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MALORY'S MORDRED AS HERO

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MALORY'S MORDRED AS HERO

by

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ABSTRACT

Critics have regarded Malory's Mordred more as a plot functionary than as a character of intrinsic interest, generally as a consistent and simply motivated villain. However, the circumstances of his birth are those of a hero, as schematized, for example, by Rank or Raglan. The middle books show him in a sometimes villainous but often neutral, humorous, or sympathetic light. Throughout, Malory uses his sources inconsistently, more often than not ameliorating his received portrait of Mordred. In the final books, Arthur and Mordred are described progressively less as hero and villain and increasingly as equal, even symmetrical, antagonists. Mordred, in fact attempts to conform to the life pattern of the hero. The concept of Mordred as hero explains several otherwise very curious features of the later Morte Darthur. Especially, it adds an extra needed dimension to the account of Arthur's downfall, the nature of which is otherwise not satisfactorily explained.
DEDICATION

To Jerrie Wilson

Without whom, in the end, nothing.
I needed her and she was there.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MALORY'S MORDRED AS HERO

by Ted Paul Reed

INTRODUCTION

Malory's Mordred is the only one of his most significant characters who is virtually never discussed as an entity in his own right. He is regarded as an uncomplicated part of the plot machinery, a one-faceted agent of the destruction of the Round Table; his functional role and its significance may be considered, but not his nature. Thus he may be the agent of fate,\(^1\) the embodiment of the ultimate failure of chivalry,\(^2\) the physical result of Arthur's sin and thus agent of his punishment,\(^3\) or the final traitor in a cumulative breakdown of loyalties.\(^4\) In any case he is one of those "comparatively straightforward characters...whose functions in the Morte Darthur


largely dictate their actions.\textsuperscript{5}

Moorman, in particular, finds it "relatively easy to demonstrate...consistency of characterization" and claims that Malory has taken great care to alter his sources "in order to present Mordred consistently as well as to fit him thematically into the \textit{Morte Darthur}." So simple is Moorman's Mordred that "throughout the \textit{Morte Darthur}, his actions have been made by Malory to stem consistently from a single motive; ... he is envious and jealous of those who are in power and who use that power for good ends." He cites a number of examples of Malory's thus systematically denigrating Mordred, including his role in the murder of Lamerok, his hatred of Dynadan, the ill opinion of several characters (Gawain, Guinevere, Lancelot, the Bishop of Canterbury), and so forth.\textsuperscript{6}

For Moorman consistency of characterization is important as evidence for his view of the unity of Malory's work. However, all but two of the examples he cites are from Book VIII, so that they hardly constitute a strong case for consistency throughout the entire cycle, which, I think, is not in fact demonstrable at all. I believe a simple examination of Mordred's role in Malory, without any preconceived notion of unity or lack of it, and

\textsuperscript{5} Moorman, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{6} Moorman, pp. 87-88.
without any a priori theory of the nature of Arthur's tragic downfall, will preclude the view that Malory's Mordred is unrelievedly base and treacherous throughout; evidence against this view will be found in beginning, middle, and end. Further, Mordred will emerge as a figure less simple than generally regarded and worth study in himself rather than merely in relation to others.

Of course, it is unrealistic to try to separate Mordred from his literary context and treat structural and thematic considerations as irrelevant. He exists within the *Morte Darthur* and has a functional role there. Malory's work, if not organically unified in the modern sense, has at least a minimal degree of thematic "cohesion";⁷ it tells of the rise, flowering, and fall of the Round Table society, and in the end Mordred's actions are the immediate cause of Arthur's death and the destruction of that society. We can, however, reverse the customary process of regarding Mordred as a mere product of narrative or literary theoretical needs. We can study him as a character of intrinsic interest and ask what part he plays in determining the themes and significance of *Morte Darthur*. When we do,

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we will discover early affinities between Mordred and the prototypical mythic hero which will not be vitiated by later villâny and which will add a new dimension to the cause of Arthur's tragic fall.

In the following, we will assume that Malory wrote his tales in the order in which we have them and that events in them are in chronological order. The first assumption is uncertain and the second false, but the anomalies will have no effect here. Concerning compositional order, perhaps the most radical departure from the received sequence is the scheme of Terence McCarthy, who places Books VI, II, and V, in that order, ahead of Book I. But Books VI and II contain no references to Mordred, while the sprawling Book V—Malory's "longest and least attractive book"—must, whatever its compositional place, come after the early part of Book I chronologically, which is sufficient for our purpose. Vinaver, more conservatively, places Book II ahead of Book I, sees


9 I will discuss later a deleted reference in Book II.

VIII and VIII as last, and allows that the four intervening books "may well have been composed in the order in which they appear in the extant copies". 11 Kennedy disputes even this deviation from the received order, finding no compelling reason for placing Book II first and believing that Malory very probably "began at the beginning and wrote them in the order in which they appear in the Winchester text." 12 This is, in any case, the order of presentation as we have it in our only two distinct sources, both dating from a time close to Malory's death in 1471—Caxton published his edition in 1485, while the Winchester Manuscript was copied about 1477-80. 13 The recent placing of the Winchester Manuscript in Caxton's workshop compromises the independence of these two sources and raises new editorial problems. 14 Nevertheless, in the absence of evidence that Malory intended a different final arrangement, we will accept the present narrative order and deal with any problems as they arrive.


13 Hilton Kelliher, "The Early History of the Malory Manuscript", in Aspects of Malory, pp. 143ff.

CHAPTER 1
MORDRED AND THE BIRTH OF THE HERO

Let us begin, then, by stripping the story of Mordred's birth and infancy from the welter of incident in the first part of Book I. Morgawse, the wife of King Lot of Orkeney, comes to the court of Arthur with her four sons. Arthur lies with her and begets Mordred upon her, unaware that she is his sister. Later he has a dream in which griffins and serpents ravage his land and slay his people; he fights them and is sorely wounded, but he finally kills them.\(^{15}\) Shortly afterwards Merlin reveals to him that he is the son of Uther and Igrayne, so that

'... ye have done a thynge late that God ys displeased with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of yourc realme.' (43-44)

Late the following spring, Arthur sends for all children "begotyn of lordis and borne of ladyes" on May-day, the date Merlin has given for the birth of the child who would destroy him. He has them all put to sea in a ship, which by fortune is driven to a castle and broken up, killing all the infants

save that Mordred was cast up, and a good man founde hym, and fostird hym tylle he

was fourtene yere of age, and than brought
hym to the courte . . . (55)

Lot apparently learns that Arthur got Mordred on his wife,
for Malory gives this as the reason for his enmity toward
Arthur (77). Merlin prophesies a great battle at Salisbury,
in which Arthur's own son Mordred will oppose him (79).
Curiously, Merlin has already told Arthur that Pellynore
would tell him the name of the incestuous son who would
destroy the realm (52).

Thus far we have only a circumstantial account; Mordred
is in no way characterized. But the circumstances are
themselves suggestive, not of the origin of a villain, but
of the birth of a hero. Perhaps the most convenient way
to quantify the resemblance is to compare the above account
with the easy scheme of Lord Raglan, who, in his attempt to
reduce some allegedly historical figures to purely legendary
ones, has extracted a 22-point pattern for the career of a
hero. Only the first ten need concern us here:

(1) The hero's mother is a royal virgin;
(2) His father is a king, and
(3) Often a near relative of his mother, but
(4) The circumstances of his conception are
   unusual, and
(5) He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
(6) At birth an attempt is made, usually by his
   father or his maternal grandfather, to kill
   him, but
(7) He is spirited away, and
(8) Reared by foster-parents in a far country.
(9) We are told nothing of his childhood, but
(10) On reaching manhood he returns or goes to
    his future kingdom. 16

If we follow Raglan in accepting a princess or queen as a satisfactory substitute for a royal virgin.\textsuperscript{17} Mordred conforms to eight of the ten criteria, omitting only (4) and (5). But this is one more match than has Arthur himself, who does not conform to (3), (5), or (6). (Raglan forces Arthur into an eight-point match by regarding his father as the Duke of Cornwall and his reputed father as Uther Pendragon; he then lacks only [3] and [6]).\textsuperscript{18} Applying this trick to Mordred still gives him a score of eight, omitting [3] and [4].) Thus under Raglan's scheme Mordred begins life at least as much like a hero as King Arthur.

Another who has concerned himself with the myth of the hero's birth is Otto Rank. He, too, has abstracted elements from diverse accounts of heroes and gives the following composite history:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents; usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents, due to external prohibition or obstacles. During the pregnancy, or antedating the same, there is a prophecy in form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father, or his representative. As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or lowly people (shepherds) and is suckled by a female animal, or by a humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents . . .\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} In several of his examples. Ibid., pp. 179-88.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 188.

Freud, following Rank in reconstructing a hero formula, allows more flexibility in the father's response to the threat:

... the father (or a person representing him) gives orders for the new-born babe to be killed or exposed to extreme danger; in most cases the babe is placed in a casket and delivered to the waves.\(^{20}\)

Otherwise he follows Rank in exact detail.

Raglan's criteria generally fit this picture, but the birth of Mordred is even closer, differing from it in no essential way. Thus, Mordred is the son of King Arthur and Queen Morgawse. His parents have secret intercourse because of the prohibition against adultery (and incest). Arthur has a prophetic dream, and he is told by Merlin that he will die at the hands of Mordred. Arthur has Mordred delivered to the sea in a ship. When the ship is destroyed, Mordred is found by a "good man" and raised by him (nothing is said of suckling, but Mordred is just an infant and may be presumed to have received some sort of mother's milk since he did survive). At fourteen, Mordred returns to the court of Arthur.

At the outset, then, Mordred has the earmarks of a hero (in contrast, for example, with Tristram, whose birth


\(^{21}\)Ibid. pp. 7-8. Strangely, but not surprisingly, Freud finds the formula utterly inapplicable to Moses (pp. 10-13), who is used as an example by Rank (op. cit., pp. 13-15) and by Raglan (op. cit., pp. 184-85).
is relatively ordinary (371-73), and with Launcelot, Per-
civale, and Gawayne, whose births are not described). It
is hardly likely that Malory envisioned Mordred as one of
his heroes, but he did inherit the pattern and he did not
(contra Moorman) denigrate Arthur's illegitimate son by
deviating from his source, the thirteenth century French
prose romance La Suite du Merlin.22

The changes Malory did make have the effect of in-
creasing the emphasis on Arthur's guilt in the begetting
of Mordred. This is the effect, for instance, of Merlin's
harsh prophecy (44, quoted above) and his gloss upon it:
"hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be punysshed
for your fowle dedis" (44). In the source, Merlin gives
a long speech explaining Arthur's dream and predicting
his kingdom's destruction by a knight "qui est engendrez,
mais il n'est encore pas nez".23 The incest Theme is
echoed when Marlin tells Arthur that Pellynore '"shall
telle you the name of youre owne son begotyn of youre
syster, that shall be the destruccion of all thyss realme.'"
(52). This prediction does not come true; it is in fact

22 Eugene Vinaver, "Commentary", Works, pp. 1267ff dis-
cusses this source, which exists as four manuscripts and
fragments, incompletely and inaccessibly published. Accord-
ingly I shall depend upon Vinaver's commentary for com-
parison of Malory to his source in this Book. References
to the commentary will concern direct comparision only; un-
less otherwise noted, interpretations will be my own.

23 Ibid., p. 1298.
entirely superfluous in view of Merlin's specific prophecies at other times. It is linked to nothing else in _La Morte Darthur_, nor is it in the French source. It is thus, unless intended as an echo of Arthur's guilt, a wholly gratuitous insertion by Malory.

Again, Malory's Lot hates Arthur for his adultery with Morgawse:

> And for because that kynge Arthure lay by hys wyff and gate on her Sir Mordred, therefore kynge Lott helde ever agaynste Arthure. (77)

The French source attributes his hatred to the drowning of the children. This alteration is a change in the motivation behind a war with far-reaching consequences, and so it casts a very strong emphasis on Arthur's guilt once more. Moreover, the shift is part of a mitigation by Malory of Arthur's murder of the children that is both deliberate and radical. In the _Suite_, Merlin himself condemns Arthur: "'vous saves bien quel felonnie vous fesistes des enfans que vous mandastes par vostre terre que on vous aportast.'" While in Malory, "many putte the wyght on Merlion more than on Arthure" (55-56). Ironically, in the _Suite_ all the children are saved by divine intervention; by having all but Mordred die, Malory brings the episode even closer to Herod's

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24 Ibid., p. 1301.
25 Ibid., pp. 1310-11.
26 Ibid., p. 1311.
27 Ibid., pp. 1302-03.
slaughter of the Holy innocents.  

Finally, let us examine the outcome of Mordred's intended death voyage. In the French version, he is found by a fisherman, who does not, however, raise him but recognizes his noble origin by his clothing and so takes him to the lord of a nearby castle. The lord raises him together with his own infant son for an unspecified time. Malory brings Mordred a little closer to the hero pattern when he tells us that "a good man founde hym, and fostird hym" (55), and thereby conforms to Rank's rescue of the hero by "animals, or lowly people". Malory's good man brings Mordred to Arthur's court at the age of fourteen, "as hit rehersith afterward and towarde the ende of the MORTE ARTHURE." (55) But this reference is spurious; the statement is not in the French nor does it look forward to anything in Malory's own work. Vinaver finds the only possible text that could have suggested Malory's statement in lines 689-90 of the alliterative Morte Arthure, with their backward-looking reference to Mordred's early presence at Arthur's court; he himself finds the connection "a little

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28 The example of Jesus, if we do not take his claim to divinity too seriously, may be forced to meet seven of Raglan's criteria.

29 Vinaver, "Commentary", Works, p. 1303.

30 Rank, p. 61.

31 Vinaver, "Commentary", Works, p. 1303.
less than certain."\textsuperscript{32} His diffidence is justified; the lines--

"Thowe arte my nevewe fulle nere, my nurre2 of olde,  
That I have chastyede and chosene, a childe of  
my chambyre;"\textsuperscript{33}

-- are non-specific but surely refer to a time when Mordred was less than fourteen, and, in fact, almost suggest that Mordred was never long absent from Arthur's court at all. The source of Malory's statement and his pseudo-citation remain a mystery;\textsuperscript{34} it is most natural to draw the conclusion we would have drawn in the absence of the citation--that the statement is original with Malory. Further, Mordred's return to court at fourteen, on the verge of manhood, is an explicit step in the career of the hero: "On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom."\textsuperscript{35}

So in Malory's early pages we have a Mordred whose conception, birth, and childhood follow a heroic pattern. Malory never compromises this pattern in dealing with his sources and sometimes enhances it. Mordred is not characterized morally; in particular, he is not portrayed at all negatively in the repeated predictions of his destruction of

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{35}Raglan, p. 178.
Arthur and the kingdom. His image has in no way deteriorated in its transference from the Suite du Merlin and any increase of emphasis on Arthur's guilt necessarily decreases emphasis on Mordred's treachery.
CHAPTER 2
MORDRED IN THE EARLY BOOKS

Once the circumstances of Mordred's origin and the attendant prophecies have been dealt with, less than halfway through Book I, Malory does not refer to him again in that book. Nor does he appear in Books II or IV. Thus his early appearances as a full-grown knight are confined to the brief Tale of Sir Launcelot, though there is one non-appearance in Book II that must be mentioned.

Malory's Tale of Arthur and Lucius is essentially a modernized abridgement of the alliterative Morte Arthure; He eliminates the tragic ending (over 1000 lines), thus restricting the narrative to an account of Arthur's Roman campaign, and drastically compresses the rest while keeping the story line intact. Occasionally he makes an alteration in his source, and one of these will seem at first glance to be a pejorative one with respect to Mordred.

When Arthur has decided to go abroad, Malory has him call a parliament and ask for counsel:

The kynges and knyghtes gadirde hem unto counsayle and were condecended for to make two chyfftaynes, that was sir Baudwen of Bretayne, . . . [and] sir Cadore son of Cornuayle, that was at the tyme called sir Constantyne, . . . And there in the presence of all the lordis the kyng esyned all the rule unto thes two lordis and queene Gwenyvere. (194-95)

Thus Arthur leaves his kingdom in the hands of a pair of
regents. He further announces

'If that I dye in this journey, here I make
the, sir Constantyne, my trew ayre, for
thou arte nexte of my kyn save sir Cadore,
thy fadir, and therefore, if that I dye, I
woll that ye be crowned kynge.' (195)

In the source the alliterative poet has a more authoritarian
Arthur tell the same parliament,

"I sett jow here a soveraynge, ascente jif jowe lykys,
That es me sybb, my syster sone, Sir Mordrede hym selvene,
Salle be my levetenante, with lordchipez ynewe,
Of alle my lele lege-mene, þat my landez þemes."  
(644-47)\textsuperscript{36}

Here it is Mordred who is left in charge. Again in the
source, Arthur makes his regent his heir:

"If me be destayned to dye at Dryghtyns wylle,
I charge the my sectour, cheffe of all oþer," (664-65)

but with this further promise:

"Luke þowe kepe the so clere, there be no cause fondene,
Whene I to contre come, if Crystle wille it thole.
And thow have grace gudly to governe thy selvene,
I salle corounne þe knyghte kyng with my handez."  
(675-78)

Astonishingly, Mordred in the poem tries to decline:

"I be-seke jow, syr, as my sybbe lorde,
þat þe wille for charyte cheese jow anoþer;
ffor if þe putte me in þis plytte, þowre pople es ðyssavyde;
To presente a pryncse astate my powere es symple:
Whene oþer of werre wyse are wyrchipide here-aftyre,
Than may I forsothe be sette bott at lyttile.
To passe in your presance my purpos es takyne,
And alle my purveaunce apperte fore my prís knyghtez."  
(681-88)

but without success.

\textsuperscript{36}Citations are to Morte Arthure, ed. George G. Perry,
Malory has taken a passage of over eighty lines from his source, the main burden of which is the appointing of Mordred as regent, and compressed them to twenty-three lines of text with Mordred eliminated altogether. This calls for an explanation. For those who like to view the *Morte Darthur* as a single work, the answer is clear. Dichmann, for example, feels that the suppression of Mordred's regency and the final part of the poem "point inescapably to the conclusion that Malory must have written 'The Tale of King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius' as part of a larger whole." More specifically, Malory felt that the time of the Roman war was too early for Mordred to enter into the action of the story; he wanted Mordred's villainy to mature slowly and did not wish to invest him with importance so early in Arthur's history. 37 Vinaver, on the other hand, sees Malory's interest in the tale residing in Arthur as conqueror rather than as tragic figure; Malory would thus omit the final disaster and any event pointing towards it. He further suggests that Malory molds his source partly to form a political allegory as a tribute to Henry V, and in the process "replaces Mordred's sinister figure by two characters, each reminiscent of a prominent contemporary." 38


38 Vinaver, "Commentary", *Works*, pp. 1367-68.
Interestingly, the underlying assumption of every discussion seems to be that Malory is omitting reference to a villain. But Mordred is by no means a "sinister figure" at this point in the *Morte Arthure*; he is, on the contrary, portrayed in an extremely favorable light. Far from attempting to usurp the crown, he here attempts, with humility and grace, to decline the regency, saying that he is not ready for such a responsibility but needs experience and the opportunity to prove himself (683-88). When Arthur denies Mordred's request, he refers to him as "nurree of olde" (689) and "childe of my chambyre" (690); he further commends his nephew to the queen as "syr Mordrede, hat bow has mekylle praysede" (711). Whatever his later actions in the poem his character here in unexceptionable. The question, then, becomes: why did Malory omit this very positive portrayal of Mordred? Is this an example of Malory's manipulation of his sources at the expense of Mordred?

The answer lies in a consideration of the function of Mordred's regency rather than its portrayal. Malory wrote at the end of a long and highly developed Arthurian tradition, in which, however variable and capricious some of its narratives might seem, certain constraints had evolved in the handling of the story material. Within the constraints much was possible in terms of varying characteri-
zation, omission and inclusion, altering of events or sequences of events, shifting of emphasis, and so forth. But certain motifs, relationships, plot lines were always true; they might be ignored, but not contradicted. Thus, Arthur was always the king, Morgan was always his enemy, Tristram always loved Isolde, and Mordred's regency always precipitated the final battle. So Malory is confronted with an event, Mordred's assumption of power, which in all his sources leads straight to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. The mere event, regardless of how flatteringly Mordred is portrayed, creates the expectation of this final disaster. The very poem he is here working from gives an extremely positive depiction of Mordred and still has the same outcome. Therefore, once Malory has decided to delete the final part of the alliterative Morte Arthure, whatever his reason and whatever his literary intentions, he must suppress Arthur's appointment of Mordred as regent. This need is entirely sufficient to account for Malory's elimination of Mordred from this incident, without any further theorizing. Malory is acting from narrative necessity and is in no way downgrading Mordred with this source change.

Mordred next appears briefly in Book III, which is primarily drawn from three sections of the Vulgate Lancelot. In one episode (261-63) Launcelot helps King Bagdemagus in a tournament against the King of North Galys,
who has three Round Table knights on his side: Madore de la Porte, Mordred, and Gahalantyne. In unmarked armor Launcelot defeats each of them and wins the tournament for his side. No censure of the actions of the three is stated or implied; when they return to Arthur's court, they tell of Launcelot's prowess without apology, envy, or bitterness:

Also there was tolde all the grete armys
that sir Launcelot dud betwyxte the two kynges,
. . . all the trouth sir Gahalantyne dud telle,
and sir Mador de la Porte, and sir Mordrede,
for they were at the same turnement. (287)

(These lines are not in the source.) Mordred is not singled out in any negative way, nor is his association with the others in any way sinister. Gahalantyne is not again linked with Mordred; he is Launcelot's companion at arms and will leave England after Launcelot's death to live in his own country as a holy man. (1259-60). Madore is with Mordred again when he and Aggravaine try to trap Launcelot with the queen, but his main role is an the accuser of Gwenyvere in the poisoned apple episode; here he is mis-
taken, but is a valiant knight acting in good faith. As the cousin of the murdered knight, he voices the thoughts of all present when he accuses the queen (1049); he pursues his case, supported by the other knights, in the approved fashion (1050-51), he meets the queen's champion and, when defeated, discharges his quarrel (1055-58); and finally he "sewed dayly and longe to have the quenys good grace, . . . and all was forgyffyn" (1060).
Malory has adapted but not significantly altered the tournament episode as it appears in the Vulgate Lancelot (V.97-102).\textsuperscript{39} We have yet to see Mordred acting as a villain, or Malory blackening his character.

This is Mordred's only appearance in Book III, but in another episode (277) Malory has deleted a passing reference to him that appears in the Vulgate Lancelot (V, 309). The reference, noting that Ywain has left a recovered Mordret at a castle, is meaningless in Malory because he has omitted the material referred to, but it is interesting to see the nature of the matter left out. Mordret's recovery is from wounds suffered at a tournament closing a long section (V, 264-66, 277-92) in which, for the most part, Lancelot and Mordret are companions at arms. It is perhaps natural that Malory delete this part, especially if he wishes to downgrade Mordred. But if he does so wish, he has omitted a particularly felicitous episode in the midst of this section (V, 283-85).

In this episode, Lancelot, Mordret, and others encounter an old priest at a tomb in the woods. The others retire and the priest addresses Mordret, saying that through him the Round Table will be destroyed and that he will kill his father after being fatally wounded by him. Mordret

replies that his father is dead, whereupon the priest reveals that Artus is his father. He goes on to give a variant of the serpent dream, explaining it. Mordret is the serpent and will henceforth be pitiless and do more evil in a day than his ancestors did good in a lifetime; and he will kill the old priest. Mordret concedes that the final part of the prophecy is true, and, ignoring the priest's plea to talk to Lancelot, kills him. Lancelot and the others are disturbed, but do not act. Lancelot sneaks a scroll from the dead man, which predicts the moment of death of Artus and Mordret; he is tempted to find a reason to kill Mordret but refrains for Gawain's sake. (In fact the subsequent behavior of the two totally ignores the incident, though Lancelot later remembers the serpent prophecy [V, 319] and tells the queen most of the incident [V, 334].) Malory certainly knew of this event; it is improbable that an author bent on blackening a character would have omitted such an appropriate episode.

Further, the priest's remarks about Mordret's capacity for evil ("tu feras plus de mal en j ior que tous tes parentes ne face de bien en sa uie" [V, 284]) are a verbal echo of a sentence ("II fist plus de mal in sa vie que tous sez parentes ne fist onques de bien" [IV, 359]) in an even harsher and more adaptable passage—-a description of Gawain and his brothers (IV, 358-50). Mordret—-twenty years old, with curly blond hair, handsome but for an evil expression—-
is described as envious and cruel, a hater of good knights, cause of the death of Artus and 15,000 men. He began well, but only during the first two years of his knighthood did he perform good deeds. Here again is a passage unflattering to Mordred but passed over by Malory.

Thus, in Book III Mordred is a trivial and neutral character, and we have yet to encounter Moorman's consistently evil and treacherous Mordred.
CHAPTER 3
MORDRED IN THE BOOK OF SIR TRISTRAM

The Book of Sir Tristram has proven so problematical for Malory scholars that its few admirers have to take the part of apologists.\footnote{See, for example, Larry D. Benson, Malory's Morte Darthur (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976) p. 109: \"Sir Tristram has had such a bad press that we should, simply to redress the balance, begin by noting some of the pleasures it offers any reader, whatever his expectations about narrative structure.\"} In particular, its disconnectedness and chronological problems have posed a formidable task for those wishing to intergrate it into a unified \textit{Morte Darthur}. Thus we see its narrative characterized as an analog to the main theme of the \textit{Morte},\footnote{Thomas C. Rumble, \"The Tale of Tristram\': Development by Analogy\", in Malory's Originality, pp. 118-183.} its chronology normalized with the concept of \textit{\"retrospective narrative\"},\footnote{R. M. Lumiansky, \"The Question of Unity in Malory's \textit{Morte Darthur},\" TSE, 5 (1955), 35-39.} and the like. For our present purpose, whether we take it as primarily an analogous narrative or as part of the unfolding Arthurina story line, we have at last a collection of Mordred's appearances that may give us some data from which to evaluate his character.

The first of these comes early in the story of La Cote Male Tayle, when Mordred joins him and the sharp-tongued Maledysaunte on their journey. They are challenged...
by two knights; one dehorses Mordred, but is downed by
La Cote Male Tayle, who chases his own opponent to a castle
where he is set upon by a hundred knights and escapes
only through excessive valor and the aid of a damsels.
Maleydysaunte tells Mordred she thinks him dead or cap-
tured, then when he returns, sends her own messenger to
verify his story before she will believe it. When the
story is proven, she sulks. Mordred lectures her: she
is wrong to rebuke him: though he is not yet a skilled
horseman, he is good with sword, so that experienced
knights who can easily dehorse him are wary to fight
him on foot; just so was the newly knighted Launcelot
often bested on horseback but defeated and slew many
on foot. When Launcelot joins the company later, Mordred
leaves. (463-67).

Malory has made one significant change from his
source, the French prose Tristan. Mordred's entire
speech is invented, developed from a brief urging to
be less aggressive 43 into an eloquent defense of la
Cote Male Tayle, who is "a good knyght, and..."

43 Vinaver, "Commentary"; Works, p. 1468. The prose
Tristan exists as a group of unpublished manuscripts.
Accordingly, I will again depend on Vinaver for compar-
is on with the source.
shall preve a noble man." So far from denigrating Mordred in altering his source, Malory has made him here into a friendly and generous-minded partisan of the new young knight.

We next hear of Mordred (536) lying sick in the castle of an old knight, recovering from wounds received ten days before from Sir Percides, who would have slain him but for love of Gawayne and his brothers. We are not told any reason for Persides' desire to kill Mordred, so we are not justified in attaching any significance to this episode. (We might note in passing the Mordred has now lost three fights without a victory.)

Mordred again appears (as does Aggravayne) as one of seven Round Table knights joining Dynadan in some fun at the expense of the cowardly King Mark (585-91). Dynadan tells Mark the Arthurian knights are headed by Launcelot, describing Mordred's shield as Laucelot's. Since Mordred is injured, the knights decide to put his armor on Dagonet, Arthur's fool, who chases Mark, followed by the amused knights. An anonymous knight (later identified as Palomydes) confronts Dagonet and knocks him from his horse. He despatches three of the others
in succession, refuses to identify himself, ends by
defeating all of the knights except Dynadan, who has
not caught up, and Mordred, who is not armed. Here
again we see Mordred in a neutral light; though Malory
makes a minor ordering change (not reflected in the
brief account above), the incident essentially follows
the source.

At last we come to an incident portraying Mordred
(in part) in an unfavorable light (613-15). Malory has
indeed altered his source here, and mostly at the ex-
 pense of Mordred, but Mordred is still not unmitigated
villain. The incident takes place immediately after the
killing of Morgawse.

Aggravayne and Mordred are riding when they encounter
a wounded knight being pursued by another (subsequently
identified as Brewnys Saunze Pite). Dynadan approaches,
but refuses to help. The brothers face Breunys, who
knocks each in turn off his horse and rides over Aggravayne.
Dynadan, his hand forced, dehorses Brewnys. When he
identifies himself Mordred and Aggravayne are angry be-
cause they ahte him. The injured knight identifies
himself as Dalan, accuses Dynadan of killing his father

44 Ibid., p. 1488.
and attacks him. Dynadan defeats him and likewise cuts down Mordred and Aggyrwayne. Later, in the Grail quest, the brothers "cowardly and felonly" kill Dynadan.

The core of this episode is the hatred of Mordred and Aggravayne for Dynadan. In the source, Dalan is a friend of the brothers, whose father has been killed by Kynadan's father and who thereby induces them to attack Dynadan.\(^{45}\) Malory suppresses this relationship and describes their motivation in much less flattering terms.

\[\ldots\text{they hated hym oute of mesure bycause of sir Lameroke. For sir Dynadan had suche a custom that he loved all good knyghtes that were valyaunte, and he hated all tho that were destroyers of good knyghtes. And there were none that hated sir Lynadan but thos that ever were called murtherers. (614)}\]

Thus, instead of taking the part of a friend, Mordred and Aggravayne attack Dynadan out of pure malice. Yet Malory does not make it quite pure at that, for he includes a mitigating cause for their ill will: Dynadan is a friend to Lamerok, who in the immediately preceding episode was caught in bed with Morgawse, a discovery resulting in Gaherys' killing his mother and letting her lover escape (611-613). It is a little harder

\(^{45}\text{Ibid., p. 1494.}\)
to mitigate the later slaying of Dynadan, but it should be noted that Dynadan, Mordred, and Aggravayne are all absent from the Tale of the Sankgreal, so that Dynadan's murder, exemplifying the villainy of Mordred, is casually looked forward to, then forgotten—a peculiar lapse by an author allegedly interested in keeping a character's treachery and envy ever before his reader. Further, Dynadan appears alive in Book VII, after the quest is over, as one of those trying to heal Sir Urry (1148); perhaps not too much ought to be made of this, however, as other knights appear alive after being killed onstage, a few of them at this very time.

A further source change in this episode is the elimination of two humorous dialogues with Dynadan. This pair of deletions renders the incident more serious, but at the same time detracts from the likeability of Dynadan. It makes his initial reluctance to fight look shoddy, especially when he is forced to joust "for shame". Nevertheless, Dynadan remains a sympathetic character here, while Malory's alterations do have the net effect of detracting from Mordred (and Aggravayne as well, for 46 Ibid.)
the two are not in any way distinguished in the episode).

Mordred's next appearance is also characterized by malice, of a very mild sort. (647) Sir Alysaundir, on horseback, is so love-smitten at the sight of his lady that he is unaware of his surroundings. The "false knyght sir Mordred" happens by and decides to lead his horse all about. As he is about to lead the knight away to shame him, a damsel arms herself and attacks Alysaundir, who is brought to his senses by the blow, whereupon Mordred flees. Mordred's actions here, though their purpose if to shame another knight, though unkind, are relatively harmless, even playful. More significant is that here for the first time Mordred is called "false." Perhaps Malory now intends to consistently portray Mordred in an evil light. If so, he has written half his work before deciding to do so, and "false knyght" is a curiously mild rendition of the French: "un desloyaux chevalier qui moult estoit cruel et felon."47

On the fifth day of the tournament at Surluse, Palomydes defeats Gawayne, Mordred, Gaherys, and Aggravayne in succession (663). This is in itself a brief and entirely innocuous episode, though the aftermath of the tournament

will be murder. (Mordred has now lost six jousts.)

Our next report of Mordred is second-hand, as Tristram, Dynadan, Palomydes, and Gareth discuss the death of Lamerok. Gareth is estranged from his brothers—"for cause that I undirstonde they be murtherars of good knyghtes I lefte there company." According to a squire's eyewitness report, the brothers ambushed Lamerok, slew his horse, and fought him on foot for three hours before Mordred "gaff hym his dethis wounde behynde hym at his bakke." The brothers are at odds with most good knights of the Round Table (698-700). The casting into dialogue is mostly Malory's work. The significant change, however, is the shifting from Gauvain as dealer of the fatal blow (in the French) to Mordred. 48

The murder of Lamerok is a highly significant event. It is predicted by Launcelot: "Sir Gawayne and his bretherne woll sle hym by one mean other by another." (613); it is foreshadowed by Lamerok's distrust of Gawayne, expressed as he leaves the Surluse tournament (670); Palomydes says that Gawayne and his brothers slew him "felounsly" as he left the tournament (688); Tristram rails at Aggravayne and Gaherys for the murder, calling the brothers "the grettyste

48 Ibid., p. 1513.
distroyers and murtherars of good knyghtes that is now in the realme of Ingelonde"--in a passage not in the French (691); Palomydes tells of it again, naming the four brothers, including Mordred, but giving details to his listener and not the reader (716); the name of Lamerok is often mentioned afterwards, frequently with reference to his treacherous murder (1048, 1059, 1149, 1190). Thus Mordred is linked in a critical way with a deed of treachery. However, except for the actual description of the murder and a single later reference to it (in the words of Palomydes in both cases), Mordred is not connected to it by name. Though he struck the lethal blow, and from behind at that, the murderers are normally given as "Gawayne and his brothers". So Malory has at least failed to consistently emphasize Mordred's role in this crime.

In a larger context, the ambush-murder is part of the feud between the houses of Lot and Pellynore. Lamerok is the son of King Pellynore, who has earlier killed King Lot in battle (77). (Lamerok denies this, accusing Balyn le Saveage (612), but this is an erroneous reference that has become a minor textual crux.) He is characterized as one of the best of knights, "as good as ever was sir Launcelot othir sir Trystram" according to Dynadan (599), whose judgment is echoed

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49 Ibid., p. 1511.
by Palomydes (529), a group of four knights (639), and Trystram himself (557, 698). Like the others of this peerless trio, he conceives an illicit love. It first surfaces when he fights Mellyagaunce over the question of whose lady is fairest—to Lamerok, Queen Morgawse "ys the fayrest lady that beryth the lyff." (486-87). We see it next as Mark overhears Lamerok's lament by the fountain:

'O, thou fayre quene of Orkeney, kynge Lottys wyff and modir unto sir Gawayne and to sir Gaheris, and modir to many other, for thy love I am in grete paynyst!' (579)

Finally Lamerok and Morgawse tryst in a castle near Camelot, falling victim to a trap laid by Gaheris, who surprises them in bed and beheads his mother, but spares the unarmed Lamerok. Gaherys' accusation sums up the blood feud;

' thy fadir slew oure fadir, and thou to ly by oure modir is to muche shame for us to suffir. And as for thy fadir, kynge Pellynor, my brothir sir Gawayne and I slew hym.' (611-13)

(The killing of Pellynore, according to his widow, was done 'nat manly, but by treason.' [810]) Ironically, Lamerok, unlike Trystram or Launcelot, could have married his paramour; as Arthur himself suggests, "Hit had bene muche fayrer and bettir that ye hadde wedded her, for ye ar a kynges sonne as well as they." (664),
It would have, indeed; Lot's death is already avenged, so it is Lamerok's own actions in his affair with Morgawse that provide the brothers with their reason for killing him. The criminal nature of the killing of Lamerok may thus lie mainly or entirely in the manner of the slaying rather than in the act itself. But it is just here, as exemplar of the manner of the deed, that Mordred appears, giving Lamerok "his defhis wounde behynde hym at his bakke" (699). Thus, despite Malory's failure to follow up this base portrayal, Mordred is at the moment of Lamerok's death a murderer, without the partially saving grace of integration into the Lot-Pellynore feud.

Mordred has thus emerged in a very negative light in the latter part of Book V. Perhaps he will remain consistent until the end of the *Morte Darthur*, unreliedly base. The rest of Book V does not encourage this view, however; he appears only twice more, in a decidedly neutral light. At a tournament he is on a list of Round Table Knights not present (733). Later Percivale sends messages to Arthur's court by a returning Round Table Knight he has rescued; among them is word to Kay and Mordred that he will not forget their mockery and scorn on his knighting day and will return to the
court when he has more renown than either of them. When the message is delivered, Kay and Mordred concede the possibility but maintain he was an unlikely knight. (814-15). Curiously, this passage is not in the source, but the mockery is in the source and not in Malory, where it would appar just before the death of Morgawse (611). Mordred may appar unkind in mocking the new knight (in contrast to his defense of La Cote Male Tayle), but his association with Kay lightens the tone of the incident and renders it innocuous.

Taken all together, the characterization of Mordred in Book V is an amorphous as the book itself. He is the enemy of Dynadan and a participant in the ambush-murder of Lamerok. But he also take part in a number of innocuous and even humorous episodes, as well as the flattering incident with Maledysaunte and La Cote Male Tayle. Significant in view of later events in his occasional association with Aggravayne, notable as the alleged future murderer of Dynadan.

50 Ibid., p. 1529.
CHAPTER 4
MORDRED IN THE LATER BOOKS

Malory's Grail quest proceeds without Mordred, as does that of his French source. Nothing can be concluded about Malory's intentions here; it would have required an unusual amount of initiative to insert Mordred in a narrative where he has no natural place. Later, I will suggest how this omission compromises Mordred's career as hero.

Book VII opens with the renewed passion of Launcelot and Gwyenlyvere, in a climate of increasing suspicion:

many in the court spoke of it, and in especial Sir Aggravayne, Sir Gawaynes brother, for he was ever opynne-mowthed. (1045)

Launcelot prudently withdraws from the queen and answers her complaint by warning of the suspicions of many knights, such as Aggravayne and Mordred (1045–46). When he suddenly leaves the court the queen holds a dinner, including both these knights among her guests (1048). Though Launcelot's warning foreshadows later trouble, it is itself harmless, and it is certainly not sinister to receive a dinner invitation—neither Mordred nor Aggravayne take any further part in the poisoned apply story.

51 Les Aventures ou la Queste del Saint Graal
See Sommer's Vulgate Version, VI, pp. 3–199.
Mordred is one of the knights fighting on Arthur's side in a tournament, when he (and Aggravayne, and others) are struck down by a distinguished Launcelot fighting for the other side. (1070-71) When Launcelot next returns to court, almost everyone is happy:

the kynge made grete joy of hym; and so ded Sir Gawayne and all the knyghtes of the Rounde Table excepte Sir Aggravayne and Sir Mordred. (1092)

This remark and the dinner-guest list are not in the sources, nor does Mordred's name appear in Launcelot's warning. The net effect of these changes is to slightly increase Mordred's presence and to associate him with Aggravayne. The opposition of the to brothers to Launcelot begins to surface.

At the great tournament, Mordred and Aggravayne (and Gaherys and Gawyn) fight on King Arthur's side. During the battle each unhorses an anonymous knight and eachis twice smitten down by Launcelot (1108-11). (Mordred's onstage joust record is now l-9.) Later, each is among the 110 Round Table knights who fail to heal Sir Urry. (1148).

Mordred's appearances in Book VII seem very neutral morally except for his sulking upon the return of

52 Ibid., pp. 1596-97, 1603.
Launcelot, but an enmity with Launcelot is emerging that will prove deadly. Interestingly, Mordred is always associated with Aggravayne, and it is the latter whose presence is stronger in the book, which begins with Aggravayne alone voicing suspicion of Launcelot and Gwencyvere (1045) and ends with Aggravayne alone watching them night and day waiting for an opportunity to "put hem bothe to a rebuke and a shame" (1153). Mordred is not a prime mover yet, but an accomplice or junior partner to his brother.

Aggravayne has been associated with Mordred in earlier books, but never in the ascendancy. Nor has he established a substantial identity of his own that might account for his stronger presence here. His primacy, here and later, is very puzzling if we wish to view Mordred as arch-villain, since it substantially reduces Mordred's role as causative agent in the early stages of the Round Table's disintegration. We would expect exactly the opposite relationship between the two if Malory is systematically enhancing Mordred's villainy.

Yet, in the final words of Book VII (except for the explicit), "here I go unto the morte Arthur, and that caused sir Aggravayne." (1154)
The coupling persists into the first chapter of Book VIII, in which Gwenyvere's adultery becomes public and Launcelot leaves the Round Table never to return. At the very outset, we are given the causal agents of the destruction of "the floure of chyvalry" and their motivation:

. . . all was longe uppon two unhappy knyghtis whych were named sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred, that were brethirn unto sir Gawayne. For thys sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had ever a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot . . . (1161)

This passage is not traceable to either of Malory's sources for this book, the Vulgate Morte Artu and the English stanzaic Morte Arthur. It may, therefore, be taken as Malory's own statement of the proximate

53 Ibid., p. 1628.
cause of the "grete angur and unhappe that stynted nat
tylle the floure of chyvalrye of alle the worlde was
destroyed and slayne" (1161). The "two unhappy knyghtis"
are not 'discontent' but rather 'unlucky' or 'ill-starred',
and may be viewed in part as instruments of fate. This
cannot, however, be a reference to Arthur's sin in be-
getting Mordred since the adjective applies equally to
Aggravayne. Moreover, though Malory increases Mor-
drd's role in the plot to reveal the queen's adultery.
Aggravayne retains the ascendance until his death. Thus,
ignoring Merlin's prophecy that Arthur will be destroyed
for his sin (44), Malory begins Book VIII by setting the
final events in motion through the malice of two knights.

These events begin when Aggravayne broaches to his
brothers the matter of doing something about the queen's
adultery. Three of the brothers want to hear no more,
but Mordred does, which Gawayne readily believes, "for
ever unto all unhappyness, sir, ye woll graunte" (1161).
This remark is taken by Moorman as one of the cases in
which a character speaks ill of Mordred in a passage
"not to be found in Malory's sources."\(^{55}\) However, though
it is not in the speech of Gawayne in the \textit{Morte Arthur}
(11. 1688-1711), it is not difficult to see in it an

\(^{55}\) Moorman, p. 88.
echo of that poem's remark that the brothers present included "Mordreite, that mykelle couthe of wrake" (1675). By taking this criticism from the narrative and putting it into the mouth of a character, Malory somewhat mitigates its effect rather than the reverse.

This note of Mordreite's presence, interestingly, is the only mention of him in the episode until the knights gather to take Launcelot in the queen's chamber, though the Morte Arthur poet thus seems to leave him present through the conversation with the king. In the Mort Artu Mordret is somewhat more in evidence, though he and Guerrehes (only two brothers leave in this work) are specifically without ideas when Artus asks for advice, so that Agravain carries the action forward alone. Malory, by persistently linking Mordred with Aggravayne in this sequence, brings the former more deeply into the causal chain. Thus it is explicitly the two together who reject Gawayne's advice (1162), confront the king (1163-64), lead the twelve knights to the queen's chamber (1164, 1165), cry out to Launcelot inside (1165, 1166, 1167, 1168).

An interesting pairing, which is not in the sources and which seems to make Aggravayne and Mordred more ungrateful and treacherous, occurs in Gawayne's speech attempting to dissuade the two from acting. He notes that

56 VI, 272; in Frappier (p. 111) Mordret is omitted here.
Launcelot rescued them and sixty-two others from Sir Tarquyn. (1162). In the episode referred to, neither is mentioned, although several of Tarquyn's victims are named, including Gaherys (255-56, 264-69). Of course, consistency of detail (especially between books) and strict accuracy in backward views are not Malory's strong points, though it is curious to note that the total number of Tarquyn's prisoners, sixty-four, is accurate (266). It is also curious that Launcelot himself, in reminding Arthur and Gawayne of this incident (again getting the number right), mentions only Gaherys by name (1198). If Malory, in Gawayne's speech, is lowering Mordred's character, he is certainly not being as painstaking about it as Moorman would have us believe.

Although Malory links Mordred with his brother and thus increases his share in the trapping of Launcelot, the increased share is still not an equal one. Aggravayne remains the primary antagonist: it is he to whom Gawayne mainly addresses his remarks (1161-62); it is he who does the talking when the brothers speak to the king (1163-64); it is he whom Bors warns Launcelot against when advising him not to go to the queen (1164); it is he whom Launcelot addresses by name when trapped (1167); it is he whom Gawyn
later recalls warning against mischief (1176). When Launcelot breaks out of the chamber, he is surely instinctively going first after the chief agent of his betrayal when "at the firste stroke he slew sir Aggravayne" (1168). Mordred is a partner, but a lesser one, who becomes the principal antagonist only after his brother's death. Even then, his part in this episode is limited to telling Arthur what has happened "frome the bygynnynge to the endynge" (1173-74); it is the events, and not anything Mordred does with them, that cause Arthur to condemn Gwenvyvere to be burned.

It should be noted that Aggravayne's prominence with respect to Mordred does stem from the sources, but the changes necessary to alter that balance are trivial—in fact, mostly simple elaborations on what Malory does in newly linking Mordred to Aggravayne in several passages already mentioned. To cite but one example, the attempt to capture Launcelot in Gwenvyvere's chambers: in the Mort Artu, Agravain takes with him a "grant parti de cheualiers" (VI, 274). In the stanzaic Morte Arthur, Aggravayne plans to lead "other twelve kyghtes kene" (l. 1756), none of them named; when the trap is sprung, "Come Agravayne and Syr Mordreit/ With twelve knyghtys stiffe in stowre" (ll. 1810-11). In
Malory, Aggravayne and Mordred gather twelve named knights (1164), then when Launcelot is trapped, "there cam sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred wyth twelve knyghtes with them of the Rounde Table" (1165). One more simple alteration—to "Mordred and Aggravayne", or perhaps to "Mordred, with Aggravayne and twelve..."—would shift the dominant role to Mordred. We can only conclude that, whatever the origins of Aggravayne's predominance, Malory has no interest in changing it.

Malory increases the responsibility of the brothers for the impending tragedy by making a crucial change in Arthur's reaction to Aggravayne's revelation of the adultery. He writes that the king, "as the Freynshe booke sayth," already had a "demying" of the affair but was ignoring it for love of, and gratitude to, Launcelot (1163). However, neither the French book nor the English poem says anything of the sort. In the Mort Artu the king is stunned, then demands that the brothers try to take the lovers in the act (VI, 270-71). In the Morte Arthur he is grieved that the noble Launcelot should be guilty of treason, but unhesitatingly asks for advice on how to take him with the queen (11. 1736-51). Malory's Arthur, in marked contrast, is reluctantly forced to act. The significance of the action of Aggravayne and Mordred
lies not in the discovery of the adultery to the king, who knows of it, but in the forcing of the matter into the open so that Arthur is powerless to ignore it further. The brothers are not merely revealers of information but movers of events. The impact of the events thus set in motion goes "far beyond the issue of adultery in itself. That the estrangement of Launcelot will lead to the ultimate destruction of the Round Table is clear from Arthur's lament (elaborated by Malory from a single sentence in the Mort Arthu)\textsuperscript{57} after the bloody rescue of Gwenyvere:

'... much more I am sorry for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydrius in no company ... alas, that ever sir Launcelot and I shuld be at debate:' (1184)

Surprisingly enough, even at this late stage Mordred is not strongly portrayed as despicable. It is true that the beginning of the Round Table's destruction is laid to his and Aggrayane's "prevy hate" for the queen and Launcelot (1161), a motive echoed in Arthur's lament laying responsibility for the developing disorder squarely upon the brothers:

\textsuperscript{57}Vainaver, "Commentary", Works, pp. 1634-35.
"'A, Aggravayne, Aggravayne: . . . Jesu forgyff thy
thy soule, for thyne evyll wyll that thou haddist and
sir Mordred, thy brothir, unto sir Launcelot hath caused
all this sorrow.'" Nevertheless, the two are never
described narratively as base, envious, false, treacher-
ous, or the like. The only adjective narratively applied
to them is "unhappy" (1161), which is Launcelot's own
word for himself in telling of his slaying of Gaherys
and Gareth (1189), another key link in the chain of events
ending on Salisbury Plain. The brothers are scarcely
being condemned by Arthur when he reminds Gawayne that
Launcelot "slew youre brothir sir Aggravayne, a full
good knyght, and allmoste he had slayne youre othir
brother, sir Mordred" (1175). These words appear in a
long dialogue almost entirely of Malory's own invention.58

A neutral addition of Malory to his sources is the
list of knights accompanying Aggravayne and Mordred on
their mission; none are named in either the Mort Artu
(VI, 274) or the Morte Arthur (ll. 1764-67). The twelve
knights are "of Scotlande, other ellis of sir Gauaynes
kynne, other well-wylles to hyss brothir" (1164). That
is, they are natural allies; none are elsewhere portrayed

58 Ibid., p. 1633. The source passages are Morte Artu,
as evil—in fact they include Sir Ascomore, "the good knyght that never fayled his lorde" (221). Thus Malory, in identifying the anonymous accomplices of his sources, provides plausible allies for a perhaps questionable mission, forgoing the opportunity to blacken the enterprise by using knights of established ill character.

The strongest criticism of Mordred comes from the mouth of Launcelot, the target of his emnity. In returning the queen to Arthur, he denounces her accusers as liars and calls his entrapment a frame-up:

'. . . they that tolde you the talys were lyars . . . for I was sente unto my lady, youre quyne, I wote nat for what cause, but I was nat so sane within the chambir dore but anone sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred called me traytoure and false recrayed knight." (1197)

But Malory has already told us that "as the Freynshhe books seyth, the quene and Launcelot were togydirs. And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyst nat thereof make no mencion" (1165). This follows, however limply, both the Mort Artu ("se colcha auoec sa dame" [VI, 275], or "so coucha avec la reine" [Frappier, p. 115]) and the Morte Arthur ("To bed he gothe with the quene / And there he thoughte to dwelle alle nyght." [11. 1806-07]). Thus it is Launcelot who is lying, as he has already lied to his relatives and friends (1170-71) and earlier to Arthur (1188). Mordred and Aggravayne appear here not
as villains but as victims of the slander of their oppo-
ponent. Launcelot's next slur will prove more justified.

Despite the malice of his motivation, and despite
the ultimately fatal consequences of his role in these
events of early Book VIII, Mordred is still not consis-
tently and vigorously portrayed as a base and perfidious
knight. For something approaching such a portrayal, we
must yet look to the future, as Launcelot does upon leaving
England: "'For ever I dreed me . . . that sir Mordred woll
make trouble, for he ys passyng envyour and applyeth hym
muche to trouble'" (1204). At this point Launcelot is the
traitor and Mordred the friend of Arthur, but the latter
will soon be given the means for his own treachery. For
Arthur and Gawayn soon pursue Launcelot over the sea to
invade his lands, whereupon Arthur makes a crucial error:

And there kynge Arthur made sir Mordred
chyeff ruler of all Ingelonde, and also he
put the quene undir hys governaunce:
bycause sir Mordred was kynge Arthurs son,
he gaff hym the rule off hys londe and off
hys wyff. (1211)

Thus the stage is set for Mordred to turn upon his father,
and indeed it is the father-son relationship of Arthur
and Mordred that is here emphasized. Though this king-
ship here is given as a reason for Arthur's putting into
his son's hands the means of his own destruction, and
may therefore be viewed as Arthur’s early sin returned to destroy him, this theme is no more than implicit. This reason is Malory’s: In the *Morte Artu* Mordred offers to remain behind in charge (VI, 317), while in the *Morte Arthur* he is the choice of the knights (ll. 2516-23).

The final collapse of the Round Table begins when Mordred forges reports of Arthur’s death, has himself chosen king, and announces his plan to wed Gwenyvere, "which was hys unclys wyff and hys fadirs wyff". (1227). It is this relationship that is emphasized by the Bishop of Canterbury in his rebuke of Mordred:

'. . . Woll ye first displease God and sytthyn shame yourselff and all knyghthood? For ys nat kynge Arthur youre uncle, and no farther but your modirs brothir, and uppon her he hymselffe begate you, uppon hys owe syster? Therefore how may ye wed youre owne fadirs wyff' (1224-28)

Here we have, explicitly mentioned, the incest of Arthur; however, it is relevant here only to show the closeness of Mordred’s kinship to the king--it is the planned incest (or quasi-incest) of Mordred that is condemned by the Bishop, who threatens the usurper with excommunication for it. Only secondarily does he condemn Mordred’s false reports of Arthur’s death and the resultant "foule warke in thys lande"; he then performs the excommunication and flees for his life.
The planned marriage does not take place. Gwenyvere has, through a ruse, gained the Tower of London and there withstood Mordred's determined siege. He now tries "by lettirs and sondis, and by fayre meanys and foule meanys," to persuade her to come out, but she answers that "she had levir sle herself than to be maryed with hym" (1228). The queen besieged in the Tower is mentioned twice again—Gawayne writing of it (1231-32) and Launcelot reading Gawayne's letter (1249)—but without particular force. For practical purposes, Mordred's attempted marriage is dropped here, and emphasis shifts to his turning on his father.

Though Mordred is hated by Gwenyvere and the Bishop, their attitude is by no means universal, as we learn when Mordred seeks help upon hearing of Arthur's impending return:

And suche people drew unto hym; for than was the comyn voyce among them that with kynge Arthur was never othir lyff but warre and stryff, and with sir Mordrede was grete joy and blysse. (1228-29)

Malory here heavily scores the English people for this shift in loyalties. But it is not their allegiance to a traitor that is criticized; it is rather their ingratitude to "the moste kynge and nobelyst knyght of the worlde" and their general habit of fickleness: "thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme" (1229). This whole passage has no counterpart in the sources—Vinaver thinks it
a reference to unspecified contemporar
ty events; however that may be, its effect on the portrayal of Mordred is positive rather than negative. An easy chance to tar him is passed by and he is yet to be narratively labeled a villain, however questionable his acts. We are left with the fact that, fickle or not, "the moste party of all Inglonde hylde wyth sir Mordred," despite his intention "to beate hys owne fadir from hys owne londys" (1229).

The importance of this filial betrayal is indicated by its repetition within a few lines, as Mordred waits at Dover "to lette hys owne fadir to londe uppon the londe that he was kynge over" (1229). Arthur, after a fierce fight, forces a landing at Dover, but Gawayne is killed. It is at this point that Mordred is, for the first time in Malory's entire work, explicitly labeled a traitor, as the dying Gawayne writes Launcelot asking help for Arthur, who is "full straytely bestad wyth an false traytoure whych ys my halff-brothir, sir Mordred" (1231). He repeats the epithet almost immediately in telling Launcelot of the Dover battle with "that false traytoure, sir Mordred" (1232).

59 Ibid., p. 1647.
The day of destiny now draws rapidly nearer. Arthur defeats Mordred again at Barham Down, and after this battle begins to win new support: "Than much people drew unto kynge Arthur, and than they sayde that sir Mordred warred uppon kynge Arthure wyth wronge" (1232). Arthur and Mordred agree to meet in battle near Salisbury on Monday after Trinity Sunday, and both begin to marshal their forces. Interestingly, no moral distinction is drawn between the two sides, as "many a full noble knyght drew into hym (Mordred) and also to the kynge; but they that loved sir Launcelot drew unto sir Mordred" (1233). From now through the final battle, we shall see Arthur and Mordred portrayed not as hero and villain but as antagonists matched equally, even symmetrically. An aspect of that symmetry appears here in Malory's omission of an interesting circumstance in his sources: in the Morte Arthur Mordred buys the loyalty of his supporters with great gifts (11. 2962-66. 3158-59), while in the Mort Artu he is expressly using Artus' wealth to do so (VI, 321, 351-52). No such taint attaches to Mordred's support in Malory--a clear mitigation of Mordred's character in the midst of his destruction of the Round Table.

The night before the scheduled battle, Arthur has a pair of dreams. In the first he finds himself seated
upon a wheel, which turns and pitches him into a deep water filled with serpents and beasts grabbing at him. In this (as in most of the following) Malory prefers his English source to his French one: in the *Mort Arthur* the version is explicitly of the wheel of Fortune (VI, 36)]. Malory generally suppresses reference to Fortune in the French book (for example, in Artus's lament for Gauvain [VI, 356]). Ironically the *Mort Arthur* with its frequent appearances of Fortune, has the battle begin as planned (VI, 364-65), while in Malory, where the tragedy is humanized by deemphasizing Fortune, the actual battle breaks out because of a chance occurrence, after peace has been concluded.

In the second dream Gawayne advises the king to avoid battle the next day, for if he can arrange a month's truce Launcelot will arrive to help him; otherwise Arthur and most of his knights will die. Arthur decides to take the advice and sends representatives to negotiate with Mordred. Here again Malory follows the *Morte Arthur* (ll. 3192-3235), which shows Mordred in a more favorable light than the French book; in the latter Mordred sends the king an insolent message that precludes any attempt at negotiation (VI, 363). The outcome of the discussions is that Mordred is ceded Cornwall and Kent and is to rule
England after Arthur's death (1234-35). This is, of course, more than just a truce; it is an agreement sufficient to end hostilities permanently.

The significance of this agreement, which renders any aid from Launcelot irrelevant, is not entirely clear. Mordred is unquestionably sincere; no advantage can come to him from breaking the treaty later that he has not already by refusing to make it—Arthur's lifting of his siege of Launcelot, in fact, means that time is on the king's side. It is possible that Arthur, who sent his representatives "in ony wyse to take a tretyse for a moneth-day wyth sir Mordred" (1234), and who now begins persistently to call Mordred 'traytoure', intends himself to break the agreement when Launcelot arrives. Though this is consistent with the narrative, it is not strongly suggested by it and is at variance with the character of Arthur. The most natural assumption is that the agreement is a sincere one, in which Mordred, as Arthur's only son, is not really asking more than he might reasonably expect in the natural course of events. In any case, it is difficult to criticize Mordred's conduct at this point.

In describing the meeting between Arthur and Mordred, and the unlucky interference of the adder, Malory makes minor changes in the direction of symmetry and equality between the antagonists. Thus in the Morte Arthur each
man warns his supporters of possible treachery from the other side and orders an attack at any sign of it, but there is no verbal similarity between the warnings. In Malory, however, the verbal parallels are marked. Thus

Arthur

warned all hys hoost that and they se ony swerde drawyn, 'loke ye com on fyersely and sle that traytoure, sir Mordred, for I in no wyse truste hym'. (1235; italics mine)

Similarly, Mordred

warned hys oste that 'and ye se ony maner of swerde drawn, loke that ye come on fyersely and so sle all that ever before you stondyth, for in no wyse I woll nat truste for thys sretryse'. (1235; italics mine)

The stanzaic poem has Arthur's party suspect treachery and attack when the stung knight draws his sword to kill the adder, perhaps implying the knight was one of Mordred's, though the context suggests he was one of Arthur's men between the hosts (ll. 3336-49). In Malory the knight is totally unidentifiable and both parties react identically (1235). It is perhaps worth noting that the agreement is not quite concluded in the Morte Arthur (ll. 3340-41), while Malory's adder waits until the accord is complete and the antagonists are drinking together.

The parity between the antagonists continues with their equal bravery in the fighting. Malory tells us taht Arthur rode among Mordred's knights
and ded full nobely, as a noble kynge shulde
do, and at all tymes he faynted never. And sir
Mordred ded hys devoure that day and put hymselffe
in grete perell. (1236)

The symmetry reaches a grim climax as Arthur and Mordred
deal one another death wounds in one of Malory's most
starkly beautiful passages. He follows both sources
in having Mordred's blow come after Arthur has lethally
spared him, but his prose transcends both—neither
has anything like the ghastly courage of Mordred's
thrusting himself up Arthur's spear to give the return
blow. The symmetry of the final clash is emphasized by
Malory's specifically noting, as his sources do not, that
Mordred as well as Arthur runs to meet his opponent (1237).

Malory subtly iterates the theme of filial betrayal
in describing Mordred's final act as the smiting of "hys
fadir, kynge Arthure". Nevertheless, however ignoble
Mordred's actions may have been, there is nothing ignoble
about his death, which he meets courageously and without
flinching, in the best style of chivalry. Even Arthur
might grudgingly concede that "nothing in his life be-
came him like the leaving it"—as he essentially does
in the alliterative Morte Arthure (which Malory knew,

60Mort Artn, VI 376-77; Morte Arthure, ll. 3392-99.
having used it as source for Book II): "sore me forethy-nkkes, / That ever siche a false theefe so faire an ende haves." And indeed Mordred's end, and his conduct in the days preceding it, are in Malory both morally and chivalrously unexceptionable, more so than in his sources.

Mordred reappears, in retrospect, only thrice more. The first two references are not significant: a passing non-pejorative mention of Mordred's putting to flight the Bishop of Canterbury (1241), and a description of Gwennyvere's becoming a nun when she hears that "kynge Arthure was dede and all the noble knyghtes, sir Mordred and all the reman-aunte" (1243). (The phrasing of this last remark, of course, allows the tendentious claim that the adjective 'noble' applies to Mordred as well as the other knights.)

It is Launcelot, hearing that Mordred is warring against "kyng Arthur, hys owne fadir," who has the last word about him, and that word is harsh:

'Alas: that double traytoure, sir Mordred, now me repentith that ever he escaped by hondys, for much shame hath he done unto my lorde Arthure. . . . And yet, alas, myght I never have hap to sle that traytoure, sir Mordred: (1245)

When Launcelot arrives at Dover, he is told the outcome of the struggle and is denied a chance at the 'traytoure' (1250). It is interesting to note that Gawayne (1231, 1232),

Arthur (1235, 1236, 1237), and Launcelot (1249) all call Mordred a traitor, but that Malory, not notably reluctant to label a knight, never does. All the same, it would be rather too wilful to deny that this passage, with its final reminder of Mordred's blook relationship to Arthur, represents Malory's own final judgment or something very close to it.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

And so we end with the fading echo of Launcelot's epithet, a final evaluation of Mordred as simply and entirely base. Nevertheless, this judgment has not been in the forefront of Malory's mind all the while he wrote. Moorman claims that Malory manipulated his sources to the detriment of Mordred, that

throughout the Morte Darthur, his actions have been made by Malory to stem consistently from a single motive; like his brother Agravaine, he is envious and jealous of those who are in power and who use that power for good ends.62

We have seen that this contention is wholly untenable, that Mordred is not portrayed consistently (and thus that his portrayal militates against, rather than for, unity) throughout Malory, that in fact he is not unrelievably base even in the final book. We have seen positive aspects of Mordred's character in the beginning, middle, and end. We have even seen Malory sometimes alter his sources in such a way as to present Mordred in a more favorable light. Though Malory's Mordred is villainous, he is by no means consistently or wholly evil.

Nor is he one of those "straightforward characters... whose functions in the Morte Darthur largely dictate their actions."63

62 Moorman, p. 88.
63 Ibid.
He is more complex than that. Perhaps his very inconsistency is in some way due to his affinities with patterns that transcend Malory's literary intentions altogether. Thus one of the most interesting of Mordred's extra dimensions is revealed in his conformity to the theme of the birth of the hero, discussed above. Let us see, now, how his adult career compares with the pattern of the hero's later life.

The remainder of Rank's composite history of the hero, the beginning of which has been already quoted, reads:

> After he is grown up, he finds his distinguished parents in a highly versatile fashion, takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged on the other, and finally achieves rank and honors. 64

Freud has him find his parents "after many strange adventures". 65 This scheme is reflected in Raglan's next three points:

(11) After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
(12) He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
(13) Becomes king. 66

(Raglan's remaining nine points are rendered irrelevant here by Mordred's death.)

64 Rank, P. 61.
65 Freud, p. 8.
66 Raglan, p. 179.
Had Mordred succeeded in his ambition, he would have slain his father (who did in fact acknowledge him by choosing him as regent—only in Malory, not in his sources)—and again in the treaty at Salisbury), married the queen, and become the English king (which he was, in fact, for a brief time). In short, he would have conformed to the pattern of the hero. He would have lacked only Freud's "many strange adventures", the equivalent of Rank's finding the parents "in a highly versatile fashion" or Raglan's optional victory over "a giant, dragon, or wild beast".

But these adventures, occurring between the hero's unusual origin and his climactic assumption of power, constitute the principal events in the life of the quest hero. Perhaps the successful quest is a crucial prerequisite to the later stages of the mythic hero's career. Then, if we consider the heroic pattern to be operative in the life of Mordred, his lack of a quest adventure may have inhibited his success against Arthur. In particular, this may be the significance of Mordred's absence from the quest for the Sankgreal.

67 Though the choice is also Arthur's in the alliterative Morte Arthure (11.644-47)

Of course Malory was greatly constrained by his source material. It would have been a virtual impossi-
bility, requiring a major creative act wholly beyond any writer working in the romance tradition, to have worked Mordred into the Grail story as a successful quester. To have then had Arthur fall and Mordred survive as his successor would have been utterly un-
thinkable. Still, these literary considerations are circumstantial rather than conceptual obstacles to Mordred's fulfillment of the heroic pattern.

It is hardly likely that any part of this was in Malory's mind as he wrote. Nevertheless, the motif is present. Mordred is born into the pattern of the hero and his ultimate actions are directed toward his own fulfillment of that pattern. It is at least a plaus-
ible hypothesis that this had an extraliterary effect on Malory's portrayal of Mordred. And it is probably that further study of Mordred as a character, and of his role in the Morte Darthur, will prove more illuminating if he is viewed, at least in part, not simply as a villain but also as a hero aborted.

Let us consider, for example, the problem of the cause of Arthur's downfall and the destruction of the Round Table--a problem for which no single solution has
proven adequate. Book VII, in which decay immediately sets in, opens with the return from the quest of the Sankgreal of "all knyghtes that were leffte on lyve" (1045). This seems to recall Arthur's dire prediction when one hundred fifty knights set out on the quest:

"ye have berauffe me the fayryst and trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde. Fow whan they de-parte frome hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste." (866)

but there is no further evidence of the enervating effect of the quest, and, in fact, the only prominent knights lost in the venture are Percivale and Galahad, who have little existence other than as Grail knights anyway. The Round Table remains strong.

Malory himself, introducing his final book, says the death of Arthur is caused by Aggravayne (1154), who does, indeed, set in motion the chain of events that ends with Arthur's death. However, he dies long before events have gathered momentum, so that other factors must later come into play to bring about the final ruin.

Several characters blame themselves for the tragedy. Gawayne tells Arthur that "thorow me and my pryde ye have all thyts shame and disease" (1230) since he is responsible for Launcelot's absence. Gwenyvere says that
"Thorow thyh same man and me hath all thyh warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste nobelest knyghtes of the worlde, for thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lord slayne." (1252)

Launcelot, after the death of Gwennyvere, tells a hermit that "by my defaute and myn orgule and my pryde that they [Arthur and Gwennyvere] were both layed ful lowe" (1256). All three are partly correct; each has contributed in a major way to the disaster. Yet, until the very end, all their destructive actions are reversible. The final battle takes place just a month before Launcelot will return to rescue Arthur.

Arthur himself, of course, contributes to his own downfall. His begeting of Mordred is described as displeasing to God and fated to produce a child that will destroy him (49). Mordred, his final destroyer, is the embodiment of his sin, whose birth, according to Moorman, is "a symbol of the corruption which underlies Arthur's court from its conception."\(^{69}\) On a more mundane level, Arthur’s appointment of Mordred as regent begins the sequence of events that leads directly to the final battle, in which Mordred fulfills Merlin's prophecy. Yet, in Malory's final book the incest motif is downplayed in favor of the theme of filial treachery. And,

despite everything, Arthur's death at Mordred's hands never becomes inevitable--but for the adder, the treaty worked out at Salisbury would have prevented the last battle altogether.

We begin to see a multiplicity of partial causes for the Round Table's destruction, all of which contribute but none of which is decisive--nor, so far, are they all together. Seconds before the final clash actually begins, the fight has to all appearances been permanently fore-stalled by the treaty.

The last, and necessary, cause of the bloodletting is the sting of an adder, so that the final causal agent becomes--Fortune. Now we recall Arthur's dream of the wheel (1233), no longer the "roe de fortune" of the Mort Artu (VI, 361) but readily re cognizable as Fortune's wheel. Looking further back, we see the wheel again in Launcelot's lament upon leaving the court: "But fortune ys so varyaunte, and the wheele so mutable, that there ys no constaunte abydynge "(1201). Looking still further back, to the beginning of Book VII, we read that

hit befelle in the moneth of May a grete angur
and unhappe that stynted nat tylle the floure
of chyvalry of alle the worlde was destroyd
and slayne.
And all was longe uppon two unhappy knyghtis...
(1161) (italics mine)
So the final tale begins with a suggestion that the events are the outcome of happenstance—the working of Fortune—and that the two "unhappy" knights are the agents who set the wheel in motion.

Yet, even this is not enough. When the battle ends, both Arthur and Mordred still live; the king may yet walk away from his death. As sir Lucan, one of Arthur's two surviving companions, urges,

"leve of thyse, for, blyssed be God, ye have won the fyld: for yet we ben ehere three on lyve, and with sir Mordred ys nat one on lyve. And therefore if ye leve of now, thys wycked day of Desteny ys paste:' (1236-37)

But Arthur will kill Mordred come what may, and he completes the tragedy with a fatal act of will.

But how unsatisfying a fall!—a multiplicity of causes, all necessary but not sufficient even taken together, then the final ruin through the caprice of Fortune and a single act of will. This view gives the lie to our deepest feelings about the fall of the Round Table and the destruction of the Arthurine ideal. Surely the tragedy is too strong and deep to be explained away so simply.

Probably there is no elegant analytical solution to our problem. Perhaps we must be content to say, with Lambert, that "in Malory's last books, as in many of the great tragic works, we glimpse unnamed patternings, mysterious interlacings, under the surface of the world we know."70

Or we may be able to get a closer glimpse of at least one pattern. Let us apply our insight about Mordred—that he is in part a mythic hero following the classic pattern—and examine the consequences in the last book of the *Morte Darthur*.

To begin with, we must revise our notion that Arthur is the protagonist and Mordred merely an antagonist—in an important sense both are protagonists. This does not mean that the story is equally about both; the story of Mordred is contained within the story of Arthur. It does mean that Mordred is acting to fulfill his own objectives and not merely reacting to the narrative needs of the Arthur plot line. It means that the final conflict is not one between a hero and the traitor who is trying to bring him down; it is a clash between two heroes. This conception not only makes the last battle inevitable—in keeping with our feeling about the tragedy—but accounts for some of the most striking features of the last two books.

Viewing the last books as partly a story of Mordred working out his heroic destiny immediately accounts for the change in Malory's view of Mordred's rebellion. In Merlin's prophecies, Mordred is the agent of God, punishing Arthur for his sin; in the final books he is the son attacking his own father. On the mundane level, this is an unexplained shift of guilt from Arthur to Mordred. But in the mythic
frame the alteration is compulsory—it is precisely his father that Mordred must avenge himself on to conform to the heroic pattern.

Again, the approaching clash of two heroes, rather than hero and villain, explains the increasing equality and symmetry between Arthur and Mordred leading to the striking verbal parallels at their final conference (noted above) and culminating in their mutual fatal blows.

The last battle now becomes inevitable; no treaty can stave it off. Mordred must fight his father to continue his heroic career, and Arthur must fight his son to counter the threat arising from Mordred's birth in the heroic pattern. For these two the day of destiny has to come.

The outcome, though, is not predetermined. I have suggested that Mordred's lack of a quest adventure might inhibit a victory over Arthur; it would not, however, preclude it—it is no more necessary for Mordred to conform to every element of the heroic pattern than it is for any one of the heroes from whose stories the pattern is extracted. Until he receives his death wound, it remains possible for Mordred to triumph and fulfill the rest of the heroic scheme (if for example, Arthur's spear point glances off Mordred's armor, as Gawayne's dagger does when he fights Mordred in the alliterative Morte Arthure).
I have already noted the practical impossibility of such an outcome in the Arthurian tradition, but there is nothing against it in principle.

Our examination of Malory's treatment of Mordred has given us a two-sided conclusion. On the negative side, we see that Mordred is not portrayed as unvaryingly evil, or even as consistent at all, throughout the *Morte Darthur*. This precludes the use of Mordred as evidence for unity through character consistency and compromises the case for any argument depending on the use of Mordred's characteristics in one section to support a conclusion about another.

On the positive side, we see that Mordred conforms to the pattern of the birth of the hero at the beginning and dies in the end trying to conform to the pattern of the hero's later life. This adds a new dimension to the cause of Arthur's fall, explaining some problems not amenable to current forms of analysis, and generally holds out the hope of adding previously unseen facets to discussions of other matters.
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