

LA TAVOLA RITONDA
AND THE MALORIAN TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

The anonymous fourteenth century Italian compilation known as the *Tavola Ritonda* is considered the masterpiece of Italian Arthurian composition. It is a work which strikingly foreshadows the *Le Morte D'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory in its attempt to recast and combine numerous Arthurian tales into a single volume which traces the story of the rise and fall of King Arthur, and the greatest of his knights, Sirs Lancelot and Tristan. The *Tavola* stands in the middle of two traditions, between tales such as those of Chrétien de Troyes that trace the adventures of a single knight errant and the massive compilations such as the encyclopedic *Vulgate Cycle*, which seemingly attempt to tell every tale told about Arthur and his realm. Fashioning his material like a true craftsman, the (presumed male) author of the Italian compilation selects for his material those tales which he deems best to tell the Arthurian story--the early exploits of Lancelot, the Grail quest, the trepidations of Tristan and Iseult, and Arthur's clash with Mordred. One hundred and fifty years before Malory, he fuses the disparate traditions of the French *Vulgate*, *Post-Vulgate*, and *Prose Tristan* with narratives from native tradition. He formed a work where the dividing lines between tales have become blurred, and where themes and characterization are carried over from tale to tale.

Most of the credit for such innovation has long been accorded to Sir Thomas Malory, although few have followed up on Edmund G. Gardner's suggestion in the 1940s that the *Tavola* was a major precursor to the *Morte Darthur*. In his *Arthurian*

Legend in Italian Literature Gardner stated that “The *Tavola Ritonda* represents an attempt--remotely anticipating that of Malory--to fuse several branches of Arthurian story into a consistent whole” (156).

The *Tavola*, composed around 1335, was written at a time when Arthurian composition was reaching a pinnacle in Italy and was at the same time on the decline in France. By the time the *Tavola* came into existence, three centuries of tradition concerning Tristan and King Arthur in Italian poetry and prose had been in place. As far back as 1193, Henricus of Settimello had made mention of Tristan in one of his poems (Gardner, *Arthurian Legend* 8). Following him, numerous others over the intervening centuries included brief but significant references to Arthurian figures. These included a reference to Morgan in one of the poems by Chiaro Davanzati and a lengthy description of Iseult’s beauty found in Brunetto Latini’s “Tresor” (Gardner, *Arthurian Legend* 39).

A second tradition in prose also developed in Italy, as it had in the French Arthurian tradition. To this tradition the *Tavola* belongs, and like its primary French source, the *Tristan en Prose*, it still preserves much of the poetic story, while lacking the poetic style and refinement of the earlier works such as those of Chrétien de Troyes.

Although some consider the *Tavola* the masterpiece of Italian Arthurian composition, much study of it yet remains. Several major histories of Italian literature do not even mention the *Tavola*, while others make only the briefest of mentions of it. It was not until 1864-65, when F.L. Polidori published his edition of the *Tavola* under the full title *La Tavola Ritonda o l'istoria di Tristano*, that the *Tavola* received due scholarly attention (Shaver, *Tristan* ix).

A century later Daniela Branca made the first modern extensive study of the

work, which for the most part validates Polidori's efforts, though offering challenges based upon new manuscript findings (Shaver, *Tristan* ix), while in *The Conflict of Love and Honor*, Joan Ferrante, emphasizes the social themes, such as love and religion, present in the work (Shaver, *Tristan* x). Further studies by Donald Hoffman, "Dionysos in Cornwall" and "The Guarone Variations," focus on the personal aspects of love and the contrast between ideal love and love of a more corruptible nature (Shaver, *Tristan*, x).

In the introduction to her English translation of the *Tavola* and in an article entitled "The Italian Round Table and the Arthurian Tradition," Anne Shaver discusses the *Tavola* in light of its sources and also in comparison to Malory's achievement.

Shaver writes:

It . . . anticipates a later trend: the fifteenth century's preference for one-volume histories, less encyclopedic than the earlier romances, but still cyclical, including the whole rise and fall of the kingdom of Logres. Thus it is good to compare the *Tavola* in two directions, back toward the French *Tristan en Prose*, which antedates it by more than a hundred years, and forward to Malory, who wrote the *Morte Darthur* in the mid-1400s. (*Tristan* ix)

Christopher Kleinheiz in his "Tristan in Italy: The Death or Rebirth of a Legend," calls the *Tavola* "the most original of the Italian redactions" of the French Tristan tales, and focuses on the development of the work. Shaver summarizes Kleinheiz's observations; who

sees its creation as a fourfold process: literal translation

from a definite source, free translation from a definite source, compilation from several sources in a manner literal or free, and interpolation of episodes from no known sources, episodes which might be free inventions. (*Tristan* x)

Gardner, quoted above, devotes some thirty pages to the *Tavola* in his *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature*, which includes a summary of the story and section by section analysis. Gardner also discusses the *Tavola*'s use of characterization, noting that:

The Italian writer takes a special delight in the humours of Dinadan, 'il savio disamorato'; the scene of the debate between him and his companions on the subject of love is excellent, and there is a comic episode, in which he is dismayed by a damsel who pretends to be enamoured of him, which is in the spirit of Boccaccio and evidently a fresh invention. (*Arthurian Legend* 166)

Malorian scholarship, on the other hand, is extensive, dating back to John Leland, who in 1544 defended the veracity of the Arthurian legend by citing the work of "Thomas Melorius" (Parins 52). In 1864-65, F.J. Furnivall became the first to suggest that Malory borrowed from the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. In his edition of the Stanzaic poem he asks, "Did he [the Stanzaic author] and Syr Thomas Maleore translate from one original . . . or had Syr Thomas seen the present poem?" (Parins 165). He follows this question by comparing a selection from both poems, and then notes that there are "many other coincidences of expression" (Parins 165).

The next in line among the great Malorian scholars is that of Ernest Rhys, who offered much of the great early scholarship on Malory, tracing the development of English prose through Malory and beyond. In his *Malory's History of King Arthur and the Quest of the Holy Grail* (1886) Rhys states, "In the history of prose it is most valuable indeed, as showing the attainment of a taking manner of tale-telling, which has greatly influenced later romancists, not to mention the poets who have been captivated by it" (Parins 226).

In 1889 the German scholar H. Oskar Sommer, produced his famous edition of Caxton. An admirer of Malory's genius at adopting his source material, he was responsible for presenting the first systematic study of the use of specific sources by Malory, while still offering the caution that:

All the MSS. mentioned here as the sources of 'Le Morte Darthur' can only be styled thus in so far as they contain the same versions as those Malory actually had before him when compiling his work; in case can we assert with certainty that this or that is the very MS., or even the faithful copy of it, which the compiler had before him.

(Parins 268)

Eugene Vinaver, the most noteworthy Malorian scholar, produced his three-volume edition of the Winchester manuscript in 1947. It has been the standard scholarly text of Malory's work since. Vinaver is best known for his conjecture that Malory created multiple romances and that it was the *Morte's* editor, William Caxton, who was most responsible for the idea that Malory wrote a single work. In his introduction to his

The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, Vinaver writes:

When these volumes fell into Caxton's hands he realized that, as a matter of practical expediency, he had to make them into a single 'book of King Arthur' . . . led by force of circumstance to attempt a 'book' in the modern sense, i.e. a homogeneous literary composition 'of sufficient length to make a volume. (xxxix)

More contemporary scholars, such as P.J.C. Field and Beverly Kennedy, have focused on the such matters as the knightly ethos in the Englishman's work, gender and grammatical evaluations, and many other points of evaluation. Kennedy, in the introduction to her *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (1985), remarks that, "One might call a study of this kind anthropological, in the sense that I view Malory's text as an expression of the different knightly codes and values of his society, and therefore in interpreting his text I am also of necessity interpreting his culture" (1). On the other hand, P.J.C. Field, in his *Romance and Chronicle* (1971), subtitled "A Study of Malory's Prose Style," says he in his introduction that his work will be "concerned primarily with the way in which Malory's [prose] style contributes to the meaning of the *Morte Darthur* as a whole, not with the way in which he expresses his personality" (Field, *Romance and Chronicle*, 3).

These are but some of the examples of study that has been carried out on both of these major texts. However, despite the fact that several prominent scholars clearly pointed out important similarities between the two texts, none as yet has taken on the task of making an extensive study of them in conjunction with one another. It is just that

that I am proposing to do here. The purpose of my efforts will be to illustrate a number of the important similarities between these two works, compiled and composed by two writers, distant from one another in time, place, and circumstance, and with *no* connection other than third or fourth-hand manuscripts of the French Arthurian tradition, as there is no evidence that Malory knew of the *Tavola*'s existence. Those who have read Arthurian compositions extensively, in particular Malory and the French prose compilations, will readily perceive the relationship between the two texts at first reading, but for those less familiar, an example-by-example analysis will make this claim clear.

The *Morte D'Arthur* and the *La Tavola Ritonda* can both be conceived as patchwork quilts of a sort, and their respective authors as the quilt-makers. It can readily be seen that a patchwork quilt is made up of assembled pieces of different material, which are fit together to form a much larger creation. In the same manner, the two authors assemble different tales to form their compilations. Just as the squares in the quilt are of different designs, so are the tales of different forms--poetical forms, prose forms, short narrative tales, or longer romances. Malory and the Italian author both combined the multifarious pieces of the Arthurian legend that were available to them and fused them to form a much larger tale.

To make this point clearer I will first describe how the general narrative followed by the two authors is very similar, as each moves from the early days of Arthur's reign, and thence through the early story of Tristan, through the quest for the Holy Grail, the fall of the Round Table, and lastly to the mysterious departure of Arthur, and the setting of the sun on the glories of his kingdom. Since both authors used much of the same material to construct their creations, it is natural that the two works will have a similar

look. Both authors made some use of native sources and tradition, though both relied most heavily upon the French prose tradition. Both authors also make numerous references to their supposed sources, citing them as authority and using them to connect the various parts of their compositions, especially at those places where two different sources are involved. Thus our two authors go about their task as would a patchwork quilt-maker, choosing from specific materials and weaving them together in specific ways. This process of creation will be specifically addressed in the first of my three chapters.

Malory and the *Tavola* author, however, were not just mere assemblers of stories but also fashioners of material they had at hand. Much as a quilt-maker would, they often repeat a pattern throughout their material to give it continuity throughout. They have accomplished this either by remodeling the individual stories that they were using, by embellishing those stories with particular details, or by fashioning new stories altogether. This sort of refashioning of the material is carried out by both authors for the explicit purpose of illustrating that the greatest knight-errant in the world was either Lancelot, in the case of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, or Tristan in the case of the *Tavola Ritonda*. The second chapter demonstrates how Malory chose tales that most exalted Lancelot's knightly prowess, while the *Tavola* author primarily chose tales wherein Tristan was the favorite. The examples demonstrate that each author changed the presentation of the characters throughout their work and made every attempt to raise them to a position of eminence--an effort that required overt manipulation of material and obvious intent upon the part of the authors.

The final chapter of my thesis will be devoted to yet another major point of

comparison--specifically the striking similarity in the way that both authors have handled the stories of the deaths of the three main characters, Lancelot, Tristan, and Arthur.

These episodes are no less than the climactic moments of the two works, and the attention that each author pays them and the changes that he makes to them define clearly their artistic intentions. As will be seen, their approach to the deaths illustrates how they similarly went about choosing and fashioning these stories in order to tell dissimilar tales. As well, the divergences in what they write reveal the convergences in their intentions. This assertion will be made clear in chapter three.

Lastly, in my conclusion, I will review points of comparison and suggest additional ones that could potentially shed more light on the important connection that exists between the work of Sir Thomas Malory and the anonymous Italian author.

CHAPTER I

THE MATERIAL AND THE THREAD

In the introduction I suggested that one of the main points of correlation between the *Tavola Ritonda* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* is that they use many of the same sources for the major parts of their work. In the first portion of this chapter I will examine the overall narrative and sources of these two authors in order to demonstrate their similarities of source and story. Further, at points where their sources differ, the kinds of stories they tell are of the same narrative type--essentially tales of adventure. Another correlation is that both authors used source references copiously to tie together and embellish their stories. These references to a supposed source vary, but for the most part the audience is made to believe that each author is working primarily from a single book--Malory's "Fryensshe Book" and the *Tavola* author's "Book of Sir Gaddo."

As mentioned above both Malory and the anonymous author of the *Tavola* drew primarily upon French prose sources for their material. Along with these primary sources, both also used native material, which were for the most part verse narratives of short length in their respective native languages which focused on the adventures of a single knight, such as the Tale of Sir Lasancis used by the Italian author, or around an event such as Arthur's war versus the Romans, as told in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which Malory borrowed from extensively. These works, both prose and verse were available to Malory either through private collections or monastic libraries, which

frequently housed Arthurian romances in their collections.

One distinction should be made about the sources which the *Tavola* author had access to. Unlike Malory, who took his materials directly from the French prose sources, the Italian author used texts copied from the French and translated and adapted into Italian. The stories that both authors tell is essentially the same, differing only in minor, though sometimes important, details, and in places where either Malory or the *Tavola* author took it upon himself to enact a major change in the story. To give a better perspective it will be worthwhile to glance at the narrative structure of both works and to look at their component parts. From this it will be clearer as to how similar are the stories and the sources of these two works.

The story of Arthur and his knights begins for both authors at the court of Arthur's father, King Uther. Malory begins in *medias res* by abruptly informing the reader that Uther is having trouble with the Duke of Cornwall, while the *Tavola Ritonda* begins with a brief tournament at Uther's court. Malory then quickly switches to tell of the beginning of Arthur's reign, while the *Tavola* pauses to tell of Tristan's lineage and Lancelot's lineage, youthful exploits, and the budding of his love for the queen. All of this is told briefly, but both narratives already include a significant weaving together of several materials. Both authors have already introduced us to the court of King Arthur and have situated his court in respect to that of his father, as well as introducing several of the major figures of the Arthurian realm. The *Tavola* has already introduced Tristan and Lancelot, and though in Malory these figures don't come on the scene until late, the source for both were the Prose *Tristan* and the Vulgate Lancelot. The beginning of Arthur's reign has been drawn almost exclusively from French prose sources--major

sources for both authors until Malory writes about the Roman war, which comes five books into his tale of Arthur's early reign, and until the *Tavola* author incorporates a handful of episodes drawn from a verse tradition of the Tristan story well into his main section of the Tristan story.

After both authors have established Arthur and his court, and have introduced the main characters of the story (Malory brings in Lancelot as a main character immediately following the Roman war), Tristan and the story that revolves around him become the center of attention through the next significant portion of both compilations. This section is filled with the traditional exploits of the young Tristan, such as his slaying of the Morholt, his winning Iseult by slaying the dragon, his adventures among Arthur's knights, and most importantly his encounters with Iseult, now wife of King Mark of Cornwall. All of this section is taken from the French Prose *Tristan* with only minor changes by both authors from the sources and only minor divergences from each other. Since the Prose *Tristan* is a long and rambling piece, it was possible for each author to select which among the copious episodes those they wished to tell. Both Malory and the *Tavola* have inserted within this main narrative episodes not found in Prose *Tristan*. For instance at the beginning of the Tristan story the *Tavola* author tells the story of the marriage of Tristan's parents. Within this is story of Sir Ferragunze, a diminutive knight, who is the foster-father of Tristan's mother. Ferragunze makes four boasts to the court, passes a series of tests which prove these boasts to be true, and is then made to tell the reasons for each boast. No extant text exists in Italian, though it has a later counterpart in the fifteenth century English metrical romance *The Avowynge of Sir Bawdewyn* (*Arthurian Material* (Gardner, *Arthurian Literature* 168) Since it is certain that the Italian author

did not know English, it is reasonable to conclude that the story he used for Sir Ferragunze was a now-lost Italian narrative (perhaps itself based on a lost French source) which he included to embellish the tale that he had before him. Malory, likewise, embellishes his tale of Sir Tristan with episodes drawn from outside his direct source. The most notable of these in the Tristan section is the story of the “Great Tournament” which Malory has woven into the other Tristan material to heighten the praise of that great hero. This episode has been found in at least two other French manuscripts, but not directly connected with the Tristan material as Malory or his source presents it (*Works* 1591). The story of the “Great Tournament” is most likely an episode to which Malory had access, possibly in another French prose manuscript. This important weaving together of traditional sources and new materials is one of the hallmarks of both Malory and the *Tavola* author. Both act as quilt-makers by assembling a collection of older materials into a form that is structurally sound and worthy of artistic merit.

Following this very long Tristan section (which Malory truncates before its tragic conclusion, as will be discussed in chapter three) and slightly before the story of the Grail quest which is to follow, both authors include episodes which have no known sources. Here Malory includes his “Tale of Sir Urry,” most certainly his very own creation, which tells of the knight by that name who comes to the court of King Arthur seeking relief for his wounds. In contrast, the Italian author includes a series of adventures wherein Lancelot and Tristan come to odds with one another. These episodes will be dealt with in detail in chapter two, but they demonstrate the writers’ original editions and the selectivity guiding the materials which they included.

Following these intervening episodes is the great quest of the Holy Grail and after

that the story of the destruction of Arthur and his Round Table. In these sections both authors turn once again to the French prose tradition, following the Grail story in its outlines. The *Tavola*'s version of the *Queste* is, however, mixed with a series of Tristan adventures extraneous to the quest. The Italian version remodels the French so that the latter's spiritual search for a supremely holy vessel and symbolic quest for God's grace, is transformed into a series of more-or-less common knightly adventures. Shaver writes: "Most of those adventures are no different in kind from the many in more secular parts of the book, except now the knights make sure to baptize anyone who needs it" (*Tristan* xvii). Malory, like the Italian author, strips away much of the overtly religious doctrine and tone, and alters the tone in this section from religious didacticism to adventurous questing.

Once the Grail quest comes to a conclusion, the *Tavola* author returns to the story of Tristan to tell of how he was slain by King Mark and how he dies with Iseult in his arms. The scenes at his death bed, the great sorrow that takes place at Arthur's court, and the vengeance carried out by Arthur against King Mark are adapted from the Prose *Tristan*. Malory, on the other hand has none of this, and here we discover the significant divergences in their two narratives. Following the Grail quest Malory immediately begins narrating the destruction of the Round Table. He skips over the death of Tristan, having made mention of it before the beginning of the Grail quest itself

For both authors the outline of the story of the fall of the Round Table follows the Vulgate *Mort Artu*. However, both authors combine this account with material in their native languages--in Malory's case the English Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, and in the Italian author's legends of which there is no literary trace. By combining these two major

sources and by his introduction of details such as a Gawain's letter to Lancelot which will be discussed below in chapter two, Malory creates a new story of Arthur's downfall. Likewise the *Tavola* author fashions a new account by his triple fusion of French prose, Italian narrative, and his own additional details. His version of the fall of the Round Table includes an account of a war which pits Gawain and his kin against Lancelot and his followers and which provides motivation in addition to the traditional account of the discovery of Lancelot and the Queen together. The *Tavola* author also narrates that Arthur, after the battle with Mordred, is taken out to sea on a barge by Morgan le Fey. He tells us that the king dies thereafter and that in the end he is buried on an Island in the sea.

Both stories conclude by narrating how Lancelot returned to England and sought and achieved revenge upon Mordred. Both also tell of his coming to the hermitage, where he spends his final days doing holy penance after his death, he is taken to his castle, Joyous Garde, and is laid to rest. Thus both the Englishman and the Italian begin their stories in the days just prior to Arthur's birth and conclude with a portrait of the passing of the great knight-errant Lancelot who had returned from the exile which the king had imposed upon him in order to avenge the treachery that had destroyed his former lord.

From this general perspective, selection, order, and assemblage of various stories and themes by the Italian author and remarkably similar to those in Malory's assemblage. As for selection Malory had little use for elements such as magic, religious doctrine and personal sentiment, psychological enquiry and the love intrigue, all very typical of French romance. Therefore the Englishman selected few episodes which contained these

elements. By the same token the only overtly magical elements in the *Tavola* are the scenes where the Lady of the Lake brings Tristan, Lancelot, and the two queens together in a magical tent (*Tristan* 272), and the scene where Lasancis fights with enchanted weapons (*Tristan* 211). Both also excise doctrine and personal sentiment. For both, the narrative is almost wholly concerned with tales of adventure in which the wrongs of the oppressed are righted and in which fame and glory are achieved by the various knights-errant of Arthur's court--mainly Tristan and Lancelot.

Both Malory and the *Tavola* author tie their material together using the device of the "source reference." By "source reference" I refer to any explicit mention of a source, whether the citation is to a true source or a purely fictional one. Before looking at the specific ways in which each author used this device, I would like to pause briefly to discuss the nature of those references.

When considering Malory's use of source references it is necessary to begin with the "Freynshe book," cited some seventy times, such as when he writes, "And, as the Freynshe book, sayth, sir Launcelot mervayled, when he behylde Sir Gareth do such dedis" (*Works* 1112). The numerous citations of this supposed source, all similar to the example above, seem intended to give the impression that Malory was using a single French source, but as we have seen he is actually drawing from numerous French and insular sources. His medieval audience, however, would have no reason to doubt that he was using a great "Freynsshe book." The *Tavola* author also has a penchant for source references; his usage exceeds the Englishman's in that he offers much more information about the history of the source. At its first mention, the *Tavola* author writes:

I would tell them according to what I have found in the

good book which is the source of all the high tales of the Tavola. That book belonged to Sir Viero of Guascogna, a kinsman of Carlo Magno of Francia, and at present it is owned by Sir Garo, or rather Gaddo, de' Lenfranchi of Pisa. (33)

[Io diroe secondo che ho trovato nel buono libro, cioe nella fontana di tutte l'atre storie che della Tavola si leggono; lo quale libro si e di messer Viero di Guascogna, dello lignaggio di Carlo Magno di Francia; e li detto libro si e al presente di messer Garo, o vero Gaddo de'Lanfranchini di Pisa. (Polidori 460)]

Later he repeats much of the same information: "In the book brought by the premier of the king of Francia, which first belonged to Sir Piero, count of Savoia and is now owned by Sir Gaddo de' Lanfranchi of Pisa" (276) ["En lo libro tratto dello primecano dello re di Francia, lo quale fue da prima di messer Piero conte di Savoia, e al presente si e di messer Gaddo de' Lanfranchi da Pisa" (Polidori 431).] It is possible that the *Tavola* author intends his audience to believe that the "Good Book" is a an actual French Book and source for his work, but there is nothing specifically to indicate this.

In addition to the references to the "French Book" and the "Book of Sir Gaddo" both authors offer variations of their source references. For example both Malory and the *Tavola* author make reference to "the tale" or "the story." The Italian author says on numerous occasions "Now goes the tale"(321) ["Ora dice lo conto" (503)], or "in the story"(328) ["che nella storia" (515)], whereas Malory says, "And so I leve here of this

tale” (*Works* 1154), or “Now seyth the tale” (*Works* 1011). It is not clear whether the reader should infer that the story or tale is from the “French Book” or the “Book of Sir Gaddo.” It is certainly possible to read these generalized references as variations on the specific references, and to observe that they serve the same purposes of unification, ornamentation, and validation. In total, the Italian author refers to a source some 130 times--nearly as often as Malory, who in addition to the seventy-plus references to the “Freynsshe Book,” makes dozens of other references in the varying forms noted above. No other authors of the medieval period came even close to the extensive use of references that these two authors employed.

These forms of the source references used by Malory and the *Tavola* author may be found in many specific examples. The authors usually used the source reference for one of two purposes: as a linking device from tale to tale, as when Malory writes: “Here levith the tale of sir Launcelot and speketh of sir [Gawain]” (*Works* 935), or as a source of authority for the story they were telling, as when the *Tavola* author writes “according to the book which is the wellspring of all the others” (*Tristan* 40) [“secondo lo libro che e fondamento di tutti gli altri libri” (Polidori 57)].

Of the two ways of using the source reference, the authors make the most extensive use of the former--as a link from story to story. For example, at the conclusion of *The Tale of Arthur and Lucius* Malory writes:

Here endyth the tale of the noble kynge Arthure that was
Emperoure hymself thorow dygnyte of his hondys. And
here folowyth afftyr many noble talys of sir Launcelot de
Lake. Explycit the Noble Tale btwyxt Kynge Arthure and

Lucius the Emperour of Rome. (*Works* 247)

The *Tale of Lancelot* does indeed follow directly after this, and we can see that such a reference does provide a definite end to one tale while providing a bridge to one that follows. Reiss notes that “To understand the full purpose of these, one must realize that they do more than separate one tale from another. Because some of them actually contain mentions of what is to come, they may also be viewed as links joining the separate tales to each other” (27). It is a storyteller's *device* that Malory employs time and again, here serving the purpose of linking stories from divergent sources in order to provide continuity as the narrative shifts in place, time, and focus from Arthur's war to Lancelot's early exploits. Another example of the source reference being used to link episodes comes at the end of the *Book of Lancelot and Guinevere*, at the point where Agravain informs the King of Lancelot's and the Queen's treason. Malory writes: “And here on the othir syde folowyth The Moste Pyteous Tale of the Morte Arthure Saunz Gwerdon par le Shyvalere Sir Thomas Malleore, Knyght” (*Works* 1154). Here the source reference (“The Mosty Pyteous Tale”) marks the point where Malory shifts from the last great adventures of Lancelot, and the account of his love madness for the Queen to the tragic tale of the ruin of the Round Table. The matter previous to the reference comes from the Vulgate *Lancelot*, whereas the matter that follows is Malory's recasting of the death of Arthur. The source reference here bridges from one part of the Arthurian story to the next, as Malory does time and again throughout his work. In these cases the references unify the narrative and stitch together various pieces of material. In doing so Malory acts the role of patchwork quilt-maker, with the stories as the squares of material, and the source references as thread.

The *Tavola* author almost exactly matches Malory's usage of source references. At one point he writes: "and now the story stops telling about the high vendetta made for Tristano, and begins to tell of the destruction of the Tavola Ritonda" (334) ["E ora lascia lo conto di parlare dell' alta vendetta di messer Tristano, e conteremo della distruzione della tavola Ritonda" (524)]. In this example the Italian author is using the reference to both mark the point where one story ends--that of the vengeance made upon King Mark by Arthur and his court for the slaying of Tristan--and to begin another--the destruction of the Round Table. This use is very closely to Malory's: "Here endyth this tale, as the Freynshe booke seyth" (*Works* 180) and "Now woll we leve of thys mater, and speke we off Sir Trystram" (*Works* 833). Since the *Tavola* was composed over a century before Malory wrote and since there is absolutely no evidence that Malory knew the Italian story, it is remarkable that both authors would adopt such a similar style, especially in light of the numerous other similarities between the two works. Certainly the two authors are not alone in making source references of this type, but their similar and extensive usage sets them apart.

Another reference comes at the point where the *Tavola* story transitions from a curious exploit of Tristan and Lancelot to the beginning of the quest of the Grail. An example from the *Tavola* is: "Now the story stops telling about this, and we will tell how the gracious knight Sir Galasso came to the court of King Artu, and by his coming began the high quest of the Sangradale" (Shaver 273) ["E ora lascia lo conto di parlare di questa avventura, e conteremo si come lo gizioso cavaliere messer Galasso venne a corte dello re Artus, per la quale venuta, si comincio l'alta inchiesta dello santo Sangradale" (426)]. The linking here via the source reference--"the story"--is very important since it ties

together the narrative at a point where the episodes are highly divergent. Without the source reference the compilation would appear disjointed, jumping from an extremely rare story involving the Lady of the Lake's magic tent in which she has imprisoned Lancelot and Tristan to the opening lines of the Grail quest. Were it not for the linking device, Chapter 108 of the *Tavola* would begin by introducing characters and matter that has not appeared in the first three-fourths of the compilation. Like Malory, the *Tavola* author understood the importance of unity, and as will be seen next, both understood the need for at the least the appearance of veracity.

Many times throughout their compilations the Italian author and Malory used source references to claim veracity. These appeals to authority sometimes refer to actual sources, as when Malory writes the following during Lancelot's battle with Gawain in the siege of Benoic:

So sir Launcelot faught wyth sir Gawayne, and whan sir
 Launcelot felte hys myght evermore encrese, sir Launcelot
 wondred and drad hym sore to be shamed; for, as the
 Freynshe booke seyth, he wende, whan he felte sir
 Gawaynes double hys strengthe, that he had bene a fyende
 and none earthely man. (*Works* 1217)

The French *Mort Artu* does indeed indicate Gawain's increasing strength for the story there emphasizes Gawain's magical strength that increases in conjunction with the rising sun (Cable 181).

On other occasions the references are wholly fabricated. For example at the point where Malory declares that a certain Sir Pedivere, who had slain his wife, has been sent

to Rome to do penance for beheading her, Malory writes: “And as hit tellyth in the Frenshe book, whan he com unto Rome the Pope there bade hym go agayne unto quene Gwennyver” (*Works* 286). Because this reference to the Pope seems most likely to me to be Malory's own addition, he appeals to the “Frenshe book” for authority. On the surface there appears to be no pressing need to make this appeal to authority since his readers would not be aware that he has fabricated this matter. On the other hand, by bringing the Pope into the narrative he stretches the bounds of his story and brings in the source reference to reassure his readers that he is following a credible authority. At a further point in his compilation Malory writes, “Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynte of hys dethe harde I never rede” (*Works* 1242). This further appeal to authority is a bit more explicit than the other references Malory uses in that he states offhand that his sources have been authorized and that other books extraneous to this should not be trusted. Many other examples from Malory could be cited, but the above illustrate Malory's use of source references for purposes of authority. Sometimes he appeals to an actual source; at other times the reference is to a non-existent source which Malory has cited at a point where he includes material of his own invention. In either case Malory's purpose and effect are the same--having the audience believe the stories truthful, and backed by authority.

The *Tavola* author also used of the source references to achieve this purpose and effect. Like Malory, he often felt compelled to establish the belief that the stories he was telling were reliable and that the claims made with his narrative were credible. For instance, at a point where he asserts that Tristan is the greatest knight-errant, the *Tavola* author writes “Therefore our book does set down the decision that Sir Tristano was the

best worldly knight and the boldest that nature ever formed” (320) [“Impero il nostro libro pone e da sentenza, che messer Tristano fu lo piu pro' cavaliere mondano e 'l piu ardito che mai natura formasse” (503)]. This assertion of Tristan above all others and the corresponding authority behind that claim are integral parts of the *Tavola's* composition. Though the *Tavola* in its entirety is about King Arthur's realm, the main focus is on Sir Tristan, and, because this is the case, the Italian author goes to great lengths to establish that Tristan is the preeminent knight, a matter discussed in my third chapter. Further, because the *Tavola* author makes this assertion, he is at pains to make this claim fit into the rest of his material. Since much of the matter he uses is taken from the Vulgate *Lancelot* the Italian author must contend with the fact that Lancelot in this source emerges as the chief of the knights of Arthur's household. In order to maintain throughout his own work that Tristan is preeminent, the *Tavola* author explicitly appeals to authority, a technique which is especially important in those episodes taken over from his sources whereof where Lancelot or Galahad (in the Grail section) are considered best.

Another example of the Italian author's use of the source reference comes at the point where the lovers Tristan and Isuelt die in each other's embrace. The lovers are said to die at the same moment, Tristan from the poisoned wound he had received and Isuelt from the grief she felt. When the Italian author arrives at this point, however, he seems to hesitate, for he writes: “According to our book, it is true that the queen died a little before Tristano, just a fraction of time, and Tristano died after her. Therefore we can truthfully say that Isotta died because she saw Tristano her lover die” (Shaver 322) [“E

vero e che, secondo che pone il nostro libro, la reina mori innanzi che Tristano uno attimo di poco d'ora, e messer Tristano mori appresso. E pero, con verita possiamo dire,

che Isotta mori perche vedeva morire Tristano suo drudo” (505)]. Why he does not simply tell the story as he found it is unclear, but for whatever reason he believed it was necessary to explain how the lovers died at the same time even though the story says that

Iseult died because of her grief over Tristan's death. The *Tavola* author's ingenious explanation, if it can be called that, is to claim that they died just a fraction of time apart from one another, which is to say at virtually the same time. To accomplish this he feels compelled to appeal to an authority, apparently because he is stating something that might be hard to believe, and for the fact that he is making a statement that is *not* found in his sources.

The above are but a handful of examples illustrate the ways that Malory and the *Tavola* make use of source references in their compilations. These examples provide an overview of what can be deemed the ‘material’ and the ‘thread’ that the two authors have used to form their compositions--compositions that have taken shape in a way described by Larry D. Benson, who says of Malory that:

The organization of the *Morte Darthur* is Malory's own design. Insofar as the *Morte Darthur* does resemble a medieval cathedral, Malory is its architect. He could have organized his cycle along the lines of the Vulgate version, or those of the *Roman du Graal*, of the cyclic *Tristan*, or even those implied in the *Perlesvaus*. Instead he chose to create a new book of King Arthur. . . Malory's *Morte Darthur* is unique, a new combination of old and newly created materials such as can be found in no previous

cycle. (Benson 66)

Benson's words, which could just have well been speaking of the anonymous author of the *Tavola*, sum up well what has thus far been presented. Both authors have been shown (at least in outline to this point) to have combined their own creative and editorial abilities with the stories and legends circulating in their respective regions. Both authors have created a new Arthuriad. Each has done so by carefully selecting from their available material those tales and episodes which best represented the story that they wanted to tell. Each has also used their skills to link these various materials together in way that provides unity of theme and focus from tale-to-tale as well as unity and focus throughout.

CHAPTER II

ASSEMBLY AND TRANSFORMATION

After examining the materials that Malory and the *Tavola* author used and after examining the use of source references to piece that material together, I will examine in this chapter how they adapted and added to that material by focusing on the presentations of Lancelot and Tristan as the chief knights-errant in the *Morte Darthur* and in the *La Tavola Ritonda* respectively. To achieve these portraits both authors used one or more of several strategies: focusing, coloring, and embroidering. These strategies for shaping stories may appear to overlap, and at times they are used in conjunction with one another, but examination of the texts permits each to be distinguished from the other. By “focusing” I mean Malory’s or the *Tavola* author’s selection of stories among sources to illustrate what is good or best, bad or worst about a character, or to demonstrate a character’s excellence or failure in prowess or love. By “coloring” I mean the editorial strategy by which the English and Italian authors alter the stories taken from their sources—changes which make the characters they are writing about either better or worse in prowess, love, holiness, than they were in their sources. The third strategy I have termed “embroidering.” Embroidering is embellishing. Malory and the *Tavola* author, like a quilt-maker, add personal touches to the creation after having assembled the separate pieces. These additions are usually either short quotations or passages added on to a story or whole episodes created by the author. These additions are more obvious

when considering Malory, whose sources are familiar, than the *Tavola's* author, since the latter's sources are not so readily identifiable. However, educated conjecture can be made, and I have selected stories that seem to reflect changes made by the *Tavola* author to his sources.

The first editorial strategy I wish to analyze is focusing, which as indicated above, concerns choosing which stories to tell. Focusing involves choosing tales or certain parts of tales from existing sources, in order to shine a particularly good or bad light on a character.

The prime example of focusing, or choosing, as used by Malory comes in the part of his compilation which he has called *The Book of Sir Lancelot* (Book Six in Caxton's edition), where Lancelot emerges as the central character of the *Morte Darthur*. In this narrative, which is solely dedicated to exemplifying Lancelot's character and knightly deeds, Lancelot is shown to resist the sexual temptation of the four queens who imprison him, thereby proving his commitment to the queen. Moreover, he wins a tournament for King Bagdemagus, defeats the mighty Sir Turquine who had imprisoned dozens of knights errant, and slays two giants. After Lancelot has defeated the two giants, and the damsel escorting Lancelot learns his name, she exclaims,

We demed, there myght never knyght have the bettir of thes
two jyauntis; for many fayre knyghtes have assayed, and
here have ended. And many tymes have we here wysshed
aftir you, and thes two gyauntes dredde never knyght but
you. (*Works* 272)

After this episode Lancelot saves Sir Kay from three knights, defeats four knights of the

Round Table, including Sir Gawain. At the end of the book, Malory declares, "And so at that tyme sir Launcelot had the grettyste name of any knyght of the worlde, and moste he was honoured of hyghe and lowe" (*Works* 287). In commenting upon this section of Malory's composition August J. App states that "Lancelot, in Malory's first book about him . . . appears, above all, as the perfect lover of Guinevere, and secondly, as the invincible and generous champion of the weak and the oppressed" (58). In Malory's account Lancelot is the pre-eminent knight from the moment he comes onto the scene. Just as he begins his story of Arthur *in medias res*, so he begins with Lancelot at the height of his prowess--a prowess demonstrated at great length in this portion of Malory's work solely devoted to him.

Similar editorial selection regarding Tristan can be seen throughout the *Tavola*, a circumstance which is not surprising since Tristan is the indisputable hero of the *Tavola Ritonda*. Two episodes in particular exemplify this fact: the Story of Lasancis and the story of Carados of the Torre Vittoriosa.

The story of Sir Lasancis describes the activities of a knight sent from the island of Vallone to destroy the fellowship of the Round Table and Arthur's court. He has been provided with enchanted armor and a magical lance whose slightest touch immediately overthrows every adversary. This he uses to defeat Arthur, Lancelot, and the rest of the Round Table whom he imprisons in the hall of the palace. After a search, Guinevere finds Tristan, who arranges to have Lasancis fight without his lance. Forced to surrender and confess, the latter is imprisoned for the rest of his life (*Tristan* 216). This tale's inclusion suggests that Tristan is the only one who could save the day and that Lancelot, here just another defeated knight, owes his life to Tristan.

The episode of Carados and the Torre Vittoriosa is a story, almost certainly adapted, from the Vulgate *Lancelot*. In this story Tristan defeats Carados, a mighty knight of the Tavola Vecchia, and redeems the losses of his Round Table companions, who have had to leave their shields with their names inscribed upon them, hanging upon the walls of the 'Torre Vittoriosa' (*Tristan* 207). In contrast, Lancelot is said to be defeated by Carados on two occasions. Significant only Lancelot's name is specifically mentioned as among the defeated (*Tristan* 209). At another point the Italian author tells us of Lancelot's shame and his failure against Carados:

Lancilotto had returned to the court, all unhappy because he had been beaten that day by a bold knight. He had even left his shield hanging on the wall of the tower that belonged to the knight who had beaten him with his lance alone, and because of this, Lancilotto felt himself greatly disgraced. (200)

[Lancialotto so era tornato a corte assai addolorato, impero che quello giorno egli era stato abbattuto da uno prode cavaliere, e aveva lasciato suo scudo appiccato alla parete della torre del cavaliere che abbattuto l' avea solamente con sua lancia; e di cio Lancialotto avea grande disgendo.

(Polidori 311)]

A third example of focusing from the *Tavola* occurs in chapter eighty-nine of the Italian text. In this story Tristan, escorting Iseult in Logres, comes upon Lancelot disguised as a monk. Lancelot, unnamed and unrecognized, delights upon seeing Isotta

for the first time and thinks he has never seen such a lovely creature. He tells the disguised Tristan that it is not fit for a monk to escort such a woman and then threatens to take her from him. A fight ensues, during which Tristano shows great courtesy by allowing a squire to retrieve the sword knocked out of Lancelot's hand. Fortunately for Lancelot the combat ends with a recognition, for he was clearly getting the worst of the combat (*Tristan* 220). This scene is very interesting for it reveals much about the *Tavola* author's editorial strategies. Once again the audience witnesses a scene in which Tristan's nobility and prowess are contrasted with Lancelot's unseemly behavior and inferior knightly ability. Lancelot, acting the role of rogue and driven by lust, discourteously desires to take away Isuelt. She is defended by Tristan, who nobly restores Lancelot's sword when it has been knocked out of his hand in combat. Typically this loss of one's weapon would mean defeat or even death, but Tristan goes beyond the call of knightly virtue in allowing Lancelot to fight on. Even given a second chance Lancelot is no match for Tristan. According to Shaver, these and similar episodes make the Italian Tristan "more heroic than the French Tristan" both by the emphasis upon his greatness and by "the degrading of those he associates with" (*Tristan* xvii). Certainly glorifying Tristano is the main peculiarity of the *Tavola*. The author uses the strategy of focusing to achieve this glorification, just as Malory had used focusing for the glorification of Lancelot by choosing stories in which the knight was seen to excel other comrades who often pale in comparison. Focusing, however, was only one of the authors' strategies.

Coloring involves altering stories which the two authors have taken from their sources. This strategy contrasts with focusing, which is strictly a matter of choosing

which stories to tell. Coloring often involves developing some characters as more sinister or less noble in character, while developing others with greater virtue or prowess. This is usually accomplished not so much by additions to the stories, as by changing the roles, plot lines, or sometimes the emphasis of the stories in the author's sources.

In Malory coloring changes the contents of many stories for the purpose of making Lancelot exemplary, or otherwise disparaging other characters, most notably Sir Gawain. From among these stories two prime examples stand out: that of Elaine of Astolat and of Sir Gareth. The former is well known both from Malory and perhaps even more so as told by Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King*. Like many other stories in Malory, it has its genesis in the Vulgate Cycle, in particular the *Mort Artu*. In all versions the story is essentially the same. The lovely Elaine, daughter of Astolat falls in love with Lancelot who visits their manor on the way to the tournament at Winchester. In faithfulness to the queen Lancelot refuses her love, which causes the maiden to die of grief. Following her instructions, the family places her dead body on a barge which flows down the river by the castle of Camelot. Accompanying her body is a letter which explains the meaning of the barge and the body. In Malory's work, the letter, addressed to Lancelot, reads as follows:

Moste noble knyght, my lorde sir Launcelot, now hath
 dethe made us two at debate for youre love. And I was
 youre lover, that men called the Fayre Maydyn of Astolate.
 Therefore unto all ladyes I make my mone, yet for my
 soule ye pray and bury me at the leste, and offir ye my
 masse-penny . . . And pray for my soule, sir Launcelot, as

thou arte pereles. (*Works* 1096).

This letter is quite in contrast to the one that accompanies Elaine in the French version.

In the *Mort Artu*, the letter reads in part:

And if you ask for whose love I have suffered the pain of death, I answer that I died for the most valiant and yet the vilest man in the world: Lancelot of the Lake. He is the vilest man I know, for all my entreaties and laments and tears did not suffice to make him take pity on me. (Lacy 114)

The French version is certainly harsh in its condemnation of Lancelot, even if unjustly so.

In Malory's account Lancelot is "peerless," in sharp contrast to being deemed by Elaine in the *Mort Artu* as "the vilest man I know." These changes to the source text constitute coloring, whereby the character of Lancelot is in a sense changed from black to white, from "vile" to "peerless" for it seems that Malory could not let stand such a negative appraisal of his favorite knight.

A second example of coloring in Malory can be seen in the story of Sir Gareth, which occupies the whole of Caxton's Book VII. This story, whose source has not been identified, is almost certainly derived from a lost Anglo-Norman story of the "Fair Unknown." These tales involve the arrival of an unknown knight at Arthur's court who sets out and then returns after he has won a name for himself and discovered his ancestry. Because of the parallels between these tales, it is possible to identify the elements of the original story and Malory's alterations. The changes that the English author makes are in this case coloring and not embroidering since he developed a story from his sources,

altering it for the purpose of exalting Lancelot and degrading Gawain.

Like the other unknown knights who come to Arthur's court, Gareth, brother of Gawain, arrives and then soon departs on adventures, but not before being knighted by Sir Lancelot, to whom he reveals his identity. The importance of the knighting by Lancelot is twofold, since Gareth shuns his own brother in refusing him the honor that would seem to belong to him, suggesting that Lancelot, not Gawain, is the paragon of knighthood. Lancelot, not Gawain, is cited for his nobility in giving the young knight clothes and gold, an honor traditionally accorded to King Arthur in the related stories. Later, after Gareth has completed his adventures, Malory informs his audience that Gareth "wolde ever be in sir Launcelottis company" (*Works* 360). He then explains why Gareth has chosen Lancelot's company over his brother's:

For evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed Sir Gawaynes
 condicions, he wythdrewe hymself fro his brother sir
 Gawaynes felyship, for he was evir vengeable, and where
 he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated
 Sir Gareth. (*Works* 360)

This is an extraordinary change of events, since Gawain is the traditional boon-companion of Gareth, especially since Gawain is Gareth's brother. This juxtaposition emphasizes that Lancelot garners the narrator's constant praise, while Gawain is labeled a murderer. Malory's alterations to the traditional story show that in order for Lancelot to fully displace Gawain--the preeminent knight in English tradition--the former's reputation had to be exalted and the latter's tarnished. Malory's degradation of Gawain had already begun in the Prose *Tristan* and in the Post-Vulgate tradition. He therefore

carries further what the author of his source material had already set in motion, as Vinaver points out when he writes, “Malory followed the French tradition in picturing Gawain as a traitor, betraying the tradition of the marvelous, mysterious knight-errant” (Hebert 32). Thus, through coloring Malory has taken an adventure story about Gawain’s brother and turned it into an exaltation of Lancelot and a condemnation of Gawain.

The *Tavola* author employs this kind of editorial change throughout his work. The Italian author alters numerous stories, which have their ultimate source in the French much as Malory had. As with the Englishman, these changes range from alterations in short passages to a complete transformation of events.

An example of the latter is an episode which the *Tavola* author adapts from the Vulgate *Mort Artu*. In this episode, famous from the French account, Lancelot has been discovered acting adulterously in the queen's chamber. In the French the encounter leads to the feud between Lancelot and the king and the final destruction of the Round Table. In the Italian the tale has been moved to the first half of the Arthurian story in order to contrast Lancelot’s treachery to the nobility of Tristan, already dead when this episode takes place in the *Mort Artu* and in Malory. Here, the lovers are discovered, after which a battle takes place. Lancelot and his company take a number of prisoners whom Lancelot threatens to hang from the gallows that he has built upon the walls. Tristan, however, makes peace between Lancelot and Arthur. Further, the scene also depicts the first meeting between Arthur and Tristan in the *Tavola*. Arthur embraces and kisses him more than a hundred times, saying,

Welcome is the honor of all chivalry and the flower of all
 knightly errantry. Know, my dear Tristano, that for the

offense Lancilotto has done me, I would in no way pardon him. Nevertheless . . . for love of you I will pardon and make peace with Lancilotto. (*Tristan* 121)

[Bene istia e vegna l' onore di tutta cavalleria, e lo fiore di tutti gli erranti cavalieri, lo quale io o disiato tanto di vedere! E sappiate, caro mio Tristano, che per la offensa che Lancilotto fatta m'avea, in nuena maniera a lui arei perdonato, ma tuttavì . . . io, per lo vostro amore, perdono e rendo pace a Lancialotto. (187)]

This is an extraordinary transformation. Through coloring the *Tavola* author has created a juxtaposition whereby Lancelot is depicted as an adulterer while Tristan is depicted as a peacemaker. Because of Tristan's acknowledged nobility he is able to make peace between the wronged king and between the lover of his wife. What's more, because Tristan is the flower of knight-errantry, the king is willing to pardon Lancelot, who appears as anything but noble in his threat to hang the prisoners which he has captured--an act unseemly for even the basest of knights-errant. This episode offers perhaps the clearest depiction of Tristan's rise and Lancelot's fall in the Italian compilation, and it is without question the handiwork of the *Tavola* author.

Coloring has also been employed by the Italian author to alter encounters-at-arms between Tristan and Lancelot that had always ended in a draw in French and English accounts, into celebrations of Tristan's superiority. Shaver writes:

The Italian author uses all of the battles provided in the French prose version between the two "best knights in the

world” and adds others, rewriting the former and slanting the latter so there is no doubt that Tristano is far superior to the French knight. (*Tristan* xvi)

One of these encounters takes place at one of the stones that Merlin has erected throughout the kingdom of Logres. In the French account there is only one stone and one encounter, but this combat takes place at the sixth stone. Lancelot, at rest by the stone, is challenged by Tristan, who mistakes him for another knight. Here we are told that “it appeared that Tristano was getting the best of the battle” (314) [“e perche le pareva che Tristano avesse il meglio della battaglia allora” (492)]. Six pages later the *Tavola* author reinforces Tristan’s superiority over Lancelot in battle by remarking,

We do not find a single joust in which Lancilotto has the advantage over Tristano, but rather Tristano always has it over Lancilotto. Nor, whenever they fought with swords, was it Tristano who asked for respite, no matter how long the encounter might last. (*Tristan* 320)

[Ma nel nostro libro non si pone ne truova che mai messere Lancialotto a giostra avesse uno vantaggio sopra Tristano, che Tristano non avesse un altro sopra di lui; e mai non combatterono di spada, pure che la battaglia avesse durata, che da Tristano venisse lo riposo. (Polidori 502)]

In making this claim the *Tavola* author cites as authority his source book, so that there may be little or no doubt that Tristan was the superior knight. Thus through coloring the *Tavola* author has taken material from his source and altered it to heighten the praise of

Tristan. Thus both authors reshape their source material by deliberately altering episodes. Through coloring they change the fabric of the material that they use, taking the process of making new out of old one step beyond the process of selection--the editorial strategy of focusing.

The third editorial strategy essentially involves adding elements to certain stories or other references of the author's own creation for the purpose of highlighting something about a character or making an explicit statement about them that is lacking in the sources. In numerous places throughout his *Morte Darthur* Malory uses "embroidering" for the purpose of exalting Lancelot and casting disparagement on others. One such example occurs in the story of Arthur's return to England to reclaim the land from the usurping Mordred. In Malory's version Gawain, who has been mortally wounded, composes a letter to Lancelot in which he takes the blame upon himself for their quarrel and conflict. This letter is Malory's own addition to the story of Arthur's conflict with Mordred. In the letter Gawain writes rather strangely of Lancelot, "for of a more nobelar man myght I nat be slayne" (*Works* 1231). He also refers to Lancelot as the "flore of all noble knyghtes that I ever harde of or saw be my dayes" (*Works* 1231), and concludes his letter by saying, "And therefore I requyre the, moste famous knyght of the worlde, that thou wolte se my tumbre" (*Works* 1232). By putting these words in Gawain's mouth, Malory has uniquely established a method for declaring that Lancelot is the greatest of all knights, which Gawain had been in both the English and French verse traditions. As we shall see later in this chapter, the author of the *Tavola* turns the tables and puts similar praise of Tristan into the mouth of Lancelot when he proclaims that Tristan, and not he, is the greatest knight in the world. Later in the *Morte* Gawain is

again shown as praising Lancelot in a speech that is Malory's own. This bit of embroidering comes at the beginning of the *Morte's* tragic conclusion. Here Gawain attempts to put down the evil speech of Agravain and Mordred by reminding them of Lancelot's heroism:

I woll never be ayenste sir Launcelot for one dayes dede,
 that was whan he rescowed me frome kyng Carados of the
 Dolerous Towre and slew hym and saved my lyff. Also,
 brother, sir Aggravane and sir Mordred, in like wyse sir
 Launcelot rescowed you bothe and three score and two
 frome from Sir Tarquyne. And therefore, brothir,
 methynkis suche noble dedis and kyndnes shulde be
 remembirde. (*Works* 1162)

This speech is significant. By having Gawain recall episodes in which Lancelot has been triumphant, Malory is able to remind his readers of the numerous scenes that have come before, scenes he has chosen for the purpose of exalting him as the greatest of the knights-errant. In addition the list of Lancelot's deeds provides an opportunity to contrast the rescuer and the rescued. That Gawain can humbly recall these deeds of Lancelot to his brothers is due to Lancelot's rescuing them from peril. It is a poignant juxtaposition.

Malory's use of embroidering is especially clear in the story of "The Healing of Sir Urry." In this tale a knight whose wounds "sholde never be hole untyll the beste knyght of the worlde had searced hys woundis" is brought to Arthur's court (*Works* 1146). When none of the Round Table knights who are present succeeds, Arthur exclaims "Mercy Jesu! where is sir Launcelot du Lake, that he ys nat here at thys tyme?"

(*Works* 1150). When Lancelot arrives, his mere presence is enough to alleviate some of Urry's sufferings. Sir Urry says to him "Now, curteyse knyght, I requyre the, for Goddis sake, heale my woundis! For methynkis ever sytthyn ye came here my woundis grevyth me nat so mucche as they ded" (*Works* 1152). On bended knee Lancelot beseeches God:

"Now, Blyssed Fadir and Son and Holy Goste, I beseche
The of Thy mercy that my symple worshyp and honeste be
saved, and . . . Thou mayste yeff me power to hele thys
syke knyght by the grete vertu and grace of The . . . never
of myselff" (*Works* 1152).

Lancelot then searches Urry's wounds, which heal at his touch. No source has been traced for this episode, and it is nearly certain that it is Malory's own invention.

Apparently, the episode permits Malory to make a roll-call of several dozen knights and to offer saintly praise of Lancelot.

Another case of embroidering in Malory occurs in "The Tale of The Noble King Arthur and The Emperor Lucius," which was adapted by Malory from the English Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. In this story, which tells of Arthur's campaign in and conquest of France, that Lancelot makes his first appearance. Malory presents him as an already established knight and begins his epic-long glorification of the French knight, until then largely ignored in English Arthurian romance. Malory changes the story by taking the six mentions of Lancelot in four thousand lines of the English poem and adding to the point that Lancelot is praised above all others in the campaign. At the beginning of the story Lancelot is named second only to the king among the members of the Round Table, a fact which Mary Dichmann says "sets the pattern that [Malory] uses

throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, the pattern of Lancelot's supremacy" (75). Later, when a group of Arthur's knights are leading their Roman prisoners to Paris, Lancelot and others are singled out for praise. Ambushed and outnumbered, they nevertheless choose to fight and are victorious in the end. Lancelot says that had they fled, "the shame sholde ever have been oures" (*Works* 217). Reiss notes that: "In this subdivision, Lancelot especially is praised. In his prowess he rivals, even supersedes, Gawain, who is used primarily as a means of emphasizing Lancelot's worth" (Reiss 88). Of Lancelot it is said, "nother knyght that day myght stonde hym ony buffette. Therefore was he honoured dayes of his lyff" (*Works* 216). Such embroidering is very significant for Malory's purposes. Since he decided against telling the story of Lancelot's youth and early knightly deeds, Malory chooses instead to embroider upon his English source, and in doing so he finds a way to bring Lancelot into the narrative by presenting him as the pre-eminent knight in the Roman conflict. Malory uses the editorial strategy of embroidering with brilliance in this instance.

Embroidering is also present in many places throughout the *Tavola Ritonda*. Like Malory, the *Tavola* author makes numerous additions to his sources which either lavish greater praise on Tristan or unprecedented disparagement on Lancelot. Sometimes such embroidering upon the sources accomplishes both. In the story which occupies chapters 100 and 101 of the *Tavola*, which the Italian author has apparently created, Lancelot is shown to act as a scoundrel against the backdrop of Tristan's exemplary behavior. The story begins with Lancelot, who believes he has been attacked unjustly by Sir Tristan in an earlier episode. As it turns out, some other knight had encountered Lancelot—one who had borrowed Tristan's armor. Instead of seeking the truth, Lancelot determines

treacherously to attack and slay the innocent Tristan. Learning of his intent, the queen tries to persuade him not to carry it out, but he ignores her request:

He sent for Sir Briobris, Sir Bordo, and Sir Astore di Mare,
and planned with them how to take vengeance on Tristano
and put him to death. And Tristano took no precautions
against them, for he knew nothing about it, and he still
loved Lancilotto with a good heart and a loyal love, as he
had always loved him. (254)

[e manda per messer Briobris e per messer Bordo e per
messer Astore di mare, e con loro egli sie ordino di
prendere alta vendetta sopra di Tristano e di trarlo a fine .
E Tristano di cio nulla prendeva guardia, e di tali novelle
egli gia non sapeva niente; anzi amava Lancialotto di
buono cuore e di leale amore, come gia mai amato l 'aveva.
(395)]

When Lancelot and company attack Joyous Gard, where Tristan is supported by Dinadan, Palamede, and Brunor, a battle ensues that lasts until Tristan recognizes Lancelot, following which there is a general reconciliation. No source for this episode has been traced, and it is likely that the *Tavola* created it to portray Lancelot as acting treacherously and Tristan as being superior at arms, since he had gained the upper hand in the battle before it was called off. Moreover, Tristan readily pardons Lancelot, even though the *Tavola* author makes it clear in his narration that Lancelot's aim was to take Tristan's life. Irrationally seeking murder against one whom he has considered his best

friend, Lancelot even goes against the protests of the queen. By embroidering this scene onto others taken from his sources, the *Tavola* author presents Lancelot to be false to his beloved, to his boon-companion, and to the knightly code which declares that no knight should unjustly attack another, while in contrast Tristan is shown to be magnanimous toward the treacherous Lancelot by pardoning his wicked behavior.

In addition to emphasizing Tristan's greatness in action, the author of the *Tavola* pauses at one point to give extended embroidered praise to his favorite knight. Early in the narrative the *Tavola* author includes a page-long list praising Tristan's qualities. In addition to noting that Tristan was full of compassion and never had hated anyone, the *Tavola* author writes:

Thus it could be truly said that Tristano had prowess without meanness or deceit, love without envy, largesse and courtesy without avarice or villainy. Thus he showed that he was from first to last worthy of courtly love. (*Tristan* 78)

[Che messer Tristano ebbe in se prodezza sanza viltà e sanza inganno, amore sanza invidia, larghezza e cortesia sanza avarizia e sanza villania. E in ciò dimostra che fue dal principio per fino alla fine d' amore. (Polidori 119)]

But praise of Tristan in the *Tavola* occurs more frequently in the Grail and *morte* Tristan sections, at times seemingly from the mouth of the narrator himself.

At the beginning of the Grail story the *Tavola* author exalts Tristan even above the great and well-nigh perfect Galahad, an example of authorial manipulation unparalleled in Arthurian romance. When Galahad has drawn the sword from the stone

shortly after his arrival at Arthur's court, a damsel tells Lancelot he is no longer the best knight now that Galahad has arrived. This scene thus far follows its source, the Vulgate *Queste*, but it takes a deliberate turn when Lancelot responds by saying “Lady, be assured that I have not held myself the best knight in the world since I first fought with the knight of the silver band who was then wearing the insignia of two lions” (Shaver 276) [“Dama, siate certa che io non mi tenni mai lo miglior cavaliere del mondo dall 'ora in qua ch 'io combattei col cavaliere della banda dello argento, che allora portava due lioni” (430)]. This reference by Lancelot to an earlier combat with Tristan in Chapter 109, wherein the latter was victorious, allows the *Tavola* narrator to praise Tristan as the greatest of knights through the mouth of Lancelot. Thereafter the narrator makes the bold claim of Tristan's pre-eminence over even Galahad: “Know that the damsel spoke the truth, and Lancilotto had met his better, for by grace of God Galasso was the most gracious and best knight in the world except for Sir Tristano” (Shaver 276) [“E sappiate che la donzella diceva il vero, impero che Lancialotto avea suo migliore: che, per la grazia di Dio, Galasso era lo piu grazioso e lo miglior cavaliere del mondo salvo che messer Tristano” (130)].

In the *morte* Tristan section of the *Tavola*, the number of extended praises of Tristan multiply. In one instance the narrator of the *Tavola* seems to speak his opinion directly:

He had completed more jousts and battles between the ages
of fifteen and thirty-three than any other knight did in
eighty years [T]he decision of kings, counts, and
barons was that Tristano was certainly the best knight in

the world. If you searched among the best, the finest, the most approved, Tristano was first. (*Tristan* 320)

[E si trasse piu giostre e battaglie a fine dagli XV anni in fine agli XXXIII anni, che no fece niun altro cavaliere in fino in ottana anni . . . impero ch 'ell' era sentenza data per re, conti e baroni, che Tristano era pure il migliore cavaliere del mondo: e volendo trarre de' migliori l'uno, il pui tine e 'l piu approvato, Tristano fu desso. (501)]

In a second example from this section, knights and men of both good and darker character respond to the news of Tristan's death. The *Tavola* author writes of those who loved Tristan that "When they heard the news, every nobleman made his own lament, and bewailed the great loss, because every nobleman who had wanted to live according to justice was supported by Sir Tristano" (*Tristan* 324) ["Donde che, per tale novella, ciascuno barone faceva lamento di per se, e si piangeano il grande danno ch' e intervenuto: impero che ciascuno barone che voleva vivere co' ragione , si era da messer Tristano favoreggiato" (Polidori 506)]. Some, however, were pleased by the news, for while Tristan was alive,

Other knights, who might have wanted to take someone or some city or castle by force had kept such desires to themselves and did not act on them out of fear of Tristano, for he was the champion and defender of justice and truth. His equal has never been found in five things: that is, in prowess, courtesy, nobility, loyalty, and beauty. (*Tristan*

323)

[E quello barone che pensava di volere isforzare altrui o di
citta o di castella, quella volonta si tenea dentro dal cuore e
nolla dimostrava, per la grande lemenza ch' avieno di
Tristano, lo quale era campione e difenditore di ragione e
di verita, e pari gio no irovava in cinque cose: cioe, in
prodezza, in cortesia, in gentilezza e in leanza e in bellezza.

(Polidori 506)]

Here the *Tavola* author heaps praise on praise of Tristan. By his estimation he is more than the greatest knight in the world. He is an archetype of knightly and manly perfection, so bold and so feared that his might was enough to uphold justice, enough to keep the forces of evil at bay. He is the paragon of justice and virtue, its defender, and here assumes the status that had long been accorded to King Arthur himself. With such effusive praise the *Tavola* author has all gone beyond the bounds of the typical praise offered to romance heroes. In almost all instances heroes of romance are portrayed as the best at both war and love, and in the case of Arthur, the fountain of virtues. In the case of the Tristan in the *Tavola* this series encomium falls just short of hagiography, as is especially evident in one further example, where the *Tavola* author appears to refer to a supposedly popular belief:

Some readers believe, though it is not affirmed, that Papa
Dionido . . . gave indulgences to anyone who would pray to
God that Tristano would be granted a good life and a long
one, so that the land of Liones would not be left without a

ruler, because King Meliadus had no other sons. (*Tristan*
327)

[E credesi per alcuno lettore, mano' l' afferma, che papa
Dionido . . . concedette indulgenza a ciascuna persona che
pregava Iddio che a Tristano donasse buona e lunga vita,
accie che lo reame di Leonis no' rimanesse senza reda;
impero che dello re Meliadus no' rimase piu figlinoli.
(Polidori 514)]

This supposed Papal edict--most likely an invention of the *Tavola* author since no French equivalent is known--is striking evidence of the Italian author's desire to portray Tristano's great worth and to focus attention and admiration upon the great Sir Tristan.

In example after example then, both authors have gone to great lengths to provide a pedigree of achievement and praise for their chosen knights. The methods that each employed to achieve their ends are numerous, but they include "embroidering," "coloring," and "focusing." Through these both the English and the Italian authors have fashioned patterns that portray Lancelot and Tristan respectively as the noblest and finest of all the knights-errant. This reshaping of their sources has allowed each author to shape their own version of their Arthuriad. Though, whereas the main stories are for the most part the same, the roles of those who play the major parts in therein have been changed. Sometimes roles have been reversed while other times roles or characteristics have been exaggerated. Further still, there are times when the major players, such as Tristan, Arthur, and Lancelot, have been dropped from scenes altogether, or at least had their roles reduced in great proportion. It is in the final chapter of this study that these

specific points will be discussed and made clear.

CHAPTER III

FINISHED PATTERNS

Having examined some of the methods both authors used to weave a pattern throughout their narratives, it is possible now to examine the ways in which they changed particular stories. I have chosen to examine the stories of the final days and deaths of Arthur, Tristan, and Lancelot, for among all the stories common to both works, these are the most inclusive, the most powerful, and the most important. These stories illustrate how both authors treat their materials, and reveal that though their methods are similar, they have differing conceptions of what is most important in their material. Just as both authors had done when weaving Lancelot's and Tristan's characterization, they select material important to their focus, while excluding what conflicts with it. For, while the *Tavola* deals briefly with the deaths of Arthur and Lancelot, Malory hardly mentions Tristan's, but instead takes pains to expand and alter the account of Lancelot's death.

The principal source for Arthur's death and passing to Avalon is the *Mort Artu*. Malory's direct source was a later manuscript of this text, combined with the account of the king's passing in the English Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (also developed from the Vulgate *Mort Artu*). The direct source for the *Tavola* was likely an Italian translation or adaptation of the French Prose *Tristan*. To these principal sources both authors added and subtracted much to create their unique accounts of Arthur's final moments. In the role of quilt-maker, both writers are more fashioners than assemblers.

Despite the fact that the writers' sources do *not* state incontrovertibly that Arthur died, both authors make a point of indicating that he had and distance their accounts from the legend of and belief in Arthur's continued existence. The *Tavola* merely refers to the legend of the ship's coming for the king -- a ship that had taken him to his place of burial on an island of the sea, while Malory claims mysteriously that Arthur "chaunged hys lyff." According to the *Tavola* author,

As it happened, people believed that Fata Morgana came by magic in that ship and took him to an island in the sea. There he died of his wounds, and there the fairy buried him, so they say. (*Tristan* 345)

[E tale conveniente, si crede che la fata Morgana venisse per arte in quella navicella, e portollo via in una isoletta di mare; e quiivi mori di sue ferite, e la fata il sopelli in quella isoletta. (Polidori 542)]

Referring to the same Malory writes,

Yet som men say in many p[art]ys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wyne the Holy Crosse. Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so, but rather I wolde sey: here in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff. (*Works* 1242)

Much debate surrounds what Malory meant when he tells us that Arthur had "chaunged hys lyff." Stephen Lappert offers that Malory's ambiguity was intentional--an

equivocation used to avoid angering an audience which believed in the myth (366), while Mauriel Whitaker believes that Malory recalled the idea of a mortal transferred to the Celtic other-world (29). Whatever his reasons, Malory, without doubt, distances his account from the legends that Arthur is alive and shall return.

It is a curious fact that both authors chose to challenge the popular tradition of Arthur's survival, which had persisted in England and on the Continent from at least the early twelfth century, for that is date of the first recorded account of the so-called "Breton Hope" (Fletcher, *Arthurian Material* 101). Malory is but one of many writers who offer a version of the story of Arthur's survival, one repeated in dozens of documents composed in English or the more scholarly Latin. Speaking of Arthur's burial, William of Malmesbury observes that the "tomb of Arthur is nowhere beheld, whence the ancient ditties fable that he is yet to come" (Fletcher, *Arthurian Material* 104). Robert of Gloucester specifies the belief in Arthur's survival is particularly Briton and Cornish and supports his own denial of it with an eyewitness account of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury Abbey (Fletcher, *Arthurian Material* 193). William of Newburgh in the late twelfth century declares that he is dead and that it is "the stupid Britons" who expect his return (Fletcher, *Arthurian Material* 101). Whatever the case, this last possibly reflects Malory's doubt.

The literature of Italy in the days of the *Tavola* author is also filled with references to the Breton hope, and like the English references they occur in both positive and negative varieties. One example is a Tuscan poem from the thirteenth century titled "Detto del Gatto Lupesco," which tells of a wandering minstrel who happens upon two English knights looking for King Arthur, "whom we have lost and know not what has

befallen” (Gardner, *Arthurian Legend* 15). The two had come from Mongibello (Mt. Aetna), where in Italian popular legend Arthur lives on with his retinue. At the turn of the thirteenth century, Boncompagno da Signa refers to a letter from a lecturer to a student who has been truant, which tells him that he is not likely to graduate before Arthur returns to Britain (*Arthurian Legend* 10). Henricus of Settimello in his *Elegia* says “That old Arthur shall come to the Britons before a false friend brings aid in adversity” (*Arthurian Legend* 8). In his *Gesta Florentinorum*, the Florentine chronicler Sanzanome speaks of the Sienese looking to triumph over the Florentines “like the Britons who are still said to expect King Arthur” (*Arthurian Legend* 9).

To this point both work’s accounts are nearly identical, except that the *Tavola* is highly condensed. Still there are earlier additions and omissions that illustrate the writers’ craftsmanship. For instance Malory tells us that the ladies in the barge “had black hoodis” (*Works* 1240) and that, when the ladies row away, the king exclaims to Bedivere ““Comforte thyself . . . and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste to truste in”” (*Works* 1240). Lappert notes that the hoods add a sense of doom, supported by Arthur’s words to Bedivere: “The additions have a strongly negative import: Arthur both states that he can no longer be relied upon and intimates that he and Bedivere will not meet again” (Lappert 364). In addition, Malory adds a touching personal response by Morgan, who is one of the four ladies who is aboard the ship that carries Arthur away from the shore. Upon seeing the wounded king, Morgan declares ““A, my dere brothir!”” (*Works* 1240). When Malory tells us that Bedivere comes to a chapel and a hermitage where a hermit says ““a numbir of ladyes brought here a dede corse and prayde me to entyre hym”” (*Works* 1241), Bedivere exclaims that the body must be that of the king. For this

Malory has chosen to follow the account in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. Once more, Malory adds a to the episode when he writes “Thus of Arthur I fynd no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynte of hys dethe harde I never rede” (*Works* 1242). Once again Malory relies upon a spurious source reference to back up his version of the story. What is curious in this case is the phrase “bokis that bene auctorysed.” Here Malory attempts to support the claim that he makes in the second part of the sentence, that he knows “nothir more” of the “sertaynte of hys [Arthur’s] death.” For though it may be true that he has no more information from books of authority, the sentence is not an attempt at veracity, but at embellishment allowing Malory to maintain ambiguity in the story of Arthur’s passing.

In contrast, the author of the *Tavola* condensed material in this part of the narrative, though that does not mean he spent any less time or forethought crafting it. His omissions and condensation may reflect craftsman’s art. Like Malory, he fuses historic and romance elements and creates a unique ending for his patchwork creation. Of Arthur's final moments the *Tavola* author says that, “King Artu was put to flight, badly wounded, accompanied only by Sir Ivano and a squire” (344) [“e lo re Artu si misse in fugga, forte inaverato, e in compagnia di messer Ivano e d'uno scudiere” (542)] He tells us that the three flee to the edge of the sea where Sir Ivano dies of his wounds for which King Artu makes “the greatest lament in the world.” (344) [“faceva lo maggiore pianto del mondo” (542)]

The Italian author continues to narrate the familiar account in the *Mort Artu*, telling us how Artu commands his squire to throw his sword into the sea (in the *Mort* it is a lake) and has to repeat his order twice before he does so. The Italian author continues

with the familiar romance conclusion:

After a little, over the water there came a small ship covered in white samite. When the king saw it, he said to his squire, "now my end has come." The ship approached the king, and some arms reached out of it, taking the king and visibly putting him into the ship, which carried him away over the sea. (345)

[E stando per un poco, ed ecco per lo mare venire una navicella, tutta coperta di bianco: e quando lo re la vidde, si disse allo scudiere:--Ora e venuta mia fine--. E la nave s'accosto allo re, e alqaunte braccia uscirono della nave che presono lo re Artu, e visisblemente il misono nella nave, e portarollo via per mare. (542)]

There follows the rather matter-of-fact and only quasi-mysterious account of Arthur's death which gives the *Tavola* author the distinction of being the only romance author who states that Arthur has died and been buried, though it seems his reference, like Malory, is equivocal, since he appends, "so they say" to the end. It must be recalled that the French source at this point, the *Mort Artu* describes how Arthur sails away on a ship, though later mention is made of a tomb in which Arthur is perhaps buried. In the *Tavola* there is no doubt as to his death. Shaver comments that "the *Tavola* does not even end in Malory's hope" (*Tristan* xiv), wherein the hermit was not certain that it was Arthur's body buried in the tomb, and had refused to state outright that the king had perished. To me it seems curious that the *Tavola* author would make a more or less explicit statement

about the king's death is interesting since he would have no need to address the matter to an Italian audience who may not care either way as to Arthur's fate. Perhaps it could be conjectured that, whereas Malory's England had long been torn over dynastic struggles wherein rulers and aspirants to the throne invoked the name of Arthur either to support their claim, or denounce the claim of another, Arthur in early fourteenth century Italy had no such political connotations. The *Tavola* author was therefore free to tell whatever story he desired. Since the legend of Arthur's survival was so popular in Italian tradition, he apparently had no compelling reason to change the French version that the king is dead and buried.

These two accounts of Arthur's death suggest that the narrative materials were developed with great care and forethought. Not satisfied with simply adapting the Vulgate account, Malory fused the ending found there with details from the Stanzaic and of his own creation. He has adapted the romantic details of Arthur's passing to conform to his desire to narrate a more historic account of Arthur and his men. He tells the story of Arthur's boarding the mysterious ship, but also makes it appear that Arthur could be buried in the grave that Bedivere comes upon. In this he is able to satisfy both the credulous and the skeptical. Likewise, the *Tavola* author was careful in fashioning his own tale of Arthur's passing. Instead of expanding his sources, he condensed version the story. His account of Arthur's final moments and his eventual death and burial are straightforward and certainly succinct--Arthur's death has occupied but a single page. His reference to Fata Morgana indicates that he was aware of the mythic ending and the belief in Arthur's return. It is possible to assume that he chose the ending he did to avoid overshadowing his earlier mythical account of the vines said to be growing from

the tombs of Tristan and Isuelt (*Tristan* 324). In the *Tavola* Tristan lives on, symbolically through the vine. Arthur, does not live on, in symbol or in legend.

Tristan's death, on the other hand, is told at great length and in great detail by the *Tavola* author. As in the French Prose *Tristan* his death is precipitated by the treachery of Morgan la Fay who sends to King Mark the poisoned spear which he uses to kill Tristan. The *Tavola* author writes,

But according to the true book belonging to Sir Gaddo . . .
Fata Morgana, was the cause of that death, because she
had found out through her magic arts that King Marco
could kill Tristano with he same blade Tristano had used to
kill her lover Onesun. (316)

[Ma, secondo che dice il naturale libro di messere Gaddo
. . . fata Morgana, che di tale morte fu cagione: impero che,
sappiendo ella, si come l'arte sua le dimostrava, che lo re
Marco doveva ferire Tristano con quello ferro col quale
Tristano avea morto Onesun suo drudo. (495)]

Following the Prose *Tristan* the Italian narrator tells us that one day while Tristan and Iseult sing and play, Mark wounds Tristan with the poisoned spear in a rage of jealousy before subsequently fleeing. Before Tristan dies, and after the knight's parting words to Mark, the court, and finally Iseult, the *Tavola* author adds his opinion as to who was the greatest knight in the world, an opinion undoubtedly his own:

Therefore our book does set down the decision that Sir
Tristano was the best worldly knight and the boldest that

nature ever formed . . . [H]e was a bold and wise fighter,
 the most vigorous, bravest, noblest, most courteous,
 handsome, and loyal knight who ever belted on a sword.
 Because of his virtue, his death was a great blow. (*Tristan*
 320)

[Impero il nostro libro pone e da sentenza, che messer
 Tristano fu lo piu pro' cavliere mondano e'l piu arditto che
 mai natura formasse . . . ch' egli fu pro' e savio
 combattente, e fu il piu vigoroso e'l piu cortese e lo piu
 leale cavaliere che mai cignesse spada: e per cotale vertu,
 della sua morte fu un grandissimo danno. (503)]

This addition compares to Ector's eulogy of Lancelot in the *Morte D'Arthur*, is one of Malory's chief additions to the account of Lancelot's passing:

Ah, Lancelot . . . [T]hou were hede of al Crysten
 knyghtes! . . . thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes
 hande. . . and thou were the truest frende to thy lovar . . .
 and thou were the sternest knyght to thy mortal foo that
 ever put spere in the reeste. (*Works* 1258).

In both writers' accounts, the chief knight is praised as the greatest of knights, Lancelot being "sternest" and Tristan the "boldest." Likewise, both are praised for their virtues, Lancelot as the truest friend and lover; Tristan as noble, brave, and loyal. Such additions are important for they allow each author to remind the reader at a most critical and dramatic time of the greatness of the knight to whom they have devoted so much effort.

The *Tavola* account then describes the dual-death of Tristan and Iseult, followed by King Mark's remorse, his erection of a tomb for the lovers, and Sagamore's departure to tell the dolorous news to Arthur's court. In speaking of the lovers' deaths the *Tavola* author offers a description of the vines from the grave:

The true story tells . . . a year later . . . out of their grave
grew a vine which had two roots, one of which had its start
in the heart of Tristano, and the other came out of Isotta's
heart. The two roots formed one bole . . . which grew up
out of the grave, making deep shade over the images of the
two lovers. (324)

[Conta la vera storia . . . che compiuto l'anno . . . nel pillo si
nacque una vite, la quale avea due barbe o vera radici; a l'
una era barbicata nel cuore di Tristano, e l'altra nel cuore
di Isotta; e le due radici feceno uno pedale . . . e uscia del
pillo e faceva grande meriggiana sopra le due imagini delli
due amanti. (508)]

This passage does not occur in the Prose *Tristan* account, where the lovers are merely buried in a costly tomb. The Italian author has taken this material from an additional source--one that has preserved the ending found in the poetic versions of Thomas and Gottfried von Strausburg. This addition restores the poignancy of Tristan and Isult's love, which is missing in the account of their deaths in Prose *Tristan* where Tristan is the center of attention and where Iseult is virtually forgotten. Here Tristan lives on, if only symbolically. In the French account he is buried, avenged, and lives no more.

In the Italian account, by contrast Tristan is shown to be the world's greatest lover even after his death. Praises for him are as copious after his death as they were in his prime. When news of Tristan's tragic death reaches Arthur's court by way of Sagremor, great lament is made at court:

The masters of the story say that when King Artu and the other barons heard the mortal news they bowed their heads and almost lost their senses for sorrow, making the greatest lament ever made in the world. (326)

[Li maestri delle storie pongono, che quando lo re Artus e gli altri baroni intesono la mortale novella, inchinarono il appo a terra, e per lo grande dolore non si sentivano, e facevano il maggiore pianto del mondo. (511)]

Arthur, Lancelot, Queen Guinevere, and many others make their laments. Compelled by his grief, Arthur goes a step further and summons his kingdoms to vengeance against King Marco, who in the end is made to endure a most unusual and cruel punishment. An enormous tower is built before Tristan's grave, where Mark was force-fed to the point that "he became so fat that no one had ever seen a fatter man; they say he died of fatness" (333). ["che mai neuno nomo non si vidde si grasso; e mori di grassezza" (523)] The *Tavola's* inclusion of the vendetta of Arthur's court against Marco, which is told in some manuscripts of the Prose *Tristan* and the Post-Vulgate, though here, is important because it depicts the loss that is felt at court at beyond. The *Tavola* author adds:

the *Tavola* author adds:

Know that the death of Tristano caused great joy in certain

countries among people who wanted to live without justice
 . . . Tristano's protection while he lived was a great joy to
 all countries where people were just, because through him
 they were given aid and defended against all wrong. (327)
 [E sappiate, che della morte di messer Tristano fu grande
 allegrezza per diversi paesi; e quegli erano gente che
 voleano vivere senza ragione . . . Tristano, noe mentre
 ch'egli visse, e' n'era grande allegrezza per ogni paese dove
 avea gente da ragione; pero che da lui erano aiutati e difesi
 contra al torto. (513)]

This Tristan's loss is not just a personal one for his companions, it is also a universal one, for in his death justice also diminishes. To atone for this irreplaceable loss the *Tavola* author portrays a vengeance on King Mark that is noteworthy for its cruelty. Mark was not merely slain or punished for his cruelty, as he is in the other accounts, but he is here tortured, spending each day viewing Tristan's grave. All of this is noteworthy for the fact the *Tavola* goes to great lengths to illustrate that Tristan's death must be atoned for on account of his greatness, while Lancelot and Arthur die in obscurity, the former as a hermit and the latter by way of a mysterious departure. As it was in the beginning, so it was in the end--*Tristan* ever the focus of the *Tavola Ritonda*.

Malory's account of Tristan's death is, on the other hand, remarkably different. Even though Malory devotes one-third of his *Morte* to "The Book of Sir Tristram," he devotes not a single chapter to Tristan's death. In fact Malory does not even mention the event until after the conclusion of the Grail quest and then only in two passages

incorporated in episodes not connected to the Tristan story. The first of the two passages comes during the roll-call of knights in “The Healing of Sir Urry”:

Also that traytoure kynge [Mark] slew the noble knyght sir
 Trystram as he sate harpyng afore hys lady, La Beall
 Isode, with a trenchaunte glayve, for whos dethe was the
 moste waylyng of ony knyght that ever was in kynge
 Arthurs dayes, for there was never none so bewayled as
 was sir Trystram and sir Lamorak, for they were with
 treson slayne. (*Works* 1149)

Curious to note is Malory's inclusion of Sir Lamorak--even here, Tristan must share his death-scene. Lamorak, a knight of but small standing except in Malory--in whose sources he is hardly mentioned at all--is inexplicably brought into the story. Presumably it is just another opportunity to make mention of Sir Lamerok, but as to why the notice of Tristan's death must be shared with another is anyone's guess. Some thirty pages or so after this passage, Malory mentions Tristan's death a second time. Lancelot here responds to Bors, who has just suggested that Lancelot take the Queen to Joyous Garde as Tristan had done with Iseul:

That ys hard for to do . . . For by sir Tristram I may have a
 warnyng: for whan by means of an trefyse Sir Trystram
 brought agayne La Beall Isode unto kyng Marke from
 Joyous Garde, loke ye now what felle on the ende, how
 shamefully that false traytour kyng Marke slew hym as he
 sate harpyng afore hys lady, La Beall Isode. Wyth a

grounden glayve he threste hym in behynde to the harte,
 which grevyth sore me. (*Works* 1173)

Malory's relating of Tristan's death scene in such an indirect manner suggests that it was more important to move on to tell of the achievement of the Grail quest than to interrupt matters with the piteous tale of Tristan, who, after all, was not the character of his greatest concern. Although Malory could not avoid telling of Tristan's end, since the story of Tristan was well known, he chose to tell of it in passages embedded in unrelated material and after-the-fact. He provides no elegiac ending like that reserved for the final tale--the destruction of the Round Table, the death of Arthur, and the saintly final passing of Sir Lancelot.

The final days of Sir Lancelot in Malory follow French and English sources of Arthur's mysterious end. Malory (Caxton, Book XXI) tells us that Lancelot comes to England upon receiving word of the king's plight. He spends two days at Gawain's tomb, visits the Queen in her cloister, and later becomes a hermit and a priest (*Works* 1249). Upon the queen's death he retrieves her body and takes her to be buried beside Arthur in Glastonbury, where he stays groveling at the tomb of the King and Queen. After this devoutly pious stint, Lancelot becomes ill, receives his last rites, and dies with a smile on his face (*Works* 1258). This is surely an extraordinary transformation of Lancelot, who had failed in the quest of the Holy Grail due to his sinful love of the queen. During this account and subsequent events Malory makes significant alterations. For example, Malory writes that Lancelot's body is taken to Joyous Garde and given a death-rite more significant than that found in his sources. Malory adds that Lancelot's companions kept his corpse on view for fifteen days, whereas in the French it was only on display for a

short time. Malory also adds that Lancelot's visage was kept visible so that the people might behold his face as (he lay upon the bier)--a detail not found in his sources. These details confirm Malory's desire to praise Lancelot by expanding his sources. Also added by Malory is the eulogy by Sir Ector, previously cited (*Works* 1259), in commenting upon this addition, August App notes

This eulogy of Ector may fairly be taken to sum up Malory's own final judgment upon Lancelot. Just as Gawain was the favorite with the older chroniclers and romancers, so Lancelot is certainly the unrivaled favorite of Malory. In the final book he gives him the last full measure of vindication and glory. (App 88)

Malory, in fact, stresses the asceticism of Lancelot's behavior, as in the following passage for which there is no precedent:

Thenne syr Launcelot never after ete but lytel mete, nor dranke, tyl he was dede, for than he seekened more and more and dryed and dwyned awaye. For the Bysshop nor none of his felowes myght not make hym to ete and lytel he dranke, that he was waxen by a kybbet shorter than he was, that the peple coulde not knowe hym. For evermore, day and nyght, he prayed (*Works* 1257)

Malory's text repeatedly comments on the example that Lancelot sets for the other penitents who have joined him. This point is stressed when Malory writes about how the knights adopt the habit worn by Lancelot (*Works* 1255), and how they imitate him by

releasing their horses, and by enduring the prayers and fasts which they subject themselves to (*Works* 1255). Therefore, Malory not only increases the drama and the sentiment of Lancelot's final days, but also elaborates on the details of the knight's asceticism.

In the *Tavola*, Lancelot's final days and death are given brief mention, especially in comparison to the lengthy accounts in the French sources of both the *Tavola* and the *Morte*. In contrast to Malory's ten pages the *Tavola Ritonda* devotes only a single paragraph to the final days of Lancelot. The Italian author tells us that after Arthur's death Mordarete continued his siege of Urbano. After the queen, fearing for her life, sends a page to Lancilotto seeking help, Lancilotto comes and kills Mordarete in battle and enters Urbano where he finds the grieving queen. The arrival of the squire who had served Artu till the later left in the boat, and who tells the news of the king's fate, precipitates the queen's death out of grief, of which the *Tavola* author gives a unique account:

When the queen heard these words, she realized that she had been the cause of so much evil and was overcome with remorse. So sharp was her sorrow that it cut her heart in two, and suddenly she fell down dead. (346)

[E la reina, intendendo la parole, immaginando si come ella era istata cagione di tanto male, si affisse di dolore; e fu quello dolore si colare, che passo per mezzo del cuore, e di subito cadde morta. (543)]

The *Tavola* author then relates, like Malory, how Lancilotto buries the queen, but adds a

curious detail when he writes:

On a column there he had inscribed all that happened
between King Artu, King Mordarette, and Queen Ginevara.
He also had inscribed the date, that is, that King Artu and
the knights of the Tavola were destroyed in the 399th year.

(346)

[e fece iscrivere nel pillo di sopra tutto cio ch'era
intervenuto dello re Artu e di Morderete e della reina
Ginevra: e favvi scrivere il novero, cioe si come lo re Artus
e i cavalieri della Tavola era distrutta nel
trecentonovantanove anni. (544)]

According to the *Tavola*, Lancelot departs from the queen and travels to an abbey, where he finds others doing penance. Here he stays doing penance with his companions.

There, the Italian author writes briefly, "He lived a year and three months, becoming a priest and singing mass, then he died and passed out of this life" (Shaver 346). ["e vivette un anno e tre mesi, e fu sacerdote e canto messa appresso, mori e passo di questa vita" (544).]

Curiously, these final details of the story compare with Malory's account. For instance both authors place Lancelot and the Queen together in the hero's final moments--this is not the case in the French. Why the two authors chose such a similar approach is difficult to say. Writing over one hundred years apart and with no evidence of Malory's knowledge of the *Tavola* the similarity appears coincidental. However, since the two authors have taken a similar approach to numerous other matters, this similarity should

not be a surprise. Both bring Lancelot and the queen together again--the latter's death marking a turning point in Lancelot's life. Whereas his love for her had kept him from winning the spiritual quest of the Grail, her death awakens him to the need of the spiritual perfection neglected for her sake. The poignancy of this meeting is yet another example of the similarities between the two authors.

Immediately after Lancelot's death the *Tavola* ends, as is the case in Malory's account. The *Tavola* author devotes five meager lines to the actual death, emphasizing instead the monumental passage of Lancelot's one time-companion. The Italian author strips Lancelot's final days and death of all their glory, and, though he still becomes a priest and spends his final days serving God, the account leaves out the details of his great devotion and all mention of the inspiration that he had upon his companions. All of the drama of death in the *Tavola* is reserved for Tristan and Tristan alone. Absent in the *Tavola* account is Ector's eulogy, the multitude of angles lifting and welcoming Lancelot into the gates of heaven. In the Englishman's account, as in the French *Mort Artu*, Lancelot is provided with a saintly departure, while in the Italian story his death is that of a knight turned hermit who after his fighting days were over turned to God and passed quietly from this world.

Such are the accounts of the end of the three greatest men in the Arthurian prose tradition: King Arthur, Sir Tristan, and Sir Lancelot as told by Malory in his *Morte Darthur* and by the anonymous author of the *Tavola Ritonda*. Malory or the Italian author could simply have followed earlier accounts, but in each alterations were made to shape the accounts to fit the overall design of the composition. The *Mort Artu* offers a fit end to Arthur's story, but Malory altered it to suit his apparent purpose of offering a more

historical account that still permits a mystical ending. The *Tavola* author has done likewise. In all cases events have been made to fit the pattern of their works that was established first in the selection of their materials and subsequently carried out through assembly and alteration. In evaluating the choices and the changes that these authors made, we can see that their works in every way resemble that of artisans. Each acts like a patch-work quilt maker who fashions something new and unique out of many things old.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding three chapters we have seen how Sir Thomas Malory and the anonymous author of the *Tavola Ritonda* have taken the materials of the legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table and fashioned them into new and a new telling of the Arthuriad. The similarity of the writers' methods has been the point of departure of this study. The work, however, of investigating and documenting the affinity of the two compositions has just begun, for the *Tavola Ritonda* is only just now being widely studied, such as those mentioned in my introduction, and has yet to receive the volume of scholarship that one would expect of such an important document. Further, there seems to be a modest movement again toward source and narrative studies. For the past few decades scholars have tended to shy from such efforts in the belief that studies of the sources were limited for evaluated purposes. Source studies, however, reveal significant connections between similar compositions. Commenting on the necessity of such studies, Eugene Vinaver, the great Arthurian scholar, writes "Only with the help of his sources is it possible to study his art and to reveal his real literary character" (*Malory* iv), while Luminansky offers that "The chief advantage of source study . . . is that it furnishes a valuable approach for the assessment of a literary work" (5). As well it must be kept firmly in mind that the *Tavola Ritonda* was *not* a source of Malory, which emphasizes the significance in the similarity of their works. Their connection is that they used many of the self-same source in a very similar way.

The present study, however, has been concerned with more than sources. From the start I have attempted to reveal ways in which the *Tavola Ritonda* is similar to Malory's masterpiece, such as by showing that both authors depended heavily on the French Arthurian prose tradition that flourished in the mid-thirteenth century, including the Vulgate *Lancelot*, *Queste*, and *Mort Artu*, the Post-Vulgate reworking of the Arthuriad, and the Prose *Tristan*. Combined with this material were works of native provenance, such as the English Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and Alliterative *Morte Arthure* for Malory and stories such as that of Sir Lasancis for the *Tavola* author. I have given numerous examples of how both authors brought this material together to give continuity to their works as a whole by using the narrative device of the source reference, whether the latter is wholly fictitious or refers to an identifiable source. References by Malory to the "Fryensshe Book" or by the *Tavola* author to the "Good book of Sir Gaddo" were used often to link narrative sections or author a sense of authority to the material. These two uses of the source reference were common, though no two authors of the Middle Ages made such extensive use of them.

The two authors, however, did more than assemble materials. They often shaped them, sometimes making profound changes to the stories they included in their works. Both Malory and the *Tavola* author altered stories for the purpose of enhancing a central character and diminishing his companions. This was often the case in the *Morte Darthur*, where Lancelot is portrayed as exemplary in overcoming obstacles and in feats of war, while Gawain is uncharacteristically shown to be a treacherous knight of notably less prowess. Likewise, in the *Tavola Ritonda*, the author alters the narrative to portray Tristan as the premier knight-errant, often at the expense of his companion Sir Lancelot.

The editorial strategies of the two authors, though, went a step beyond selecting and changing. As has been seen in chapter three, the authors invent whole stories and numerous details for their creations. Like the changes made to the stories they have taken from their sources, these additions served the purpose of adding to the praise of Lancelot and Tristan. Malory has therefore included in his *Morte* the story of Sir Urry, while the Italian author has created several encounters between Sirs Tristan and Lancelot, where the former is clearly shown to be superior.

These are only a few of the ways in which the *Morte Darthur* and the *Tavola Ritonda* and the means used to fashion them are similar. From the material from which they are fashioned, to the numerous editorial techniques that both authors used, and to the overriding purpose of both works in telling the story of Arthur and his knights, these two compilations belong side-by-side in the Arthurian literary tradition and the history of literature. The similarities are so remarkable that the natural inclination is to assume that there was some connection between the two works beyond the sources that they ultimately took their stories from. No evidence exists for such a connection--not even the possibility that both authors were influenced by the style and fashion of a third work that provided them with a blueprint for their own. Over one hundred years apart and in countries of divergent literary, cultural, and political environments, Malory and the anonymous Italian author fashioned the masterpieces of Arthurian literature in their respective countries. What both accomplished is perhaps best indicated by Eugene Vinaver, who writes only of the *Morte* and Malory:

The 'dry bones' of Arthurian romance do not live today in
any other work in spite of many attempts by writers of all

nations and all ages to revive them. And the reason is surely to be found in the unique impact of one type of imagination upon another, in the kind of re-creation that, of all Arthurian writers of the modern age, Malory alone was able to accomplish--a re-creation that to all intents and purposes is synonymous with creation. (*Malory* vi)

That these two authors contributed such similar and noteworthy (re)creations in such different times and places is certainly a remarkable fact. That it has taken well over a century of scholarship to more fully demonstrate this fact is no less remarkable. I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to the study of these remarkable works of literature.

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