

# Stansby's 1634 Edition of Malory's Morte: Preface, Text, and Reception

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One quotation from Sir Walter Scott's letter to his rival editor Robert Southey about his plan to publish a new edition of the *Morte Darthur* illustrates an open question which I shall treat in this article. But before printing I should like to have your opinion or rather your instruction concerning the earlier editions and what extent of collation will be necessary. All that I can find in Scotland are copies in the 17th Century. Caxton's copy I believe is not now known to exist but I am desirous to know what is the earliest I presume the refaciamento in Edward VI this time. I should not be unwilling to replace the oaths profanity & so forth which that Editor [i.e. of Stansby's edition] piques himself on having exploded from Sir Thomas Mallore's copy.<sup>1</sup> Since neither of the projects came to fruition, William Stansby's 1634 edition of Malory's work has been considered to be, as is indicated in its preface, an expurgated and modernized version, and this common view still passes unexamined.<sup>2</sup> Any new information concerning Stansby's textual production should thus be welcome. The present study is one such attempt to investigate the textual presentation of prefatory remarks and to examine the (dis)concerted production by the editorial writer and the printshop.

Malory's text is transmitted from Caxton to Stansby in a linear way. With one possible exception, each edition is based solely on its immediate predecessor, and none of the printers uses more than one edition as his copytext:<sup>3</sup>

(Malory MS.)

- 1485 William Caxton: folio, STC 801.
- 14981 Wynkyn de Worde: folio, STC 802.
- 15292 Wynkyn de Worde: folio, STC 803.
- 1557 William Copland: folio, STC 804.
- 1582 Thomas East: folio, STC 805.
- 1634 William Stansby: 3 parts, quarto, STC 806.

According to my collation of the printed editions, the textual productions prior to Stansby can be, to use Angus McIntosh's terms, roughly described as follows:<sup>4</sup> de Worde's two versions are of a 'mixed' type editing, in which to Caxton's text here and there are silently made linguistic modernizations, stylistic alterations, and additions ranging from a word to a passage; Copland's edition, apart from a morphological translation, is exactly of a 'mirror' type; and East's edition is again of a 'mixed' type, though the variants are, by and large, caused by careless working and attempted linguistic normalization.<sup>5</sup>

One simple, good way to show an aspect of this editorial situation is to see the fate in later editions of the faulty readings which the scribes/printers made to the text. Are they noticed and revised, or left intact? Let us make a textual comparison among Caxton, de Worde, Copland, and East in the places where, in editing Caxton's Malory, James Spisak

considered Caxton's reading to be defective.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the emendations of compositors' obviously accidental mistakes, Spisak made about 380 substantial corrections. De Worde's first edition gets improved readings in 166 corrupt places which the print shop noticed and attempted (completely correctly or not) to improve,<sup>7</sup> and there are 73 such corrections in his second edition. All the other faulty readings overlooked in de Worde's press escaped any notice and were reproduced verbatim in Copland's and East's editions.

Now some 140 corruptions are carried over to the correcting hands of our printer Stansby. Certainly the preface of this edition precariously mentions the defective nature of text, warning readers of the "more acute and sharp-witted" days against throwing away the book because of "a small spot or a staine."<sup>8</sup> But how many of all these defective readings attracted attention and were emended? The answer is disappointing: only two improvements in all.<sup>9</sup> A detailed collation throughout the book indicates that there can be found some attempted corrections and linguistic modernizations or normalizations.<sup>10</sup> But, what is worse to Stansby, the edition slavishly reproduces nearly all of the further corruptions brought about in its exemplar, and it also introduces not a few in itself.<sup>11</sup> The most fatal instance of sloppy work is its omission of the part of text which corresponds to an entire leaf signed 'Dd 8' in East's edition.<sup>12</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the scholarly printing attitudes of de Worde's press, which had a high respect for producing a good text.<sup>13</sup> And if we remember the fact that, in publishing Ben Jonson's 1616 First Folio, Stansby the master took scrupulous care to realize the author's accurate text, the new Malory as a product of the same press deserves attention for its carelessness.

Stansby's edition is unique in having its own preface together with Caxton's. All the other printers, though intentionally or unintentionally, making slight, stealthy lexical alterations, simply reproduce Caxton's catchy preface, the main purport of which can be summed up as follows: first, the story was to serve as a guide to right, chivalrous living; second, the audience intended was of the noble and knightly class; and third, it depended on the readers to sort out the book as either history or fiction. Generally, the preface ushers readers into the book and gives them, in large measure, an orientation in its reception, sometimes, especially in early printings, even twisting the author's intention in the stress of new social and cultural circumstances. The reissue of Malory in the early 1600's seems to have demanded a fresh preface to cater to new tastes and attitudes. It is this preface that has deceived and deluded students of Malory, let alone Scott and Southey, into believing that Stansby's is a recast edition.

This preface was written by stationer Jacob Bloome. He made two main editorial principles explicit. First, he professed to keep fables and fictions, which, according to neoclassical assumptions, might undermine the historical ground of King Arthur's heroic deeds:

..., in many places fables and fictions are inserted, which may be a blemish to the reputation of what is true in this History, and it is vnfitting for vs to raze or blot out all the errorrs of our Ancestours, for by our taking consideration of them, wee may be the better induced to beleue and reuerence the truth;... (4a)

Secondly, he ordered the press to rewrite or excise profane words and superstitious speeches:

In many places this Volume is corrected (not in language but in phrase) for here and there, King Arthur or some of his Knights were declared in their communications to swear profane, and vse superstitious speeches, all (or the most part) of which is either amended or quite left out, by the paines and industry of the Compositor and Corrector at the Presse;... (4b)

Actually, however, according to my investigation, Stansby's text suffered not a single revision in pertinent places. The story is that even the relevant variants from Caxton had already been made in de Worde's editions. This textual breach of the preface shows the possibility that Stansby, the master of the press, may have somehow neglected the directions that Bloome, as the preface indicates, gave.

It is guesswork to determine who initially proposed the cooperative project. Stansby may have asked the stationer to contribute an enticing preface, entrusting him with its marketing. Or, more likely, Bloome may have approached Stansby, who had the rights to Malory assigned on the 23rd of February, 1625 or 1626, by the wife of Thomas Snowdham, an apprentice to Thomas East.<sup>14</sup> Setting aside the printing order, they produced another joint publication, Sir Thomas Herbert's A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, in the same year, but nothing else at any time before or after. Their publishing interests crossed but once here in their life, and their collaboration did not last any longer.<sup>15</sup>

Anyhow, when considered in connection with the sloppiness with which Stansby's press went about the faulty readings, the incongruous textual realization of the editorial principles seems to imply the contemporary reputation of Arthurian literature, and it can also indicate that the intended customers of this edition were not the upper class but the middle and lower classes. The class of audience assumed on the grounds of the technical aspect of printing is confirmed by the disparaging tone of the preface. Bloome hesitates to recognize the capacity of judgement in the readers, comparing them obliquely to an ass:

Thus, reader, I leave thee at thy pleasure to reade, but not to judge, except thou judge with vnderstanding. The asse is no competent Iudge betwixt the Owle and the Nightingale for the sweetnes of their voices,... (4b)

and recommends them to read the book in a naive way with a firm belief in Arthur's historicity:

Neither is it beseeming for a man to censure that which his Ignorance cannot perceiue, or his pride and malice will prejudicate or cavill at. (4b)

This is just the opposite of Caxton's apologetic stance. "Many noble and dyuers gentylnen" requested him to publish King Arthur, and "noble lordes and ladyes" were assumed to be the readers. Caxton consigned the book to their "fauour and correctyon," and

he said nothing reservedly about Arthur's historicity, saying "for to gyue fayth and byleue that al is trewe that is conteyned herin, ye be at your lyberte."<sup>16</sup>

The drastic change of audience between Caxton and Stansby can be traced by gradual stages if we examine the text of 'Caxton's preface' replicated in each edition. In as early as de Worde's 1498 edition, the market gets widened downward, as is indicated by the addition of "or comynaltee":

Humbly besechyng all noble lordes & ladies/ wyth all other  
estates/ or comynaltee/ of what estates or degree they ben of/  
... That they take and entende to the gode and honeste actes  
in theyr remembraunce/ (.2b, my emphases)

And Caxton's edition says that "many noble and dyuers gentylnen" came to the printer asking for the publication of King Arthur, whereas in East's edition the "gentylnen" is suggestively changed into "getylwomen."<sup>17</sup> If we consider it in the context of the contemporary literary situation, where, as Louis Wright explicated, writers at the turn of the sixteenth century realized the importance of the feminine audience and they were "solicitous about having their books read by women," then the slight alteration is far from a mere compositorial mistake, and it can prove to be evidence of the printer's attempt to attract the attention of women readers.<sup>18</sup> All these changes were taken over in Stansby's 'Caxton's preface', and, furthermore, consciously or not, "gentylnen" in the paired "gentylnen or getylwomen," which Caxton used in dedicating the book, was deleted.<sup>19</sup>

There is another notable feature in the preface. As for the genre, Bloome is apparently contriving to present the book as history. The organization of the preface discloses it. After the fashion of chronicle, he commences the preface with a popular compendium of British history, from Julius Caesar to Constantine the fifth in this case. The ground for Arthur's historicity is solely patriotic and the kind of hero-worship: Arthur is described as "our Arthur" and "our victorious Arthur," and, in Bloome's reasoning, "all the honour we can doe him is to honour our selues."<sup>20</sup> The expression used here is correspondingly emotional: by means of a rhetorical question, he appeals to the readers to praise Arthur as one of Nine Worthies; he urges them to glorify and admire the king by the repetitive use of 'let vs + infinitive'; "this Kingdome of Britaine was graced with one Worthy, let vs with thankfulnes acknowledge him, let vs not account it our shame ... let vs not be more cruell then death ... or let vs not be worse then the graue in burying his fame."<sup>21</sup>

Such a historical treatment of Malory's Morte reveals itself more explicitly in the title. Caxton's colophon-title 'le morte darthur' now appears in the title page of Stansby's edition in the following form:<sup>22</sup>

THE MOST/ ANCIENT AND/ FAMOVVS HISTORY/ OF THE RENOWNED/PRINCE/  
ARTHVR/ King of Britaine,/ Wherein is declared his Life and Death,/ with all his  
glorious Battailes against the/ Saxons, Saracens and Pagans,/ which (for the honour of  
his/ Country) he most wor-/thily atchieued./ As also, all the Noble Acts, and Heroicke/  
Deeds of his Valiant Knights of/ the Rovnd Table. Newly refined, and published for the  
delight, and/profit of the Reader. (my emphases)

Here is designated the history of Prince Arthur who fought against the Saxons.<sup>23</sup> In those days the vogue for chronicles, which began with the rival books, aimed at "a relatively uneducated public," by Grafton and Stow, still continued.<sup>24</sup> The variety of format from a gorgeous folio to a homely sextodecimo shows the wide range of its reading public. Anthony Munday's Brief Chronicle (1611), for example, was obviously aimed at the middle-class, as is demonstrated by its dedication: "To the Maister, Wardens, Assistants, and Whole Liurey, of the Honourable Company of Merchant-Tailors"; and William Warner, as Louis Wright said, supplemented to his Albions England (1602) a prose epitome for the "lesse literate."<sup>25</sup> While historical writings were popular among the bourgeois, intellectual circles had experienced the 'battle over the British history' between Vergil, Speed and Selden, on one side, and Leland, Kelton, Powell and Harvey, on the other.<sup>26</sup> The conception of 'history' was examined and modified, for example, from a morally profitable function to an informative function of historical events, and from clerical, providential writing to a scientific narrative based on causal relation.<sup>27</sup> Taking into account these cultural backgrounds, we cannot help but perceive in the pretentious title a canny move on the part of the stationer: in spite of the dispute on the definition of history, or more properly, because of the dispute, Bloome positively asserted that the book was history and thus invited readers to accept it as genuine, historical fact.<sup>28</sup>

There is another, though negative, motive for sorting out the book as history. By the time of Stansby's reprint, the concept of chivalry had been completely transformed. William Segar's Book of Honor and Armes(1590) reveals that Renaissance chivalry departed from traditio in two salient ways: the first is the knightly image of a soldier-scholar not a martial protector of society; and the second is the element of public responsibilities or patriotism rather than individual royalty. Obviously, Malory made little or no reference to either of these virtues. Unlike Caxton's days, when he could print the book rather as imaginative literature for chivalric edification, Bloome's contemporary society had no continuum between art and life.<sup>29</sup>

In accordance with the transvaluation of chivalry, chivalric romances were degraded and became a matter of ridicule under the new values of neoclassical critics and humanists. (Stansby himself printed Cervantes' Don-Quixote in 1612 and ?1620!) Arthurian romances were no exception.<sup>30</sup> If they were treated seriously for educated readers, therefore, the matter had to be used selectively, as in Spenser's introduction of Prince Arthur,<sup>31</sup> or it had to be modified against the skeptic circle, as in Robert Chester's presentation of King Arthur who returned from his campaign without conquering Rome.<sup>32</sup> These literary milieus considered, it is not necessarily unreasonable to conjecture that the stationer might have thought it less risky to get out the book in historical dress.

A few more words should be said about Bloome's preface. The problem of history was also heated in another dimension in Stuart times. As Robert Brinkly pointed out, the acceptance or rejection of the Trojan-British story was bound up with the contention between the King and the Parliaments.<sup>33</sup> James I, who called himself "a second Brute," insisted upon Divine Right, whereas the Parliaments claimed Supremacy on the grounds that the origin of the country was Saxon rather than British and that the people had the prerogative in Anglo-Saxon days. So the sheer belief in Arthur's historical existence and the explicit mention of Arthur's fight against the "domineering Saxons" in the title and the preface entailed taking sides with the Royalists in these political circumstances. It is thus highly

probable that Stansby's edition seemed, to people sensitive about politics at least, to come off the press as a kind of propaganda for the feminine and bourgeois audience.

The inquiry into the 'expurgated' text which Scott prompted has now ended in negative research. But in the course of investigation some interesting revisions that are not specified in the preface have been found. The most notable is the tampering with Malory's mention of sources.<sup>34</sup> Malory conventionally favours source-references. He uses them throughout the book 71 times: 40 cases are explicitly referred to French sources; one case is an explicit mention to an English source; and 30 cases are neither French nor English.<sup>35</sup> The dominance of French references incited the early printers, Caxton and de Worde, to make the source-reference more specific by adding "Frenshe" to the simple "booke seyth or telleth" formula.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Caxton, probably led by recurrent mentions of French sources, says definitely in the preface that the author "reduced it into Englysshe." And then in the colophon of his 1498 edition, de Worde goes so far as to change Caxton's

For this booke was ended the ninth yere of the regne of Kyng  
Edward the Fourth, by Syr Thomas Maleore, Knight  
into  
For ye translacon of this boke was fynnyshed. the .ix. yere  
of the reygne kynge Edwarde the fourth by syr Maleore knyght.  
(E5a, r, 11, my emphases)

These changes seem to have prepared Malory's work to pass as a translation, and the later printers, Copland and East, received the book as such. Bloome, following and developing Caxton's lines, also declares that this work "was first written in the French and Italian tongues" and that "it was many yeares after the first writing of it, translated into English, by the painfull industry of one sir Thomas Maleore Knight."<sup>37</sup> Despite such introduction by Bloome, the text composed in Stansby's press is altered in the opposite direction. Of 70 source-references (excluding one English mention), 55 cases are excised; to put it in terms of distribution, none in Part 1, two-thirds in Part 2 and all instances in Part 3 are erased.<sup>38</sup> This excising practice, which begins halfway in Part 2, does not seem to be an editorial principle from the outset, but it is a starkly established one in Part 3.

The editorial measures suggest that the printer's side may have tried to eliminate the aspect of translation, and this feeling is confirmed when we come across the only exception, where the English source-reference is preserved while the immediately following foreign references are all deleted out. Stansby's exemplar runs:

And there they al lyued in their countryes as holymen. And  
some Englysshe bookes make mencion, that they wente neuer out  
of Englande after the deth of sir Launcelot, but that was but  
fauoure of makers. For the french booke maketh mencion and  
is aucthorised that syr Bors, syr Ector, sir Blamor and syr  
Bleoberis, went into the holy land,... For the booke sayeth  
that syr Launcelot commaunded them so to doe or euer he passed  
out of thys world. (East, Oo5b, my emphases)

And Stansby's text is:

And there they liued in their countries as holy men. And some English bookes make mention, that they went neuer out of England after the death of Sir Launcelot, but that was fauour of markes (sic.). For Sir Bors, Sir Ector, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleoberis, went into the Holy land,... For Sir Launcelot commaunded them so to doe or euer hee passed out of this world. (Part 3, Pp3b)

Furthermore, in Stansby's colophon, de Worde's "ye translacon of this boke" is changed back to Caxton's original "this booke," and "Whyche boke was reduced in to Englysshe by the well dysposyd knyghte afore namyd" is completely removed. These revisions in the text and the colophon, which are all incompatible with the preface, show that there was an editor working independently of the preface writer, and they also imply that the editor finally arrived at a decision to create an impression that the story was based on English sources and originally written in English.

We cannot easily respond to the question whether or not Stansby's edition was well received by its intended audience. But here is a contemporary reader's scribble attached to a copy of Stansby's edition.<sup>39</sup> It is part of a Welsh ballad on the heroic achievements of King Arthur who defeated the Saxons at Badon Hill and delivered Britain from them:

at Badon Hill at Badon Hill  
the cruel Saxons had them fill  
of Blood which oft thay shed  
The vengeful Britons thousands slew  
For Thousands came and but a few  
From the tir'd victors fled  
  
For British Earth drank up their gore  
and gaping seem'd athirst for more  
as conscious of the wrongs  
the numerous Fraud and artful lyes  
Deceitful Leagues and [.....]  
By which thay spoiled her sons  
  
Al powerfull Arthure now pursues  
with eager Haste his hated Foes  
and longs to see his Isle  
Free from this base and barbrous Race  
deserving all her wonted grace  
in peace and plenty smile (an extract)

The poem describes the Saxons as being "cruel," "deceitful" and full of "Fraud and artful lyes." In the political surroundings discussed above, such estimate of the Saxons must have been provocative and even hostile. It is certain, however, that there was at least one reader who could appreciate, to the extent the fragment goes, the professed purpose of this edition to save Arthur "from the gulf of obliuion."

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[Notes]

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