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The purpose of this study is to reveal the beginning
of Malory's selfconscious artistry as it is exhibited in his
book of Balin. I attempt to reveal this through an examina-
tion of his prose style, primarily by viewing the changes he
makes in his French source. In the first chapter I define
style as not only syntax and the arrangement of words but
also narrative structural devices. The second chapter
deals with these narrative structural devices. In the
third, fourth and fifth chapters I examine the stylistic
techniques Malory uses in his narration, description and
dialogue. The final chapter looks at "Balin" and its
relationship to "The Tale of King Arthur" and the entire
Le Morte Darthur.

STYLE IN MALORY'S BOOK OF BALIN

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For centuries critics of Le Morte Darthur have called
the narrative childlike, simple and naive. Andrew Lang,
in Sommer's edition of Malory's work, makes a statement
which sums up the critical opinion of the work to that
date:

> On the whole, it may be said of the narrative manner
> that it is well fitted to the wandering tale; just old
> and quaint enough to allure, and to mark the age,
> without disturbing or delaying even the youngest reader
> of the noble and joyous history.[1]

Much critical work has followed Sommer's edition.[2] Eugene
Vinaver has dealt extensively with Malory's relationship
to his French source.[3] However he does not view Malory
as a selfconscious stylist. Only in the last several years
have critics looked at Malory as a serious craftsman, but

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[1] H. Oskar Sommer, Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas
Malory. The Original Edition of William Caxton Now
Reprinted and Edited by H. Oskar Sommer, London, 1889-91,
xxi.

[2] For a detailed look at Malory criticism to 1968 see
Derek Brewer's "The Present Study of Malory" in D. D. R.
Owen's Arthurian Romance (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971),
pp. 83-97. Elizabeth Pochoda in Arthurian Propaganda
(Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1971) also includes an extensive
annotated bibliography of Malory-related material.

[3] Lumiansky and his scholars closely look at Vinaver's
criticism--elaborating and questioning and correcting his
work in Malory's Originality (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
Press, 1964).

concerning themselves primarily with his narrative techniques. Larry Benson in Malory's Morte Darthur attempts to view Le Morte Darthur in the context of its own time, by considering it in relation to the Arthurian prose cycles and the English romance tradition. Noguchi in "The Paradox of the Character in Malory's Language," (Hiroshima Studies in English Language and Literature XIII, 1967) and P. J. C. Field in several articles (culminating in the excellent book, Romance and Chronicle: A Look at Malory's Prose Style) compare Malory's writing to that of the vernacular chronicle.

However, these critics still see Malory as an unselfconscious stylist. Even Field stresses the colloquial nature and unselfconsciousness of Malory's style. Not until Mark Lambert's book, Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur, has a study concerned itself with Malory as a selfconscious artist. Lambert does not restrict his view of style to word choice and syntax alone, but defines style more generally as the author's relationship to his material. His purpose in studying this relationship between the author and his material is to determine Malory's vision of Arthurian knighthood, the vision of knightliness--what true nobility is. Lambert is concerned with the "vital issue" of knightliness in Le Morte Darthur as viewed through an examination of its prose style.

> It is above all the texture of this narration which brings us two things basic to the experience of Le Morte Darthur: first, the sense of a world in which

values are as palpable as material objects--the world of a believer, where emotions, landscapes and time itself exist in relation to knightliness rather than simultaneously with it; second, the tone of Malory's voice, his painstaking gravity, and the way that tone forms our attitudes toward the stories he tells.[4]

My own study is concerned with Malory's relationship to his material in the book of Balin. By viewing style in this manner then, my definition of style will encompass not only syntax and word choice but also narrative structural devices. I believe that in the book of Balin Malory first exhibits the artistry which culminates in the last books of Le Morte Darthur. In this study I hope to demonstrate the stylistic devices Malory experiments with in "Balin." I will examine Malory's technique of narration, description and dialogue, primarily by viewing the changes he makes in his French source. The final chapter will view "Balin" and its relationship to "The Tale of King Arthur" and the entire Morte Darthur. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the beginning of Malory's self-conscious artistry as it is exhibited in his book of Balin.

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[4] Mark Lambert, Malory: Style and Vision in "Le Morte Darthur" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. ix-x.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Malory used as his source for the tale of Balin the French romance, Suite du Merlin. The Suite is part of the Boron Prose Cycle described by Fanni Bagdanow as follows:

> A long romance beginning with the Estoire del Saint Graal and followed by the Suite du Merlin and the Post Vulgate versions of the Quest and the Mort Artu, was written after the First Version of the Prose Tristan but before the Palamedes. This work which used to be called the "pseudo-Robert de Boron Cycle," but which I should prefer to call the Roman du Graal, deals with the rise and fall of Arthur's Kingdom, the "roiaume aventeureux," and derives much of its material from earlier cyclic compositions.[1]

The Suite du Merlin is concerned with Arthur's conception and the establishment of the Round Table, Balin's Dolorous Stroke and the creation of the Wasteland, the beginning of the quests, Arthur's victories over rebel kings and the anticipation of the Grail knight. Underneath all this glorious beginning lies the Grail quest: the quest is the subject of almost all of Merlin's prophecies. Malory fully employed these themes as he created "The Tale of King Arthur."

The narrative technique of the Suite du Merlin is called "entrelacement," the common structural method of the French cyclic romance. A brief look at "entrelacement"

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[1] Fanni Bogdanow, "The Character of Gauvain in the Thirteenth Century Prose Romance," Medium Aevum, XXVII (1958), 157-58.

will reveal the major differences between Malory's structural device and that of his source.

"Entrelacement" is that narrative technique in which numerous subtales, each acting like one thread in a tapestry, "hold each other together and by their close juxtaposition and interrupted continuity, form a dazzling literary fabric."[2] The first modern scholar to recognize this narrative device was Ferdinand Lot in his study of the Prose Lancelot, published in 1918. In his chapter "Le Principe de l'entrelacement," Lot describes the structural method of the Prose Lancelot:

> . . . le Lancelot n'est pas un mosaique d'ou l'on pourrait avec adresse en lever des cubes pour les remplacer par d'autres, c'est une sparterie ou une tapisserie: si l'on tenet d'y practiquer une coupure, tout part en morceaux.[3]

About thirty years later, C. S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love briefly referred to this narrative method as the "interlaced story. The formula is to take any number of chivalrous romances and arrange such a series of coincidences that they interrupt one another every few pages."[4] The "interlocked" story or "polyphonic" narrative (as he

[2] The Romance of Balain, trans. David Campbell (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), intro.

[3] Ferdinand Lot, Étude sur le Lancelot en Prose (Paris: Champion, 1918), pp. 17ff.

[4] C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 300-01.

later called it) is "something that cannot be taken in at
a glance, something that first looks planless though all is
planned."[5]   Writing about Spenser, Lewis stated that because

> the (improbable) adventure which we are following is
> liable at any moment to be interrupted by some quite
> different (improbable) adventure, there steals upon
> us unawares the conviction that adventures of this sort
> are going on all round us, that in this vast forest
> (we are nearly always in a forest) this is the sort of
> thing that goes on all the time, that it was going on
> before we arrived and will continue after we have
> left.[6]

Eugène Vinaver, in The Rise of Romance, refers to
these statements of Lewis as he discusses narrative "entre-
lacement." He states that what Lewis describes is exactly
what authors of the Arthurian cycle were trying to do:

> The feeling that there is no single end, that each
> initial adventure can be extended into the past and
> each final adventure into the future by a further
> lengthening of the narrative threads.[7]

"Entrelacement" allows for themes to reappear after inter-
vals so that the whole fabric of the narrative can be
stretched until the reader "loses every sense of limitation
in time or space."[8]

Vinaver likens the literary structure of entrelace-
ment to the geometric designs on the Romanesque churches

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[5] C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge:
Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), p. 194.

[6] Major British Writers, gen. ed. G. B. Harrison
(New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954), i. 97-98 (intro. to
excerpts from Spenser by C. S. Lewis.

[7] Eugène Vinaver, The Rise of Romance (Oxford:
Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 76.

[8] Ibid.

and illuminated manuscripts from the ninth to the thirteenth
century: "The interlace proper consists of threads
superimposed upon one another in such a way as to make it
impossible to separate them."[9] This pattern allows the
viewer's eye not to follow one single thread but to travel

> either horizontally or vertically--or both--embracing
> all the threads as they come within the field of vision.
> At whatever point the movement is arrested the area
> perceived will contain a certain number of interrupted
> threads.[10]

Some critics have viewed the Suite du Merlin (and,
for that matter, the entire Boron Prose Cycle) as a collec-
tion of tales haphazardly thrown together.[11] Vinaver argues
against this idea. He believes that the mechanics of the
work are hidden behind the extraordinary complexities of
the text.

> If the spirals and interlace of the decorated initials
> have for so long refused to yield the secret of the
> strictly controlled movement which they contain, it
> is because we have lost the art of perceiving the
> infinity of the great in the infinity of the small.[12]

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[9] Ibid., p. 78.

[10] Ibid., p. 81.

[11] Ibid., pp. 69-70. Vinaver spends much time citing
nineteenth century critics who were unable to make sense of
the French prose narrative. He quotes from Gaston Paris who
states that there were in the late romances examples of fine
prose (La Littérature Française au moyen âge (Paris, 1888, 5th
ed. [1914]), p. 111) but found the narrative "jusqu'a
l'absurde, sans réussir à piquer la curiosité" and "les
adventures nous fatiguent par leur creuse et monotone
invraisemblance" (intro. to Merlin [Société d'Anciens
Textes-Français, 1886], xlviii and lxix).

[12] Ibid., p. 81.

The fascination of looking at the Arthurian cycle comes in experiencing the structure of entrelacement, in following a theme through the work and waiting for it to return while following other themes. Grasping the entire structure allows the reader to experience all this plus the simultaneous presence of all that is going on.[13]

In the fifteenth century however there came an increasing demand for a distinct genre of one volume histories that were produced by "combining, condensing, and rendering the material of several older volumes in order to produce a single volume shaped to the taste of the time."[14] Caxton regarded Malory's work as a piece of this same manner, . . . which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certeyn bokes of French and reduced it into English."[15]

But Malory's reorganization of material was more than a matter of reduction. What he did was select, omit and add materials to shape his cycle in accord with his own ideas of coherence and proportion. Benson and several other critics agree that Malory's "The Tale of King Arthur" is actually an experiment by Malory of his form before he attempted it on the larger scale of the entire work.[16]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Larry Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. 23.

[15] Caxton's Introduction to Le Morte Darthur, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, edited by Eugène Vinaver in three volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. cxiii. All quotations of Malory's text will be taken from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

[16] Benson, p. 29.

The extensive interlaced structure of the French Suite is absent in the narrative structure of "The Tale of King Arthur." Malory has unraveled the tapestry and created a narrative structure consisting of six separate divisions, in which each division acts as a distinct period in the tale. "Balyne le Saveage or the Knight with the Two Swords" is one such subdivision marked by Malory himself with a title and closed with an "explicit." The use of distinct subdivisions rather than "entrelacement" suggests to Vinaver that Malory was writing separate works.[17] The opening lines of the "Balin" section serve as important example for Vinaver's theory.

> AFFTIR the deth of Uther regned Arthure, hys son, which had grete warre in hys dayes for to gete all Inglonde into hys honde: for there were many kyngis within the realme of Inglonde and of Scotlonde, Walys and Cornwwayle. (p. 61)

These lines have no counterpart in the French original. Vinaver believes that these opening lines indicate that the story is a self-contained work. He states in a note to this tale that

> To Malory, the Romance of Balin is not mere continuation of a chronicle of Arthur's reign, but an independent narrative which any reader unacquainted with the rest of the tale of Arthur should understand. It is for the benefit of the reader that Malory sums up

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[17] Thomas Wright, "The Tale of King Arthur" in Malory's Originality, ed. R. M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), p. 13.

in one sentence the long story of Arthur's accession
to the throne.[18]

Surely "Balin" can be read for its own sake but
Vinaver misses an important point here. That Malory does
not employ the extensive "entrelacement" of the French
cyclic romance for the narrative structure of his work
does not imply that he views the romance of Balin as a
self-contained work, not connected to "The Tale of King
Arthur." Rather than the "ordo artificialis" of his French
source, Malory connects his tale of Balin to "The Tale of
King Arthur" and the entire Le Morte Darthur by devices
other than "entrelacement."

In "Balin" Malory has reduced his source considerably.
He narrates the action in brief but complete episodes,
eliminating almost everything that does not directly
pertain to Balin. The narrative focuses on the action and
the events. The limited description adds a kind of realism
to the events and the dialogue develops the strong character
portraits that we find in "Balin." Although "Balyne le
Saveage or the Knight with Two Swords" is an early work,
in it Malory displays the beginnings of his unique style.

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[18]Works, Notes, 61. 1-5.

CHAPTER III

TECHNIQUES OF NARRATION

Brevity was a desired virtue in classical and medieval literature. However, as Vinaver states, it was a virtue more admired than practiced.[1] Malory practices this virtue in "Balin" as he reduces his source to about one-third, from 38,000 to 11,000 words.[2] To a large extent he summarizes; he leaves out several prominent events which have no real effect on the story or character of Balin.[3] This reduction of words, which accounts for most of Malory's condensation, creates the "sometimes dignified, sometimes brisk but always factual impression of his narration."[4]

The basis of Malory's style is the simple sentence and the sentence consisting primarily of coordinate clauses. This type of sentence gives the narrative its chronicle-like

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[1] Vinaver, The Rise of Romance, p. 85.

[2] I quote from P. J. C. Field's "Description and Narration in Malory," Speculum, XLIII (July 1968), p. 477. He arrives at these figures by including the twelve folios of French omitted in Legge but found in the Paris and Ulrich edition, Merlin, Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siecle (Paris, 1888), 2 vol. 215-175.

[3] The most important events Malory eliminates from his French source are the death of Balin's host at Pelles' castle and the escape of the maiden with the sword from Arthur's court after Merlin denounces her. However these events have no effect on Balin.

[4] P. J. C. Field, Romance and Chronicle: A Look at Malory's Prose Style (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), p. 73.

tone.[5] The reader feels as if he were reading a history, a factual account of events. Malory creates a sense of historicism through his chronicle tone and behind his story is an almost unobtrusive narrator. He relates what he wants the reader to hear and his plain chronicle tone creates an atmosphere of simple truth.

In "Balin" we see the beginnings of Malory's factual style. The first sentence opens with a brief account of the history of Arthur's reign up to this point. A seemingly simple statement but Malory emphasizes two things--Arthur's legitimate right to the throne and his struggles to gain his kingdom. The second sentence is a prime example of Malory's sentence structure.

> So hit befelle on a tyme whan kynge Arthure was at London, ther com a knyght and tolde the kynge tydyngis how the kynge Royns of Northe Walis had rered a grete numbir of peple and were entred in the londe and brente and slew the kyngis trew lyege people. (p. 61)

Malory introduces his sentence with a temporal clause, beginning with an illative particle "so" and follows it with a string of coordinated verb phrases.

The simple coordinated clauses are perfect for Malory's narration. The words flow easily and we perceive the events or objects in the order in which they occur. It is as if "we were there," watching what was going on.

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[5] P. J. C. Field in Romance and Chronicle reveals the similarities between Malorian narrative and the chronicle style. He states that in a sense Malory puts his romance material into a chronicle form. He also states that Malory treats his material much in the same way as the chronicle writers and letter writers of his time, who wrote with an interest in their material.

His coordinated sentences work at their best when he is
relating a series of actions. The chase of Lanceor is a
good example of Malorian coordination.

> So thys knyght of Irelonde armed hym at all poyntes
> and dressed hys shylde on hys sholdir and mownted uppon
> horsebacke and toke hys glayve in his honde, and rode
> aftir a grete pace as muche as hys horse myght dryve.
> (p. 68)

The clear narration of Lanceor's almost ritualized actions
proceeds with a series of "and's." The narrative speeds
up as Lanceor speeds up, with the use of formulaic adverbial
phrase as Lanceor rides after Balin.

The battle scene between the two knights also pro-
vides us with a good example of Malory's coordinate clauses.

> Than they fewtred their spearis in their restis and
> com togidirs as muche as their horsis my[g]ht dryve.
> And the Irysh knyght smote Balyn on the shylde that
> all wente to shyvers of hys spere. And Balyne smote
> hym agayne thorow the body and over the horse crowper;
> and anone turned hys horse fersely and drew oute hys
> swerde, and wyst nat that he had slayne hym.   (p. 69)

The actual fighting is joined by continuous "and's" while
the elaborations of the actions and the thoughts of our
hero are contained in clauses introduced by adverbs,
subordinating conjunctions and function words.

In the paratactic structure of Malory's narrative,
the events seem to happen of themselves.[6]

> and there he pyght his pavylyons and sought all the
> contrey to fynde a towmbe, and in a chirch they founde
> one was fayre and ryche. And than the kynge lette putte

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[6] Field,"Description and Narration," p. 478.

h[e]m bothe in the erthe, and leyde the tombe uppon
them, and wrote the namys of hem bothe on the tombe . .
. . (p. 72)

Malory narrates each event in the order that it occurs and
in a very deliberate manner. The coordinating conjunctions
make it necessary for Malory to relate only one event at a
time, not allowing for any simultaneous action to occur.[7]

The best example of Malory's paratactic style in the
book of Balin is the chase of King Pellam. A close examina-
tion of the passage will reveal the skill of Malory's
syntax.

Than kynge Pellam [caught in his hand] a grymme wepyn
and smote egirly at Balyn, but he put hys swerde
betwyxte hys hede and the stroke, and therewith hys
swerde braste in sundir. And whan Balyne was wepynless
he ran into a chambir for to seke a wepyn [and] fro
chambir to chambir, and no wepyn coude he fynde. And
allwayes kyng Pellam folowed afftir hym. And at the
last he enterde into a chambir (whych) was mervaylously
dyght and ryche, and abedde arayed with cloth of golde,
the rychiste that myght be, and one lyyng therein, and
thereby stoode a table of clene golde. (p. 85)

In the paratactic structure much emphasis must be placed
on the conjunctions and function words.[8] This passage opens
with "than" indicating a subsequent action and referring
back to the passage several lines earlier, "And Kynge
Pellam hymself arose up fersely . . . ." (p. 84). Pellam's
following action is joined with "and" while Balin's oppos-
ing action is introduced by "but." The narrative continues
in a relentless series of "and's" closely following Balin

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[7] Ibid., p. 479.

[8] Ibid.

as he runs weaponless through the castle. Malory then
reminds in one short sentence of the relentless pursuit:
"And allwayes kyng Pellam followed afftir him." Even though
the sentence is introduced by "and," the fact that Malory
makes it a short direct sentence does more than an elaborate
series of action words to emphasize King Pellam's chase.

Malory follows Balin into the Grail chamber. We
see the chamber as Balin perceives it, first being struck
with the majesty of the entire room before focusing on
specific objects in the chamber. Malory again uses a
short, simple sentence when Balin finally views the sword:
"And uppon the table stoode a mervaylous spere strangely
wrought." Then Malory backs away and observes Balin's
actions.

> So whan Balin saw the spere he gate it in hys honde
> and turned to kynge Pellam and felde hym and smote
> hym passyngly sore with that spere, that kynge Pellam
> [felle] downe in a sowghe. (p. 85)

The illative "so" (implying subsequently) followed by a
temporal clause serves as a connective passage to relate
Balin's next action--the "getting" of the spear. His
actions are then related by coordinating clauses. The
result of his actions is in a clause introduced by "that."
Malory again uses another relatively short sentence to
describe the physical destruction caused by Balin's actions:
"and therewith the castell brake roffe and wallis and felle
down to the erthe." And from the physical destruction the

narrative moves to Balin, and then to the people in the
castle: "and Balyn felle down and myght nat styrre hande
nor foote, and for moste party of that castell was dede
thorow the dolorouse stroke." Malory's suspension of the
phrase "dolorouse stroke" throughout the entire chase and
confrontation only makes the words more ominous when the
narrator finally utters them. The narrator then recapitu-
lates the result of the dolorous stroke: "Ryght so lay
Kynge Pellam and Balyne three dayes." The sentence begins
with an emphatic phrase. The word order (Verb-Subject)
places the emphasis on the action (or inaction) of the
verb "lay." The sentence becomes a forceful actualization
of all that happened in the Grail Castle.

The predominantly paratactic structure of Malory's
narrative also allows for extensive repetition of words
and phrases. The repetition of opening phrases is quite
common in Le Morte Darthur.[9] In the first few pages of
"Balin," Malory employs a series of opening clauses centered
on the illative particle "so" and a temporal clause or
phrase:

So hit befell on a tyme . . . . (p. 61)
So whan the kyng was com . . . . (p. 61)
Than hit befell so that . . . . (p. 62)
So the meanwhyle . . . ther com into courte . . . .(p.65)
Another common manner of opening the sentence in "Balin"

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[9] Ibid., p. 480.

is with the simple adverb.

> Than they fewtred their spearis . . . . (p. 69)
>
> Than he saw hym lye . . . . (p. 69)
>
> Whan Balyn aspyed hir dedis . . . . (p. 70)

The use of these adverbial clauses and phrases creates a
continuity in the narrative. "Than" and "Whan" indicate
subsequent action--action resulting from an earlier action.[10]

Not only do sentence openings appear in clusters,
but Malory repeats significant words rather than substitut-
ing synonyms. Repetition serves several purposes in Le
Morte Darthur and perhaps the most important use of repeti-
tion in "Balin" is for emphasis--of certain objects, actions,
and ideals. A close look at the first scene will reveal
how Malory uses repetition of certain words and phrases for
emphasis.

The concrete noun repeated throughout the first
scene of "Balin or the Knight with the Two Swords" is the
word "sword." And since the sword is the most important
object in this tale, because the event which necessitates
the most important quest in Le Morte Darthur is the result of
a sword in this tale, it is natural for Malory to emphasize
the sword. Arthur asks the damsel, ". . . for what cause
are ye gurte with that swerde?" (p. 61) And she responds,

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[10] Field, Romance and Chronicle, p. 40. Here Field
states that rarely do Malory's sentences ever have "zero
starts." Most of his sentences begin with some sort of
adverbial clause.

> "Thys swerde that I am gurte withall doth me grete
> sorow and comberaunce, for I may nat be delyverde of
> thys swerde but by a knyght, and he muste be a passynge
> good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute
> velony other trechory and withoute treson."

The word "swerde" is then repeated four times in the next ten lines and is not used again until all the knights have tried to help and Balin appears to try for the sword. "Than Balin toke the swerde by the gurdyll and shethe and drew hit oute easily. And whan he loked on the swerde hit pleased hym muche" (p. 63). After Balin achieves the sword and decides not to return it, the sword becomes the important object once more and is repeated seven times in the next eleven lines.

In this scene, Malory also repeats the qualities needed to obtain the sword. The knight must be a "passing" good man "withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (p. 62). After Arthur fails to obtain the sword, the maiden warns the knights: "But beware ye be nat defoyed with shame, trechory, nother guyle, for than hit woll nat avayle, . . . for he must be a clene knyght without vylony . . . ." (p. 62). When it seems that no one will succeed she cries, "Alas! I wente in this courte had bene the beste knyghtes of the worlde withoute trechory other treason" (p. 62). The phrase is repeated twice more in the scene: when Balin appears and when he achieves the sword.[11]

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[11] Thys damesell than beheld thys poure knyght and saw he was a lykly man; . . . . he sholde nat be of no worship withoute vylony or trechory.

Malory repeats the object desired in this scene. He also repeats the abstract qualities needed to obtain the object. It is likely then that the attempt to attain the object should be repeated. And it is. Malory uses one verb to describe the obtaining of the sword.

. . . all hys knyghtes assayde . . . (p. 62)

. . . I woll assay . . . (p. 62)

. . . thy shall assay . . . (p. 62)

. . . whan I have assayde . . . (p. 62)

. . . Now assay ye all . . . (p. 62)

. . . assayde all be rew . . . (p. 62)

. . . assayde as other knyghtes ded . . . (p. 63)

. . . to assay as thes other lordis . . . (p. 63)

. . . ye shall assay to do what ye may . . . (p. 63)

The repetition of this verb gives a uniformity to the action and this is one of Malory's motives. Some critics have found such repetition annoying but it is one of Malory's most important stylistic devices and integral to his overall plan--to emphasize the normative behavior of Arthurian knights--to emphasize not "this chivalric action but this chivalric action."[12]

Repetition in combat narration is quite common. Malory uses formulaic (or approximately formulaic) words and phrases when he relates a battle scene. Although much of "Balin" is battle and combat, the battle scenes in this tale

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[12] Lambert, p. 45.

are not as impressive as those in the later books. However, the short confrontations between knights are quite formulaic and ritualized:

> And with hys swerde lyghtly he smote off hyr hede before Kyng Arthur. (p. 66)

> And therewith anone Kynge Pellinor smote hym a grete stroke thorow the helme and hede unto the browis. (p. 77)

> . . . and smote the knyght that wente with Balyn . . . (p. 80)

> . . . and smote this knyght . . . thorowoute the body . . . (p. 81)

> And arose hym up fersely and clave his hede to the sholdirs . . . . And therewith Balan smote him thorow the body . . . . (p. 84)

> . . . felde him and smote him passyngly sore . . . (p. 85)

> . . . with his swerd he smote of bothe their hedes. . . . (p. 87)

The use of formulaic descriptions not only saves effort in having to construct a long story but also reveals the similarity of all battles, all knightly actions.[13]

Vinaver notes that although Malory has succeeded in eliminating the extensive "entrelacement" of his French source, "there still remain in Malory's text many traces of the original method of interweaving--occasional cross-link in the form of references and allusions to what came before or what was to come."[14] The "references and allusions"

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[13] Ibid., p. 91.

[14] Vinaver, The Rise of Romance, p. 128.

account primarily for the narrative structure in Malory's tale of Balin.

Malory, like his French source, opens the action of his tale in the present and then moves back into the past to supply background information. He uses a "flashback" technique to explain circumstance and reveal specific past events which cause specific present actions. He constructs, however, a much tighter narrative than his French predecessor. For example, when Malory explains why Balin is at Arthur's court, he tells us:

> . . . there was a poore knyght with kynge Arthure that had bene presonere with hym half a yere for sleyng of a knyght which was cosyne unto kynge Arthure. And the name of thys knyght was called Balyne, and by good meanys of the barownes he was delyverde oute of preson, for he was a good man named of his body, and he was borne in Northehumbirlonde. (p. 63)

In the French:

> Ensi i assaiierent tout cil de laiens, ne mais un povres chevaliers qui estoit nés de Norhomberlande. Chis avoit esté desiretés de par le roi de Norhomberlande pour un parent le roi du'il avoit ochis, el l'avoit [on] mis em prison plus de demi an, si en iest de nouviel issous. Et pour chou estoit il si povres qu'il n'avoit se petit non. (I, 215)[15]

> Thus all who were ther tried, all but a poor knight who was born in Northumberland. He had been disinherited by the king of Northumberland because he had killed a relative of the king, and he had been in prison for more than half a year. He had just come out and was so poor that he hardly had anything.

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[15] Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, eds., Merlin. All further quotations will be taken from this edition.

In Malory's version, the circumstances for Balin's appearance
in Arthur's court are made quite plain. That he was from
Northumberland seems no more than an afterthought. In the
French text, the fact that he was born in Northumberland
seems quite important and we are still not sure how and why
Balin comes to Camelot.

Malory uses flashback best when he wants to give the
motivation for action. Most past events are told in order
to supply the cause for a result. In the first scene Merlin
reveals the reason the maiden wears the sword:

> For she hath a brothir, a passyng good knyght of
> proues and a full trew man, and thys damesell loved
> another knyght that helde hir to paramoure. And thys
> good knyght, her brothir, mette with the knyght that
> helde hir to paramoure, and slew hym by force of hys
> hondis. And whan thys false damesell undirstoode this
> she wente to the lady Lyle of Avylion and toke hir hys
> swerde and besought hir of helpe to be revenged on hir
> owne brothir.
> And so thys lady Lyle of Avylion toke hir this
> swerde that she brought with hir and tolde there sholde
> no man pull hit oute of the sheethe but yf he be one of
> the beste knyghtes of thys realme . . . . (pp. 67-68)

And the Lady of the Lake gives Arthur her reason for wanting
the head of Balin or the damsel with the sword: ". . . for
he slew my brothir, a good knyght and a trew; and that
jantillwoman was causer of my fadirs death" (p. 65).
Likewise Malory explains Balin's rash deed: "So whan Balyn
was redy to departe, he saw the Lady of the Lake which by
hir meanys had slayne hys modir; and he had sought hir
three yere before" (p. 65).

More important than the "flashback" however is
Malory's "anticipation." Originally a technique of oral
delivery, anticipation was used by the author to impart a
certain shape to a narrative destined with constant interrup-
tions. By frequent prefigurations of things to come, a bond
of expectation was created between the narrator and his
audience.[16] Although Le Morte Darthur was conceived in
written form, and foreshadowing was not technically neces-
sary to the text, Malory found anticipation a very useful
device and readily employed it.

Malory did not introduce anticipation to the tale
of Balin. It was used by the French romancer and was an
integral part of the narrative structural method. Through-
out the Romance of Balain the narrator anticipates important
events: the Dolorous Stroke and the creation of the Waste-
land, the fratricidal ending, the fight of Lancelot and
Tristan, the fight between Lancelot and Gawain, the Quest
of the Holy Grail, and the final destruction of Logres.
Anticipation in the French romance is one method used by the
author to re-introduce a recurrent theme. Echoes and
prefigurations also serve to emphasize important themes,
warning the reader to pay strict attention: this theme will
be seen again.

Malory uses several methods to anticipate events in
"Balin." Characters foretell events; events are foreseen

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[16] Jeanette Beer, Villehardouin: Epic Historian
(Geneva, 1968), p. 33.

through characters' actions; and the narrator also makes
predictions. In the first scene a minor character prophesies.
The damsel with the sword tells Balin

" . . . for ye shall sle with that swerde the beste
frende that he have and the man that ye moste love in
the worlde, and that swerde shall be youre
destruccioun." (p. 64)

But Merlin is the most important prophet, in both his
words and in his deeds. His prophecies, directed towards
Balin and Arthur, deal with the most important themes in
the work, the Grail quest and the collapse of the Round
Table. Merlin also looks into the nearer future and the
personal experiences of some of the more important characters.
He links the love triangle of Arthur-Lancelot-Guiniver and
Mark-Tristram-Isolde at the tomb of Lanceor and Columbe.

. . . in com Merlion to kynge Marke and saw all thys
doynge. "Here shall be," sayde Merlion, "in this same
place the grettist bateyle betwyxte two [knyghts] that
ever was or ever shall be, and the trewyst lovers; and
yette none of hem shall slee other." And there Merlion
wrote hir namys uppon the tombe with lettirs of golde,
that shall feyght in that place; Which names was
Launcelot du Lake and Trystrams. (p. 72)

The most important prediction Merlin makes to Balin is the
forewarning of the Dolorous Stroke, the result of the death
of Colombe,

"because of the dethe of that lady thou shalt stryke
a stroke moste dolerous that ever man stroke, excepte
the stroke of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. For thou shalt
hurte the trewyst knyght and the man of moste worship
that now lyvith: and thorow that stroke, three kyng-
domys shall be brought into grete poverté, miseri and
wrecchednesse twelve yere." (p. 73)

Merlin forecasts the success of Balin in battle against King Royns and he predicts to Arthur the forthcoming battle with King Nero and King Lot. After Arthur's victory and the building of the memorial, Merlin forecasts the future of Arthur and the quest of the Grail:

> And there he tolde the kynge how that whan he was dede thes tapers sholde brenne no lenger, "aftir the adventures of the Sankgreall that shall com amonge you and be encheved." Also he tolde kynge Arthure how Balyn, the worshipfull knyght shall gyff the dolerouse stroke, whereof shall falle grete vengeaunce. (p. 78)

and of the treachery of Mordred:

> . . . Merlin tolde into kynge Arthure of the prophecy that there sholde be a grete battle besydes Salysbiry, and Mordred hys owne sonne sholde be agaynste hym. (p. 79)

Malory anticipates later events through Merlin's actions as he does through Merlin's words. The best example comes at the end of the tale. After Merlin makes the tomb of Balin, he also "lete make there a bedde, that this shold never man lye therein but he wente out of his wytte. Yet Launcelot de Lake fordyd that bed thorow his noblesse" (p. 91). Merlin then takes Balin's sword and puts a new pommel on it, saying,

> "there shall never man handyll thys swerd but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be sir Launcelot other ellis sir Galahad, hys sonne. And Launcelot with hys swerde shall sle the man in the world that he lovith beste; and that shall be sir Gawayne." (p. 91)

Merlin takes the scabbard and leaves it on the mainland for Galahad to find and sets the sword in a marble stone. Malory, as narrator, then proceeds to tell what happens

to the sword. [17]

> And so by adventure hit swamme downe by the streme unto
> the cite of Camelot that ys in Englysh called Wynchester,
> and that same day Gslahad the Haute Prynce com with
> kynge Arthure, and so Galaad brought with hym the
> scawberde and encheved the swerde that was in the
> marble stone hovynge uppon the watir. And on Whytson-
> day he enchevyd the swerde, as hit ys rehersed in THE
> BOOKE OF THE SANKGREALL. (p. 92)

The use of anticipation is quite important to Malory's

narrative. For the most part, Malory employs anticipation

in "Balin" to relate the Grail Quest to the Dolorous Stroke.

Although "Balin" may exist in its own right, even if Malory

is not thinking of "Balin" as "an antecedent to the story

of Galahad and the Grail, but in terms of Balin's own fate,"

with anticipation "Balin" becomes the pivotal point on which

the entire Le Morte Darthur is balanced. [18] The following

two chapters will reveal how Malory incorporates descrip-

tive devices and dialogue with his narrative techniques to

create the pivotal point for the entire work.

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[17] Malory as narrator also relates the treachery of
Morgan le Fay, Gawain's revenge on Pellinor, and the final
defeat of Arthur at Salisbury.

[18] Vinaver, The Rise of Romance, p. 128.

CHAPTER IV

THE DESCRIPTIVE METHOD

Several critics have observed that in "Balin" the only original piece of description Malory introduces is in the first scene when he describes the lady with the sword. She wore a "mantell . . . that was richely furred."[1] This statement holds some truth. Most of Malory's description in "Balin" is derived from the French and sometimes translated directly from the French source. However the important thing about Malory's descriptive technique is what he ruthlessly eliminates in his French text. This is his most common method—condensation and omission in his source material. His condensation of description begins in the first scene. In the French, a wounded knight on his weary horse arrives in Arthur's court.

> Et en chou qu'il parloient laiens par le palais, atant voient un chevalier entrer en la sale, et fu tous armés a cheval, mais il estoit teuls atornés que li sans li saloit par les costés, en plus de trois lieus, et ses chevaus estoit tel atornés du courre qu'il avoit fait qu'il chai desous lui en mi le palais si tost comme il fu entrés. (I, 212)

> It happened that while they were all talking in the palace, they saw a knight enter the hall. He was in such condition that the blood ran out of his side in more than three places and his horse was in such a state from running fast that it fell down under him in the midst of the palace as soon as he entered.

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[1] Field, Romance and Chronicle, p. 87.

Malory states simply: ". . . ther com a knyght."

In several other scenes Malory reduces his descriptive information quite severely. I would like to look at two scenes in detail: the ambush and battle with King Royns and the scene of the betrayed lover. In the ambush scene Malory cuts out most of the descriptive material from his French source. He states:

> Than there lodged Merlion and thes two knyghtes in a woode amonge the levis besydes the hyghway, and toke of the brydyls of their horsis and putte hem to grasse, and leyde hem downe to reste tyll hit was nyghe mydnyght. (p. 74)

This is a considerable amount of description for Malory. But this description is barren compared to the French. The French romancer gives a tense realistic account of the ambush. We see the knights in the shadows in the moonlight, hiding beside a narrow road.

P. J. C. Field notes that Malory omits material of two kinds here. The first is the omission of connective detail. When the French knights are in the woods, settled for the ambush, "ensi parloient entre eur trois ensamble de moult de choses." Field states that

> this purely connective detail is of little visual or causal detail, but which makes the progress of the story more solid, is removed. It recurs continuously in the French romance from the beginning and is always drastically reduced, and usually cut out, so that the [2] sequence of action tends to be abrupt and disconnected.

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[2] Field, "Description and Narration," p. 483.

The pictorial detail is also cut out, "even though it may contribute to the progress as well as the mood of the story."[3] In the French version of the scene, the physical circumstance described explains much of the action. But Malory is less interested in the circumstances of the causes of the action than he is in the act itself--the display of knightly behavior.

The battle scene again shows Malory's reduction of material. The French gives a detailed account of Royns's approach and the battle. King Royns is taken unawares; of his forty knights, Balin and Balan kill twenty-eight and capture the remaining twelve. Malory reduces the detailed French account of the battle to these words:

> And anon they mette with hym, and smote hym downe and wounded hym freyshly and layde hym to the growunde. And there they slewe on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde mo than fourty of hys men; and the remanaunte fledde. Than wente they agayne unto kynge Royns and wolde have slayne hym, had he nat yelded hym unto hir grace. (p. 74)

Malory omits much of the French detail and many of the seemingly important events in the French account. The effect is a brief, bloody combat which emphasizes not only the skill of the two brothers in battle, but also their mercy--the key feature of Arthur's code of chivalry.

The second scene I wish to examine is that of the betrayed lover. In the French romance after the "crossed" lover kills himself, Balin meditates on his bad luck,

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[3] Ibid., p. 483.

thinking he is "li plus mescheans chevaliers qui soit."
The French version gives a detailed description of his
journey into the forest after he leaves the lovers. Riding
through the forest he hears the birds singing "lor joie
et lour deport menant." Balin meets a squire, tells him
the story of the lovers and asks the squire to put that
story into writing. The French text also brings into the
story the people who find the bodies of the lovers and their
relief when the squire comes by and tells them of the
bizarre events. Malory reduces all of this to twenty-one
words: "When Balen sawe that, he dressid hem thensward,
lest folke wold saye he had slayne hem; and so he rode
forth . . ." (p. 88). As in the battle with Royns, Malory
sacrifices the landscape and setting surrounding Balin for
brevity. We do not have a picture of the countryside as
Balin rides through it; we only know that Balin "rode
forth."

In the French romance, the author would devote a
page or more to the description of a landscape.[4] Though
these set pieces are interesting, they interrupt the sequence
of chivalric action (something that Malory tries to prevent).
In the French landscape we see a fairly accurate picture of
where Balin is traveling and a peopled landscape. Malory
does not describe the scene; Balin encounters no one until
he comes upon a mysterious old man.

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[4] Lambert, p. 79.

> And so he rode forth, and within thre dayes he cam by
> a crosse; and theon were letters of gold wryten
> that said: "it is not for no knyght alone to ryde
> toward this castel." (p. 88)

The French text lingers over the picture of Balin

riding "comme aventure le portoit," until at last he comes

to a river "forte et rade" where there is a

> chastiaus si bien de toutes choses k'en tout le
> pais n'avoit plus biel ne plus gent. Quant il vint
> a demie liue priès dou chastiel, il trouva une grant
> chimentiere ou il avoit tomber pliusours vielles et
> nueves. Au chief del chimemtiere par deviers le
> chastiel avoit une crois toute neuve. En cele crois
> avoit lettres qui disoient: "Os tu, chevaliers errans
> qui vas querant aventures? Je te déffenc que tu
> n'ailles de chi pres dou chastiel. Et sache que elles
> ne sont mie legieres a un chevalier. Quant il a leues
> les lettres il entent moult bien que elles dient, a
> che que il estoit bien lettrés. (II, 44)

> The castle was so well situated in all ways that
> in the whole country there was not a more beautiful one.
> When he came within a half a league of the castle he
> found a large cemetery where there were many graves,
> old ones and new. At the edge of the cemetery there
> was a new cross. On this cross were letters that said:
> "Do you listen, o knight errant who searches for adven-
> ture? I forbid you to go any closer to the castle than
> this. And know that they are not at all hospitable
> toward one knight. When he had read the letters he
> understood quite well what they said because he was quite
> literate.

Laura Hibbard Loomis states that the inscription on

the cross is the only thing described by the French author

essential to the dramatic situation.[5] Malory emphasizes the

inscription on the cross by making the letters of gold;

it becomes a "blunt, stern prohibition." The elimination of

extraneous material gives the gold inscription more importance

and Balin's laconic speech more significance.

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[5]Loomis, p. 181.

I want to briefly look at two more scenes in which Malory eliminates connective detail for various reasons. Both passages are actually connective passages in the narrative. The first is the scene in which Balin prepares to leave the court of Arthur. In the French,

> Lors prent ses armes, si monte en son cheval et chaint l'espee qu'il ot de la damoisiele dejouste cele k'il portoit devant, si qu'il en ot deus a son costé. Lt prent un escu et un glaive gros[se] et fort et se part de la ville et s'adrece cele part ou il cuidoit que li rois Rions fust a tout son ost, et li exculiers s'en revait d'autre part son commandement. (I, 222)

> Then he took his armor, mounted his horse, put on the sword he got from the damsel beside the one he had carried before, so that he had two at his side. He took a shield and a heavy and strong lance and left the city and headed for the place where he thought king Royn was with all his host. And the squire left in another direction and commended his lord to God, and the knight went thus with swords.

Malory states simply, "So his squyre and he departed at that time" (p. 67). Malory does not clutter Balin's departure with trivial details. Balin leaves simply--without any pomp and ceremony.

A more interesting scene however is the connective narrative prefacing the episode of Balin and Garlon, the invisible knight. In the French,

> A l'endemain, entour eure de miedi, que li rois ot fait tendre ses pavillons dehors le chastiel en une praerie et fu ses trés desus ens ou chemins entre petits arbrissiaus, li rois se sentoit un poi pesant, si se coucha en son pavillon. Et ot commandé que tout se partissent d'illuec entour fors que ses cambrelens. Il commencha a penser a une chose qui moult li desplaisoit, et en cel penser estoit si tant dolans que nus plus, et pour chou ne pooit il cheoir en repos.

Endementiers qu'il estoit en cel penser, il escoute et
ot venir tout le chemin le friente d'un cheval qui
assés venoit grant oirre, et hennissoit li chevaus et
faisoit la plus forte friente del monde. (I, 275)

And the next day, around noon, when the king had had his
tent set up outside the castle in a field and when his
pavillion had been set up on a path among some bushes
he felt a bit tired and went to lie down in his tent.
And he commanded that everyone leave except his servants.
He began to think about something which displeased him a
great deal. And thinking this way, he was as sad as
anyone could be. And for that he could not lie down
and rest.
  While he was deep in this train of thought, he
listened and heard the hoofbeats of a horse which was
coming along the road at great speed, neighing and making
the loudest sound in the world.

Malory states,

So within a day or two kynge Arthure was somewhat
syke, and he lette pycch hys pavilion in a medow, and
there he leyde hym downe on a paylet to slepe; but he
myght have no reste. Ryght so he herde a grete noyse
of an horse, and therewith the kynge loked out at the
porche dore of the pavilion and saw a knyght commynge
evyn by hym makynge grete dole. (p. 79)

Malory eliminates the commands and thoughts of the king but

leaves several descriptive details which seem out of place

in his narrative: Arthur is feeling sick; his pavillion

is pitched in a meadow; Arthur lies down to sleep. In

Malory we have come to expect, "And soon it befell that

Arthur was out of doors and he saw a knight . . ." The

inclusion of these scene in the narrative might suggest that

Malory here wanted to emphasize the humanity of Arthur after

so glorifying him in the previous passage. Or that he wanted

to provide a time sequence for the action. Whatever the

reason this connective passage is an effective one.

For the most part however, Malory eliminates quotidian detail--the description of daily routine. "Arrival, departure, arming, unarming, dismounting, caring for one's horse, going to sleep and waking up--the things done in more or less the same way by good knights and mediocre knights on important days and uneventful days--are omitted or simplified."[6] Malory does leave out descriptions of this nature but he does not eliminate the everyday details if they exhibit the "outward signs of the knightly way of life."[7] Field calls these statements "chivalric ritual statements," noting that Malory was quite fond of them.[8] Examples from "Balin" include:

> . . . Balyn sente for hys horse and armoure, and so wolde departe frome the courte, and toke hys leve of kynge Arthure. (p. 64)

> . . . thys knyght was makynge hym redy to departe . . . . (p. 65)

> So thys knyght of Irelonde armed hym at all poyntes and dressed hys shylde on hys sholdir and mownted uppon horsebacke and toke hys glayve in hys honde . . . . (p. 68)

> And when they were mette they put of hyr helmys and kyssed togydirs and wepte for joy and pite. (p. 70)

> And when he saw kyng Arthur he alyght of hys hors and com to the kynge one foote and salewed hym. (p. 79)

> And thenne he loked on hys armour and understood he was wel armed and therwith blessid hym and mounted upon his hors. (p. 89)

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6 Lambert, p. 88.

7 Field, "Description and Narration," p. 485.

8 Ibid.

These "chivalric ritual statements" are important to
Malory for several reasons--they eliminate the need for a
more descriptive and consequently longer narrative but
more importantly, emphasize the normative action of
Malorian knights--the unified pattern of action typical
of chivalric behavior.[9]

There are several places in the narrative where
Malory adds (or retains from the French) a touch of
realistic detail. I have previously mentioned one such
scene where Malory adds this kind of detail: "So
within a day or two Kynge Arthur was somewhat syke, and
he lette pycch his pavillion in a medow, and there he
leyde hym down on a paylet to slepe; but he myght have no
reste." In several other places Malory adds descriptive
pieces that stand out for their realistic detail. In
the scene where Balin finds himself responsible for the
death of Lanceor and his lover, a dwarf rides up and "pulled
hys heyre for sorowe . . ." (p. 91). More startling than
this action is the scene in which Garnyssh sees his para-
mour. He "beheld hir so lyeng, for pure sorou his mouth
and nose brast out on bledynge . . ." (p. 87).[10]

Another method Malory employs is in the naming of
personages not named in the French source. From the French

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9 Field, "Description and Narration," p. 486.

10 Field points out that these startling descriptive
pieces are quite common in the French romance. That
Malory uses them so sparingly, gives them more emphasis.

"la dame de l'isle d'Avalon," Malory derives a proper name,
Lady Lylle of Avelion. Morgan's unnamed lover is named
Accolon; the French "duc de Harnel" becomes Duke Hermel in
Malory. Two unnamed French knights receive proper appel-
lations, Herlieus de Berbeus and Peryn de Montbeliad.
Malory has a purpose for this naming of characters.
Although we are aware of his love of proper names (e.g.,
all the roll calls in Le Morte Darthur), his affinity for
proper names probably is the result of his wanting to
establish a more historical sense--to convey a more
definite sense of real people in an actual time and place.

Most of Malory's descriptive passages come from his
French source but rarely are they pieces of pure descrip-
tion. In "Balin" Malory includes two purely descriptive
passages from his French text. One appears in the scene
in which Merlin erects statues at King Lot's funeral.

> But of all the twelve kyngis kynge Arthure lette make
> the tombe of kynge Lotte passynge rychely and made hys
> tombe by hymselff.
> And then Arthur lette make twelve images of laton
> and cooper, and overgylte with gold in the sygne of
> the twelve kynges; and eche of hem helde a tapir of
> wexe in hir honde that brente nyght and daye. And
> kynge Arthure was made in the sygne of a fygure
> stondynge aboven them with a swerde drawyn in hys
> honde, and all the twelve fygures had countenaunce
> lyke men that was overcom. All thys made Merlion by
> hys subtyle craufte. (p. 78)

The statuary is elaborate and Malory describes it in
great detail. And the statuary serves as a sort of marker
in Le Morte Darthur. It looks back on Arthur's battle with
the twelve kings and his victory. It also serves as a

prophecy.

> And there he tolde the kynge how that whan he was
> dede thes tapers sholde brenne no lenger, "aftir the
> adventures of the Sankgreall that shall com amonge
> you and be encheved." Also he tolde kynge Arthure
> how Balyn, the worshipfull knyght, shall gyf the
> dolerouse stroke, whereof shall falle grete
> vengeaunce. (p. 78)

The statues connect Balin and the dolorous stroke to the

Grail legend yet another time in "Balin."

Malory retains and augments a second piece of

description, the account of the bridge at the end of the

tale.[11]

> Than Merlion lette make a brygge of iron and of steele
> into that ilonde, and hit was but halff a foot brode,
> "and there shall never man passe that brygge nother
> have hardynesse to go over hit but yf he were a
> passynge good man withoute trechery or vylany."
> (p. 91)

Vinaver states that in the French, a knight must be hardy

before he can cross the bridge and "the notion that it

(the bridge) can be used as a moral test seems to be

Malory's own."[12]

Quite possibly the most noticeable of Malory's

descriptive techniques is his use of adjectives. His

adjectives do not provide us with a physical or sensory

description but rather a moral, emotive one. There is an

astonishing lack of physical description. Unlike the

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[11] Car ill i fist un pont de fer, qui n'avoit mie
demi piet de lé, et tenoit de l'une rive jusques a l'autre.
Et dist que par chou pourroit on connoistre les hardis
chevaliers; car nus, s'il n'iert trop hardis, n'avra ja
cuer de passer outre par dessus cest pont. (II, 59)

[12] Works, notes, 91. 34-38.

realistic descriptions of our seventeenth century novelists (which give us physical descriptions of personages and we must judge their character), Malory gives us their moral aspects, and our imaginations must supply their physical attributes.[13]

In "Balin" Malory's most used adjective is "great," which he uses twice as many times as the adjective "good."[14] Other adjectives appearing frequently in the tale and throughout Le Morte Darthur are "fayre," "noble," "worshipfull," and "trew." All of these adjectives imply some sort of value structure imposed on the reader by the author. But as Field points out, although the "facts of the story thus have inseparable responses built in them . . . . because of their simplicity seem to exist independently of the narrator."[15]

In her study Villehardouin: Epic Historian, Jeanette Beer makes several observations which can be applied to Malory's descriptive style. She states,

it was generally assumed that the aim of a medieval description was to record the qualities characteristic or proper to an object rather than to obscure its nature with unusual or picturesque details.

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13 Field, "Description and Narration," p. 482.

14 Malory uses the word "great in its positive form fifty times. He uses "good" in the positive form only twenty-three. However, in the superlative form he uses "greatest" only three, while he uses "best" approximately ten times.

15 Field, "Description and Narration," p. 482.

Underlying this method was the assumption that each object, each person, even each physical feature has a fitting epithet: Debet autem quaelibet persona ab illo intitulari epitheto quod in ea prae ceteris dominatur et a quo majorem famae sortitur evidentiam.[16]

She goes on to state that the corollary of this must be

that repetition will no doubt occur since the qualities

most appropriate to an object can hardly fluctuate at an

author's whim. The recurrence of a theme will not induce

an author to seek new treatment if descriptive virtue to

him consists in aptness rather than in variety of expression.[17]

Beer observes that Villehardouin does not use

adjectives unless they pertain to the progress of the

Fourth Crusade or his narration of it.

His constant use of the adjective "bon" to convey the satisfactory note of objects or persons to that enterprise, and his telescoping of human qualities into one simple favorable adjective, produce a simplicity of style that even suggests naivete.[18]

This is exactly how Malory's adjectives function. Rarely

do adjectives appear in groups of two and almost never

in clusters of three or more. And Malory hardly ever uses

an adjective that does not in some way pertain to his

definition of knightliness--either how close one is to

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[16] Jeanette Beer, M.A., Villehardouin: Epic Historian (Genève: Librairie Droz S. A., 1968), pp. 100-01. Here Beer cites Matthieu de Vendôme, Ars versificatoria, ed. E. Faral, p. 120.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

that definition, or how far away from the definition of knightliness someone is.

This distance "how close to" or "how far from" the ideal of knightliness calls for extensive use of the superlative form of the adjective. Mark Lambert states compellingly,

> To describe something as the best suggests that degrees of excellence in a particular category can be measured. And frequently implied references to standards, together with a wide range of things so referred encourage the audience to see the world of the romance as one in which values are fixed and objective and comparative worth can be determined with assurance.[19]

In "Balin" Malory calls King Arthur and King Pellam by his highest superlative, setting them above everyone else--"the moste worshipfulleste of men." Garlon is the "marvellyste of knyghts" (i.e., the knight of most wonders); Lancelot and Tristram are the "trewest lovers"; Balin strikes the "most dolerous stroke" which causes the "greatest dole." Balin and his brother are the "doughtyeste"; Lanceor, the "valyauntis"; and Balin "one of the beste knyghtes."

But the superlatives in "Balin" do more than show relationships to the standard. They serve as foreshadowings, linking sections of Le Morte Dartnur. That Arthur and Pellam are called by the same high epithet reveals how high Malory rates Arthur (ranking him as high as the most spiritual of knights) and how important the Grail quest is.

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[19] Lambert, p. 26.

We also learn that Lancelot and Tristram are the "trewest lovers" as Malory sets up the parallel love triangles early in his narrative. Balin is "one of the best knyghts in the worlde," making his "most dolerous stroke" more terrible. And because he is one of the best, he can release the magic sword, linking him not only to Arthur who pulled his sword from the stone, but also to Lancelot and Galahad: "Than never shal man handyll thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde and that shal be Sir Lancelot other ellis Galahad hys sonne" (p. 91).

What can be said in summary about Malory's description? Briefly, in his description Malory tries to exemplify the world of knightly order. However, he retains enough concrete detail to make his narrative believable. The elimination of connective detail, pictorial detail, the increase of chivalric ritual detail all "paradoxically combine to increase realism, because they create an unobtrusive but all pervading persona of a narrator who tells the story to us."

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20 Field, "Description and Narration," p. 486.

CHAPTER V

THE FUNCTION OF DIALOGUE

One of the major differences readily apparent to the reader of the French "Balain" and Malory's version of the tale is in the use of dialogue. Malory relates most of his work in direct speech rather than in the indirect discourse of his French source. Dialogue in "Balin" is a forceful, dynamic means of conveying Malory's essential theme--the necessary qualities of knighthood, and Malory employs various devices in creating a striking dialogue. Several of these devices (collective discourse, repetition of stock words and phrases, oaths, and interjections, "ye/thou" discrimination) must be examined before viewing the overall effects of Malory's skill in writing dialogue.

Lambert discusses collective discourse in Malory's Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur. He notes that Frappier first uses the term in "les discours chez Villehardouin" (Études Romanes Dédiées à Mario Roques [Paris, 1949], p. 50):

> "Les discours collectifs" constitutent le procédé le plus curieux, en tout cas le plus médiéval, car il est bien d'une époque où les formes de pensée et d'expression reflètent souvent un état d'esprit en quelque sorte unanimiste.[1]

Collective discourse occurs in many medieval writings and

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[1] Lambert, p. 16.

particularly in Malory. The "vox populi" was more popular
in medieval writings than it is in ours and consequently
was used much more freely.[2] The uses of collective dis-
course are varied and I have chosen several examples which
will illustrate its diversity.

The most common form of collective discourse in
Malory is the short response of a group of people to one
person's question or statement.[3]

"Well," seyde the knyghtes, "make you ready and we
shall assayle you with all oure power." (p. 72)

"Sir," they seyde, "his name is sir Marhaus, the
kynges son of Irelonde." (p. 94)

"Yondir he ys," seyde the knyghtes. (p. 61)

What appears more unusual to the modern reader of
medieval collective discourse is the response by a "duet."

"Sir knyght," seyde the two brethirne, "we are for-
foughten and much blood have we loste thorow oure
wylfulness, and therefore we wolde be loth to have
ado with you." (p. 64)

"Now fayre knyght," seyde the lorde and the ladye,
"and ye com here in oure marchys, se here youre poore
lodgynge, and hit shall be allwayes at youre
commaundemente." (p. 71)

This occurs twice in Malory's tale of Balin. When Balin
meets Garnysh and they set off together, this conversation
ensues:

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[2] Ibid., p. 18.

[3] The five following quotations are taken from
Vinaver's second edition of Malory's Works, published
1971, Oxford Univ. Press.

"How fer is she hens?" sayd Balin.

"But six myle," said the knyghte.

"Now ryde we hens," sayde these two knyghtes. (p. 87)
In the last scene with the two brothers, a lengthier
discourse is rendered collectively. What they are saying
is further emphasized by the fact that they are saying it
together.

> . . . and there she herd how they made her mone eyther
> to other and sayd, "We came bothe oute of one [w]ombe,
> that is to say one moders bely, and so shalle we lye
> bothe in one pytte." (p. 90)

Lambert states that two passages such as these would
appear especially "unrealistic" to the modern reader for
two reasons:

> first, the clearer our previously formed idea of
> the individual characters, the more unwilling we will
> be to accept collective discourse from those charac-
> ters. Second, it is easier for us to accept a chorus
> than a duet. We find it difficult to visualize or
> think of the individual members of a large group, on
> the other hand, it is hard for us not to see a group
> of two as two individuals.[4]

This is true in most cases but it does not seem to inter-
fere in either of these two examples.

There are three other passages in "Balin" in which
Malory employs collective discourse quite effectively.
He uses indirect collective discourse when several of
Arthur's knights view Balin and his brother in battle:
"And all they that behelde them seyde they were sente

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[4]Lambert, p. 19.

from hevyn as angels other devilles frome helle" (p. 76).

He employs indirect and direct discourse spoken collectively

when Balin challenges a group of men to fight him.

> And they all seyde nay, they wolde nat fyght with
> hym, for they dud nothynge but the olde custom of
> thys castell, and tolde hym that hir ladye was syke
> and had leyne many yeres, and she myght nat be hole
> but yf she had bloode in a sylver disshe full, of a
> clene mayde and a kynges doughter. 'And therefore
> the custom of thys castell ys that there shall no
> damesell passe thys way but she shall blede of hir
> bloode a sylver dysshefull.' (p. 82)

By using collective discourse at this point, Malory shows

that Balin would have fought not one man at a time but

all of the men at once--a rash impulse, a brave but

foolhardy action not untypical to Balin's character.

However, the most powerful example of collective

discourse in all of Malory occurs after Balin performs

the Dolorous Stroke:

> So he rode forthe thorow the fayre contreyes and
> citeys and founde the people dede slayne on every
> syde, and all that evir were on lyve cryed and seyde,
> "A Balyne! Thou hast done and caused grete [dom-
> mage] in thys contreyes! For the dolerous stroke
> thou gaff unto kynge Pellam thes three contreyes ar
> destroyed. And doute nat but the vengeaunce woll
> falle on the at the laste!" (p. 86)

We can only imagine Balin's loneliness and despair as he

rides through the three destroyed countries. Coming to

him from every direction is the one collective voice of all

the people he has ruined.

Another device Malory employs in the dialogue is

repetition. Although not so common as in the narrative,

the repetition of entire sentences and phrases does occur
in the dialogue in "Balin." The sword maiden tells Balin,
" . . . ye do what ye may." Later on Balin, using those
exact words, tells Merlin, ". . . dred you nat, for we woll
do what we may" (p. 74).

In the scene where we find Balin discussing Garlon,
he says three times,

". . . thys is nat the first despyte that he hath done
me . . ." (p. 81)

". . . for the despyte he has done me . . ." (p. 83)

". . . thys is nat the firste spite that thou haste
done me . . ." (p. 84)

As shown in the preceding examples, repetition serves to
emphasize and to point out similarities. The dialogue
in "Balin" is repetitive within the tale and has many
similarities throughout the entire work. These similari-
ties "add universality to the action and certainly to the
sentiments. . . . Malory gives us a style of dialogue
which stresses the similarity of all knights, not the
difference between individuals."[5]

Malory employs two other techniques which I wish to
mention briefly. Both add to the colloquial, lively tone
of his dialogue. The first of these is the use of oaths
and interjections. In the later sections of Le Morte
Darthur, particularly in "Sir Tristram," interjections are

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[5] Field, Romance and Chronicle, pp. 134-35.

more than common and characters swear "vigorously and often."[6] Field states that the oaths add liveliness and realism to the dialogue and apparently the English aristocracy of the later Middle Ages was quite fond of them.[7] In "Balin" as in the earlier works, hardly a character speaks who does not begin his statement with an "A!" or an "Alas!" but the oaths do not extend much beyond "by my faith," and "by the faith of my body." Yet even these mild oaths add a touch of liveliness and high-spiritedness to the dialogue. Listed below are the oaths which recur in "Balin."

"Be my faythe," seyde Arthur. (p. 62)

"Be God," seyde the damesell. (p. 63)

"I shall take the adventure," seyde Balyne, "that God woll ordayne me. But the swerde ye shall nat have at thys tyme, be the feyth of my body." (p. 64)

"Be the feyth of my body," seyde Balyn. (p. 72)

"Be my feyth," seyde Arthur. (p. 78)

"By my hede," seyde Arthure. (p. 79)

"By the fayth of my body I woll dye therefore." (p. 80)

Balyn seyde, "God you save." (p. 86)

Another manner of writing more colloquial speech employed by Malory is the discriminating use of "ye" and "thou." "Ye" was the formal term, more distant and respectful. "Thou" was sometimes considered an inoffensive

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[6] Benson, p. 114.

[7] Field, Romance and Chronicle, pp. 124-25.

intimate term, but in more cases, a contemptuous term. According to Field, by Malory's time the use of "thou" as a term of intimacy was old-fashioned if not obsolete.[8] However one can find it used this way quite often in the work. And it occurs frequently in "Balin." We find it in the death scene of Balan and Balin as "thou" and "ye" are used interchangeably.[9]

The contemptuous use of "thou" implied an "unwarranted assumption of superiority by an equal or an inferior."[10] This is the more common usage in "Balin." When Balin and Garlon fight, their speech is filled with "thou's."

> . . . and therewith thys (Garlon) aspyed that Balyn vysages hum, so he com and slapped hym on the face with the backe of hys honde and seyde, "Knyght why beholdist thou me so? For shame, ete thy mete and do that thou come fore."
>
> "Thou seyst soth," seyde Balyne, "thys ys nat the first spite that thou hast done me. And therefore I woll do that I com fore." And rose hym up fersely and clave his hede to the sholdirs.
>
> "Now geff me (the) truncheon," seyde Balyn (to his lady), "that he slew youre knyght with." . . . "with that truncheon thow slewyste a good knyght, and now hit stykith in thy body."
>
> Than Balyn called unto hys oste and seyde, "Now may we fecche blood inoughe to hele youre son withall. (p. 84)

It is interesting to note that Balin uses the formal "ye" in this fight when speaking to his lady and to his host.

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[8] Field, Romance and Chronicle, pp. 104-05.

[9] Ibid. Field excuses this by stating, "For the bereaved and dying, emotion is too strong for etiquette.

[10] Field, Romance and Chronicle, p. 106.

After discussing these various devices that Malory
uses in writing dialogue, we must decide how the dialogue
operates in the tale. What is the primary function of
dialogue in this work? How does dialogue help create the
strong, vivid portraiture of Balin? Balin's speeches
all have a certain dignity--but that dignity is not reserved
for Balin alone, not even for the subject of knighthood.[11]
As Field points out, and as I have shown, "there is a lack
of individualization--the same diction, syntax, proverbs,
oaths and images are used by one person and then another."[12]

Laura Hibbard Loomis states that Balin's varying
moods distinguish him.[13] And they do distinguish him from
his consistently polite French prototype. However all of
Malory's knights speak with a "considerable range and
variety of expression."[14] What stands out in the dialogue
is the suitability of the speeches to the speakers.
"Though similar feelings may find similar expression in
different characters, the feeling ascribed often does
striking justice to the situation."[15] A look at the

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Loomis, p. 188.

[14] Field, Romance and Chronicle, p. 120.

[15] Ibid., p. 135.

dialogue in "Balin" will reveal how Malory's changes in
his source and his diverse narrative techniques create a
dramatic, if not tragic, tale.

The change that Malory makes in the first scene of
his tale is certainly that which most clearly establishes
the essential differences between his knight and the French
Balain, his story and his French source. In the Huth
Merlin when the lady with the sword refuses Balain's offer,
he angrily retorts: "Damoisele, ne m'aiiés en despit
pour ma povreté; je fui ja plus riches. Encore n'a il
nul chaiens a qui veaisse, mon escu" (I, 216).

> "Damsel, don't scorn me for my poverty. I have been
> once much wealthier. Moreover, there is no one here
> whom I would not meet in battle."

Malory's Balin responds in an entirely different
manner and to an entirely different matter, not angrily
but with restrained indignation:

> "A, fayre damesell," seyde Balyn, "worthynes and good
> tacchis and also good dedis is nat only in araymente,
> but manhode and worship [ys hyd] within a mannes
> person: and many a worshipfull knyght ys nat knowyn
> unto all peple. And therefore worship and hardynesse
> ys nat in araymente." (p. 63)

The English knight is not angry because he is temporarily
without money--he is indignant because the lady refuses
to look beneath outward appearances for the qualities she
is seeking. Outward appearances often disguise the
worthiness of the man in Malory. His poorly arrayed
knights are most often his best. In this change from his

source, Malory asserts implicitly that wealth and riches are not essential to knighthood, a theme repeated throughout the work.

The incident of the betrayed lover stands out primarily because of the dialogue. Malory's dialogue is emphasized by the stark description of the encounter. In the French text the lover, after discovering his lover and her paramour together, wails mournfully: "Ha las, que ai jou fait?" This French knight steps out of his conventional mold to show some individuality. In his grief he cries out at Balain: "Sire, or poes veoir que vous aves gaaigniet en moustrer moi mon grant duel." But even this grief does not come close to the "despairing weakness" found in Malory.[16] "O Balyn! Moche sorow hast thow brought unto me, for haddest thow not shewed me that syght I shold have passed my sorow!" (p. 87). And Balin responds just as wretchedly:

"Forsoth," . . . "I did it to this entent that it sholde better thy courage, and that ye myght see and knowe her falshede, and to cause you to leve love of suche a lday. God knoweth I dyd none other but as I wold ye dyd to me." (p. 88)

In the death scene at the end of Malory's tale, it is the dialogue which heightens the pathos to tragic dimensions. As in other scenes, Malory has eliminated the incidental details, thereby emphasizing the dialogue. Balin's arrival at the castle of the jousting event is a

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[16] Loomis, p. 189.

scene which Malory "has shortened beyond recognition."[17]

In the French text, singing and dancing girls welcome

Balin to the castle and a very courteous seneschal tells

him of the custom, "car teuls est la coustume de cest

chastiel que nus estranges chevaliers n'i vient que il

ne couviegne jouster au signeur de cele tour" (II, 45-46).

> (because it is the custom of this castle, that no
> strange knight comes here that he must joust with the
> knight of that tower.)

And the French Balain condemns this custom as an evil one:

> car quant uns chevaliers errans vient de lointainnes
> terres lassés et travilliés de grans jornees, quidiés
> vous qu'il soit si aaisiés de combatre maintenant com
> sera li chavaliers de la tour qui ne fera fors que
> reposer? Certes se li errans estoit li mieudres
> chevaliers dou monde, quant il se combat en tel point,
> si ne m'esmervilleroi jou mie s'il estoit outrés.
> Iceste chose ne di je mie, che sachiés vous, por moi;
> car je ne sui ne si lassés ne si travilliés, ains me
> plaist bien autant li combatres comme feroit li
> reposers; mais je le di pour la coustome, qui est la
> plus malvaise et la plus vilainne que je veisse
> piech'a mais en lieu ou je venisse." (II, 46)

> because when a knight errant comes from far away tired
> and exhausted by long days, do you think that it is as
> easy for him to fight then as it is for the knight in
> the tower who does nothing but rest? Certainly, if the
> wanderer were the best knight in the world, when he
> fights in such circumstances, it would not be surprising
> to me if he were beaten. This thing is not for me, you
> know that, for I am not so tired or exhausted but that
> it would so please me to fight as well as the one who
> rests; but I am saying that the custom is the worst
> and most villainous that I have ever seen in any
> place I have been.

Malory barely mentions the festivities at the castle;

he omits the courteous seneschal. Balin does not discuss

the custom as a point of chivalric courtesy (like the

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[17] Vinaver, note 88. 21-37.

French knight), "but speaks in words that make him known
to us as a brave and worn weary man."[18]

> "Wel," sayd Balin, "syn I shalle, thereto I am redy,
> but traveillynge men are ofte weary and their horses
> to, but though my hors be wery my heart ys nat wery.
> I would be fayne ther my deth shold be." (p. 88)

Malory here has added a note of weariness to the scene

simply by being brief and this statement is certainly

one of the most emotion-filled statements in the entire work,

distinguishing Malory's knight from his long-winded French

counterpart. Yet as Field so rightly notes,

> Balin's emotion is individual in the sense that it is
> the product of his own circumstances and no other,
> but it would be difficult to maintain that the style
> of speech is different from Malory's norm. Balin's
> laconic courage makes us respect him: but many other
> characters can be brief too.[19]

The dialogue in the battle between Balin and his

brother is considerably condensed. In the French text

when Balin arrives at the island, a maiden warns,

> "Sire chevaliers, chou est tout de la mesqueance qhe
> vous avés vostre escu cangié: se vous l'eussiés a
> vostre col, vous n'i morussiés hui, ains vou reconneust
> vostre amis et vous lui. Mais ceste mesqueance vous
> envoie Dieus pour le fait que vous fesistes chiés le
> roi Pellehan en lieu de venganche, si n'est mie la
> venganche si grans comme li fais le requesist. Che
> vous mande Merlins par moi." (II, 47)

> "Sir knight, it is all from bad luck that you have
> exchanged your shield. If you had it around your
> neck, you would not die today. Thus your friend
> and you would recognise each other. But God sends
> you this misfortune because of the fact that you

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[18] Loomis, p. 183.

[19] Field, Romance and Chronicle, p. 135.

struck king Pellam out of vengeance and there is not
vengeance so great as what you have done. Merlin sent
me to tell you this."

Laura Hibbard Loomis cites from Dr. Ella Vettermann who
states that this passage is an "instance of the better
motivation and sequence of the French text because it
definitely connects this episode with Merlin's prophecies
of doom that would follow Balin."[20] Vettermann condemns
Malory's version because he represents the maiden as
addressing Balin by his name, which she could not have
known, and because no reference is made to the Dolorous
Stroke, nor to the maiden as Merlin's messenger. Even
though the French maiden's warning may be more satisfactory
to some, as Loomis observes, it destroys all the suspense
in the situation and implies a "mental denseness on the
part of the hero who, after such a warning, proceeded to
fight unquestioningly with his unknown 'amis.'"[21] The
maiden in Malory (who proves that it is not only knights
who speak briefly and poignantly) further confuses Balin,

"O Knyght Balyn, why have ye lefte youre owne sheld?
Allas! ye have put yourself in grete daunger, for by
youre sheld ye shold have been knowen." (p. 89)

Malory reduces the battle scene in the same manner
that he reduced the battle with King Royns. He condenses
the battle to a few sentences and Balaan's speech at the
end is not the lengthy discourse found in the French source.

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[20] Loomis, p. 183.

[21] Ibid., p. 184.

As Vinaver states, in shortening the dialogue, Malory's "words and actions acquire greater weight and directness."[22]

In the final conversation between the two brothers, the dignified yet emotional tones prevail. The French text tells of the brothers' laments and their insistence on a common burial, embedded in polite exchanges and chivalrous compliments. Loomis notes that Malory keeps the sense of all this but "with a more dramatic sense of the swift passing moments."[23] Malory omits the compliments, the polite exchanges between the two brothers, again re-emphasizing the pathos which permeates the entire tale of "Balin."

> Then sayde Balyn le Saveage, "What knyght arte thow? For or now I found never no knyght that matched me."
>
> "My name is," said he, "Balaan broder unto the good knyght Balyn."
>
> "Alas," sayd Balyn, "that ever I shold see this day"; and therewith he felle backward in a swoune.
>
> Then Balyn yede on al four feet and handes, and put of the helme of his broder, and myght not knowe hym by the vysage, it was so ful hewen an bledde; but when he awoke he sayd, "O Balan, my broder! Thou hast slayne me and I the, wherfore all the wyde world shalle speke of us bothe."
>
> "Allas!" sayd Balan; "that ever I sawe this day that thorow myshap I myght not knowe yow! For I aspyed wel your two swerdys, but because ye had another shild I demed ye had ben another knyght."

22 Vinaver, note 90. 10-19.9.

23 Loomis, p. 185.

> "Allas!" sayd Balyn, "All that maade an unhappy
> knyght in the castel, for he caused me to leve myn
> owne shelde to our bothes destruction. And yf I
> myght lyve I wolde destroye that castel for ylle
> customes."
>
> "That were wel done," said Balan, "for I had never
> grace to departe fro hym syn that I cam hyder, for
> here it happed me to slee a knyght that kept this
> iland, and syn myght I never departe, and no more
> shold ye, broder, and ye myght have slayne me as ye
> have and escaped yourself with the lyf." (p. 90)

The brevity of the speeches makes the moments before death

appear more real than in the French text and rescues the

intensely dramatic scene buried under the extensively

superfluous dialogue of the French.

By omitting all unnecessary material Malory created

a dialogue with a blunt, laconic forcefulness unmatched in

medieval writing. His characters say at the right time

only what they need to say. After Merlin explains to

Balin and his brother their forthcoming encounter with

King Royn, Balin answers, "Dred you nat, for we woll do

what we maye" (p. 74). When King Pellam declares his

intention to kill our hero, Balin replies, "Well, do hit

yourselff" (p. 84). And after Balin smites the dolorous

stroke and Merlin rescues him, Malin states, "Sir, I

wold have my damesell." Merlin responds, "loo, where she

lyeth dede" (p. 85). But the briefest and most poignant

statement occurs after Balin hears the call of the hunt.

"That blast," said Balyn, "is blowen for me, for I am the

pryse and yet am I not dede" (p. 88).

Malory does not offer the reader a psychological analysis of his characters' emotions. In a world where actions speak louder than words, where men are more comfortable with swords than with speeches, Malory has created a dialogue which allows his heroes to speak with a vividness and with great forcefulness but in a knightly manner. Malory does not dwell on their individual emotions but rather lets their dialogue also reveal their normative-ness--as he does in his description of events and his narration of action.

CHAPTER VI

"BALIN" AND THE "HOOLE BOOKE"

By viewing the tale of Balin in the light of its
relationship to "The Tale of King Arthur" and to Le Morte
Darthur as a "hoole booke," we can best examine the results
of Malory's changes in the Balin story. This concluding
chapter is concerned with the Balin romance and its
relationship to its surrounding narrative and to the two
major themes in Le Morte Darthur, the Grail quest and the
fall of the Round Table.

Elizabebeth Pochoda states that the meaning of the
Balin story is found in its placement in the narrative
structure. The meaning of the story depends on the fact
that it comes before the establishment of the Round Table
and the unification of the realm. She observes that the
opening lines of the tale do not serve as summary as
Vinaver believes but as a re-emphasis for the reader that
Arthur had just come to the throne and that the Order of
Knighthood was not yet established. The closing lines that
deal with Merlin's return to Arthur's castle and the report
of Balin's death Pochoda believes to be Malory's admonition
of the dangers that inhere in any society. The "explicit,"
rather than closing off the story, serves to re-emphasize the

theme of fratricide, which is "underlined as a prefigura-
tion to later events."[1]

Scudder calls Balin a "pre-Round Table knight."
His story reveals the "deep disorder and moral confusion" of
the times. She argues,

> In no wise could the anarchistic condition of the realm
> be more vividly conveyed than through Balin's miserable
> story, as he gropes in a world of no established
> standards, where the finest purpose and truest instincts
> of untutored honor do but lead a man into even worse
> blunders and failures.[2]

However Balin does possess some of the basic qualities of
Arthurial knighthood as later stated in the code--his
granting of mercy is evidence of this. He is a passing
good man of his hands and of his deeds; he is of aristocratic
origin, courageous and loyal. But as several critics have
noted, his actions are rash. He is actually antisocial.
Balin possesses a strong sense of loyalty to Arthur but
not a sense of loyalty to the realm.[3] And his family
loyalty is stronger than his loyalty to Arthur. His first
blunder, the beheading of Lady Lylle reveals this. Edmund
Reiss notes that,

> To maintain his family honor as well as his own,
> Balin not only violates the honor of Arthur's

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[1] Elizabeth Pochoda, Arthurian Propaganda (Chapel
Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 63, 82.

[2] V. D. Scudder, Le Morte Darthur of Sir Thomas
Malory (London and New York: Haskell House, rpt. 1965),
p. 196.

[3] Pochoda, pp. 63-64.

court and attacks a person to whom Arthur is indebted but he also kills a lady.[4]

Throughout the tale, Balin's good deeds turn into disasters. And the deeds and disasters of Balin loom over the next book.

The book that immediately follows the Balin romance deals with the marriage of Arthur and Guinivere, the establishment of the Round Table, and the beginning of the quests. The newly made knights go out on their adventures and fail, primarily for lack of a restraining code. As illustrated in the Balin tale, and emphasized again in this subdivision of "The Tale of King Arthur," there is an "imperative need for a standard through which the confused instincts of nascent chivalry may be focused and preserved."[5] At the end of this book, the great oath of chivalry is conceived.

An important function of the Balin story, which I have previously mentioned, is its premonitory relationship to the reign of Arthur and the fall of the Round Table and the destruction of the realm. The theme of fratricide is introduced in a prophecy at the opening of the tale of Balin and pervades the story. Two knights traveling under Balin's protection are killed. Balin kills Garlon and maims Garlon's brother, the Grail king. Finally, Balin

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[4] Edmund Reiss, Sir Thomas Malory (New York: Twayne Publishing Co., 1966), p. 47.

[5] Scudder, p. 201.

and his brother kill each other. All of this looks

forward to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. His wars

with his son, and the fall of the Round Table. It is all

foreseen by Merlin, ". . . and Launcelot with hys swerde

shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste:

that shall be sir Gawayne" (p. 70). Edmund Reiss states

that Balin's story acts as a comment on Arthur's future:

> Just as Balin has sinned and paid for it, so it is
> implied, will Arthur. Also, just as Balin brought
> in a Wasteland that is ambiguous, so will Arthur's
> Order, that of the Round Table bring life back to the
> world.[6]

The most important mission of the Round Table, the

highest quest, was the search for the Grail. And the

Grail theme is interspersed throughout the Balin story.

A maiden traveling with Balin is seized and bled to save

the lady of a castle. Malory then goes on to tell that

in the Grail quest, Percival's sister will give her life

to save this lady. And after Balin smites King Pellam the

Dolorous Stroke, Malory summarizes what will happen as a

result of this stroke:

> And kynge Pellam lay so many yerys sore wounded,
> and myght never be hole tylle that Galaad the Hawte
> Prynce heled hym in the queste of the Sankgreall.
> For in that place was parte of the bloode of oure
> Lorde Jesu Cryste, which Joseph off Aramathy brought
> into thys londe. And there hymselff [lay] in that
> ryche bedde. And that was the spere whych Longeus
> smote oure Lorde with to the herte. And kynge Pellam

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[6] Reiss, p. 46.

was nyghe of Josephe hys kynne, and that was the moste
worshipfullist man on lyve in tho dayes, and grete
pité hit was of hys hurte, for thorow that stroke hit
turned to grete dole, tray and tene. (pp. 85-86)

In the final scenes, Merlin "lete make there a
bedde; that ther shold never man lye therin but he wente out
of hys wytte" (p. 91). Merlin gives Balin's sword a new
pommel which no man can grasp but "the beste knyghte of
the worlde and that shall be Sir Launcelot othir ellis
Galahad, hys sonne" (p. 91). He leaves the scabbard of
the sword on the mainland "so Galahad sholde find hit"
and causes Balin's sword to float down the river to
Camelot to be found years later by Galahad "as het
rehersed in the booke of the SANKGREALL" (p. 91).

But more important than these "prophesied" is the
relationship of Balin to Galahad. They share the same
sword. Balin is known as the "knight with the two swords"
and Galahad arrives at Arthur's court without a weapon.
Like Arthur, they are the only knights at a certain point
who can obtain the cherished sword. Balin is the precursor
of the Grail theme; "he is the exact converse of Galahad,
the long awaited bearer of the sacred mission who comes to
Arthur's court to break an evil spell."[7] This "chevaliers
mescheans" strikes the Dolorous Stroke which maims the Grail

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[7] Vinaver, Rise of Romance, p. 64. It should be noted
here that Vinaver does not apply these quotations to Malory's
version of the tale. Vinaver states emphatically that
Malory's Balin was not an antecedent to the story of Gala-
had and the Grail, but a self-contained romance concerned
only with Balin's own fate.

king and creates the Wasteland. Galahad is the only knight
that can cure the evils that Balin brings upon the country-
side. Balin brings bad luck wherever he goes; he serves

> to darken the scene which Galahad was to illumine
> by his mere presence. . . . None other than Balin
> could have performed this task more naturally; none,
> by the mere fact of being what he was, could have
> afflicted the kingdom of Logres with the evils which
> Galahad was to cure.[8]

Balin is the first of Malory's strong character
portraits.[9] Balin looks forward to Galahad's success and
Arthur's ultimate failure. And the tale of Balin makes a
strikingly deep impression on the reader primarily because
of Malory's changes in his source. Malory emphasizes the
pathos of Balin's situation and his tragic plight by stark
description, strong forceful dialogue, simple paratactic
narrative, and omission of material not directly related
to the Balin story. The absence of "entrelacement" in
the external narrative ordering does not isolate the Balin
tale as several critics have argued. Rather, the condensed
and very powerful narrative impresses an image on the
reader which stays with him throughout his reading of Le
Morte Darthur.

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[8] Vinaver, ibid., p. 65.

[9] Scudder, p. 196.

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