, see e.g. McGrady, who refers to them as "intermediary readers" (9). For modern translators as readers, see e.g. Reiß, esp. 106-9; Siever, esp. chs 7.4-7.7; Eco, *Mouse or Rat*, esp. ch. 1.

always be easily resolved, an awareness of them is vital to a sound analysis of the text.

Overall, a comparative reading leads to a more complete picture of *LeM*, while also drawing attention to those gaps that cannot be bridged by comparing variants and identifying puzzles that remain unresolved even after a comparative reading. This study has consistently applied comparative reading methods. The β version of *LeM* was read, as edited, alongside a) both of its modern translations, namely the modern English translation by Rupert Pickens and the modern French translation by Anne Berthelot and Philippe Walter, and b) two control manuscripts of the α version of the text, namely BnF fr. 9123 and BnF fr. 105.[463] Moreover, both versions were read c) alongside two close Middle English translations of *LeM*, namely the anonymous *Prose Merlin* and Lovelich's *Merlin*. The selected comparisons between the α and β version of *LeM* in this study present recent interests in francophone research in English and draw attention to their relevance. The comparative reading method was also vital to chapter 4 with its analysis of the Middle English *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which was adapted from the currently unedited α version of *LeM*.[464]

*An Example of Comparative Reading*

This study concludes with an example that demonstrates the benefits of comparative reading by focusing on a particularly convoluted passage of *LeM*. The passage in question occurs during one of the many visits Merlin pays to his friend and scribe Blaise. During these visits, Merlin typically recounts the content of the preceding episodes of *LeM* to Blaise and announces the upcoming ones. In this instance, this pattern is followed at first but then extended when Blaise asks Merlin "who is to father the Lion of the Two Messengers and when that will be" (403).[465] Merlin confirms only that this will happen soon, in response to which Blaise is

[463] Additional material read in comparison with *LeM* included versions of the narrative that predate *LeM*, namely Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Vita Merlini* and Wace's *Brut*, and other versions of the *Roman* section, namely the beginning of the Dutch *Boek van Merline* by Jacob van Maerlant and the corresponding sections in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Ulrich Füetrer's *Buch der Abenteuer*.
[464] The forthcoming edition by Richard Trachsler will thus provide an invaluable resource for further (comparative) analysis.
[465] "… qui doit engendrer le lyon as . ij . mesages & quant ce sera" (375).

distressed and offers his help. Merlin then has him write a letter which is similarly obscurely worded and mentions a lion who is taken prisoner. Merlin distributes copies of this letter as he sees fit, and the text tells us that these letters motivate knights to go on adventures and that "this was the only way the Great Lion would ever be destroyed" (403).[466]

In the β version of *LeM*, on which the above summary is based, this scene makes little sense. Blaise's question comes out of the blue and bears no clear connection to his being reminded that Merlin is in love with a lady immediately before he asks it. It is also unclear why Blaise is so distressed by the imminent conception of this "Lion of the Two Messengers". Merlin asking him to write a letter is similarly nonsensical, as the letter's content seems to have nothing to do with the problem at hand. Finally, the three references to lions raise further questions about who precisely is being fathered, taken prisoner, and destroyed, and whether these lions all stand for the same character or not.

Despite its indecipherability, it is surprisingly easy simply to gloss over this passage. Obscure prophecies that involve animals appear elsewhere in *LeM* and are incomprehensible to all the characters involved except Merlin. While undoubtedly meaningful, these obscure prophecies seem particularly important *because* they are not easily understood. And, indeed, most of the obscure prophecies are not realized within *LeM*, as a result of which they are typically interpreted as intertextual references to other parts of the *LG* cycle.[467] In the passage at hand here, too, the various lions that appear have been suggested to represent Galahad.[468] However, because it is Blaise and not Merlin who first launches into the vocabulary of obscure prophecies here, it has also been suggested that the lions stand for Merlin or have been, at least in part, made up spontaneously by Blaise.[469]

While there has been, so far, no consensus regarding the meaning of the β version of this passage, a comparative reading provides some insight. The following

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[466] "ne ia autrement ne fust destrus li grans lyons" (376).
[467] See e.g. *Les premiers faits* p. 1854, para. 265.2; p. 1855, para. 266.2; p. 1894, para. 675.1; p. 1901, para. 743.1. See also Fuertes-Regnault 417-21.
[468] See *Les premiers faits* p. 1892, paras 651.1 and 652.1.
[469] See Trachsler, *Clôtures* 85-91; Fuertes-Regnault 502-3.

overview takes into account the two modern translations, the α version, and the Middle English *Prose Merlin*.

| | |
|---|---|
| β version (*Lestoire de Merlin* 375-6) | & blaise li dist quil saparcheuoit bien quil amoit vne dame dont la prophesie deuoit cheoir que dite en auoit este si li pria moult doucement & dist .<br>MErlin biaus dous amis ie vous proi por dieu que vous me dites qui doit engendrer le lyon as . ij . mesages & quant ce sera . …<br>Cest li commenchemens & li contes des auentures del pais par quoi li meruilleus lyons fu enserres & que fils de roy & de roine destaindra & conuendra quil soit castes & li mieudres cheualiers del monde . & les lettres que blaises fist mist merlins par tout les chemins ou les autres estoient & ne porent este ostees se par cels non qui les achieuroient & par che furent li cheualier plus enuolentiex derrer . ne ia autrement ne fust destrus li grans lyons |
| Modern English translation of the β version (*The Story* 403) | And Blaise told him that it seemed certain to him that King Arthur loved a lady, and the prophecy that had been foretold of her was about to be fulfilled. And so he entreated him most kindly and said: "Merlin, dear friend, I beg you for God's sake to tell me who is to father the Lion of the Two Messengers and when that will be." …<br>This is the beginning. It is the story of the adventures in the country whereby the wondrous Lion, whom the son of a king and queen will hold, was taken prisoner. He must be chaste and the best knight in the world.<br>And the things that Blaise wrote down Merlin scattered along the roads where the others were, and these things could not be brought about except by the ones who would fulfill them, and this is why the knights were all the more willing to ride out. And this was the only way the Great Lion would ever be destroyed. |
| Modern French translation of the β version (*Les premiers faits* pp. 1449-50, paras 651-2) | Blaise lui dit alors qu'il s'apercevait bien qu'il aimait, lui Merlin, une dame à propos de laquelle une prophétie déjà proférée devait se réaliser. Blaise lui fit alors cette douce prière : « Merlin, cher doux ami, je vous prie de me dire, au nom de Dieu, qui doit engendrer le lion aux deux messagers et quand cela se produira. » …<br>« Voici que débute le conte des aventures du pays où le lion merveilleux fut enserré et où un fils de roi et de reine sera engendré [descendra] et il faudra qu'il soit chaste et le meilleur chevalier du monde. » Merlin installa les lettres écrites par Blaise sur tous les chemins où les aventures devaient se produire et ces lettres ne pouvaient être enlevées que par ceux qui accompliraient les aventures. C'est ce qui incita les chevaliers à errer et le grand lion ne connut pas d'autre fin que celle qui fut prédite. |
| α version (my transcription of BnF fr. 105, 306r) | et blaises dist amerlin quil sap*er*coit quil amoit vne dame par sa prophecie dont il sauoit bien une p*ar*tie sus quoi ele cheoit . si li dist pour dieu sire gardez uous de la louue q*ui* doit enterre le lyon aus . ij . messages que moult le redot …<br>Cest yci li commencemens des auentures du pays par quoi li m*er*ueilleus lyons fu aterre . et que fils de roy *et* de royne destruira . et couuendra que il soit chastes . et li mieudres cheualiers qui lors sera el monde . *et* les lettres que blaises fist mist merlins en crois par touz les chemins par ou les auentures estoient . et ne pouoient estre ostees se p*ar* ceuls non qui les acheuroie*n*t et par ce furent li |

| | |
|---|---|
| | cheual*ie*r plus volentiers derrer ne autrement ne fu destruis li gr*an*s lyons[470] |
| Middle English *Prose Merlin* (*Merlin* [Wheatley] p. 563) | and Blase seide that he a-parceyved well that he loved a lady where-of the prophesie sholde falle and hadde be seide, and Blase hym preide full hertely and seide, “Merlin, dere frende, I praye yow for the love of god that ye will telle me who shall be-gete the lyon to the two messages, and whan this shall be do.” … “Cest li comenchemens et li contes des auentures de pais pur coy li merveilleux lyons fu enseres et que fitz du roy et de royne le destraindra et couenra qu' il soit chastes et le myldres cheualiers del monde,” and these lettres that Blase wrote Merlin sette by alle the weyes where the auentures were, and ne myght neuer be taken a-wey, but by theym that sholde hem acheve, and ther-fore were the knyghtes the better willed for to labour. Ne neuer other-wise was distroied the grete lyon … |

A comparison of these versions provides ample evidence for the role of the scribes and translators as readers. This becomes evident, for example, in the different readings introduced in the two modern translations: Pickens's Modern English translation disambiguates the pronoun in “quil” at the beginning of the Old French β version as referring to Arthur, but Berthelot and Walter's Modern French translation disambiguates it as referring to Merlin. Similar trends emerge in the manuscript variations, as is evidenced, for instance, in a variation in the manuscript on which the Modern French translation is based: the verb in the letter's prophecy reads “descendra” (will descend) here instead of “destaindra” (will hold). Interpretations can also differ between modern and medieval versions, as is the case with the ambiguous Old French word “messages”, which is translated by both modern translations as “messenger”, whereas the Middle English *Prose*

[470] “And Blaise told Merlin that he knew he loved a lady because of his [earlier] prophecy and that he understood a part of how it would end. And he said, ‘For God's sake, sire, please beware the she-wolf who will bury the Lion of the Two [Messages], who is much afraid of her.’ …
‘This is the beginning of the adventures of the country [in which] the wondrous lion was overcome and which will be destroyed by a prince. He must be chaste and the best knight in the world.’ And Merlin distributed the letters which Blaise made on all roads where there were adventures. And they could not be taken except by those who would accomplish them, and that is why the knights were more willing to ride out, and otherwise the great lion [would not have been] destroyed” (my tentative translation. The ambiguities and contradictory tenses in this passage are retained; interpretive choices are marked with brackets).

*Merlin* translates it as “message”.[471] The evidence of interpretation by scribes and translators also extends beyond the word level, as when Berthelot and Walter add a few words at the end of the passage to support their interpretation that all mentions of the lion refer to the same character.

Further tentative observations can be drawn from a comparison of these versions. First, the Middle English *Prose Merlin* is closer to the β version than the α version in this passage, as is particularly apparent in Blaise’s question. The same is the case elsewhere in the *Prose Merlin*, but the majority of that text corresponds more closely to the α version of *LeM* and has been held to be translated from it.[472] Two possible explanations are that either the source manuscript of *LeM* on which the Middle English *Prose Merlin* is based is itself a mixed version of the α and β groups, or that the translator was working from several source copies. Further insights might be gained from the translator’s choice to keep the wording of the letter in Old French, thus giving us more direct access to the exact wording of the source manuscript than even a close translation such as this one otherwise would have.[473]

Second, a comparison of the β version with the α version points to some crucial differences that have not yet been taken into account in attempts to interpret this convoluted passage. In the α version of the passage, Blaise does not ask a question about the conception of the Lion of the Two Messengers but instead warns Merlin about a she-wolf who will bury said lion. This warning echoes an earlier prophecy by Merlin about his own demise at the hands of Nimiane, even repeating some of the words from it:

> … car ia uenu est el pais [li leus] qui le lion saluage doit loier de cerceles … Dieu merci fait blaises … nest **lions** plus fors que **leus** & plus fait a **redouter** . … vous nen saures ore plus fait merlin . mais … **ceste**

[471] The Middle English *Prose Merlin* is not alone in this reading. For example, a variation in BnF fr. 95 replaces “messages” with “ensenges” (309v), which means “symbol” or “sign” and is thus closer to the “message” interpretation than to the “messenger” interpretation.
[472] See e.g. Finotello 108-9; Mead, “The French Manuscripts” clxxvi-clxxxiv. The same is the case for Lovelich’s *Merlin*: it, too, largely corresponds to the α version but is closer to the β version in some episodes.
[473] Interestingly, this is not the only time that the translator retains quotations in Old French. In an earlier passage, they keep the refrain of a song in Old French (*Merlin* [Wheatley] p. 310), the wording of which is closer to the β version as well.

> **prophesie chiet** sor moi . & si sai bien que iou ne me saurai **garder** .
> (206-7; words repeated in Blaise's warning in bold)
>
> "… the wolf has already come into [Benoic] who is to bind the lion with rings … ." "For the love of God," said Blaise, "Is not a **lion** stronger than a **wolf** and more to **be feared**?" ... "You will learn no more right now," answered Merlin, "… this **prophecy befalls** me, and I know very well that I cannot **keep mysel**f from it." (222)

Unlike Blaise's question in the β version, this intratextual parallel in the α version makes Blaise's warning fit the immediate context: Blaise is reminded of Merlin's lover, and thus of Merlin's prophecy of his demise at her hands, and so decides to raise the topic. When Merlin confirms that the prophecy will become true soon, Blaise's distress is also justified, because he fears losing his only friend. The imprisonment of the lion that is mentioned in the letter can also be seen in this light, because Merlin is imprisoned in Benoic, where Lancelot will be born.[474] Overall, the α version of this passage, while not perfectly clear, is easier to follow than the β version.

Interestingly, however, the differences between the two versions cannot easily be put down to a matter of what Nicola Morato has called textual entropy.[475] The β version of this passage demonstrates an understanding of the intratextual connections in its source, the α version. This becomes clear in the way the first sentence is rewritten and in the addition which confirms that the prophecy to which Blaise refers has previously been made, suggesting that it is to be found elsewhere in *LeM*. The change in wording from "aterrer" to "enserrer" more neatly matches Merlin's imprisonment later in *LeM* and provides further possible evidence that the β redactor interpreted the α version of this passage in the way discussed above. Nevertheless, the β version deliberately, it seems, removes this difficult-to-trace intratextual connection and replaces it with an equally obscure question that does not lend itself to being decoded at all. The questions raised by these decisions – Why prioritize an unintelligible prolepsis over intratextual

[474] While there are some minor differences from prophetic descriptions of Lancelot elsewhere (see esp. 264; 246), a reading of the prince in this passage as Lancelot supports the intratextual connections of the passage in the α version. If the prince is read as Galahad instead of Lancelot, then the country in which Merlin is imprisoned and the country in which Galahad is born (Listenois) do not match up.
[475] See Morato, "Textual Entropy".

continuity? Why maintain the reference to Merlin's imprisonment at all if it is partially erased? – cannot be answered in the context of this brief analysis, but they do support the hypothesis raised in francophone research that creating coherence may not have been the primary concern in the composition of the α version of *LeM*.

This study took as its starting point Aristotle's observation that "to be a whole [story] is to have a beginning and a middle and an end" (Aristotle 14). It concludes with the above discussion of a passage from the middle of *LeM*'s plot which not only prefigures the ending of the text – Merlin's imprisonment – but also heralds the beginning of something new, the "beginning of the adventures":[476] a new era, the time of knights-errant, is prefigured by *LeM* and prepared by its protagonist.[477]

This key passage, then, exemplifies what is true for *LeM* overall: it is a whole story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it is also the beginning of a larger story, that of Arthur and his knights. This double status is, as I have shown, central to *LeM*. The connections *LeM* draws to other works do not merely – exactly in line with what one might expect in a prequel – make existing continuities between them explicit and relevant for its plot. *LeM* also *modifies*, even reverses, said continuities in ways that give it primacy, prevalence, priority over the works which are set after it. The resultant effect is not that of a prequel but of an origin story setting out the roots from which other Arthurian works branch out.

Ultimately, this study of *LeM*'s autonomy and connections to other Arthurian works has, I hope, shown that a more comprehensive approach, one that considers the text's autonomy and multiple connections, is necessary to fully appreciate its narrative depth and innovativeness. The complex interactions between intratextual, intertextual, and transfictional aspects of the text are a fascinating

[476] The β version adds to this beginning of the adventures that this beginning is also a story: "Cest li commenchemens & li contes des auentures" (literally: "This is the beginning and the story of the adventures"). In the modern French translation, this passage is interpreted to address "the beginning of the story of the adventures" ("Voici que débute le conte des aventures"), but this is not, strictly speaking, what the Old French text says.
[477] The example discussed here thus not only matches some of the results of my previous chapters about the narrative functions of Merlin in this text, for instance the mutual exclusion of Merlin and chance, Merlin's importance for pretermination, and his meta-narrative function as a source fiction

demonstration of the playful and experimental storytelling that shapes Arthurian literature. This study has taken a first step toward exploring the richness and complexity of *LeM*'s narrative, and it is my hope that the insights and perspectives offered here will spark further investigation of its narrative techniques.

# Appendix: Manuscript list

The present list and information about manuscripts containing the *Roman de Merlin* or the *Suite-Vulgate*, has been compiled using the overviews provided in various publications by Alexandre Micha ("Les manuscrits" and "Les manuscrits (suite)"), Patrick Moran (*Lectures cycliques*), Irène Fabry-Tehranchi (*Texte et images*), Nathalie Koble (*Les suites*), Stones ("Chronological" and "Manuscript"), in Corinne Füg-Pierreville's edition of the *Roman de Merlin*, as well as the information gathered by Fabry-Tehranchi and Laurent Brun on *ARLIMA* and provided, variously, on *Jonas*, *Biblissima*, *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*, and other databases. The information provided in these publications do not always agree; I have followed them up to the best of my ability in the limited time I had but a number of unconfirmed information remain. My list here gives only the barest information, but more can be found in the sources I have listed.

**Abbreviations**:

Locations:
BnF = Bibliothèque nationale de France
BL = British Library
BR = Bibliothèque royale
Add. = Additional
NAF = Nouvelles acquisitions françaises
fr. = français
UL = University Library
ULB = Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek
BM = Bibliothèque municipale

Titles:
Roman = Roman de Merlin en prose, Suite = Suite-Vulgate de Merlin, Joseph = Joseph d'Arimathie en prose, Graal = Lestoire del saint Graal, Lancelot = Lancelot en prose, Queste = Queste dou Graal, MA = Mort Artu, PV Suite = Post-Vulgate Suite de Merlin, Propheties = Propheties de Merlin

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Robert de Boron | | | | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 20047 | Joseph d'Arimathie en vers | [Roman de Merlin en vers] | | |
| Continuations Other Than the Suite-Vulgate | | | | |
| Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria α.L.9.30 (formerly E. 39) | Joseph | Roman | Didot-Perceval | Lapidaire en vers (non-Arthurian) |
| Paris, BnF NAF 4166 (ex-Didot) | Joseph | Roman (Propheties interpolated) | Didot-Perceval | |
| Bern, Bürgerbibliothek 388 | | | Propheties | |
| Brussels, BR 9624 | | | Propheties | |
| Chantilly, Musée Condé 644 | Joseph (incomplete) | Roman (beginning incomplete) | Propheties (incomplete, before the Joseph. The Roman ends with an introductory sentence of the Propheties as well) | |
| Geneva, Bodmer 116 | | | Propheties | |
| London, British Museum Add. 25434 | | | Propheties | |
| London, British Museum Harleian 1629 | | | Propheties | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 350 | | | Propheties | Guiron le Courtois |
| Paris, BnF fr. 15211 | | | Propheties | |
| Rennes, BM 593 | | | Propheties | Didactic texts |
| Brussels, BR IV. 852/29 | | | [PV Suite] | |
| Cambridge, UL Add. 7071 | Graal | Roman | Suite (abridged), PV Suite | |
| Imola, Biblioteca comunale, 135, AA25 no 9 (7) | | | [PV Suite] (?) | |
| London, BL Add. 38117 (ex-Huth) | Joseph | Roman | PV Suite | |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paris, BnF fr. 112 | | | [PV Suite] | Fragments of prose romances |
| Siena, Archivio storico del Comune (no shelfmark)<br>▪ Edited in Micha, “Fragment.” | | | [PV Suite] | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 337 | | | Suite, Livre d’Artus | |
| Manuscripts Containing the Roman With Or Without The Suite-Vulgate | | | | |
| Berkeley, Bancroft Library, UCB 106 (formerly Phillipps 3643) | Graal (vol. 1) | Roman (vol. 2) | Suite (vol. 2) | Religious texts (non-Arthurian) |
| Bonn, ULB S 526<br>▪ Edited by Poirion et al. as *Le livre du Graal*. | Graal | Roman | Suite | Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Chantilly, Musée Condé 643 (307) | Graal (Joseph fragments interpolated) | Roman | Suite (incomplete) | |
| Darmstadt, ULB 2534 | Graal | Roman | Suite | |
| Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana B VI 24 | Joseph | Roman (ending incomplete) | | |
| Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana 2759 | Joseph | Roman | | |
| Cologny, Bodmer 147 (formerly Phillipps 1046) | Graal (Joseph fragments interpolated) | Roman | Suite | Various interpolations in Graal, Roman, and Suite (non-Arthurian); Queste, MA |
| London, BL Add. 10292 (-10294)<br>▪ Edited by Sommer as *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*. | Graal | Roman | Suite | 10293: Lancelot, 10294: Queste, MA |
| London, BL Add. 32125 | Graal | Roman (ending incomplete) | | Brut, Estorie des Engles (non-Arthurian). |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| London, BL Harley 6340 |  | Roman | Suite |  |
| New Haven, Yale University Beinecke 227 (formerly Phillipps 1045) | Joseph, Graal | Roman | Suite |  |
| New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M. 38 | Graal | Roman | Suite (abridged?) | Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M. 207-8 | Graal | Roman | Suite |  |
| Oxford, Bodleian Library Douce 178 | Graal | Roman | Suite |  |
| Paris, BnF Arsenal 2996 | Joseph | Roman |  |  |
| Paris, BnF Arsenal 2997 | Graal | Roman (! Precedes Graal!) |  | Quinze signes de la fin du monde (non-Arthurian) |
| Paris, BnF Arsenal 3350 | Graal | Roman | Suite (abridged?) | Lancelot, Queste, MA (incomplete) |
| Paris, BnF Arsenal 3479-80 | Graal | Roman | Suite | Lancelot 3480: Lancelot, Queste, MA) |
| Paris, BnF Arsenal 3482 |  | Roman | Suite | Lancelot (incomplete?), Queste (beginning incomplete?), MA |
| (Brussels, BR 9246 +) Paris, BnF fr. 91 | Graal (Bruxelles, lost?) | Roman (BnF fr 91) | Suite (BnF fr 91) |  |
| Paris, BnF fr. 95 | Graal | Roman | Suite | Le Roman des sept sages de Rome, La penitence Adam (non-Arthurian) |
| Paris, BnF fr. 96 | Graal | Roman | Suite | Lancelot |
| Paris, BnF fr. 98 | Graal | Roman | Suite (Propheties interpolated) | Lancelot, Queste, MA |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paris, BnF fr. 105 (-Arsenal 3481) | Graal | Roman | Suite | Arsenal 3481: Lancelot |
| Paris, BnF fr. 110 | Graal | Roman | Suite | Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Paris, BnF fr. 113 (-116) | Graal | Roman | | Lancelot, 114: Lancelot, 115: Lancelot, 116: Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Paris, BnF fr. 117(-120) | Graal | Roman | Suite | 118: Lancelot, 119: Lancelot, 120: Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| (Paris, BnF fr. 1426 +) Paris, BnF fr. 332 | Graal (1426) | Roman (332) | Suite (332) | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 344 | Graal | Roman | Suite (abridged?) | Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Paris, BnF fr. 423 | Joseph (incomplete) | Roman (abridged) | | Numerous shorter religious tales. |
| Paris, BnF fr. 747 (-751)<br>▪ *Roman* edited by Micha, see Robert de Boron, *Merlin*. | Graal | Roman | Suite | 747-751: Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Paris, BnF fr. 748 (-754) | Joseph | Roman (incomplete) | | 754: Lancelot |
| Paris, BnF fr. 749 | Graal | Roman | Suite | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 770 | Graal (Joseph fragment interpolated) | Roman | Suite | Conquête de Jérusalem (non-Arthurian) |
| Paris, BnF fr. 1469 | Joseph | Roman | | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 9123 | Graal | Roman | Suite | |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paris, BnF fr. 19162 | Graal | Roman | Suite | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 24394<br>■ *Roman* edited by Füg-Pierreville, see Le Roman de Merlin *en prose*. | Graal | Roman | Suite | |
| Rennes, BM 255 | Graal | Roman | | Lancelot (incomplete) |
| Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Reg. 1517 | | Roman (beginning incomplete) | | Garin de Montglane (non-Arthurian) |
| Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Reg. Lat. 1687 | Graal (beginning incomplete), Joseph (incomplete) | Roman (beginning and end incomplete, incomplete Propheties de Merlin interpolated) | Suite (beginning and end incomplete) | |
| Saint Petersburg, Российская национальная библиотека (National Library of Russia) fr. F. pap. XV. 3<br>■ Edited by Colin. | | Roman (beginning incomplete?) | Suite (end incomplete) | |
| Switzerland, private collection (formerly: Bodmer, Günther Cat 3 no. 11, Tenschert Cat. 16 no. 6-7, Kraus Cat. 165 no. 9, formerly Clumber, Newcastle 937) | Graal | Roman | Suite | Vie de Bertrand du Guesclin (non-Arthurian) |
| Switzerland, private collection (formerly Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica 1, formerly Phillipps 1047 and 3630 (?), Douce 215, Manchester, Rylands, Fr. 1, sold 7.12.2010 at Sotheby's) | Graal (vol. 1) | Roman (vol. 2) | | Vol. 2: Lancelot, Vol. 3: Lancelot, Queste, MA |
| Tours, BM 951 | Graal, Joseph | Roman | Suite | |
| Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria L.III.12 | Graal | Roman | Suite | |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Venice, Biblioteca San Marco fr. App. Cod. XXIX (243) | | Roman (end incomplete) | | Propheties |
| Versailles, Lebaudy, private collection (formerly Phillipps 1047, sold 1946) | Graal | Roman (?) | Suite (incomplete) | |
| Fragments Of Roman And/Or Suite-Vulgate | | | | |
| Amsterdam, UL MS I A 24q<br>▪ Edited by Clark and Field. | Graal (fragment?) | [Roman] | [Suite] | |
| Bristol fragment, flyleaves of the following folios: *Prima/Secunda/Tercia pars operum Johannis Gerson* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1494, ISTC ig00189000; USTC 745208 – Bristol Central Library shelfmark 88-90/SR39), and *Quarta pars operum Johannis Gerson prius non impressa* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach the younger for Matthias Schürer, 1502, USTC 689050 – Bristol Central Library shelfmark 91/SR39).<br>▪ Edited by Tether et al. | | | [Suite] | |
| Hanover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek IV 581 | | [Roman] | [Suite] | |
| Modena, Archivio di Stato<br>▪ Edited by Bogdanow, see "Quelques fragments." | | [Roman] | | |
| Namur, Archives de l'État Arch. Eccl. 1664<br>▪ Edited by Giannini et al. | | [Roman] | [Suite] | |
| Notthingham, UL WLC Lm7 | [Graal] | [Roman] | | |
| O'Gorman's fragment, formerly owned by Hermann Suchier<br>▪ Edited by O'Gorman. | | [Roman] | | |
| Paris, BnF fr. 2455 | Graal, [final lines of Joseph] | [first lines of Roman] | | |
| Paris, BnF NAF 934 no. 28 | | [Roman] | | |

| Manuscript | Joseph/Estoire dou Graal | Roman de Merlin | Continuation | Other texts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Princeton, UL Firestone Library 106 | | [Roman] | | |
| Toronto, University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library F-11 00121 (pastedown in a collection of commentaries by Giovanni Andrea Bussi, *Novella in Sextum Decretalium*, by Filippo Franchi, *Super Sexto libro Decretalium*, and Guido de Baysio, *Egregia commentaria et elimata Archidiacini Bononiensis super Sexto Decretalium*.<br>▪ Edited by Denoyelle. | | [Roman] | | |

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# Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Ich versichere an Eides Statt, dass die Dissertation von mir selbständig und ohne unzulässige fremde Hilfe unter Beachtung der ‚Ordnung über die Grundsätze zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis an der Heinrich-Heine-Universität' erstellt worden ist.

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