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Malory's Use of 'Counsel' and 'Advyce' in Creating a King

MEREDITH REYNOLDS

Malory concentrates his use of the words 'counsel' and 'advyce' around the figure of Arthur in the 'Merlin' section of *The Tale of King Arthur*, thus associating Arthur's development into a good king with these concepts. (MR)

Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* was shaped not only by its source texts but also by contemporary 'mirrors for princes' that instructed nobles on how to be proper and successful kings and knights. Karen Cherewatuk identifies in particular the *The Tale of King Arthur*, which centers on the establishment of the king's rule, [and] illustrates both idealistic and practical lessons for the young monarch.¹ In this essay, I elaborate a reading consonant with Cherewatuk's argument: I focus on the repetition of the words 'counsel' and 'advyce' and the role they play in Arthur's education in 'Merlin,' the first section of *The Tale of King Arthur*. Here, 'counsel' and 'advyce,' or their orthographic variants, are used twenty-two times and eleven times respectively.² To concentrate an audience's attention on a specific idea, Malory often increases word repetition: as 'Merlin' focuses on Arthur's rise to power and his development into a good king, 'counsel' and 'advyce' become directly tied to him. These words mark the progress Arthur makes towards becoming a wise and powerful king.

Arthur becomes king of England, at least initially, not through evident bloodline succession or military coup, but through 'Goddess will' (15.8). He is young, untried, and unsure; he is not comfortable in a leadership role and understandably relies heavily on counsel from those around him. Merlin functions as his main advisor, 'the figure guiding the movement and acting as the obvious unifying principle' in *The Tale of King Arthur*.³ Led by Merlin, Arthur's barons help guide Arthur into correct and kingly decisions. The first real test for Arthur comes when King Lot of Orkeney and his followers claim that 'it was grete shame to all them to see suche a boye to have a rule of soo noble a reame as this land was' (17.28–29). When Arthur goes into London, 'by the *council* of Merlyn the kyng lete calle his barons to *council*. . . wherfor the kyng asked *council* at hem al. They coude no *council* gyve, but said they were bygge ynough' (19.29–34; emphasis mine). This repetition (four times in five lines) is noteworthy. Malory uses this technique regularly to

focus a reader's (or listener's) attention; in this case, the reader is to take note of Arthur's first counsel.⁴ While Murial Whitaker believes '[s]ometimes, Malory's use of repetition seems unnecessarily complicated from the structural point of view,' I agree with Jeremy Smith's interpretation, that '[p]erhaps the most subtle handling of vocabulary achieved by Malory is in his use of repeated expressions in close proximity to each other.'⁵ In this case, repetition forces readers to acknowledge Arthur's political and military weaknesses, not to discredit him, but to establish one of the purposes of *The Tale of King Arthur*, to show how much he learns, how much he progresses in terms of leadership. Arthur's asking for counsel indicates his sincere interest in his own education. Furthermore, a sign of a good leader is his willingness to accept counsel. Arthur does just that, sending for Merlin and saying, 'And whan [Merlin] is afore you [the barons] I wold that ye prayd hym hertely of his best avyce' (19.38–39).

Merlin, too, repeats the words 'advys' and 'council' in his response to Arthur: "I shal telle you," said Merlyn, "myne *advys*. . . Wherfor this is my *council*: that our kyng and soverayne lord sende unto the kynges Ban and Bors by two trusty knyghtes with letters well devysed. . . Now what sey ye unto thys *counceyle*?" (20.12–27; emphasis mine). As the individual responsible for Arthur's first counsel, the 'omniscient strategist,' as labeled by R.M. Lumiansky, Merlin must speak very clearly to convey his plan.⁶ As a result, he reiterates his point through the repetition of the words 'advys' and 'counsel.' Arthur then signifies his understanding and acceptance of Merlin's advice by responding, 'Thys ys well *councelde*' (20.28; emphasis mine). Malory closes the scene by describing the actions of the knights as they carry out Merlin's advice.

But while Merlin is the central 'military adviser and tactician' in Malory's early books, he certainly is not the only one; Arthur also receives counsel from his allied kings and knights.⁷ Malory once again guarantees a reader's attention by using repetition. Ban and Bors ride into London to show support for Arthur and almost immediately 'they wente unto *counceyle*,' along with Brastias, a clerk named Gwenbaus, Merlin, and Ulphius (24.6; emphasis mine). The word 'counsel' appears twice more in the next three lines: 'And aftir they had [ben] in her *counceyle* they wente unto bedde. And on the morne they harde masse, and to dyner and so to theire *counceyle*, and made many argumentes what were beste to do' (24.9–12; emphasis mine). Again, Malory wants readers to take special notice of this scene; Arthur is taking part in his first *war* council, getting advice from not one man but several, from kings, knights, and clerks, men with philosophical, military, and practical experience. Arthur will need this collective knowledge if he is to defeat Lot and his followers. And it is necessary for Arthur to succeed, for, as Edmund Reiss notes, these battles 'present concrete proof of the worth of Arthur and

his new Order. Arthur is the new king: and with his new allies, King Bors and King Ban, he stands up against the old order, the titanic figures belonging to the older generation.⁸

Arthur receives advice and counsel four more times in this part of the 'Merlin' section:

• So by Merlyons *advise* there were sente foreryders to skymme the contrey... (26.25–26; emphasis mine)

• ...and by kynge Ban and Bors his *counceile* they [the foreriders] lette brenne and destroy all the contrey before them there they sholde ryde. (26.28–30; emphasis mine)

• Than by *counceile* of Merlion, whan they wyst which wey the an eleven kynges wolde ryde and lodge that nyght, at mydnyght they sette upon them as they were in their pavilions. (26.36–27.3; emphasis mine)

• 'Now shall ye do by myne *advise*,' seyde Merlyon unto the three kyngis, and seyde: 'I wolde kynge Ban and Bors with hir felyship of ten thousand men were put in a woode here besyde in an inbusshemente...' (27.14–17; emphasis mine)

In all four instances, the counsel heard is successfully followed. Furthermore, Arthur's power as leader, as king, is advanced each time in the eyes of not only his supporters but his enemies as well. When Lot sees Bors bearing down upon him from an ambush, he marvels that Bors was able to enter the country and come to Arthur's aid without his knowledge. By the knight's simple response: 'Hit was by Merlions advice' (32.12), Lot realizes that he is no longer trying to defeat a mere boy; he is battling against a boy guided by distinguished and powerful men. This slow but steady progression in Arthur's kingly education is clear to Malory's audience as well.

Arthur receives counsel twice more in this section. The first occurs after Arthur has just been reunited with his mother Igrayne, during the celebration of the court. The joy is short-lived and the peace is fleeting as an outside threat is introduced. A squire brings his mortally wounded lord, Sir Myles, into Arthur's court and demands revenge; the court responds: 'Than the noyse was grete of that knyghtes dethe in the courte, and every man seyde hys advyce' (46.23–24). Up to this point, Arthur has received war counsel in order to protect his realm from usurpers to the throne; now Arthur must receive political counsel from his fledgling court so he can properly look after his subjects' safety. For readers already familiar with the Arthur story, this scene foreshadows the future strength of Arthur's court. The attack against Myles becomes an attack on Arthur's court, and the knights and barons will not accept such an attack from within. It speaks well of Arthur's ability to bring his followers together into a true fellowship.

This purpose is reiterated in the second and final use of 'counsel' and 'advyce' in this section. Still young and brash, Arthur rides out of court looking to prove himself physically. He gets to rescue Merlin, but it is not enough. Therefore, he challenges another knight but is promptly unseated. Arthur wishes to revenge his loss, but Merlin convinces him to leave the knight, King Pellinore: 'therefore hit ys my *counceile*: latte him passe, for he shall do you good servyse in shorte tyme' (53.27–29; emphasis mine). Arthur's response is, grudgingly, 'I woll do as ye avise me' (53.33). This advice is certainly sound, for Pellinore will play a large role in the development of the Round Table's fellowship. Thus, Malory uses the word 'counceile' to notify readers of the importance of this conversation. Arthur and Merlin have shared other conversations in this section, but this exchange is the only one that includes the words 'counsel' and 'avise.' This conversation is Arthur's first real council with regard to the future of the Round Table and is, though seemingly a minor scene, quite important to future events in Camelot.

Good counsel is essential to building and keeping one's power. It is necessary both during times of war and of peace. Arthur's development into a good king is not completed; he still has to defeat the Emperor of Rome. However, in 'Merlin,' he progresses significantly. He has around him a wealth of good advisors and has begun to develop a personal council, including Kings Ban and Bors, Sir Kay and Sir Gawayne, who will replace Merlin upon his disappearance from the text.⁹ The audience has watched Arthur mature into a respectable leader with a reasonable group of counselors. Malory's use of repetition thus emphasizes Arthur's growth as it also illustrates the importance of wise and reasonable counsel.

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NOTES

N.B. All parenthetical citations are to Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P.J.C. Field, 3d ed., 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

- 1 Karen Cherewatuk, "'Gentyll' Audiences and 'Grete Bookes': Chivalric Manuals and the *Morte Darthur*," in *Arthurian Literature XV*, eds. James P. Carley and Felicity Riddy (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1997), p. 214. See also Karen Cherewatuk, 'Sir Thomas Malory's "Grete Booke"', in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 42–67.

- 2 For a complete list, see Tomomi Kato, *A Concordance to the Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974). According to the MED, the definitions of these words, the nouns *counsel* and *advice* and the verbs *counsel* and *advise*, are essentially equivalent. For example, definition 7 of *avisen* is '(a) to instruct (sb.), advise, counsel, direct.' The definitions of *counsel* include 'An adviser, a counselor' (4.a) and 'A body of advisers to a ruler' (3.a). Malory appears to use these words interchangeably.
- 3 Edmund Reiss, *Sir Thomas Malory* (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 36.
- 4 For example, the word 'desyre' occurs seven times in the conversation between Uther and Merlin regarding the bedding of Igrayne (8.15–9.6).
- 5 Muriel Whitaker, *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure: The World of Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1984), p. 50. Jeremy Smith, 'Language and Style in Malory,' in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (New York: D.S. Brewer, 1996), p. 111 [97–113].
- 6 R.M. Lumiansky, *Malory's Originality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), p. 23.
- 7 Lumiansky, *Malory's Originality*, p. 27.
- 8 Reiss, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 40.
- 9 What if Arthur receives bad counsel? The issue of bad counsel becomes relevant only later in Malory's narrative, as Arthur becomes more active in the decision-making process, listening to the advice of his counsel and determining whether or not to follow that advice. Early in his rule, however, Arthur is relatively immature and is not yet seasoned or wise enough to make important decisions alone or to recognize bad counsel. Good counsel thus becomes mandatory to establish Arthur's rule, and in 'Merlin' the repetition of 'counsel' and 'advyce' shows how important good counsel is for a young monarch who has not yet mastered the skill to make kingly decisions on his own.

Malory And Cardiff

P.J.C. FIELD

When Malory's life and his book are considered together, it appears that he probably visited Cardiff and thought of it as an unexpectedly Arthurian locality. (PJCF)

Modern Cardiff is a bustling industrial, commercial, and administrative center, with very little apparent connection with Arthurian romance. Malory, however, kept the one reference to it that he found in his major sources, and added four more. He probably did this partly because he liked geographical realism,¹ but he may also have been influenced by the frequency with which Cardiff features in Middle English Arthurian romance: not only in his own *Morte Darthur* but also in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Ywain and Gawain*, *Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle*, and Harry Lovelich's *Merlin*.² He had read widely and enthusiastically in Arthurian romance, and that may have persuaded him that Cardiff was not only a real place, but one with strong Arthurian connections.³

Malory first mentions Cardiff in his Roman War story in the phrase 'the captayne of Cardyff,' which he took without alteration from his source, *Morte Arthure* (228.12–13).⁴ The phrase implies that Cardiff has a castle under a captain's command, which it did during the fifteenth century. Malory almost certainly knew about that castle from life as well as from literature. In the 1440s, it was held by Henry Beauchamp, Earl (and later Duke) of Warwick, who was a major power—perhaps the major power—for most of that decade in Malory's county, Warwickshire. Henry and his wife Cecily Neville are said to have been living in the castle when Henry's father Earl Richard died in the spring of 1439,⁵ and were certainly doing so in 1443, when she gave birth there to a daughter Anne, her husband's eventual heir.⁶ When Henry succeeded to his father's earldom, it would have been prudent for Malory, as the head of a Warwickshire gentry family, to pay him a visit, even if he intended, like his father, to avoid exclusive commitment to any of the county's magnates. Far from fearing commitment, however, Malory seems at some time to have become one of Henry's retainers.⁷ Since fifteenth-century retainers were normally required to spend time regularly with their lords, if Cardiff Castle remained Henry's principal residence when Malory was his retainer, it becomes more likely that Malory visited the castle personally at some time before Henry's untimely death in the summer of 1446.

The *Morte Darthur* does not give a systematic interpretation of English politics or any other aspect of its author's world, but some of its episodes