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The case of the ‘curious document’: Thomas Malory, William Matthews and Eugène Vinaver

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Abstract: This article looks at the publication history of Eugène Vinaver’s *Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, examining letters and documents located in the Oxford University Press archive and exploring the part that correspondence between William Matthews and Press representatives played in the production of the Second Edition of 1967. These correspondences also expose new contexts for what has come to be known as ‘the Malory Debate’, after a book of the same name edited by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick and Michael N. Salda (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000). The article uses the cultural production theories of Pierre Bourdieu to emphasise the important, but often hidden, part that publishers play in the development of scholarly texts and debates, helping to shape disciplinary fields and ensure a rigorous framework within which they can evolve and mature.

Résumé: Cet article s’intéresse à l’histoire de la publication des *Works of Sir Thomas Malory* d’Eugène Vinaver au moyen d’un examen des lettres et documents qui se trouvent dans les archives possédées par Oxford University Press et d’une étude du rôle joué par la correspondance entre cette maison d’édition et William Matthews à l’occasion de la production de la deuxième édition en 1967. Ces correspondances mettent en lumière de nouveaux éléments de ce qu’on appelle ‘the Malory Debate’ d’après un ouvrage du même nom édité par Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick et Michael N. Salda (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000). L’article se fonde sur les théories concernant la production culturelle élaborées par Pierre Bourdieu pour souligner le rôle important, quoique souvent caché, joué par les éditeurs dans le développement des textes et débats savants qui contribuent à la formation des domaines disciplinaires et à la mise en place et à la consolidation d’un cadre rigoureux dans lequel ces textes et ces débats peuvent évoluer et arriver à maturation.

Zusammenfassung: Der vorliegende Aufsatz behandelt die Publikationsgeschichte von Eugene Vinavers *Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Er bietet eine detail-

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lierte Untersuchung der Briefe und Dokumente im Archiv der Oxford University Press und kontextualisiert diese neu vor dem Hintergrund der Frage, welche Rolle die Korrespondenz zwischen William Matthews und dem Verlag für die Produktion der zweiten Edition von 1967 spielte. Die Betrachtung dieser Korrespondenz liefert zudem neue Erkenntnisse für die so genannte 'Malory Debate' (Malory-Debatte) – benannt nach dem unter dem selben Titel veröffentlichten Buch von Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick und Michael N. Salda. Methodologisch orientiert sich der Aufsatz an den Theorien kultureller Produktion von Pierre Bourdieu, um die wichtige, obgleich oft verborgene, Rolle von Verlagen in der Entwicklung wissenschaftlicher Texte, Debatten und Kontroversen aufzuzeigen, denen eine zentrale Bedeutung in der Ausformung von Forschungsfeldern und deren Rahmenbedingungen zukommt.

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* contains one of the most enduring stories in literary history, resulting in proliferations of retellings and remediations that ensure it remains current in global, cultural, and academic contexts. It is also at the root of as many academic adventures as it has actual ones in its pages: there have been quests to examine lost manuscripts, to track down sources, and to identify the correct, authorial Thomas Malory. These two aspects have sometimes clashed, which makes *Le Morte Darthur* a rewarding case study: examining how the various agents working in connected areas of book production and academic research have impacted on this work (or works¹) reveals not only how our perceptions and consumptions of the text have evolved, but show how the networks they connect to (forming relationships that foster and manipulate actions on the text) have acted as key factors in the development of its status.

The disciplines of book history and publishing studies can help analyse literary texts in ways that bring out buried histories of the texts and their construction and production, augmenting scholarship connected to the ideas those texts contain. Work by Robert Darnton, D. F. McKenzie, Pierre Bourdieu, Benedict Anderson and others has transformed the way books are understood, introducing, for instance, concepts of books as part of a communications circuit, a

¹ This is how easy it is to fall into a bear-trap with Malory studies, as the debate about whether *Le Morte Darthur* is one book or several is still going on, started by Eugène Vinaver in 1947 with the first edition of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947) and continuing to the present day with P. J. C. Field's 2013 edition of *Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), where he underlines its nature as 'a long book' (p. xxiv).

sociology of texts, a literary field, or as print capitalism.² In this article, archival discoveries from a scholarly publisher throw new light on academic debate in Malory studies. These discoveries can be explored via Bourdieu's assertion that 'the literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.'³ It will show his thesis that no literary text exists without a 'universe of coexistent works'⁴ can be applied via a journey through the past histories of Arthurian scholarship, focussing on what has become known as 'the Malory debate':⁵ theories around the editing of Malory that have burned slowly and with varying degrees of heat since Eugène Vinaver's edition appeared in 1947. In doing so the part of all people involved is shown to have a significant place in the development of Malory studies, even, and perhaps at times especially, those people who work on the behalf of scholars within the academic publishing circuit. The networks within which scholarship takes place will also be examined, emphasising the value scholarly communities have in fostering the development of academic fields.

The history of Arthurian scholarship in the twentieth century can be traced via two key texts, *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* and *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*.⁶ Both were well received by reviewers, with Alain Renoir concluding that Loomis's 1959 collection 'must be considered one of the very important works of literary scholarship published in many years. No professional Arthurian can dispense with it, and one cannot imagine the student of mediaeval literature who will not have to consult it.'⁷ Similarly, Alan Lupack, reviewing Norris Lacy's 2006 volume found it 'masterful in the selection of topics and in the coverage of complex fields' and 'essential reading for students and scholars of the

² See Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?' from *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (London: Faber, rev. ed. 1990), pp. 107–36; D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, rev. 1991).

³ Bourdieu, p. 30.

⁴ Bourdieu, p. 31.

⁵ After a collection of essays bringing together a range of responses to the topic, called by the same name: *The Malory Debate: Essays on the Text of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick and Michael N. Salda (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

⁶ *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), and *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006).

⁷ Alain Renoir, review of *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, *English Studies*, 47:1–6 (1966), p. 62.

Arthurian tradition'.⁸ Yet neither of these works makes anything other than a very fleeting reference to the formation and growing membership of the International Arthurian Society (IAS), which began in 1948 in Quimper, France. Françoise Le Saux, writing at a time when she was President of the British Branch of the IAS, describes the important place this organisation has had in the discipline, noting 'its role in creating a highly successful and hugely influential forum among Arthurian scholars of all nationalities and specialisms'.⁹ Indeed, the IAS is characterised by its unusually close-knit, international community of scholars, with communication tools like Arthurnet¹⁰ and the Facebook pages of the different Branches¹¹ as well as an online access to Society publications for members improving information exchange and mentoring activities. But even in the mid-twentieth century, the networks that existed between academics, and between academics and academic publishers, can be seen to have created eddies of debate, tension, and resolution. And in examining the histories of such interactions, it is possible to reach a more accurate appreciation of how much effort lies behind what remains as visible, published work. Or, as Norris Lacy puts it:

A myopic view of Arthurian scholarship from a twenty-first-century vantage point that looks back only to the late twentieth can easily obscure the crucial debt we owe to earlier generations.¹²

In 1975 Exeter University hosted the Congress for the IAS. The Congress lasted for more than a week, had 350 visitors (170 members, 88 non-members, and 91 family members) and included three days of excursions.¹³ Among those present was Professor Eugène Vinaver, now frail and elderly:¹⁴ he was seventy-six years old, and it was twenty-eight years since the publication of the first edition of his *Works*. On Thursday 14 August, a paper by the deceased Professor William Matthews, read to the Congress audience by Matthews's friend, Professor Roy F. Leslie, 'left

8 Alan Lupack, review of *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, *Arthuriana*, 16:4 (2006), p. 102.

9 Françoise Le Saux, review of *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, 61:3 (2007), p. 354.

10 Sadly in stasis at the time of writing: see <http://people.clas.ufl.edu/jshoaf/arthurnet/> (accessed 19.5.2015)

11 I am grateful to the many members of the IAS BB who helped with supportive interest and queries connected to this paper via the Society's Facebook page, including Linda Gowans and Leah Tether.

12 Norris J. Lacy, 'Preface', *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, p. vii.

13 Information from the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*, XXVII (1975), p. 183.

14 Eye-witness report via Peter Field: see 'Caxton's Roman War', in *The Malory Debate*, p. 127.

the assembled Malory scholars shaken.¹⁵ To have a paper read posthumously at a conference is unusual enough, but this paper – ‘Who Revised the Roman War Episode in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*?’ – launched an attack on Vinaver’s work, claiming that Malory himself had made the changes in the Roman War, and not, as Vinaver had asserted, Caxton. This was based on a series of six points, which are reproduced in the published so-called ‘long version’ of Matthews’s paper in *The Malory Debate*.¹⁶ Vinaver made no public comment.¹⁷ To a young Malory scholar (it was P. J. C. Field’s first Arthurian conference), it was, as he puts it, ‘dynamite’.¹⁸

The publication history of this paper has already been detailed elsewhere,¹⁹ but it is pertinent to highlight that it was a further twenty-two years before it was printed for the first time: twenty-two years of rumour and argument over the copied and recopied versions circulating among Arthurian scholars. Michael Salda comments: ‘everyone seemed to know something about the essay – and everyone seemed to know something different.’²⁰ As a response to this, Salda put together a panel for the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo in 1993. He invited Charles Moorman (friend and supporter of Matthews), James Spisak (who had been one of Matthews’s students and who would go on to complete Matthew’s edition of Malory), P. J. C. Field, Shunichi Noguchi, and Kevin Grimm (all Arthurian scholars who had engaged with Matthews’s work). Field had to withdraw, but the papers were collected and published, including one written by Field in response to the others, in *Arthuriana* in 1995. These papers show that even after such a large time gap, feelings ran high. Moorman’s extraordinary piece, ‘Desperately Defending Winchester: Arguments from the Edge’,

¹⁵ Field, *The Malory Debate*, p. 127.

¹⁶ See *The Malory Debate*, ‘A Question of Texts’, pp. 65–107.

¹⁷ Peter Field, personal communication 12 May 2015. Field explained this by saying that if Matthews was right, all the Malory experts had been reading the wrong text of Malory for more than 25 years without the slightest suspicion that they were wrong. See also Takako Kato, ‘Towards the Digital Winchester: Editing the Digital Manuscript of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, *International Journal of English Studies*, 5:2 (2005), p. 180, where she quotes Toshiyuki Takamiya, also there in 1975, saying there were no questions after the paper, only a strange silence. I am grateful for the comments and corrections both Peter Field and Toshiyuki Takamiya have offered in the construction of this paper, which have illuminated several key areas, notably what happened at the 1975 Congress.

¹⁸ See n. 17 above.

¹⁹ See Robert L. Kindrick, ‘Introduction: Caxton, Malory, and an Authentic Arthurian Text’, *Arthuriana*, 7:1 (1997), 6–21; also Kato, pp. 180–84.

²⁰ Michael Salda, ‘Caxton’s Print vs. the Winchester Manuscript: An Introduction to the Debate on Editing Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, *Arthuriana*, 5:2 (1995), p. 2.

called publicly for the publication of the Matthews's work from those who held the legal right to do so. In trying to explain the strength of the response to the unpublished pieces, Moorman suggests it is because 'Matthews is perceived by his critics not simply as a scholar attempting to examine a literary problem, but as a genuine iconoclast, a breaker of idols.'²¹ He goes further, suggesting that the discovery of the Winchester Manuscript caused scholars – and publishers – to succumb to avarice: 'on that newly discovered manuscript old scholarly reputations were refurbished and new ones founded, new editions of it were published frequently at premium prices, the whole Arthurian industry bathed in its glory.'²²

It is not until two years later, in a special edition of *Arthuriana* in 1997, that Robert L. Kindrick published Matthews's work: 'To one generation of scholars who have willingly accepted Vinaver's arguments and to another generation raised on them as gospel, Matthews's contentions may sound surprising, even shocking', he noted in his introduction.²³ Three years later, in 2000, Kindrick, Salda and Bonnie Wheeler published *The Malory Debate*, a volume that pulled together work from *Arthuriana* plus essays from other scholars written on the topic of editing Malory.

This work, generated by the difference of approach between Vinaver and Matthews, has underpinned much of Malory scholarship for decades. Vinaver died in 1979 and never responded to Matthews's ideas. But what if there was evidence that showed Vinaver was aware of some of Matthews's views? There is more to this textual conflict than can be understood by the materials detailed above. Such evidence exists in the archives of the Oxford University Press: the correspondences housed there show not only that Matthews played a part in the publishing process behind the second edition of Vinaver's *Works*, but that Vinaver responded to the criticisms Matthews submitted.

The first edition of the *Works* was seen through the Press's production processes by Kenneth Sisam, Secretary of the Clarendon Press, who was also a respected academic with specialist knowledge of medieval texts.²⁴ Sisam's con-

²¹ Charles Moorman, 'Desperately Defending Winchester: Arguments from the Edge', *Arthuriana*, 5:2 (1995), p. 28.

²² Moorman, p. 29.

²³ 'Introduction: Caxton, Malory, and an Authentic Arthurian Text', *Arthuriana*, 7:1 (1997), p. 7.

²⁴ Kenneth Sisam was the editor of *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), a volume that has stood the test of time as a textbook for undergraduate medieval literary studies. He lectured on Old and Middle English at Oxford whilst still a student, and went on to be a lexicographer on the OED before taking up his post as Assistant Secretary at the Press in 1922.

fidence comes through in the letters he writes on Vinaver's behalf to help him gain access to the Winchester Manuscript in 1934: 'I believe he is the only scholar in this country who has devoted himself for many years to the study of Malory, and his accuracy and acuteness of mind give him special advantages in this problem.'²⁵ Sisam was able to supervise the first edition through to publication, and the archives reveal this was, at times, not an easy task. But when the second edition was underway, Sisam had retired and Daniel Davin had succeeded him as Vinaver's contact at the Press, taking on the role of Assistant Secretary responsible for the Clarendon Press. Davin, unlike Sisam, was not a medievalist, although an accomplished classicist who could read five languages. He was therefore more reliant on expert opinions in medieval literature than Sisam had been, and, as will be seen, was fortunate to have those close by him. Vinaver and Matthews, too, were fortunate that Davin's ability to handle problems and people was at their disposal, although they will not have appreciated that to the extent readers of the short series of letters that exist in the Oxford University Press archive can. These letters start in late 1962, and show Davin managing a major challenge to Vinaver's work – this time from a 'very pleasant and rather impressive chap'²⁶, a well-established 57 year old professor of English at UCLA, and a board member of the University of California Press, William Matthews.

Matthews had dined with Helen Gardner in late October 1962, and they had talked about some work he was doing on Malory. He sent her a copy of his paper soon afterwards:

...I should like your frank wisdom on it. As you will see, it is couched for a talk. The talk is to end with the last quotation from Caxton on p.16. The rest is a hurried addendum, just jotting down my retaliation, a tu quoque, to Vinaver. The addendum is undocumented; but if necessary I could extend it ad nauseum...²⁷

At this point in time Helen Gardner was not only a Reader in Renaissance Literature in the English Faculty and a Fellow of St Hilda's College, but also the first

25 Letter from Sisam to the Rev. Dr. A. T. P. Williams, Winchester College, dated 4 July 1934 (OUP archive). All quotes from the OUP Archive appear by permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press. With the exception of this 1934 letter, which is from file PBED004676, all other quotes can be found in material from file PBED020014. I am particularly grateful to Dr Martin Maw and Beverley McCulloch of the OUP Archive for their patient assistance with work on this article.

26 Letter from Dan Davin to Helen Gardner, 22 November 1962 (OUP archive).

27 Letter from William Matthews to Helen Gardner, 29 October 1962 (OUP archive).

woman Delegate for Oxford University Press, serving from 1959–74.²⁸ As Delegate, her role was not only to help select proposals for publication, but also to appoint editors of series, approve authors for books in a series, and authorise new editions of works. She was a 'particularly interested and influential Delegate,'²⁹ and these letters show her to be a careful protector of the Press's reputation, alert to the potential threat of Matthews's paper to Vinaver's *Works*. She may have found Matthews to have been a 'reasonable and responsible person',³⁰ but that did not stop her from suggesting to Dan Davin that he 'better treat it as confidential' but if he thought it serious, should 'ask Jack Bennett what his views are.'³¹

The reason for this exchange becomes clear when the eighteen pages of typed content from Matthews, also in the archive, are examined. Here Matthews sets out his arguments, as the title of the paper says 'In Defence of William Caxton'.³² The paper moves from a discussion of Caxton's integrity, through a rebuttal of Vinaver's theory that Caxton deleted the explicits found in Winchester, to a section that claims (tentatively, it is true) that Malory, as a translator, would have completed *Le Morte Darthur* in much less time than the ten years Vinaver claims. Matthews says, 'assuming that Malory already knew the general course of the Arthurian romances, allowing for the unavoidable reading of a great deal of material that he preferred to omit, recognising that selection and rearrangement take time, I still think that Malory might have done the job in a year, give a little. I don't say he did, for I don't know.'³³ Matthews also sets out why he believes the *Morte* is one book,

28 She was also a scholarly editor of note, having produced an edition of John Donne's poetry, *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), and another, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), both to wide critical acclaim.

29 *The History of Oxford University Press, Vol III (1896–1970)*, ed. by Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.110.

30 Letter from Helen Gardner to Dan Davin, 8 November 1962 (OUP archive).

31 Letter from Helen Gardner to Dan Davin, 2 November 1962 (OUP archive). J. A. W. Bennett was, at this time, Oxford University's leading authority on medieval literature. He was the editor of the journal *Medium Aevum* between 1956 and 1980 (see FN 69 below), and was also working on the volume on Middle English Literature for the *Oxford History of English Literature* series.

32 Pieces of this document reappear in a chapter by Matthews called 'Caxton and Malory: A Defense', in *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley*, ed. by Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp. 77–95. However, the document in the archive is significantly different, including the addendum discussed below.

33 William Matthews, 'In Defence of William Caxton', in the OUP archive, pp. 11–12. Matthews argues that Gavin Douglas's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* took about 18 months, and was a similarly complex undertaking. It is worth noting that this apparently irrelevant section of his argument was laying a foundation for his book, then under construction, on the identity of the author of *Le Morte Darthur*, which was to appear as *The Ill-Framed Knight* in 1966.

not many, using the internal cross-links as evidence: ‘The way in which Malory has cut and placed some of his sources seems to make no literary sense except in relation to a grand design for the whole of his writing.’³⁴

Matthews’s paper produces persuasively put together arguments; his explanation of why the title is clearly Malory’s own, for instance, seems secure, and is backed by choice references to the text. The paper proper ends, as Matthews told Helen Gardner, half-way down page 16, and then there are a further two pages of addendum:

The foregoing defence may be regarded as a historical exercise: *de mortuis nil nisi verum*. Caxton is dead: his works have little interest except to historians. With Malory, however, it is quite another matter, for from a literary viewpoint he is still alive. What is done and said concerning him and his work matters a great deal. So if I now move from defence to attack, it is for reasons similar to those which I suppose must have motivated Vinaver’s attacks upon Malory – to redeem Malory by a protest against an editor.³⁵

In this final section, Matthews brings his biggest complaint against Vinaver: that he allows his theory to distort the text, and thus undermine what Matthews views as good scholarly editing practice. The strength of this belief is shown particularly with regard to Vinaver’s splitting of the text into forty-two sections ‘on very small authority’: ‘Caxton’s chapter-divisions occasionally cut a baby in half; Vinaver’s “novella” are sometimes the headless, limbless corpses of entities that never were.’³⁶ The paper finishes with a further listing of what Matthews calls the

many other serious defects in Vinaver’s edition – the occasional miscopyings, the frequent omissions in the footnote comparisons of Caxton and Winchester, the numerous inconsistencies in the conflation, the many dubiousnesses of the readings that are introduced by the modern punctuation, the prevalent vagueness in the references to the French sources, and so on.³⁷

It is not hard to see why, on receiving such a piece, Helen Gardner felt the Assistant Secretary should read it as soon as possible. She was not a Malory specialist, and Matthews’s comments read like a substantive criticism of a major scholarly edition produced by the Press. In 1962 Vinaver was working on what would be the second edition of the *Works*, and the seriousness of the faults Matthews suggests prompts Gardner to write to Davin that ‘if Will’s complaints really look v. sub-

³⁴ ‘In Defence of William Caxton’, p. 13.

³⁵ ‘In Defence of William Caxton’, p. 16.

³⁶ ‘In Defence of William Caxton’, p. 18.

³⁷ ‘In Defence of William Caxton’, p. 18.

stantial I think it might be a question of not being able to proceed with a second edition of Vinaver's *Malory* without further consultation.³⁸ Davin responds to the paper with a letter that shows the careful attention that characterised his time at the Press, earning him a reputation for being 'the greatest academic publisher of his time.'³⁹ He lists the main points of contention, and admits 'to me who have only common sense and a smattering of knowledge in the subject, its argument seems formidable' but then turns to practicalities:

The question is what should be done. Vinaver's introduction to the new edition is not yet ready and for all I know he may have altered his views. . . I don't think we can condemn his edition on the basis of arguments he has not had a chance to answer. Is there any way we can get Matthews' views before him while he is still working on the new edition? (About two thirds of it is in type). Should the paper be sent to Sisam for his views? Or to Norman Davis?⁴⁰

Gardner replied with the suggestion that Matthews might be persuaded to set out his arguments in an article for *Review of English Studies*, and, if Norman Davis agreed, 'a copy should be sent to Vinaver to ask him whether he wishes to reply in *RES*, or would prefer to deal with the matter in his introduction.' In addition, she wonders if there is a way to show Vinaver Matthews's deeper criticisms of the implementation of his theory in his edition, acknowledging: 'Of course it isn't at all easy to suggest to a person of Vinaver's age and standing that his text is inaccurate as well as 'fudged'.⁴¹

There had, of course, been criticism of Vinaver's *Works* before 1962,⁴² although Matthews makes no reference to this, but these letters, and Matthews's paper, anticipate other notable volumes such as *Essays on Malory*, edited by J. A.

38 Letter from Helen Gardner to Dan Davin, 8 November 1962 (OUP archive).

39 Jon Stallworthy, 'Davin, Daniel Marcus (1913–1990)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition, May 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40201>, accessed 22 May 2015].

40 Letter from Dan Davin to Helen Gardner, 7 November 1962 (OUP archive). Norman Davis was the Merton Professor for English Language and Literature from 1959–80, and also the Director of the Early English Text Society, so was very experienced in assessing editions of medieval English texts for publication.

41 Letter from Helen Gardner to Dan Davin, 8 November 1962 (OUP archive).

42 See, for instance, Derek Brewer, 'Form in the *Morte Darthur*,' *Medium Aevum* (Jan 1, 1952), pp. 14–21, and R. H. Wilson, *Characterizations of Malory: A Comparison with his Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). Wilson's work, predating the finding of the Winchester Manuscript, makes an argument for the unity in *Malory*: a feat that has prompted Peter Field to call him 'the most scholarly Arthurian that has lived' (personal communication, 22 May 2015).

W. Bennett (1963) and R. M. Lumiansky's *Malory's Originality* (1964), so this correspondence was circulating exactly at the time other defences were being worked on. In the OUP archive there is an undated handwritten piece entitled 'Matthews on Vinaver' and signed 'JAWB', Jack Bennett's response to the paper Davin sent to him. Bennett points out that he had himself been critical of some aspects of Vinaver's edition in an *RES* review of 1949, and tells Davin that Vinaver has 'much modified his position' regarding Caxton's attempts to make a book in an essay in the forthcoming *Essays on Malory*. However, he calls Matthews's criticism of Vinaver's editorial method 'simplistic' and says that what Matthews attacks as 'serious defects' is 'too severe'. Taken overall, Bennett's reaction largely rejects any need to take the paper as a real threat.⁴³

Gardner and Davin could not, however, ignore Matthews's claims: being published by the Clarendon Press 'assured an impeccable standard of scholarly publication, and – of over-riding importance to many scholarly writers – prestige.⁴⁴ Authors took pride in being 'Clarendonian.'⁴⁵ There is a reassuringly calm sense of professionalism in these letters, as a solution is worked out: no sense of panic, or drama, just one of efficient integrity in action. Davin sees Matthews, who resists the idea of publishing in *RES* because it 'would have to anticipate some essential points from one or both of two books he is writing.' Instead, Matthews will put together some notes for Vinaver, which Davin will send on, anonymising them:

I shall pass these onto Vinaver, without disclosing their source, and ask him for his comments in the light of whatever he may be doing with the new edition. If Vinaver wants to know his name Matthews has no strong objection; but it may save complication not to disclose it at this stage.⁴⁶

This report is prepared within the week by Matthews, and sent with a letter to Davin, explaining that it 'consists of notes of an "imaginary review" of the existing edition.' This document concentrates on the impact Vinaver's methods have on the reader, Matthews justifying this by saying that:

since Vinaver is fully entitled to express in his introduction any opinions about Malory that he wishes to express, I have not felt it necessary to include here the kind of arguments I set out in the paper you read about Caxton. What I have concentrated on is methods of

43 Undated two-sided page in the OUP Archive, signed JAWB, in amongst the papers on the second edition of the *Works*.

44 Or what Bourdieu categorises as 'symbolic capital' or 'the capital of consecration'. See Bourdieu, p. 75.

45 *The History of Oxford University Press, Vol III (1896–1970)*, p. 10.

46 Letter from Dan Davin to Helen Gardner, 22 November 1962 (OUP archive).

arguments that seem to me to be unfair to the innocent reader (and nearly all of them are blessedly innocent in Arthurian textual and source problems) and methods of editing the text that seem to me to be open to serious criticism. In all cases I have given some suitable examples: given time these could be multiplied.

The confidence with which Matthews writes this is convincing. He finishes the letter by underlining that his review 'is a serious one,' and suggesting that Davin 'may wish to get someone to check it (or sample check it)' before he does anything about it: 'But, so long as it is understood that I am making the report at your request, you can make whatever use of it you think best for the Press. My own concern is mostly that there should be a decent edition of Malory.'⁴⁷

Davin sends this Report, but not until it has been sent to Norman Davis and edited by the Press. The edited changes are documented in a second copy of Matthews's Report in the OUP archives with the suggested changes made in pencil. Clearly Davin was at pains to ensure Vinaver received a filtered version: for instance, the first section, 'The Introduction', has been substantially reduced from a whole page to one small paragraph. In Matthews's original, he twice makes a 'serious challenge' to Vinaver: first on 'the inspiration that led M. to begin' and 'which tale was done first (the "second")' as well as 'the thesis that Malory developed his style in prosing the alliterative *Morte Arthure*' and 'the evolutionary theory that M. developed over a stretch of (ten?) years from small beginnings to great endings'. Second, Matthews 'would also very seriously challenge the grave charges that Vinaver brings against Caxton.'⁴⁸ In the edited version, the serious challenge has been muted to points that 'might be challenged', and a long succeeding paragraph has been cut in its entirety. In this paragraph Matthews lists the things he feels Vinaver has no right to do, which include supporting 'his charges against Caxton by quotations that misrepresent the meaning of the statements from which the quotations are selected' and 'to make less-than-the-whole-truth statements about sources in support of a theory'.⁴⁹ Reading the edits is to understand the tact and professionalism of the Press: gone are potentially inflammatory comments such as whether 'the editor's knowledge of ME is always adequate to the delicate task of amending the text' and judgements that Vinaver's

⁴⁷ Letter from William Matthews to Dan Davin, 28 November 1962 (OUP archive).

⁴⁸ William Matthews's report (with editorial emendations in pencil) for Dan Davin, in the OUP archive.

⁴⁹ Report, as above, p.1. The two examples Matthews cites from Vinaver for this latter point are: 'All that Malory's French source can offer by way of parallel to this episode is a story of how Gaheriet fought with a giant to rescue a damsel' and 'the story of Arthur's Roman expedition which in all Arthurian romances serves as a prelude to the concluding episodes of the Cycle . . . is more than 900 pages from its natural sequel'.

edition, by mixing the two base texts, is ‘neither fish nor fowl.’⁵⁰ These comments repeat what are the two key strikes against Vinaver given in the longer paper shared with Helen Gardner: that Vinaver is inaccurate, and that Vinaver conflates the two source texts. Either of these charges, to a major scholarly edition, could be fatal – if true.⁵¹

Davin’s letter accompanying the Report, dated 9 January 1963, therefore, shows him presenting it tactfully to Vinaver, with a good amount of emphasis on his own ignorance of the worth of what the anonymous critic is saying:

Please forgive me for badgering a busy man, but I have been sent some criticisms of the first edition of Malory which I think you should have the opportunity to consider, since you are now working on the new edition.

I guess that many of the correspondent’s points have already been taken by you in revision. Many, again, could not be dealt with except by further resetting, even if you were prepared to accept them. And many will be unacceptable because they proceed from a fundamentally different conception of how the edition should be done.

Nevertheless, there may be enough that are good to make it worthwhile for you to see them. And, again, it is as well to know about views opposed to your own so that you can, if you think it fit, take account of them in the new introduction.

Needless to say, I am forced to be neutral in these matters, if only from ignorance. But I shouldn’t like to make myself a nuisance and so I hope that the notes I enclose will be of some help in your arduous task.⁵²

This reveals a great deal, taken in context with the other letters held in the Archive, about the roles the Press agents played in what Bourdieu calls the ‘cultural consecration’ of a text. Academic works depend on validation for success: a balance of validation by peers within the academy with that conveyed by the prestige, or intellectual capital, of the publishing press. In the case of Vinaver’s *Works*, OUP was not only carrying out validation checks on Vinaver’s expertise via the academy, but needed to keep in positive balance the real commercial and reputational risks of putting out a text that was judged as unsound. If Matthews was correct, as Helen Gardner had pointed out, then a whole new edition would have to be prepared, and with Vinaver’s second edition already well underway, the

⁵⁰ Report, as above, p. 2 and p. 5.

⁵¹ On the charge of conflation, Vinaver himself sets the record straight, as this paper will go on to show. On the charge of there being ‘serious’ inaccuracies, see the study done by independent Japanese scholars in 1967, where a total of 600 were found in the *Works*. Very few of these affected the meaning of the text, most being minor copy-editing slips. See Shunichi Noguchi, A. O. Sandved, and Ján Šimko, ‘Corrigenda’, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd Edition, ed. by Eugène Vinaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 1753–56.

⁵² Letter from Dan Davin to Eugène Vinaver, 9 January 1963 (OUP Archive).

Press needed to find out, fast, if his updates would adequately address enough of the criticisms to ensure it could still go to publication without more drastic intervention. Bourdieu talks about 'the sensitivity needed to sniff out these movements of the cultural value stock exchange'⁵³: here Davin reveals himself to be a master of this skill.

Davin's tone is apologetic, and respectful. He offers the Report to Vinaver but does not compel him to act on it, leaving it up to him to decide if the comments are of use ('if you think it fit'), and claiming his own supposed ignorance on the matter ('I am forced to be neutral in these matters, if only from ignorance'). But Davin has taken every precaution to ensure his 'ignorance' is highly informed, as revealed by the other letters in the archive between Norman Davis and himself. Davis's judgement on Matthews's views was spoken with scholarly authority, for as well as being the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, he was at this time preparing his own scholarly edition of the fifteenth century *Paston Letters*,⁵⁴ so Malory's period was one he was very familiar with. He was also a contemporary of Davin's from the University of Otago in New Zealand, so the two had a long-standing connection, and presumably this helped working relationships between the Press and the University, especially on sensitive matters such as this. Davis sends a confident response, with consideration of the impact Matthews's Report might have:

How far it can be used in preparing a new edition is another matter, for much of it is, as you can see as well as I can, so fundamental that it would call for a resetting. You will remember that before I saw these remarks I told you that in my opinion Vinaver's method of conflating the MS and Caxton was thoroughly unsatisfactory. Matthews' comments on his pp. 4–5 therefore seem to me justified, and they are of course fortified by reference to Jack Bennett's reviews of the first edition. This consensus of criticism suggests that Vinaver has not done this part of the work well. Yet you can hardly tell him to do it differently at this stage.

Here is another authoritative voice: and, on one of the key accusations, that Vinaver 'conflated' the texts, Davis is supporting Matthews, even taking the validation further by reminding Davin that he had said something similar himself to Davin in the past.

This is remarkable, for as Vinaver himself later reiterates, he does not 'conflate the extant versions so as to get an intelligible text; I try to get as near the original as possible by examining each variant in terms of its textual history.'⁵⁵

⁵³ Bourdieu, p. 137.

⁵⁴ *The Paston Letters*, ed. by Norman Davis, vols I-II (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1971 and 1976).

⁵⁵ Letter from Vinaver to Dan Davin, 10 December 1966 (OUP Archive).

However, despite this disagreement over how academic editions should be made, and a misunderstanding of Vinaver's entire system of editorial practice, acknowledging the potential repercussions, Davis dismisses the worst case scenario: 'But what is the use of telling Vinaver about it? He might be able to modify a few readings, add some references in the commentary and improve the glossary; but he cannot be expected to change his whole method of presenting the text, which depends on the theories he sets out in his introduction.'

Pulling all the various contexts of this matter into a summary, Davis concludes: 'the value of Vinaver's edition is that it presents a more or less readable text with a vast amount of annotation on the French sources. It is a highly idiosyncratic production, with a flavour that would be destroyed by toning down the views on which it is based.'⁵⁶ This defence evokes relief from Davin: 'I agree with you in thinking there is not much we can do, although I hope his new edition is already taking account of at least the detailed weaknesses.'⁵⁷ Davis's comments enable Davin to compose his letter to Vinaver with just the right balance of supplication and casualness: there is no hint of the Report posing any significant challenge to Vinaver's work, or any sense of a heavy-handed Press stepping in to demand rewrites, although, as the archive has revealed, both these elements were present, and unknown to Vinaver, as he laboured on the second edition.

Unexpectedly, Vinaver responded twice to Davin's letter and the comments in the Report. The first time was fairly soon after it was sent, on 26 February 1963. He says, briefly, 'it contains one or two useful suggestions, but I am afraid a great deal of it makes me wonder how much the anonymous writer really knows about textual criticism . . . When I have a moment to spare I shall send you some notes on this curious document.'⁵⁸ The second is dated some three years later, and is a much longer response:

While sorting out my papers I found a draft of a letter which I never sent you. You had forwarded to me the observations of an anonymous correspondent of yours about my edition of Malory, and you wanted to know my reaction to them. I am sorry to have overlooked the matter and to have left it so late but perhaps in view of the approaching date of the publication of the second the time for a reply is not so badly chosen after all.

The most useful thing in your correspondent's letter is the reference to Jack Bennett's review of the first edition. Bennett had pointed out, quite rightly, that the critical apparatus was incomplete and inconsistent: many important variants were omitted and a number of unimportant ones recorded. This is one of the defects of the first edition which I have now tried to remedy in the second. The entire critical apparatus has been revised on the basis of a fresh

56 Letter from Norman Davis to Dan Davin, 5 December 1962 (OUP Archive).

57 Letter from Dan Davin to Norman Davis, 7 December 1962 (OUP Archive).

58 Letter from Eugène Vinaver to Dan Davin, 25 February 1963 (OUP Archive).

collation of the two texts – Caxton's edition and the Winchester MS. I hope the result will be found adequate.

This letter gives us Vinaver's refutation of Matthews's complaints about his *Works* – a clearly articulated, sometimes slightly testy, rebuttal, but one that nevertheless acknowledges exactly how contentious the comments are: 'What puzzles me is the criticism of my method of establishing the text. If only half of what your correspondent says were true my edition of Malory would be worthless, at least from my point of view.'⁵⁹ The reader of these archived letters, with privileged access to the other histories and voices embedded in this thread, realises at this point the full force of Bourdieu's assertion that:

the relations which make the cultural field into a field of (intellectual, artistic or scientific) position-takings only reveal their meaning and function in the light of the relations among cultural subjects who are holding specific positions in this field, . . . because intellectual or artistic position-takings are also always semi-conscious strategies in a game in which the conquest of cultural legitimacy and of the concomitant power of legitimate symbolic violence is at stake.⁶⁰

The OUP archive allows all the agents to be seen, at least as far as their correspondences permit, and this access enables a shift in perception, not only of Vinaver's *Works*, but of the Press and the academics it relied upon to help create the cultural field it exists in, a field that was to yield further intellectual harvests in the editions that succeeded it, and the research generated in response to it – among which, of course, was Matthews's paper of the 1975 IAS Congress.

The last link to this chain of letters comes from Davin, who replies to Vinaver in 1966 with much more confidence than he had shown in his earlier treatment of the Report and its author: 'I had quite forgotten that piece of rather brash criticism which I sent to you from our correspondent so long ago. I am not at all surprised that you cannot accept his views about the text. . . Still, I am glad that the new edition is at least going to eliminate the few objections of his which did have some foundation.'⁶¹ All had been resolved to the satisfaction of Davin and the Press, and the next year saw the second edition of Vinaver's *Works* appear, with a whole new section called 'The Problem of 'Unity', and many corrections and reworkings, Vinaver himself admitting he had found many cases where his

⁵⁹ Letter from Eugène Vinaver to Dan Davin, 10 December 1966 (OUP Archive).

⁶⁰ Bourdieu, p. 137.

⁶¹ Letter from Dan Davin to Eugène Vinaver, 21 December 1966 (OUP Archive).

principles of emendation had been interpreted in what now seemed to him ‘far too rigid a manner’.⁶²

So, when the 1975 IAS Congress took place, and Vinaver sat listening to the words of William Matthews, it was not the first time he had been criticised by him. Indeed, unbeknown to the audience, and most likely to everyone else in that room, that paper was a continuation of a conversation that had begun some thirteen years earlier, at a dinner with Helen Gardner. Unmediated by the intercessionary hands of the editors at the Clarendon Press, or, indeed, any publisher, this paper was released directly into the academic network, which, denied a version validated by a single authoritative source,⁶³ responded with conflicting opinions that spanned another two decades until the publication of an official version in *Arthuriana* in 1997. Announcing this forthcoming volume, Bonnie Wheeler summarised the current situation, underlining the scholarly chaos this had caused: ‘Oral and written versions, short and long versions, authorized and unauthorized versions — all these circulate in a *House of Fame* so complex as to justify a new novel by Umberto Eco.’⁶⁴

In essence, there could hardly be a better case study to illustrate Bourdieu’s theories about the field of cultural production being a site of struggle among networked agents connected by some relationship to the product (in this case, Vinaver’s *Works*). Texts like *Le Morte Darthur*, classic texts, ‘change constantly as the universe of coexistent works changes’.⁶⁵ In uncovering dialogues about the text that add to an understanding of their complex histories, we can see how the struggles both create the history of the field and also, because the agents and groups they bring together ‘are not present in the same present’, produce a contemporaneity for the text by bringing together the different times involved.⁶⁶

The struggle, which sends the work into the past, is also what ensures it a form of survival; lifting it from the state of a dead letter, a mere thing subject to the ordinary laws of ageing, the struggle at least ensures it has the sad eternity of academic debate.⁶⁷

⁶² Eugène Vinaver, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) p. v.

⁶³ See Robert L. Kindrick’s Acknowledgements and Introduction in *Arthuriana*, 7.1 (1997), p. 1–6 for the background to this.

⁶⁴ Bonnie Wheeler, ‘Editor’s Note’, *Arthuriana*, 5:2 (1995), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Bourdieu, p. 31.

⁶⁶ Bourdieu, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, p. 111.

The letters in the OUP archive are part of a debate about editing Malory that is far from dead – indeed, with the most recent edition of *Le Morte Darthur* appearing in 2013, edited by Vinaver's reviser, P. J. C. Field, a whole new set of responses and histories are feeding and will feed into that – and they show that there is always more to be uncovered about texts, especially if the publication histories are consulted. In a digital age, ironically, such histories can be quickly lost with the press of the delete key. Norris Lacy's call to acknowledge the debt of previous Arthurian academic work should be widened to include those publishing editors who have laboured to bring that work to publication, often intervening or acting, as this article shows, with significant and unrecognised impact. As Field notes in the Acknowledgements of his edition, he had 'the help of new editions and reference tools and of half a century of scholarly debate and discovery not available to Vinaver.'⁶⁸

Far from being a 'sad' eternity, then, academic debate can be seen as a vital, positive, richly rewarding one, composed of agents who occupy all kinds of spaces connected tightly or loosely to the texts they work with. This is especially so with the Arthurians, via the Society that Vinaver himself helped to found back in 1927 in Oxford, and which was, at his instigation, to become the official International Arthurian Society in 1948.⁶⁹ In *The Guardian*, a report on the Congress of 1975 quotes Vinaver as saying that 'the development of Arthurian studies has exceeded my highest expectations, both in the quality of the work and the enormous expansion of the subject.' As the article also makes reference to Vinaver's own presentation (given to 'a rapt, capacity audience'), made earlier on the same afternoon that Matthews's paper was read out, it is possible that Vinaver's reported 'wry satisfaction'⁷⁰ at the state of Arthurian Studies included a reflection on the events of the 14th August. At any rate, because of the commitment shown by Vinaver, and by Matthews, and by those who worked with them to give their argu-

⁶⁸ Field, p. ix.

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Professor Toshiyuki Takamiya for directing me to Vinaver's obituary in the *BBSIA*, 32 (1980), p. 298, where A. H. Diverres refers to Thorpe's account in *BBSIA* 25 (1973), setting out that the IAS was Vinaver's brain-child. The piece also notes that the Oxford society published two proceedings under the title of *Arthuriana* (in 1929 and 1930), and when this society was renamed the Society of the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, *Arthuriana* became *Medium Aevum*. Today, the journal known as *Arthuriana* is the publication of the International Arthurian Society's North American Branch. This came into being in 1994 after taking over from *Arthurian Interpretations*, which had operated from Memphis State University. See 'From the Editor', *Arthuriana*, 4:1 (1994), p.vi.

⁷⁰ Janet Watts, 'Putting the Sword In', *The Guardian*, 15 August 1975. With thanks to Gillian Rogers for directing me to this article.

ments space to be aired and considered, the discipline of Arthurian Studies, and the theories around the so-called ‘Malory debate’ are still very much alive. There are more stories to be told from the OUP archive, and, it is to be hoped, from other related publishing archives, too. It is time that other ‘curious documents’ are sought out, examined and realigned with their core textual centres: as Bourdieu says, ‘it is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field.’⁷¹ Let us try, with our own ‘symple connyng’ not to not lose it, for if we do, we lose those intellectual and cultural genetic pieces that tell us more truthfully where our ideas come from: those ‘noble actes, feates of armes, of chyvalrye, prowess, hardynesse, humanyte, love, curtosye, and veray gentylnesse, with many wonderful hystories and adventures’⁷² are just as much as part of the Arthurian story as Malory’s.

71 Bourdieu, p. 31.

72 William Caxton, ‘Prologue to “Le Morte Darthur”’, quoted from Field, p. 856.