Old texts and new: a digital King Arthur

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1. Introduction

Literary criticism and literary linguistics often lock horns: the charge from traditional literary approaches is that linguistic studies are reductive; the counter charge, that literary criticism is impressionistic. Yet stylistics is best where it is at its most interdisciplinary, and I therefore explore how these differing approaches supplement each other; to argue that those factors distinguishing literary criticism and stylistics are, in fact, complimentary.

To do this, I take a staple of the English literature canon: Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Due to its canonical status, it offers the stylistician a vast wealth of literary criticism that can be interrogated and developed by applying linguistic approaches. For instance, recent Malory criticism focuses on situating the text historically (e.g. Lexton, 2014) and these literary studies can be complimented by the corpus analysis of digitised historical texts. Likewise, some of the *Morte*'s early literary criticism can be considered proto-pragmatic in its discussion of the text in relation to the reader (Vinaver in Bennett and Oakeshott, 1963: 37), anticipating the 'context-sensitive approach to meaning making' (2017 PALA Conference call for papers) promoted in historical pragmatics (Jucker, 1995).

Context has been the overriding concern of the past few decades of literary criticism, informed as it is by New Historicism. And this historic focus is where interdisciplinarity is most evident: historical pragmatics and historical stylistics are interdisciplinary by necessity. Pragmatics, emerging from speech-based data, speaks much more readily to recent texts, that can draw on voice recording technology. Stylistics has developed principally through its exploration of more recent texts (Busse, 2010). Take for example the narratological models derived from the nineteenth-century novel. Whilst John Steinbeck confidently claims 'The *Morte* is the first and one of the greatest novels in the English Language' (in Benson, 1990: 810) our understanding of how a novel operates admonishes us from applying these same analytic criteria. But this is the great advantage of interdisciplinarity. Diverse approaches act as checks and balances, providing methods that allow the analyst to build interpretations from several data sources, methodological theories, and perspectives.

To test the suitability of these models then, the analysis must be contextually situated. To do this I look at the two main witness texts of *Morte Darthur*, one manuscript, Winchester (hereafter, *W*), written around 1470, and the other printed by William Caxton in 1485 (hereafter, *C*). Whilst there is evidence that *W* was in Caxton's print shop (Hellinga, 1981), it is generally accepted that the two derived independently. Thus, although *C* is not an edited or amended version of *W*, the differences between these texts do represent two reader responses. What's more, they can also be seen as texts which give different reading experiences to their respective readers. Indeed, that *W* was not discovered until 1934 illustrates these different reading experiences in the various critical responses the text received pre and post-discovery. It is a difference that framed much of the twentieth-century debate on what kind of writer Malory was.

My approach draws on digital technology to revive these old debates and even older texts. Breaking each of the texts down lexically, I compared them using Perl programming. This formed the basis of a digital parallel-text edition, which, in borrowing tools from corpus approaches, allows an analyst to perform close and distant reading. As a consequence, my new edition of *Morte Darthur* is not merely an analytical tool, but is also a text for the reader:

Figure 1: *Morte Darthur* parallel-text edition (343784-344043)

343784 ♦ **WINCHESTER** ♦

And than whan he was waked kyng Arthur seyde alas
sir Gawayne my syster son here now þou lyȝest the
man in the worlde that I loved moste and now
ys my Joy gone for now my nevew sir Gawayne
I woll discouer me vnto you that in youre person
and In sir Launcelot ▌ ▌ I moste had my
Joy and myne affyaunce And now haue I loste my
Joy of you bothe where fore all myne erthely Joy
ys gone fro me ▌ myn vncle ▌ ▌ seyde
sir Gawayne now I woll that ye wyte that ▌
▌ my deth dayes be com And all I may
wyte ▌ myne owne hastynes and my wyffulnesse for thorow
my wylfulnes I was causer of myne owne dethe For
I was thys day hurte and smytten vppon myne olde
wounde ▌ þat sir Launcelot gaff me gaff me and
▌ ▌ ▌ I fele my selff that I muste
nedis be dede by the owre of noone And thorow
me and • pryde ye haue all thys shame and
disease For had that noble knyȝt sir Launclot ben with
you as he was and wolde haue ben thys vnhappy
warre had neuer ben be ge gunne ▌ ▌ ▌
▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ for ▌ he thorow hys noble
knyghthode & hys noble bloode ▌ ▌ ▌ hylde all
youre cankyrde enemyes in subieccion and daungere And now seyde
sir Gawayne ye shall mysse sir Launcelot But alas that
I wolde nat accorde with hym And þer fayre vnkle

343784 ◊ **CAXTON** ◊

And thenne whan he ▌ awaked ▌ he sayd allas
sir Gawayne my systers sone here now thow lyggest the
man in the world that I loued moost and now
is my Ioye gone for now my neuewe syre Gawayne
I will discouer me vnto your ▌ ▌ ▌ persone
▌ in syr Launcelot & you I moost had my
Ioye & myn affyaunce & now haue I lost my
Ioye of you bothe wherfor / alle myn erthely Ioye
is gone from me ▌ Myn vnkel kyng Arthur said
sir Gawayn ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ wete ▌ you
wel my deth day is come & alle ▌ ▌
is thorou myn owne hastynes & ▌ wilfulnes for ▌
▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌
I am ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ smyten vpon ▌ thold
wounde the which sir launcelot / / gaf me ▌
on the whiche I fele wel / ▌ I must
▌ ▌ dye ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌
▌ ▌ • ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ &
▌ ▌ had ▌ ▌ ▌ sir laūcelot ben with
you as he was ▌ ▌ ▌ ▌ this vnhappy
werre had neuer ▌ begonne / _ & of alle
this am I causer for sir laūcelot ▌ ▌ ▌
▌ & his ▌ blood thorou their prowes helde alle
your cankeryd enemyes in subiectyon and daungere And now sayd
sir Gawayne ye shalle mysse sir Launcelot But allas ▌
I wold not accorde with hym and therfor ▌ ▌

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My interest is after all in how these differences alter the narrative and the way in which a reader follows and makes sense of a text. The following paper illustrates the way in which the parallel-text edition is a site of interdisciplinarity in action. To illustrate this, I focus specifically on characterisation as a process that is influenced by the disposition of plot, speech and thought presentation and character reference.

2. Plot

Defined as the narrative's *fabula*, in its sequence of events, plot is one of the most consistent features between *W* and *C*. This is perhaps unsurprising as the two texts purport to tell the same story (albeit Book 5, *The Roman War*, does so in radically different ways). Plot offers a discourse-level common ground for the two texts, captured by a database table which houses a summary of each of *Morte Darthur's* episodes, overlaid on the lexical items that narrate it. As such, it is a manifestation of Genette's observation of the temporal duality of the *fabula* and the *sjuzet* and can account for what he terms accelerations and decelerations (1980: 98-99).

These anachronies can be illustrated through another type of plot: the dispersion plot. Borrowed from statistical studies, the naming coincidence is telling, as it conceptualises plot as a linear phenomenon, predicated on principles of density and compression. For example, Book 8 (Tristram and Isolde) looks like this:

Figure 2: dispersion plot of Book 8
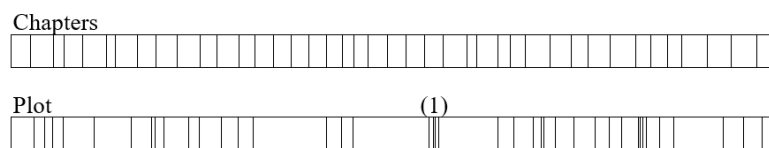
The upper plot is an illustration of the *sjuzet*, albeit a paratextual one, which shows how the narrative is chunked in terms of *C*'s printed chapters. The lower bar shows the distribution of the *fabula* based on the plot table of narrative-progressing events. The unit of measurement is word count. This corresponds with Genette's use of line and page counts for analyses of duration (ibid: 87-88), albeit a more granular unit of measurement afforded by the digital text. Dispersion plots therefore offer a means of digitally operationalising Genette's method.

Point 1 on the chart indicates a cluster: a 'plot-heavy' moment in which Tristram and Isolde drink a love potion. Presuming that extended plot details are foregrounded by the amount of textual space they consume, it seems odd that such a crucial plot development should be given such short shrift. Compared to the largely inconsequential jousts and battles that take up the most expanded sections of narrative, brevity marks the event which impacts the fate of the lovers and the narrative consequences for the entire 'Tristram' section (one third of the entire *Morte Darthur*). The effect is to render the *sjuzet* in a style reminiscent of the medieval chronicle, which in their cataloguing of historical fact focused their readers on battles and knightly prowess. Jump forward to nineteenth-century retellings of the *Tristram and Isolde* story and what is evident is the Romantic shift in cultural appetite: the focus is now Tristram's role as introspective lover, the tale an epic love tragedy, apt subject matter for opera, poetry and Pre-Raphaelite art. Not so in Malory, where compressions of narrative deal with the lovers. Plot's relationship to its textual rendering can be analysed as a foregrounding mechanism which encourages a particular reading of character.

These densely-packed clusters re-occur each time the narrative switches to the love affair: a whole two months of lovers' bliss is reduced to two sentences. *C*'s additional line at this point may indicate an anxiety with the narrative accelerating so quickly, disrupting temporal iconicity and giving

the protagonists so little attention. Yet such accelerations may be iconic in another way, reflecting the illicit nature of Tristram and Isolde's love, made up as it is from mere snatched moments, backgrounded away from the eyes of the court. There is in this interpretation a degree of propriety being exercised by the narrator, made explicit in brevity topoi such as 'But the Joy Þat la beale Isode made of sir Trystrames Þer myght no tunge telle' (*W*, 111446-111462). What the above example illustrates is the way in which macro-level analysis, enabled by digitisation, offers insights corroborated by close-text analysis.

A theoretical question that an analysis of plot duration raises is exactly how to segment and apportion the text. For example, a Proppian analysis (1968) of the opening to Malory's 'Book of the Holy Grail' looks like this:

Figure 3: Proppian analysis of plot (opening to the 'Book of the Holy Grail')

$\gamma^2\ \beta^1\ \beta?\ \beta \uparrow D^7/D^{10}$	F^1/F^9 Fneg $\downarrow$	Lancelot
	$F^2\ G^3\ [D$	
	Fneg$]^3$	Sword in the stone
	F^6	Grail
	$D^{10} \downarrow Q$	Arrival of Galahad
a^3 M N		Grail appearance
a^6		King Pelles/Dolorous Stroke/Damsel
	a^6	Vow to undertake quest to see the Grail
	Q	Guinevere asks Galahad who he is
γ^1		Arthur berates Gawain
$[B^3]$ (not in *C*)		Guinevere berates Lancelot
$\uparrow D^1$		Quest: Galahad
$D^9/H^1\ F^1$		Quest: Badegamus
…		…

Despite the perceived similarities of folktales and romance, such a taxonomy proves difficult to apply due to the interwoven nature of romance (its *entrelacement*) and the lack of a single hero or villain. Its tellability is in fact dependent on a certain level of structural complexity, to 'deploy a rich field of virtualities' (Ryan, 1999: 118). The 'Book of Holy Grail' illustrates this in its myriad of forking paths and choices its protagonists must make. Propp's is also a taxonomy concerned more with order and sequence than duration; which is a concept more readily analysable in a corpus-informed approach.

That the analysis is lexically-driven allows us to look at the interaction of plot and characterisation in relation to the smallest of textual amends. The cross examination of *W* and *C* shows how these lexical changes can affect both plot and characterisation. Literary criticism has often dismissed the changes as 'accidental' (Moorman in Wheeler et al., 2000: 110), but aggregated, these changes form patterns which affect the reading of the text and its characterisation processes. In Book 20 Lancelot laments:

> me repentis that euer I cam in thys realme Þat I shulde be thus shamefully banysshyd vndeserued and causeles but fortune ys so varyaunte and the wheele so mutable Þat Þere ys no constaunte a bydynge and that my be preved by many olde Cronycles as of noble Ector of Troy and Alysaundir the myghty conquerroure (*W*, 337296-337351)

C differs in this final line, giving the reader 'many old Cronykles of noble Ector and Troylus and Alysaunder the myghty Conqueror' (*C*, 337338-337351). The discrepancy may be 'accidental' but it does alter the reading experience. Rhetorically, *C* adheres to the classical triad, creating a more polished text. Stylistically, *C*'s difference impacts on characterisation by casting Lancelot as Troilus, the lover knight. Not simply a warrior hero in the way that Hector and Alexander are, but evocative of the conflict between faithfulness in love and fidelity in duty. It is this conflict that thematically fuses Lancelot's character with the overarching plot concerning the collapse of the Round Table.

That the change is evident in *C* may be further corroborated by its metatextual reference to chronicles. Caxton's ambition was to print *Morte Darthur* as part of a Nine Worthies project, of which Alexander and Hector were two. Troilus stands as an anomaly, part of Hector's story, not his own. King Arthur, another of the nine worthies is similarly displaced by Launcelot, whose mention of the wheel of fortune links him with a trope that pertained to kings and directly with Arthur's dream of himself on the wheel earlier in Book 21. Caxton knew Troilus's story well, having printed Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in 1483 and having translated and printed the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (1473). These inter- (and intra-) textual references consequently make Lancelot part of a hero tradition that goes back to the first book printed in English.

Situating a study of Malory's characters intertextually is one way in which a 'context-sensitive approach' may be undertaken. Literary critics argue that, particularly in comparison with his sources, Malory focuses his narrative around his characters, by giving them speech and endowing formerly anonymous knights with names (Mahoney, 1980: 648). I will therefore now look at speech presentation and then naming and reference.

3. Speech presentation

Recent pragmatic approaches have examined how speech is presented in historical narratives and the ways in which such discourse is marked in older texts (e.g. Moore, 2011). Whilst the application of Leech and Short's speech and thought presentation model (1981) is often difficult owing to its development in reference to more recent, novelistic discourse, the model does provide a useful nomenclature by which to examine character speech and thought.

As mentioned, one of the advantages of a digital approach is to be able to conduct macro-level analysis or distant reading. Comparing *W* and *C* the following differences in speech presentation are apparent:

Table 1: differences in speech presentation between *W* and *C*

	W to *C*	*C* to *W*
Direct Speech to Indirect Speech	49%	24%
Direct Speech to Narrative Report of Speech Act	18%	6%
Indirect Thought to Direct Speech	2%	0%

The first thing of note is that discourse presentation is modified in both directions, reminding us that the relationship between *W* and *C* is not linear in either provenance or editorial intervention. It also indicates that character discourse is flexible and therefore the choice of presentational style is meaningful. The general trend is for *C* to make the discourse more indirect. *C* also has a relatively high (3 to 1) conversion of Direct Speech into Narrative Report. To borrow the language of literary criticism, this makes *W* a more dramatic reading experience, in that 'its text consists of an array of speeches' (Boyce Allen and Moritz, 1981: 45). *C* tends towards diegesis, *W* towards mimesis. *C* thereby exercises more narratorial control, making the text read more like Malory's sources, increasing the sense of narratorial mediation and projecting a 'chronicle' tone.

One of the problems an analyst encounters in assigning Leech and Short's taxonomy is the lack of punctuation. Moore argues that modern editions' imposition of speech marks represents 'substantive' changes that have an effect on the reader's perception of authenticity and segmentation (2011: 1). The original reading experience would have been much more fluid. Literary critics even go so far to say that the addition of modern punctuation accounts for why nowadays readers find Malory's speech presentation 'clumsy' (Cooper in Wheeler et al. 2000: 272). Often changes mitigate

for this fluidity and attempt to clarify the narrative and the level of mediation between reader and character (Direct Speech is marked in bold):

> sir Agglovale bade the porter go unto hys lorde and tell his lorde that **I am here** (*W*)

> syre Aglouale badde the porter **goo thow vnto thy lord and telle hym that I am here** (*C*, 233031- 233048)

Here, *C* clarifies the direct/indirect dividing line, in the absence of punctuation. To a modern and probably medieval reader, this helps reduce the cognitive burden of accounting for sudden shifts in pronouns and tense. The text takes responsibility for construing the interpretation.

> A second example serves to illustrate the role of the narrator:

> **well** seyde sir torre **for my horse and i have fared evyll syn we departed frome Camelot** (*W*)

> **wel** said syr Tor for his hors and he had ferd euyll syn they departed from Camelot (*C,* 35337- 35354)

Apart from its first word, this line in *C* is Indirect and fits a pattern across the text in which events are IS-narrated (particularly if repeated) and feelings and reactions are DS-narrated. But in this example, parallel analysis raises an important issue regarding how to classify discourse presentation. Re-reading *C* in light of *W* one might be tempted to read *C* as a form of Free Indirect Discourse. Certainly, retaining evaluative, idiolectal lexis (*euyll*) is one of the features Leech and Short claim as indicative of Free Indirect forms (1981: 263).

The presence of Free forms in pre-modern texts is disputed (Moore, 2011: 3), but I would argue that in comparing *W* and *C*, free forms offer a more aligned reading experience. Does the following remove immediacy and suggest mediation?

> **and unto myne othe I woll preve hit with my body honde for hande who that woll sey the contrary (W)**

> vnto his othe he wold preue hit with his body hand for hand who that wold saye the contrary (C)

Shifting tense in *C* from *woll* to *wold* not only backshifts the speech into Indirect form but also marks a semantic shift. A shift from volition (*woll* is indicative of character ambition and determination) to simply indicating the future (*wold* is indicative of narratorial omniscience). In other words, *C* can be read as Free Indirect Speech adhering to *W*'s depiction of character intent, or it can be read as narration which proleptically anticipates his later success. The point here is that reading *C*'s line as an early Free form gives a reading experience that is consistent with *W* and more coherent with the line ending with the decidedly 'personal' 'who that wold saye the contrary'.

The division between speech and narration, character and narrator may be examined in analysis of reported and reporting clauses. Middle English's lack of punctuation in inevitably means that lexis takes on the role of marking shifts between these discourse forms (see Moore, 2011: 16). The reporting clause's optionality today is perhaps obscured by modern orthographic demarcations of switches between different characters speaking. One of the considerable differences between *W* and *C* in this regard is the use of the reporting clause:

Table 2: Reporting clause differences between W and C

Reporting clause:	Count	Percentage
in C only	215	67%
in W only	44	14%
Changed position	60	19%
Total	314	

Two thirds of these changes are insertions of a reporting clause in *C*, again part of *C*'s move to greater clarity. It serves the function of marking voice and conversational turns, making it easier for a reader to follow by foregrounding character through the repetition of proper names. Character, and their voices, become key functional apparatus by which a reader navigates the text. For example:

> Ye <u>sayd Launcelot</u> doo as ye haue done and I shal be your waraunt Thenne I praye you sayd Beaumayns yeue me the ordre of knyghthode thenne must ye telle me your name **seyd launcelot** and of what kynne ye be borne Syr soo that ye wylle not discouer me I shal **sayd Beaumayns** nay sayd syre laūcelot and that I promyse yow by the feithe of my body vn tyl hit be openly knowen Thenne syr he sayd my name is Gareth and broder vnto syr Gawayn of fader and moder (*C*, 72107-72200)

W omits two of *C*'s reporting clauses (in bold), providing continuous character speech. The first reporting clause (underlined) the flexibility of the reporting clause is clear in both its placement and internal word order. *C,* borrowing from the conventions of classical Latin, embeds the reporting clause within the speech. Also Latinate is its internal structure as it follows the inquit word order, one of the few places where *C* consistently opts for VS rather than the SV ordering more usual in *W*.

In this passage, *C* adds three reporting clauses and shifts one to mark the climactic passage when Sir Gareth reveals his identity. Character identification is the main factor motivating the narrative plot as Malory draws on romance's 'Fair Unknown' tradition, in which an individual would prove their worth and finally reveal their identity. Gareth's identity is constructed through his deeds under the pseudonym Beaumaynes. Beyond the thematic importance of identity, its climactic importance to the narrative demands clarity for such identity revelation and the coherence of the overall plot.

Whilst digitisation can assist our tracking of these local phenomena as signs of editorial convention at a macro level, the integration of a plot table offers another tantalizing possibility in understanding how these serve the narrative. The dispersion plot below shows the distribution of where each text has an additional reporting clause. The hypothesis is that a clustering of these additions represents meaningful interventions, reader responses in which the reporting clause attracts particular attention.

Figure 4: dispersion plot of reporting clause additions

The five most frequent clusters in *C* coincide with climactic moments pertaining to hero identification, as with the example above. Character revelation is a recurrent narrative trope in *Morte Darthur* and the clustering of reporting clauses at these moments may fulfil a functional requirement for clarity. 'Who speaks' in these moments is paramount to overall narrative coherence. The reporting clause is liminal between narrative and speech and in Middle English, without the assistance of punctuation, its placement is crucial for narrative coherence.

Corroboration for the importance of the guiding role of the reporting clause in *C* may be seen in comparison with *W*'s biggest cluster, not found in *C* (labelled 1 on the chart). This attends the moments the knights board a ship surrounded by a black cloud. The lack of clarity, evidenced in *C*'s omission of reporting clauses, may be again interpreted as serving the narrative's events as its cocophony of voices iconically evokes a cloudiness, by which the reader shares in knights' confusion over who speaks and, crucially, who to trust. That additional reporting clauses also attend moments at which oaths and promises occur supports this thematic link with judging a character's worth by their words.

4. Character reference

Names also offer an anchor and guiding function by which a reader navigates a text (Toolan, 2009: 54). A striking feature of *W* is its red lettering (rubrication) of character names, which reinforces this guiding function. One of the most common differences between *W* and *C* is the substitution of pronouns and proper names. This makes the text cohesive by repetition (lexical) rather than by grammatical substitution (functional). As cohesive ties, pronoun forms have an immersive quality, unlike proper names, which through repetition repaint their subject each time. In other words, *W*'s preference for functional items encourages an immersion, a willing confusion in which pronouns assist in a seamless and barely noticeable flow.

Naming rather than pronominalising assists the cognitive burden placed on a reader who must track numerous participants, but not without radically altering the reading experience. A look at how these types of substitution cluster shows that *C*'s replacement of pronouns with referent forms often occurs in battle scenes and jousts. These are by their nature fast-paced and predicated on quick interchanges between different characters. The term for such jousts, *melee*, has modern connotations of such confusion. There are reasons to believe a medieval reader would have had this same association, whereby melees were confusing, illustrated here by Rene d'Anjou; a contemporary of Malory:

Figure 5: *Turnierbuch des René von Anjou*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Ms. fr. 2693

Individuals are indistinct, their identity both hidden and revealed by decorated armour. Malory's battle scenes often draw on such ambiguity to effectively simulate battle. The reader iconically shares the experience of characters thrown into a dizzying array of swords, horses and opponents. The price paid is clarity, which *C* seeks to resurrect by using proper names rather than pronouns.

Yet the impact of these differences is not merely functional but also stylistic. Associated with pronominal substitution is 'referent' substitution. Lexton notes substitution of *sir* for *king* in battle scenes effectively characterises Arthur as warrior knight (2014: 41). In the 'Book of Sir Tristram' these substitutions pertain to King Mark. Whilst *C* refers to *the king*, *W* gives his name (highlighted in bold):

> Who is captayne of this felyshyp seyde kynge **Marke** For to feare hym sir Dynadan seyde hit was sir Launcelot A Jesu seyde kynge **Marke** myght ye knowe sir Launcelot by his shylde Ye seyde sir Dynadan for he beryth a shylde of sylver and blacke bendis All this he seyde to feare kynge **Marke** for sir Launcelot was nat in the felyshyp (*W*, 164658-164721)

Whilst *W* makes explicit which king, *C* sees no reason for this disambiguation. The book's events are set in Mark's kingdom (not Arthur's) and as such narrative setting enables the reader to interpret who is the intended referent. An additional affordance of this form of reference is that it makes Mark's failure to live up the ideals as *the king* apparent. The reverse pattern is seen with Isolde, where at climactic moments *C* substitutes 'the quene' for 'Isoud'. Isolde's story is principally a personal one, distinct from the social role she plays as wife to King Mark. Again, analysing these substitutions in relation to plot patterns emerge which foreground personal or social characteristics.

The point here is that names and epithets not only clarify but characterise, and that these two reading processes are co-dependent. Epithets are another of the ways in which this is done, offering a way of packaging information about a character's story, their future, and providing clues to narratorial stance and aligning reader sympathies. The table below shows that these are again sites of change between *W* and *C* and therefore suggest a meaningful functions:

Table 3: name epithets

	C deletes	*C* adds	Example
Hero/villain epithet	27	49	'sir Marhalte' to 'syre Marhaus the good knyght'
Family epithet	3	6	'my queen' to 'my Quene and my wyf'
Name epithet	20	79	'sir Launcelot' to 'sir launcelot du lake'

Such explicit marking of characters may account for literary critics' accusation that Malory's characters are flat (Lambert, 1975: 92-96), but narratively these act as a shorthand permitting swift interpretation. Repeated clusters such as 'the good' appear in both texts and align reader sympathies. Ong's observation that such epithets act as mnemonics for the oral tradition (2005 [1982]: 38) gives an incomplete picture, as they also serve a mnemonic function in the written tradition. Whilst in oral discourse the principal beneficiary of such a memorisation device was the teller, in written discourse it is the reader. In a text with such a large cast of characters, explicit signals as to who is good and who is bad are critical to the coherence of the text.

Character epithets position the reader through evaluative lexis, and what reinforces this argument is that sympathies are also aligned at clause level. Brown and Yule cite the following example:

> If the speaker is empathising with one participant in a domestic drama rather than another, the same events may be described for example by sentence a or by sentence b.

> *John hit his wife.*

> *Mary's husband hit her.*

> The speaker's empathy, his sympathy with one point of view rather than another, may also lead to a particular choice of lexis. (1983: 147)

Both participant names (hypernyms, proper personal names) word order and, consequently, grammatical voice (in particular transitivity), have the potential to position a reader's sympathies differently. In Middle English the flexibility of word order compared with Present-Day English means that it has greater capacity for such effects. The juggling of participants (a frequent difference between *W* and *C*) can alter a reader's interpretation. The concluding line of an episode in Malory offers an example of the potential effects arising from such manipulations:

> and so sir Dynas and dame Brangwayne rode to the courte of kynge Marke (*W*)

> and so dame Brangwayne and syre Dynas rode to the courte of kynge Marke (*C*, 135194-135208)

Here *C*'s frontshifting of Dame Bragwayne keeps the narrative focus on her as the episode essentially narrates her rescue, rather than Sir Dynas's heroism. 'And so' often discourse marks episode resolution in Malory (Fludernik, 2000: 258), and by having Dame Bragwayne take Theme position, that resolution focuses squarely on her rescue.

Lexical forms of substitution pertaining to character reference are also evident in synonymy. The following passage illustrates this and the aforementioned changes that affect characterisation. Seeing them in combination illustrates how many forms of difference participate in altering the reading experience:

Figure 6: synonymic difference

W

Than lette they ren ech horse to oþer and þis
iij knyghtes bete they x knyghtes and þan set þer
hondis to þer swerdis and bete them downe
Than þer cam oute of the castell a Sixty
knyghtes armed Now fayre lordis seyde thes iij knyghtes
haue mercy on youre selff / and haue nat a
do with vs Nay fayre lordes seyde the knyghtes of
the castell we counceyle you to with drawe you for
ye ben the beste knyghtes of the worlde and þer
we woll lat you go with thys harme but we
muste nedys haue the custum Sertes seyde sir Galahad for
nouȝte speke ye well sey they woll ye dye sir
we be nat yet com þer to seyde sir Galahad
than be gan they to meddyll to gydirs / And
sir Galahad with the straunge gurdyls drew his swerde and
smote on the ryght honde and on the lyffte honde
And slew whom that euer a bode hym And dud
and hys ij felowis
holpe hym passyngly well and so they helde þer Journey
euerych in lycke harde tyll hit was nyȝe nyght
Than muste they nedis departe So þer cam a
good knyght and seyde to thes iij knyghtes if ye
woll com In to nyȝt / and take such herberow
we shall ensure you by the fayth of oure bodyes
and as we be trew knyghtes to leve you in
you with oute ony falsehode And as sone as ye
know of the custom we dare sey we woll accorde
we thydir and spare nat for me well go we
seyde sir Galahad and so they entird in to
the castell and whan they were a lyght they made

11

C

thenne lete they renne eche ▮ to other and the
thre felawes bete the ten knyghtes and thenne sette theire
handes to their swerdes and bete them doune and slewe
them Thenne there came oute of the Castel a thre
score knyghtes armed ▮ Faire lordes sayd the thre felawes
haue mercy on youre / selfe and haue not adoo
/ with vs Nay fayre lordes sayd the knyghtes of
the Castel we counceyl yow to withdrawe / yow for
ye ben the best knyghtes of the world and therfore
We wille lete yow go with this harme but we
must nedes haue the customme Certes sayd ▮ Galahad for
nought speke ye wel sayd they wille ye dye ▮
we be not yet come therto / sayd ▮ Galahad
thēne beganne / they to medle to gyders / and
▮ Galahad with the straunge gyrdels drewe his suerd and
smote on the ryght hand and on the lyfte hand
& slewe what that euer abode / hym & dyd
was none that sawe hym they wend he had ben
none erthely man but a monstre and hist two felawes
halp hym passyng wel and soo they held the Iourney
eueryche in ▮ lyke hard tyl it was ▮ nyȝt
thenne must they nedes departe So ▮ cam in a
good knyghte and sayd to the thre felawes of ye
wyll come in to / nyght and take suche herberowe
we shall ensure yow by the feyth of our bodyes
and as we be true knyghtes to leue yow in
yow withoute / ony falshede And as soone as ye
knowe of the custome we dare say ye wyll accorde
▮ thyder and spare not for me ▮ Go we
sayd ▮ Galahad and soo they entryd in to
the chappel And when they were alyghte / they made

Synonymy is evident in *C's* substitution of *W*'s *knyghtes* with *felawes*. Primarily this serves a clarifying function, distinguishing the knights of the Round Table from those knights with whom they come into conflict. Even the subtle shift from the deictic 'thes iij knyghtes' to the definite article 'the thre felawes' suggests that the mode of such cohesion and coherence shifts. Whereas in *W* functional items perform the clarifying function, in *C* that role is transferred to the lexis. But any such lexical change has a semantic impact. *Felawes* would have had potential religious connotations for a medieval reader, evidenced in other uses of the word, most famously by Chaucer in reference to his Canterbury pilgrims.

The chivalric, courtly world is being substituted by the religious. Even the narrative setting is shifted from a castle to a chapel. In this, the semantic shift supports the thematic thrust of the narrative in the 'Book of the Holy Grail', whereby knights must learn to translate their earthly virtues into spiritual ones. As Hodges notes 'In Malory, the Grail Quest comes at the expense of service to Arthur's kingdom' (2012: 116). Even the deletion of the honorific *Sir* points to the kind of muting of knightly characteristics of the protagonists. Whilst the deletion of *Sir* is a feature across *C*, the 'Book of the Holy Grail' accounts for 12% of such deletions despite being only 5% of the text. Similarly, there are a further 12 deletions of *knight*, *knighthood* and *king*. Literary criticism has often emphasised how Malory reduces the mystical aspects of the Grail story when compared to his sources (Lewis in Bennett and Oakeshott, 1963: 7). What a comparison between *W* and *C* shows is how Caxton, who also makes this clear in his Preface, seeks to reassert this spiritual focus.

A further insight offered by digitally mapping these synonymic character references is that they occur exclusively in the 'Book of the Holy Grail' and in close proximity to the appearances of

the Grail. These moments are climactic but brief. What the selection of spiritual vocabulary offers is a local contextualisation of the Grail which serves to enlarge its presence by the significance it exerts. The Grail is spiritually affecting the lexis and those around it.

Synonymy is of course indicative of semantic overlap. A look at the Middle English Dictionary (linked into the parallel-text edition) shows that *knights* and *fellows* were frequent companions. What this synonymy affords *C* is the tragic irony that these two worlds cannot be reconciled. Here a further affordance of the digital edition may be noted, in its capacity to link with online digital resources like the Middle English Dictionary. A corpus like the Middle English Dictionary offers the researcher a means of accessing a reader's schema, of understanding what associations certain words and concepts had for the fifteenth-century reader: vital in historic studies and context-sensitive approaches to text.

5. Conclusion

Synthesising linguistic and literary approaches is an exercise in interdisciplinarity that allows for new readings of old texts. For a fifteenth-century like *Morte Darthur* a context-sensitive approach requires that the analyst draw on the breadth of stylistic and literary critical material, theory and methodology.

Interdisciplinary working is comparative and offers corroborative methodological advantages. Likewise, an intertextual analysis of *W* and *C* is comparative and corroborative. Both intertextuality and interdisciplinarity make apparent different reader responses to the narrative that in turn create different reading experiences. Plot, speech presentation and character reference are three key areas of narratological and linguistic research that span different forms of discourse and demand that an approach draw on a range of methodologies. That climactic moments of plot coincide with many of the lexical differences between *W* and *C* suggests that many of these changes are meaningful and purposeful. The presentational strategies being deployed are thereby conscious *correctio* (clarification), seen here in respect of the text's characterisation.

An interdisciplinary approach offers proof that an examination of small textual elements such as lexis and syntax is warranted in a discussion of discourse-level considerations such as narrative, and that linguistic method can corroborate and develop the intuitions of literary criticism. An interdisciplinary approach produces ways of marrying distant and close-reading strategies, of using digital tools and corpus-derived approaches to provide a pragmatic and therefore 'context-sensitive' analysis of historical literary texts.

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