Malory – Loss and Faith

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the narrative world, value systems, and narrative structures of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. I read these more literally than criticism has generally been inclined to do, and I arrive at the conclusion that the work, while complex, is remarkably consistent internally. Further, I argue the work is consistent while accurately representing in its narrative world issues for two most divergent strains of contemporary theoretical discourse on human conduct: René Girard's work on mimesis and sacrificial logic, complemented by Michel Serres's works on the same; and Gilles Deleuze's reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's oeuvre for systems of evaluating worth.

The introduction begins with a brief summary of Malory's scholarly criticism and positions itself within that critical context before providing an outline of the thesis proper and the theoretical works employed there. The remainder of the thesis is split into two parts. The first, in three chapters, unpacks the text for a cosmology, an axiology, and then a narratology. The second explores how the problems inherent in the fictional world thus composed are treated, by addressing in turn how Malory's episodic narrative configures its beginnings, endings, and middles.

I argue that in this fictional realm's foundations, Malory's use of Fate as a numinous agent functions as the sacred does for Girard in myth: by attempting to hide the scapegoat victim of collective murder. However, contingent and localized details intrude in Malory's narrative to reveal that murder, and yet they do not, indeed cannot, prevent it. Further, the repetitive episodic narrative is structured in sequences that resonate with themes of desire, rivalry, and envy. These ideas are central to Girard's mimetic hypotheses regarding the violent rituals, culture, and institutions that result from a founding sacrifice. Repetition highlights both the interminable nature of this violence, and the intrusive nature of the contingent, wherever someone is blamed.

Counter to the tensions of the mythic narrative and the historical (contingent) narrative is the third term of a noble will. In accord with Deleuze's criteria, this will is active and affirmative in Malory. It plays an increasingly prominent role in this thesis's second part, where the focus shifts from examining narrative systems to modes; that is, to the way the narrative is told. In the time of reading, whether beginning, ending, or in a repetitive loop, the quality of a character's will is manifest in the moment. In the best of Malory's knights, as in Nietzsche's hero, this will is more than affirmative: it is declarative about what is good, noble, and worthy. The hero wills chance and Fate and calls it good, and I examine how in every respect this is opposed to envy and rivalry, to the conditions that make mimesis and sacrificial logic possible. The character of this will does not prevent the destruction of the realm, no more than Balin survived its foundation, but the noble will does reach beyond and is, I argue, all the more worthy for the poignancy of its loss and faith.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations and Conventions

Bracketed page and line number references are to Eugène Vinaver and P. J. C. Field's third edition of *Le Morte Darthur* (Malory 1990). An 'n' prefix for such a reference indicates the corresponding commentary entry for that page and line number in the third volume. I use Vinaver's book and section divisions, with short titles for the eight books: 'Arthur,' 'Roman War,' 'Lancelot,' 'Gareth,' 'Tristram,' 'Sankgreal,' 'Lancelot and Guinevere,' and 'Morte,' or books one through eight. When referring to the Winchester MS-derived text in the 'Roman War' I prefix a W to the page and line reference, and a C for the Caxton-derived text that runs parallel below it. At times I refer to the text simply as 'Malory.' In using this convention, unless stated to the contrary, I do not refer to the man himself but only the body of work attributed to him.

For convenience, editorial quality, and consistency across such a vast collection of works I refer to Norris J. Lacy's edition of the French Prose Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Cycles (Lacy 1993), the latter also known as the *Roman du Graal* through Fanni Bogdanow's scholarship. Whenever possible I have used Renée L. Curtis's abridged translation of *Tristan* (Curtis 1994), in other cases I have referred to Ménard's French edition (Ménard 1987).

For brevity and clarity I refer to the French Vulgate works as: *Merlin*, *VM Suite*, *Lancelot*, *Grail*, and *Mort Artu*; the Post-Vulgate *Merlin Continuation* and *Mort Artu* as *PVM Suite* and *PV Mort Artu*; the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Hamel 1984) as *aMA*; and, the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* (Hissiger 1975) as *sMA*.

INTRODUCTION

Two unusual features of Malory's work – the seemingly fragmented, episodic, narrative and the intertwining of the eerie and vertically-motivated with the pragmatic and contingent – prompted me to begin reading Malory from theoretical frameworks that also seem, on the face of it, unrelated and even un-relatable: René Girard's and Michel Serres's work on sacrificial logic, and Gilles Deleuze's work, after Friedrich Nietzsche, on the eternal return, difference, and repetition. The result is that, in my reading, Malory's sequenced serial narrative is interwoven for *sens* where his Old French models are more famously read as interwoven for *matière*.[1] For *Le Morte Darthur,* this finding leads to a further conclusion that the narrative has clear and emotionally-oriented threads that alternately privilege and undercut what I have for convenience labelled 'mythic' and 'historic' modes of narrative. In Gérard Genette's sense of the terms (1980, 27; 1988, 13-17),[2] the work's *narrative* is meaningfully sequenced in a hybrid of the iterative and the repetitive, even though the *stories* themselves appear all but stochastically arranged at times.

My reading takes its initial cues from critical division over the work's 'unity,' genre, and intent based on external criteria. I instead approach *Le Morte Darthur* as presenting its own internally consistent systems for the narrative world, character values, and structure. To better understand what these systems might mean for the work's reading, I have examined how these are in turn *re*-presented in the modes of narrative telling for beginnings, endings, and middles.

From the widest perspective, this thesis engages with Malory's criticism over two issues. First, that the work can be read far more literally than is usual, not despite the inconsistencies that arise by doing so, but because of them. We can resolve a great many of these inconsistencies if we are sensitive to the presence of two narrative threads throughout the work, and we read the work for the consequences of these where they are bound in conflict with one another: one that privileges mythic reasoning, and the other that privileges narrative facts and localized events, a historic narrative.

Second, like a chivalric variant of Kant's second formulation for the categorical imperative (very loosely: treat no one as a mere means to an end), far from the work treating the ends as justifying the means, the conduct of the hero who endures even the most heinous of ends confirms the inherent nobility and worth of that hero's conduct. This conduct becomes itself a hero, if not the

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1   Eugène Vinaver (1971, 15-32) explores the tiered medieval understanding of literary narrative for *sens* and *matière*, and as opposed to storytelling. He draws on how Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Gottfried von Strassburg, amongst others, were self-consciously distinguishing between the writer's role and that of the storyteller as a recounter of *matière* (a tale's 'matter' or 'material'). The writer had a special artistic obligation to imbue the *matière* with *sens*. Vinaver offers many possible meanings for *sens*, including: 'significance' or 'purpose' with respect to Chrétien (23), but also 'wisdom' and even 'scheming' for Gottfried (16).

2   In brief, Genette distinguishes between the '*story* (the totality of the narrated events), *narrative* (the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them), and *narrating* (the real or fictive act that produces that discourse – in other words, the very fact of recounting)' (1988, 13).

hero, of the work. As with the first point above, by taking the work's surface values more literally, the value systems of the narrator and the best of characters esteem conduct, not results. Yet this is problematized by the mythic narrative threads where an unfortunate result is all too often recast as a cause for future violence whether prophetically, as in the early books especially, or simply by oaths of vengeance, in which case the mimetic discourses of envy, rivalry, and scapegoat logic are made all the more manifest.

This introduction contextualizes the above for a representative subset of Malory criticism in the three following sections: general critical issues, narratological issues (for mythic and historic threads), and then axiological concerns.

Malory Criticism

Fifty years after the 'Unity Debate' began, not taking a position on the work's unity remains difficult regardless of whether one tends towards the views collected in *Malory's Originality* (Lumiansky 1964), or those in *Essays on Malory* (Bennett 1963). The debate originated, of course, in Eugène Vinaver's claims, in the introduction to his edition after the Winchester MS discovery (xli-li, lvii-xcix), regarding the great degree of independence the tales enjoy.[3] Unity or independence is still a common starting point for much criticism, for instance in Barbara Nolan's essay on the 'Gareth' and 'Lancelot' books (1996, 153-4), and, by way of Vinaver's suggested term 'cohesion,' in Fiona Tolhurst's article on genre (2005). Further, it is also an issue critics continue to return to, and from diverse subjects, including in P. J. C. Field (1998a, 85). Almost every critic has a perspective on the debate, even when, like Mark Lambert, they decline to enter into it in earnest: 'in this tourney I do not ride' (1975, x). But, it is a significant issue, as demonstrated further in the same paragraph where, despite the above remark, Lambert feels compelled to confess in parentheses:

> I should say here that I think D. S. Brewer essentially right in suggesting that in Malory we find connectedness, but not the kind of unity we expect to find in the novel. The important point is that the 'tales are meant to be read in their present order.' (1975, x)

I argue that the structure in Malory is sequenced serial narrative, for which there are parallels in other forms of narrative, although these are not models we would claim literary descent from. The greater and lesser independence of episodes[4] and tales taken as a series forms its own system of patterning, which in turn and as a whole shapes *Le Morte Darthur* as a single work, albeit one comprised at times of multiple narratives for the same and similar events. That is, I believe we can

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3   Stephen Knight (1969, 5-34) summarizes the debate's early years.

4   By 'episode' I mean nothing more technical or controversial than in Morton W. Bloomfield (1970). Namely, that narrative presupposes at least some emphasis on sequential action, and for that sequence, or 'plot,' to be divisible into episodes, as a general rule (98). The specific demarcations of episodes for a given text is open for debate, but I am referring to 'any natural unit of action, any section into which a plot may be with some reason divided' (99), including the possibility of episodes nested within each other.

say more on the topic than Lambert's paraphrase of Brewer, and by doing so find useful consequences for our reading of Malory.

The 'Unity Debate' still serves as a fertile ground for many and varied critical offshoots, including the role of tragedy (Tolhurst 2005; Whetter 2005), the varying degree of independence in tales and episodes (Edwards 2001, 3-4, 19-23; Wimsatt 1994; Benson 1976, 29-36), the role of a tale for the book it is contained within or the episode for its tale (Riddy 1987; Mann 1986; Knight 1969), and even, by way of teleological argument, the characters' virtue or lack thereof (Whetter 2005, 152; Edwards 2001, 51-2; Hanks Jr 2000; Lewis 1963; Wilson 1934). In so far as genre guides a reader's expectations, each of these critical problems traces back to the outstanding issue of the work's uncertain genre. We know, more or less, what to expect from a romance, an epic, a chronicle, for a given period and in a given language. We could critically evaluate the work with certainty (again, more or less) if it adhered to one of these, or even more than one if only the work behaved consistently. But without a very great deal of qualification, of lengthy and highly articulate reasoning, such as K. S. Whetter (2008) offers – and the sheer scale and complexity of these limiting conditions speak directly to my point – it would be disingenuous to claim the work belongs to even a hybrid genre. A class must have a membership greater than one if we are to use the term purposefully, and Malory is simply not of the same kind as other works. At least: the combination of that which is interesting about Malory forms a gestalt for which we do not have a single clear parallel.

These problems connect with a more basic factor that informs our experience of reading, and our expectations for a given genre: narrative motivation. One idea strongly suggested by the conclusions of this thesis is that there is no genre for Malory's work. It is self-established and self-referential not only for the narrative style and structure, but also for the very factors that motivate the narrative, to the part of the work that functions. The work may well be a singularity; reading it in accord with one's taxonomic impulses certainly seems to compound confusion. It is, at least, a highly irregular work.

Following Morton W. Bloomfield's (1970) arguments, distinguishing epic from romance by their respective preference for horizontal or vertical narrative motivation between episodes, I find Malory's follows now one route, now the other. For crucial moments it exhibits both tendencies for the same event, with horizontal motivation privileging a historic narrative that is at odds, in interesting ways, with vertical motivation that privileges a mythic narrative. My first chapter is largely concerned with expanding on the mythic space of Malory's narrative world, and in particular the agency of Fate within that world as a tragic force. While it is not possible to separate these entirely, the second chapter engages more directly with the historic discourse, where the work reveals via localized and contingent details the scapegoats the mythic narrative seeks to cover up. Chapter three examines the episodic sequence structure that allows these narratives to co-exist, to tell their own stories, and to inform us about their correlate. Together, as my thesis's first part, these describe a non-trivial system that I introduce in more detail in 'Interwoven *sens*,' below.

The system presents a very real and difficult problem, however, and the same one Girard and Serres face with respect to mimesis and scapegoat logic. As introduced in 'The Good and the Hero,'

below, the second part's proper focus is more narrowly on modes – the way that the narrative is structured for beginnings, middles, and ends; the way the world/realm is founded, reasserted, destroyed; and, the way the best of characters conduct themselves. The way, the mode, in each case reinforces a reading of Malory that stresses evaluations of the kind Deleuze (2006) finds in his reading of Nietzsche: the means are primary, the ends serving only to highlight the value of those means. One does not beat the mimetic game, one must go beyond it, establish one's own values, and become them. Accordingly, chapter four is a transitional chapter between demonstrating mimetic logic in the work and relating how it is problematized. The beginnings, whether of books, tales, sequences, or episodes, scatter the themes and *sens* of the previous endings. Originally these are ritualized events but, through repetition, the envy and rivalry that motivates these becomes more obvious – although as early as 'Lancelot,' where the hero sets out to prove himself after the war on the continent and homecoming tournaments, the centrality of mimetic rivalry is clear enough, and the mimetic conditions of earlier beginnings are discussed at length in the first part. The interminability of mimetic logic is set as a real problem for and within the text.

With the mimetic problem thus fully established, the last two chapters can finally present the work's overcoming of them. In chapter five, the endings as scattering agents for future beginnings' gatherings, needs little further elaboration – instead it is the few exceptions to this rule that fill out a procedural picture of the work's resolution to the mimetic problem in the contingent and local, and in loving relationships. But these require a process found in the middles; living beyond mimesis is proven in time, in loops of an instant and future that are willed despite Fate and chance, and not in a static account of reconciliation, and chapter six expands on this. I discuss the text's values that allow promises of vengeance and obsession with past losses to be transformed into oaths, faith between characters, faith in oneself, and the capacity to create new futures. These are not the futures of results, but of conduct, modes of becoming and willing that go beyond mimetic reasoning, envy, rivalry, and Nietzschean weakness. Futures belonging to the noble men (and at least one noble woman) in Malory who take the *aventure*. First, I must step through the critical context for my arguments.

If it is not already, it will become obvious that I tend towards the arguments of Vinaver's camp in the unity debate. But in developing Vinaver's position, by way of the text's internal value systems so far as I can identify them, I find there is no longer any question about the work's unity or independence. It is too much to the point of the work that it repeats ideas with variation, episodically, just as Girard's mimetic theories claim we do. It is too much the experience of reading that these repetitions accumulate an emotional weight. The tales are often distinct, but more fundamentally, the work is one and many.

I have tried to limit my claims to what can be shown to happen within the text, how it operates, and what this can suggest for our understanding of Malory. And I have tried to create a picture of how his narrative world works on its own terms from its own explanations and treatments of those

terms. This has meant that I have had nothing to say about the author's hypothetical intent,[5] which is not to say connections external to the text are irrelevant, or excluded from my reading. Quite the opposite: I believe the text requires the reader to do a great deal of hermeneutic work. This thesis at its core springs from my reading, which I believe is consistent with Malory in specifics and generalities, and engages with numerous critical problems successfully. But, I claim it is consistent without implying it is the only successful reading, or an inherently necessary one. While Malory's own intentions are inaccessible, his omissions and reconfiguring of earlier texts along with the work's own additions and internal ellipses, allow and prompt many dialogues with the reader and critic, including mine here.

Malory's work is all the more open to critical reflection, and imposition, by not having an overarching theoretical artifice or theological agenda. Certainly it has nothing so formal as his major sources do: the French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Cycles, the French prose *Tristan*, the Middle English alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur.* In these the adventures and marvels sit in each body of work within a reasonably clear overarching design.[6] The French Cycles, for instance, proceed from an elaborate, if apocryphal, religious history and contextualize events exhaustively, almost obsessively.[7]

However, in terms of an opening position, 'the beginning' of *Le Morte Darthur*, Vinaver observed that Malory has many beginnings to his work beside the origin and consummation of King Uther's 'love' for Igrayne.[8] By commencing with not just one but several stories, all in some way concerned with foundations (of a culture, civilization, or a prominent aspect within that culture), the work asserts from the outset the right to construct its own design, and with subsequent 'beginnings' the freedom to reassert this, or vary the narrative framework for what follows. Vinaver contends that these indicate authorial instructions (that is, the narrator's instructions) to treat each book as a separate romance, with a strong preference for smaller, self-contained tales.[9] Rather than engage with the long and storied debate over whether Malory's work is one, five, eight, or many more

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5   Since 'The Death of the Author' (Barthes 1977) this has become no terribly controversial position to take. Further, speculating on Malory's authorial intent has been viewed as something particularly important to distance literary criticism from as far back as Lewis (1963) and Vinaver (1963). More recently Field has argued for the same (1998a, 83).

     On editing Malory, where authorial intent is a genuine and serious issue, see *The Malory Debate* (Wheeler, Kindrick, and Salda 2000), and note p26 fn8, below.

6   For instance, it is possible to generalize and not be too far from the truth of each respectively: a vast interwoven tapestry of wonders, dizzyingly variegated up close, yet of one cloth as a whole; a 'kaleidoscopic' variation on the tapestry model (see chapter three below, and Wimsatt (1994)); a variety of Middle English late epic; and, a Middle English romance.

7   For a study of the truly elaborate framing practice in the French, including internal textual mirror devices, see Pickens (1994).

8   On 'Balin' as opening a new tale: n61.1-5; for 'The Wedding of King Arthur': n97.1-7. These 'beginnings' have influenced both how critics have read the tales, for instance in Archibald (1996), as well as how they have read the structure of the work, as in the case of Sanders (1987).

9   Vinaver makes this point in numerous ways and places throughout his career after the Winchester MS discovery. As a classic reference see his Introduction II.2 and III.1-3 (xli-li, lvii-xcix). See the start of this section on the 'Unity Debate.'

separate 'books,'[10] I have, again, taken the text at face value for the most part and tested my working hypothesis that *Le Morte Darthur* asserts its own internally consistent structure. In this case, that we should heed the narrator's instructions literally, that these are multiple, sequenced, tales of foundations.

Field (1971, 142-159) analyses Malory's style with respect to the narrator's evasion of judgement.[11] One outcome of the narrator's seeming reluctance to evaluate matters is the tendency in criticism to supply this perceived lack. Evaluation of others, deeds, and oneself becomes, somewhat paradoxically, a core textual concern.[12] What is highly unusual is that the text can support such a wide variety of value judgements, or at least suggest to different people such divergent readings. The great number of quite defensible literary responses, and the degree of variation between them, returns me to my previous claim: that Malory inspires critical reflection without implying the necessity of an underlying agenda. For instance, compare Cherewatuk on Guinevere's barren womb as a cause of the society's failure (2006, 42-3, 126), with Elizabeth Edwards's unintentional/not-quite-conscious Malory, author of the symbolic (2001, 22), and Catherine Batt's shift from issues of narratorial voice to historical male anxieties (2002, xiii-xxiii). Or, even with respect to one issue, Dorsey Armstrong (2003, 36) reads the subtext of the prohibition against violence to women, sworn by men, and upheld by men, in the Pentecostal Oath as revealing specific, significant, and unsettling gendered power relations within the community, while Cherewatuk (89) and Batt (2002, 68) find the same 'shocking' because they are able to read it as a manifesto, not a mere statement of affairs. We can go as far back as Roger Ascham's estimation of Malory in *The Scholemaster* of 1570 (Parins 1988, 56-7),[13] where he aligns Malory's work with the corrupting immoral influence of papistry, while Wilfred L. Guerin (1964) divines an exemplum of warning for mankind should it seek to overreach by attempting to replicate a kingdom of God on earth.[14]

I do not think Malory's work is fit for a pulpit; the work is too complex, confused, and frequently confusing, to be read for dogma that is not itself ambiguous and uncertain. However, it obviously has played this role for critics historically. As a result, I believe the work is all too often more telling of the reader's social anxieties than the work's (whether altogether real, as in the case of fifteenth and twenty-first century gendered power relations, or largely perceived, as with

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10 A debate, I suspect, prolonged by the desire of critics not to have the work found objectively wanting, but who nevertheless have differing ideas over the appropriate criteria for a good work in the first place.

11 On this 'unobtrusive' narrator, see Karen Cherewatuk (2006, xiii), who cites Field (2002, 28-9) and Wheeler (1993, 112). Although Field refers to Lambert in support of this (Field 2002, 29 fn13), Lambert has a different take, rejecting 'unobtrusive' (Lambert 1975, 43-4 fn38) in favour of 'intensifying' (56-123, nb. 67-9), given Malory's tendency towards reduction and concentration. One would hardly describe the narrator as (generally) 'chatty,' any more than his favoured knights (generally) are in their direct speech. Lambert further argues, convincingly, that laconic dialogue is a distinctive marker of the knightly, with noise as its contemptible correlate (190-1, 194, 219).

12 See 'The Good and the Hero,' below, and chapter six.

13 See also the summary of Malory criticism over the centuries in Parins (1988, 1-39, esp.10-20).

14 See p11 fn30, below.

Ascham's England overrun by an immoral Catholicism). And this in turn attests to the special qualities in the work that render it so readily interpretable as 'real,' as the sort of literary world in which one might find one's own anxieties reflected.

I argue that Malory's work succeeds because it has recreated for many generations a world where the reader's sensibilities over what is best for society can be so vividly seen, even if only problematically so. We see ideologies replicated at times, but we need not assume they are also advocated. Unobtrusive, laconic, intensifying, and concerned with axiological discourses at a fundamental level, then, the work is also resistant to consistently identifying anyone, or any group, for accusation or blame. Even the manifestly guilty are spared (for example, Mark's trial[15]), accusers repent their accusing (Gawain on his deathbed[16]), and the founding scapegoat stories are problematized (Merlin on Fate, Balin, and Pellinor[17]).

Since the narrative frequently resists providing a specific hermeneutic locus, things seem to just 'happen' in Malory, and the knight's adventure is itself an important subset of these happenings. Jill Mann argues:[18]

> Malory's conception of 'taking the adventure' is not to be identified with [the *PVM Suite*'s] rather prosaic idea of keeping a stiff upper lip. It is not a matter of stoic suffering or iron resistance; it is an attempt to stretch the self to embrace the utmost reach of possible events. The knight does not try to close the distance between himself and events by fitting them to himself, mastering them so that they become a mere expression of himself; instead he achieves union with them by matching himself to them, by taking into himself, accepting without understanding, their mysterious inevitability and his enigmatic responsibility for them. It is this submission of self which paradoxically means that his essence, his 'worship,' remains whole despite the fragmentation in his experience. (1986, 90-91)

However, there is a world of difference between 'submission' and 'acceptance.' Mann's conflation of the two is all the more peculiar given that she clearly articulates the strength of character required by this acceptance (e.g., 'stretch[ing] the self to embrace the utmost reach of possible events'). Balin, in this case, is engaged with his environment and the tasks he sees as his to perform, but he does not submit to them, he takes them. Further, the distinction is not so obviously related to 'the self,' a somewhat hastily posited notion for Malory, I feel, and to which I will return. It is instead the act of will that Balin, like the good knights who follow, declares at every stage of his tale. His declarations of his will are active, not reactive: he does not react to the omens and warnings by leaving the hostile land; he does not give up or submit to anyone; and, he takes the

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15 See 'The Unstable Chivalric World,' chapter one.

16 See 'Gawain Remembers,' chapter six.

17 Discussed in chapters one and two.

18 Jill Mann's (1986) excellent article discusses a great many of the ideas I address, not only 'happenings,' but the roles of chance, destiny, knightly adventure, conduct of (good) knights, the importance of 'Balin,' and the tragic in Malory by contrast with the *PVM Suite*. Our readings diverge with respect to how we view conduct, and the roles of Fate and contingency.

adventure regardless of the options available (bad and worse), or the possible outcomes (life or death). Balin, again, as the good knights who follow do at pivotal moments, acts (accepts and takes) his reactions (confrontations with Fate and chance), a crucial point that is considered in more detail in 'The Good and the Hero,' below. While generally I find Mann's arguments very persuasive, against the passage quoted above I wish to draw attention to how the conduct of the knights in Malory is always very specific. We miss the values the narrator and characters discuss and esteem most frequently if we are loose in our descriptions of that conduct. Balin, like Arthur in his final combat with Mordred, is not submissive or reactive, but precisely the reverse of these. They choose the only 'noble' path.

On the greater relationship between the narrator's reluctance to explain and the work's narrative world, Mann writes:

> Vinaver sees this desire to create compact, independent narratives as Malory's main motive in altering his sources, and presumably interprets the loss of explanation as unfortunate by-product of it. I should like to argue the opposite case: that it was because Malory wished to remove explanations that he condensed his sources. And […] I shall try to show that, once the reason why Malory takes such pains to separate his narratives into discrete units is understood, we shall also see that they must nevertheless be taken together to achieve their full meaning. (1986, 72)
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> [Balin's drawing of the sword] offers an image of the fusion of chance with destiny; the selection of Balin as the one who will succeed has the arbitrariness of chance, but the unerring specificity of its aim gives it the character of destiny. (80)

I suspect Mann's argument is very much to the point, but that we can go further to discuss the outcomes of such a project. That is, I believe this is what Malory does, but it also allows the text to operate as a sequenced serial narrative on multiple tiers for *sens*, as will be discussed in increasing detail throughout this thesis.[19]

Field, however, argues that the narrator's evasion of judgement suggests a profound impotency for human agency:

> This apparent lack of control over material seemingly independent and existing in its own right is appropriate to a story in which men, although the most important factor in their world, are not the controlling one. God or fate or their sins, human treachery or the chance of war, are likely to bring the best to a sudden end. (1971, 147)[20]

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19 Note also p18 fn50, below.

20 Field takes the point further with respect to Malory's abilities:

> It seems certain that Malory was able to show things he could not have explained, and which he would have spoilt by attempting to explain. (1971, 149)

On those evaluations the narrator does make:

> Malory is making the same sort of judgements on his characters as they make on each other. And because his own interjections and his factual chronicle style separate the facts from him as narrator, his comment that X was 'a semely man' or 'a myghty kynge of men' becomes the observation of fact by a bystander. (1971, 149)

I believe Field reveals here a most far-reaching aspect of Malory's work. There are conspicuous absences in *Le Morte Darthur*, particularly when it comes to attributing responsibility for 'happenings,' and that these gradually cultivate a background sense within the work of wonder over how the fictional world operates. They invoke a sense of some inarticulate force driving what happens. A motivational force that may be menacing or benevolent, at times both, at others indifferent, but certainly it is something powerful, controlling, unknown, and perhaps unknowable.[21] While the characters may feel the consequences, bitterly, the workings that give rise to these consequences exist outside narrative description, implying they may also be beyond human comprehension. Malory's work fashions this dark romance world as the framing condition for the narrative world in the first place, and as I argue in chapter one, in all subsequent 'first places.'

These happenings arouse readerly interest,[22] while the narrative invites further audience reflection when it builds up to some significant encounter or event, and then simply states what happens without commentary by the narrator. Commentary is instead by proxy. It can be through characters in the form of direct evaluations or indirectly as statements of expected consequences, and it can be through signs and happenings within the world itself that have no obvious causal connection beyond a mysterious narrative force, a connecting *narrative logic*. And by 'narrative logic' I refer to the story's own reasoning for what happens, that which binds one event or character to another, and how the narrative progresses, its motivation. It need not be a rational, psychological, natural/physical, or conditional logic, and it very frequently is not.

I generally exclude psychology from narrative motivation because, taken with the seriousness it deserves, it would require a notion of identity in Malory's characters more solid than the text supports. There is no persistent sense of any person behind even Lancelot, let alone the minor characters. However, types or modes of psychological response exist.[23] In particular, two psychoanalytic concepts resonate with Malory at numerous points in this thesis: Jacques Lacan's *l'extimité* and C. G. Jung's shadow.[24] The former, as Jacques-Alain Miller (1994) interprets it, is

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21 As Whetter argues (2005, 152-3), this aligns the work with certain forms of tragedy.

22 See, for instance, Catherine Batt on the narrator telling us to 'seke' other books at the close of 'Arthur' as 'blur[ring] the reconstitutive processes of reading and writing, and mak[ing] the reader's independent response and further research the necessary adjunct to his own endeavors' (2002, 70). Batt invokes Derrida's *supplement* from *Of Grammatology* (1976, 144-45) to describe how Malory's substitutions of narrative highlight in that substituting what is not included but elsewhere.

23 See 'Modal Motivation' in chapter one.

24 Slavoj Žižek (1989, 145-151) argues Lacan's extimité is Lacan's and Freud's *das Ding*, the Thing. A traumatic, horrifying, kernel of the symbolic order, of the unconscious structured like a language, which posits the 'Real as impossible' (146). (c.f.: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1999, 28) on Žižek and *Beowulf*'s Grendel. Although in Malory this might apply to relationship anxieties more often than the occasional outright monster.) The Thing threatens the symbolic order from its very heart with the possibility of a second death: 'the radical annihilation of the symbolic texture through which so-called reality is constituted'(147). This includes even the idea of 'knowledge in the Real,' of nature adhering to its own rules (148). After an analogy to cartoon logic, where a character running off a cliff does not fall until it looks down, Žižek turns to Freud reading the dream 'of a father who does not know that he is dead [... and because of this] *he continues to live* – he must be reminded of his death or, to give this situation a comical twist, he is still living because he has forgotten to die. That is how the phrase *memento mori* should be read: don't forget to die!' (148)

contrary to the 'the common ravings' of a psychic 'bipartition between interior and exterior' (75). It is instead that most interior of places, opaque, intimate, hidden, and yet has 'in the analytic experience' the 'quality of exteriority': 'the intimate is Other – like a foreign body, a parasite.' (76) Extimité is certainly appropriate to describe how a text's anxieties reveal not so much the community's fears of horrors lurking external to it (a fairly standard reading for an 'adventure story' archetype), but of what lies hidden and unacknowledged at the innermost core of each and every member of that community.

Jung's 'shadow' (1989, 335-6; 1980, 21) – that part of ourselves we most vehemently deny, and hate disproportionately when we observe its characteristics in others – by contrast, applies in contemporary Jungian theory to communities as well as to individuals (Zweig and Abrams 1991). It accounts for the collective when it descends on the scapegoat, just as it does for, say, Lancelot enraged that Tristram could marry Isode le Blaunche Maynes. Engaging with the shadow plays such a pivotal role in Jung's ideas of personal development that he refers to it as the 'apprentice-piece' for the 'master-piece' encounter with one's animus/anima (1980, 29). There is, for instance, certainly something very fundamental, and of engaging both with the Other and with the Other-within, in the final reconciliation between Palomides and Tristram.

Returning to Malory's narrator: commentary-by-proxy, when it does occur, is not elaborated on by the narrator proper, except in those few of Malory's well known parenthetic reflections on love, faithlessness in political allegiance, and more generally speaking, something akin to paeans for the lost past and laments for the woes of the 'modern' age.[25] Malory instead speeds through drama and dialogue.[26] The work does not often linger on points, it almost never draws out the consequences, and through this reluctance to explain it invites the reader to muse all the more instead. In addition to the parenthetic reflections just noted, other exceptions to this rule tease out emotional states. For instance, there are narrative pauses for: Lancelot's inner turmoil in numerous passages during the war with Arthur and Gawain (for example, 1215.15-1216.9); Arthur catching the air on the cliffs before facing the giant 'saint' (200.16-17); the triangulated gazes in and out and across the window when Gareth faces Ironside (321.21-322.12); and any of a number of stand offs between Tristram and Palomides, but particularly the mis-recognition scene (696.32-697.33).

This may well remind us of Balin's reflections during the crossroads horn-blowing episode of his waking nightmare (see p29 fn15). It certainly speaks to the extreme intensity of the work's anxieties over treason and traitors, and, given that they problematize ordering principles of the Real, of any ground on which to base notions of integrity let alone chivalry. See p78 below on Megan Leitch's reading of the Pentecostal Oath, treason, and extimité.

25 Including: on 'True Love and Summer' (1119.1-1120.13), 'Lo ye all Englysshemen' (1229.6-23), and on the gentleman's pursuit of hunting (375.23-29). The possible return of Arthur (1242.22-9) is a slightly different case, engaging as it does with the narrator's lack of certainty over various extraordinary claims in Arthurian literature and legend, and will be taken up again later.

26 Raluca Radulescu (2003, 127 and fn32) observes that in almost all respects, *except* a sense of urgency, of haste, Malory follows the *sMA* rather than the *Mort Artu* in his 'Morte' book.

Helen Cooper's (2000) excellent article on revisiting the Winchester MS, and the punctuation for combat episodes in particular (272-3), is also well worth mentioning in this respect.

One further general difference to stress between Malory and his major sources, is that our author's work proposes and engages with a narrative world that has a seemingly chaotic baseline, the ground is uncertain, while his models envisage ordering principles within nature or the world to a greater or lesser extent. Malory instead proceeds from chance, *aventure*, as the basis of things insistently opposed to the general social need for, very broadly speaking, socio-political order,[27] while like most romances the work is also made up of stories where knights venture out to enter into adventure, into romance. Malory's work is framed on either side by the foundation and collapse of the realm within a world that is itself mysterious, yet not so obviously supernatural.[28] But the vast bulk of the intervening tales also engage with this other realm, as is proper to romance. These romance origins of the narrative world are recurring highlights and centres for events throughout the story where it asserts and reveals itself in the form of literal apocalypses – as disclosures of the hidden, chthonic, or jarringly *fée*, beneath the surface of seeming order. Malory's models by contrast proceed from an already constituted city/woods division of orderly courtly ('civic') versus mysterious romance spheres, and they never fully abandon the distinction. For them order and disorder are opposed statically. In Malory, this stasis is less certain.[29]

This tendency towards the stochastic in Malory informs my reading of Fate, a character's values, emotional tragedy, and the role of mythic and historic narrative in Malory. In chapter one I begin establishing this within the context of a work largely stripped of God's and Fortuna's agency, without deference or appeal to Providence, and generally devoid of explanatory narrative motivation, particularly of causal logic, 'fatal flaws,' or any device that might function by attributing blame.[30] Any critical attempt to schematize the 'something' that is left over, when we remove those

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27 Elizabeth T. Pochoda (1971) has read Malory as exploring, again, broadly-speaking, political ideas of good governance, and more narrowly as a problematic and problematizing propaganda for social ideals (140). More recently Radulescu (2003) has revisited in great detail the supporting social structures of the fifteenth century English gentry that resonate within Malory. See chapter one below, including p24 fn3 and p46 fn38. See also Hyonjin Kim (2000), who concludes that 'Malory's Camelot and the Pastons' England' are very much not 'two completely different worlds,' and that the work is less a nostalgic vision of the chivalric past than it is an idealization of an emerging social class (138).

28 Thanks in part to the degree the work plays down the supernatural and imparts verisimilitude by its matter-of-fact narration, our own non-supernatural world is brought closer to this narrative world, with the implication that perhaps our world, at its core, is mysterious also.

Elizabeth Edwards reads the numinous and sense of 'superfluous absence' in Malory as reflecting a symbolic order (2001, 6-8).

29 See Robert Merrill (1987), whose study begins from the premise that 'art is primarily an attempt to exemplify cultural crises,' that periods of cultural rupture prompt questioning of social, human even, assumptions, and that this 'loss of faith' in one's own civilization leads to behaviour that 'becomes compulsive, excessively predictable or unpredictable, violent, deviant, and unexplainable' (ix).

30 Against this, and my thesis generally, contrast Wilfred L. Guerin (1964): 'Vinaver's refusal to use the word 'moral' in connection with *Le Morte Darthur* seems singularly shortsighted' (273). In narrating the realm's downfall, Guerin argues, Malory is presenting an example to mankind of what happens when one attempts to recreate a paradise on earth. Guerin is adamant that vices, and 'tragic shortcomings of earthly life' abound in the work as warnings (273).

Guerin considers the work a cautionary tale of overreaching human enterprise because he evaluates the story by its results. Similarly, to take a more recent example, D. Thomas Hanks Jr (2000, 96-7) considers Balin to be an anti-knight by his results (i.e., because he leaves a trail of disaster behind him).

literary motivations, remains unconvincing because the narrative is inherently reticent with respect to explanation. It does not attribute responsibility in any clear, consistent, or causal manner.

The work, by contrast, and without an obviously formal design such as we find in shorter verse romances, or even the interlaced Cycles, does not at all read like an Arthurian hodgepodge,[31] nor do I think we need to resort to psycho-linguistic traces of the symbolic in our search for an ordering principle. This is perhaps the root of the problem. As I hope to demonstrate: Malory is ordered, only it is also largely without those organizing principles we are accustomed to look for in literature. First, then, this investigation develops a positive definition of motivation in Malory, and necessarily it is a loosely-configured one.

Interwoven *sens*

The stochastic element in Malory suggests two distinct ways of interpreting the tales, both of which I argue the text supports and indeed takes turns stressing. As *sens* arising from the same text they lead to incompatible conclusions and in these terms we may examine one of the text's more pervasive inherent tensions: how the good might conduct themselves in a hostile world. In chapters one through three, for the sake of clarity, I have mostly argued from the text for the mythic and historic narratives separately, but their interdependence from chapter three onwards will be increasingly evident. What follows is an overview.

As Bloomfield (1970) argued for romance generally, I find the mysterious is used in Malory for vertical motivation between episodes.[32] Bloomfield held that this typified the distinction between romance and epic. Further, a specific variety of Fate is embedded in the world as an agent for emotional rather than rational tragedy. As such, after Girard's work on the sacred (1987), Fate has a mythic function in Malory. It secures the founding tales of collective murder for the community; the institutions of culture, including rituals, prohibitions, the sacred, and monuments; a deep-seated entanglement with human mimetic desire, forever threatening real violence; and, when sacrificial logic finally fails, an extinction event for the community.

While Armstrong (2003, 46, 194) refers, via Eve Sedgwick (1985, 21), to Girard's theory of triangulated desire for the opening Uther/Igrayne/Tyntagil scenario, Batt (2002, 62) notes a number of similarities between 'Balin' and Girard's ideas on the scapegoat, ritual, and endemic communal violence. Not without justification, Batt, like many of Girard's critics, takes exception to the subtext of Girard's model: 'Girard's analysis of male violence allows the female little space, but for mention of displacement in terms of a desire to blame forms of violence on women' (62), while

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31 See p88 fn12.

32 Vinaver's literary discussion of *sens* (see p1 fn1) and Bloomfield's structural arguments (specifically, the strength and quality of motivation between episodes, see chapter one) in this respect complement each other in explaining the epic to romance transition as a move from horizontal connections to vertical.

noting after Sarah Kay (1995, 58-9) that this displacement is a depoliticized one. That is, it normalizes gendered power structures.

However, in Malory rivalry and violence are not the exclusive privilege of men against women. Female rivalry for a single male occurs, including numerous instances where Lancelot is considered hotly-contested property, but there are others, such as the two Isodes over Tristram. Two women even conspire against Brangwayne for envy of the esteem Isode has for her (419.26-35). Whether or not this is an accurate representation of gendered roles, ideal or real, in Malory there is at least an 'equal opportunity' representation of the roles that envy and rivalry can play between people, male or female. The model is applied as a problematic one for homosocial and heterosexual relations without the obvious gender privileging apparent in Girard's work. Further, the object of rivalry, in so far as the object may be blamed in the mythic narrative, is frequently revealed in the historic narrative as the victim of that rivalry.

Crucially, envy, rivalry, and mimesis in general within Malory is, unlike the case for Girard, not a universal condition. It is instead common. It is also that which Malory represents as bringing out the worst in some of the best of characters. Just as it is not a condition of communal existence, it is also not a necessary outcome for the community or individuals, as I hope to show Malory further demonstrates.

Counter to this mythic narrative is what I refer to, for want of a better term, as the historic narrative.[33] Here the stochastic is not interpreted as some numinous force, but as exactly what it looks like in the text: contingent facts related in additively-sequenced statements ('*x* happened, then *y* happened, and then *z* happened, and …'). A feature of Malory's narrative style frequently referred to as paratactic.[34] For the exact same passages as we read even the earliest of dire prophecies the text also suggests readings that reveal the mythic narrative: the scapegoat is identified by the community; a story is given to attribute blame to the scapegoat; the story 'explains' why the person must die; the scapegoat is described as integral to, and a monster for, the community; and this death is not the result of indescribable supernatural forces but of the actions of specific characters for clear mimetic reasons (envy, usually), very often at an identifiable place and time. The intertwining of these narratives in different modes,[35] and through Malory's use of

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33 'Historic' in the sense that the narrator tells a story of what actually happens as it happens.

34 With all due respect to Arnold A. Sanders's article (1987), and technical accuracy aside, the conventional use of the term 'parataxis' to describe a prevalent set of linguistic *and* narrative traits in Malory does avoid a great deal of periphrasis for which I am not apologetic. The work is certainly not the result of seemingly anarchic accumulations without logical transitions or sequencing. But, it is decidedly loose in these respects, and the resulting ambiguities are both significant and appealing for the story. Conversely, it is useful to be reminded that, strictly speaking, the situation is more complex, and that liberties are being taken. See Sanders (1987, 27).

35 The second part of this thesis is primarily concerned with these. By 'mode' I have in mind an idea related to, but less formal and more inclusive than, Genette's 'mood,' itself already a stretched and repurposed grammatical term:

> Indeed, one can tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells, and can tell it *according to one point of view or another*; and this capacity, and the modalities of its use, are precisely what our category of *narrative mood* aims at. (1980, 161-2)

small independent episodes,[36] forms what I have called a sequenced serial narrative. Chapter three in particular discusses the features and outcomes of this structure by way of comparison with other forms of episodic narrative.

Since the distinction is crucial I need to be as clear as I can from the beginning about these terms. I use 'mythic' and 'historic' as a structuralist might. I do not think it helpful, or even entirely possible, to identify either with something concrete, but read Malory for the 'mythic' and the 'sacred' in relation to the paired terms in this context, the 'historic' and the 'contingent.' In Malory the most significant meaning for each exists in its distinction from its correlate, by the various textual relationships that bind *and* distinguish them. Proposing a positive definition opens a host of frankly irrelevant questions and dilemmas for my present literary study, including the relationship between myth, society, and the individual.[37] That is, 'what are they?' is not the most appropriate question to ask here, instead we ask: 'how do they function?' within the field of the work, within its narrative 'world.'

Unlike Girard, or Michel Serres, when discussing sacrifice, scapegoats, parasites, doubles, mimesis, and the like in literature, thought, and society, I am not proposing any kind of correlation between Malory's work and the real world[38] – and certainly not the 'mirroring' in each other of ideas and social reality that Dumézil abandoned. In Malory the 'sacrifices' are not of the same type as the retelling of Iphigenia's in the *Agamemnon* (lines 227-50). They are never so archaic and raw. But I believe we can still read for parallels in *Le Morte Darthur* of foundational moments and tales of cultural origins that exhibit scapegoat logic, and derive from scenarios consistent with Girard's mimetic hypotheses. The situation with Malory is closer to what we read in Livy on Romulus than in

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A passage of narrative may have a tragic mode if it has the characteristics and behaviour of what we associate with a tragic work, but we need not generalize from that passage to the character of the work as a whole. Another passage may read the way we expect of romance or chronicle, it is in a romance or chronicle mode, respectively, but then lead on to a series of events more consistent with, say, tragedy or epic. In keeping with chapter one's 'Modal Motivation' section, 'mode' is open to connotative functions as well as the denotative ones that Genette purposefully limits his concerns to with 'mood.'

36 With Lambert (1975, 121-3), I find it is the singleness of focus for each episodic unit that presents a sequence of discrete, localized, and often intensely emotional happenings (or, for Lambert, an 'individual's psychic life'), rather than a dispersed and interconnected world with its own 'complex simultaneity of happenings' (122). Although, and for the same reasons, I disagree with Lambert's conclusion that this is at the expense of a 'model of human interaction' (122), except in so far as this refers to the wider social context, rather than the interpersonal relations that Malory very clearly does engage with on a local and contingent level, as well as on the mimetic.

37 Daniel Dubuisson outlines the problems Georges Dumézil faced sixty years ago in this respect, and the latter's eventual solution. Namely, to avoid it entirely and continue his study of myth as myth, noting as they arose resonances or 'harmonics' of the mythic system with other aspects of a civilization, or between one Indo-European civilization's myths and those of another. (2006, 34-5, 44-5)

38 A historian of literature, on the other hand, may very well have something to say about the relationship between the characteristics discussed here and the production of Malory's text as a historic event within the context of the complex, internecine, Wars of the Roses – a line of research outside this dissertation's scope. See, for instance, Helen Cooper's (1996b) article, particularly her conclusions (198).

However, from a literary perspective: the *authorial voice* of Malory the prisoner, when it surfaces in the work, is one that behaves *as if it believes it is a scapegoat*, and at those times the text reads as that voice's testament. There is then some literary critical justification for employing Girard's predominantly anthropological theory within Malory's fictional world.

Aeschylus on Iphigenia with respect to content, approach, and the narrative framing of mythic and historic elements – the sacred and the contingent. Aeschylus's stark account of sacrifice contrasts with the cloud of variants we find in passages from Livy or Malory.

Take, for instance, Livy's account of Romulus's 'end' in *Ab Urbe Condita* (Livy and Foster 1919, 1:16).[39] The immediately obvious differences might overshadow the similarities. Between *Le Morte Darthur* and *Ab Urbe Condita* there is a gaping chasm of time, space, and language, of literary and historical context generally, as well as no reason to suppose Malory was in any way aware of Livy's work. Nonetheless, parallels exist. Livy writes this event as history, just as Malory writes the conception, life, and death of Arthur, along with the adventures of his Round Table knights. And this is true regardless of whether we suppose this 'history' of Malory's is a narrative framing expedient for his tales, an attempt at something like a legitimate 'history,' or (and most likely, I feel) something in-between.

Livy includes differing reports of what happened to Romulus that occupy a range of positions on a myth–history continuum,[40] another characteristic of Malory's work.[41] One of Livy's reports describes what is clearly a collective murder obscured when the senators rend Romulus, and this report is spread by rumour, the *noyse* we are familiar with in Malory. Another report appeals to the supernatural: the sudden storm that surrounds and removes Romulus from the world. Livy also reports a posthumous deification of Romulus: the 'wild confusion had been succeeded by a sunny calm' and a new god (1:16). Livy's variants are consistent with *both* narratives that embody Girard's ideas on the origins of myth and cultural institutions, *and* ones that recount the historical murder proper. We should note that despite Livy's incredulity, as well as his clear distaste for both what he believes happened and what use was made of it by some, he still treats the accounts as equally significant in so far as each is an account to report.[42] The chapter closes with one who takes advantage of the murder to set – in the name of the absent, maybe murdered, maybe apotheosized, king – a divine injunction to the assembled people and their descendants as a race, and it is a martial imperative. In the name of the founder and the sacred this Proculus Julius asserts the civilization's purpose, calming the unrest of both the army and the plebeian masses. Henceforth Rome's violence is not only directed outwards, the Romans say they do so by a sacred founding mandate, and perhaps some believe it too.

These multiple and conflicting accounts are given within the context of Livy's history of Rome's foundations, all equally valid in so far as they are accounts he has chosen to relate. Malory gives us multiple accounts, narratives, on a comparable myth–history continuum for his history-as-story, or perhaps story-as-history (depending on the reader's take on what the work attempts – whether it is

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39   I regret not having the space to quote the passage in full. Almost every clause speaks to my argument.

40   For Serres (1991, 89-117) this is one of several key moments of cultural foundation in Livy's early books.

41   This is something stressed almost throughout this thesis, but the earliest is in the comparisons with Herodotus in 'Framing the Realm,' chapter one. Compare also Livy's 'from that moment Romulus was no more on earth' with the account of Arthur's death, p26 fn7.

42   This too is discussed in connection with Herodotus in 'Framing the Realm,' chapter one.

literature, history, or both), and these threads weave the fabric of his fictional Arthurian world.[43] It has its own functioning mythic and historic order of things – the former privileging the sacred, the latter the contingent, but, and I feel I must stress this, Malory's world is created *within* literature. One might well dispute Livy's account on the basis of historical fact, but for our purposes the narrator clearly indicates what happened in his historical narrative and what is said about it in the mythic, all of which is enclosed within the fictional world – there is no room for dispute. Conversely, as shall be discussed in the next section, the hero's conduct, privileged by the narrative, and that which can withstand the tension between the sacred and the contingent, resonates with classical literary models in epic and tragedy, as it does also with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze. The narrative world may be modelled upon human experience of the real, but the narrative's conduct of those who are 'good' resonates with ancient literary models that continue to impress upon philosophic thought with respect to the real.

By following these *sens* threads (for the historic: doubles, imitation generally, and envy in particular; for the mythic: the ritual of adventure itself, but Fate, prophecy, and various other vertical motivations too) the most discontinuous-seeming episodes belong to greater sequences. Further, one can read the vertical weighting, particularly of emotions, in the repetition of episode types within a given sequence.

The Good and the Hero

By the end of chapter four there is a real problem for my reading of Malory, one inherited from Girard and Serres. There is meta-narrative that 'speaks' and 'acts' through sacrificial logic, that can be read in Malory's mythic narrative, and this meta-narrative is insufficient over time to hold back escalating violence. The historic narrative reflects this insufficiency in the fellowship's increasing internal discontent, particularly in the blood feuds of Gawain and his brothers that get worse, not better. And it can also be seen in the relentless playing out of mimetic triangles of rivalry and desire, such as those of Arthur – Lancelot – Guinevere, and Tristram – La Belle Isode – Mark/Palomides, as well as others, including Gawain – Lancelot – Gareth, and finally, of course, Arthur – Lancelot – Gawain. While the work does end with a genuinely tragic form, in the historic narrative and on the personal and contingent level, it is not entirely a tragedy. There is something that does not quite fit, and it is the same something that we find survives the end of Balin and Balan. It transcends the final resolution of Tristram and Palomides[44] where we last read of a living Tristram, and is even in the

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43   See chapter three. For instance, in 'Only the Dead Have Seen the End of War' I discuss one such medley of narrative threads at odds with one another in Malory for Arthur's coming to power, for the consolidation of his reign, and for Balin's role in the realm's foundations.

44   See Dorsey Armstrong's (2006) excellent article on Other-ness in Malory from a Postcolonial theory perspective, and with particular attention given to Palomides as Saracen, of course, but also Tristram as Cornish, and Lancelot as French. The notion of Arthur's or the Round Table's 'home' as Camelot is far from the only idea problematized.

treatment of Gawain's love on his deathbed, along with Lancelot's return to England where he has no cause or desire to lift a sword. No doubt other places could be identified, but this is perhaps a reasonable sample of significant 'ends.' *Something* survives the end of the civilization too, yet it is lost to the world with the deaths of the characters. Further, Malory's parenthetic musings assert a nostalgic awareness that faith in such an *ēthos* is lost for the world at *his* time of writing.[45]

There is a sense that, while mimetic logic is not undone, it is overcome – the individual characters might die, but even in their final narrative moments their conduct and character become something more memorable. As Serres proposed more generally (1982, xxxiii),[46] this literature continues the work of connecting and disconnecting multiple spaces of thought begun in myth, not the rational spaces inherited by science, but the relational ones. Paths, I believe, that in Malory connect the relational spaces Serres later argues belong to the relational hell of mimesis ('Hell is right here.' 'Hell is mimesis.' (2000, 165, 168)). Serres argues from Lucretius in *The Birth of Physics* (2000), as Deleuze does from Nietzsche in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (2006), just as Malory does in his historic narrative against his mythic one, for the proper valuing of the contingent – the love of the good in the local, faith in it, and the necessarily tragic experience of its loss.[47] This privileging of a specific axiological discourse is visible in Malory's treatment of knights and worship, Nietzsche's tragic heroes and the good, and Deleuze's triumph of active forces over reactive.

By contrast, for Serres there is only a negative response to mimesis, and to sacrificial logic in particular, and herein lies the problem as well as my reason for incorporating Nietzsche to understand Malory's 'something.' Serres's proposal is an internalized solution that minimizes exposure, a *reactive* rejection of mimesis. He proposes living 'under' the *clinamen*,[48] to desire only

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In so far as I engage with the Other in Malory, it is the Other *within*, whether for an individual or a community, and accordingly I refer to Lacan's *extimité* and Jung's shadow (see above). Or, when discussing the scapegoat, I am concerned more with how the one is constructed within and outside of a given community, while Armstrong is directly engaging with the difficulties of 'belonging' to that community in the first place, and what that community might be. Regardless, there is certainly something to Armstrong's arguments, while the conclusions (203) are most persuasive.

45 In 'Lo ye all Englysshemen [...]. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme. ' (1229.6-14), and the subsequent 'And so fared the peple at that tyme: they were better pleased with sir Mordred than they were with the noble kynge Arthur [...]' (1229.15-17), shameful 'myschyff' is first described as interfering with noble conduct at the level of *national* character, supplanting 'the olde custom and usayges of thys londe' (1229.11).

46 See p59 for the relevant passage.

47 A recent chapter of Whetter's (2013) is directed to the earthly versus celestial knight (and narrative) strain of Malory criticism that has its own long history. Indeed, it was far from a new concern for the Lewis and Vinaver articles in Bennett (1963). But, in so far as the earthly knight in Malory is concerned first and foremost with the world about him, with his relationships and actions within that world, I believe it applies here too in terms of the local and contingent rather than the abstract or mythic. More importantly, it is in precisely this sphere that the most important form of loss in Malory is found: human relationships, as Whetter (2013, 175) also concludes.

48 Serres (2000) argues that Lucretius's atomist physics can be read literally, particularly the models of a laminar flow and turbulence for the same and the new, respectively. Turbulence, change, is instigated by the *clinamen*:

[J]ust as a lightning bolt creates its oblique flight across the parallel lines of rain *nunc hinc, nunc illinc,* here and there, so declination appears in laminar flow as the minimum angle in the inception of turbulence, *incerto tempore, incertisque locis* (at an indefinite time and place, III, 218-19). [...]. [F]aithful

the most minimal degree necessary (given entropy) beyond what one already has in order to sustain life. One ought to reside within a walled garden of the local: 'There are no solutions, reasons or sciences, other than the local. This wisdom of the Garden […].' 'Here are the waters, cataracts and flows, rivers and vortices, of Epicurean physics. Here the local rolls its weak viscosity without much affecting the global volume. Not far from its proximity, constraints evaporate. […] Space seeded with circumstances.' (Serres 2000, 191)

If Serres's solution to the mimetic problem seems overly idealized, compare it with Girard's: a loose embrace of free-market capitalism.[49] In both cases, the problem of mimesis, capable of being seen everywhere, is elevated to a universal condition, assumed to be present everywhere. For Nietzsche and Deleuze, this suggests one has gone beyond *ressentiment* (Deleuze 2006, 104-111), at core a condition barely distinguishable from mimetic envy as we find it in Malory and Girard, and into a state of Bad Conscience, where the most life-denying of reactive forces are internalized (Deleuze 2006, 111-138). Serres's 'Garden' of the local is in form indistinguishable from Nietzsche's 'Ascetic ideal,' the hermit who rejects the world and this life, even though by proposing it Serres clearly means for one to hold onto the experience of life within reach and the present moment. If one assumes that mimetic logic is a complete system then one cannot escape it, and so Serres's 'Garden' is a trap – it succeeds to the exact extent it cuts one off from the life one tries to hold onto.

At the apex of the *clinamen* is a neurotic 'shut-in,' which one must discard as a viable solution in any sense, but which may have parallels in Tristram's and Lancelot's madness – an utter rejection of the human relational world. Between the 'shut-in' and the splendid isolation of the 'Garden' there is too much that is good shut out, as Tristram and Lancelot demonstrate when they give up their respective stays at the Joyous Garde (including, 682.22-683.22, 839.1-840.21) and Ile (830.20-831.33). Further, there is much that is bad in the world that could, should, be righted by them because they are good knights (consider Bors to Lancelot on the damage their people and land sustains while they are holed up in Benwick, 1211.19-22). Thus, with a model equally axiological and emotional, Malory demonstrates the insufficiency of rejecting this life and the world.

In the fictional civilization's foundations, manifold stories of culture and legend, then ultimate internecine destruction, there is no attempt at even a quasi-Socratic definition of worship, the good, or the noble.[50] Good knights, and often ladies too, almost invariably know each other by sight, and

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to the phenomenon: turbulence appears stochastically in laminar flow. Why? I don't know why. How? By chance, with respect to space and time. And, once again, what is the *clinamen*? It is the minimum angle of formation of a vortex, appearing by chance in a laminar flow. (2000, 6)

49 I find it hard to believe Girard is entirely serious about this. However, in fairly recent recorded conversations (Girard, Rocha, and Antonello 2007, 242-243), Girard suggests that in the western free market there is an acceptable compromise. His essential points are that we should be grateful literal lynchings are a thing of the past in the West, and that while the scapegoat mechanism continues it is through a 'moral' capitalism.

50 See 'Willing the End' in chapter five, particularly the discussion of Nietzsche versus Socrates's *Gorgias*.

Mann (1986) draws a different conclusion: that a value in the text, like 'worship,' can be reduced to a substance, to a knight's 'essence,' with some kind of identity relationship established between the two. I think this, like the collapsing of 'submission' and 'acceptance,' and the notion of a concrete 'self' in Malory

always know each other by their exemplary conduct, their 'condision' or character, regardless of whatever disguise they may be using at the time. I am not referring to *hoi polloi* knights and ladies, but to those that are good, in so far as the narrative tells us so and in the indicative. In keeping with my initial hypothesis that we should take the text at face value, the work's frequent and consistent use of 'good,' 'noble,' 'worshipful,' and variants of the same, can and often ought to be taken predicatively, not attributively. The good know they are good, who is good, and what is good because they are the good and they declare it to be so. The masses, the weak, the envious, by contrast are predisposed to hate those who are good, and seek to destroy them because the weak are not extraordinary, the strong, or the chivalric.

Malory's and Nietzsche's value systems resonate with each other, and this is also true of the behaviour of those within their respective value systems. Further, the two share a common connective tissue between cultural foundations and extreme violence on one hand (which, of course, is central to the ideas of both Girard and Serres), and the character of a true hero, a worshipful knight, on the other (familiar to us from the literature of epic and emotional tragedy found in almost every age and language). The hero is the one who has memory and uses it to shape the future, not the one who is full of petty resentments and who relives hurts of the past. By chapter six we are ready to discuss this not merely as a static opposition in Malory, but to read in Gawain a knight who translates himself across the threshold from weak, reactive, and revengeful into one who, through painful memory, actively wills the future, who *can* will Fate, chance, and love.[51]

> As we might imagine, the means employed to find a solution or answer to this ancient problem [giving a human a memory] have been far from tender; there is, perhaps, nothing more frightening and more sinister in the whole prehistory of man than his *technique for remembering things*. 'Something is branded in, so that it stays in the memory: only that which *hurts* incessantly is remembered' – this is a central proposition of the oldest (and unfortunately also the most enduring) psychology on earth. One may even be tempted to say that something of this horror – by means of which promises were once made all over the earth, and guarantees and undertakings given – something of this *survives* still wherever solemnity, seriousness, secrecy, and

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(see above), is also hasty, and we can profitably compare Malory's 'condision' with the Greeks' *ēthos* as well as our contemporary notion of a person's 'character.'

> Their 'worship' becomes identified with their essence – with the continuity and integrity of their being, and with the continuity between their essential being and the exterior world. (1986, 75)

The distinction, subtle perhaps, speaks to the primacy in Malory of the will, *acted* on in *the moment* for and by *the good* (or, reacted against by the bad), rather than anything quite as static as 'being,' or intrinsic as 'essence.' Which is not to say the good knights are not (fairly) consistently good, but that even 'the good' itself is not entirely static in Malory. That said, in Mann's (1996) later essay there is an undeniable weight to her discussion of identity 'wholeness' with respect to the later 'Sankgreal' book. Although this is something pursued rather than a state of being attainable for any duration: 'it mediates a view of life as a constantly frustrated search for wholeness which is no sooner found than lost again.' (1996, 220)

51 A bewildering amount has been written on 'love' in Malory. But, I would like to draw attention to Kevin T. Grimm's (2001) article. Grimm focusses primarily on Palomides and his extreme emotional states, but in the process reveals the narrative's inherent esteem for love and personal integrity, or 'openness of character' (72), and how these triumph over bitter envy and anger in Palomides's case.

sombre colours are found in the life of men and nations: the past, the longest, deepest, harshest past, breathes on us and wells up in us, whenever we become 'serious.' Things never proceeded without blood, torture, and victims, when man thought it necessary to forge a memory for himself. [...] [T]he most powerful aid to memory was pain. (Nietzsche 1996, II 3, 42-3)

Here then is the powerful bridge of emotional pain in Malory between the historic and the mythic, a heroic 'condision' and mimetic logic, repeated in the narrative's sequenced serial structure, consistent with the values of the characters, and expressed by them in their actions – not to renounce the world, give in to envy, or submit to Fate, but to take that Fate *as* chance and something they will into the future. Girard's mistake, repeated by Serres, is to attempt to escape mimetic thinking with mimetic thinking.[52] In chapter six I demonstrate how Malory's best knights do not 'fix' or 'resolve' sacrificial logic, not even for themselves, but their conduct and will goes utterly beyond it, and in a way that mimetic logic is incapable of explaining.

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52 Risking elaboration *ignotum per ignotius*: reacting to a reaction is no less reactive. Or, negatives do not cancel each other out in this case.

PART ONE: SYSTEMS

Between foundation and collapse we read in Malory a unique world schema where Arthur's reign, realm, ideas of chivalry, and the social and political order of things are grafted upon a world of magic and the unchecked human violence of outright civil war. After addressing these, my primary concern is to detail what it is about the structural play within this schema in Malory, particularly the play of repetitive patterns and internal value systems that may be behind the work's enduring appeal, and the use of comparable techniques as we find them in art, literature, music – in entertainment generally.

I. THE WORLD AND FATE

> For beauty is nothing
> but the beginning edge of the dread we may barely endure,
> object of our awe because it serenely disdains
> to annihilate us. Every Angel is dread.
> (Rilke, 'The First Elegy,' *Duino Elegies*, 4-7)

Framing the Realm in Passion and Omission

The more and the less significant 'beginnings,' including what we might call the narrator's 'recaps,' indicate both episodic division and a stress on the stories' common point of origin. But, this point is not fixed. They create a shifting locale of thematic convenience from which the narrative departs, and frequently this is one of a variety of scenarios where Arthur established his realm amongst confusion, mystery, magic, and the social upheaval of political war. Uncertainty is from the start a baseline for the narrative and, I believe, key to readerly curiosity. 'Frequently' and 'one of a variety' since the work in no way suggests it is obliged to consistently take up any definable locale, least of all that one can assume one tale's ending is contiguous either chronologically or thematically with the next tale's beginning. From the start these beginnings shift. What is of importance to readers and the narrative itself is this resituating of time, place, and theme of the tale in the recap as a summary beginning or ending or both. The reader is encouraged to take the resituating literally, and not as lightly as its resemblance to our familiar 'Once upon a time…' might suggest.

From the opening sentence we read:

> Hit befell in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englond and so
> regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornewail that helde warre ageynst hym long
> tyme, and the duke was called the duke of Tyntagil. (7.1-4)

The first clause (of the 'it came to pass…' variety), modified by a description of Uther's 'dayes,' precedes the introduction of a powerful magnate whose wife Uther is to fall in love with, and with whom he is currently at war. The opening themes of war and political loyalty are then in haste underscored with those of adulterous infatuation and, arguably, 'love' of some variety. Numerous pages of background in the French are omitted,[1] while the circumstances of Uther's love for Igrayne are reframed in Malory as undercutting and destroying any hope for peace between the king and his lord. Without doubt this grouping of themes (love, war, and divided loyalty) is closely connected with the narrative's most pressing concerns for the final movements of the text, but these are also

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1   See Vinaver's commentary on the elided passages (n7.1-7), which he considers 'vital for the understanding of subsequent events.'

familiar recurring themes throughout *Le Morte Darthur*.[2] However, it is not this specific scenario that Malory's subsequent recaps recall.

Of course no author is obliged to retell what exists in other works. Still, I find these omissions significant for two reasons in particular. First, his work otherwise has characteristics of the fifteenth-century English 'grete boke,' which by nature attempts to be encyclopaedic in scope.[3] Clearly the work is heavily abridged from the models in many places, but even when brutally terse with respect to those tales, our author is not haphazard in the framing and sequencing of his episodes and books. Thus, what must have been known and yet not included is significant. Second, these beginnings are the work's first opportunities for self-declaration, to suggest what it is all about, to situate itself and the tales that follow. In terms of the recaps that close and open the following tales, the beginning repeatedly recalled also resituates what has gone before. The story is re-contextualized. Since for the reader it becomes clear that even time is not entirely reliable as an ordering principle, the work's own summaries in beginning and ending statements have to be taken that much more seriously and prescriptively.

'Balin' opens by reminding us that Arthur is Uther's son, and that he had 'grete warre' in his time to consolidate his realm (61.1-5). Our beginning reference point is then shifted from Uther to Arthur, father to son, prefiguring a great number of parallels throughout – some from the immediate future (Pellinor's children, Mordred's conception), others extending right to the end of the work (Arthur and Mordred again, but also the complicated paternal and paternal-like relationships between Lancelot and Galahad, Lancelot and Gareth). The tale continues with the subject of Arthur's conflict with King Royns of North Wales. 'The Wedding of King Arthur' opens in much the same way (97.1-11), except to emphasize that Arthur overcame his opponents, followed Merlin's advice 'the moste party dayes of hys lyff,' and that his barons were pressuring him to take a wife. Later recaps typically stress the formation of the Round Table or the Pentecostal Oath, which occur in 'The Wedding,' and may or may not remind us of war as the narrative's foundation, but they do refer to Arthur's rather than Uther's struggles – the latter becoming something of a distinct prelude and *mise en abyme* for all that follows.[4] Regardless, the effect of such reiteration is to recall the realm's

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2   For example, if pressed, and if 'combat and tournaments' were substituted for 'war,' then this would be a serviceable list of the dominant themes in Malory's 'Tristram' book. Given the historical context, one can imagine why war, civil war especially, would be treated as a special subject, with pride of place reserved for its consideration at the beginning and ending of the work, thus framing it.

3   Radulescu finds the fifteenth-century English gentry visibly preoccupied with political discourse, particularly regarding governance, and '[w]ithin this context Malory's *Morte Darthur* metaphorically becomes a 'grete boke,' not only a manual of chivalry, as Cherewatuk suggests, but a composite work addressing political issues alongside chivalric topics.' (2003, 71)

     Wimsatt sees two forms of encyclopaedic purpose coalescing in Malory's work: the 'Mirror for Princes' courtesy book type, and a comprehensive Arthurian 'history.' 'Malory effects a marriage of encyclopedic forms: a narrative summa of the French cycles joins with a thematically inclusive mirror for knights.' (1994, 210)

4   Malory's rapid establishment of Arthur's kingdom's origins can be seen as a replay of the themes previously described under Uther's reign, and stands in useful contrast with the Vulgate *Estoire*'s ornate many-tiered framing devices and nested *mise en abyme*. On the latter, see Pickens (1994).

foundation within and as a response to the period of intense political and social instability that followed Uther's death. The foundation was an overcoming of that anarchy. It simultaneously evokes the past and contrasts it with the current state of affairs, and always in doing so alludes to the well-known future as an inevitable end of the same realm:

> Thenne stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty
>
> of men maade hym stronge, and many wende to have ben kyng. (12.11-13)

In each of these 'beginnings' then is: an origin for the ensuing narrative, a recap, an implicit prophecy and prefiguring, an episodic division, and a subtle atmospheric charge combining the wistful, dark, mystery of romance with political hope and fear in a chronicle-like form.[5] The beginnings imply the end and situate the episodic unit within the romance's frame. The endings close episodes, but often explicitly encourage us to read on, further, and perhaps elsewhere also. The prominent subject matters of these recaps are periods of heightened emotions – the human passions of war and lust in these earliest examples.

It is useful to compare this approach with some of Carolyn Dewald's generalizations about Herodotus. Dewald singles out parataxis (in the true grammatical sense as well as the additive thematic and episodic method familiar to readers of Malory), a tight focus and shape for individual narrative accounts (including opening and closing markers of a 'subject recap' variety), and associative thinking (in preference to subordinating logic) as key to enabling Herodotus's 'ring composition' (an *a-b-c-b-a* model for embedding sub-plots and themes) in his work (Herodotus 1998, xix-xxiii). While I believe Malory's narrative structure is a serialized one (see chapter three), and not of the ring composition variety at all, the three common factors serve a startlingly similar purpose in both works where telling a (hi)story is the nominal reason for writing, while active audience engagement with the unsaid, and a hermeneutic locus outside of the roughly chronological progression, undercut that same overt rationale.

Specifically, both works are on the syntactic and larger narrative levels resistant to implicit causal connections by way of their: paratactic construction; associating themes by juxtaposition and patterns; and use of narrow, clearly delineated, episodic units. Where they differ is that Malory's units are sequentially arranged rather than embedded in one another, which leads to his use of repetition of earlier episodic structures to emphasize and weight themes, while Herodotus hierarchizes his tales and digressions within his ring structures. Dewald argues Herodotus chose his style for the easy oral delivery of his early material, and possibly all of it (Herodotus 1998, xxii). I have no historical evidence to support a claim that the practise of oral delivery informed Malory's narrative style, but it is easy enough to imagine this being the case at, for instance, Newgate Prison.[6]

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5 'Chronicle-like' since these 'top and tail' recaps serve as book ends to narrative entries when they occur. We are prepared for the next instalment and then have its extent marked out for us. This is an approach foreign to the Old French interlace and Middle English poetic models of both the *aMA* and *sMA*.

6 On this prison environment, including a scenario where Malory might have 'hired' his literary sources, see Sutton (2000).

Short episodes, bound additively and associatively rather than in subordinating or conditional narrative logic are easy for an audience to digest, and to engage with both what is *and* is not said.

Consider how Merlin is introduced into book one's first tale without any contextualization by the narrator or characters. Ulfius merely states his belief that Merlin will be able to help King Uther, who is 'seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne' (8.11-12). He tells the king that he shall seek Merlin 'and he shalle do yow remedy, that youre herte shal be pleasyd' (8.13-14). Immediately Ulfius happens upon Merlin in disguise who, in parts equally playful and evasive, addresses himself to the matter more than simply *in medias res*, but with a certain *sprezzatura*.

It is thoroughly reasonable to assume a reader of Arthurian literature will have prior knowledge of Merlin, but for all of that we might well think it highly unusual for any text, let alone a romance, to let slip the opportunity for *any* digression on Merlin's origins, character, abilities, and so on. Not going back further and further in increasing detail over origins, however, is as characteristic of Malory as it is contrary to the French Cycles' practice. Right through to the final pages of the 'Morte,' for instance where Arthur's return is mentioned as spoken of by some, but as by no means a certainty, Malory is content to leave many such matters open.[7] Further, the opening portion of the Winchester MS has not survived, so we have no trace of how Merlin's name was represented from the very beginning, but as noted in Stephen H. A. Shepherd's edition (Malory 2004, 17fn4), which preserves the manuscript's rubrics, Merlin's name is abbreviated far more than any other name in the MS, often simply as a red 'M.' Not only does *Le Morte Darthur* decline to detail Merlin's background, but the surviving MS typographically adds to the character's evasiveness. The narrative reflects *and* re-presents the character as elusive.[8]

This is a 'young world' literary atmosphere where things are seen as if for the first time. We, the readers, know of Merlin, we may even know the Vulgate *Merlin*'s tales of his origins, but in Malory our attention is drawn to his sudden appearance as if he were an unknown narrative quantity. Consequently, what *is and is not said* in Malory is measured in the context of what we individually have heard or read, including when the text appeals to the 'French book' for legitimation and

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Malory's preference for common speech as a matter of style is a recurrent theme in Field (1971). He pays particular attention to the use of parataxis, repetition, ellipsis, tense sequence, and anacoluthon, which together lend themselves towards easy oral delivery (46).

7   On Arthur's death and return (1242.22-9), and in a manner not unlike Herodotus, the narrator reports what he has heard others say but adds that he withholds *both* belief and disbelief. He will not speak to the truth value of the stories circulating on the matter. The text is explicitly open on the subject and defers to the audience.

8   See Helen Cooper's chapter (2000), particularly the section on names, rubrication, and the abbreviation of 'Merlin' (273-7). Indeed, indebtedness to the entire text Cooper's chapter belongs to, *The Malory Debate* (Wheeler, Kindrick, and Salda 2000), is acknowledged by Shepherd at the beginning of his edition's preface (Malory 2004, xi-xii). It is clear he had those very issues in mind when producing his text. Cooper concludes her chapter in a way that returns to my point in the body copy above:

    There are, then, three heroes who emerge from a study of [the Winchester MS]. […] And the third is a postmodern Malory, who will write a breathless combat almost as much through breaking the conventions of punctuation as by the words themselves, and who perhaps writes twice over into his readers' imaginations the half-recognition of the disguised Merlin, once through Arthur's own bewilderment, and a second time in the form of his words on the page. (277)

credibility. As such this is not unlike what we find in classical Greek epic and tragic literature writing within and in response to mythology and legend.[9] And perhaps this is due in part to the liminal period of composition – wavering somewhere between medieval and modern. At any rate, it is consistent with a literature concerned with the dawn of a new era, which is true both of the narrative time of the fictional Arthur and Malory's time of writing. In mid-late fifteenth-century England there is not only a great deal of social, intellectual, political, and literary change, as well as linguistic change (for instance, with the Great Vowel Shift), there is also a deep sense in which the nature of human agency is increasingly called into question as Europe moves further into the Renaissance. Revolutions of every variety were on the horizon. This is an issue partly explored late in Malory's text itself as defined social relationships are tested, and at key moments individuals are too.

From the early beginnings and even the prelude we are, with little rhetorical padding or warning, thrown into a very human narrative world in emotional and political turmoil – love, war, and allegiance, faith and loss, are central and pressing concerns. The tale, its structure, and its grammar each increase the degree the reader engages with the work, which from the first moment is a sequence of emotionally charged scenarios.

Fate and Narrative Logic

Book one, 'Arthur,' is, like its French counterparts,[10] a book of explicit firsts in the world, albeit Merlin's role in these firsts is far less obtrusive in Malory's text. These firsts set up not just the realm, but the framework for readers to engage with the world and to follow its narrative. After the light-handed, mysterious, introduction of Merlin, one of the first extended studies in Malory of this kind is the 'Balin' tale.[11] Take, for instance his responses to those who tell him his future in attempts to dissuade, warn, or threaten him:

> [*In reply to the damsel's dire prophecy for Balin if he keeps the sword:*]
>
> 'I shall take the aventure,' seyde Balyn, 'that God woll ordayne for me. But the swerde
>
> ye shall nat have at thys tyme, by the feythe of my body!' (64.12-14)

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9   Euripides's Helen and Herakles, for instance, are reimagined in *very* different ways in his surviving works. Malory's Merlin, presented without introduction, is in a reader-centric sense allowed all traditions, different ones at various times, and none that are not related in the work.

See also Merrill (1987), and note p11 fn29 above.

10   Namely: the prose *Merlin*, *VM Suite*, and *PVM Suite*.

11   I use 'Balin' here because it is the first distinct major episode after the 'Uther' prelude to excite a body of critical commentary and speculation *for* the tale's extensive lack of commentary or judgement by a narrator's voice. (See 'Malory Criticism' in the introduction, p18 fn50, as well as fn14 below.) This lack provides us with a clear position on values raised in this significant position between the sequence of small post-coronation episodes and 'The Wedding' tale. 'The Wedding' in turn rounds off the foundational stage for Arthur's reign with his marriage, the Round Table and its Pentecostal Oath, along with a number of prophecies.

> [*To Merlin, who claims Balin's failure to stop a damsel killing herself, regardless of whether he was capable of doing so or not, is the reason he is fated to strike the Dolorous Stroke, and so form the Waste Land, maim King Pellam, and so on:*]
>
> 'Nay,' seyde Balyn, 'nat so; for and I wyste thou seyde soth, I wolde do so perleous a dede that I wolde sle myself to make the a lyer.' (73.1-3)

> [*After he leaves the scene of Garnysshe's multiple murder and suicide:*]
>
> And within thre dayes he cam by a crosse; and theron were letters of gold wryten that said: 'it is not for no knyght alone to ryde toward this castel.' Thenne sawe he an old hore gentylman comyng toward hym that sayd,
>
>   'Balyn le Saveage, thow passyst thy bandes to come this waye, therfor torne ageyne and it will availle the,' and he vanysshed awey anone.
>
>   And soo he herd an horne blowe as it had ben the dethe of a best. 'That blast,' said Balyn, 'is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede.' (88.3-12)

I discuss these quotations in terms of the values they suggest, including ideas of wrong as 'transgression' (Lat. *pecco*), *breach*, and wrong as 'missing the mark' (Gk. ἁμαρτάνω, *hamartanō*), *failure*, in the next chapter. For now note that the damsel, Merlin, and a collection of mysterious forces at work in the world (the cross, the old man who vanishes, and the sounding of a horn) all reveal what will happen as false conditional statements. *If* Balin is indeed truly the best knight of the age, without villainy or treachery, as it is magically established he is when he draws the damsel's sword, *then* his *very character demands* he take the adventure,[12] could not possibly have averted Columbe's suicide, and would show no fear in the face of mysterious omens or marvels. The narrative's own logic dictates that things could not play out in any other way in this world for Balin under the conditions given.[13] He *fails*. That is his Fate, his ill-Fate. It happens this way because that's the way the story tells it. This failure incurs Fate through narrative logic, and these three are bound in each successive episode of his tale. Compare Balin's situation with those of well-Fated characters like Lancelot, Tristram, and Lamerok, who until and perhaps *through* their ends are privileged in the narrative and the outcomes of their actions. They rarely, if ever, fail – while they are known to transgress (through adultery, for instance).[14]

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12   On character, natures, and Balin with respect to Mann (1986), see p18 fn50.

13   That is, if Balin is villainous or lacking in chivalry then he might have let Columbe kill herself, or lacked the skill to stop her. He is neither, and so her suicide could not have been averted by him, or by any other knight of his age since he is the superlative knight at the time. This is what the text literally tells us of Balin and the scenarios he faces.

14   See Whetter's (2005) excellent article on this tale. I agree it is of vital importance that we see Balin as a *good* knight. Similarly, I believe with Whetter that we as readers miss the point entirely if we measure the tale solely by romance standards – the epic elements and, to an even greater degree, the strong tragic characteristics of this tale, if ignored, render the tale all but unintelligible. I feel Whetter allows himself to invest overly in finding or devising a benchmark genre other than romance by which we can read and measure the work as a whole, but it does seem certain 'Balin' functions as a 'microcosm' of that entirety as Whetter argues (160 and fn48) after Mann (1986, 75) and Thomas C. Rumble (1966, 82-5). Where Whetter discerns foreshadowing in 'Balin,' I am inclined to see these occurrences as foundations also.

Putting to one side Balin's character, actions, the judgements of others, and the events that follow, what remains in the quotations above are his feelings, value judgements, and expressions of will. Balin's reaction to these happenings, to the 'way of things,' is to more than merely accept what has happened. With varying degrees of regret he promptly *resolves* to go forth and fearlessly do what he feels he must, to answer the call of the hero.[15] His initial motivation, and refrain, is to 'take the aventure [...] that God woll ordayne' for him (64.12-13). In this way his inner character – 'manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person' (63.25) – actively responds to this call, and so his character[16] binds him to the narrative's Fate for him more strongly.[17] Morton W. Bloomfield in 'Motivation and Marvels' (1970), considers this 'call,' this 'vocation' of the hero, to be a hallmark of romance. For Bloomfield the integrity of a work's treatment of this call, as a vertical, irrational, motivation of connections between episodes, is a key distinction in the transition between epic and romance, and their literary relationship.

> In this sense of the mysterious other, life itself is reflected, life in its fundamental
> mystery. Life is both rational and irrational. The typical epic stresses the first, the
> typical romance the second.
>
> Closely related to this sense is the notion of vocation – the call to action which
> comes from the unknown. [...] Man is tested by the unknown, and his quality is
> measured by his reaction to this test. A sense of vocation in diluted form runs through
> the noblest of the romances. (108)

Obviously, this applies very directly to this early episode and chivalric adventure, which sets the scene for readers with respect to how they comprehend, fill in the gaps, and *read* all that follows.

> This sense of the mysterious never completely vanished from the romance, but it
> became debased as time went on and led ultimately to the piling up of episodes and
> contributed heavily to the disorganization and looseness of the later manifestations of

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15 It is tempting to see in the troublesome deliberation 'and yet am I not dede' (88.12) Balin's acceptance of his situation extended to a self-reflexive 'dead man walking' degree. Still, while Balin is increasingly alarmed and aware of what is happening around and through him, it seems more likely he is wondering if the blast is blown for him, and if so, why, since 'I am not dede.' If 'am I' was not a scribal or authorial error for 'I am,' then so much the better. The text as it has survived, error or not, is reminiscent of a Heraclitus fragment (Frag 62, Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.6.), admittedly one that is obscure even by his standards: 'Immortals mortal, mortals immortal; [these] living [the others'] death, [those] dying [the] life [of these]' (Heraclitus and Robinson 1987, 42, 43, 124-5).

Shepherd has 'am I not dede' in his edition without comment (2004, 58.30).

16 Or 'condision' as the narrator and knights in dialogue refer to it. For instance, Dynadan to Berluse on King Mark: 'And bycause I promysed to conduyte hym to my lorde kynge Arthure, nedis muste I take a parte wyth hym; howbehit I love nat his condision, and fayne I wolde be from hym.' (583.13-16).

17 This too is reminiscent of a Heraclitus fragment (Frag 119, John Stobaeus 4.40.23), translatable as both '[a person's] character (ἦθος, *ēthos*) is [his or her] Fate (δαίμων, *daimōn*),' *and* '[one's] Fate is [one's] character.' Here 'Fate' refers to not only 'destiny' but also the 'divine' or 'spirit' associated with a person. A person's 'character' is that which sets that person's course, and that which belongs to the divine in a vertical relationship with that person. The inverse is held to be equally true: one's course, Fate, or end defines one's character, as does one's spirit or divinity (Heraclitus and Robinson 1987, 68, 69, 159-60). In Malory there is a comparably reciprocal relationship, just as weakly-defined, between the major characters, their 'manhode and worship,' their knightly calling, and their Fate.

> the genre. [...] Kafka and Borges in our time are practitioners of the *aventure* type of
> narrative. The irrational side of life must take its revenge on the rational in literature as
> well as life. (108)

On the one hand, Balin is dealt a peculiarly rough hand by the tale. On the other, and in terms of the greater themes and later narrative significance, he has an honourable, if quickly forgotten, place in the work as a willing and founding narrative sacrifice for the 'Sankgreal' and 'Morte.' His Fate, and therefore, his character, is 'called' and what results is the condition *here* in the foundations of the reign for much that resonates in the later books as the same reign collapses.[18]

Bloomfield identifies the role of vocation and the 'sense of the mysterious' in romance as *vertical* motivation to distinguish it from *horizontal* motivation where condition leads to result in a comparatively uncomplicated fashion, and where this result in turn becomes a cause for the next episode in the narrative. He finds a relative sense of 'naturalism' or 'realism' present in epic that is to a greater or lesser extent absent in romance. Or, that romance distinguishes itself from epic by a careful balancing of the need for logical narrative connections with an increasingly prominent new need for a sense of mystery – the narrative structural equivalents of parataxis and *non sequitur* enter the realm of storytelling logic, and with it a less orderly cosmological system.

Take even an extreme example from medieval epic: Siegfried's amazing and magical attributes in the *Nibelungenlied* derive from bathing in the blood of the dragon he has slain (Hatto 1969, chapter 3, 28). This does not stretch imaginative reasoning in the way Merlin's prophecy to Balin does. The conditions and consequences follow a kind of logic, but they are in no way understood as reflecting reality, as what would occur in the *real* or *natural world*. Instead, in Bloomfield's argument a structural distinction is made where for epic the audience can typically follow the tale's logic from point to point, episode to episode. The story's and characters' horizontal motivations are readily comprehensible from cause to effect. That is, they are rationally motivated.

Compare connective logic of that variety with the long literary chronology of the 'Miraculous Sword or Lance,' 'Dolorous Stroke,' 'Wasted Land,' and 'Miraculous Healing' themes as traced by Vinaver in 'The Waste Land' chapter of *The Rise of Romance* (Vinaver 1971, 53-67, esp. 57). Initially without any relationship at all in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte del Graal*, their associations are increasingly developed through the *Perceval* continuations to become a significant nexus in the Post-Vulgate that is completed in Malory as self-contained in one work. At no stage in the progression, from distinct, unrelated themes to clearly linked narrative logic and associations, is there anything *naturally* logical about any of it. If anything, the final binding in Malory's work of the four themes proposes more mystery – the Post Vulgate's mysterious connection between the terms are linked by blame or transgression to Balin who will be punished, but this is lost. In Malory the themes are developed with clearer episodic progression[19] but even weaker episodic[20] and

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18   The connections are many, but surely near the top of the list we must have: the healing of the Maimed King, the significance of the Grail, Balin's sword becoming Galahad's, when he draws it from a new stone, and then Lancelot's, who later kills Gareth and mortally wounds Gawain with it.

19   Compare Malory's cause for the Waste Land, Balin's failure (to save the lady from suicide), with the cause in the French, the anger of God at Balin for his transgressions (against the laws of hospitality, the use of

thematic[21] motivation, resulting in vertical associations of great narrative weight, but no clearly articulable rationale beyond 'the story says so,' or *possibly* (bearing in mind all mention of this from the sources is omitted) 'because God wills it.' Bloomfield believes such is the nature of the 'noblest' of romances. Vinaver on this same process of accumulated connections in the Waste Land grouping sees Valéry's conception of genius at work:

> He [*Goethe's Werther*] forgets that art, 'playing second Nature's part,' can supply whatever Nature has omitted. Spenser knew this, and so did Valéry when he asserted that genius was *not* the immediate impulse which brought forth, before anyone else had thought of it, the one and only thing that mattered: genius, as Valéry has it, is the power 'to grasp the value of what has already been found' […]. Invention, according to this view, presupposes two actions, or even two agents: one gathers things together, the other discovers their latent energy and value. (1971, 66-67)

As a matter of genius, and frequently of medieval 'best practice,' accumulation and association do not demand rationalisation in romance. Instead, and certainly in Malory, we read romance's vertical motivation alongside the more rationally motivated epic and historical chronicle modes – indeed, we have Bloomfield's 'piling up of episodes' too, particularly in 'Gareth' and 'Tristram.' Yet, the world each mode evokes coexists somehow, one with another, along with their respective narrative structures. Fate plays out, irrespective of human will but in a sympathetic or even symbiotic relationship with human 'character' (*ēthos*), as an irrational, vertical narrative logic. The connection is important to note since otherwise a distinct sense of purposelessness, of human futility, could easily be read into *Le Morte Darthur*. The good, like Lamerok, Dynadan, Balin, do not die despite their virtues, they die well in good causes through their honour and nobility, their 'character.'

   Malory's work does not reduce each character's ending to anything quite as straightforward as this, and context is always significant. For instance, given Gareth's characteristics, Gareth as a character has an ending that is perfectly fitting for the narrative's purposes. But, it is extremely hard to justify if we read Malory at all psychologically, as if Gareth was in any way representative of a person. He is by character ('condision'), kin, and history the best man for the unfortunate job. It is when we realize not only will he die, but that he must die, that the emotional weight of the tragedy

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the sacred lance, entering a sacred chamber, and the murder of the knight who rides invisible). In the French there is no ill-intent against God and, more significantly, given the quest he was on Balin could not do other than he did and stay true to his character. The episodic progression in Malory may seem unfair, but it makes sense in so far as any vertical motivation between episodes can in romance (i.e., his failure marks him for a tragic end). The *PVM Suite* progression is far less clear.

20 In Malory the episodic motivation from Merlin's prophecy to the events that follow defy explanation. Balin's failure to stop the suicide is simply stated as the *cause* for the Waste Land along with the mutual fratricide, but *how* is unclear, and *why* is beyond all reasoning. In the French the righteous vengeance of God requires no further explanation.

21 Through Merlin we understand Balin's sword is cursed with some fratricidal magic, but how and why Balin, the best knight, is the marked recipient is left unexplained. The damsel who brought the sword to court, moved with regret that he will keep it (64.1-5, .8-11, .15-19, and .20-21), seems no more knowledgeable than we are. In other words, in Malory's version the thematic motivation is *clear* (a magic cursed item for the best knight), even if the purpose, the connective logic, of that motivation is entirely uncertain, i.e.: *weak*.

quickly begins to be realized for the reader, even as shades of horror are awakened for the characters concerned as the consequences of the 'accident,' his death, become apparent.

Malory's work increases its potential for a tragic emotional reading by disregarding any correlation between intent and result (good will does not necessitate a good end), or between acts and effective result since the latter is ultimately guided by Fate as a matter of narrative logic (even doing what one ought is not necessarily sufficient). However, there is a sympathetic, while non-causal, relationship between this Fate and a character's *ēthos*. These two resonate with each other in a vertical relationship, thus emphasizing the mysterious, the 'otherness' of romance, without relying so much as other works on supernatural devices, as well as generating the underlying sense most readers of Malory get that, somehow, *conduct* is significant. That is, for Malory as for Heraclitus: *ēthos*, character, is destiny, divinity; Fate is *ēthos*.[22]

Prophecy

A narrative logic dependent on Fate is successful only so far as there is a corresponding system binding characters, places, and things to future narrative. Until the work's own internal rhythms become established, prophecy serves to bind events back and forth in the tales. It is a kind of voice for the narrative logic that keeps the story from resembling an arbitrary sequences of occurrences. Particularly in the early tales prophecy shapes the work and acclimatizes the reader to expect the inexplicable. This system provides a narrative recognition of Fate as operating in the world through the characters themselves.

Without Fate to connect the tales' many twists and turns we are left with mere chance. Itself an important aspect of much folk and romance literature, *luck*, or any sense that fortune is aligned with the arbitrary, is not what underpins Malory's narrative. On the contrary – if straightforward 'chance,' or something like 'luck' as we understand it now, were responsible for significant happenings in *Le Morte Darthur* then there would be no vertical associations, we would have no sense of foreboding, of meaningful (if incomprehensibly connected) repetition of themes, and even ideas of inherent worth in the realm, including those in the 'Sankgreal' adventures, would largely disappear. Luck does not suggest there are reasons for what happens, things simply happen; some are blessed or doomed, and this is so without justification.

Fate and prophecy share promises with the reader that something happens for a reason, something or someone at some stage has or had a purpose, we are just unsure what that might be and read on with hope for illumination. In effect, if chance were responsible then there would be no connective logic, no story, *unless*, that is, *chance as Fortuna* was developed consistently alongside other concerns in the narrative, which Malory's work certainly does not do.[23]

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22 See above, p29 fn17.

23 For an overview of Fortuna's changing roles from the pre-Christian period through to the medieval see Patch (1967, 8-34). Fortuna came to be representative of the fickleness of the world, or a divine balancing

C. S. Lewis describes Lancelot's humbling adventures from Malory's 'Sankgreal' through to the 'Morte' as not contradicting but as perfectly consistent with literary ideas of prophecy and Fate:

> As he failed on the [Grail] Quest, so (for the same reason) he is failing now [in book eight]. In him, its highest specimen, the whole Round Table is failing; on it and him, as the result of his illicit love, the prophecies begin to be fulfilled. They are, no doubt, worked out through a tangle of human motives, the spite of Agravain and Mordred, the assumption of the blood-feud by Gawain. Of course. The fulfilment of the prophecies about Oedipus came about through seemingly free agents obeying human motives. That is how prophecies are fulfilled in good stories; no one ever suggested that the motivation somehow abolishes the connexion between the prediction and the event. And when all is nearly over and the doom worked out, Lancelot again recalls to us the source of the whole tragedy: 'For in the quest of the Sangreal I had forsaken the vanities of the world had not your love been' (1253.14-15). (1963, 20) [24]

Consistent with this are the 'full disclosure' prophecies of Malory's Merlin, where in the French Merlin uses riddles and provides material piecemeal.

> 'Truly ye ought sore to repente hit,' seyde Merlion, 'for that lady was youre owne doughtir, begotyn of the lady of the Rule [...]. And because ye wolde nat abyde and helpe hir, ye shall se youre beste frende fayle you whan ye be in the grettist distresse that ever ye were othir shall be. And that penaunce God hath ordayned you for that dede, that he that ye sholde truste moste on of ony man on lyve, he shall levve you there ye shall be slayne.'
>
> 'Me forthynkith hit,' seyde kynge Pellynor, 'that thus shall me betyde, but God may well fordo desteny.' (119.29-120.10)

While Malory's Merlin stops short of revealing that Pellinor's own son, Torre, is the man in question,[25] the explanation given is a very long way from the circuitous path in the French as traced by Vinaver (n119.29-120.8). In Vinaver's view, with respect to the source's scattered accounts of Merlin's riddles to Pellinor, Malory 'had little use for such mysterious utterances. He was anxious to relieve his own as well as his reader's mind by giving a clear explanation of the events he had related.' (1334). While this certainly seems true, here and elsewhere (for example, in Merlin's frank revelations to Arthur on Guinevere (97.29-32) and on Mordred (44.16-19, 55.21-22)), the 'mystery' of the prophecies in Malory lies not in an obfuscation of the message, nor in a drawn out process of

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principle, or both, and in more developed forms God and Fortuna 'do not work in opposition, or without some measure of concord.' (27) Aside from her wheel's brief appearance in Arthur's dream (1233.11-21), promptly overshadowed by Gawain's dream visitation, the tale does not appeal to Fortuna, or explain events in terms of either of her standard roles.

24 Note that at the beginning of book seven Lancelot is equally and painfully aware of this: 'And if that I had nat had my prevy thoughtis to returne to youre love agayne as I do, I had sene as grete mysteryes as ever saw my sonne sir Galahad, Percivale, othir sir Bors.' (1046.8-11)

25 Revealing Torre's parentage (101.4-6) is itself another example of Merlin's predisposition in Malory towards full, clear, and immediate disclosure, whether the information is palatable or not. See Vinaver's commentary on the longer, convoluted, process in the French: n100.34-101.32.

revelation of detail, but in *how* the story makes such prophecies come to pass despite the character's prescience, despite intent to contradict the prophecy, and despite acts made freely to that end. Hence Pellinor's desperate response.

> But Pellinor's reply to this – *God may well fordo desteny* – is curiously unlike the view
> expressed in the French that what has once been decreed by fate can never be
> 'foredone.' (1334)

As discussed in the next chapter, this denial draws attention to Pellinor's character, particularly his repeated failure to properly engage with his world, and is not something I believe a reader of Malory ought to take as a serious narrative possibility. We have been conditioned against such a delusion by Balin's recent example. In each of these examples, compared with their models, the episodes and themes are less convoluted and more *clearly* motivated, but as this becomes a more purely vertical relationship they at the same time become more *weakly* motivated. The sense of mystery, then, is more present – it is revealed in its elusiveness.

In 'Balin' shortly before the final battle between the two brothers, Balin like Lancelot in the passage from Lewis above, and unlike Pellinor as just discussed, reflects on how he came to his present situation by summarizing who he in fact is, what he represents, for the readers and story:

> 'Me repenteth,' said Balyn, 'that ever I cam within this countrey; but I may not torne
> now ageyne for shame, and what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe, I wille
> take the adventure that shalle come to me.' (89.1-4)

Balin knows the direct reason for his predicament is entering the country and refusing to do something shameful, while in Lewis's example Lancelot understands the same as originating from his adultery and refusal to relinquish his love. The acknowledgement of ultimate responsibility, as Lewis points out, in no way diminishes either the role of prophecy and Fate on one hand, or the free will of human agency on the other, but binds them in the characters' own best characteristics. In these cases, the significant characteristic for one is that he will do no villainy or shameful thing, and for the other that he is the best knight-lover of his age. The tragedies in Malory most often operate in just this way. They emphasize the tragic role of virtues, not vices or faults, even when those virtues considered on their own are ambiguous. Malory does not defend Balin from stubbornness, nor excuse Lancelot for his inability to leave his king's wife alone. But, the work does not linger on potential critiques either. In both cases, implicitly in their deeds and conduct, explicitly through other characters' speech, the narrative stresses the positive readings of each: Balin as fearless and unwavering in his chivalric virtues, determined to see his God-given *aventure* through, regardless of whether he live or die in it; and, Lancelot as the greatest lover and the most courteous of knights.

Balin is aware of the omens, so in the quotation above it is unlikely *aventure* is meant in the senses of 'chance,' 'luck,' and 'arbitrariness' (see p74). Knowing the future almost to a certainty he still risks it ('takes the adventure'). Given the close proximity of *aventure* and *adventure* in Balin's statement above (the latter instance taken in the sense of 'risking' or 'self-imperilling,' as well as the modern English 'adventuring' or 'questing'), it seems appropriate to read *aventure* in the sense of the 'destiny' or 'Fate' that may 'fall' on him as life or death. In addition he takes the adventures, the perils, that come to him. Balin is grammatically passive with respect to both *aventure* (that shall

fall) and *adventure* (that shall come). He conceives of his active role with respect to both Fate and adventure as limited to his determination to *take* the adventure that *shall come to him*. Everything else, by this stage in the narrative, he sees as outside of his control. If he were not of this sort, the sort who *acts* even from a reactive place,[26] who does take the adventure, then the narrative would not have his sword for Galahad in the 'Sankgreal,' nor would Lancelot for the 'Morte.' The narrative through prophecy and Fate creates its own vertically motivated logic binding characters, events, things, time and place.

Consider by way of contrast the Christian providential model at work in the *PVM Suite*'s Balin sequence, including the following from §22:

> Then a young girl came forward and said to the knight, who was already approaching
> the bank, 'Sir knight, it is unfortunate that you have changed your shield; if you had it
> on your shoulder, you would not die today, but your friend would recognize you and
> you him. God sends you this misfortune as vengeance for the deed you did at King
> Pellehan's castle, and the vengeance is not so great as the deed called for. Merlin sends
> you this message by me.' When he heard these words, he was badly frightened,
> because he knew part of what she said to him. It frightened him still more […]. (Lacy
> 1993, IV:218)

Malory's text does not have this connection. Malory's work has a fearless Balin who is open to Fate and determined; the *PVM Suite*'s Balin in the above passage is terrified as he is told he is being punished by God Himself for a specific crime, for a transgression against Him. Readers familiar with the French, or who look for providence as a divine balancing principle in literature, can make the connection in Malory – but the text works without it, and the author clearly omitted it here, and elsewhere as a general practice.[27] The French Cycles carefully trace interwoven thread after thread of such connections and are preoccupied with the distribution of divine justice. The spirit of *Le Morte Darthur*'s variety of Fate is of a quite different order.

Take, for instance, Apollo's commands to a defiant personified Death in *Alcestis'*s opening scene:

> Even you, I swear, will have to yield, for all your savage spirit: such a one will come to
> the house of Pheres, when Eurystheus sends him to bring the team of horses from the
> wintry climes of Thrace, such a hero who, after being entertained in Admetus' halls,
> will forcefully wrest this woman from you. Then, with no gratitude from us, you'll do all
> we ask you now – and still have earned our hate. (Euripides 1993, lines 64-71)

Fate in Euripides's *Alcestis* is so exaggerated that not only mortals but Death himself will, *one way or another*, fulfil Apollo's prophecies. The only choice allowed Death is to show the proper deference Apollo expects, to do what he ought with some grace, or be forced to do so through the

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26 I take up active and reactive qualities of will, after Nietzsche and Deleuze, in chapters five and six below. For now it is enough to note that Balin wills his future, he is not passively accepting his Fate, and is certainly not submitting to it. See also the discussion of Mann (1986) on p18 fn50.

27 See, though, the next section, 'The Unstable Chivalric World,' on God's smiting of the castle in the 'Sir Galahad' tale of the 'Sankgreal.'

narrative's own logic – in this case to be mugged of his prize, Alcestis, by a drunken mortal, Herakles. The outcome is fated. The story is concerned not with this certainty but with the *conduct* of characters through to the already ascertained, inevitable, end. Fate, in *Alcestis*, is a primary narrative motivator. It accumulates emotional weight with each subsequent demonstration of the characters' conduct; the work plays with themes of grace given, received, and owed in the receiving, not by connective or conditional logic of any kind, but by repetition of variations on the host/guest and gift themes. The prophecy, then, states what will happen, the themes resonate by association rather than subordination or causal relationships, and the characters play out Fate through their own virtuous characteristics. For the example work in question these would include: hospitality beyond bounds (Admetos), generosity beyond bounds (Alcestis), strength and courage beyond bounds (Herakles). Associative resonances compel us to make leaps from one point to another, while the reasoning of causal logic demonstrates links we are obliged to accept. Hence, and in yet another way, Malory's use of Fate for motivation encourages active audience participation. We want to make connections; we are not told what they should be.

And yet while separate from them, Fate is not incompatible with either the Christian motifs or the agency of characters. The rational, including the political, is a defining human artifice – the glory and foundation of the Round Table and Arthur's court along with all the chivalric codes. The rational's insufficiency to withstand Fate, nature, and the emotional is an insistent shaping refrain in Malory – abstract reason and ideas of justice repeatedly butt heads with Fate, which could also be understood as a revealed form of the *Real* in the tales. As such, Fate is self-legitimating, undeniable, and independent of the need for explanation. It replaces Providence.

In Malory's work we do not have anything so explicit as Apollo's prophecy (or, perhaps, his will) to direct our expectations from the beginning. If there is an answer in the text to its own cosmological question 'why must this happen?' it is to be found not in an entity within the world or, properly speaking, above it in the divine.

> Whatever effects [Malory] and the author of the *Suite* had in mind, clear patterns of events are peculiarly appropriate to the story of the *Suite*, where divine providence is of great importance: they are less so in the *Morte Darthur*, whose narrative exhibits some of the brute incoherence of history. It is a distinctive part of the character of Malory's book that we feel that, although its events may be purposive, that the purpose is hard to discern: the narrator rarely tells us what those purposes are, and may himself not know them. (Field 1998b, 105)

This quotation is directed to 'The Wedding' tale which follows 'Balin,' and Claude Luttrell's (1989) argument that Malory misses the point of the *PVM Suite*'s version as well as the folk motifs derived from a proposed lost folk *ur*-tale. Field contends the omissions and loose treatment of previously significant folk material is consistent with Malory's true narrative purpose, whatever that might be, and regardless of whether he had one consciously. Extending on this response to Luttrell, I believe the tale crafts a significant but evasive agent in Fate, one that is self-effacing to the point of unknowability, and as such is entirely appropriate to Malory's work. Such an agent is as necessary to his work as a similar sense of vital, mystical, unknowable force is to the obscure rites of, say,

Apollo's Delphic Oracle, or any good Arthurian Merlin to a romance that invokes his character. Malory's Merlin, as noted, literally reveals himself fully formed and mysterious in the work. The lack of a back-story for his parentage or formative adventures improves Merlin for the spirit of romance by relying on his existent literary and legendary context in the reader's own imagination. The simple historical mode as a sequence of observed happenings plays an authenticating narrative role for his story, while it also lends an enigmatic air of the non-causal and vertically-motivated. As a result the tale gains a *purely* narrative-centric form of episodic motivation in a Fate that is free of any overarching secondary agenda.

The Unstable Chivalric World

There is one truly significant and dramatic exception to the rule that God does not, explicitly and directly, act upon the world to enforce justice in Malory.[28] The episode is striking, jarring even, for the events themselves, but within the work as a whole it stands alone even more clearly for its unambiguous attribution to God:

> Than they drew all to the castell, and furthewith there fylle a suddeyne tempeste of thundir and lyghtnynge and rayne, as all the erthe wolde a brokyn. So halff the castell turned up-so-downe. So hyt passyde evynsonge or the tempest were seased. (1004.14-18)
>
> So on the morow they dressed them in their harneys toward the castell, to wete what was fallyn of them therein. And whan they cam there, they founde nother man nother woman that he ne was dede by the vegneaunce of Oure Lorde. So with that they harde a voice that seyde,
>
> 'Thys vengeaunce ys for bloode-shedynge of maydyns!' (1005.5-10)

While generally in Malory exacting justice is the chivalric duty of noble kings and knights alone, in this, and some small number of other isolated cases in the 'Sankgreal' inherited from the French, justice is handed out by God. The emotive strength and sense of wonder in Malory's narrative motivation is entirely vertical. The above smiting is unexpected and unanswerable within the rational human world of clear cause and effect. Instead we find chivalric justice, and questions of

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28 There are a small number of others that lose their problematic status on closer scrutiny. Merlin's revelation of 'God's destiny' for Pellinor (120.3-8), previously mentioned, can be read as a Fate for Pellinor consistent with God's will, rather than as an exercise of His will in the name of His justice. This reading is in part supported by Pellinor's distinction between Fate and God's will (120.9-10), where the latter is ultimately superior, despite his hopes going unfulfilled precisely because God, Fate – and of course the tale – are in accord.

Lancelot's miraculous healing of Sir Urry (1151.1-1152.36), and other miracles such as the Grail healing Percival and Ector in response to Percival's prayers (816.27-817.13), occur as blessings from God's Grace *through* his favoured knights – and again, for the tale's purposes also. Such is implicit in Tristram's prayers early in his career (388.33-6), and Gareth who wants only the rewards God will give him (301.7-10). It is made explicit for Lancelot in the 'Sankgreal' (896.27-897.9). Lancelot even confesses how he misused these blessings (897.15-23). Neither human nor divine concepts of justice, or what one deserves, apply to these.

what is 'right' more generally, forever displaced into a consideration of the characters' values and the structure of the narrative itself. In effect this act of divine retribution is the exception that proves the general rule within the story's world with its vertically motivated episodic connections and themes.[29]

Returning to Balin's reactions, this time to how he responds to the judgements and demands of others:

[*To the dwarf who tells Balin of the blood vengeance Lanceor's kin will exact upon him:*]
'As for that,' seyde Balyne, 'them I fere nat gretely; but I am ryght hevy that I sholde displease my lorde, kynge Arthure, for the deth of thys knyght.' (71.16-18)

[*Compare with what Balin offers voluntarily before the threat:*]
'Hit was I,' seyde Balyn, 'that slew this knyght in my defendaunte; for hyder he com to chase me, and othir I muste sle hym other he me. And this damesell slew hirself for his love, which repentith me. And for hir sake I shall owghe all women the bettir wylle and servyse all the dayes of my lyff.' (71.6-10)

[*In response to the Wasted Land's people's outrage and curses Balin says nothing at all. Instead he carries on:*]
But whan Balyne was past tho contreyes he was passynge fayne, and so he rode eyght dayes or he mette with any adventure. [...] And there besyde he mette with a grete horse tyed to a tree, and besyde there sate a fayre knyght on the grounde and made grete mournynge, and he was a lyckly man and a well made. Balyne seyde,
   'God you save! Why be ye so hevy? Telle me, and I woll amende hit, and I may, to my power.' (86.7-13) [*He then manages to interrupt the knight's attempted suicide.*]

[*Briefed that he must do battle with a knight after the cross, disappearing old man, and horn blast omens, Balin replies:*]
'That is an unhappy customme,' said Balyn, 'that a knyght may not passe this wey but yf he juste.'
   'Ye shall not have adoo but with one knyghte,' sayd the lady.

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29 On the relationship between the customs of this castle and those of the castle undone by Balin and Balan's death, see 'Promises' and 'Lamerok Leaves' in chapter six. In addition, Balin and the damsel under his protection visit, and survive, the very same castle that God will smite (81.19-82.14).
   'Well,' seyde Balyne, 'she shall blede as much as she may blede, but I woll nat lose the lyff of hir whyle my lyff lastith.'
      [...] And as hit tellith aftir in the SANKGREALL that sir Percivall his syster holpe that lady with hir blood, whereof she was dede.' (82.6-14)
Balin's damsel is safe, which is itself interesting when compared with Galahad's dim prognosis for such a blood-letting:
   'Sertes,' seyde sir Galahad, 'and ye blede so muche ye mon dye.' (1002.28-9)
On Percival's sister and female worship in this episode, see Robeson (2005).

'Wel,' sayde Balyn, 'syn I shalle, therto I am redy; but traveillynge men are ofte wery and their horses to, but though my hors be wery my hert is not wery. I wold be fayne ther my deth shold be.' (88.21-28)

Balin is told his Fate by many, and even through the world itself (the Grail's room speaks to him, the castle and land are destroyed, the old man who vanishes warns him, and he hears the sound of the horn blown for him), yet he proceeds regardless, 'fayne' for the most part, and with a sense of good purpose 'take[s] the aventure that God woll ordayne' for him. He has feelings about what happens and those who die, but they do not weight him down, scare or stop him. Ultimately it is this accepting spirit that characterizes him and the best of knights who follow throughout Malory – including the 'Sankgreal' – to its tragic end. The Christian motifs survive, but are reframed without the providential guidance.

One of these reframed motifs becomes apparent when, after several parenthetic and circumspectly critical references to the old customs of trial by combat as 'proof' of one's case, King Mark succeeds in 'proving' his innocence contrary to what we know of the murders he committed:

Than the two maydyns cryed alowde, that all the courte myght hyre, and seyde,

'A, swete Jesu that knowyste all hydde thynges! Why sufferyst Thou so false a traytoure to venqueyshe and sle a trewe knyght that faught in a ryghteuous quarell!' (593.9-13)

In the work's world there is a generally held social belief, along with laws that are based on this belief, that trial by combat is a divinely sanctioned form of revealing the truth and dispensing justice in the process. The text repeatedly hints at how the people's belief is misguided, characters when pressed do not sincerely believe in it, and here the text offers its own kind of proof that the narrative world does not work according to these rules.[30]

Mark's victory above may be the most overt critique in the work of such 'trials' and 'proofs,' but the supposed sympathetic connection between right cause and successful knight is problematized throughout.

So when the kynge herde hym sey his wyll he undirstood well there was none other remedy but to answere hym knyghtly. For the custom was suche tho dayes that and ony man were appealed of ony treson othir of murthure he sholde fyght body for body,

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30 The combat occurs in §§88-89 of Ménard (1987, IV:162-4), but there is no direct speech appeal to God by maidens. Vinaver offers no commentary on the court's, Lancelot's, or Arthur's reaction to Mark's false vindication by combat in his edition, or any mention of the trial at all. He instead skips from observations on Malory's unfaithful representation of the French courtly love tradition in Palomides's speech (592.4-14) to a similar concern over the omission of a speech by Dynadan to Palomides (595.6-7). Nor is there any mention of even the trial in Curtis's *Tristan* (1994):

However, things go ill with [King Mark] in that country, and after numerous adventures – including the murder of a knight called Bertelai – he ends up at King Arthur's court where he is forced by Lancelot to reveal his identity and admit his crime. (304)

Curtis's translation is, of course, abridged. Still, then as it seems now, it is as suitably French of Curtis and Vinaver to overlook such an issue in favour of considerations of formalized love, as it is typically English of Malory to foreground battle joint with issues of culpability and justice while dismissing courtly romantic fashions.

other ellys to fynde another knyght for hym. And alle maner of murthers in tho dayes

were called treson. (404.36-405.5).

When King Angwyshe asks Tristram to fight on his behalf, the latter agrees but on the condition that the former swears he is in the right in this matter and promises to honour an undisclosed future request. It is implied that neither King Angwyshe nor Tristram believe the outcome of the battle is in any way linked to who is in the right since the former has no confidence to defend himself, while the latter wishes for some surety that his expected victory will serve a just cause. This is also implicit, if we understand trials as a legal subset of 'quarells,' in the Pentecostal Oath: 'no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell for no love ne for no worldis goodis.' (120.23-4).

Widening the scope then to include this larger set of *quarells*, we find the following slippery problem in an episode of 'Madness and Exile' from 'Tristram,' where Mellyagaunce, Lamerok, and then Lancelot intend to 'prove' whose lady is fairest by combat (486.4-487.35). Lamerok declares his love for the Queen of Orkney, who he believes is 'the fayryst lady that beryth the lyff' (486.16), to a Mellyagaunce who has just confessed his love for Guinevere.

'That ys nat so,' seyde sir Mellyagaunce, 'and that woll I preve with my hondis!' 'Wylle

ye so?' seyde sir Lamorak. 'And in a bettir quarell kepe I nat to fyght.' (486.17-20).

However, in a twist unique to Malory, which Vinaver observes 'if used consistently by knights-errant, would have saved them many a battle and destroyed the whole fabric of courtly chivalry' (n486.34-487.32), Lamerok shifts his stance on the topic when Lancelot challenges him on the same grounds.

'Sir,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'I am lothe to have ado with you in thys quarell, for every man

thynkith hys owne lady fayryste, and thoughe I prayse the lady that I love moste, ye

sholde nat be wrothe. [...] and so every knyght thynkith hys owne lady fayryste.'

(487.9-15).

Blioberis enters the discussion developing the theme still further:

'For I warne you, I have a lady, and methynkith that she ys the fayryst lady of the

worlde. Were thys a grete reson that ye sholde be wrothe with me for such langage?'

(487.22-25).

On the one hand we have here knights employing reason, and abiding by it since they seem aware, unlike their counterparts in the French courtly romance tradition, that there is no connection between the outcome of the battle and the fairness of their beloved. On the other we more cynically have Lamerok already in possession of this knowledge, yet nevertheless willing to 'prove' his lady's superior beauty upon Mellyagaunce – just not upon Lancelot.

Proof of a right or a just cause in *quarells*, along with trial by combat, then, make for an unusual branch of 'the old customs' of the land since Malory feels moved to include *and* problematize them. Yet in doing so the text confirms the separation of the truth or justice of human causes from any sympathetic relationship to supernatural causes. The work treats the well-Fated and ill-Fated differently, as it does the various heroes, villains, and anti-heroes. As there is some sympathetic relationship between their character and their Fate, so there is also a sympathetic relationship between characters of like 'condision.' However, this has nothing to do with specific instances of

justice or what is right. Injustice in the narrative is instead acted upon by knights. It is a strictly *horizontal* motivation for human chivalric effort.

The lack of a binding vertical relationship between truth, justice, or rightness and victory in a *quarell* is one of the earliest demonstrations of a flaw in the narrative world's rational order, specifically, within the chivalric code. Love and other emotions, including anger, are in fact more than sufficient as a motivator for battle as the knights and reader well know. Reason, however, cannot properly account even for the knights own courtly customs – trial by combat over legal disputes, proof by arms over amorous ones. It is no exaggeration to see, with Vinaver, a threat in this severed binding relationship to the chivalric logic of the courtly romance tradition.

Both justice as something knights must make without Fate's or God's assistance, and the sympathetic concord between those of like 'condision,' are themes in the 'Red City' tale of 'Tristram.' The underlying anxiety, no doubt familiar during the Wars of the Roses, of the good ruler ruined by ill-advice, and of this ruler being at fault for taking advice from those of poor character, is manifest in the initial complaint (711.24-713.5).[31] The old King Harmaunce, who loved nothing so much as the deeds of errant knights like those of Arthur's court, including hunting, jousting, and so on, is reminiscent of the famous passage on Tristram (375.12-29). The nature of Harmaunce's error is described in that same passage:

> [T]hereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discever a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman frome a vylayne. For he that jantyll is woll drawe hym to jantyll tacchis and to follow the noble customys of jantylmen. (375.26-29)

Compare with the consequences given in the 'Red City' for the inverse scenario:

> And as ever hit is an olde sawe, 'Gyeff a chorle rule and thereby he woll nat be suffysed,' for whatsomever he be that is rewled by a vylane borne, and the lorde of the soyle be a jantylman born, that same vylayne shall destroy all the jeauntylmen aboute hym. (712.23-27)

In response to the brothers' taunts:

> 'Hit may well be,' seyde sir Palomydes, 'but as yet I wolde nat dye or that I were full crystynde. And yette so aferde am I nat of you bothe but that I shall dye a bettir Crystyn man than ony of you bothe. And doute ye nat,' seyde sir Palomydes, 'ayther ye other I shall be leffte dede in this place.' (718.3-8)

While at first glance it seems Palomides concern is the state he will die in with respect to God, the import of his second sentence is different. He does not fear dying by their hands; if he were to die, unchristened, he would still die a better Christian man than them. In other words, he does not consider them any more Christian than he is, and he knows himself as *the better man*. Through the eyes of the citizens, and possibly in a rare narrator's voice also, we see first Palomides's fine physical figure in the Red City, and then something of the man within:

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31 The importance of good counsel in the period and for Malory is a focal issue in Radulescu (2003).

And though he were nat crystynde, yet he belyved in the beste maner and was full faythefull and trew of hys promyse, and well-condyssyonde[...] (717.11-13)

In the story's own reasoning Palomides's *condision* is proven in part by wishing to answer the call of adventure on Tristram's behalf,[32] in part by his completing the quest successfully, and finally by our sense throughout 'Tristram' that Palomides is one of 'the good guys.' He is one of the *well*-Fated knights. Ultimately this sense is cemented as the case for us in the last of Malory's 'Tristram' tales when, Tristram and Palomides reconciled once again after the latter's moving and heartfelt personal confession to Tristram, the pair go about having Palomides christened (844.19-845.20).[33]

The Red City needed a good and noble knight to rid it of the villainous usurpers. Palomides 'the Sarezyn' is, by *ēthos*, *condision*, capable of this task because he is one of the story's *well*-Fated knights, while his opponents, strong and of great prowess, are still mere villains by *condision*. In turn he is *well*-Fated because of his *ēthos*. There is more than a sympathetic relationship between the two terms. They become in effect symbiotic, two sides of the same coin bound vertically between narrative logic expressed through Fate and worldly character as *ēthos*. Each defers to the other, and yet both are represented in the story itself through its paratactic structures and indicative mood: this is the case, *and* this is the case, *and* so on. The story's connection between 'might' and 'right' is then not bound to the specifics of incidental rightness or wrongness of one party or another, nor the rightness or wrongness of their stated cause or purpose: it is not a sufficient 'grete reson' as Blioberis points out. Instead the inherent good within a character, his or her *ēthos*, is vertically bound to Fate, and horizontally compelled through ideas of chivalry to physically right wrongs, defend the weak, and so on. The proper exercise of a knight's prowess, *ēthos*, and *well*-Fatedness is directed in the text against those who are not of a good *condision*.

The same configuration characterizes the idea of fellowship, many variations of which are explored in the 'Tristram' where those of like character are drawn together. Dynadan, despite his strongly voiced differences of opinion on matters of standard chivalric practice, is a good knight who draws other noble knights into his company. Palomides, unchristened, at heart is 'well-condyssyonde,' and despite his and Tristram's game of *Fort-Da* the work always guides Palomides back into good company. Their *ēthos* binds them to a given Fate, their *ēthos* draws them together in fellowship, their chivalry compels them to preserve justice in the world, while their hearts are often tragically conflicted in a triangle over the same woman.

Both vertical and horizontal types of motivation are at work in the narrative's logic in so far as it is concerned with human justice and knightly fellowship. The courtly tradition of chivalric love is

32 The discovery of this quest in the 'Joyous Garde' tale easily meets Bloomfield's vertically-motivated vocation criteria for romance, possessing as it does a fallen king laid out in 'a ryche vessell heled over with rede sylke' (700.25-6) sailing on the Humber with his suppliant's letter clasped in his dead hand. Further, the romantically named 'Red Cité' is accessed by the same vessel, while the letter addresses itself almost to the very spirit of chivalry and not to any identifiable individual. This call so resonates with the noble Palomides that he all but begs Tristram to be allowed to answer it:

I pray you gyff me this entirpryse, and ye shall se me enchyeve hit worshypfully, other ellys I shall dye in this quarell. (702.5-7)

33 See chapter five, 'Ending "Tristram".'

still present as an idea, or even as an ideal, in the narrative world, but with the vertical motivation of that tradition severed what remains is a constant source of instability for the fellowship, and even for the sanity of the two best knights and lovers. With this in mind, and the severance of a vertically-motivated correlation between just cause and righteous outcome, Malory's good knights, those who are *well*-Fated by *ēthos*, suddenly seem over-sized for their world. Without a strong king to keep them in check there is nothing to keep Gawain from his string of homicides, or Lancelot from saving Guinevere when he decides to. Much of this is suggested by earlier versions of the Arthuriad, but never with so compelling a construction of the world the story unravels within.

The wicked do not necessarily get justice unless a good knight can overpower them. The good, like Balin, or Mark's victims Amant and Bersules lamented by the maidens above, do not necessarily prosper. Much of what we understand by Malory's 'realism' or 'naturalism' comes down to this: that men and women cannot depend on anything for justice other than their own strength and the strength of those bound to them (by allegiance, fellowship, or love), and that the world operates by a Fate that is in no way bound to human conceptions of right or wrong. The tenor is a mix of the romance's heroic vocation, tragedy's heroic acceptance simultaneous with defiance (as opposed to fatalistic resignation or denial), and matter of fact chronicling of what happens. In short: it is a compelling, engaging, and credible *fiction*.

Le Morte Darthur, through a sustained absence of causality other than pure narrative logic, arouses the emotions rather than reason – a sense of awe, perhaps, at an unseen puppet-master menace in 'Balin,' or outrage in concert with the maidens that the recreant King Mark survives his trial. The romance world, given the *way* of the tales, its narrative logic, will not be called to account for itself in Malory – as elusive as the divine, we the readers are in a position comparable to Lancelot's once the mysteries of 'The Castle of Corbenic' have finished with him:

> 'Now I thanke God, […] for Hys grete mercy of that I have sene, for hit suffisith me. For, as I suppose, no man in thys worlde have lyved bettir than I have done to encyeve that I have done.' (1018.3-6)

In this sense then, Malory's romance is at times a secular, fictional, form of revealed truth.

Modal Motivation and Emotional Tragedy

> The Latin *furor*, I note, is related to the Greek θυω. Fury, I believe, is in precession over sacrifice. The multiple hurls itself headlong upon the one and surrounds it, this is the birth of the concept. The population swoops down upon the individual, fury moves onto the hero: it is the birth of tragedy, of collective culture, of logic, indeed, of the concept in general. (Serres 1995, 84)[34]

Overall, the effect of the disembodied prohibiting voice and the ill-happenings in this tragic and exponentially-scaled sequence is to leave us as mystified and without reference as Balin. But Balin pushes on, while we perhaps stand in confusion, or limp along after, in awe of (or dismay at) Malory's tragic knight. On the one hand, in Malory, Balin is the archetypal scapegoat for the story's origins for the divine Grail quest, and the sacrifice who will finally solidify Arthur's reign. Witness how crowds and individual characters decry him and his deeds. On the other, he is the hero who Merlin rightly prophecies will do much for Arthur, and who will come to a truly tragic end.

Serres finds sacrificial heroes treated in this way throughout Western culture's founding myths and histories.[35] Again and again the rage of the many coalesces on the one, and in the one's destruction is the genesis of a harmony, a collective, a 'fellowship' we could say, and a logic for it. Before the historical taxonomy of class struggle, or any other theoretical model, there is fury and *noise* and a social need to localize it on a victim, who at times is also a figurehead:

> Fury is not only a matter of Mars [*i.e., struggle*], it is a matter of Jupiter [*sovereignty*], and of Quirinus [*production*] as well. It is not the state of one man, solely, it is a recognized state of the group, the crowd, the collective. The population, let loose, ravages everything in its path, and that is the Latin meaning of the word *population*, the ravaging masses. The *noise* is only rarely a duel, *noise* is the multiple's. [...] It has been acknowledged by some authors, rather well described by Lucretius or Zola, enlisted by Canetti, admirably limned by Homer, Livy, Shakespeare, the Greek and French writers of tragedies. *Noise* and fury are the tragic driving force. In this noisy state, free energy is diffused, it increases crazily, it suddenly abates and stabilizes. It is frozen in institutions, organizations, functions. (Serres 1995, 83)[36]

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34 Serres refers to the less common meaning of the homonym θύω (*thuō*). Most often the word means 'to offer part of a meal to the gods; to sacrifice,' but it also can mean 'to rush on; to storm, rage' with the sense of great violence, potential or real, from which the Latin *furor* indeed derives. While the two are distinct words in classical Greek, the literary imaginative connection is quite clear. Frisk (1960) states there can be little doubt that originally the two were identical.

35 Serres's (1991) most exhaustive study of this examines the first few books of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*.

36 The antiquated French word *noise* in Serres's work is a usefully multivalent term denoting ideas of strife and contention, while it also gathers by association with the more usual French word *bruit* a range of other meanings including normal auditory noise, and both technical and idiomatic forms of interference. See the translator's note (Serres 1995, 141). Interference in turn is central to Serres's concept of the parasite – the third party that interrupts standard binary logic, amongst other literal and figurative readings (1982, 2007).

In these terms we can appreciate Balin's role as necessary, as hero, as victim, and as forgettable in the world that follows: Arthur's realm ritually established. Only in Malory do we find in *one* work, *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of The Rounde Table,* Balin's tragedy and sacrifice at the realm's foundations bound to the unravelling of the realm in the 'Morte,' through a myriad of connections and associations including the twin magic swords (Excalibur and his own), the well-established role of the Grail Quest, and Merlin's prophecies. In other words, he must be destroyed in the beginning, forgotten for the middle, and his artefacts must destructively resurface for the ending, undoing the foundation. The 'whole book' of King Arthur, the adventures and everything else from this tale until the destruction of the realm, is underpinned in Malory by the hero's blood sacrifice, ill-omened tomb, and the second prophetically inscribed sword in the stone. Such is Fate, and the great artistic achievement of this work's representation of it.

As Lewis observes of the Oedipus tragedy, or as Apollo attempts to convince Death in the *Alcestis* prologue, human agency is not affected, altered, or at all inconsistent with the workings of Fate. In the introduction to his verse translation of *Alcestis* (Euripides 2011, 3-28), William Arrowsmith discusses the literary and human value of those who die for others in a way that applies rather well to many of Malory's favourite knights:

> Whether these surrogates are scapegoats like Oedipus, or victims like Pentheus, or volunteers like Alcestis (or Iphigeneia, Makaria, and the others) is less important than the recurrent human situations such sacrifices dramatize. No man, as Admetos learns, can escape his personal death; but we only learn how to live and die from those who, by dying for others, teach us their value, and ours, and the value of life generally. Men are defined, modally defined, by death; only in the presence of death does life reveal its value. Those who reveal that value best are the heroes – those who, like Alcestis and Herakles, knowingly confront death on behalf of others. The hero, as Nietzsche knew, is the only justification of human life. (11)

Analysis of values once again set aside for the following chapter – the significance of these for a cosmology of *Le Morte Darthur* is in what Arrowsmith terms a 'modal psychology.' By contrast to both logical and psychological motivation in narrative, a modal motivation is based on the *phusis*, the inherent *nature*, or in our case, the *condision* of a character. I avoid referring to a character's 'nature' on purpose as it has connotations that posit one's essential being, while for Malory's knights we read primarily of what they do, secondarily of what they think and say, and never of an ideal 'self', a core 'identity,' which might explain or cause behaviour. In Malory behaviour, conduct, evaluates and is evaluated, but there is no suggestion of an ego, or any kind of essential 'self' responsible for that conduct.[37] The characters define themselves in time by what they do,

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Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus in this context refer to Georges Dumézil's comparative work that argues for an Indo-European invariance for these 'three classes or social functions' (Serres 1995, 81). I have bracketed the explicit association for each in this quotation, although here, as in *Rome* (1991) published in French in the following year, 1983, Mars is clearly understood to imply war, Jupiter religion and politics, Quirinus economics (or, earlier, agriculture).

37 See chapters five and six, 'Malory Criticism' in the introduction, and p18 fn50.

consequently readers might find there is nothing 'behind' the characters, they are not defined statically.

It is Balin's *ēthos* that marks him as (one of) the best knight of his age, and to do what he does, as it is the tragic world's *nature* to destroy such a hero and mortal, and the tale's to emphasize through incremental repetition the grandeur and tension of each in their escalating, necessary, and binding conflict. Balin, representing the social needs against the relentless forces of the world, fights to establish Arthur and his kingdom. And, he does so very much as an individual hero. He is the volunteer sacrifice. He states he risks himself willingly for the social good, contract, and the establishment of good governance. His *mode*, what I have called his *ēthos*, or Malory calls *condision*, has a bidirectional relationship with Fate through being called and answering the call of heroic vocation, and thus the narrative's own logic.

In this way Bloomfield's vertical heroic vocation, and Vinaver's ideas of non-rational causality, dovetail with what Radulescu (2003) reveals of gentry context concerns in Malory. One ought to give and receive service both with one's lord and one's vassals, and this was seen as a defining characteristic of good lordship and governance. It was a bidirectional activity both up and down the social order that bound one *with worship* into the larger community.[38] A reader understanding a character modally engages with their struggles and relationships, and so has a sense that there is something common and human about the character's place in the work. If this is achieved then for all of the character's lack of specifics in Malory, of what we usually call characterization,[39] it is difficult to feel entirely removed from the character's plight. On an almost anthropological level we identify with the character's situation, if not necessarily the character him or herself, and invest in his or her Fate. The self-sacrificer is doing service for society, for 'us,' of such a kind that they will be destroyed in rendering it.[40] We receive from those who die in the giving, forever bound and unable

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38 A member of the gentry's reputation as worshipful depended upon the extent and quality of interconnectedness they had with their community. A lord's, landowner's, or even king's worship was reflected in, and a direct result of, their 'good governance' as services rendered and received in turn, as, indeed, a form of 'friendship.' This theme is repeated with a wealth of supporting evidence throughout Radulescu (2003). See, for instance, Radulescu (28) on reciprocal service between landowners, landowner and feoffee, and lord and landowner, particularly John Paston II urging John Paston III to foster specific friendship bonds with a Master John Smith.

Consider also Ralph Norris's (2008, 168) observation, that Malory's use of minor sources to provide names for characters left anonymous in his major sources allows him to reflect the interdependence of the 'great magnates' and the 'lower gentry' in the 'houses' of Lancelot and Gawain.

39 If we were asked to describe even so prominent a character as Lancelot, we would be hard pressed to do more than generalize based on what he does, or might conceivably do in a given scenario. Malory's characters are not statically conceived in any detail, we do not read *who they are*. However, the work itself is in many ways an extended study of human conduct, of *how people act.*

40 The gift and debt of favour is more strongly figured in Malory's work than his French models. In the latter the courtly chivalric ideals of limitless service owed to one's lady as an unwavering, defining even, imperative for knighthood are still prominent, although not as absolute as they were in Chrétien de Troyes. However, a wider range of examples can be found in Malory. Balin clearly believes his utmost is required as favour owed to his lord, Arthur, who along with society gains through the sacrifice. Yet, all is later undone via the same sword of Balin reworked by Merlin. In all cases the strength of these mutually binding favour gift/debts is closely aligned with the social worship a knight holds, of love and faith offered beyond normal bounds, and the consequences of the loss of the same.

to repay the debt in kind to them. As such they deserve and demand personal honour, societal worship, and are the ultimate expressions *of* faith *through* loss.

Such is the chivalric theory, but while associations from Balin's legacy weigh heavily in the 'Sankgreal' and 'Morte,' his character and deeds are forgotten. The narrator remarks on Merlin's prophecy for the spot where Balin failed to stop Columbe's suicide before Tristram and Lancelot fulfil that prophecy and fight (568.10-570.2, the reference to Balin, Lanceor, Columbe and Merlin's prophecy is not in the French). Lamerok lies to Gaheris, blaming Balin for Lott's death rather than his own father (612.28-30, also not in the French). Only Galahad, in another passage unique to Malory,[41] recalls Balin, who he was and what he did (863.3-9). As is fitting for Galahad he specifically mentions Balin's good character, his prowess, and the Dolorous Stroke.

Aside from these three references there is nothing further of Balin by name in the works after his tale. It is as if the story, in forgetting the character as a man, lifts him and all things remaining of him in the world into the sphere of vertical motivation for future events, like for instance Lancelot's culpability for the death of his two 'knight-brothers' Gawain and Gareth with Balin's sword. Galahad reiterates the beginnings of the beginning at the beginning of the end, which Arthur well knows has arrived when he weeps for the coming loss of his fellowship (864.5-12, 866.19-867.9). That is, Balin's tale has become a foundational myth that itself weakly, vertically, motivates otherwise mysterious, destined, happenings late in Malory.

This and similarly intangible binding networks reveal themselves in the narrative associatively and they are tragic in resonance. They are never far from the surface in Malory and are present in many of his highly charged passages, as I shall show in the second part. Vinaver stops just short of a similar observation when considering Malory's 'Morte' in the last chapter of *The Rise of Romance*:

> And as night falls on Salisbury Plain nothing remains but the horror of the final disaster and the certainty of loss.
>
> There is more in all this than the pathos of disaster, more even than the beginnings of realistic motivation through character. The change from the cyclic romance to a narrative intelligible without reference to anything that lies beyond it and unrelated to any wider scheme of things brings with it a new sense of the tragic; the very restriction of the field of vision heralds the advent of tragedy as an essentially modern form. The cyclic conception was one which inevitably opened up a wide perspective, be it that of earthly and divine chivalry in the Arthurian Cycle or that of Apollo's world in the *Oresteia*. Just as Orestes as seen by Aeschylus is the occasion of a conflict between certain moral powers of the Universe, so in the French Cycle Lancelot is the occasion of a conflict of powers inherent in the structure of the feudal world. (Vinaver 1971, 136)

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41 These references are not in the French Vulgate models, which is understandable since the *PVM Suite* source for 'Balin' was written after them. My point is that Malory's narrator 'recollects' Balin and his tale, Lamerok uses him as a scapegoat, while we sense Galahad *knows* better than any the significance of things, in particular the role of Balin's founding sacrifice. Lancelot, for his part, may or may not know everything, but he senses enough to be wary of the sword and understands to whom it is bound.

The world of *Le Morte Darthur* has a tragic vision charged, isolated, and without what we might call a moral resolution or a 'greater plan' outside of itself.[42] Vinaver goes on to elaborate on the likeness in the *Eumenides* and *Mort Artu* of scope, and of work to world view, by emphasizing the sense of final peace each promises and delivers – the 'eternal order of things after being disturbed will be restored and a holy calm re-established' (137). Vinaver contrasts this peaceful resolution in the *Mort Artu*'s treatment of Lancelot's passing with Malory's treatment of the same, which he finds 'one of unrelieved sorrow' (137). In summing up this transplant of world view from the Cycle's to Malory's he concludes on Malory:

> As there was no comfort for Lancelot and Arthur in their last hour, so there is none for
> those who are left to lament them. Crystallized into single characters, the vast epic
> becomes the story of men set apart as bearers of a tragic fate, and as the circle of
> destiny closes in upon them, our own vision is both narrowed and intensified in the
> unfolding of what has come to pass. (138)

As will become clear, I disagree with Vinaver over how 'unrelieved' this sense of sorrow is, but I do agree with him that Malory's form of tragedy is emotionally oriented and heightened, as opposed to the French text's peaceful balancing within the same basic narrative parameters; the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*, of course, shares in this transition. But, we can take Vinaver's comparison of the *Mort Artu* and *Eumenides* still further and in the process say something about what is happening in *Le Morte Darthur*, rather than leaving the work hanging somewhat as it is at the end of his *Rise of Romance*.

Norris J. Lacy (1994) argues[43] convincingly that the Cycle's climax, properly speaking, is located much earlier in the *Lancelot Proper*, and to a lesser extent in the *Grail*, while the *Mort Artu* is by design a resolution to and not a climax for the Cycle itself. I believe that in the *Oresteia* also we find the true tragic climax in the *Agamemnon*, and, similarly, to a lesser extent in the *Libation Bearers*, while the *Eumenides* is by design and function a resolution to the former – a synthesis in Hegelian terms.

If we tentatively allow such a comparison, then we might consider Euripides's *Orestes* as a corresponding analogue for Malory's form of tragedy in the 'Morte.' Unlike Aeschylus's satisfying resolution, Euripides's conclusion to the same myth cycle is criticized in terms not unlike those that can be found for Malory's 'Morte.' Frank Nisetich attempts to defend the play's apparent lack of resolution, and the state of despair it is thought to leave an audience in by critics, despite the play enjoying great popularity in classical times (Euripides 2010, 169-185). 'Euripides brings in a god to remind us that gods, if they exist, are *not* in the habit of rescuing people from the consequences of their own evil actions' (181). Euripides's treatment of resolution is likened by Nisetich to what we

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42 Lewis's (1963) careful distinction between ethics and morality in medieval literature, and his argument for the former in Malory is still compelling.

43 Lacy's purpose in 'The *Mort Artu* and Cyclic Closure' (1994) is to re-evaluate the *Mort Artu* on its own terms within the Cycle context, and so respond to a body of criticism derived from Jean Frappier's regard for the work as insufficient to close the Cycle, 'crepuscular' when one might expect the grandiose. Frappier's influential evaluation is included in Loomis (1959, 313).

expect to see in modern dramatic representations of tragedy, echoing Vinaver's comments on Malory above.[44] Nisetich continues:

> In the first place, Apollo's intervention does not involve anything impossible or unprecedented. In the second place, it is absolutely necessary, both in itself and in its manner and timing. (181)

In other words, and just as in the earlier discussion of *Alcestis* and 'Balin,' in this modal, emotional, form of tragedy Fate acts through human agency, and yet is binding regardless of it. What happens must happen necessarily *because* the narrative logic demands it, and it does this precisely because of the *sort*, the *mode* or *condition*, of the characters involved. One final observation by Nisetich that matches my previous reading warrants quoting:

> Greek gods act in their own interest and at their own prompting. Orestes is unhappy that 'Apollo takes his time' (line 420), but he does not deny that it is his privilege to do so. More important, if Apollo did not take his time, we would have no play. (181)[45]

As before, neither Fate nor God negotiate with Malory's characters, and if we remove Fate from the world the narrative logic falls apart completely. In short, I do not think it too far from the mark to liken Malory's world to one infused with a Dionysiac tragic spirit, while the French sources resonate Apollonian (Nietzsche 1993). The former willingly engages with the unknowable with its horrors and wonders alike. The latter seeks the beautiful and a final orderliness within the universe.

Whatever we might wish to say about Malory's intentions, we can with great certainty state that the cosmology of his work was *not* inspired by a Greek dramatist. We can perhaps speculate on a similarity of sentiment in Malory and Euripides as natural literary reactions against the older French models and Aeschylus, respectively, and possibly a reflection of either the spirit of Malory's tumultuous times or of his own experience of the world. Life may be hard and dangerous and not necessarily fair, '[b]ut in God is all' (388.34), and within a man's character also is a very great deal indeed for these two non-providential authors.

We gain a better understanding of the post-Salisbury narrative then by way of Fate and the text's own cosmology. Arthur's reign is over, and with it the fellowship. The *furor* of civil war leaves only Arthur, Mordred, Lucan, and Bedwere, of which only the last survives. Without the collective, the figurehead, a binding Pentecostal Oath, or romantic vocation after Excalibur is thrown into the water, Bedwere is not so helpfully told to '[c]omforte thyselff' (1240.31) by Arthur, although this we will return to. The rational, including most understandings of the chivalric code, can make no sense

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44 Specifically: 'the very restriction of the field of vision heralds the advent of tragedy as an essentially modern form.' (Vinaver 1971, 136)

45 Note that the remainder of the line quoted from in their translation ('That's the way a god works') is an idiomatic rendering of the Greek, which includes a form of the word *phusis*. That is, Orestes is aware of the *nature*, the *way*, of the gods and does not question that.

Malory's knights seem keenly aware of something similar in terms of men's character and this spirit informs the proverbs they use on the subject (1084.4-6, 1126.5-6), and even at whose hands they would die, given a choice (781.31-2, 945.7-9, 1231.20-3). See my earlier discussion of *condition*, and Palomides in the Red City, including the sympathetic attraction of men of noble character.

of the story after the political apocalypse. The world, raw and insistently victorious, has reasserted itself – as it did before Arthur, and in lesser ways as it does periodically throughout his reign according to the narrative logic's demands. The work does not, however, end just there.

It is a matter of tuning our perspective to the spirit of the work so we see not a dismal decay at work in the world and despair over Lancelot's passing, but appreciate instead that he alone of the knights who did not succeed in the 'Sankgreal' *has changed his mode*. He does not commit one clear act of chivalric prowess or violence after his final wounding of Gawain,[46] opting instead to mourn the world's and his personal losses, make his peace with Guinevere and the memory of Arthur, and live as a recluse in humble submission to a religious superior and to God. Thus he is in time received with grace by God, the archbishop is blessed with a vision of the same, and it is his non-comprehending brother Ector's lot to *lament the knight*, if not the man, who in truth passed from the world some time earlier. The mode of the best of knights is to be *destroyed by the world* as illustrated by many including Lamerok, Tristram, Gareth, Balin, and even Gawain or to *leave the world* in so far as they are knights, as in the cases of only Galahad, Percival, Lancelot, and Arthur (and presumably Bors later). The various hermits we come across who were good knights of their time attest to previous generations attempting to take this route.

The text demonstrates that instead of attempting to avoid tragedy through moderation, or avoiding sins like pride, or anger, as one might see quite explicitly working through Arthur and Gawain in the *Mort Artu*, for instance, one ought to accept one's Fate and limits as human and yet strive to do well, better, or best. Such a 'wisdom' or perspective is, unfortunately, decidedly hollow in and of itself. There's not much left for one to say about it, or any meaningful way to respond to it. However, as a narrative or 'world' schema in Malory's work it is an extremely versatile means to bind and sequence a vast array of more-or-less independent episodes and tales. This not-*quite*-nihilism is the subsistent cohesive force for the play of Malory's Arthurian return of the same, and the system of values within the work, both discussed in later chapters.

The *Mort Artu* by contrast has a perfectly straightforward concept of tragedy resulting from specific sins. We rationally understand, follow the sequence, and take or leave the message of the exemplum, and we do not have to sense or emotionally feel the connection between the characters and what must come to pass. In fact, we may well feel morally superior to them, and so distanced from them and the exemplum, because we can see the causal relationship. In other words, the *Mort Artu* uses horizontal motivation based on Christian theology to explain and dictate the process of events. There is no mystery about it – there is instead a moral certainty that over-determines the existing narrative certainty of what will happen. From the *Mort Artu*, §23:

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46   In §25 of the *Mort Artu* (Lacy 1993, IV:156-160) Lancelot is involved in battle against Mordred's sons once he returns to England. In Malory Lancelot has to be reasoned with and urged increasingly strongly by those close to him in all of his chivalric acts after his escape from Guinevere's chamber. Lancelot has changed modes. He is no longer a bound knight in social truth, only in conduct with respect to his lord, Arthur. Lancelot is the first of the Round Table knights to experience the world without King Arthur as his lord, an experience that appears to move him more deeply than any other knight. From this point on Lancelot indeed does struggle to do as well as he can, and in God he finds a 'truste for to truste in' (1240.32), a service that does not exempt him from emotional anguish.

'You must do as I asked,' said the good man, 'if you don't want to bring shame upon yourself.' Thus did the man speak to King Arthur in an attempt to make him reconsider, but that was not to be, for the king swore on the soul of his father Uther Pendragon that he would not turn back but would instead attack Mordred. 'Sir,' said the good man, 'it's a pity that I can't change your mind.' But the king told him to say nothing more about it, for nothing in the world could prevent him from doing his will. (Lacy 1993, IV:150)

In §§22-3 of the *Mort Artu* (IV:148-150) it is clear that *in the end* Arthur's fault of hubris brings about the battle of Salisbury. He will not heed Gawain's dying entreaties or his dream-vision of Gawain from beyond the grave, nor the archbishop's reading of either Arthur's Fortuna dream or the ominous stone with its prophecy of a realm orphaned. In the above quotation he is urged to avoid bringing shame on himself by reaching out to Lancelot, but here as repeated elsewhere, it is stated he *will not*. Finally, Arthur is represented as understanding the consequences of exercising his will despite multiple warnings and overwhelming evidence in the form of prophetic signs. He and his pride are thus the final rational cause of the realm's fall.

In Malory, by contrast, Arthur is clearly destroyed despite his efforts and his bending of his will to avoid this Fate. Within the greater Cycle context, Lacy (1994) sees Fortune as operating through human faults, and then describes various ways in which the *Mort Artu* presents characters as no longer possessing even 'the illusion of control' (91).[47] Before moving on to the subject of prophetic dreams, Lacy summarizes characteristics of the French work's closure:

Thus, portents of the future are offered not only by some of the characters but also by the intrusive narrative voice, which announces the tragedy from the start. Later, the narrator juxtaposes within a few lines the information that Arthur required people to swear allegiance to Mordred and the fact – for it is presented not as prediction but as simple fact, known from the 'story' that is the source of this narrative – that Arthur will be defeated on Salisbury Plain. This is one of the primary effects of the *Mort Artu* references to *le conte*: it generates an extratemporal perspective and thus juxtaposes present and future to create foreboding irony. (93)

In one respect, then, the *Mort Artu* and *Le Morte Darthur* are the same. Never is there any doubt that the battle of Salisbury will take place. There is no hint that Arthur's reign and realm will in any meaningful way survive it. On the contrary, we are assured it will not. In terms of the realm, of *politics* (understood not as we typically do now, but as the intensely personal set of binding relationships between these knights, the king, and the commons), this is the end. In almost every other respect, however, the two diverge utterly.

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47   The sin of pride, Lancelot's in particular, is a primary motivational force in the romance (Lacy 1994, 91).

Malory's Arthur does listen to advice and does follow it, yet it is not enough[48] – Fate not only acts through human agency, it will operate regardless of it also; the narrative voice is silent rather than didactic, preferring to leave prophecy in the narrative world than to comment on it directly; Malory has no need to appeal to his equivalent of *le conte*, 'the Frenshhe book' (1260.5), his work has accumulated its own critical mass of narrative Fate; the sins or flaws are barely perceptible – Malory's characters, excepting Mordred, neither desire nor obstinately will this end, they try to avoid it. In short, the characters retain agency, but the narrative amply demonstrates that intent, will, and even acts themselves are not sufficient.

To rework Lacy's observation above, that in the *Mort Artu*'s quiet dissolution of the Arthurian world even 'the illusion of control' is progressively lost, in Malory's more properly apocalyptic vision we see it revealed that *control itself is an illusion*, but never is that presented as an excuse not to 'worshipfully' make good one's attempt. Doing so would be inconsistent with their *ēthos*, and so their Fate, and so the story itself and its logic. Malory's king and knights do not passively accept or deny Fate, they *take the adventure* from the first book through to the last.

Perhaps this clear and firm distinction is behind what Vinaver sensed was Malory's 'essentially modern form' of tragic vision. It is certainly striking in its stress on the individual, and with a little imagination can sound in the key of such existentialist thoughts as Kierkegaard's 'leap to Faith,' Nietzsche's 'Eternal Return,' Sartre's 'Bad Faith,' and Heidegger's 'Dasein,' even leitmotifs in Camus's *The Stranger*. It certainly goes some way to explain why *Le Morte Darthur* retained popularity throughout the Renaissance,[49] and is still read, while the French Cycles suffered a different fate.[50]

Emotional tragedy in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Euripides's *Orestes*, or the sublime of Rilke's 'Angels,' is quite different to the rational variety found in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, or Aeschylus's

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48   Of course in the end Malory's Arthur also charges at Mordred, and despite Lucan reminding him of his dream of Gawain, and urging him to not to disregard God's grace that he has let him live out this much of the fated day.

> 'Now tyde me dethe, tyde me lyff,' seyde the kyng, 'now I se hym yondir alone, he shall never ascape myne hondes! For at a bettir avayle shall I never have hym.'

> 'God spyede you well!' seyde sir Bedyvere. (1237.5-8)

Compare Arthur's situation with Balin's in Pellam's castle when he sees he has an opportunity to kill Garlon (83.27-31). In both cases, with the chance presented to make a clear and certain end to their chivalric *aventure*, they take it regardless of their own lives and as is fitting for a true knight.

> 'Knyght, why beholdist thou me so? For shame, ete thy mete and do that thou com fore.'

> 'Thou seyst soth,' seyde Balyne, 'thys ys nat the first spite that thou haste done me. And therefore I woll do that I come fore.' And ryse hym up fersely and clave his hede to the sholdirs.

> 'Now geff me the truncheon,' seyde Balyn to his lady, 'that he slew youre knyght with.' (84.4-11)

Such is their *ēthos*, and thus their Fate.

49   Only the eighteenth century went without a new printed edition (xl, cxxxi; Parins 1988, 6).

50   See, for instance, Montaigne's scathing opinion reproduced in Vinaver (1966b, 9). The opinion of Gaston Paris and others recorded in preceding pages are almost as vehement. In summary of these Vinaver writes: 'it soon became a commonplace of literary history to speak of the Arthurian Cycle as an unfortunate accident' (1966b, 8).

Eumenides, and can be differentiated by how we find and follow reason in the latter, while reason alone is insufficient in the face of experience in the former grouping. Emotionally-weighted tragedy stresses: a seemingly arbitrary and utterly destructive Fate; a superlative hero or heroine who comprehends and acknowledges the situation for its impossibility; and, his or her willingness to run the almost certain risk of destruction in the process of confronting that Fate directly. All three speak to the excessively strong *ēthos* of the work's hero, understood not as a flaw but as beyond normal bounds. The rationally-weighted model instead invokes a balancing factor whether Fortuna, God, or both and dispenses with Fate as an agent; taints the protagonist's character in some didactically telling and causally significant way; and, replaces the former model's willingness, the affirmation in defiance, with an irreversible, logical, chain of consequences directly derived from the character's taint or flaw, and applied to the ordering principle's logical or didactic schema. Neither Arthur's brief 'Wheel of Fortune' dream, nor the more prominent role played by Gawain's presumably divinely sanctioned intervention from beyond the vale, are ultimately sufficient to avert what is in fact fated within the narrative's own logic. While Arthur's reign as an arc from beginning to end may be understood in terms of the medieval Wheel of Fortune tradition, the very different treatment of this in Malory as opposed to the *sMA* and *Mort Artu* suggest it is not a core textual concern, along with the divine in so far as we can understand Gawain's dream-visitation role.

With this distinction in mind we can view Malory's somewhat colourless characterization in a quite different light.[51] Sparsely applied details here and there, for example, Gawain's predilection for fruit, or his morning-sun-empowered three-fold strength, are not the defining sort we could pinpoint as causal tragic flaws. There is a wavering, and at times even a *narrative forgiving*,[52] of characters' earlier ill predispositions that means even if we were looking for a causal relationship for events from past deeds we look in vain.

Cosmology

> HEIDEGGER: Thus, you do not use 'cosmological' in the sense of the Greek χόσμος. But why, then, do you speak of the 'cosmological'?
>
> FINK: I do not think the cosmological from out of Heraclitus, but rather from out of Kant and from the antinomy of pure reason. Pure reason attempts to think the whole. The whole is a concept that is first oriented toward things. In this manner, however, we can never thoughtfully experience the gathered whole. Kant exhibits the aporias of an attempt at thought that believes itself able to think the whole on the model of a

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51 For the standard critical study of what Malory does add to characterization in his Arthuriad, see Wilson (1934).

52 For instance: Gawain (see chapter six) and Lyonel's rehabilitation post-'Grail.' For Lyonel, contrast his 'Sankgreal' behaviour (968-73) with his conduct in the 'Poisoned Apple' (1047-8), Lancelot crowning him king of France (1204.27-8), and when he advises Lancelot at the beginning of the Siege of Benwick (1211.23-29).

spatial thing. Because the attempt does not manage with this approach, Kant subjectivizes the whole as a subjective principle in the process of experience, which is compl[e]mented by the regulative idea of the totality of all appearances.

HEIDEGGER: The justification of your use of 'cosmic-cosmological' in distinction to 'ontic-ontological' is thus the allness …

FINK: … which, however, is the allness of ἕν, of the self-gathering, letting-arise, and letting-pass-away. In reference to the clamping together of letting-arise and letting-pass-away, I refer to Nietzsche's motif of the coupling of building and breaking, joining and undoing, of the negation in the sway of the world. (Heidegger and Fink 1993, 110)[53]

This chapter is offered in the spirit – while clearly not the style or subject matter – of Fink's conception of cosmology. I have not attempted to grasp the all or even the many in the one sweeping rationalizing gesture. I have instead chosen to draw out by association and comparison some of what seem to me to be glaring aporias in the world of *Le Morte Darthur*, at least from a twenty-first century perspective, and even for informed readers of medieval romance. In the process some relationships between terms identified have been made – of Fate as *ēthos*, *ēthos* as Fate; of vocation as the vertical motivation for adventures, and at the same time the purpose and duty of *ēthos*, with the possibility that they are symbiotic in origin; of the sympathetic and antagonistic vertical and horizontal motivations in love and fellowship; of the peculiar position of justice; of the origins of the realm in a hero's sacrifice; of the destruction of that realm bound prophetically, and associatively in the same foundations; of the types of motivation that operate on characters, events, and episodic progression; of the binding of prophecy and Fate with a narrative logic that has nothing to do with chance or providence.

I have not sought out a cohesive world view, but rather a landscape or horizon with relationships unusual for modern readers, but not without historical precedent. Framed by the 'Uther' *mise en abyme* and 'Balin' tale on one side, and the Battle of Salisbury then Lancelot's departure on the other, the vast bulk of the text addresses itself to *ēthos* in terms of justice, love, fellowship, *faith*, as much as treason, *loss*, and of course Fate. Character, then, is the subject of the next chapter. In the third chapter I address the narrative's structural engagement with its world and *ēthos*. However, I hope to show in the process how the 'motif of the coupling of building and breaking, joining and undoing, of the negation in the sway of the world' that has arisen already in terms of 'Balin' and the work's later tales, is an inherent and recurrent palimpsest operation of the narrative's logic throughout the work.

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53 ἕν (*hen*), '[the] one' is along with its counter-concept πάντα (*panta*), 'all things, the universe' a prominent subject in Heraclitus's fragments that Heidegger and Fink discuss. Χόσμος (*kosmos*), 'cosmos; the well, orderly, whole.'

II. VALUES AND CHARACTER

> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
>
> Or what's a heaven for?
>
> (Browning, 'Andrea del Sarto,' *Men and Women*, 98-9.)

> In the begynnyng of Arthure, aftir he was chosyn kynge by adventure and by grace, for
> the moste party of the barowns knew nat he was Uther Pendragon son but as Merlyon
> made hit opynly knowyn, but yet many kyngis and lordis hylde hym grete werre for
> that cause. But well Arthur overcom hem all: the moste party dayes of hys lyff he was
> ruled by the counceile of Merlyon. So hit felle on a tyme […]. (97.1-8)

It could be objected that I linger too long at the very beginning of *Le Morte Darthur*. I believe the beginning is considered overmuch in terms of what follows in the text, or what preceded it in Malory's models, while the inverse approach is perfectly coherent, not to mention profoundly instructive and satisfying. 'The Wedding of King Arthur,' like 'Balin,' is sufficiently strong to be read literally and in careful literary detail for foundations of the reign and civilization.

'The Wedding' opens (97.1-8, above) by telling us that in the beginning 'of Arthur,' the subject of the text, he was chosen, his origins and legitimacy were not universally known, and there was war – and the war was not only great, but it also happened because the legitimacy of his reign was questioned by rivals. We should recall that Arthur was first chosen by the commons, the gathered crowd of peoples rich and poor alike:

> 'We wille have Arthur unto our kyng! We wille put hym no more in delay, for we all see
> that it is Goddes wille that he shalle be our kynge, and who that holdeth ageynst it, we
> wille slee hym.' And therwithall they knelyd at ones, both ryche and poure, and cryed
> Arthur mercy bycause they had delayed hym so longe. (16.12-17)

We might also recall, for those same first few lines of 'The Wedding,' a complex of the key legendary, mythic even, tropes common to stories of human foundations everywhere: widespread violence, the crowd, the one, choosing, and, 'by adventure and by grace' (97.2), the sacred. Further, Merlin is given the role of faithful prime advisor to the king, the fifteenth century's political equivalent of antiquity's seer, or the high priest of primitive societies – and without relinquishing the customary transcendental characteristics of the seer or high priest.

In this story these are all truths we can treat as narrative fact. There are two parallel tales told here – the *mythic*, where we should be wary of singletons, doubles, and failures; and what for convenience I refer to as the *historic*, where we should look out for transgressions, victims, and mimesis. Both function and so they tell the same story twice. The mythic tale asserts and regards as real the vertical, mysterious, and other-than-natural addressed in the previous chapter. The historic tale of lived experience exists within and subverts the mythic by its primary concern for the personal, local, and contingent. To read this second Malory is to pay attention to personal values

and what happens in the text with them, and this is the subject of this second chapter. I will return to 'Balin' as the text's own model for all of its following explorations of literary myth as collective violence, and literary character as the best possible means of revealing and resolving that problematic. But first, I want to disambiguate two very different but easily overlooked kinds of 'wrong' in Malory.

Conduct

We can generally group the outcomes of quests into one of the three varieties that we first see juxtaposed in 'The Wedding.' The tale trifurcates with each questing knight representing a different possible result in terms of their conduct as a knight. They are evaluated on the basis of *how* they achieve their quest, and not on the nominal outcome of that quest.[1] Little or no interest is shown by the court in the objects of the quests when the knights return, just as before them Arthur's first reaction to the 'marvel' is one of relief that the woman and her 'noyse' have gone.[2] The knights all essentially achieve what they set out to do – but as Pellinor learns too late, *that* is not what they will be judged upon. Each knight in turn will bear witness to his own behaviour on his return, and in concert with Merlin's hermeneutic testimony. So, in 'The Wedding' we have:

- Success, in Torre, for which the knight is showered with acclaim and rewards of the sort that make knight errantry possible for him in the future. That is, he is given recognition by the king and court as well as financial independence.

- Transgression, in Gawain, of an activity that is promptly and explicitly prohibited with sanctions emplaced. This 'breach' category correlates with later meanings of the Latin *pecco*, 'to do amiss, transgress, commit a fault, offend, sin' (Lewis 1891).

- Failure, in Pellinor, where the explicit or implicit terms of the adventure are not met. This, by way of distinction from the previous term, corresponds with the Greek *hamartanō* (ἁμαρτάνω), 'to miss, miss the mark; to fail of doing, fail of one's purpose, go wrong; to be deprived of a *thing*, lose it' (Liddell and Scott 1977).[3]

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1. See Field (1998b) and Luttrell (1989) on this tale's concern for conduct and apparent lack of interest in the direct objects of the quest. 'Two Palimpsest Models,' below, addresses these issues in more detail.

2. 'So when she was gone the kynge was gladde, for she made such a noyse' (103.11-12). This is unique to Malory, as are most of the textual points highlighted in this chapter.

   Mann (1986) reads this factor, like the appearance of other marvels in 'The Wedding' and 'Balin,' as evidence of the distance between knights and the adventure, in this case an emotional distance that is bridged by the knights' pursuit of worship when they take the adventure (74). This 'distance' could equally well be described as the 'call' of romance, the knight's vocation as a vertical motivation, which, as Merlin instructs them (103.13-16), must be answered for their worship (see the previous chapter on vertical motivation). However, presently I wish to discuss instead the structure, function, and origin of adventure in the narrative, and to do so by way of the values the text proposes at each stage.

3. A second set of meanings for *hamartanō* include 'to fail, do wrong, err, sin' (Liddell and Scott 1977), which are best interpreted in light of the first set above. In other words, 'sin' in the classical Greek context is comprehended as ultimately a variety of failure. Conversely, the first cited meanings for *pecco* in Lewis (1891) are 'to miss, mistake.' Certainly we see transgression as something distinct from failure, even if

The last, failure, is perhaps the most peculiar for modern readers to understand. In most modern western cultures we and our children are periodically reminded, in what are meant to be encouraging tones, that 'it doesn't matter if you win or lose, but that you give it a go,' which is superseding the previous folk wisdom with the same antecedent clause: '…, but how you play the game.' Culturally we increasingly emphasize the egalitarian nature of 'the game' and that *participation* rather than success or failure, *or even conduct*, is the vital (or even the only) concern.

This is in line with René Girard's observations towards the end of Part I of *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987, 134-8). Namely: human culture, *because* it is almost entirely desacralized in the West, must find new, non-violent, means to apply acquisitive mimesis appropriately, and avoid mimetic rivalry. [4] People can no longer resort to sacrifice or surrogate sacred victims of violence for the many as they coalesce on the one since we have lost faith in myths and mythic thinking (e.g., the egalitarian nature of 'the game'). On the other hand, an outbreak of

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originally there was a closer relationship between the two. Transgression and the intent to transgress are central to Christian thought and political justice in the West. For instance, as Megan Leitch points out (2012, 52), *intent* to commit treason is legally considered 'central to, and all that was required to constitute, the crime' of treason as codified in the English 'Statute of Treasons' of 1352. No one *intends to fail* at a task, unless it is a ruse of the gambit variety, a purposeful strategy for eventual success. But we do question whether someone *intended to transgress* or not. While culpability is more clearly identifiable in cases of transgression, we still retain the connection between failure and punishable fault in terms of social responsibilities: failure to properly care for a child, to pay one's taxes, or, on the wane in western countries, English common law's 'Misprision of Felony' – failure to report a crime.

We find failure stressed in Malory alongside an emphasis on the honour-bound obligations of individuals, while his model texts are consistently more inclined to emphasize transgression. For instance the French *PVM Suite* marks Balin's death as an insufficient punishment for his gross breaches of the divine, while the *Mort Artu* attaches faults to Arthur that may or may not necessarily cause his death but in a literary sense *explain* it. Malory's work instead walks a narrow path between relating these classic scapegoat mechanisms and resisting their localized implications.

Edwards reads erring, straying, and the wandering adventure as connected with the Latin *errare* (2001, 118-19), which are ideas related to the structure of an adventure. With my chosen terms I am making a different distinction, from the perspective of the narrative's value statements, concerning the evaluating conditions of adventure, how they are resolved in the text, and to what end.

Finally, it should be very obvious that I am not equating failure (*hamartanō*) with sin (*pecco*), nor reconfiguring an Aristotelian-esque argument for tragedy in Malory, both of which Whetter, rightly, dismisses (2005, 160-161).

4   On Malory and Girard, see 'Interwoven *sens*' in the introduction.

The instinct to copy, acquisitive mimesis, and the corresponding prohibitive instinct not to, are primary within any group Girard would consider human *and* a community. Mimetic rivalry occurs when two or more subjects attempt to outdo each other with respect to the same object or objective – the competition, or original *agōn* (ἀγών) from which antagonism is only a short, logical and linguistic, leap away. Mimesis in the form of rivalry becomes conflictual mimesis, which is contagious within the community as aggressors imitate each other's aggression (1987, 19, 26). Through a positive feedback loop it rapidly escalates to a crisis point where violence threatens the continuity of the community itself. Mimetic modelling is a variation on this theme where the original object becomes, or simply is, irrelevant for the apprentice who seeks to imitate the master

As I hope to show, acquisitive mimesis, mimetic rivalry, conflictual mimesis, and mimetic modelling all take part in Malory's work whenever individuals, violence, and desire are concerned. In those places the emotions help narrate the story more sensitively than the sweeping themes and supernatural forces discussed in the previous chapter, but without negating those themes and forces their due either. In other words: the mimetic critique subverts its mythic counterpart and exists alongside it.

unrestrained violence in the age of nuclear weapons risks extinction of the species and rendering the planet uninhabitable.[5] Desacralization brings with it a weakening of a culture's prohibitions and rituals, however the mechanism underpinning culture for the selection of a scapegoat (the one who fails) shifts, and is always hidden within new terms for 'the game.'

In Malory the concern is neither failure with respect to a quest's objective, nor failure to participate. The central issue is failure of conduct for at least two reasons. The work, for the most part (and some notable exceptions are considered in the next chapter), narrates the deeds of the best and strongest of brave knights. Not being cowards, they invariably take part. Secondly, failure of conduct draws attention to the social context, since successful acts, even beneficial ones, would be beside the point entirely if the individual, by *condision*, were a monster.

The first thing to note about 'The Wedding,' in Girard's terms, is that in the mythic narrative shame and villainy mark the failure (Pellinor), while in the historic they mark the transgressor (Gawain). Malory's text juxtaposes these to problematize both readings. Although never entirely explicit, the work's sympathies seem to lie with those of good intentions. That is, with those who are without villainous or treacherous intent, who are not transgressors, but who do fail.

Present within both 'Balin' and 'The Wedding' are statements and dialogue regarding Gawain's revenge of his father's death on Pellinor. Beginning a blood feud speaks directly to the core of the prohibitions and rituals established to prevent and dissipate mimetic rivalry. Gawain intends, and commits, transgressions of precisely this kind, spanning generations to include Lamerok, and spilling over in the form of such horrors as Gaheris's unashamed murder of his own mother (611-13). And yet the text tells us the reverse, the backwards story, that mythically casts a succession of knights who miss the mark and become scapegoats for the increasing violence that Gawain and his kin are immune from punishment for, and judgements they are largely unconcerned by.

> 'A, kynge Pellynor,' seyde queen Gwenyver, 'ye were gretly to blame that ye saved nat thys ladyes lyff.' (119.22-23)
>
> 'Truly ye ought sore to repente hit,' seyde Merlion [...] (119.29)

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5   Girard holds that the origin of human culture and human institutions occurs in a founding sacrifice (1987, 3-47). This is a collective murder of one member of the society to expiate the violence that threatens the community as a whole, violence that is generated by the feedback loop of intensifying mimetic rivalries. One person literally or figuratively draws the short straw, is spontaneously the perceived locus for all of the community's problems, and is cast out in myth as a monster, while killed in history and fact as a scapegoat. The miraculous calm amongst the community newly reunited inspires *myth*, *prohibitions* against the mimetic activity that gave rise to the crisis in the first place, and cathartic *rituals* that aim to recreate the sacrificial process as accurately as possible without drawing attention to the collective murder itself. The one who was cast out was evil and monstrous, and also a double: the scapegoat must be conceivable as one apart from *and* as all of the community for the sacrifice to function. Finally, the act of casting out was sacred or divine, not human (105-125).

Without a functioning mythic system (ritual and prohibitions that hold back escalating mimetic rivalry), and without a new scapegoat, the community would tear itself apart with violence (84-104). See also Girard's more recent *Battling to the End* (Girard and Chantre 2010, esp. ch.1, 'The Escalation to Extremes,' 1-25), Robert Doran's interview with Girard on modernity and apocalypse (Doran and Girard 2008), and Doran's (2011) subsequent article.

As Merlin's speech develops, parataxis is used extensively to construct wave after wave of praise for Pellinor's daughter and her beloved, then recrimination for the base method and agent of the beloved's murder. Merlin closes with a prophecy that rewrites the future human murder of Pellinor for envy and an insatiable blood feud, as a divine act of vengeance for transgression:

> 'And because ye wolde nat abyde and helpe hir, ye shall se youre beste frende fayle you whan ye be in the grettist distresse that ever ye were othir shall be. And that penaunce God hath ordayned you for that dede, that he that ye sholde truste moste on of ony man on lyve, he shall leve you there ye shall be slayne.' (120.3-8)

Thus the narrative repeats Balin's scenario with Pellinor – a mythic tale masks the scapegoat, a historic tale reveals the former but does not and cannot undo it.

As with Girard's theory, prohibition and ritual in Malory arising from the dead scapegoat (or, in mythic terms 'outcast monster') are progressively revealed as insufficient to hold disastrous communal violence in check. What is most interesting, however, is not that *Le Morte Darthur* restates this problematic but that it operates on the mimetic function countless times in an *almost* mathematical or programmatic looping of repetition with variation (see the next chapter). Girard and Serres clearly believe alternatives must be sought, while the latter has from an early stage held that the solution, if there is one, will be found in literature. As Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell state in their introduction to Serres (1982):

> We have just seen how the birth of rationality and science signals the end of myth in its original form. However, when this happens, the problem of space – of pluralized spaces – does not vanish purely and simply, it is merely displaced. If on the one hand, the weaving together of disparate spaces accomplished by myth results in the birth of science, on the other hand, it creates a new field in which the work of connecting and disconnecting will continue, namely, *literature*. 'Narrative, exiled from the locus of *muthos* where the logos was born, continues to disconnect the connected and to link together what is separated. What we call literature is the infinite pursuit of this work in progress.' (xxxiii)[6]

Yet, as we shall see shortly, two complementary models from music may tell us the most about first, the interrelationship of mythic and historical modes in Malory, and second, how repetition achieves precisely this connecting and disconnecting in his work.

Failure is a characteristic of the scapegoat singled out for lynching. This one takes all the blame and all the values the society attaches to him or her as it forms collectively, and even in order for it to form as a collective. Myth and the sacred lose their power when it is revealed that human agency is behind the crises and not monsters, gods, or Fate. Girard argues with an anti-sacrificial reading of the Gospels that he believes reveals this, while for Serres the mythic is undone by the incommensurability of the local and universal, and by our need to find more intelligent paths

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6   The inline quotation is Harari and Bell's translation from *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola* (Serres 1975, 169).

between experience and fields or models of knowledge. However that does not necessarily improve the situation:

> The crisis temporarily subsides after a sacrificial murder. Iphigenia is put to death, the wind rises up, the Trojan War will take place, a new crisis of violence. Here the war takes place in Athens, atrocious brawls among the funeral pyres. The plague, like the unleashed ocean, like the swelling waters of the river, is a figure of violence. In the sixth book, there is no sacrifice to interrupt the new crisis. No Iphigenia in a plague-ridden Athens, the priest has fled. Instead of one unimportant funeral pyre, there are a hundred, all afire, one at each crossroads. Have we gained anything in the exchange? In other words, if you suppress violence, it reappears. Remove its local setting, that is to say, the solution of religious sacrifice, and immediately the global space of the city is plague-ridden with violence. An important question which Lucretius did not avoid, and which perhaps he could not answer and which pushed him to his limits.
>
> Violence is the only problem so poorly resolved that our own culture is, without a doubt, the continuation, through other means, of barbarianism. (Serres 1982, 121-122)

The Plain of Salisbury is for Malory what plague-ravaged Athens was for Lucretius, nuclear apocalypse for Girard and Serres. In each case the comfort of the sacred has gone cold, the scapegoat is untenable as a solution, while the responsibility is revealed as human.

Again: with the sacred dispelled there is no meaning left in the ritual, or the sacrifice, while prohibitions gradually lose their force. The terms of 'the game,' mentioned before, weaken from a focus on victory to abiding by the rules (behaviour, a respect for ritual, honourable conduct), and finally to mere attendance. However, no matter how weak the terms become there is in each case a clear potential scapegoat in the defeated (victory condition), the naïve (conduct condition), and the coward (participation condition). All of these are forms of failure under the terms of 'the game' as *agōn* – it is always a contest – and serve to mark the potential scapegoat through their failure not a transgression. Meanwhile myth constructs a sense of the scapegoat as the ultimate transgressor, responsible for all crimes, as a retrospective cover story for the sacrifice. What subverts this mythic world is that reading Malory's romance of *aventures* is itself a series of *aventures* – the hard edges of the pragmatic bruise the smooth edged romance one is more accustomed to. This expectation of smoothness, whether we call it 'unity,' or something else, is undercut throughout Malory. 'The Wedding' sets the scene for this process with its tendency to interject the contingent into what was, essentially, a folk tale.[7]

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7   Thus prompting articles like Field's (1998b) and Luttrell's (1989), and the reason they were referred to above, p56 fn1. Contingent and the mythic elements coexist in Malory for narrative purposes.

Vinaver's commentary notes many pragmatic details introduced in Malory, for instance: compass directions (n118.9:); remunerating 'men of religion' (n119.11); and, Pellinor is described as feeling guilty in the French without any prompting (n119.2-4, n119.22-23, n119.24-28), while in Malory, as I read it, Pellinor regrets Alyne's death but does not believe in the circumstances that he is responsible for her suicide, nor that one should be held responsible for such things (119.24-28).

Perspective

The mythic and historic tales are conjoined through a peculiar narrative perspective. Field (1971, Chapter VIII, 142-159) describes Malory's narrator as having a flawed human perspective somehow distanced from the narrative by a gulf of indeterminate time more usually associated with the 'omniscient narrator' type (a perspective which is, by contrast and definition, not flawed in this way). For readers it can be difficult to follow such an unusual narrative voice. As with cinema's 'shaky cam' technique, or *cinéma vérité* style,[8] we are in Malory presented with a series of episodic sequences that we have no reason to question. The veracity of what the narrator tells us is that much more certain for us *because* we know we do not get everything, while on the other hand, of what we do see, *that much* is incontrovertible.[9] Without an identifiable character as narrator within the narrative, Malory's disembodied 'shaky cam' narrator's perspective is further dislocated by time, leaving the reader with something like a misty crystal ball filter for perception.[10]

Field (1998b) explains the absences that Luttrell (1989) laments in Malory's version of 'The Wedding' as 'low points' skipped over by a preoccupied and energetic narrator anxious to get on with his story. As with *cinéma vérité* our minds must either supply likely connecting details for the story, or opt instead to match the speed of the narrator and keep up with what is happening. The benefits of both Malory's narrative voice and *cinéma vérité* include the audience's authentic experience of disorientation, brief but reliable glimpses of the 'real,' high dramatic action, and emotional tension. The price we pay for this is the loss of a thoroughly consistent natural world in terms of time and space, lost connective detail, and significantly – any pretence to ultimate knowledge of the world.[11] It is in these moments that the author's talent for subverting the mythic

8   *Wikipedia* has overviews of these that are perfectly sufficient for my purposes (s.v. 'Shaky Camera,' last modified February 9, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaky_camera; s.v. 'Cinéma Vérité,' last modified February 16, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_verite). Reasonably famous examples of the 'shaky camera' technique include *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Cloverfield* (2008); of 'cinéma vérité' in pseudo-documentary television series we have *Parks and Recreation*, as well as both the UK and US versions of *The Office*. While distinct terms for audio-visual material, I refer to them interchangeably in so far as they are analogous to Malory's narrative style and perspective.

9   The 'shaky camera' artifice is evident in the omission of low points through devices like pausing of the camera recording, as well as in the presumption that the footage we watch is unedited and bona fide, as attested to by the low budget – as if we ourselves found the digicam in the woods. The camera's testimony is like a reliable member of an adventure party, someone without opinion or censure. In film use it can be employed to evoke situations where the story's point is that some incredible objective truth can be proved, or disproved, or proved *and* disproved, while a jarring narrative proceeds through time leaning now in the affirmative direction, now against it, and not infrequently both ways at once. We have our eyes and ears to guide us, and no presumed interference between the evidence and us, but still there is no stable framework from which to gather a rational and decisive idea of the truth.

10 With Genette (1988, 64) I use 'perception,' like 'perspective,' without meaning to privilege vision. It should be understood I am referring to the imaginary receptive position(s) the reader assumes for experiencing what the narrator tells us.

11 Terence McCarthy (1991) draws a very different conclusion when considering much the same set of aspects in Malory's narrative:

> As we have seen, by refusing to analyse motive and personal behaviour, Malory places a barrier between us and his characters, with the important result that what we lose in intimacy we gain in respect. (171)

can be observed. The bidirectional universal to local relationship proposed by myth is contradicted by first-hand experience. In Malory we read the shocking, yet obvious, truth that no one sees everything, the sum of the world cannot be breezily accounted for in its details, and vice versa.

If, however, the mythic and historic modes cannot be connected or disconnected easily in the telling of the tale, in the narrative perspective, their interplay, writing and rewriting of each other, does correspond to a pair of radically different musical models.

Two Palimpsest Models

Twentieth century 'serial' music is, essentially, composed by repeating the process of selecting unique variations from a given set (understood as a neutral, dispersed, representative subset of the whole) to hear beauty in a music with a never-repeating form. 'Minimalist' music is, in a similarly extremely-basic sense, a process revealed through repeating forms so in the act of listening one becomes gradually aware of the closing-in-upon-zero inclination from the same,[12] to hear the never-the-same of the same.

At root these are complementary projects departing from diametrically-opposed conditions. Serial music uses abstract mathematical methods (set theory, matrices, inversions, and so on) to precisely calculate sequences that never express the same. This project is synchronic in conception, but 'proven' in the time of playing. Minimalism derives from a pre-determined process operated upon one or a small few simple musical phrases.[13] Through a lived experience of the process the wholly new and different emerges from that which is minimally differentiated from the same. Since the work comes into being as a process, rather than existing within static musical notation, it is diachronic, always experienced by references backwards and forwards. If one is to refer to a 'proof' it is outside of time in the artist's idea of what can happen in the experience of listening.

Serial music is High Modernist art derived from mathematical calculations. As such it is the very pinnacle of sacrificial[14] scientific music – maximally purged of repetition, obsessed with rejecting the past, free from even a key in any given passage other than the full twelve tones of an

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I am unconvinced by the argument that presenting motive and conduct without exegesis (for the most part) creates a barrier rather than an invitation. McCarthy's own reading of the work certainly suggests *he felt* engaged rather than distanced by it, which is after all the subjective experience under discussion:

> Malory encourages us to reason things out less often than to feel them. Despite the great restraint of emotion in the *Morte Darthur* – the stiff upper lip attitude and speech of its characters – its emotional force is extremely strong. (172)

12 This musical experience is identical in function to Serres's (2000, 6) notion of Lucretius's *clinamen* for physics (see p17 fn48). The slightest possible deviation from the path of the same was what Steve Reich was concerned with in 1968 when writing on his new musical project, now firmly associated with minimalism (Reich 2002, 35-6).

13 I describe reduced models that I believe fit with the spirit of these movements. In particular, I am aware that taken literally the minimalist model given would not apply to even some works considered canonic.

14 'Sacrificial' in so far as post-World War II these modernists believed there were 'monsters' in the conventions of music to cast out. See also the body copy's following paragraph.

octave, it operates over the same set again and again. The score is always directed backward upon itself in order to reject future variations that would repeat those that have come before. Minimalism for its part is unashamedly ritualistic at times,[15] yet this self-awareness in turn desacralizes it. That said, since its inception several significant composers associated with minimalism have not simply appropriated but have openly engaged with religious and spiritual material.[16] As would be expected mutual antipathy reigned high in the twentieth century between the approaches to new music.[17]

As a model for literature, minimalist music could be described as the barely perceptible dawning of something different out of the forced awareness of the at once lulling, inescapable, and near-interminable repetition of the same. One reads Malory and cannot help but be aware of this same insistence in the sequence of adventures that are at times, frankly, monotonous. And yet we end up in the 'Morte' with something very different from what we start with in 'Arthur' and seemingly impossibly derived from it. As a working hypothesis that couples both palimpsest models for rewriting, I propose Malory draws upon his manifold sources for *stories* as a serialist composer creates musical passages by drawing from his or her selected set; Malory's *narrative*, however, functions as a minimalist work would, repeating processes in order to reveal that fragile germ of something different within the endless woods, and volumes, of Arthurian romance. The mythic and historic narratives exist at the intersection of these two processes. They tell distinct stories.

The next chapter is concerned with the sequencing that achieves this transformation through repetition, but here it is important to observe the primacy in this model of contingent facts in each and every iteration. Minimalism as a model engages with a common human experience of living

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15 Consider, for instance, Terry Riley's *In C* (1964), which along with La Monte Young's early works may be considered the origins for minimalist music. *In C*, a work for an indeterminate number of performers over an indeterminate amount of time, is constrained only by the order in which the performers begin playing the phrase they will repeat with whatever instrument it is they opt for (they can even skip ahead phrases). The work's score is effectively a set of instructions for the performance of a musical ritual process. It is not a set piece.

16 These include: Steve Reich whose works are increasingly concerned with aspects of Jewish faith; Philip Glass who has ranged from Hopi Indian beliefs (*Koyaanisqaatsi*) to Ancient Egyptian (*Akhnaten*) and composed an almost encyclopaedic approach to spirituality in a work commissioned for the turn of the millennium (Symphony no. 5); while the late Arvo Pärt's works were almost exclusively on traditional Christian themes.

17 Perhaps the most outspoken critic of minimalism amongst atonal (not strictly speaking serial, which is a subset of atonal) composers, Elliott Carter remained unequivocal late into his life: 'It's death' (Norris 2003). Robert Fink (2005, 63) summarizes Carter's comparisons of minimalism with fascism, the banality of advertising, and perhaps most significantly for my present purposes, and with the foregoing discussion of the sacrificial origins of civilization kept in mind:

   I cannot understand the popularity of that kind of music, which is based on repetition. In a civilized society things don't need to be said more than three times. (63)

Interestingly, Reich's typical response to serial music displays a sensitivity to localized facts and processes over time, a sensitivity that I feel is reflected in his musical practice and theory:

   Stockhausen, Berio, and Boulez [composers of atonal, and frequently of serial, works] were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces after World War II. But for some American in 1948 or 1958 or 1968 – in the real context of tailfins, Chuck Berry and millions of burgers sold – to pretend that instead we're really going to have the darkbrown Angst of Vienna is a lie, a musical lie. (Fink 2005, 118)

through and in repetitive processes, and an interest not just in why one is repeating, but how scenarios change. The serial model attempts never to repeat, yet in its conditions, outside time, it is doomed to repeat over the same set of data again and again. As synchronic, as fixed in a mimetic process, as eliminating repetition and the irrational maximally, it is the musical model equivalent of Girard's sacrificial mythic model. It is only by listening to the contingent, the changes that are revealed in the repetition of a minimalist model, that one becomes aware of the serial model's inherent, *a priori*, fatedness to repeat in its own conditions. This is why, in my view, Malory's work is so hard to pin down, since it alternates between the two models and at times tells both simultaneously. Replicating and revealing and undermining the universal sacrificial model; repeating and modulating and developing an alternate, localized, cultural model.

> 'Me forthynkith hit,' seyde kynge Pellynor, 'that thus shall me betyde, but God may well fordo desteny.' (120.9-10)

If God can, He does not. From a literary point of view we know Pellinor will die, but what the text problematizes is that while the mythic story's prophecy undoubtedly comes to pass, the emphasis on this aspect of Pellinor's death hides his murder and his murderer. Instead the myth casts Torre in the unenviable position of not being able to save Pellinor, recalling Balin with Columbe, just as Alyne's scenario did also. Myth tells us that Pellinor dies *because* Torre does not hear him. The story says that this is in fact true. History tells us that Gawain avenges his father's death on Pellinor. This in the story is also true, and has the added advantage of pointing out the repetition involved in the mythic story: the failure as scapegoat will always take the fall for the privileged transgressor, and that story will be hidden. The vertical privileged domain of the mythic is revealed each time in the localized and natural domain of the historic mode, but this does not reduce the power of the former – Pellinor will die, and Torre will not hear him to help. This remains true through to the 'Morte.' Not even Gawain's warning and advice from beyond the grave is sufficient to avert the final tragedy even though his advice is followed. The adder will have always been there to strike from the heath bush.

At least two things are certain: the space for a process to operate within is circumscribed by its conditions; and, Malory's many beginnings, his turns backwards and forwards, signal a change in conditions. The mythic cannot write the scapegoat's story; the victim cannot write the founding story for a cultural institution. The text then contains at least the conditions of both in its beginnings, and these are reasserted in its loops.

The Wedding

A brief synopsis of this tale is in order at this stage. First, there is a reiteration of war and Arthur's lineage. Second, there is Merlin, Arthur's sacred, mythic, legendary guide. Third, Guinevere – Arthur chooses with his heart now rather than choosing another wife out of fear for the prophesied future. Again, we can and should perhaps read this literally – from the beginning, *before* even the marriage contract between kings, Arthur *knows* Guinevere will love Lancelot. Fourth, the marriage contract is

agreed upon, and Guinevere's dowry is the Round Table and one hundred knights. All parties are pleased, except perhaps Guinevere, from whom we hear nothing. The legendary realm is nearly fully constituted, and the prologue to this tale ends. I will return to Torre's first appearance later.

Events at court follow – Gawain and Torre request to be knighted, in that order. One sentence is all that is allotted for the wedding feast preparations and the wedding itself. Torre is knighted first, for Arthur's hope for him, and regardless of his origins. Gawain second, for blood ties. We should pause here and backtrack a little – Pellinor is loved, and Torre also. We have seen already with Balin that strong bonds of loyalty attract murderous envy and violent mimetic rivalry rather than loving fellowship and stable political allegiance, and I repeat that this is already so from the very beginnings of the text and realm. Pausing again, Merlin gives the seat of honour to Pellinor who has helped secure Arthur's realm, and who killed Lott in a battle to retain sovereignty for Arthur. The text and Merlin's dialogue claim this is Pellinor's due. The text and Merlin know this secures Gawain and Gaheris's envy, and their conspiracy to murder Pellinor. But first Gaheris wishes to become more like Gawain, to become a knight also. The murder is made Pellinor's due in the same act as the honour due to him is asserted, and through the same man, Merlin, and through the same court and family line – Arthur and Gawain cannot be separated as mirrors and doubles in this respect. The adventure has not yet started, but the scapegoat has been identified. Another doubling: the inaugural adventure is a ritual re-enactment of Balin's sacrificial quest with a repeated stress on the knights' *return*, the significant point of difference between sacrifice-model and ritual-institution.

> At the level of the blood feud, in fact, there is always only one act, murder, which is performed in the same way for the same reasons, in vengeful imitation of the preceding murder. And this imitation propagates itself by degrees. It becomes a duty for distant relatives who had nothing to do with the original act, if in fact an original act can be identified; it surpasses limits in space and time and leaves destruction everywhere in its wake; it moves from generation to generation. In such cases, in its perfection and paroxysm mimesis becomes a chain reaction of vengeance, in which human beings are constrained to the monotonous repetition of homicide. Vengeance turns them into *doubles*. (Girard 1987, 12)

The first stage of Gawain's quest can be summarized as an encounter with doubles (the brothers he threatens, who return to Arthur's court), the murder of his own double (one who will not let others pass), and one transgression mapped onto another (his act without mercy is translated into the murder of a damsel). Fully engrossed in mimetic thinking, he never interprets himself as the aggressor, only as the victim. His only concern is that he is hurt, and he expresses this as self-pity for the feared loss of his arm. One of the damsels, exhibiting grace, shows more mercy on him than he certainly deserves by listening to him. He does not understand her but she takes pity on him for love of Arthur, his kin. On his return to court his deeds prompt prohibitions to be made explicit that could, given Gaheris's reaction to his actions, easily have gone unsaid.

> 'Alas,' seyde Gaherys, 'that ys fowle and shamefully done, for that shame shall never frome you. Also ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship.' (106.22-25)

However, Gawain's future actions demonstrate that he does not respect the prohibitions, or perhaps that he thinks himself immune. Always someone else is to blame, the scapegoat, and his actions are frequently transgressive throughout the work – up until the time he is set to die. Only then does he fully acknowledge his own fault and responsibility. The 'queste of ladyes' set on him, like his oath on the 'foure Evaungelystis,' and the shame Gaheris describes, are never mentioned again.

Torre likewise begins with a sequence of doubles. The first impasse he resolves without Gawain's anxiety over prestige by sending the doubles to Arthur, and in turn he receives a guide in the dwarf. The second set of doubles are the twin pavilions, he investigates each in turn discovering they are *not* the same. He locates and leaves with the object of his quest. When challenged he does not escalate the situation, as Gawain inevitably does, but invokes a knightly code not unlike Balin's:

'I shall abyde what adventure that commyth by the grace of God,' (111.8-9)

The remainder of Torre's quest is a sequence of examples of humility and piety: he attends Mass both mornings, he shows mercy, he pledges and keeps his oath, and in return a host-guest pact is formed in mutual gratitude. Contingent details at each stage of his quest preoccupy Torre. He is simple and pragmatic. Resolving events locally without fear or aggression, without deference to anything outside his present situation (for instance, his bloodline), is key to his ultimate success – his welcomed return to court where he receives worship and gifts. In effect, he goes about things with a reasonably generous spirit, and people repay that spirit in kind (the dwarf), in services (humble hospitality from the lady and her husband), and gifts (royal largess from Arthur).

Pellinor, however, appears utterly lost in the story. His purely object-centric 'Questing Beast' mode, like his quintessentially romantic, aimless, and triumphant stand in the forest against all comers (46.16-52.3), do not map onto *Le Morte Darthur*'s interpersonal relational quests. His first encounter, Alyne, a double of Balin's Columbe, he ignores. His second encounter is prefaced with an unusually lengthy (114.24-115.3) and detailed account of the scenario he is about to face. He thanks the labourer for the information, but completely disregards the specific characteristics and relationships of the people involved. He opts instead to first go directly after the quest 'object' herself, then, failing that, he treats the knights and the tents as he did those who encountered him in the forest earlier – submit or die. It is difficult to discern whether he is actively disinterested in pragmatic details, or simply unaware of them in his uncompromising commitment to the object of his quest. The weight is somewhat in favour of the latter interpretation given his repentance when he happens upon his daughter Alyne's head and the corpse of her beloved, and this before anything is revealed of her relationship to him. He is so lost in romance abstractions and ideals that even blood ties are a mystery for him – the precise contrary of Gawain. Nynyve's cousin, Meliot, is far from unjustified in his anxiety for her safety while in Pellinor's care (given what we have read in Torre's mother's report), however they uncover a plot against the king together. In effect Pellinor is no danger to the king or his realm, quite the opposite. But he does not 'get it.' Marked then as a scapegoat for his failures at every step, Merlin retrospectively applies a story as myth that translates failure into transgression, thus marking a tragic doom in his future. Pellinor, and those like him in Malory, are stuck in an eternal night where:

'Ye may as well ryde backwarde as forewarde, hit ys so durke.' (118.1-2)

Over and over, the work crosses back and forward across itself: actual transgressors (Gawain, Mark) contribute to communal unrest pushing time forward, while scapegoats are created by myth as it rewrites the past, always finding monstrous wrongs already done and forecasting a tragic Fate the scapegoat cannot escape. Pellinor sees and hears but fails to understand relationships, therefore he is fated to one day understand them and desperately need another person, and yet not be heard. This is mythic sleight of hand. Gawain kills Pellinor. He is envious and at times psychotic. Pellinor is the actual victim of violent rage, but must be understood as the perpetrator of a transcendent crime that demands divine wrath. *Le Morte Darthur* tells both tales in both directions in one voice that is becoming increasingly difficult to justify calling 'naïve.'

Where Luttrell sees a poorly executed variant of the *PVM Suite*'s corresponding tale, Field sees Malory following his own quite different take on what is important. For Field, Malory subordinates attention to detail in patterning of the mythological narrative elements[18] to a concern for 'the honour or dishonour each knight gains from his adventures' (Field 1998b, 105). He continues to develop this defence by contrasting the Post-Vulgate author's clear interest in demonstrating divine providence, as embodied by, for instance, mythological patterning, with Malory's narrative, which privileges a 'brute incoherence of history. It is a distinctive part of the character of Malory's book that we feel that, although its events may be purposive, that the purpose is hard to discern: the narrator rarely tells us what those purposes are, and may himself not know them.' (Field 1998b, 105). Field defends Malory's work from charges of obscurity and confusion 'compared with its source' (Field 1998b, 104), but does so by stating that Malory's purpose is elsewhere. Field gestures towards Malory's preference for: quests, the issues surrounding honour and dishonour, judicial evaluations of these, and a narrative that asserts what happened without pretence of a greater purpose for those happenings.

Far from introducing contingency simply for its own sake, or to evoke the numinous and vertical for romance reasons, or even as a nod to epic patterning (Vinaver 1966a), I believe *Le Morte Darthur* does all of these things *and* that the stochastic elements are there to interfere with mimetic thinking. Torre engages with them directly at every step. Gawain attempts to dominate and appropriate them. Pellinor ignores them. In the historic telling these elements are all there is to tell, from one sequence to the next. They are also the specific details that myth overwrites when it defers meaning vertically and far away from those who are truly responsible for violence. Where individuals are concerned, their values and contingent facts break up this mythic world of withheld knowing and epistemological mastery, and shatter it with glimpses of the real. Fittingly, this 'real' is filled with revelations of collective violence and victims, corpses and the imaginary sacred, the truth of 'justice.'

Pellinor answers the vertical call alone, and fails. Gawain, through blood contingencies (kinship), is immune and answerable only to himself. Torre is not absorbed in the vertical or

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18   This is not unlike his inconsistencies with minor characters' names. See Field (1998a).

himself, his locus of concern is always immediate and tangible – the local. Like Gareth, he shows pragmatic discretion about what he copies.[19] After Balin almost every knight can be understood by what and how they copy, how they are doubles for each other, how they occupy rivalry or modelling relationships with each other, or, on the contrary, the degree to which they engage with the local and contingent.

Tombs and Scapegoats

On one level at least *Le Morte Darthur* is an encyclopaedic series of explorations of mimesis and its ultimately unsustainable nature. We read forward in Malory a sequence of things that in fact (we have every reason to suppose) 'happened' in the narrative, the historic tale. We are 'told' backwards the mythic equivalents (and prophecies are merely these 'backward tellings' inverted, they have the same sacred imposition of meaning on the contingent, and smoothing out of inconsistencies, hiding of the tomb), which are no less real for their being mythic.

> What is essential is the cadaver as talisman, as the bearer of life and fertility; culture always develops as a *tomb*. The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the surrogate victim, the first most elemental and fundamental matrix of meaning. There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol. The above-ground tomb does not have to be invented. It is the pile of stones in which the victim of unanimous stoning is buried. It is the first pyramid. (Girard 1987, 83)

Balin's tomb is a cursed island accessed only by an enchanted bridge and on it is his sword bound in stone that at some stage floats unseen downstream. One way to distinguish the mythic from the historic in Malory is to look for the presence of tombs and the absence of bodies. Balin's tomb is clear but physically inaccessible, mythic – although the readers are privy to the whole process. Pellinor's is hidden from direct narrative, as are Lamerok's and Tristram's. They enter the historic mode through rumour, scandal, *noyse* – the growing historically-sustained suspicion of the truth behind the prophesied Fate for Pellinor, the known enmity of Lott's kin for Lamerok and his honour. Gaheris murders his mother, but will not kill Lamerok because he is unarmed. Gaheris needs Lamerok to fulfil his scapegoat role properly, in costume – yet historically we discover it was to be a cowardly ambush and collective murder by the many of the one. Near the end we have a tomb for Bagdemagus (1020.3-8), but no corpse at all (1211.30-32). Gawain-the-psychopath is itself a mythic construct, and not the character we thought we knew – Bagdemagus lives. Tombs, rumour, and absent corpses all hide the truth, but it becomes increasingly difficult amongst the work's escalating violence to discover what that truth really is. At its peak in the 'Morte' *all* we can *see* is violence, which is certainly no coincidence.

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19 Although, consider Galahad, who shows no real interest in imitating anyone. As the 'perfect knight' he is something of a special case. See 'Ending 'Tristram',' in chapter five.

While in myth the community's guilt and agency in the murder is transferred onto the victim and hidden there, the matter-of-fact, seductively naïve, narrative style in *Le Morte Darthur* reveals in historical mode the contingencies that myth never does. Myth smooths localized, specific, and unpalatable facts into sacred, communal, redemptive 'truths.' The paradox of a just society's foundation based on an undeserved collective murder is in Malory more than just hinted at or capable of being read 'between the lines.' The accusations by the commons, the prophecies by Merlin, the stripping of Balin's identifying markers, the gift of the white shield so the two brothers, doubles, destroy each other without contaminating the community with their own hands, the deaths themselves that occur physically outside of the community on an island and thus localize the pollution elsewhere – these are all simply stated as facts without elaboration or reason in Malory's work. Balin is not destroyed by God, directly or indirectly, in *Le Morte Darthur.*

This is not a sacred theatre, but like a good scapegoat Balin attracts blame wherever he goes and whatever he does and from almost all who encounter him. These are also facts for the crowd bent on casting out this victim knight who quested to save the realm. We know this from the beginning, since he is from elsewhere, Northumberland, and only just released from prison for a crime we have good reason to believe he was not guilty since, opinion and calumny aside, it is recorded as narrative fact again that he is identified through drawing the sword as *without* villainy. Yet, this succeeds only in generating envy and instigating new waves of mimetic rivalry centred on him. Balin avenges unjust wrongs against his kin at court and is exiled.[20] Lanceor, the 'orgulus' knight (67.9), prepares to follow him and bring him down, under *the pretext* of avenging the transgression at court, but *because* he is jealous of the good knight (67.7-14, 68.29-31). Balin will repeat this host/guest transgression again in Pellam's house,[21] but in each case it is a wrong that has no viable alternative in the situation for a knight of his character. His failures[22] are rewritten as transgressions, the collective murder is hidden beneath myth.

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20 It is hinted at in the text that this may in fact also be a long-standing blood feud, as it is more clearly in the French (n65.11-12, n65.31, n66.11-14). I read this as yet another example in Malory's version of Balin taking the blame as a scapegoat, particularly where those aligned with the supernatural are involved.

21 In that episode the demands of chivalry and Balin's adventure require Balin to not only kill the brother of the good, or at least 'god-fearing,' King Pellam (no less than the current divinely-sanctioned custodian of the Holy Grail itself), but in the process to absolutely violate the laws of hospitality, the sanctity of the feast and host-guest bonds. Malory constructs this as avoidable by Balin only if he abandons this one chance offered to avenge and amend through Garlon's blood the damage Garlon has committed to those under Balin's protection. The consequences here and later of this forced choice between terrible options hinge upon Balin doing very specifically what the narrative logic demands is *best* as a *knight*, and that he make his best efforts to defend himself afterward. Consequently, I do not see even this very serious transgression by Balin as other than paradoxically confirming his status as one of the best of knights at that time. As noted in the text above this choice between bad and worse has similar personal stakes and contingent circumstances as Balin faces with the Lady of the Lake at Arthur's court.

Such a move has precedents as early as Homer's treatment of Herakles in *The Odyssey*, 21.25-30. Homer makes no mention of Herakles as a failure, or missing the mark – at this early stage in western literature the archetypal hero Herakles was branded utterly recreant for his transgressions. That is, he was already a scapegoat of myth.

22 Here and elsewhere by 'failure' and 'failing' I always refer to the 'missing the mark' sense discussed above, and do not intend anything at all like a moral judgement.

Malory's work turns the tale *onto* myth. Not from an abstract distance, but from specifically localized times and places it *views* the sacred, sacrificial function the corresponding tales *represented* in the *PVM Suite*. *Le Morte Darthur* reveals the community's role in the tale, and yet it refuses to challenge or judge anyone's part in it. For Malory's work, as in Girard's, it is imperative, if one is to escape sacrificial thinking, not to continue the cycle of blaming. Hence in Malory the full gamut of mythic elements are represented, and they function mythically, alongside the limits of the mythic: it is insufficient to withhold escalating violence over time (it is a synchronic not diachronic solution – one can map it structurally, and attempt to recreate, *to repeat*, the instant of the solution, but it has no duration of its own); and, it is contradicted by a paratactic history, one that is aware of and reports contingencies without seeking to universalize what it reports.

The sense of disproportionate narrative punishment or, and without wishing to sound overly petulant, of 'unfairness,' is more robust when we see the comparative consequences in 'The Wedding' for Pellinor and Gawain. The latter lets his rage go free when another slights him – his overwhelming priority is to protect his sense of his and his kin's dominance. Gawain exhibits a pronounced anxiety over social prestige, always protecting his status amongst mimetic rivals. For the bulk of *Le Morte Darthur*, and in contrast with the majority of Malory's models, Gawain's *condision* or *ēthos* is characterized by unchecked and rapidly escalating antagonistic rivalry, mimesis of a runaway variety, going beyond bounds, and transgressing (Wilson 1934, 40-53, esp. 41, 45-6). It is also precisely the sort of escalating violence, generating 'paroxysms' of mimetic crises, as Girard might say (1987, 12), that necessitates further scapegoats, prohibitions, and ritual. Pellinor, coming last, failing – as Balin did just prior – loses and will lose much more than Gawain. The Pentecostal Oath-swearing ritual is established, sanctions are placed on Gawain, Torre is rewarded, but Gawain will kill Pellinor and the blood feud will not stop there.

Shortly after the community confirms Arthur's reign, the Round Table is constituted, and the prohibitions and ritual of the Pentecostal Oath also. But after the wedding feast's 'marvel' there is the inaugural ritual of Arthurian chivalric adventure itself. The *aventure* ritual is formalized with one fundamental and distinguishing departure from the structure of Balin's tale briefly mentioned already – the knights *must return* to court and relate truthfully what happened. The cornerstone and workhorse of Malory's episodes is this romance standard recast as an imitation of the founding sacrifice – the bi-directional *aventure*, the going out and coming home. The lack of the latter is precisely what upsets Arthur in the 'Sankgreal' and signals the beginning of the end for the Round Table and his realm. The knights' mimetic rivalry proves this by expressing itself not in controlled rituals, but in widespread mutual murder in the 'Sankgreal.' In this book, the most overtly spiritual in the work, responsibility for violence and woe is manifestly human in origin and not divine when knight meets knight and they kill each other. What is *most* tragic and disturbing in Malory's work is very often not the supernatural, but the innately human character of mimesis revealed as escalating violence and mutually-assured destruction. None of which is to suggest that the narrative, and specifically characteristics of the narrative's world including those outlined in the previous chapter, are able to operate as if the supernatural were other than overwhelmingly powerful. Mythic operations too, are real in the story.

Here then, in the third tale of the work with the Round Table, king, and queen only just established the institutions are revealed as already fundamentally flawed. The *agon*, contest, is insufficient from a ritual point of view to expiate tension. A knight's failure leads to him becoming a sacrificial victim, but this does not halt further violence. The Pentecostal Oath's prohibitions against transgressions to safeguard the community are powerless against a privileged family within the same community, and that family is already bent on revenge in the name of a blood feud. Merlin as seer/counsel is steeped in the mythic and either cannot see how to stop the cycle of violence, or, read more cynically, depends upon it and the sacred for his own form of authority. He is, perhaps, as corrupt in this sense as the high priests of antiquity were regarded to be. Nevertheless, Merlin does not ever find a way to help the victim/scapegoat escape their Fate, nor does he point the finger at those who bring about the scapegoat's destruction.[23]

If there is anything unusual for us in the idea of the coupling of failure with the contest as the primary function of selecting a scapegoat, and then mythically translating him or her into the horrendous, sacred, transgressor role, it is made more jarring in Malory by the text's general rule that good knights, all other things being equal and prohibitions respected, *do not lose*. What sense we do get of the imminent unexpected in Malory's work is rarely due to uncertainty over the victory or defeat of any major character. For instance, in book three we are told that it is by treason or enchantment alone that Lancelot has any reason to fear being bested (253.8-12), and in part the book proceeds to establish just that. Given the narrator's typically loose treatment of the term 'treason' we may well understand this to mean at least any breach of the Pentecostal Oath or of established knightly conduct. Indeed it is by transgressions of these same codes that Pellinor, Lamerok, and Tristram are defeated. And each in turn is less successfully hidden than the one that preceded him, all the way back to Balin. With each murder the noise and scandal of Gawain and his kin spreads and is repeated more frequently, violence escalates, and then – in a notable calm – Agravain and Mordred plot.

On the mythic level each of these victim characters, except Tristram,[24] is portrayed as transgressing *after the fact of failing*, even as it becomes increasingly clear that their death has nothing to do with failure except to fulfil the scapegoat mechanism. Instead it is always a transgressive murder originating from mimetic rivalry (for the most part of the 'blood feud' variety) masked as a casting out of a heinous transgressor.

The mythic understanding of Fate as an agent is revealed as narrative fact – albeit a murky fact, yet this is necessarily so for vertical motivation to operate, and for myth to preserve its characteristics as myth, as sacred. The work proceeds serially to combine and recombine variations on these themes in sequences of juxtapositions of terms until finally as Guinevere is to be burnt alive Lancelot saves her complete with more than sufficient justification for his substitution as the

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23 Consider, though, how Nynyve's modelling relationship with Merlin as her mentor concludes with him buried alive. Merlin *allows* his love for her to override his basic need to prohibit her mimesis of him becoming a threat to him.

24 Tristram's final demise is a direct consequence of Mark's envy.

sacrifice. The many do coalesce on him, the one, and the many destroy themselves. The exact opposite, that is, of what happened with Balin. The outcome is absolutely opposite, the function is just the same – the community clears violence from itself by whatever desperate means possible, even its own self-destruction. It is the same outcome Girard predicts[25] for those primitive societies who cannot successfully carry the scapegoat mechanism through to a transcendent sacrifice – the designated victim is still expelled but by way of the community's destruction. The same scenario and bloody mayhem Lucretius via Serres attributes to Athens beset by plague.[26]

Lancelot's mimetic modelling on Arthur concludes with Guinevere as an object whom they both effectively renounce some short time after her successful rescue. There is violence in the rescue, which Lancelot never fears but since book three he has learnt to avoid perpetuating (see the next chapter), working instead to uncover and protect the victim. Hence he becomes the victim par excellence for rivalry, a genuine transgressor and threat. He is so obviously these things, as well as a clear and loyal ally, that making him the community's scapegoat will itself necessarily fail. Everything about the situation is too revealed to function as myth, although this is precisely what Gawain's challenges to him over the death of the innocent Gareth amount to. Lancelot the recreant, treasonous, knight is a mythic fiction too, and acknowledging this is at the core of Gawain's deathbed dialogue and letter.[27] We have already observed that before even the wedding contract was brokered Arthur knew of Lancelot and Guinevere – Merlin's prophecy there certainly unhinges future potential for the scapegoat mechanism to work. I am uncertain, but perhaps, again, this suggests Merlin is far from innocent of the purposes he serves in his role, that he has from the beginning only ever worked to further the interests of the sacred and the continuation of violence – at any rate, his crucial role in the foundation of cultural institutions in Malory is undeniable. Returning to the later books: Lancelot, for his part, has already experimented with this scapegoat role through Mellyagaunce, where Lancelot's wrong was to be righted (he is and is not a great harm to society) and his death is to be hidden (imprisoned in a secret dungeon – a dishonourable end, and one which would, if successful, have forced his absence to defend his cause at court as a final and cowardly breach of his word).

I suggest that Lancelot cannot be made a scapegoat because he does not fail mimetically. The failure Lancelot experiences, is a profoundly *personal* variety of failure, notably in the 'Sankgreal,' but elsewhere also. For now it is enough to observe from near the end of 'The Castle of Corbenic': 'Now I thanke God, […] for Hys grete mercy of that I have sene, for hit suffisith me' (1018.3-4). He does not compare his experience with that of others. He has understood, as few of the other knights do, that mimetic rivalry with others, particularly in the Grail quest, leads only to senseless bloodshed. He had to overcome his own faults, not other knights, which in turn circles back to the

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25 Extinction is the alternative always proposed for the scapegoat mechanism in Girard's work (1987). See, for instance, p96 and the surrounding chapter ('The Process of Hominization,' 84-104) on the 'sanctuaries' of co-habitant groups formed through this sacrificial process in preference to the extremes of violence elsewhere.

26 See 'Conduct' above, and the quotation on p60 in particular.

27 See chapter six.

primacy of conduct as well as the Browning quotation this chapter opened with. The divine is almost a red herring in the 'Sankgreal' as the focus narrows upon the personal and local and we are led further and further from all things sacred: mimesis, ritual, and cycles of violence. Lancelot's confrontations are increasingly with himself and the faults within. It is anti-mimetic, and anti-rivalry. He is no longer visibly concerned that others have seen more than him, which goes some way to suggest he has, for a mimetic reading of Malory's work, actually understood what is wrong with human behaviour. He has correctly gauged that he must battle his own self (isolated on a boat, wearing a hair shirt, etc.), while the other knights engage in unchecked mimetic rivalry and slaughter each other. Galahad's objectives are barely hinted at in dialogue – they are presumed to be purely divine in origin. His is not the path for the likes of Lancelot, let alone Gawain, or the others.

Without the scapegoat, or rather with the scapegoat and no community, there is no proposed 'truste to truste in.' However from the beginning dual easily overlooked, and always individualized, notions suggest themselves as alternatives in Malory – *ēthos* and God. Kindness and honour are not necessarily just 'good things' that the text advocates, they are perhaps the only and the local route to good, non-sacrificial, non-violent, relations between people and hence community. Institutions on the other hand are portrayed as inherently corrupt from their foundations and through their operations. Certainly, no exception is made for Rome – the true Christian ideal is firmly located on the land, with hermits living amongst the woods, or at most in small churches where a travelling knight can enjoy a basic meal and attend Mass in the morning.

Both Lamerok and Tristram will die as scapegoats also and it is absolutely significant that Malory's text does not tell their deaths synchronously with their dying. It is known to happen as a future certainty, and then it has happened as a travesty of the past. From future to perfect tense, the moment of their murder within the cycle of violence cannot be directly viewed, just as we can only see Balin's through the community's myth of founding violence. In this light 'Tristram' may have been abandoned not, perhaps, because of the interminability of what had already gone, but – more in keeping with Malory's selective criteria[28] – because what was to come, another blood sacrifice, was altogether too much.

We can now see why providence plays no role in Malory's text. Fate operates not as part of some grand plan, but tragically through human nature as understood via the scapegoat mechanism. As such there is good reason for a Christian narrator like Malory to keep God and His acts distinct from the narrative's use of Fate. The vertical motivation of the romance world from the previous chapter is this same character-bound imperative to mimetic violence and human efforts to constrain, redirect, or transcend it – to reach beyond their grasp.

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28   Vinaver's commentary has a number of references to the omission in Malory of the violent details of wars, battles, and even duels. For instance, with respect to 'Balin,' see n74.9-15 and n75.28, whereas on a grander scale there is the removal of any war on Lancelot's return to England in the 'Morte' (see p50 fn46). Conjecturally we might suppose Malory's preference for the *PVM Suite* over the *VM Suite*, with the latter's greater emphasis on warfare, is similarly motivated. On the 'Roman War' see the next chapter.

Contingency

In effect, and for the most part, the narrative structures events and the world in one or several senses of the Middle English word *aventure*. The text takes the subject as the model for its own writing. In so far as it is a model it operates as a *process*, structurally akin to how I have described minimalist music, where the form is repeated so as to read the effect of the contingent on the same. The contingent to myth, as the *clinamen* to laminar flow, or the minimally differentiated to repeating musical forms, is the slow and barely perceptible genesis of something wholly new and different. One experiences adventure through the telling of adventures where the field of vision is limited and contingency subverts any attempt to absolute knowledge of what is really going on in any privileged way.

From the *Middle English Dictionary*:

1. (a) Fate, fortune, chance; one's lot or destiny; in *plur.*: one's fortunes, one's circumstances; the outcome of something; dame ∼, Dame Fortune, the goddess Fortuna; [...]

2. (a) Something that happens, an event or occurrence; an experience; an accident; *plur.* events, vicissitudes; [...] (b) a misfortune, a mishap, an accident; [...]

3. (a) Danger, jeopardy, risk; (b) an (in) ∼, in doubt, doubtful, uncertain, hazardous, in fear of (sth.); [...]

4. (a) A venture, an enterprise; a knightly quest; [...] (b) an adventure, an exploit, a daring deed; ∼ of armes, a feat of arms; fonden (seken) ∼, to seek adventures, undertake a dangerous task, go on a quest as a knight-errant.

5. A marvelous thing (action, occurrence), a wonder, a miracle.

6. A tale of adventures, an account of marvelous things.

(s.v. 'aventure, n.' last accessed February 20, 2014, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED3150) [29]

While the Old French *cheance* includes meanings such as: 'chance; fortune; fall (of dice); luck; circumstance(s), situation' (Hindley, Langley, and Levy 2006).[30] In Malory the ambiguity is not merely played with between *aventure* as Fate and *aventure* as a happening – the two, representing respectively the mythic and the historic or localized, are scratched on the same surface in the same word (for example, see p34). Both stories are the same story pointing in opposite directions, yet only one story could be occupied by a person, while the other occupies our minds, politics, laws,

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29 For the purpose of references to the previous chapter's concerns with the work's mythic tier, note the parallels with Ancient Greek's *tukhe* (τύχη):

1. The good which man obtains (τυγχάνει) by the favour of the gods, good fortune, luck, success; hence Τύχη was deified, like Lat. Fortuna. 2. Generally, fortune, chance, good or bad. 3. Rarely of positive, ill fortune, i.e. if they are killed, by ill-luck [...]. 5. Adverbial usages, by chance. 6. A chance, hap, accident, [...] mishaps, misfortunes. (Liddell and Scott 1977)

30 Compare with the Old French noun *mescheance*, 'misfortune, mishap, accident, mischance; wickedness, malice' (Hindley, Langley, and Levy 2006).

and legends. In this light we can further understand why the narrator, and perhaps Malory himself, 'woll nat say' that Arthur will return (1242.26). Ultimately the text will not give way to myth, nor will it deny myth its own kind of power.[31] Over and over Malory reminds us of both story passages – forward through lived experience, backward through myth. *Aventure* as *cheance* and *hap* is the contingent amongst the mythic, and leads us to literature in the sense quoted from Serres previously (see p59).

Torre is brought to court by his father who reports his son's wish to be knighted. Aryes the cowherd laments that Torre is different from his brothers *in his conduct*, utterly unlike them – he will not work, he is obsessed with the seemingly idle pursuits of chivalry. For Arthur, Torre is more significantly different from his brothers *in his appearance*. From his mother we are told he was conceived 'half be force' (101.14), she was raped, most likely (Batt 1997, 86-8), or at the least she was violently dealt with. The knight responsible took her greyhound (101.17), it was stolen and so another violence. In the wake of the wedding feast 'marvel' and its various riotous happenings (Nynyve's abduction, her noise, the bratchet's theft, knocked over tables, and so on), in the relative calm that follows, and through the course of action Merlin sets out, the violence brought into court will be taken back out into the lands, and order will be re-established. The *aventure* ritual, in three instances, is proposed to remedy the violence and noise that has interrupted the feast, itself another ritual, and one soon to be associated with the Pentecostal Oath ritual also. What differentiates these adventures from their models is the plainness of new details, the matter-of-fact way the knights' engage with the world and other characters, and the diminished presence of the other-worldly. What differentiates the three tales from each other is conduct, a reflection of each knight's character, his *ēthos*. The shift from the founding myth to the first ritual adventures is accompanied by the absence of the crowd and the crowd's voice – specific people in specific places say specific things at specific times. Gawain attempts to drown their voices out with his own outrage and shouting, or to silence them with blows and death. Pellinor ignores the voices. Torre listens and speaks to them in turn. The three are differentiated through the contingent as a *clinamen* to the adventure ritual. The contingent reveals how the scapegoat is selected in his or her failure. Myth overwrites the contingent when it tells its tale of apostasy and transgression – no account is made for circumstances in the judgement of Pellinor or in Merlin's prophecy for him. Everything is phrased in the flawless logic of absolutes. Fate is written without concern for conditions or happenings. Historically the opposite is true, Fate clearly derives from them, but this history is hidden.

The scapegoat is always the one who *happened* to draw the short straw – the first signifier according to Girard (1987, 99-104, esp. 100). Contrary to myth's stress on inevitability, the short straw is a stochastic selector. Vinaver notes in his commentary to 'all that maade an unhappy knyght' (90.15): 'The epithet refers to the consequences of the knight's action, not to his situation,

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31 '[S]om *men say* in many partys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede [...] *and men say* that he shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse. [...] *And many men say* that there ys written upon the tumbe thys vers[...]' (1242.22-28, my italics).

character, or feelings. It qualifies the verb rather than the noun.' While he also notes that Balin's 'unhappy sword' (89.22-23) is not described so in the French. Once again, in this doubled sword that will be Galahad's and Lancelot's in time – as with the blank shield that undoes Balin, and Pellinor's seat of honour at the Round Table – things have a recurrent role in selecting the one from the many to the detriment of the one. In myth happenings collude with Fate. In history we see the human hand in 'Fate' and localized conditions for action in 'happenings.' The gloss in Vinaver and Field's third edition to the *Works* refers to this use of 'unhappy' as meaning 'ill-starred,' which fittingly locates cause and responsibility for the events not within the character, but within the world itself, which we can understand as both supernatural and the trace of collective murder rewritten.

Luck, as a form of blessing and fortune as we understand it, must be distinguished from Fate, as a necessary role one is bound to play and driven by sacrificial logic for the scapegoat. Similarly, unlucky in the French is distinct from unhappy in Malory, bound as the latter is typically with events, things, people sometimes, as an ill-occurrence, an ill-omened, or ill-chanced 'hap,' happening. That is, it is contingent, anti-mythic, literary, and a decisive part of the story *of* the adventure *and as* an adventure in its own right. Malory's Lancelot, Galahad, and perhaps Tristram are 'lucky' in this sense, and they owe their blessings to God.[32]

Much is omitted in Malory's 'Balin,' including battle scenes – the role of war here is a distraction to myth – and a visit to Bloyse by Merlin (perhaps 'understood' to have happened, but more significant is the resulting communal knowledge (and forgetting) of Balin aided by it *not* being recorded in the way we have heard it told authoritatively by Bloyse), but considering the subject matter the reduction of religious material is particularly curious. On the Dolorous Stroke, Vinaver writes:

> There are significant omissions in Malory's account of this scene. He refrains from describing the miraculous qualities of the lance which stood perpendicularly […]. He omits the voice which says to Balin: 'In an unlucky hour will you enter there, for you are not worthy to enter such a holy place,' and in the next paragraph a similar warning which Balin hears as he is about to seize the sacred lance […]. In the French as in the Spanish versions the Dolorous Stroke is treated as divine retribution for the violation of a sanctuary. To Malory it has no such significance, even though he reproduces on the same page the traditional account of the origin of the Grail lance. (1316)

Luck and God are consistently removed in Malory's version, while everyone except Balin appears to know exactly what is about to happen and who shall do it. For example: 'A, Balyne! Thou hast done […]' (86.3). In his commentary Vinaver notes that in the French work these people address Balin as 'chevaliers,' as one would expect them to for a strange knight wreaking havoc in their land. There is, then, an unmistakable mythic sense that Balin, and no other, is *bound* to do exactly as he does. He did not wander into this sequence of events by chance or by bad luck, nor does this appear to be the result, in this telling, of a curse for having transgressed a man or God. He is known by name *by the*

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32   As discussed in the previous chapter, 'The Unstable Chivalric World,' including p37 fn28.

commons, implying a *local lore* or *prophecy* as convincing and ominous as anything Merlin utters. In fact, almost nothing, animate or otherwise, is silent in Balin's presence. The world rejects and outcasts him on the mythic level. The community claim and appear to believe this but the specifics of his death haunt the text uneasily. As we have seen with Pellinor, this is because the contingent facts of the matter suggest a very different story. The known and distinctly human agent, which the text insists repeatedly is responsible for Pellinor's supposedly divinely sanctioned Fate, retrospectively adds even more doubt to the already suspect tale of Balin's death.

In other words, the violence of the system and society is first revealed, and second, is unwelcome – tragic even – but it does not stop. With 'The Wedding' tale nearly over, the two models of telling established, we are left with the Pentecostal Oath.

The Oath Ritual

The Pentecostal Oath plays a role in Malory that seems at once hard to overstate, and also distressingly easy to misplace and so overstate in the wrong direction. On the straightforward, incontrovertible, textual level it is, along with the Round Table itself and the annual Pentecostal feast, a ritual and institution for the chivalric fellowship. Given the preceding arguments for a sacrificial scapegoat reading of 'Balin' and 'The Wedding,' the Oath is also, in its outline, specifics, and location in the text, precisely the set of communal prohibitions one would expect to emerge after the founding collective murder. Each and every clause is directly concerned with controlling mimetic rivalry, and so it attempts to prevent the escalation of violence that ensues when mimesis is left unchecked.

> […] and charged them never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and allwayes to fle treson,
> (120.17-18)

Outrage and murder are fairly obvious candidates for prohibition if a community is to survive. Treason in Malory has long been the subject of a vast array of scholarly proposals and debate. In this context it is very unlikely to have been intended to signify our contemporary restrictive sense of 'betrayal of one's sovereign,' although I grant it is not impossible that this was the case. Given that Lott's sons have been mentioned in two consecutive tales already as intending to avenge their father's death, I think it is reasonably safe to interpret 'treason' here as 'transgression of communal bonds' – infighting amongst the knights and possibly the wider community.[33]

> and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, (120.18-19)

This clause speaks very directly to Gawain's recent conduct. In fact, while others have died in combat already, the close proximity of these first three prohibitions suggests Arthur's understanding that if others behaved like Gawain did there could be no fellowship, or even

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33 On horizontal bonds and treason in Malory, see Leitch (2010). Also of relevance is Leitch's research on roughly contemporaneous works published by Caxton (Leitch 2012).

community. Prohibitions follow directly from what the community understands as the conditions for the escalation of violence in the crisis preceding the collective murder.

> uppon payne of forfiture of their worship and lordship of Kynge Arthure for evirmore; (120.19-20)

The emptiness of the threatened punishment for Arthur's own kin in this clause is a source of communal anxiety for the remainder of the fellowship's existence. As myth this prohibition should be sufficient to safeguard against violence, but historically we read that Arthur's blood-ties guarantee immunity.[34] Nepotism, in this case applied literally to Arthur's nephews, is a key problem for the effectiveness of prohibitions – contingent blood relations undermine the abstract mythic resolution to violence.

> and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe. (120.20-23)

In this case the mythic transgressions of Balin (with respect to Columbe) and Pellinor (with Alyne) are prohibited, with a punishment that both get for other reasons entirely. Balin's vengeance on the Lady of the Lake is collapsed with Gawain's 'accident' in his first adventure. Women as objects of mimetic rivalry for primitive societies, and for this sequence of prohibitions, demand death for their violation, suggesting an even more pronounced anxiety than for outrage, murder, or treason.[35] However, the undesirability of death and exile seem almost matched in *Le Morte Darthur*, with only madness for competition.

> Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell, for no love ne for no worldis goodis. (120.23-24)

Knights fight, but this prohibition attempts to restrict fighting only to 'rightful' 'quarells.' Mimetic doubles are by nature indistinguishable as rivals, thus this restriction reveals its own ultimate insufficiency. One purpose of the text's progress is to attempt to understand what is 'rightful.'

> So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde, both olde and yonge, and every yere so were they sworne at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste.
>
> Explicit the Weddyng of Kyng Arthur.(120.25-28)

Leitch (2010) argues convincingly that this repetition belies a fundamental unrest in the society for the feared and abject-ified communal 'other' within,[36] employing by way of elucidation Lacan's concept of *l'extimité* via Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work on the monstrous in medieval texts (1999, xiii,

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34   This is true even for third parties such as the damsel who arranged Gawain's release. Kay's character is similarly problematic at times, yet his position is secure thanks to Arthur's promise to Kay's father and Arthur's foster-father, Ector.

35   See Cherewatuk (2006, 89), Batt (2002, 64, 68), Armstrong (2003, 36).

36   In particular, note:

> However, the reiteration [of the Oath annually] also indicates darker aspects of the nature of this community, revealing that its sociolinguistic bonds need to be continually renewed or reified. This continual danger of slipping, of breaking, expressly suggests the limitations of the Arthurian realm.
>
> Thus, in his tragic representation of a moribund chivalric world, Malory seems very aware that the breach of contract that treason constitutes is never fully separable from idealized personal bonds – and seeks to ensure that his audience cannot forget it either. (Leitch 2010, 114)

4).[37] But, however we choose to expand on the troubled kernel within the fellowship, particularly the roles of treason and traitors with which Leitch (2010, 111-2) subtly qualifies her overall agreement with Whetter (2005) on 'Balin,' the scapegoat mechanism coupled with the process of mimetic rivalry provides a straightforward functional model for the work. Further, Girard's theory explains how violence escalates, along with the purpose of its and myth's existence in the first place, and without recourse to psychoanalytic theory.

Thus: everyone swears, and every year they will do the same. The end of this tale is a ritual to forestall further violence within the community, and so to avoid another sacrifice, and yet it will not be enough. This also is the gradual realization of characters gained through the many reiterations of the adventure ritual, particularly in the pairings of Palomides and Tristram, Gawain and Lancelot. The development of their relationships to and through mimetic crises will be considered in the next and following chapters.

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37   On Lacan, Jung, and Žižek, see p9.

III. STORYTELLING

> The young barbarians want to be again at play. If it were to be only cricket or boating, it would be innocent enough; but they are going to gamble away their lives and their country, taking their chances in the lottery of love and of business and of politics, with a sporting chance thrown in, perhaps, of heaven. [...] They think that the war – perhaps the last of all wars – is over!
>
> Only the dead are safe; only the dead have seen the end of war. Not that non-existence deserves to be called peace; it is only by an illusion of contrast and a pathetic fallacy that we are tempted to call it so. (Santayana 1922, 101-102)

Malory's 'Lancelot,' by our previous criteria, is an adventure ritual – a hero goes out from court into the world and he returns. The tale itself is divided by Caxton into eighteen chapters with fairly apt rubrics. Each chapter I propose consists of at least one episode, and the sequence – the ordering principle – of those episodes is crucial.[1] Vinaver held that Malory de-threaded the French Arthurian Cycles' narrative interlace, and that the resultant groupings could be identified by common thematic threads or plots – the 'a' in the consolidated series 'a¹, a², a³' the 'b' in 'b¹, b²,' and so on.[2] Consequently there sometimes remain traces of distinct episodes within each group, while the connection between one consolidated series and the next is considered loose, if it is even considered a connection at all. If we treat an episode as a discrete block of narrative, whether action or dialogue or description, and are guided by the perspective as discussed in the previous chapter,[3] an unusual but clear directional force operates through almost all sequences. And this is the topic I address in this chapter.

Of the many possible approaches to episodic structure in Malory, a cohesive narrative progression can be discerned by expanding on and contrasting the complementary central arguments in Stephen Knight (1969, esp. ch. 3 and 4, 35-58 and 59-76) and Felicity Riddy (1987). One of Knight's primary hypotheses is that the work shifts from an additive narrative style that stresses some strong degree of independence for each episode to one that integrates episodes to allow for a climactic progression, and that this shift happens with the 'Lancelot and Elaine' tale late in Malory's 'Tristram.'

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1   On the 'episode,' see p2 fn4.

2   'Malory's most successful and historically most significant contribution to the technique of the prose tale was his attempt to substitute for the method of "interweaving" the modern "progressive" form of exposition' (lxviii). It was a point Vinaver continued to develop over his career (1971, 128-9).

3   That is, we take at face value what is and is not taken seriously by the narrator. This situation, as discussed above, has characteristics in common with *cinéma vérité* – it is asserted that the narrative records faithfully what happens on the surface, and has no more authority than the reader to evaluate whether the surface in turn is reliable or not. As we shall see, 'Lancelot' in particular but by no means alone, is almost continuously preoccupied with both the undeniable truth value of the surface, the surface as fact, and how utterly misleading the same surface can simultaneously be.

If the author is to avoid a sense of boring repetition and to avoid a proliferation of
similar detail he must have a continuing narrative thread, and it may well be that at
some stage in the 'rehersing' of the Tristram Malory realized that the simple episodic
narrative suited more ambitious stories as ill as the polyphonic style apparently suited
his artistic temperament. This is supposition, of course, but what is clear is that as
soon as he has recounted the story of Lancelot and Elaine he sees the course of his
Arthuriad clear to the end; from then on the tragic relationship of Arthur, Guinevere
and Lancelot occupies the centre of the story. (59-60)

On the other hand, Riddy finds internal coherence of a kind within the eight books taken separately
by tracing each book's thematic confidences and anxieties in turn.

Knight looks for structural consistencies and finds meaningless additive processes, not without
a certain charm, but these are finally overwhelmed by the narrator's desire for continuity (geared
towards the realm's destruction, albeit). As opposed to the earlier tales, wavering here and there on
a gradient of focal consistency, he marks a place in the work after which the focus apparently stops
shifting. He then evaluates what follows based on an assumption that once settled the story *ought*
to stay settled on that thematic.[4] Riddy looks for meaning and finds loose collectives of concerns
pulling away from each other, and concludes by appreciating the text as one where division,
essentially, is conjoined (139).

Both positions are compelling for quite different reasons – of course a critic's expectations and
concerns condition what is taken into account for analysis, and thus from that ground one's
findings must emerge. My reading is naturally no different in that respect. I am interested in what I
feel is of continuous significance within the narrative, what residue there is left when 'boring
repetition and [...] a proliferation of similar detail' have dropped beneath the threshold of notice, or
when the same is paradoxically conspicuous. By reading for the small exceptions, and for the
repetitious that reveals these singularities, one can interpret Malory's concern with division and
seeming episodic monotony, for Riddy and Knight respectively, as assuming an important role as
symptoms or side-effects of a different narrative process. A process that will also explain why the
style changes – although not so sharply nor in so localized a fashion as Knight claims above. Instead,
both factors may be understood as derived from a form of narrative *insistence*, Malory's unique
variant of romance's repetition with variation.

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4   Knight's fourth chapter (59-76) is for the most part a literary critique of the degree to which the text
     succeeds in following through on an authorial intention he has ascribed to it. For example, on the various
     hermits and their exegeses throughout Malory's 'Sankgreal':

     [...] this technique is rather slow and obvious: it is a part of the great medieval allegorical tradition
     that can produce works as fine as *Piers Plowman*, but it hardly suits Malory's style as we have seen it
     before and will see it again, that style where the narrative moves forward consistently and meaning is
     found only in action or in dialogue. In this respect, as in the other literary failings of the Grail, the
     comparison with the surrounding tales is to the disadvantage of this tale, for if it stood alone these
     narrative idiosyncrasies would not seem so bad. (66)

     In other words: if only Malory were doing what Knight's argument states he is doing (staying consistent),
     then the tales, in so far as they are a single progressive narrative (focally consistent), would be greatly
     improved in Knight's estimation.

These disjointed episodes and clusters of episodes are indeed structured additively, one after another, and this results in an accumulation of weight to the narrative's *sens*. The repetition of episode types (jousts, duels, rescues, tournaments, lists of names, and so on), along with the territories on which they occur (bridges, deep/great forests, rivers, glades, castles, prisons, fountains/wells, lone trees), particularly obvious in the more usual romance setting outside of Malory's 'Roman War' book, through seemingly relentless repetition stop being related to description or scenery and begin to function as an insistence on desire, the *will*, and available directions for desire's flow. Reading the adventures we *follow paths* that connect or disconnect territories and agency or, not infrequently, paths like those through forests that turn knights literally and metaphorically around and around in loops.

The text's *matière* is a discourse of an itinerary, it tells the story of the '*this* then *that* then *this*…,' the paratactic '1 + 1 + 1 + …,' of Malory's episodic romance adventures. The text's *sens* is an itinerary of that discourse in turn, where the emotions, desires, and active will of the participants in those repetitious adventures are gathered and drive the characters and narrative action on. Because this emotional memory gathers in weight through repetition we cannot properly speak of a return of the same as we might with myth. Each iteration is different by virtue of it being '*n* + 1' in the series, where *n* is the previous occurrence. A given kind of event's first and last instances are certainly worth paying particular attention to, however the tenth or twentieth time two knights rush each other like wild boars – not so much.[5] The 'middles' of these sequences are instead primarily about restricted, redirected, or forced 'flow,' where it is possible or necessary to go, or what may be done, and not so much about the experience of that going or doing – beyond the audience's pleasure derived from reading the small independent adventure episode itself, of course.

Hence I refer to 'emotional weight' since it is the character's ability to express or act on their desires that is most frequently problematized. As Girard hypothesized regarding ritual, repetition may invoke the original collective murder and the calm that followed it, but for all of the participants' efforts to recreate it formally in exactitude, the instances' effectiveness weaken over time. A significant mythic and historic event gradually becomes a more general process that we glaze over and the narrator tersely mentions in passing, and what stands out instead are the exceptions, the territory, and the players – the contingent details.

Taking Knight's and Riddy's argument further and more reductively than they would, but for illustrative purposes only – Knight's argument is concerned with patterns in the *matière*, and so sees the units as contiguous and discrete (at least up until 'Lancelot and Elaine,' and when this recurs later he feels justified in seeing it as a literary flaw in the new context), while Riddy's is concerned with the *sens* as a collection of themes, and so she views the narrative world as fraught with static oppositions, as a narrative of division.[6] Instead one might look at the sequential progress

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5   Although this figure occurs, with minor variations, less often than it might seem (see p155 fn23), my point is that in the time of reading it *feels* as if figures like these have an almost Homeric epithet-like character and frequency (and despite, for obvious reasons, not being prompted by metric requirements).

6   Of course Riddy does recognize the episodic nature of the text and consequences of this. For instance, on the work as a whole:

for those themes as patterned in their own right. For Riddy, though, the adventures create drama, develop it, yet they never properly resolve it. On 'Lancelot,' Riddy writes:

> As the book proceeds, however, the formal narrative bonds of the earlier part are relaxed, and connections between episodes are made by means of thematic parallels and contrasts rather than by enclosing techniques. [...] Moreover although Lancelot's final encounters [...] can be related thematically in a general way with what has gone before and with each other, they do not perform the function that final episodes in a plot usually do of supplying a sense of an ending. There seems no intrinsic reason why they should come last. [...]. *Sir Lancelot* [...] has a beginning and a middle but in one sense no end. (48)

Taking this intuition further, I feel the narrative never stops spiralling out or spiralling in, although it does not form a true circular return of the same anywhere. There is a genuine sense that this is a world *without rest*, not even a 'rest' of continuous, stable, motion. The 'weight' as feedback either takes a positive form, in which case the sequence spirals out, or it is negative in form, entropic, and so spirals in upon itself. The heroic vocation, motivation, or drive, for this movement is in the characters' reactions to specifics of myth and institutions related to the scapegoat mechanism, where the illusion of a return of the same is maintained by the text. The repetition reveals that the characters live primarily in an almost purely human-relational world of mimesis and the relentless same. A scenario Serres concludes is what we ought to learn from myths of hell – the endless experience of fear, desire unfulfilled, and torture as ultimately what we inflict upon ourselves in mimetic rivalry with one another:

> Hell is right here. Torture, punishment, we have no need of cruel gods to invent them, to refine them. So far as I am aware, it is not the devil who roasts prisoners over a slow fire, forges arms and prepares for war. Or else, I know the devil, I have seen him, he is not so far away, he is not a legend. (Serres 2000, 165-166)

The connection between repetition and death (in Freud, in twentieth and twenty-first century art, literature, and theory), or repetition and hell (itself an invariant in western myth at the very least), is hardly a revelation, although what to do with repetition – without inadvertently succumbing to that modernist myth that forever chases the entirely new – is perhaps not as self-evident. With slightly different emphases Girard and Serres see the source of repetition in violence, death, and ideas of hell as a consequence of interpersonal relations of a mimetic nature. 'Hell is mimesis.' (Serres 2000, 168)

> [The eight books'] continuity derives as much as anything from their juxtaposition in a single volume; it is spatial as well as temporal, as several of the colophons acknowledge. [...] Nevertheless the connectives offered by the colophons are no more consistent or complete than the temporal or causal links made within the tales: the *explicit* to Book One, for example, raises the possibility of a continuation but points in no particular direction: [...] (139)

However, possibly because the structure does not interest her so much, her arguments centre on thematic concerns.

Paradoxically there are no men, there are no human groups, until after the appearance of the object as such. The object as object, quasi-independent from us and quasi-invariant through the variation of our relations, separates man from the mammals. (Serres 2000, 132)

The discovery of the object as such and, globally, of the external world, [...] offers an opening and a chance to escape the network of our relations, and thereby to free ourselves from the problems raised by it; in particular that of violence. The object will be, perhaps, a neutral terrain. (133)

A standard criterion for considering an episode discrete is with respect to the object – it is self-contained within the episode, or some significant operation with that object is completed there. As sequences of episodes these are connected instead by either personal or communal relations in conflict or otherwise developed, and less frequently in so far as there is a consistent object.

For instance: what connects Lancelot's unknowing, yet gallant all the same, rescue of the sixty maidens and ladies from the two giants at Tyntagil with the rescue of Kay that follows is nothing tangible, or even based on a clearly-definable idea. Instead, after defeating Perys for the damsel (and on behalf of all women in the region), Lancelot is for a short period of the tale a free agent, and yet still, twice in a row, he finds himself acting on behalf of others he would naturally serve *without even being aware of it*. He leaves the Tyntagil damsels asking merely for hospitality in future if he needs it, only to endure 'evil' lodging in his travels until, well received and housed, he once again jumps to defend a knight facing hard odds and who turns out to be Kay, who he 'naturally' owes such service to (by traditional literary function in the story, by chivalric code, by *ēthos*, and so on).

Small wonder then that Lancelot takes matters into his own hands for some variety, to break this new cycle, and appropriates the kind of attention Kay would typically gather by wearing Kay's armour. Service to others, and so 'to prove' oneself, which is after all the reason given for setting out into the forest with Lionel (253.21), is more than a theme, it is one of several threads discussed below that order and propel the tale from episode to episode, and weave beginning, middle, and end together. Conversely, across a sequence an individual episode's object pales by comparison with the significance of issues regarding interpersonal relations and the exercise of will, particularly ideas of conduct and service, recalling the previous chapter's discussion of the quest in 'The Wedding,' and the treatment there of the knights' nominal quest-objects.

Each episode, and each tale, deviates before closing back upon itself by way of small, historical, facts. The work demonstrates accurately the relationship between legends and the real, and so it is not surprising, if one is sympathetic with Girard and Serres's projects, to find that what is revealed in this dynamic is so consistently violence. Before attempting to read 'Lancelot' in these terms and in more detail, I need to clarify the form of sequenced episodes I am discussing.

Sequenced Serial Narrative

'Serial' or 'serialized' narrative can refer to a wide range of models with very different functions and outcomes. Television has proven to be particularly well suited for delivering stories piecemeal at regular intervals, and I shall use examples primarily from that medium by way of explanation, although Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's series of Sherlock Holmes works would be a suitable literary candidate for comparison too.

At one end of the spectrum in televised serial fiction we have the traditional sitcom (*Cheers* and *M*A*S*H*, for instance) and cartoons (*The Jetsons*, *Southpark*, and *Family Guy*) that can themselves to a greater or lesser extent be self-aware and manipulative of their own conventions. The structural difference between episodes, how they start, end, and the activities engaged with in the middle, indeed even the difference in viewing experience for one episode as opposed to another in such a series, is functionally close to nil and the 'theme' simple and self-contained within an episode. Division into seasons, so far as the audience is concerned, is almost meaningless except in terms of marketed DVD collections.

At the other end of the same spectrum there are carefully developed and progressive storylines in a regular programme that unravel over one or more seasons, typically of eight to sixteen episodes each, although the 'mini-series' may sometimes be limited to as few as three or four. Recent examples include *Homeland*, *True Detective*, *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story*, *Sherlock*, *Luther*, and *The Killing*, although soap operas too share a lot in common with this category. Individual episodes have a great degree of internal freedom for both content and function, although typically each will end on a suspenseful note. A missed episode of this type can be a significant problem for a viewer, while one might be considered obsessive if deeply upset over missing an episode of the former category.

In the middle, and this is where I believe *Le Morte Darthur* fits, however unlikely that may seem at the moment, is what I distinguish from the former two categories as sequenced serial narrative. Examples of this format, including *Supernatural*, *House*, and *Smallville,* wax and wane in number and popularity. Episodes within a given season, understood as a television 'year' of, for the most part, twenty-something shows, are not as strongly motivated from one to the next as in the previous category. The first and last episodes of seasons in these narratives have special functions – the pilot episode of the first season sets up the world, the last episode of a season opens some issues and tightens others, but always with at least some sense of completion, while the premiere of the next season in some way reconfigures the narrative world to reconcile future episodes with what came to pass at the end of the previous season. A season premiere sets the stage again – not as a return to the same, but almost always as if the narrative world has been jolted severely by trying circumstances with which the characters and their environment have had to adapt, a situation not unlike the transition between books in Malory. The episodes throughout the middle of each season follow a rough chronological path, but since each is self-contained[7] as, if we take the examples given

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7   Of course there are occasional exceptions such as two- or even three-part episodes.

above, a supernatural investigation (*Supernatural*), a medical case study (*House*), or a trial of character (*Smallville*), an 'adventure' in other words, with more or less the conditions laid out in the first episode of the season, they can each be watched with a great degree of comprehension and enjoyment in comparative isolation. There is no near absolute isolation as with the first category above, nor full integration as with the second. Instead, the difference between episodes towards the beginning and those towards the end of a season is often difficult to define clearly or generalize upon. Across the series, then, the iteration of episodes in a given season, there is narrative progress, but it is not necessarily linear, and it happens despite the format's structural inclination towards maintaining the independence of episodes by returning the world, at the end of an episode, to a state similar to the one the episode began in.

Even more difficult to differentiate without resorting to long lists of tiny details are the differences accrued over a season of the state in which an episode begins or closes. Shows such as *Supernatural* and *Smallville* always begin with recaps, and usually close with previews, each of context-appropriate cuts from other episodes. Surprisingly often, even years into a show, recaps include a significant event from the first episode of the first season. As with Malory's 'recaps,' these shape our expectations, the tale's register or 'mood,' and selectively prepare the emotional ground from the show's own past, before reiterating an adventure's general form in the new episode that follows.

Potentially episodes could be watched in a random order within a season and perhaps across seasons, but doing so is not ideal or as satisfying as following the sequence,[8] and even though the developmental difference is slight and usually composed of only a small number of seemingly incidental matters. Below I read 'Lancelot' as behaving like a season of a sequenced serial narrative in this respect. In other words, it may well be true that there *seems no clear reason* why Phelot and Pedivere close this tale, especially in terms of a modern progressive literary model, but we should not assume that there is *no reason* for them to do so.[9]

In short: sequenced serial narrative adds circumstance to a reiterative process. The change in predisposition and outlook for characters, the state of the world they operate within, between the

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8   Malory criticism sometimes questions the order of the books themselves, while in the quotation above Riddy describes the position of the Phelot and Pedivere episodes within 'Lancelot' as unconvincing for an ending. The very fact such matters can be raised confirms the degree of independence books, adventures, and episodes have. If rearrangements can be defended then the actual sequence presented in the text becomes, somewhat perversely, more interesting as an ordered record of shifts in emphases not directly related to the retelling of events in the episodes in isolation.

9   It will immediately be objected that not all the books, or even tales within books, are so easy to dislocate from their context as they are in 'Lancelot,' or to relocate within the work as this book itself. I could point to adventures discussed at length already, like 'Balin' or 'The Wedding,' and suggest that *other than* the interplay of mythic and historic narratives there is nothing essential binding them to their place in the sequence, or attempt to prove the same with respect to sequences in a good number of the other books.

But, the more important fact here is that these episodes *are* all significant in their context and in their given order. The seeming haphazardness indicates a wholly different ordering principle at work. In this case, that Lancelot experiences his world and his role in it as, at root, *a lie based on a lie and protected by lies*. The gradual shift from carefree, almost stochastic, adventure episodes to grinding, inexorable, destiny is a mirage – we're always spiralling around the same concerns, from beginning to end.

beginning and the end is the accumulation of effects of the very small, almost negligible. To borrow a metaphor of Serres's from his discussion of Lucretius's atomist physics – the differences behave as nappes from the shifting of massive tectonic plates (2000, 50). The 'extra' or 'residue' from the upper plate is dragged back and under itself causing its own surface to burst upwards. Bulging, the nappe is carried forward above the rest of the plate as it grinds along at a glacial speed. Such contingencies independently are never sufficient to prevent a reading of the *matière* of an individual episode in Malory, or to cause one to fail to recognize the mythic, the legendary aspects of the same. Since they are small, accidental, they colour one's reading of the sequence, and are, in Malory, where the tale's *sens* is created and resides, like a kind of emotional memory and aid to continuity for sessions of oral delivery.

These deviations are different from the minor or major story arcs that Malory and the three shows referred to all utilize to provide a clear sense of internal consistency. Lancelot and Guinevere's love for each other is a major arc that affects a great deal of the work – but it does not itself bind 'Lancelot' meaningfully in all of its parts as do the threads of violence, desire (in terms of service and agency, as well as amorous desire), and the surface's relationship with truth. These 'threads' are more than just themes, and do not function as arcs. They situate the personal relationships, and the community's, they dictate what is possible or not, and they conflict with the storyline itself independently of the characters' purposes. Most importantly, like nappes, their slow, barely noticeable accretion over time, and in time, gives way to a final and truly colossal mass. Asked to explain the sense of grandeur in Malory's 'Morte,' whether in its own right or by comparison with his models, one cannot point to just one factor, or a small number of them, but as discussed in the previous two chapters, one must all but point to details in every part of the work since, and including, the opening episodes concerning Uther, Igrayne, and Tyntagil.

The two models at the extremes of this spectrum, and the middle ground format we have just been discussing, are of course considerably more complex in their specifics. With the first group, let us call it the 'cartoon/sitcom' model, the actual shows are affected by the real world itself. Actors retire from a show, take an extended leave, or pass on, and have to be written out somehow, while for cartoons technology and social change have considerably affected *Mickey Mouse*, for instance, over the years, just as similar factors along with politics have shifted the scope of cynicism in *Southpark*. The more determined such a show is to be faithful to an artificial sandpit of life that repeats, the more it tries to soothe a viewer with a predictable viewing ritual and spectacle at an imaginary distance, the more unwittingly vulnerable the shows become to deviation, and via circumstances in real life.

The second group, a 'serial drama' model, has the opposite problem – the longer it runs, the more convoluted the plot twists and the more multi-tiered the degree of interpersonal betrayal, inveiglement, subterfuge, and obfuscation of motives, the more likely a viewer who has missed a number of episodes is to get the feeling that *absolutely nothing has changed* when they happen upon it again. In other words, the longer such narratives run on, the more likely they are to succumb to representing Serres's nominally mythic, but in truth mimetic and real, hell of personal dynamics and relationships. This is particularly true for 'soap operas,' the logical extreme of this

model – the faces and names may change a little over the years or decades, but the infernal struggle remains exactly the same.[10] Of course there are near innumerable possible storytelling combinations with episodic serial narrative structures – the forms above are contrasted to give sufficient context for Malory's own unusual structure compared with linear romances and with the French 'polyphonic' or 'interwoven' model.[11]

Malory's narrative structure and contemporary sequenced serial narrative formats may for the sake of classification appear between the sitcom and the drama models, but they also function as a hybrid of both. They repeat types of episodes, but retain a *memory of circumstance* and the difference that those circumstances create. They repeat not to deny difference, but to unveil it.[12] They develop also, but in distinct stages (books, seasons) that require a clear re-envisaging of the world, the characters, and their relationships. This is not serial drama's indefinite extension of troubled relationships, but recognition of change and an attempt to adapt to it. Of the three models, this then is the only one that is structurally capable of putting repetition and difference in their proper place, if one ascribes to something akin to Girard and Serres's ideas regarding the roles of myth and history, of course.

> The interpretation of the old legends is the direct reading of what happens. Mythology displaces history through an immense deviation of space and time, and interpretation brings this deviation back to zero. [...] [L]egend is in a position to make me read

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10 If it is at all appropriate to think of a narrative structure as possessing an *ēthos*, the soap opera format reproduces a voyeur's hell at an ideal distance:

> The good lies in proximity, and evil in extension: what is necessary is close by, what lies in the distance is not a necessity, but difficult and futile. (Serres 2000, 186)

Soap operas are more or less defined by their indefinite prolonging of troubled human relationships, Serres's 'evil in extension.' Resolution in one place occurs only to unbundle misery and turmoil elsewhere, if not everywhere else, ad infinitum; the exact opposite of Malory's good knights' concern for resolving the local and contingent before moving on.

11 Wimsatt (1994) offers a particularly insightful reading of correlations between the prose *Tristan* and Malory's work, by contrast with the French Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Cycles, describing the *Tristan* as possessing a 'splendid heterogeneity in which another type of encyclopedism is nascent' (208). After noting the poor opinion many have had of both this *Tristan* and Malory's 'Tristram' (212), Wimsatt argues that they substitute for interlace a narrative style that 'highlights rather than conceals variety,' (213) describing the effect, after Benson, as no tapestry but a 'dazzling kaleidoscope of the color, sounds, and emotion of the chivalric life' (Benson 1976, 109).

In part my argument is that Malory's work may be seen as 'kaleidoscopic,' but only in so far as that is a static representation. As read it is not experienced as a *fixed* yet dazzling gem-like array of scenes and motifs. It is experienced *sequentially* through those scenes and with those motifs, as a path followed that spirals out or in according to the operations in each episode.

12 Compare Wimsatt's emphasis above, and in the following quotation, on the heterogeneity of Malory's work with Knight's complaints of monotony with respect to the same practice cited near the beginning of this chapter.

> The modern reader indeed is quite likely to be confused and fatigued by the *Tristram* and left with the impression that it too is a mere hodgepodge of knightly adventure. Such reaction to both works is conditioned by the canons of modern fiction and results in an undervaluing of their anatomies of knighthood. Malory's anatomy centers on – or rather is dispersed over – the *Tristram* section. The *Tristram* is of the essence: without it the very heart of Malory's book is lacking. (Wimsatt 1994, 212)

history. How must we read it? As a hell. In which the gods are our masters.

And hell is ourselves. (Serres 2000, 166)

The historic narrative, through contingency, through the specifics of terrain, passages followed and blocked, tells us of the characters as they grapple with those relations and how the new and the different enter the world. The narrative structure in *Le Morte Darthur*, whether considered in terms of small groupings of episodes in an adventure, adventures within a book, or even in terms of the work as a whole, is isomorphic with the minimalist musical model put forward in the previous chapter, and so also with Serres's theories of *clinamen*, atomist physics, and nature in his work on Lucretius (Serres 2000).

Clearly the start of the first chapter and the final chapter of 'Lancelot' correspond to the adventure ritual departure and return respectively, they frame the sequence. This too is framed in turn by the conclusion to the 'Roman War' and beginning of 'Gareth.' The transition from the 'Roman War' to 'Lancelot' is not entirely clear, and may even appear forced through the former's colophon and latter's prologue, so it is appropriate to tease out some of the less obvious relations and tensions between the two first.

Only the Dead Have Seen the End of War

The 'Roman War' ends on an appropriately mythic tone:

Than into Tuskayne he turned whan hym tyme semed, and there he wynnys towrys and townys full hyghe, and all he wasted in his warrys there he away ryddys. […] and to the vale of Vysecounte he devysed there to lygge in that vertuouse vale amonge vynys full. (W 244.4-10)

City walls, towers, and towns fall before Arthur, while he, and presumably his men also, are surrounded by a luxurious abundance. Those still left alive of the Roman senators seek him out as a collective and offer him riches, their homage and subservience, and the title of Emperor, which he consents to. Crowned Emperor in Rome by the Pope of all the lands from Rome to France, Arthur first divides up the land between those magnates beneath him, paying particular care to establish Priamus and to stabilize the Claudas situation for Lancelot and Bors. He makes sure every one of his is rewarded in terms of status and the means to retain that status comfortably. He did the same with Torre in 'The Wedding' in order to cement that state of affairs. In short: all enemy things and peoples fall before him. Immersed in plenty and wielding unrivalled power, an absolute world supremacy (so far as the late medieval English conception of the relevant world is likely to be concerned), established through bravery and possibly the text's most explicit sequence of gruesome violence against, quite literally at times, *monsters* from the furthest extremes of the known world, Arthur emerges alone. He is crowned, and then consolidates his power through the feudal institution of vertical allegiance and service.

The senators begged for peace with one voice. Arthur's own men gather and together implore him not for home, but for their wives, for love and, somewhat discreetly, sex:

> 'Sir kynge, we beseche the for to here us all. We ar undir youre lordship well stuffid,
> blyssed be God, of many thynges; and also we have wyffis weddid. We woll beseche
> youre good grace to reles us to sporte us with oure wyffis, for, worshyp be Cryste, this
> journey is well overcom.'
>
> 'Ye say well,' seyde the kynge, 'for inowghe is as good as a feste, for to attemte God
> overmuche I holde hit not wysedom. And therefore make you all redy and turne we
> into Inglelonde.' (W 246.6-14)

Caxton's version constructs the desire for their wives as something of an afterthought, or at least as a secondary happy consequence of their desired for return home:

> Thenne after this alle his knyghtes and lordes assembled them afore hym and sayd
> blessyd be god your warre is fynysshed and your conquest acheued in soo moche that
> we knowe none soo grete ne myghty that dar make warre ageynst yow wherfore we
> byseche you to retorne homeward and gyue vs lycence to goo home to oure wyues fro
> whome we haue ben longe and to reste vs for your Iourney is fynysshed with honour &
> worship. Thenne sayd the kyng ye saye trouthe and for to tempte god it is no
> wysedome. (C 246.2-10)

Caxton's version lists collective states of affairs ('fynysshed' twice, 'acheued'), of mind ('knowe none soo grete ne myghty'), and of desire ('to reste') that seem natural enough: the knights recognize the completion of their tasks, the end of war, the destruction of enemies, the longing for relaxation, contentment, and the safety of home. The journey is finished, so it is fitting to return home together.

The Winchester MS by contrast stresses surfeit ('well stuffid, blyssed be God, of many thynges') and personal bonds, or possibly responsibilities ('we have wyffis weddid'). These knights desire to be released from collective duty in order to 'sport' themselves with their respective wives. The journey is *overcome*. These knights are not tired. They have overwhelmed the enemy, appropriated his lands, and they desire *more*, not rest, and not here. Caxton's 'wherfore' shapes an argument from conditions to consequence. The Winchester MS's 'and also' adds women to the men's awareness of their plenitude. On a variety of levels, from syntactic to idiomatic to literal, the Caxton variant closes matters down, while the Winchester text all but gapes open with figures of excess.

In both versions the conquest is envisaged as a journey by the knights, and it is consistently related by the narrator in an itinerary-like form. They traversed territories, and they accumulated as they marched over those vast tracts of land. The narrator lingers on aspects of terrain throughout, such as cliffs, passes, seas, towns, and so on. Particularly obvious, and we do not entirely need to reduce this to patriotic or simple physical explanations, is the sea that divides England, specifically Sandwich as a liminal harbour town, from the procession of wholesale slaughter right across Europe. The hundred thousand and more dead, men and monsters, Arthur's 'tribute' to Rome as a cavalcade of dead kings, all, that is, of the violence, is *over there*.

I used the term 'mythic' above, and it is possible to backtrack further from 'Lancelot' well into the 'Roman War' to list the ways the enemy were represented as monsters and overcome, and in particular to detail the use of Lucius's embalmed and costumed corpse, along with the similar display made of the other kings and senators, all as a death message. Once dead these conquered

scapegoats are not disrespected – but on the contrary they are inexplicably and spontaneously elevated to something like dead God-Kings and spectacle, honorifically sent back to their foreign seat of supposedly illegitimate power and their place of origin. The war is waged firmly outside the locus of Arthur's community. For instance, the text is quite clear about the royal protection given to the messengers from Rome so they may leave England. This is, of course, in line with the ancient divine protection afforded guests and hosts, or for messengers in hostile lands. Their deaths would be a pollution of Arthur's land and his worship.

Arthur, his barons, and his realm, still under the shadow of recent civil warfare, were unanimous and eager to pursue this war. Far from being a twentieth or twenty-first century phenomenon, exporting civil discontent onto foreign soil is likely as old as human settlements themselves, and has perhaps always existed alongside the laws of hospitality and correlate codes of hostility. Arthur's 'Roman War' situated right after the establishment of his realm, itself in turn within a context of civil unrest, makes perfect literary, social, politico-historical, and mythic sense.

It is in the details that Malory reveals more than traditional mythic thinking would allow in, say, the *Iliad*. The prohibitions of the Pentecostal Oath can be seen as prefiguring the need to export war and collective violence outside of the community, since they can no longer unleash violence upon one another. But, the reticence with respect to love and the violence associated with lust on a military campaign result in further prohibitions and a desperate return – despite the surface and mythic text representing the situation in idyllic terms of victory, riches, and contentment. The war on the continent does not satiate the knights. The eagerness for war (186-190) has given way to a desire for women. If anything, new prohibitions suggest matters have been getting more heated amongst them, and that the giant 'saint' may not have been a monstrous 'other' at all.[13] A clear contrary to the Saracen other is presented in the character of noble Priamus, while Lancelot, an exemplary knight of the Round Table, may well have Arthur's prohibition against lying with other men's wives ringing in his ears. Clearly identifying where right and good reside is far from straightforward. As with 'Balin' and 'The Wedding,' when details are recorded in *Le Morte Darthur* they have a tendency to run counter to mythic discourse without being explicitly contrasted with it.

> The kynge than hovyth on an hylle and lokyth to wallys and sayde, 'I se be yondir sygne
> the cité is wonne.' Than he lete make a cry thorow all the oste that uppon payne of lyff
> and lymme and also lesynge of his goodys that no lyegeman that longyth to his oste
> sholde lye be no maydens ne ladyes nother no burgessis wyff that to the cité longis. So
> whan this conquerrour com into the cité he passed into the castell, and there he lendis
> and comfortis the carefull men with many knyghtly wordis, and made there a captayne
> a knyght of his owne contrey, and the commons accorded theretyll. (W 243.9-19)

The mythic tale tells easy to absorb narratives with clear aggressors, defenders of what is 'right,' obvious distance between the two, and a straightforward understanding of what 'right' is in the first place. The historic tale by the close of the 'Roman War' has pointed out several

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13   Almost every 'other' in Malory presents itself as a potential reflection of the hero's or the Arthurian court's own Jungian shadow, or Lacanian *extimité*. See p9.

inconsistencies. We have already discussed that before even his marriage Arthur was made aware of his future wife and Lancelot's destined relationship. In a coup against perhaps the primary role Lancelot plays in the French text, he is about to engage in a winding adventure with an inverted myth – that there is nothing untoward in his relations with Guinevere, a 'noise' he is eager to quash with words whenever it is raised in his presence (or silence with combat, if only he could find a male adversary to challenge on the issue, an opportunity the narrative in 'Lancelot' denies him). Similarly, the 'Roman War' myth of a triumphant English rule over Europe is troubled by the subtext of Arthur's prohibitions and the collective's pleas to him, and we have already discussed the grounds to suspect collective murder behind the establishment of this same realm in 'Arthur.'

The Winchester MS preserves at the end of the 'Roman War' a narrative technique of Malory's, and of sequenced serial narrative, that did not survive Caxton's editing. The endings wind up rather than close down, and they barely, if ever, signal that things are finished as the Caxton version's knights declare that matters are. It is not a question of whether something follows, but whether the mythic promise of a return of the same is delivered on, or if a historic model reveals instead that the progression is a spiral in form, that culture 'is the continuation of barbarity by other means' (Serres 2000, 190).[14] Regardless, both versions feature a prohibition to be enforced on pain of death, the Winchester MS towards the local lords to uphold 'good governaunce' (W 246.18), the Caxton text towards his own men not to rob the locals on their way back.[15]

The Winchester text concludes with a treasure-laden passing over the sea, and the women gathered (Guinevere and 'all other quenys and noble ladyes' (W 246.24-5)) to reunite with the men in one city. The Caxton text is fairly similar, except only Guinevere is mentioned as coming to meet Arthur at Sandwich, while the host is received by 'alle his comyns in euery cyte and burgh' who present Arthur with 'grete yeftes' (C 246.16-247.1). So, Caxton's version plays down the gratification of Arthur's 'lusty' knights to correspond with his changes that slow and close down the tale. To minimize violence within the community blood lust is directed out, carnal lust is directed to marriage, but when war is over and since Lancelot can hardly 'sport' himself freely with Arthur's wife, book three relates how its eponymous hero navigates the terrain of this newly formed and extended realm.

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14 Variations on this theme recur throughout Girard's and Serres's work. (See, for instance, almost the exact same phrase in Serres (1982, 122), quoted above, p60.) The general idea, channelling perhaps Santayana, is that: if suppressed, sacrificial logic and real victims will resurface, albeit displaced. 'Only the dead have seen the end of war.'

15 This in turn refers back to Arthur's previous prohibition before occupying 'Virvyn' (W) / '[V]rbyne' (C): that the knights not sexually abuse the women of the city. The capital punishment is, as it was in the Pentecostal Oath for similar offences, removed in Caxton's version (W 243.8-18, C 243.6-9). Both have Arthur reconcile the city and commons with him and his rule, and he creates a local 'captain' for the region from a knight of that locale. The anxieties in the Winchester MS are for this newly conquered land's political stability and his men's sexual appetite. In Caxton the anxiety is for Arthur's own men's unruliness – a double displacement of the Winchester's anxieties given the suppression of lust.

On the textual relationship between the Winchester MS and Caxton, see Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade's (1995), but note the comments of an unconvinced McCarthy (1998, 301) and Cooper (1996a).

In summary – if the 'Roman War' is at least in part a tale of channelled lust for war directed outward upon scapegoats transfigured into the monstrous, and derived from the Pentecostal Oath prohibition in 'The Wedding' against violence within the community, then 'Lancelot' can be read as starting from a context where lust for sex, or possibly simply love as 'sport,' is prohibited outside the community, and channelled back home where other prohibitions already exist, and where the core problematic for Lancelot, Arthur, and Guinevere is commonly known to reside. The characters cannot, however, openly acknowledge their triangle in its true form.

The Young Barbarians at Play Again

Directly after the return from war, scapegoats, and prohibitions in the 'Roman War,' the knights in 'Lancelot' energetically take to chivalric rituals of a competitive nature (253.1-12), and Lancelot is singled out – not as a failure but as by far the best.

> So this sir Launcelot encresed so mervaylously in worship and honoure; therefore he is
> the fyrste knyght that the Freynsh booke makyth mencion of aftir knynge Arthure com
> frome Rome. Wherefore quene Gwenyvere had hym in grete favoure aboven all other
> knyghtis, and so he loved the quene agayne aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff,
> and for hir he dud many dedys of armys and saved her frome the fyre thorow his noble
> chevalry. (253.12-19)

'Lancelot' begins with the narrative pretence that the love between Lancelot and Guinevere merely adheres to romantic chivalry's ideal of love, just as 'Lancelot and Guinevere' begins with Lancelot attempting to make good on his promises to refrain from further indiscretions with the queen. The former might originate from tact, common decency, or, more simply, a respect for his king; the latter from divine revelation and a genuine desire to be a better knight, or person perhaps. Both books three and seven will cycle through this thematic problem, but far from a repetition of the same, or mythic glossing over with straightforward archetypes of good and bad, they both trouble the characters with encounters from obstinate contingencies. 'Lancelot and Guinevere' is markedly distinct from 'Lancelot' in that it spirals around the issue with a far finer degree of correlation with the contingent, having in between this book's early beginnings of the realm, and itself, worn away much of what is mythical, socially in 'Tristram,' personally in the 'Sankgreal.' Malory presents here a romantic fiction that all is well, secure, bountiful, and 'sporting' in the world. The episodes themselves, gathered from late in the French Prose *Lancelot*, and from the *Perlesvaus*, where that certainly was not the case, have been put in a wholly new context by Malory.

After collective violence and prohibitions, then, we have rituals of a typically agonistic variety. These three threads connect books two and three, but more importantly, through them book three is provided with an amorous impetus. War is over, the men return to their wives – except for Lancelot. Not only does he not have one, but he receives favour 'aboven all other knyghtis' from the queen, and in return loves her 'agayne aboven all other ladyes dayes of his lyff' (253.16, 17-18), the woman who is married to the most powerful ruler in Europe.

In Malory, Guinevere is not typically reputed to be the fairest in the realm, except in the eyes of Arthur, Lancelot, and Mellyagaunce, while I hesitate to suggest that her character's jealousy, when revealed, speaks to something less than ideal in any age. One consequence of relating her in an unflattering light, or at least a more human and less ideal one,[16] is that the text constructs Arthur and Lancelot's personal relationship as a complex form of rivalry. The greatest king of the world and the greatest knight/lover knowingly admire each other and know also that they love the same woman. The text is not inconsistent with a reading where they love the same woman only *because* they are such close rivals.[17] This situation at the start of book three is presented as requiring both men and Guinevere to deny the true nature of that love to the world. In fact, this requirement holds for the vast bulk of the work until, when no longer deniable, it is the source of violence such that the community can no longer hold together at all.

'Lancelot' traces issues of male and female desire and desire-thwarted, seeming and identity, service and subterfuge. Further, whenever possible Lancelot attempts to take the position of the victim – itself a variety of Messiah-complex when Lancelot attempts it, a willingly self-sacrificial myth that Pedivere's simple 'Look! Behind you!' ruse demolishes at the book's close. Consistent with Girard's reading of Proust and Freud (1987, 382-392, esp. 383), desire is often most intense for those things or relationships one wants but cannot have, for those who seem internally full or overflowing, resplendent narcissists, who neither need nor want the desirer in turn and thereby deepen the desirer's inner awareness of need and inherent lack. This last is true for: those women who find Lancelot so 'dreamy' they literally die from unrequited love (Hallewes (281.24-7), and later the Fair Maid of Ascolat (1092-5)); Lancelot's love of the king's wife (he has it, but not openly); Arthur's dear fellowship as *the true service* of the best knights in the world; and, in 'Lancelot' in particular, even the hero's commonplace human desire to sleep unmolested, or the more properly

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16 She is not *quite* the cold, hard, and cruel 'ideal' or 'perfection' of Chrétien de Troyes's knight's lady. Nor is she ideal as a feminine object of desire, or wife – as Merlin made clear to Arthur before her entrance to the work. She is, to her credit, far more credible as a human as a result, and hence, as a mutual object of mimetic desire for Arthur and Lancelot. For instance, after she sends Lancelot away and into madness (805-8) her pride and jealousy give way to remorse. She does what a woman of influence and means can to repair the situation – she sends knights off in search of him, with twenty thousand pounds (831.31-33), to return him to her (808.16-21, 809.19-22). Economics, a knight's beloved lady taking responsibility for wronging her knight, and her display of deep regret for her actions, are all very far from the courtly romance model. They are recognizably human concerns.

17 Usually we assume Arthur or the author has forgotten that Arthur was told of Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery by Merlin before he married her. The alternative I follow here is simpler and consistent with Lancelot's reactions, the *noyse* amongst the characters in the world, and our own knowledge of the legendary Lancelot.

Further, while chronological progression is not something Malory's work is renowned for respecting, this adventure is particularly troublesome. But we can read 'Lancelot' as a sequenced serial narrative 'season': events follow the war, Lancelot is well established, and so is his relationship with Arthur and Guinevere. The narrator is coy on the details and passage of time, just as the significant characters are. Unlike 'Gareth' or 'Tristram,' 'Lancelot' is *in medias res* in this respect, and that too suggests there is truth to the rumours. We need not assume that Lancelot has nothing to hide, nor is Arthur in any way less interesting as a character if we allow him his memory.

chivalric desires to render services and protection to damsels and ladies. All are broken down in difficult ways.

Let us group and analyse the episodes into sequences as follows:

Sequence 1:

1. (Cax. 1) Prologue and Departure – Lancelot and Lionel leave court, enter deep forest.

Sub-sequence 1a:

2. (Cax. 1) Sleep and Trap (Prison) – Lancelot sleeps under an apple tree. Tarquin overwhelms and imprisons Lionel.

3. (Cax. 2) Trap (Prison) – Ector leaves court. He too is overwhelmed and imprisoned by Tarquin. (Modified version of (2) – Ector is recognized as superior to all previous knights by Tarquin.)

[Alternate Sequence I:]

4. (Cax. 3) Sleep and Enchanted Trap (Prison) – The four queens abduct Lancelot. He is imprisoned by Morgan. (Questioning regarding Lancelot's affection for Guinevere.)

5. (Cax. 4) Deal (D1) and Release – A damsel brokers a deal with Lancelot for his release. He enters a great forest.

[Alternate Sequence II:]

6. (Cax. 5) Sleep, 'Wrong Love,' Combat – Belleus nestles up to and kisses a sleeping Lancelot in Belleus's pavilion. A fight ensues in the forest clearing outside.

7. (Cax. 5) Supremacy, Healing, Deal (D2) – Lancelot overwhelms Belleus, helps with his wounds, and assents to a deal by way of amends with Belleus's lover (diverted to final episode and Pentecostal feast).

8. (Cax. 6) Deal Confirmed (D1), Trap Plotted (Ambush, Identity Masked) – Bagdemagus, his daughter, and Lancelot confirm their arrangement in the appointed abbey. Lancelot and three others, all with white shields, will ambush three knights of the Round Table (Madore, Mordred, Gahalantyne) in an upcoming tournament for Bagdemagus, and fight on Bagdemagus's side.

9. (Cax. 7) Deal Honoured (D1), Supremacy (for another), Hospitality – Lancelot succeeds in taking care of the Round Table knights anonymously and on Bagdemagus's behalf. He is entertained well by Bagdemagus and his daughter at his castle.

Sub-sequence 1b:

[Alternate Sequence III:]

10. (Cax. 7) Loop (First Forest Re-entered), Deal (A2 for A1) – A new damsel promises a nearby adventure in return for Lancelot's services in a further adventure.

11. (Cax. 7) Challenge (A1) – Lancelot challenges Tarquin for Gaheris, the Round Table knights, and the damsel's service.

12. (Cax. 8) Combat (A1), Identity Reveal – Hard combat begins between Tarquin and Lancelot once the former learns the latter is Lancelot, who killed his brother Carados (a past event, arguably related in the 'Tristram' later, see footnote 17 above).

13. (Cax. 9) Supremacy (A1), Identity Reveal – Lancelot kills Tarquin, reveals his identity to Gaheris, and departs with the damsel for A2.

14. (Cax. 9) Release, Identity Reveal – Gaheris releases the sixty-four knights from prison, reveals the identity of the one who defeated Tarquin. They feast then sleep, except Lionel, Ector and Kay who follow after Lancelot once they have eaten well.

Sequence 2:

Sub-sequence 2a:

15. (Cax. 10) Trap (Decoy), Killing, Deal Honoured (A2) – Honours deal with damsel, using her as a decoy to trap then kill Perys de Foreste Savage, a predator of women as Tarquin was a predator of knights.

[Alternate Sequence IV:]

16. (Cax. 10) Travel, Killing – Lancelot spends days in a deep forest, traverses a long bridge, slays a 'carle' (porter) who attempts to stop him, and enters a castle then a great court. The gathering masses lament his coming.

17. (Cax. 11) Combat, Supremacy, Rescue, Identity (supremacy confirmed, and Tyntagil internal reference) – Lancelot dispatches two giants, and rescues sixty ladies and damsels from prison who had served seven years as enforced silk workers.

Sub-sequence 2b:

[Alternate Sequence V:]

18. (Cax. 11) Travel, Sleep, Combat/Rescue, Supremacy (for another) – Lancelot crosses strange regions, waters, valleys, and has bad lodging. He is received well by an old gentlewoman 'oste.' In the middle of the night he wakes to rescue Kay from three knights, whom he sends to Arthur's Pentecostal feast to submit to Kay.

19. (Cax. 11) Sleep, Identity Aggregation (K: protected, L: decoy trap) – Lancelot and Kay share a bed for the night. Lancelot leaves before Kay wakes, and in his armour. Kay welcomes the promise of travel without distress.

20. (Cax. 12) Travel, Trap (Decoy), Combat, Supremacy – Lancelot rides through a great forest, low country (rivers, meadows) and another long bridge with three pavilions. He defeats three knights (Gawtere, Gylmere, Raynolde) who think he is Kay, and sends them to Pentecost as Kay's. They know it is not him after the first one falls.

21. (Cax. 13) Travel, Trap (Decoy), Combat, Supremacy – Further riding through a deep forest, and then into a glade. Encounters four Round Table knights (Sagramour le Desyrus, Ector, Gawain, Uwayne) and defeats them. They also know he is not Kay. Uwayne assumes the knight has killed Kay after the first of them falls. Gawain believes it is Lancelot. All 'commaunde hym to the devyll.' They are not explicitly sent to Pentecost. Lancelot is greatly pleased with his spear.

Sequence 3:

[Alternate Sequence VI:]

22. (Cax. 14) Hunting/Tracking, Enchanted Territory – Lancelot is in a deep forest and begins to follow a bratchet, which in turn is following a trail of blood while intermittently waiting for Lancelot to catch up. He crosses a bridge, enters a manor, and finds a dead knight (Gylberte the Bastarde) in the middle of a great hall where the bratchet is licking the knight's wounds. A 'lady' (Hallewes) is weeping and addresses him, inexplicably for the moment: 'Knyght, to muche sorrow hast thou brought me' (278.33).

23. (Cax. 14) Identity Reveal, Service (Deal), Supremacy (pre-requisite for service), Impossible Loop (Return to a place that is not the same as itself) – Lancelot leaves the manor, meets a damsel in the forest (who knows him 'well'). The previous 'lady' is revealed by the damsel as a sorceress. A nearby wounded knight (Meliot) is of the Round Table, her brother, and cursed with wounds. She requires Lancelot to break the curse and so heal him (obtain Gylberte's sword and a piece of his cloth). He is sent down the highway to the Chapel Perelus (where Gylberte lies, which is and is not the manor he just left).

24. (Cax. 15) Enchanted Territory and Decoys, Supremacy – Lancelot enters the Chapel Perelus, acquires sword and cloth, leaves. He is unfazed by the 30 'great knights' and their threats (on the way in and out), and is resistant to the 'fair damsel' (Hallewes) also, along with her tricks and threats.

25. (Cax. 15) Indirect Killing, Victory – Lancelot departs from Hallewes ('lady of the castell Nygurmous') who dies for sorrow (unrequited love of Lancelot). He returns to Meliot's sister where he is recognized by Meliot (as Lancelot, not Kay). Lancelot heals him and they rejoice. The next day Lancelot sends them to Arthur's court for Pentecost.

Sequence 4:

[Alternate Sequence VII:]

26. (Cax. 16) Trap (False Service and Decoy), Bare Victory – Lancelot is deceived by a lady and her knight husband (Phelot). An 'evil climber,' stuck up a tree without arms or armour, he barely defends himself but ultimately manages to slay Phelot.

27. (Cax. 17) Anti-Chivalry, Service (Protection), Trick (False Decoy), Failure, Transformation – Lancelot rescues a lady from her murderous knight husband (Pedivere), and offers her protection since the knight will not fight him. Pedivere fools Lancelot with an underhand oath and simple ruse, killing her while she is under Lancelot's escort and protective watch (cf. Balin's shame incurred by Garlon). Still unwilling to combat Lancelot, no matter what self-imposed handicap he offers, Lancelot sends him to Guinevere (no mention of Pentecost) wearing the lady's corpse (cf. Gawain in 'The Wedding'). Pedivere is sent from there to Rome, then back, and in the process transforms into a holy man and hermit.

Conclusion:

28. (Cax. 18) Return, Epilogue/Procession (Victories), Feast – Lancelot 'had' 'at that time' the greatest name of any knight, and was most honoured of high and low. (No mention of Lancelot's feelings with respect to any of this after his protection for the lady was compromised.)

Two sequences are traced above. The primary follows collections of chivalric events and scenarios; the bracketed alternate sequence traces Lancelot's series of service to women. There are other ways of grouping distinct narrative directions in 'Lancelot,' for instance by how far the hero, the world, and other characters get from appearing as they are in truth, or saying what they feel or believe. Play of the surface is noticeably disjointed in this book, although it follows something of a crescendo-like path until it reaches an apex in the penultimate episode where Lancelot is utterly undone by perhaps the oldest trick in the book, uncovering the extent to which the truly honourable are susceptible to the simplest of tricks. While it and no doubt other sequences might be tracked in their own right, I believe here, at least, 'the surface as true and as deceptive' is used to more pointedly reveal aspects of what I above refer to as the primary and alternate sequences.

In this primary sequence we see that Lancelot, almost a passive agent,[18] is directed to scenarios through women but with alternating benefits for men and women. In sequence 1, roughly the first half of the tale, he aids Bagdemagus and then rescues the Round Table knights from Tarquin. All matters connected to Arthur's court directly, and persons who have issued from it, have had whatever difficulties they faced overcome, and all, except Lancelot, are now free to do as they please. As the next section explores, Lancelot is still bound in service by an oath to a further adventure. In sequence 2a, Perys, an at large predator of women, then the giants, who imprison and enslave women at Tyntagil, are vanquished. In 2b, Lancelot is a free agent, and amuses himself at the expense of fellow knights. In 3, he helps heal a fellow knight despite extraordinary and

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18   Except for the section marked as alternate sequence V. See below.

disorienting magical distortions. But by 4, the roles required of a knight, whether the seemingly trivial (service to a lady by recovering her falcon), or the certainly essential (providing protection to the vulnerable), cause Lancelot a disproportionately great deal of trouble. He is the same man who in the preceding sequences triumphed over all others, including Gawain, and he has at almost every step been declared the best and finest. Yet, with Lancelot presented in all of his strength, honour, and prowess the text thrusts simple, pragmatic, circumstances that threaten to undo him in the first case, and confront him with his own powerlessness in the second.

Up a tree, or dozing underneath one, Lancelot is vulnerable when contingency, facts small and simple, cause his legendary greatness to stumble. His passage over bridges cannot be withstood. He is all but invulnerable riding through the deep forests, over the meadows, through rivers, and so on – but reduce the vast forest to the singular tree, and require him to climb it, or allow him to sleep beneath it like any other man or woman might do, and he is just a mere man amongst men after all, and a hunted one.

In short, *the primary sequence is one of violence*, and while he may wield it effortlessly this progression illustrates *how ill-suited Lancelot is to avert it*. Certainly, when looked at in the above breakdown, Lancelot brings death to almost every scenario. We might question, as Riddy does (1987, 53-4), why Tyntagil's porter is dispatched in such a summary fashion in almost the centre of the tale, and why similar 'justice' is spared the recreant Pedivere at the end. But Pedivere's fate is not without parallels to Lancelot's own, as shall be discussed shortly. Instead, as a sequence of episodes, Lancelot's power through physical superiority, bravery, and violence is cut down. And this after sequence 3, where circumstance and contingency are the only stable referents for Lancelot's successful quest, where he demonstrates he can follow *detailed* instructions, locate and retrieve *specific* things from the illusionary romance equivalent of a labyrinth. Unlike the 'Roman War,' the myth of all falling in submission before the legendary hero is contested. Faced with such humbling happenings, it is time to return to Arthur's court, the Pentecostal Oath and feast rituals.

Excepting only the alternate sequence V, which in part is service to his gentlewoman host and, besides, effectively casts Kay as almost as defenceless as an unarmed woman, Lancelot's agency does not cease to be bound to the service of at least one woman from the beginning through to the end of the adventure. In the case of episodes 16 and 17 this is true even of a scenario where he is not aware of it himself at the time. An inverse image of Pellinor's conduct in 'The Wedding,' far from refusing to be distracted by side-quests Lancelot seems to merely happen upon a rescue of Lionel and his fellow Round Table knights, and only as a pre-requisite trial for the damsel he serves before he can attempt her true will and rid the land of a marauding rapist. He follows a path from fulfilling one woman's needs to another, unaware, disinterested, or simply just asleep to the needs of his fellow men.

As a notable special case, alternate sequence V proceeds from the same Tyntagil where Uther first lay with Igrayne, where the only reward he asks of the sixty rescued damsels and ladies is hospitality in the future. He endures 'evil' lodging through many regions, until well housed and

asleep once again he is roused by Kay's plight outside his window. And then, left to his own devices, Lancelot opts to pretend to be someone else.[19] He makes a decoy of himself, much as he used the damsel to lure out Perys in episode 15, or as Phelot will use his wife in 26. The ploy is different from the more chivalrous and sanctioned use of blank signs, the white shield of Balin's final battle and Lancelot's ambush of Mordred and company in Bagdemagus's tournament earlier. Further, the ploy is used for his own entertainment – to disconcert and confuse other knights, including his fellows of the Round Table. The impression throughout the sequence, although at times somewhat ambivalent, suggests there is no true malice intended. Lancelot even takes the time to pray for and praise an anonymous craftsman for his skill: 'God gyff hym joy that this spere made, for there cam never a bettir in my honde' (278.4-5).

Lancelot's misrepresentations are, then, almost certainly *play*. Lancelot is making his own fun, albeit in this context it immediately precedes sequences where deception is unmistakably malignant. Hallewes's elaborate enchantment plays to a standard chivalric rulebook. We sense that so long as he is true to himself and his *ēthos* he will succeed. Phelot attempts to use the same ploy as Lancelot used with Perys. Here it is his physical prowess that is put under extreme strain, so it is fitting that he succeeds. Finally, with Pedivere, Lancelot is shown to be as simple, as naïve, as a small child where treachery itself is concerned. *It is nowhere in him*. In a double sense Lancelot incurs this sequence through narrative logic: he initiated these games and ruses – in the first half of the tale he does so as required by honour (for Bagdemagus's sake and his daughter's service, then to honour his promise to the damsel and defeat Perys), in the second half out of a desire for entertainment. But, Lancelot is also, like Pedivere, a liar to the man he at least nominally submits to, and for the exact same reason *it is not true* that treachery is nowhere in him. There is even an echo, in Pedivere's penance, of the religious house building Lancelot offers by way of amends in the 'Morte' (1199-1200), and they both ultimately become religious recluses. But the weight of this conclusion, and it is a conclusion to the 'Lancelot' tale's cycle of episodes and adventures, is that Lancelot is not only vulnerable to lies – he is most vulnerable to a single truth. The truth Morgan (257.21-34), a damsel (270.18-27), and Hallewes (281.13-20) have charged him with beforehand in the tale. There is a sense in the text that it is not outrage that leaves Lancelot utterly silent for the rest of the story, but horror – and perhaps not only at Pedivere. I suspect it is located in his realization here of the vulnerability to 'treson other inchauntement' (253.11-12) with which the book begins. Spiralling

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19 Note that Lancelot now attracts what is fitting for him *and* what would be intended for Kay, who is temporarily freed from the consequences of his own boastful reputation. For example, Hallewes knows him as Lancelot, the Round Table knights know him as Kay. It is an identity aggregation, rather than a true exchange. Nor does Kay, apparently, attract any of the daunting trials Lancelot typically does. The narrative always knows to address these to the real Lancelot. The attention Lancelot draws through Kay's armour is directly associated with the latter's blowhard reputation. We might read Lancelot as *a champion of victims*, a fittingly chivalric purpose, or as *a champion of misrepresentation*, since just as Kay misrepresents himself in his boasting, we find Lancelot assuming null-emblems (the white shield) and the emblems of others (Kay's, in this instance).

Regardless, the narrative proceeds to amuse itself at Lancelot's expense through the latter, misrepresentation, and ultimately with Pedivere it proves that Lancelot is not in absolute terms the former, the legendary champion of victims, either.

through repeated variations on these two themes, the adventure discloses that it is not the grand, terrifying, complex, or the near impossible that hold disastrous and fatal consequences for him, but the works of simple truth and deceit.

It *almost* goes without saying that in this work episodes are to a *deceptively* great degree independent. 'Almost,' because obviously I believe the *sequenced* nature of the episodes is of paramount importance, but it is only paramount within the understood context of their *independence*. More straightforwardly: with the possible exception of episodes four and five above, any of the first seven episodes could be removed without affecting the tale's plot (Genette's 'story') terribly much. Further, the more interdependent and sequential episode clusters themselves could be removed, or lose their middles or endings.[20] In *that* context, then, the small variations can take on their true significance as 'happenings' – the subtly charged and variant circumstances of service, violence, and play of surface and truth come into being. 'Deceptively,' since while the episodes appear to uniformly adhere to types of events in Malory – 'the duel,' 'the tournament,' 'the joust' – they present Lancelot fulfilling his myth as the best of knights, and the adventure myth of fearlessly defeating the evil and monstrous, rescuing the fair damsel, and riding off into the forest *in order* to do *the same thing all over again*.[21] At the same time the episodes progressively refine the scenarios from the almost generic[22] to a disastrous failure in episode 27 that leaves Lancelot speechless.

Another Reading of the Same

The alternate sequence's groupings of episodes emphasize a similar progression from simple, triumphant, and mythic to complex, humbling, and pragmatic, but by way of a different frame of reference.

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20 Sequence 3, for instance, might lose episode 22 or 25. For alternate sequence III episodes 12, 13, or 14 could be dropped without too much trouble. However, while episode 15 is intrinsic to this alternate sequence, it is not to sub-sequence 1b, and in fact begins primary sequence 2.

21 Behind myth, and the rituals associated with it, Lancelot's murderous enthusiasm to repeat is glimpsed in such scenes as when, in his eagerness to summon Tarquin, he beats Tarquin's hanging basin with his spear 'tylle the bottum felle oute' (265.4). He then resorts to the chivalric equivalent of pacing back and forth in impatience (265.4-6). He is contemptuous of the orthodox romance challenge process. Disdain and impatience for the traditional forms of romance adventure by Lancelot similarly explains his treatment of the porter at Tyntagil. The basin is not bashed through in the French model, while, as discussed by Riddy (1987, 53-54), the porter's terse to the point of dehumanizing end in Malory is quite different to the French where the encounter is related in some detail.

22 For example, episodes 2 and 3 are almost identical. The effective difference is that Tarquin commends Ector on giving him something of a challenge for a change. This, combined with the catalogue of his crimes and the vanquished that Tarquin recounts to Lancelot later (266.29-35), is offered as the villain's counterpoint sense of the monotony he has endured the past twelve years (255.31-33). One can imagine Tarquin, like Hallewes, all but despairing of Lancelot *ever* turning up. This slight change between 2 and 3 does not improve the situation for Ector compared with the other prisoners, but it does point up the reiteration of the same, and the modest difference in those iterations that *this episode brings about* by contrast with the long years of the same that preceded it under Tarquin's ill customs.

The prologue in this sequence is longer, including episodes 1 through 3: Lancelot leaves court, enters a deep forest, and falls asleep under the apple tree where he will be found, enchanted, and imprisoned by Morgan in episode 4. There is nothing truly remarkable up to this point, other than the motivation for Lancelot's adventure in the first place, discussed above – it is all typical romance fare of a culture hero abducted within a deep and mysterious forest. True to this model, Morgan emerges with her companions not skulking as fugitives of the mighty King Arthur, Emperor of Europe, but with perfect self-assurance. The four knights, we are told, are not there to provide protection, but to hold a vast green cloth of silk aloft as a shade for the four queens from the sun's harsh heat. So, in the first sequence Lancelot is faced with choosing between serving Morgan as her paramour and dying in her prison. Behind the personal and the intimate aspects of this choice is a parallel political one, between Arthur, court, the fellowship of men, and Morgan and all the dark and feminine magics associated with her. Equally obvious is the city/woods divide that is now definitely established. It is for encounters such as these that knights venture off into the forest in the first place, and Lancelot is no exception.

Lancelot is presented with a second choice, to serve a damsel who happens to be Bagdemagus's daughter if he wishes to be freed or, again, to stay put.[23] The opposition between the Round Table, Arthur, court, and Morgan, magic, prisons, and 'her' great forest, is reaffirmed in the character of a nameless daughter who serves Morgan, is privy to her dungeon and secrets, but is in no way of her kind. Lancelot's loyalties are now not problematized in any obvious way. The deal is agreed upon between her and Lancelot, and, as will happen again with the next damsel, by fulfilling her part of the agreement first, Lancelot *is indebted to her* to fulfil his. The presence of Round Table knights in the king of North Wales's side against Bagdemagus does not seem to trouble any of the characters over much. For decency's sake Lancelot will opt for blank shields for himself and the three knights who accompany him in their plot. It is worth noting that Lancelot is the first to propose and use masking of identity as a form of deceit, just as he is the first to use a decoy to lure out his enemy. His opponents, progressively less honourable, appear to learn subterfuge from Lancelot's own example in previous encounters, or at least, his use of deceit opens up new possibilities for them in the narrative's logic; he implicitly gives them permission to respond in kind.

The first alternate sequence, then, tells of Lancelot trapped, forced to choose between two evils, and then freed by choosing service to a woman who is aligned by kin to the Round Table. Lancelot clarifies this relationship before assenting to serve her:

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23 Neither this deal, nor the arrangements the damsel makes with him afterward, are in the French. See: n258.27-259.11, n259.9-11, and n259.15-16. In the details I discuss the same is true of a great deal of what follows in 'Lancelot.' For instance: his dialogues with Morgan, the damsel, and Hallewes regarding his relationship with Guinevere are new in Malory (see n253.8-9, n270.15-271.4, n281.13-22); as is the second deal with a damsel when she offers him a nearby adventure in return for him agreeing to rid the land of Perys afterwards, whereas in the French he asks her for news of Lionel rather than 'happening' upon Tarquin as a means to another end (n264.11-27). Further to this last difference, Perys is a robber in the French (n269.21-24, n.34-36), and not the predator of women he is in Malory. The clustered sequence, with reversal of crimes against men to crimes against women, is clarified by the two giants holding only women at Tyntagil while in the French they held knights also (n272.2).

'Now, fayre damesell,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'telle me your fadyrs name, and than shall I gyff you an answere.'

'Sir knight,' she seyde, 'my fadyrs name is kynge Bagdemagus, that was foule rebuked at the laste turnemente.'

'I knowe your fadir well,' seyde sir Launcelot, '[...] your fadir shall have my servyse, and you bothe at that day.' (258.35-259.6)

For reasons unexplained it seems this tournament is more than one of idle sport. Bagdemagus and his daughter take it very seriously, and clearly the knights do too – in the first clash twelve of Bagdemagus's knights are killed, and six belonging to the king of North Wales.

The second alternate sequence almost begins and ends with sleep, linking it with the first sequence's apple tree as this series will over and over. Weary or not, Lancelot is rarely allowed rest or idleness. Recently released and somewhat lost, he attempts to sleep in a pavilion, only to be roused by another man seemingly taking advantage of his situation, and to a similar amorous end as Morgan recently had in mind. He is bound by Belleus's lover to make amends, to see the knight he has wounded elevated into the Round Table fellowship, which he assents to providing Belleus accounts for himself well at court. With Bagdemagus's daughter and Belleus's lover, while the requirement on Lancelot is a chivalric one, it is exacted *by*, and agreed upon *to*, the two women. Once he has honoured his debt to Bagdemagus's daughter they feast and celebrate.[24] And, in the morning after, promising further service to the daughter whenever she may have need of him, he leaves only to find himself in the same place and forest as he started. This is a chivalric ideal of service to women. By the end of the tale the ideal *as ideal* will be undone by proof that it can serve treachery, and can even be made impossible quite trivially under certain circumstances.

Awake, and having observed this loop, the second damsel he will serve approaches him. The clarity of whom Lancelot serves becomes more evident with each sequence. With this next damsel, his decision to serve her appears primary, the connection to the Round Table secondary, almost accidental.

'Sir, thou besemys well; here is adventures fast by that fallyth for the. For hereby dwellyth a knyght that woll nat be overmacched for no man I know but ye do overmacche hym. [...] But whan ye have done that journey, ye shall promyse me, as ye ar a trew knyght, for to go and helpe me and other damesels that ar dystressed dayly with a false knyght.'

'All youre entente, damesell, and desyre I woll fulfylle, so ye woll brynge me unto this knight.' (264.24-35)

She promises him adventure in return for service, the first to rescue knights, the second to halt the abuse of women. In both cases Lancelot's opponent is a knight *and* an enemy to knighthood. The first is doubly determined for him specifically – no one else could finish the adventure; and no one else is Tarquin's true quarry, Tarquin's personal motivation for the outrages he commits in the first

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24   This is also not in the French (n263.29-34).

place. The second is similarly over-determined – he is committed to the service by his word and by contract with the damsel; while he is also committed not only by the Pentecostal Oath, but by his own *ēthos* too, to protect women in danger. There are other motivations as well – personal, familial, and the fellowship's bindings – that further prompt his challenge to Tarquin. All of which, in motivational terms, is piled upon his own predisposition:

> 'Fayre damesel,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'know ye in this contrey ony adventures nere hande?'
>
> 'Sir knyght,' seyde the damesel, 'here ar adventures nyghe, and thou durste preve hem.'
>
> 'Why sholde I not preve?' seyde sir Launcelot. 'For for that cause com I hydir.' (264.11-16)

What follows is an identity reveal, and the just discussed identification of these quests with Lancelot personally.

After Tarquin is dispatched, Lancelot promptly honours his promise and departs with the damsel. His zeal increases over the two adventures in this damsel's service to such an extent that he rails against romance's own literary customs by thrashing out of existence the means of summoning Tarquin, then, when left to his own devices in the sequence after Perys, he rushes Tyntagil.[25] The feast, revelry, and sleep like that which concluded Bagdemagus's daughter's sequence is left to the newly released knights, further emphasizing the sense of urgency and determination in Lancelot. His perfunctory treatment of Tyntagil's 'carle'/porter, and disregard for the masses who lament his coming, suggest the near-blind and bombastic blood lust of Monty Python's caricature Lancelot, and certainly lack the complexity and troubled conscience that pervades the adventure's later episodes.

By this fourth sequence's end Lancelot's personal mythology is as clearly represented as Arthur's conquest of Europe was in book two, and the realm's consolidation in book one. The service to his fellow knights is subordinated to the service to women, itself, in the case of the text just quoted, a mere pretext for a desire for violent adventure. The need to prove himself in turn is motivated from the very start of this book, and the close of the previous one, by the end of war, the forbidden yet undeniable love for the king's wife, and his inverted short-straw relationship to all in contests of skill and prowess within the court. In romance tournaments, and very frequently in Malory elsewhere too, the one who the crowd recognizes is not the failure. They recognize the one who conquers all and barely breaks a sweat in the process. True to mythic formulas, such a knight will ride off into the forest before he can be celebrated – a simple re-envisaging of the scapegoat failure's 'exile.'

By way of summary, then, in mythic terms, war, love, and honour drive Lancelot from court. The narrative, on the other hand, arrives, by way of Lancelot's service to others, at these two sequences near the middle of book three where the myth of Lancelot the romance hero is exaggerated. The outermost edge of a centrifugal spiral is reached. The service to women is nominal, as shown above, and confirmed in the charge and conquest of Tyntagil where the damsels' rescue is purely

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25   See p100 fn21, above.

accidental and revealed after the fact. The remaining sequences, centripetal, knock the grandiose out of the mythic image of the hero and the mythic world he inhabits. This occurs through circumstance, through accident, happenings, and the small – all of which are noticeable by their absence or the disregard they are shown in the Tarquin, Perys, and Tyntagil sequences (alternate sequences III and IV). A process which uniquely positions Lancelot to return to court and play a different, noticeably wiser, more careful and circumspect, role throughout much of the rest of the work.[26]

The changes in Lancelot's debt of service over these two sequences reveal again the central crisis he carries. It is adventure, or violence, he seeks while asserting it is service to this damsel, so Tarquin is defeated and the knights are released. Perys he kills by way of clearing a debt of honour. Without any identifiable reason he charges a bridge, village, and castle, slaying and defying those in his way.

> And whan he come into the castell he alyght and tyed his horse to a rynge on the walle. And there he sawe a fayre grene courte, and thydir he dressid hym, for there hym thought was a fayre place to feyght in. So he loked aboute hym and sye muche peple in dorys and in wyndowys that sayde, 'Fayre knyghte, thou arte unhappy to com here!' (271.24-29)

This is almost exactly in the middle of the adventure, and comes directly after the damsel's queries regarding Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere, as well as with women more generally.

> '[…] And so who that usyth paramours shall be unhappy, and all thynge unhappy that is aboute them.' (271.2-4)

'Unhappy' states and deeds, along with unfortunate slayings, are recurrent themes in Lancelot's musings on knights who have paramours. So the commons' distress towards him can be viewed as less of a reflection of their corruption, or allegiance to the two giants, than it is of Lancelot's own predicament – a violent adulterer and a liar; armed, dangerous, and on the loose. In an interesting inversion of 'Balin,' it is the commons who speak up against the mythic narrative of events and appeal to a different, historic, tale of the same. With Tarquin, Lancelot nominally serves a damsel, and releases those he ought to have sought out anyway (the sixty-four knights), in truth he is after 'adventure' and 'proof.' Here, Lancelot nominally serves himself, but it appears to be a violent emotional reaction to his own hypocrisy that, after the fact, is understood as a daring rescue of enslaved women (sixty of them).

Two prisons of chivalric adventure sandwich the defeat of a rapist and Lancelot not only denying his relations with Guinevere, but holding forth on the consequences for those who would do what he in fact does do. Only a little below the mythic surface and at the height of his prowess in this tale, violence, service, and deceit as threads of interest converge over Lancelot's own character and question it. It is also the turning point. If the episodes and sequences trace outward loops of a spiral form to here, then they begin to close in on Lancelot on his winding return to court in what

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26 See 'The Unstable Chivalric World,' chapter one, and note: 487.29-30.

follows. The grand adventures will give way to an individual quest, and that to personal defence, and that in turn, finally, to a revelation of personal helplessness to perform a simple duty.

'Lancelot' concludes with the hero forced to recognize that the world is neither simple, nor closed – it is multivalent and complex. Interrelations accurately reflect the push and pull of conflicting real world circumstance in a smaller environment than the 'Roman War,' further troubling how complex the world outside Logres truly was during that campaign, how the communal *ēthos* and the personal one is far from straightforward or innocent, and particularly with respect to problems of individuality. Even the forest does not behave like a sandpit with persistent objects – things come and go, coming into view they are present for an instant or two and then they are gone, maybe affecting others as they pass. Seeing as 'Lancelot' is, even on a mythic level, so easily and frequently made irreconcilable in the narrative itself, the 'Roman War,' as 'Arthur' was before it, seems to bristle with insufficiently acknowledged problems and unheard victims.

Solve for *x*

To some not small degree 'Lancelot' reads as an intertwining of *sens* threads, or, if one prefers Lewis's term, as polyphonic for *sens* rather than *matière*. And, I believe, this is true to an increasing degree as *Le Morte Darthur* progresses, as the threads gain in resonance and vary in context-specific weight, and perhaps as the author refines his technique too. The remainder of 'Lancelot,' in so far as the hero's service is concerned – a central issue to the entire text, on a par at least with its correlates betrayal and love – is in an almost continuous state of flux between extremes, it features disorienting, sudden, inversions. Understood statically they represent division and discord, as itemized by Riddy. Understood as a single process it is a recursive algorithm – to solve for *x* in certain problems a formula must repeat, operating on feedback from its previous iteration, until an acceptable result is found. It is not unlike a narrative differential equation that is resolved by Lancelot's return to court, in silence. As always, we are left to draw our own conclusions. The narrator makes no comment on the process or the result.

Alternate sequence V is a series of episodes that tells us what happens when the best of all Round Table knights knowingly and willingly appropriates the signifiers of, for this tale's purposes, the worst of all Round Table knights. As noted previously, this is not a mask like the blank shield in Bagdemagus's tournament. Not satisfied with his own supremacy in the previous adventures for those encounters that are fitting for him (as stated by the two damsels, Tarquin, and the ladies held at Tyntagil), he appropriates those fitting for Kay as well. There is no hint in the text that he escapes notice by Hallewes, Phelot, or Pedivere. Nor is this a flaw in the text – we are to understand that Lancelot incurs those sequences of episodes by virtue of his person itself, and his *ēthos*, while in alternate sequence V his two chivalric groups of opponents interpret the signs as is appropriate for knights of the Round Table. In terms of service this is the only time he acts without any clear sense

of duty, hence another reason why it could be referred to as 'play.'[27] By representing the superlative and the most inferior knight,[28] *both* possible 'short straw' values, Lancelot's Messiah-complex and 'game' overwhelm the chivalric equivalent of mob lynchings. The sequence of domination is against incrementally strong opponents from the first episode with its three knights who are presumably so ignoble as to attack on mass and under the cover of darkness, to a more disciplined joust and combat episode of the three named but minor Round Table knights, and finally an episode containing four significant Round Table knights, including Gawain and Lancelot's own kin Ector 'hovynge undir an oke' (277.5) in a glade deep within the forest.

All of this suggests that Lancelot appears happiest when he pretends to be someone other than himself, and that at this stage of the text he is literally peerless. He has no one even close to an equal in the realm, or, what is essentially the same thing, the narrative world. Further, while the sequences of the first half of the tale were content to test his behaviour through non-recognition,[29] which he invited upon himself in the narrative's logic by using a white shield in the first place, he shall from this point on be tested by misrepresentation due to the fact he arrogates Kay's identity.

In alternative sequence VI Lancelot is initially lured by no man or woman but, it seems, by a bratchet in a mock hunt not for a beast, but to a dead man and a new enchantress who, more obsessed than even Morgan before her, would have Lancelot to herself alone, alive or dead. Initially she presents as a recently-widowed and grieving 'lady,' but she somewhat cryptically lets slip something of her true motives: 'Knyght, to muche sorow hast thou brought me' (278.33). The episode concludes with Lancelot ineffectually expressing condolences before taking to the road again.

The impression here, and with Meliot's damsel sister, is that Lancelot is led through the sequence rather than directing his own path. He may have stormed Tyntagil in his excitement, on an impulse, or possibly intuitively, which was retrospectively sanctioned as a rescue, but from this sequence on his progress is slower and explicitly directed by others. Even the bratchet pauses and looks behind to make sure Lancelot is keeping up. It is his turn to latch onto chivalric signifiers as those he has just defeated did with Kay's armour. In this case it is her brother's identity as 'sir Melyot de Logyrs,' whom Lancelot recognizes as a 'fellow of the Table Rounde' (279.29, .31), that resolves him to do as she instructs. His degree of understanding over whom he should serve and

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27   The sequence is related as play despite, or in so far as play is *agon*: because of, Lancelot's absolute superiority:

> Wyth that sir Raynolde gan up sterte with hys hede all blody and com streyte unto sir Launcelot. 'Now let be,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'I was not far frome the whan thou were made knyght, sir Raynolde, and also I know thou arte a good knyght, and lothe I were to sle the.' (276.25-29)

28   Admittedly I am assuming Kay has a minimal status here that is a complementary inverse of Lancelot's maximal status. I doubt it is too much of a stretch in the circumstances, and certainly accounts for the helpless role Kay plays in his own right, the treatment other knights think to give him as collectives, and both the narrative's and Lancelot's logic in taking his armour.

29   The clearest example is Tarquin giving Lancelot an opportunity out of mortal combat if he *says* he is other than Lancelot. Less sure evidence can be seen in the switch from not hesitating to reveal his name to anyone who does not know it already (e.g., the second damsel of alternate sequence III, 264.20-23), to the Lancelot of this sequence who insists that, so far as his defeated are concerned and despite all evidence to the contrary, he is Kay.

what he should do is pinned on her words alone. The power and the unascertainable nature of faithfulness, or of intent behind words, is precisely what the next two sequences reveal as being far more dangerous than Lancelot's games, and close to utterly indifferent to supremacy in feats of prowess. This deep in the forest he is figuratively in the position Nynyve and Pellinor found themselves towards the end of 'The Wedding': 'Ye may as well ryde backwarde as forewarde, hit ys so durke.' (118.1-2)

Phelot's wife opens the final alternate sequence (VII), binding Lancelot by his own sense of duty to disarm and climb a tree after her falcon. It is the logical extreme of the preceding scenario since it shows how easily he can be lured by words that appeal to chivalric standards to entrap himself. Further, we observe that the natural world of mere men and women without sorcery is no safer than the enchanted regions, even as it brings us one loop closer to court. His own ideals of service endanger him. Pedivere then completes a logical proof of the pitifully vulnerable and dismal position Lancelot's claim to supremacy lands himself in – it is possible for him to be deceived by the surface of things (Hallewes), he may have to trust in words alone and follow directions (Meliot's sister), these words may be false (Phelot and his wife), and he is susceptible to the villainy of others even when he is aware of them and indisputably dominates the situation (Pedivere).

In other words: enchantments, rogue knights, plots, and unreliable information are all, of course, real problems for even the best knight of the realm, and he does not have to assume the identity of others to find them – they will seek him out. But, and the sequences build up to this new abyss-cum-pinnacle of realization for Lancelot, the power he does wield not only cannot prevent him from endangering himself or failing those he would protect, that power *as the perfection of chivalry itself* is the instrument by which he has, and will again, endanger himself and fail those he would protect. Here, and in the 'Morte,' this happens through simple words, and it is already obvious that the *noyse* about him and Guinevere will not be silenced by his sword or words.

> 'Nay,' sayde the knyght, 'I woll never aryse tylle ye graunte me mercy.' [...]
>
> 'Nay, sir, that woll I never.'
>
> 'Well,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'take this lady and the hedde, and bere it uppon the; and here shalt thou swere uppon my swerde to bere hit allwayes uppon thy bak and never to reste tyll thou com to my lady, quene Gwenyver.'
>
> 'Sir, that woll I do, by the feyth of my body.'
>
> 'Now what is youre name?'
>
> 'Sir, my name is sir Pedyvere.'
>
> 'In a shamefull oure were thou borne,' seyde sir Launcelot. (285.22-3, .28-36)

Lancelot's limits are further restricted by the terms of Pedivere's surrender. He used words only to subvert Lancelot's protection of his wife, and here uses them again to ensure his own survival. Bewildered, the only solution Lancelot can devise without further dishonouring himself is to defer the case to Guinevere. Pedivere demonstrates how words trump an honourable knight's sword, as Mark will more famously explore in many variations throughout Malory's 'Tristram.' As readers we have no more idea what to make of Pedivere becoming a hermit and holy man on his return from Rome than Lancelot might have in the tale. Certainly I believe it is significant Lancelot

has nothing to say on his return to court, or at all after the quotation above, and that Pedivere is seen by Guinevere *before* the desolate Lancelot returns speechless to her also. The text is equally silent on his reaction to the procession of acclaim for his many victories – the wide and noisy gulf that separates the individual man from his own myth.

The most interesting aspect of this, I believe, is the surprise that *through* this seemingly disjointed and clearly episodic tale, Lancelot and the narrative itself have emerged in subtly different states from those they started in. He may have returned from the Roman War as one of Santayana's 'young barbarians' who had learned nothing, but after the second half of 'Lancelot' we rarely glimpse the mythic Lancelot who storms castles on a whim, slaying all before him – until he kills Gareth and Gaheris in his rescue of Guinevere, that is, which we will return to in this thesis's second part below. Accident and circumstance have knocked him into a considerably more circumspect character – a contrast that may seem minor, subtle, and itself 'accidental' in Malory's characterization until Tristram arrives in earnest and reminds us of how Lancelot was before. As for the narrative itself, the post-'Roman War' high notes of surfeit, sport, victory, and lust that yearns to be consummated have long gone.

Gathering

By almost whatever standard of measure we elect, it seems to me, clearly the conclusion of 'Lancelot' is uneasy. The hero set out to 'prove' himself. The tale traces his path through a series of hard and even magical encounters, to which he responds with increasing vigour and a cheerful disposition until – after he jousts with the Gawain, Uwayne, Sagramour, and Ector – supremacy of prowess and chivalric honour are progressively revealed as not quite enough. It seems clear the tale is proposing that human motives are potentially more unknowable, sinister, and destructive in their effects than magic or monsters. But, equally important is the juxtaposition of Lancelot at his height of mythic invincibility, knocking down all opponents, storming castles and overwhelming giants on his own, and so on, with the same man bewildered, led, abused, and trivially fooled.[30] Yet:

> And so at that tyme sir Launcelot had the grettyste name of ony knyght of the worlde,
> and moste he was honoured of hyghe and lowe. (287.24-6)

Against the *greatest of odds* and challenges he will emerge victorious, as Arthur did against the Roman Empire. It is against the *slightest of chance happenings* and the seemingly insignificant that Lancelot is tripped up, and it is these that knock the straight-lined mythic trajectory into spirals, that develop the story through individual episodes into a sequenced serial narrative structure. The tale closes with everyone gathered at court. The city/woods division has been subsumed by an

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30 To sum up: he inadvertently follows a bratchet through the woods to Hallewes in an inverted hunt of Lancelot by Hallewes; his 'fight' against her and the giant knights is really him demonstrating he can conquer his own fears with honour; he is deceived, trapped and rendered defenceless up a tree by following his own code of chivalry; and, finally, incapable of resolving a domestic dispute he cannot even protect a woman from her husband, who is a very poor knight indeed.

inside/outside court division – a cultural distinction based not on nationality (Lancelot is, after all, French, and a French king at that) but on a common understanding of honour and various other chivalric norms and ideals we have been associating with any given character's *ēthos*. 'Gareth' begins there, albeit displaced near Wales. A detail that reveals how ritualized and cultural all the other assertions of the same are:

> In Arthurs dayes, whan he helde the Rounde Table moste plenoure, hit fortuned the
> kynge commaunded that the hyghe feste of Pentecoste sholde be holden at a cité and a
> castell, in tho dayes that was called Kynke Kenadoune, upon the sondys that marched
> nyghe Walys. So evir the kynge had a custom that at the feste of Pentecoste in especiall
> afore other festys in the yere, he wolde nat go that day to mete unto that he had herde
> other sawe of a grete mervayle. And for that custom all maner of strange adventures
> com byfore Arthure, as at that feste before all other festes. (293.3-12)

The previous uses of the name 'Gareth' are in lists alongside his brothers, and once where it is assumed to be in error,[31] which adds weight to the narrative sense that this adventure *follows on* from those that precede it, and that it introduces someone new to the court and Round Table. In a strict chronological sense this is not necessarily so, particularly given the relation of 'Lancelot' with the likely killing of Carados in 'Tristram,' and 'Gareth' situating itself after 'La Cote Male Tayle,' also in 'Tristram.' The continuity is asserted in a different kind of time. Everyone gathered for Lancelot's return at the Pentecostal feast that ended book three. Everyone gathers at the same feast in the opening of 'Gareth' at, we can safely assume, another non-specific year.[32] The feast and gathering, themselves rituals, are loaded with another ritual of a happening that will come to the court, as well as the prohibition established in 'The Wedding' against eating before that 'mervayle' is heard or seen.

Sir Gawain tells the king:

> 'Sir, go to your mete, for here at hande commyth strange adventures.' (293.19-20)

The newcomer unwittingly follows Lancelot's lead from the end of the previous book. He is centripetally pulled into the orbit of the court where he abides for a year evaluating it and absorbing the customs and character of those knights he would emulate. As is fitting he awaits the next feast to set out on his adventure to 'prove' himself, just as Lancelot intended to do.

Yet, even at a Pentecostal feast at Arthur's court, what must be the heart of Arthurian romance, the Arthurian centre of ritual repetition, myth, and culture, the marvel that arrives this time is not a monstrous other, *fée* damsel, wild hunt, or disdainful Green Knight – it is Gareth, the one

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31 He is named along with his brothers and led by their mother, Morgause, at 41.16 and 77.28. See n242.24 regarding 'that Gareth sonne wynnys' and the *aMA*'s 'the garett he wynnys,' where the latter is referring to a keep or tower.

32 Book four's events can be taken as earlier, although Gareth has so far played no real part. The story does turn to Gareth as someone *new to the story*, rather than an earlier tale chronologically. 'Gareth' is also subsequent, since in it the Brown Knight without Pity is finally defeated.

'Gareth' tells an adventure originating from a desire to prove oneself, just as Lancelot desired in his book three, but with a quite different configuration. In other words: at some stage adventure played out *that* way for Lancelot, *this* is the way it went for Gareth. At the very least, 'Gareth' does begin on the same (religious calendar) day, at another place and another, indeterminate, time.

unambiguously good son of Lott. In the tale that follows, and even in his own grizzly end, his behaviour is at all times exemplary. He is a figurative favourite lamb whose blood, when shed, seals Lancelot's and Gawain's irreconcilable differences, just as through the rest of the work he functions as a conduit to maintain at least a show of good relations between his brothers and other central characters. In a bildungsroman-esque style, prefiguring 'Tristram,' what follows is an exploration of the very problems that brought Lancelot back to court, particularly those related to *ēthos* and the potentially deceptive surface of things. In fact, arguably the first thing Gareth reveals at court is that dishonour lurks even here, minimally in the character of Kay, and so we cannot retain even the previous inside/outside court division that superseded the city/woods division. We are returned to Balin's observation: 'manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person' (63.25).

> The body coming into existence is directly the tablet of its own law. It does not bear it written upon itself, but it is from end to end the key to its code. It is what I call elsewhere a circumstance, a vortex circulating on the nappe of the fall in deviation from the fall; it is a circumstance, a case, a chance, a miracle; it is a circumstance in code that will offer this up to be read: in this circumstance, here and now, in this local pocket, this island, a particular cause produces a particular effect. (Serres 2000, 149)

Through seemingly random stories collated from disparate sources, stitched loosely and additively together, the mythic Lancelot is built up then ground down between two models of character who serve as his doubles in disarming detail. First Kay, whose outward signs he assumes for chivalry and in so far as Kay is his own Round Table inverse. Kay, whom knights attempt to forcefully reconcile what he says of himself with reality, and to make him admit as much, is a correlate of Lancelot, whom women attempt to make reconcile what he says of himself on lovers and adultery with reality. Second, Pedivere, whose degree of deceit is so closely paralleled to Lancelot's that they will each assert and stand by a literal truth in order to utterly mislead:

> 'Sir,' seyde the knyght, 'in your syght I woll be ruled as ye woll have me.' (285.4-5)
> 'As for that,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'God ys to be drad! But as to that I say nay playnly, that thys nyght there lay none of thes ten knyghtes wounded with my lady, quene Gwenyver, and that woll I prove with myne hondys that ye say untrewly in that. Now, what sey ye?' seyde sir Launcelot. (1133.29-33)

It is not only in this challenge to Mellyagaunce from 'The Knight of the Cart' that Lancelot masks the truth behind a partial truth to project the false (as, obviously, Pedivere misleads with 'in your syght,' so Lancelot does with 'none of thes ten knyghtes'). This strategy progressively creeps into many of Lancelot's dialogues with others and with his sovereign, Arthur, as his back presses harder against a wall, and in proportion to the growing sense of impending, binding, doom through books seven and eight.[33] In between the end of 'Lancelot' and the spiralling in of the entire work – in the 'greater' middle, that is – Lancelot is noticeably more circumspect about such misrepresentations. Lancelot as singularly superior within the community, but ultimately powerless within the world when he

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33   And, obviously, this happens after book six winds down the same path only to spiral out in a short-lived reprieve at its close and book seven's beginning.

plays that role, is something the text will take some time to loop back to. Other characters, particularly Gareth, Tristram, Palomides, and Mark of course, in many smaller narrative loops inside the work's 'middle' will take turns exploring permutations of this play of surface, honour, *ēthos*, desire, and Fate.

In book one, the realm, myth, and ritual are established. In book two, Arthur becomes emperor of the civilised world. Book three develops a pre-eminent lover and rival for Arthur in Lancelot. Book four will construct an apprentice and model for Lancelot in Gareth. While, book five repeats the process from a new beginning and locale to a seemingly endless sequence of middles. But here, in this gathering at the close of 'Lancelot,' and the not-here, not-now, yet for all intents and purposes just like it, opening of 'Gareth,' Lancelot returns to court as per ritual but accounted for by others, not himself, just as if he were the accused and not Pedivere. He is also the one lauded above all other knights. Taken together these are the twin characteristics of the scapegoat: the one who takes all the blame, and the one who is praised by all, high and low. The stage is set for Gareth to arrive, depart, return, and in doing so to more formally, slowly, and in more detail, explore new variations on and disruptions to the mythic return of the same through sequenced serial loops of beginnings, middles, and ends.

PART TWO: MODES

The chapters in this part discuss the mythic and historic threads as they are found in the modes[1] of beginnings in Malory where they are primarily 'gatherings'; of endings that 'will' chance and Fate; and, of middles as sequences of episodes that 'loop,' spiralling in or out,[2] resembling sometimes the indefinitely prolonged hell of Serres, at others asserting the very moment of becoming as an alternative.[3] Sequences as narrative threads widen or tighten our sense of the narrative world as the work requires of them for emotive reasons. There is one overarching concept for all of these attributes – the dual function of repetition by way of its ambiguous relationship to the same and the new. We can read Malory's beginnings, endings, and middles-as-loops as depending upon serial narrative as a flexible literary format that can credibly occupy a middle-ground in an audience's mind somewhere between the two barren extremes of 'pure' repetition and 'pure' difference.[4]

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1   On 'modes,' see the introduction, p13 fn35.

2   The textual markers of beginnings (including the rituals of feasts, adventure announcements, departures) and endings (collective murders, and feasts that are the same *and* different from those that occur in the beginnings that follow) should be kept in mind from the first part of this thesis. These landmarks are the most obvious signs of each mode of writing, but they are lacking in the transition I address first: the shift from book four to five.

3   See the introduction to chapter three and its first section, 'Sequenced Serial Narrative.'

4   I refer to the senses used by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1994). Unpacking this subject in so far as it is relevant to Malory's work is the proper business of chapters five and six. For now, though:

   For if [Nietzsche's] eternal return is a circle, then Difference is at the centre and the Same is only on the periphery: it is a constantly decentred, continually tortuous circle which revolves only around the unequal. (55)

   Repetition is not generality. [...]Repetition [...] concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities. Reflections, echoes, doubles and souls do not belong to the domain of resemblance or equivalence; and it is no more possible to exchange one's soul than it is to substitute real twins for one another. If exchange is the criterion of generality, theft and gift are those of repetition. There is, therefore, an economic difference between the two. (1)

IV. Beginnings – Gathering

> It is proper to every gathering that the gatherers assemble to coordinate their efforts
> to the sheltering; only when they have gathered together with that end in view do they
> begin to gather. (Heidegger 1993, v)

Repetition in Malory produces a sense of thematic overloading. It saturates material with an excess that is all the more obvious given the occasional internal contradiction. The seemingly haphazard collection and order of tales in 'Lancelot,' are meaningfully threaded in multiple sequences that even share episodes in the same linear narrative space, including a sequence showcasing Lancelot's recurring efforts to reconcile his worth and repute for the world with a role he can satisfactorily play in that world for himself. This is a feature sequenced serial narratives hold in common – very similar ideas appear within slightly different circumstances overlaid across disparate episodes, while discrepancies highlight the repetition, significance, and logical impossibility of the ideas, events, or things as they are simultaneously asserted. We are presented with fecundity without a clear referent not unlike Heidegger's *gathering* above, as seen in the assemblage of details, some seeming to be mutually exclusive, within sections like the close of 'Lancelot.' '*Only* when they have gathered' for the purpose of sheltering 'do they begin to gather.' Malory's text is open at *the* beginning and *the* ending, as well as in each of the greater or smaller beginnings and endings throughout – it follows Heidegger's logic.

As the knights gather in the shelter of fellowship, 'shelter' being a wholly appropriate term given the manifold threats faced by the realm, reign, and knights, so the text gathers from a variety of genres – epic, romance, tragedy, and chronicle – used almost as dialects to tell and retell the mythic and historic tales. Within this shelter are ideas of protection and courage that are far from easily uncoupled, whether considered of personal relations or communal ones. Just as the question of faith in oneself and in each other is one of the work's cornerstones as a prerequisite for honour and worth, and is all but synonymous with truth, a primary and insistent textual refrain, so too is it faith that alone gives a depth of meaning and emotional weight to the sense of loss characters and readers feel when that faith is knocked or destroyed, and on the other hand, hope when attempts are made to rebuild it.

In this chapter I draw primarily from Malory's 'Gareth' through 'Tristram' transition some key points of overlap with 'Lancelot,' although they are equally relevant to those concerns of conduct and worth raised in the 'Sankgreal,' the foundation of the realm in 'Arthur,' and the undoing of the same in the 'Morte.' In so far as these can be disentangled into the narrative modes of 'beginnings' and 'endings' with distinct yet clearly interlocked purposes they function as alternating gathering and scattering thematic agents. And these explain Malory's at times unsettling strategies for narrative motivation.

Generally, the beginnings are composed of elements from the past (analepsis) or future (prolepsis), and initiate a sequence that employs insistent repetition.[1] The middles are repetitive, largely composed of small independent episodes, loosely but still meaningfully sequenced to explore, or *deduce*, outcomes from the narrative process. The endings so far have been somewhat more about building up to new beginnings than they are concerned with reconciliation or conclusion, in any conventional sense of the words. They do not tend to close down decisively on the outcomes of the middles, and sometimes barely acknowledge them at all. Instead they are not infrequently left somewhat hanging in the mind as multiple aspects of new concerns are raised and overwhelm the ones past in the lead up to yet another beginning.

The endings may not serve reconciliatory, concluding, or 'unifying' functions at all where the beginnings pose possible resolutions for what has gone before (whether in the text explicitly or not), and the endings reveal those scenarios unravelling into new problems. This is more in keeping with a primarily subjective narrative than it is with what one might expect to find in (pseudo-)historical literature, including other Arthurian prose works as well as myths and legends. In Malory we find a variety of narrative time that is lived in and through, and it is hardly ever settled, peaceful, or resolved. Except, that is, *paradoxically so* when the focal character is fully invested in the happenings of the moment. Peace and stability are established by hand; they are to be found in the local rather than remote. And this state of affairs speaks to the subjective experience of adapting to one's environment and moving forward.

From a literary point of view the beginning is a hypothetical resolution to test, and the ending is a new dilemma, a 'hook and clasp'-like concatenation device. The more recurrent a given problem, the more the sequences that make use of that problem become functionally substitutable. The greater a sequence's potential for substitution, as found in books one, three, and five in particular, the greater the wax and wane of emphases, patterned by repetition in a vertical space. This has less to do with the narrative events (to the degree they are substitutable within the narrative) than it has to do with thematic and emotive weight and focus. That is, the *sequence* of

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1   I am not disregarding the scholarship on Malory's major divisions and the transitions between these. Sanders's (1987) article contains a useful summary of prior debate and linguistic analysis of the work to establish 'macrosegment' divisions. He concludes, in no small part on the basis of Malory's use of analepsis (after Genette), that there are three macrosegments: Arthur's early reign (book one), middle material (books two through four), and late (books five through eight).

I   Genette's analepses, and prolepses for that matter, are terms intentionally stripped of those connotations I have raised when discussing 'recaps' and 'prophecy' earlier in this thesis. He, like Sanders, wishes to avoid all non-temporal associations, such as we find in terms like 'anticipation' or 'reflection,' in order to grapple logically and exclusively with structural relationships in narrative (Genette 1980, 48-79). Conversely, the connotative terms put to one side for Genette's and Sanders's purposes, are for the same reasons of relevance to mine, since they are in part what lends literature a sense of the mythic, historic, or tragic. To clarify by example: Merlin's *voice* is frequently *prophetic*, even if it is not always strictly speaking *proleptic for the narrative*, since some of what he foretells does not in fact come to pass in the work.

I   I am here concerned with narrative motivational processes that are at work within Malory – to describe or envisage the work as operative, functional, a story-telling machine in time, perhaps, rather than to identify and hierarchize the static divisions left in the work. That is, I believe Sanders is *objectively* very close to the truth, if not straight out correct, plain and simple. But there still remains the *subjective* experience of transitions large and small to consider.

sequences predominates in meaning as the individual sequences are rendered less informative individually, and as the 'natural' continuity within and across sequences decreases.

There is a mode of narrative in Malory that is of the 'beginnings' type, and this is what initiates a new sequence. It is not confined to or defined by specific locations on physical pages, or relationships with text divisions (regardless of those divisions' provenance: whether likely authorial, scribal, or editorial). The most obvious beginnings typically establish a combat, quest, or triangular relationship as something that could perhaps resolve a character's, and sometimes a community's,[2] sense of inherent lack. Often this 'lack' is either the same as the one left unresolved in the previous sequence's ending, or some identifiably-related variant of it. The middles, for their part, explore the lifecycle of the project undertaken. While the endings are studies of the flaws in any such attempt to find an inner completeness from an external locus. The tension this creates is the motivation for a new beginning.[3]

Take for instance the 'Poisoned Apple' tale that immediately follows the 'Sankgreal' book and begins 'Lancelot and Guinevere' – Lancelot, faced with a recent and unambiguous divine injunction, along with threats from secular quarters of (dangerously close to the mark) slander and scandal, attempts to withdraw from Guinevere, at least on the surface of things. The tale develops to reveal the insufficiency of this for each of Guinevere and Lancelot emotionally and physically. Matters get significantly worse. It ends with threats to their persons and way of life no less pressing than at the outset of the tale, while the beginning's proposed course of action, Lancelot's withdrawal from Guinevere's company, is established as ineffective, contrary even to their happiness and safety.

Or, in the 'Joyous Gard,' Percival wishes to project upon Mark the sense of honour all share in having Tristram amongst them, and the unreality, impossibility even, of Tristram and La Belle Isode's indiscretions. Mark has no joy from a Tristram either with or without his liberty. Neither, it seems, does Tristram from Mark. Nor does Percival's rescue affect anything long term or short. Tristram is almost immediately imprisoned once again. (679-80)

The beginning in both of these examples gathers a complex of the problem to mind; the ending for each scatters the characters to a set of more-or-less distant relationships that are of a *modestly* different problematic status from that with which it began, but the configuration at the end is more often than not compatible with that at the onset. Hence, the impression is given in sequenced serial narrative that episodes and sequences may be substitutable, and even appear to be indefinitely protracted iterations of the same; we feel, with some justification, this is the n-th time we have read the episode in question.[4]

Malory demonstrates how combat fails to resolve the characters' most pressing questions (for example: whose beloved is the fairest, whose cause is true and just in the eyes of God, even such

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2   See 'The Wedding' in chapter two.

3   The situation is more complex since, as we have seen with 'Lancelot' in the previous chapter, multiple sequences can run through the same episodes without being coterminous. We find what I have been calling 'threads' or 'sequences of sequences' following the progress of one or another 'lack' or theme.

4   The last two chapters discuss in more detail the role of repetition in Malory.

seemingly combat-appropriate questions as who is the stronger or better knight),[5] while there is a distinct sense of purposelessness and failure after some of the most significant quests regardless of their nominal outcome (for instance: Lancelot's efforts in book three as discussed above, and more generally this recurrent and primary motif in the 'Sankgreal'). But, it is the triangle of desire[6] in its many configurations, from the outset to the close of *Le Morte Darthur*, that truly captures the characters' yearnings, efforts, and ultimate disappointments in one another, themselves, and any real achievements made along the way. The scenarios that unfold from these triangles are what lead to both of the finest knights of the realm recounting lists of services rendered to their respective kings and realms, in addresses to those lords, and while they are being utterly rejected by them.[7] And, these scenarios are what prompt extended bouts of madness when the knights suppose they have been rejected by their queens.[8] They try to convince the other and themselves that they are worthy, but the extreme sense of outrage suggests that they see themselves through the other, believe themselves to have failed in those eyes, and cannot reconcile this with what they thought they knew of their relationships.

Tristram experiences exile and madness; Lancelot exile, madness, and a full scale international war as well. Obviously in the course of Malory's long and at times meandering Arthurian adventures these are well-dispersed events, but equally certain is that they are amongst the more significant of textual landmarks. In between these crises and pivotal events Malory does not content himself with the triangulated problems of these two heroes only – we see triangulation of relationships proliferate throughout. The existence, process, and outcomes of mimetic rivalry as seen in the love triangles inform, overload even, our experience of the heroes' (mis)adventures.[9]

A sequence followed from beginning through middle to end starts with and returns to a need or lack, but not necessarily the same lack or one belonging to the same person. The tension is key, and

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5   See 'The Unstable Chivalric World' in chapter one.

6   That is, the relationship between the three roles played in typical mimetic rivalry: the lover, beloved, and rival lover. See chapter two above, the 'Conduct' section and p58 fn5 in particular.

7   Of Lancelot's memorable examples, those in 'The Vengeance of Sir Gawain' of the 'Morte' are among the most moving: 1187.35-1188.36, 1198.11-1199.4, and 1201.9-29. Tristram holds forth in a similar vein a few times, notably in: 431.14-29 and 503.25-504.15. Each has a somewhat indignant tone, which suggests they see themselves as scapegoated. Tristram, in particular, borders on outright petulant at 431.16-18 and 503.25-35.

8   The intensity of their reactions to rejection by their beloved is attested to by their literal madness. They run wild into the woods. In terms of dialogue they are far more muted with their queens than they are with their kings. They appear to deeply internalize their beloved's (presumed) opinion and the struggle with it breaks their minds. The situation for each knight is subtly different: Lancelot in fact is rejected by Guinevere multiple times, while Tristram wrongly assumes La Belle Isode is unfaithful to him.

    Although Lancelot is not above reminding Guinevere of her lack of faith (1098.3-8), he does not go so far as Tristram in his terse rejoinder to La Belle Isode, who would be joyful in her discovery of him returned to her from madness (502.20-21). The work focusses on the subjective reality for these knights, where the experience is functionally equivalent for Tristram and Lancelot, and not on the objective reality of the scenarios. The intents and motives of others are inscrutable – such is the source of almost all hardship, misery, and loss in Malory, at least with respect to the historical rather than the mythic.

9   Violence and mimetic rivalry, in so far as they can be indefinitely protracted, are key contributing factors to the considerable length and frequency of repetition in 'Tristram.' See Olga Burakov Mongan (2002), discussed further below.

less so the characters. In fact, the characters appear to gather a great deal of their individuality through their associated tensions.[10] The beginnings are where we find existing tensions reconfigured. Such a narrative path is intriguing since the 'home,' or locus of rest and ease, for the knights (and this reader, at least) is in the middle of an adventure where they are in the act of doing something, often well, almost always for the n-th time. The sense of rest is stronger there than at the end, where we rarely find loose ends thoroughly resolved, or a sense of comfort or completeness established.[11] Returning to beginnings, we find the narrative motivation of a lack, or tension, sets the characters on a new path that explores another similar yet different set of relationships.

'The Wedding' of book one is paradigmatic. In the beginning it establishes a scenario to test three knights in turn, in the middle to contrast through iterating sequences three types of knightly conduct, of *character*, and in the end to associate three results with the three types of conduct while undermining what we expect from those results.[12] As a result the world changes little across time or space in Malory, it *feels* quite static,[13] but the conduct of characters and their relationships with one another, particularly in terms of mimetic rivalry, is forever being reshuffled. This results in the middles seeming to work as programmatic loops (Gawain's quest or 'test,' then Torre's, then Pellinor's), with a similar purpose to programming language loops: to differentiate *through* repetition of a function (quest, 'test') on a set of conditions (characters and character relationships), and within a given and stable environment (the narrative world at a place and time, the 'constants' for the conditional loop).

In addition to this gathering of narrative material through an insistent repetition of iterated 'tests' there is a distinct sense of bleakness with respect to the greater picture.[14] The sequences that iterate through all possible alternatives, and the recurring idea that the acts in themselves are pointless beyond what individuals make of such acts for themselves (or for the sake of their community), is in my opinion not nihilistic, but it may perhaps feel nihilism-adjacent at times. There is an implicit acknowledgment of circularity in the logic of value and responsibility too – one must *create* an idea or thing in order to *invest* faith and love into it, and so *suffer* loss when it is broken.

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10 See, for instance, the 'Sequences' section that follows on the confusion at the end of the first gathering of book five's episodes, 'Isode the Fair.'

11 Somewhere between 'Arthur' and 'Tristram' the usual city/woods opposition of order/disorder has been supplanted by the opposed sites being associated with betrayal and the exercise of honour, respectively. At court things may run amok; on horseback less so.

12 Amongst other results already discussed: Gawain-the-transgressor is given an ominous role to play in Pellinor-the-failure's future, which necessarily involves and bodes ill for Torre-the-success. See chapter two's 'The Wedding' section.

13 Consider as just one symptom of this how, unlike his French models, Malory's characters are rarely given precise ages once they have crossed the threshold from adolescence.

14 See 'The Oath Ritual,' chapter two. Note, for instance, Leitch's response to the Oath's repetition from a psychoanalytic perspective (p78 fn36).

Again: one must gather with the idea of sheltering in mind before one may truly begin gathering. In 'The Wedding,' for instance: first, there is a transgression, a failure, and a success; then, there is the Oath; finally, that Oath must be *ritually* taken before it can be viewed as honoured or broken (by failure or transgression) but in a *localized* context.[15]

> First the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there. Throw up and back. [...] Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all.
>
> (Beckett 1983, 8)

Clearly Malory is not at all as stark as Beckett is,[16] either in general or in the quotation above, but there is some measure of commonality in the 'spirit,' or 'outlook' of the two writers and, if the centuries of literature between them are allowed for, in an exhaustive type of narrative methodology that leads to their quite different conclusions. Beckett's work echoes not just the *ēthos* of the more prominent knights in Malory's work, but also the relentless drive through repetition of successes, partial successes, transgressions, and failures in the story itself: 'Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse,' like '[s]omehow on,' is perhaps only a not-*quite*-despair-ridden twentieth-century Modernist's variant of 'I shall take the aventure.' (64.12)

Given how transparent and uncontroversial it is that the 'Tristram' book opens a new major section in Malory, below I look at the transition this 'Tristram' begins within primarily for meaningful forms of continuity between 'Gareth' and 'Tristram,' despite the clear division and new beginning. And I do so in order to explore what 'beginnings' might mean both here and within the wider context of the work.

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15   Conversely, the Oath is also treated as a universal standard, as almost synonymous with the idea of being called a knight at all, and regardless of whether a given knight could even have had the opportunity to swear it at Arthur's court. For example, see Lancelot on Perys the rapist knight (269.23-4).

    My points stand, though. Malory's world – in terms of time and space – is *almost* static. It is the persistent ground for the serialized narrative that repeats and iterates. Certainly we see the paradigm for the Oath at the end of 'The Wedding,' but in terms of knightly conduct this is something the text treats as an absolute requirement for all knights, ever and everywhere. The mythic and ritual aspects, then, are exactly that – stories from the foundations of the fictive civilization. The culture in the narrative already has this Oath institutionalized; the Oath is embedded in the characters' very *ēthos*; and, its breach always figures by way of drawing attention to both the *universal* Oath and the *localized* transgressor, the recreant knight. See also p134 fn44.

16   Malory is no Beckett, any more than he is a Livy (see the introduction's 'Interwoven *sens*'). I refer to Beckett because there is a not infrequent awareness of the individual's condition in Malory, and occasionally a similar 'colour' to the plight of their characters. Both authors in their own fairly systematic way explore this through repetition, and neither tends towards anything like cheerful resolutions.

Transitions – Beginning 'Tristram'

'Tristram' is the last book to open in an obviously disjointed time relationship with what precedes it.[17] While the earlier books, particularly 'Arthur,' have a tendency to encapsulate episodes without necessarily imposing continuity for the sequence in time and place, from 'Tristram' on these sequences of episodes are composed of less self-evidently discrete units. To some degree within 'Gareth,' but certainly by the close of 'Tristram,' familiar conventions of continuity have taken hold of the narrative to such an extent that the work seems like some predecessor of our novel – a resemblance most readers of Malory notice in passing. I wish to draw attention to the looping, or spiralling, from sequence to sequence that the work never entirely abandons even though the narrator's voice has become decidedly more consistent in these later books.

The first step in recognizing such loops is identifying the way one is initiated, its beginning. But, the marker of *discontinuity* between sequences in earlier books has been replaced by a no less troubling marker of *the same* in 'Tristram,' and to an almost interminable degree at times. The work shifts from relating a fragmented narrative world where the sacred operates through characters like Merlin, Pellinor, and Balin, to a seemingly changeless world where human characters are doomed to repeat themselves over and over.

Genette's terms for frequency are relevant for this task – 'Tristram' is *singulative*.[18] It tells *n* times what happens *n* times. It is, after all and amongst other things, an abridged version of the adventures in the vast French prose *Tristan*, with, in all likelihood, additions from elsewhere including the no less vast Prose *Lancelot*.[19] It is *singulative*, then, rather than *repetitive* (telling *n*

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17 Without detracting from the macro divisions and transitions of Sanders (1987, 28), I am interested in the reading process whereby one can *follow* Malory's work from the start through its many beginnings and disjointed moments, and that this sequence is as significant in Malory as interlace is in the Vulgate.

18 On the singulative, repetitive, and iterative, see Genette (1980, 113-6).

19 For example, in the French *Tristan* there is no mute maiden present for Percival's entrance to court, and so no miracle of her speaking to Percival (610-11). Vinaver noted an episode reminiscent of this in the Prose *Lancelot* (n611.19-31), but believed the passage came from a lost *Tristan* variant, a reference to which Field supplies in his revision at the end of the same note. With Norris (2008, 168), I tend towards the belief that Malory integrated the *PVM Suite*, Prose *Lancelot* and other French text material, either to hand or from memory, and whenever he felt it appropriate since there are so many small details scattered throughout the work. See chapter five, and compare with Percival's arrival at court in §177 very near the end of the Prose *Lancelot* (1993, 3:321-329, esp. 325).

The *PVM Suite*, in its own enigmatic way, recounts this tale in §67 (1993, 5:83-90, with the mute maiden at 86-7). In this Post-Vulgate work, too suggestive of Malory's sequence of events to be a coincidence in my opinion, Percival appears at court (§66) immediately after Lamerok is killed by Gawain and his brothers (1993, 5:79-83). In Malory, Percival's arrival is preceded by Mark and Tristram leaving Arthur's court together, with everyone rightly suspecting the worst of Mark (609-10), and is followed by the murder of the brothers' mother by Gaheris (611-2); in the *PVM Suite* this murder is itself used as the most recent reason, or to be blunt: *excuse*, for killing Lamerok.

In the French works this episode happens shortly before the Grail Quest is embarked upon. Separating it from the events leading up to the Grail, and placing it in-between episodes loaded with themes of kin, loyalty, treachery, love, not to mention an incredible transgression in the matricide, but also an explicit motivation in *envy*, is without any doubt a kind of interlacing. But, it is an interlacing for *sens*, rather than *matière* as the French texts are wont to do. Or, if you prefer, and in Genette's terminology, Malory's *narrative* is interlaced, while the story and stories are consolidated. Hence, in these specific cases, and

times what happens once). Yet it subjectively feels repetitive in Genette's technical sense, and the opposite of *iterative* (telling once what happens *n* times). That is, we feel as if, rather than collecting and treating once what were multiple occurrences, Malory successfully blurs the *many* narrated occurrences into seeming to be *one* story that is told over and over again. And, consistent with such a project, the first instance is paradigmatic for the repetitions of it that follow, which in turn is our founding event (collective murder, marvel, first Pentecostal Oath, etc.) to ritual relationship wearing a different hat. To the degree that the narrative insists by repeating a given scenario or theme, to that degree we are called upon to question whether there is a relation of identity between the separate occurrences.

So, Genette's Proustian *iterative syllepses* and Malory's *repetitive paralepses* are not so much in a relationship of opposition to one another, but are complementary and lead to a similar subjective end. The former asserts something happens over and over and over, while recounting it once and paradigmatically with exceptions and changes noted in a systematic way; the latter asserts there are many adventures, yet has a tendency to show they are in important respects one and the same since the exceptions and changes, the local circumstances, tend to fade beneath that which is repeated. The former stresses epochal development and liminal transgressions from a ground of the repeated collapsed into groupings recounted once and comprehensively (Marcel the child becomes Marcel the author *in stages*); the latter stresses repetition of ritual from a ground of the same scattered over multiple instances, called into being by an initial and intense liminal transgression recounted as both transparent and obscured (the scapegoats and sacrifices discussed in the first part of this thesis). Consequently, it is hard to differentiate in Malory the narrative's developmental end, if there is one, from an eternal return.

To return to the earlier musical analogy: serial composition asserts every phrase is different, yet the process of composition is *repetitive* to produce a purely *iterative* work. Minimalist music reduces the compositional process to a small number of musical ideas and a diachronic relationship, which the performative act *iterates* through in order to reveal the ultimate impossibility of *repetition*. The former devotes itself to avoiding any identity relationships; the latter demonstrates they simply do not exist. In Malory the tension between these strategies is core to narrative motivation, and in all likelihood their coexistence in the one work is the reason for a good number of the ambiguities critics have noted over the years (for example, the more and the less obvious timeline discrepancies).

All of the books that have gone before, except only the earliest tales in 'Arthur,'[20] begin within the timespan covered in the 'Tristram.' The order the tales occur in is not so certain, and perhaps

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more generally in Malory's 'Tristram,' the *matière* of those tales and episodes within tales is unreliable as evidence of Malory's craft beyond: a testament to his creative process of *selection* (what he *wills to return* in the stories), and the *mode* of their use, how they differ in *sens*.

20   But definitely not the end of 'Arthur,' as Merlin is still active in the world within the early events of 'Tristram' when he frees Melyodas from the sorceress's prison (373.3-5). However we *loosely* understand the events of books two through four to have occurred at some time within the period covered in book five, to at least postdate Tristram's birth, along with various other events related previously that occur after stories in 'Tristram.'

not entirely relevant – the work has, after all, in a sense begun again, and we either relax our contemporary demand for rigorous internal consistency or consign ourselves to frustration. With some suspension of disbelief we accept 'Tristram' as a new story when it diverges, and belonging to the same narrative world when it does not. From 'Tristram' on, transitions from the ending of one narrative sequence to the beginning of the next follow in a fairly natural chronological sequence.[21]

'Tristram' envelopes Arthur's realm, the previous books' contents, and the time they occur within, but without much of a directly-touching relationship. It is almost a narrative cradling. This 'swooping back' and enfolding is an example of Malory's gathering impulse with his beginnings, here on a scale encompassing the narrative world and time. It is another beginning for *Le Morte Darthur*. The narrative structure is more emphatically and consistently that of sequenced serial narrative than anything that went before, as we will shortly discuss in more detail. However, narrative continuity, or at least contiguity (that is, a sequence closes where the next sequence picks up), does not necessarily make it easier to discern the motivations that drive these sequences.

Transitions – Ending 'Gareth'

The end of 'Gareth' is intriguing. Critical consensus is that the tale is too orderly, and too consistent with expected literary ideas of 'unity,' to not be based on a single lost romance of some sort, although the details are often debated.[22] In stark contrast with the ending of the previous tale, 'Lancelot,' where the resolution is not conventional, formulaic, or comforting, the repeated emphasis in the orderly process of concluding 'Gareth' is indeed upon political reconciliations, love and marriage, and the strengthening of the Round Table fellowship more generally. The realm is presented as harmonious once again; orderliness is stressed right down to what appears to be a pecking order of worship for Gareth's new knights, the services they offer him, and just as obviously, almost ritualistically, this is reflected in the three day tournament too.

Malory's books three through five shift from focussing on one extreme example of fine knight (Lancelot) to the other (Gareth), and then on to the very mixed and complex case that in some respects lies between the two (Tristram). Gareth lives by respecting the local and contingent, in much the same way as I have described Torre above,[23] then dies in the 'Morte' by a happening that

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21 That said, the work is hardly free of *anachrony. T*he 'Tristram' itself begins with an analepsis that reaches back to a time somewhere within the extent of the first book, 'Arthur,' and continues with few index markers to locate elided tales already narrated until it is fitting for the 'Sankgreal' to continue the tale. Nor is it without those anachronies that tend to perplex, to cause us to pause and wonder what went wrong and where. For example, Bagdemagus's tomb (1020.3-8) precedes his reproach to Lancelot (1211.30-1212.2). 'Lancelot and Elaine,' itself embedded within 'Tristram,' is analeptic too.

22 At least, this has been the general consensus since Wilson (1943) and Vinaver (1427-1434), and is accepted as such in the recent study by Norris (2008, 81-94, 159-160). An example of a detail debated is the question of the language of origin for the hypothetical lost source (Field 1998c, 246-60). Fairly recently Sanders (2006, 34-46) has raised again the idea that Malory's 'Gareth' may well be original.

23 See chapter two, particularly 'The Wedding' section.

Gawain is compelled to understand as, more than localized, an especially *personal* form of treason. Tristram lives by respecting honour wherever he finds it (amongst Arthur's knights, the Irish, Cornish, etc.) and he attempts to find it in everyone, averting double-binds such as choosing between Angwyshe and Lancelot's kin (discussed below), yet he is treacherously killed by his own king. However Lancelot, both guilty of treason through adultery with his queen, and not guilty of betraying Gareth's love (as his death was not intentional[24]), must live with himself, blamed fairly and unfairly by others, survive to know the deaths of his king and queen, and die alone as a servant of God.[25] Lancelot works in both local and general spheres, and is undone in both. If this is the case then a common thread between the ending of 'Gareth' and the beginning of 'Tristram,' particularly a thread that in a meaningful sense can be said to connect and drive the narrative on as a larger sequence, is worth a closer look.

The events that bring 'Gareth' to a close are easy enough to summarize. From the episode with the Duke de la Rouse (the only knight Gareth volunteers to yield to without battle, and this because he would honour a specific oath he made) the tale sets to the business of tying up all loose ends. An arbitrary meeting and battle between Gareth and Gawain, where their identities are unknown to each other, is broken up by Lyonet who forces them to recognize each other, and who then fetches King Arthur to them since their horses are broken (357). On his arrival, the king, wanting to speak, is incapable and cries as a child (358.11-20). The tale loops back to where it started at Kynke Kenadoune for the weddings (360.13-20). *The time*, at Michaelmas, the beginning and ending of the 'husbandman's year' when the harvest is over and it is time to make the annual accounts, and *the place*, a plenteous seaside country, are emphasized by repetition. A systematic tallying is given for outstanding matters, with almost an accountant's eye for reconciliation, and in a manner not wholly dissimilar to Malory's lists and urge to be comprehensive with the wars in books one and two, or the cataloguing spirit of 'The Healing of Sir Urry.'

And yet, before the very last checks and balances are made for the characters, events, and patterns of this tale, we are told clearly of Gareth's love for Lancelot, the distance he creates for himself from Gawain, the latter's 'conducions,'[26] and the reason Gareth has for keeping that distance:

> Lorde, the grete chere that sir Launcelot made of sir Gareth and he of hym! For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved so well as he dud sir Launcelot; and ever for the moste party he wolde ever be in sir Launcelottis company.

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24 On intentionality and treason, see p56 fn3.

25 Lancelot is stripped of his most important localized relations and yet is not left to himself, he is left to himself and God. A spiritual end, of sorts – certainly by this text's standards it is – his final moments are recounted indirectly through a religious man's dream: 'I sawe the angellys heve syr Launcelot unto heven, and the yates of heven opened ayenst hym.' (1258.9-10)

26 On 'condision' and *ēthos* see 'The Unstable Chivalric World' in chapter one, and 'The Good and the Hero' in the introduction.

> For evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe
> hymself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for he was evir vengeable, and where he
> hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth. (360.28-36)

This passage does more than set the rest of the scenario's accord into relief as right and orderly to the point of being studied, or as so ideal that it appears *fantastic* of precisely that calm that follows the 'storm' (whether Livy's or Girard's, whether following a collective murder or completed ritual). Particularly since they are brothers, Gareth's opinion and his reasons for it supply a persuasive and more consistent colour to the characterization of Gawain from 'Arthur' through 'Tristram' and the later books, especially where it is a core issue for the events of Malory's 'Morte.' Gareth's disposition here even supplies the necessary context for Gawain's outrage at Lancelot when he hears of Gareth's death. But, his evaluation of Lancelot and Gawain, his conscious decision to ally himself with Lancelot, *also* casts doubt over the situation Arthur recently shed tears for: to some degree out of pity at the wounds each had incurred by the other's hands, but mostly for the joy of his kin found and reunited with each other and him.[27] In other words: Gareth has serious reservations about his brothers (here Gawain, but we know Gareth's doubts extend further than that), Gawain is not oblivious to this, and yet Arthur is moved to tears by what to him is a tender family and chivalric moment.

Gareth evaluates the character of his brother by his actions, and not repute – by what he had 'aspyed' of Gawain himself, although when, where, and how is conspicuously absent from this tale – and he opts to favour Lancelot, while Arthur sees Gareth and Gawain as bound to him by both kinship relations and feudal allegiance. However, a split between Arthur and Lancelot, or Gawain and Lancelot, would deeply conflict Gareth but, we know, *not quite tear him* from his kin and king either. The fellowship at the end of 'Gareth,' amidst celebrations and a summing up of everything orderly and assured about the tale and the relationships of those within the tale, is simply not as stable as it seems on the surface. It is surely no coincidence mention of Gareth's feelings and feudal allegiance are made here, in the middle of one of the most formal literary conclusions of any part of Malory's work, save only the 'Morte.' And even with the 'Morte,' as discussed already, the ending is open in not a few respects and in ways that 'Gareth' on the face of it is definitely not. The tale is meant *to seem* to close – and as the text's paradigmatic 'happy ending' closure,[28] the Gareth–Gawain–Lancelot future crisis marker is one of two things[29] that require us to acknowledge that these tales *never close without reservation* in Malory.

From the outset 'Gareth' is a tale about a young noble's desire to become the best knight he can, and without the aid of nepotism. There is a stress on the importance of the man one is knighted by, here Lancelot of course, and the significance of the company a knight keeps, here anyone but

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27 That Arthur is overwhelmed is clear. That his feelings are mixed joy and 'pity' for the state of the two knights is only marginally less so (358.11-20).

28 Whetter (2005, 162; 2008, 122-5, 143, 146) argues 'happy endings' are a key romance genre marker that problematizes classification for Malory.

29 The second, discussed below, is Malory's parenthetic appeal for rescue.

Gawain. Except that Gawain, like Lancelot, is always well-disposed towards Gareth the unknown knight, and is driven by neither revenge nor any other conceivably murderous impulse in *this* tale.[30] This is one of many examples of Malory's paraleptic gatherings. The text's silence on what Gareth 'saw' invites us to assemble, selectively, from what we have read so far in Malory (and outside of the work, as was the case with the significant silences on M[*erlin*] in the first tale[31]) an idea of what might have been elided in the narrative. We are prompted to make a guided narrative inference. It suggests, too, that this opinion of Gareth's is significant for the remainder of the work. Here paralepsis, of a connotative description and not a denotative of a specific past event or events, a description of the *sens* one might take from a typed group of episodes rather than the *matière* of any particular episode, encourages the reader to gather analogical associations vertically.

From what we know of Gawain we collate a subset that is appropriate for the narrative's purposes, in this case Gawain's vengefulness and predisposition towards murder. The outcome is an appropriately ominous sense of communal and fraternal discord. That is: the *undisclosedness* of Gareth's first-hand experience of ill-conduct summons possible scenarios to mind that are consistent with anything (past, present, future, within or outside of the text) *we* the readers might deem representative of Gawain's tendency towards ill-conduct. Gathering those sorts of associations amongst wedding celebrations, a 'happy ending,' and what for Malory passes as a formal literary conclusion,[32] is curious enough to take note of.

Such closure in endings is always *subordinate* to the needs of subsequent beginnings. Narrative maintenance of Gareth's new marital status is an inconvenience that is not taken into consideration again. One can see that in spite of the very clear separation between books four and five there are, in this ending of 'Gareth,' not a few themes that are not resolved but rather 'pushed' onwards unresolved. Minimally we must include: family, feudal allegiance, loyalty, an 'aspyed' vengefulness and will to murder, rivalry, and envy. A specific and telling list of uneasy issues to leave open

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30 Indeed, for the most part in this tale Gawain is consistently paired with Lancelot when the narrator constructs superlatives for knighthood (usually alongside Lamerok and Tristram), whether explicitly in praise or implicitly by being named as significant adversaries by Arthur's enemies (316.1-8, 319.7-10). The text even has Gawain and Lancelot speaking with one voice (298.5-6), while they are clearly of one mind with respect to Gareth-as-Beaumains from the beginning (295.9-12, 296.3-5).

31 See 'Framing the Realm,' chapter one, and p26 fn8.

32 The feasting, music, and three days of jousting, are all unusually detailed. The pledging of homage and service to Gareth ascend through the Green, Red, and Blue knights with thirty, sixty, and one hundred knights each, respectively, to the Duke de la Rouse with a further hundred knights, and Ironside with three hundred, *then* even the ladies he has saved kneel before Arthur and Gareth. The tournament, too, may reflect an ordered sequence of good-better-best for the winners' importance and repute (Lamerok, Tristram, then Lancelot), and those knights' lovers (Morgause, La Belle Isode, then Guinevere). If so, then it might explain the abrupt departure of Lamerok and Tristram, and the offence Arthur and the court feel.

For those ascending sequences there is a corresponding descending sequence of comparative worth in the list of marriages: Gareth to Lyones, Gaheris to Lyonet, and Agravain to Lawrell, Lyonet's extremely wealthy (but otherwise unheard of) niece. However crucial Lyonet is to the tale, she is secondary for Gareth's love, a means to an end rather than the object of his desire. After all, he *is* the central character. The women are never mentioned again in the text, except for Lyones in 'The Healing of Sir Urry' catalogue of knights where the narrator reminds us who Ironside is (1150.14-16) by describing how Gareth fought him for Lyones.

immediately before 'Tristram.' The *sens*, through a kind of 'scattering,' or thematic pushing, is met in 'Tristram' by a gathering of those same concerns, albeit they are not assigned to the same characters, nor in anything like the same place or time. Hence we might call *Le Morte Darthur* interlaced or polyphonic for *sens*, while the Old French Vulgate is interlaced (polyphonic) for *matière*. However I prefer to see Malory's narrative as a sequenced serial narrative in form, rather than appear to be forcing Vinaver's or Lewis's terms to do work they were not intended for.

No doubt numerous figurative closures could be read in concert with the above literal ones. For instance, nobility and honour and worship are once more enveloped under the umbrella of descent from the highest of family lines. Recognition of this is forced by Gareth's mother upon the king. Beaumains, Gareth incognito, is resolved at the same time – or rather the mystery of Beaumains's identity is removed, along with the freedom Gareth had to be treated on his own merits rather than as his family's influence would demand. Counter to this 'resolution,' however, is a different conclusion based on the same logic, world, and characters: the more categorically one might wish to see honour as truly hereditary in the work, the more irreconcilable (as the characters themselves observe) Gareth's character is against that of his brothers and his father, Lott, who was after all the last great traitor-king for Arthur.

The tale ends with a second striking disruption of order, and from a quite different corner: Malory asks for his readers' prayers and especially for his 'delyveraunce sone and hastely. Amen.' (363.20). His voice – the author's almost certainly, but for our purposes it is necessarily and sufficiently the narrator's – protrudes into the scene of apparent serenity and celebration as incongruously as the Gareth, Gawain, and Lancelot aside. At *this* moment a knight – our narrator – breaks out of narrative time to the time of narrating to appeal to us: at *this* moment of narrating (if not of writing) he is imprisoned, imperilled, and begging for his liberty. The narrator's request and Gareth's allegiance contrast with the formal closure, and sandwich the rest of the tale's conclusion (360.32-26 – 363.18-21). Once again, the surface of things is simply too complex to interpret unilaterally. Hermeneutics stalls because we cannot decidedly reconcile apparent harmony with equally apparent tension one way or the other when neither is privileged. The situation is 'simply' presented as is.

But even before we are reminded of Malory's own plight, human relations spoil the sheen of supposed harmony – there are four people in a relationship that demands three: Arthur and Gareth, top and bottom, respectively, and Lancelot and Gawain not yet in direct conflict with each other but set up as uneasy alternatives for an uncertain mentor relationship (down) with Gareth, and an even more uneasy relationship (up) with Arthur. Both Lancelot and Gawain take turns as beneath, beside, or in some very real senses above Arthur himself.[33]

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33 This last anxiety is never openly pressed too hard, although it is raised by Morgan's shield wielded by Tristram just before the Winchester MS's division of the first and second book of 'Tristram' (554.23-6, 558.7-9). Gawain's power to force Arthur's hand is clearest in the 'Morte' during the war with Lancelot (e.g., 1213.3-7). A more general case can be made for the blind eye Arthur turns to Gawain's murder of Pellinor and Lamerok on one hand, and Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere on the other.

Gareth's feelings for Lancelot and Gawain prefigure a future sore in the realm, while the paralepsis of its origin suggests that the cause long predates present events. It is, perhaps, even inherent within the *ēthos* of these two foremost knights of the realm. Gareth's feelings and what they evoke of the past and future are raised at the beginning of a passage including ritual homage offerings, a celebration of marital union, Round Table festivities, and of what seems like a new beginning for the realm, which immediately gives way to the beginning of 'Tristram,' itself not unlike a fresh start to the work. The discord in the ending of 'Gareth' is tied to the events that in a fairly continuous narrative culminate in the ending of the 'Morte' – the beginning of the sequence that leads to the work's end. The point at issue here is the same one that Gawain points out in the 'Morte':

> 'That may I nat beleve,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'that ever he slew my good brother sir
> Gareth, for I dare say my brothir loved hym bettir than me and all hys brethirn and the
> kynge bothe. Also I dare say, an sir Launcelot had desyred my brother sir Gareth with
> hym, he wolde have ben with hym ayenste the kynge and us all. And therefore I may
> never belyeve that sir Launcelot slew my brethern.' (1184.34-1185.6)

Gawain's fierce sense of honour, as seen in his sometimes excessive anxiety over name and kin, is never a straightforward motivation in *Le Morte Darthur*. The passion with which Gawain holds onto honour, when this is stressed, has that decidedly older feel one is more accustomed to finding in heroes from epic literature. At those times, more like a Hagen from *The Nibelungenlied* than his namesake from *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain is somewhat out of sync with romance. But, the placing of Gareth's recognition of elements of that tradition only in so far as they reveal a 'darker side' to Gawain here, before the three weddings, underlines the presence of problems for the Round Table even under the *best possible circumstances*.

When we take each book independently on its own merits we risk overlooking just how unusual book four's 'happy ending' is. Vinaver comments that such endings are 'clearly alien' to the French Arthurian Cycles (n361.10-11), but in all fairness they are very far from commonplace in Malory too. I suggest it is presented as such a unanimous success for Gareth, the institutions of marriage and knighthood, Arthur's fellowship, and the realm in order to most effectively plant the seed of rupture between Gawain and Lancelot for the final book, *and*, more immediately, to raise for 'Tristram' the themes of personal, family, and feudal loyalty in conflict. The fantasy of book four's close as an ideal moment is revealed through the narrator's dual awareness – of his own unhappy lot as a knight-prisoner, and the non-existence, even in this romance with an ostensibly happy ending, of any single perfectly good moment to linger upon. Conversely, *in so far* as 'Gareth' is an ending, and 'happy,' 'Tristram' *does* begin over again with a distinctly different bias on the myth-history continuum, and to a final conclusion in the 'Morte' that is decidedly not 'happy.'

Gawain may come up short in Gareth's estimation,[34] and amidst a celebration of all good and orderly things associated with the Round Table, but we should recall that the preceding book

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34 I am not concerned here with Gareth and Gawain's future relationship, which is hardly static. Certainly there are passages where the opinion Gareth draws here resonates, and there are others where Gawain is

concludes with a distinct sense in which Lancelot sees himself fall short of who he ought to be as a knight,[35] and that after the series of women who question him, not as a dangerous man, a murderer even, as Gawain is evaluated, but as someone who does not love women as he ought, or who is simply guilty of loving the wrong woman. Two themes then, both formulated through relationship triangles, which considered in tandem prepare us for Cornwall's parallel realm where from the outset love, envy, and a coming to terms with the difference between them, motivate almost every significant act.

Sequences – Beginning 'Tristram' Again

Returning to the opening of 'Tristram' we find that the narrative wastes no time in establishing Tristram's origins and character through a quick succession of relationship triangles with negative results waning from the disastrous to the merely instructional. His birth, name, and the loss of his mother are the result of an envious sorceress's machinations. His breadth and depth of education and generosity of spirit derive indirectly from the step-mother's murderous jealousy on behalf of her children. The apparent impossibility of a successful, or 'happy,' resolution to triangulated desire is suggested to Tristram in the episode of his unrequited rescue of Segwarydes's wife from Blioberis.

Before this, though, the events are framed for the first time not by some variant of 'In Arthurs dayes...' (293.3) as 'Gareth' begins, but with 'There was a kynge that hyght Melyodas...' (371.5). The Brown Knight without Pity still rides,[36] champions are yet to be established, villains and giants remain to be vanquished. The world is quite young again. Unlike Malory's treatment of Merlin, Lancelot, or even Arthur (excepting the mimetic triangle that leads to his conception), the tale begins with a comparatively detailed genesis of the hero Tristram. And this in turn is marked by a sequence of gatherings that disclose layers of detail for triangular relationships, each intense moment an expression of love and life, loss and at times death. He is the only knight whose actual birth is described rather than the details of his parentage, while his death is left to indirect narrative of *noyse* and outrage. But first I would like to step through the early 'Tristram' sequences slowly.

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as fine and upstanding a knight as any other, if he is not, indeed, a finer one and by the very standards he is here found to be lacking. Wilson (1934) is canonic on these details.

On the other hand, I *am* concerned with the fact this issue is raised *here*, just *before* the weddings, *before* the 'happy ending,' *before* 'Tristram,' and in particular since *nothing* in 'Gareth' appears to prompt it. It is raised within an ending and gathered from nowhere specific.

35 Travelling further back, we have also already noted the development of 'lack' in the close of the 'Roman War' by way of motivation for the opening of 'Lancelot' that followed. The connections between the 'Sankgreal' and those books remaining hardly needs explicating, but see chapter five below on Tristram and Palomides's closing sequence in book five and the implications for the transition to the 'Sankgreal.'

36 With Vinaver I find it hard to believe the Brown Knight without Pyté is distinct from Breunys Saunze Pyté (n355.14-24).

Until 'Tristram' beginnings are frequently disjointed in time, allowing for a freedom of reference for the author, narrator, and audience alike. Readers create, more or less, the inter-connective tissue for the tales, in so far as the tales are disparate, and in so far as the readers desire connection or not. I have proposed a thematic continuity, a modulated waxing and waning of that continuity, at each transition to bind books one and two, two and three, three and four. No doubt there are other possible solutions – although I believe the ones I suggest persist through to the end of book eight. What changes is the degree of explicit connective guidance offered by the narrator. In truth the author's asides that creep in – on Spring, the mutability of Englishmen's loyalty, and so on – are the only *apparently* unambiguous hermeneutic aids supplied. 'Apparently,' because they do not seem so much concerned with the narrative as they are musings offered to the reader for more general consideration.

But, from the start of 'Tristram' on, narrative time is more or less linear. The imposition of that same narrative constraint of linearity, and *because it is clearly not an arbitrary sequence*, paradoxically renders the sequences themselves more purely compositional in a thematic sense. The sequences colour, they endow with weight, the multiple concerns including triangulation of desire (as a problematic and as a narrative motivational device), faith and loss (the two polar extremes on a continuum of outcomes of such a device), and the surface (the *mise en scène*) that also firmly contextualizes every iteration.

The opening tales, which Vinaver groups under the title 'Isode the Fair' (371-436), proceed through a variety of registers from the initial account of foundations, through formative experiences including an ill-disposed stepmother, betrayal, adultery, and two periods of exile, and then they close with a neatly contrasted depiction of the recently married Tristram (to the *other* Isode) and Lancelot, La Belle Isode and Guinevere, in various states of mutual judgement, support, appeal, and condemnation. The shifts in narrative mode are subtle as we follow this sequenced serial narrative, while the distance this path has followed in this brief collection is disproportionately large. The circumstances of Tristram's birth are jarringly contiguous with the not-*quite*-harmonious feasting and wedding celebrations at Arthur's court in 'Gareth.' From his birth the work proceeds in one continuous narrative voice (but not without implicit and explicit ellipses) to an archetypal romance scenario complete with lovers' letters, misunderstandings, confusion, and hope for the future, combined with a not entirely unwarranted conviction that Tristram has betrayed his love and beloved by marrying Isode le Blaunche Maynes. The 'happy ending' of 'Gareth' as flawed romance genre marker, by way of manifold formative adventure episodes, loops back to an unhappy yet *quintessential* romance resting place *of contention* in the closing of 'Isode the Fair.'

The short tale of Melyodas, Elizabeth, the sorceress, and Tristram's birth is familiar in form from book three where a jealous Morgan le Fay enchants Lancelot to abduct him, and more closely still where Hallewes inverts a hunt to lure the object of her unrequited love, Lancelot, into her grasp. Marginally less obvious is that this is a gender-inverted variant of the Uther–Tyntagil–Igrayne triangle that opens the book, where Merlin's talents bring the assignation (and, of course, Arthur's conception along with Uther and Igrayne's future marriage) to a more successful end – a

trick that neither Tristram nor Lancelot are destined to repeat with their already married beloveds.[37] The intensity of each woman's jealous rivalry extends to preferring their beloved dead, or at least indefinitely imprisoned, to the man remaining unloving in return.

Over and over the work recounts how untenable it is, as a requirement for one's happiness, to gain another's love by force or deception – with two significant exceptions. For Uther-as-Tyntagil and Elaine-as-Guinevere, the unrequited lover is, firstly, under no illusion that their love is returned, and so, secondly, to get what they lust for they use magic to delude the beloved into thinking and seeing them as the beloved's true lover.

Elizabeth's death, however, is pitiful. She laments and christens Tristram in the deep forest of romance. She is a faithful, heavily pregnant, wife who risks herself to save her husband and king. This, along with, of all people, Merlin who rescues only Melyodas – all of this is recounted as a sequence of bare, unquestioned, unquestionable, happenings. There is no mention of prophecy, purpose, meaning, or precedent – it is a chronologically sequential account of simple contingencies asserted as historical facts.

Enveloped in this non-causal but clearly articulated sequence of events is the same triangular configuration of mimetic desire, rivalry, and intense, violent, envy that dogs Gawain and is at the root of Gareth's distrust of his brother, and which the preceding book left as an open problem within the court of Arthur. Unlike the jealous Uther who had Merlin's help, Malory's envious women have no real luck in their efforts to obtain the unobtainable, as we witnessed in 'Lancelot.' Their love must go unrequited, and they usually suffer for it. In this one case the anonymous sorceress has a partial success. By fate – although it is never likened to Fate, it simply happens – her rival dies. Completely without pretence or the mechanics of sacrificial myth, Elizabeth dies in the woods, fully aware it was her agency that brought her to this pass, and with a voice that clearly articulates what she wants done. The dangers of childbirth, and the death of the mother in particular, have no lack of possible supernatural or sacred associations. But here, even amidst the first romance wood in 'Tristram,' with a sorceress on the loose and Merlin biding his time, it is a straightforward case of biological crisis and exhaustion. Her voice is dignified; a refreshing alternative to the usual embellished fare of blaming, mimetic rivalry, and frustrated desire, and in spite of the surrounding romance trappings. The victim is not a scapegoat, and barely even presents as a victim at all.[38] It is all and unequivocally sad, but it is also without anyone or anything to blame beyond the sorceress's envy and unrestrained mimetic rivalry itself, which, significantly, Elizabeth *does not* stoop to. The pleas of Elizabeth's gentlewoman, likewise emanating from a place of love and loyalty, save the

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37 These heroes would reject Uther and Merlin's method and the death of their rivals, the kings, as hatefully treacherous. Adultery, on the other hand, rarely seems to be much of an issue in Malory – and then only in so far as it is a subject of *noyse*, and so of social relevance, a negative corollary of *worship*. Note Radulescu (2003), discussed above in chapter one, particularly p24 fn3.

38 She does name Melyodas and the infant as *responsible* for her death in a strictly literal and causal sense (372.12-23), but not *at fault* for it. She does not blame them so much as she expresses deep sorrow in her dying words for no longer living in the same world as her husband, and then she makes a last request for her son's christening. I believe this is done in a loving spirit, not one of resentment.

infant Tristram's life from the barons who are themselves envious of the child's future power. Seven years pass.

Arthur is conceived from a successfully executed enchantment to resolve a triangle of desire and mimetic rivalry; Tristram is born in the midst of a failed magical attempt to resolve the same problem, one that additionally leads to his mother's death. Arthur's worth and legitimacy is confirmed by the external sacred (the sword in the stone, Merlin's prophecies, and so on) in tandem with his blood line once that has also been established externally. Compared with the interregnum period, characterised by a state of 'grete jeopardy' for a 'long whyle' (12.11), under Arthur a comparatively stable realm, reign, set of rituals, and prohibitions are established – a culture and even a civilization in Girard's sense.

Tristram's significance, on the other hand, is at every step marked by his character and conduct, more often even than by his physical deeds. His repute and worth develops to something unassailable, and consequently it generates envy. His narrative sequences reflect the human individual and mimetic condition, and always in highly localized, contingent, scenarios, while Arthur is tied to the wider social investments of sacrificial logic. Unsurprisingly Arthur's death is delayed far longer.

The narrative continues with melancholy themes: the jealous scheming of Tristram's stepmother results in her inadvertently poisoning one of her own children, and then nearly killing her husband. Envy leads to loss, death, misery and she is set to be burned alive. She is saved by Tristram, whom she would have had dead. And while this would seem to be an even more unambiguous critique of mimetic relationships than the preceding one, Malory does not leave it so. In order to be convincingly reconciled with his wife Melyodas's son must go away. No excuses are offered. Tristram is not blamed in any way, and the stepmother, we understand, is genuinely forgiven. But Tristram still must go. This looks like a self-conscious awareness of rivalry, scapegoats, and mimesis. The sequence of unrelenting misfortune, of no alternatives that are not worse themselves, is indeed trademark tragedy. While there is no subtle undermining of a mythic presentation of things, there is instead this terse, tacit, historical sequence of happenings that has its own implicit paratactic logic *approximating* causality. Melyodas will not 'suffir' Tristram to remain (374.34-375.4).

The rivalry sequence in this tale is more plainly visible because Malory has omitted a stress on the ancestral connections (n371.5-10). While the French texts detail Tristram's predecessors and childhood, particularly the fact that Melyodas's marriage to Elizabeth was no accident but the result of Mark's desire to unite the kingdom under himself, Malory's text reformulates the events into a less complicated but more tragic domestic sphere, complementing the conveniently pre-existent traditional 'wicked stepmother' motif. The jealousies and politicking are all between present people, or at most a divided class of people[39] with individuals who are also present and closely connected. The theme of destructive kin relations is dominant from the beginning, alongside a birth

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39   In the case of the barons who think Tristram's father and mother are dead, and who would be rid of
     Tristram too.

amidst love, would-be-appropriated love, treachery, Fate, nobility, and honour. If this list sounds familiar it is because most of these[40] are encapsulated in the two exceptions that sandwich the happy ending in 'Gareth.' Each step in the sequence suggests the ultimate, *fated* even, impossibility of indefinitely extended joy and love, yet every time the violation is *through a human agent* or simple *contingency*. Malory's 'Tristram' seems determined to be rid of mythic reasoning for what could easily have been told as fated. The scope of 'Tristram' almost incorporates all of the preceding events within itself, but unlike 'Arthur' it does not attempt to obscure a foundational sacrifice in the origins of the tale.

As Vinaver notes, the description of the gentleman's education Tristram undertakes (of harping, hunting, hawking, and so on) is largely Malory's own (n375.12-29). Here, and frequently elsewhere, Tristram takes on an Apollonian role: he is civilizing, born from death – a sacrifice accepted by the victim, Elizabeth, even if not willed by her, complete with the figures of an enchantress (motivated by love and envy) and Merlin (always motivated to fine-tune Fate). Tristram is mixed – the product of the sacred and of love,[41] and he is carefully contingency-focussed in his acts, but fated, and a product of Fate. Not even the grip of madness quite rends music and culture entirely from him (496.6-16).

The relationship between kings and sacrifice has been noted by not a few.[42] After the foundation of his realm in book one, and Arthur's role in the sacrificial logic of book two, Arthur does have a fairly straightforward figurehead role for his civilization in Malory's version through to his own fated and chosen, willed, end. Tristram, despite the mythic and romantic motifs in his tale, has a tale of origins consistent with, but *not* told in the register of, the sacred.[43] Here a historic tale is littered with mythic detail. It is a significant foundation tale told in complementarily opposite modes: the primary mythic mode of 'Arthur,' where the narrative is mostly driven by Fate, is secondary for 'Tristram'; while the secondary historic mode of 'Arthur' is here primary. The contingent is Tristram's central locus of concern – it defines and is defined by him and his actions. 'Tristram' is a retelling of foundational stories, it parallels 'Arthur,' but with an inversion of comparative weight between the mythic and the historic.

Tristram, like Balin, seems doomed to choose between bad and worse options, while culture, Fate, the sacred, and sacrificial logic also appear to orbit Tristram closely. He, like an archetypal 'modern man,' seems neither fully determined nor determining. He is at once immensely potent *and* incapable of making any real or lasting difference after, that is, his initial fatal victory over Marhalt where he voluntarily substitutes himself for a chain of public sacrifices and for Cornwall's public

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40 Childbirth and amorous love are not explicitly sites of contention in the ending of 'Gareth.' A slightly unusual situation, perhaps, since the setting is primarily a wedding celebration.

41 The sacred in so far as that always represents culture and civilization. Love in so far as, even in its most idealized form in Malory, the form shared between Lancelot and Guinevere, it is always and firmly located as between two concrete characters.

42 See, for instance, the introduction's 'Interwoven *sens'* on Livy's chapter describing Romulus's end.

43 Compare with the discussions of Balin in chapter one, where his mythic tale is subverted or underscored by interspersed historic features.

servitude, or at least debt, to Ireland. Tristram personally takes on all of the consequences for Cornwall with Ireland and their royal family, and he claims not one of the rewards he could have by reconciling himself at last with them. Arthur as the mythic god-king and future sacrifice is exempt for the duration of the work, but in the succession of fine knights revealed during this age his own future is reliably and insistently inscribed. Lancelot, Pellinor, Tristram, Balin, Lamerok, Percival, Bors, Gawain, and Gareth all demonstrate for their king Arthur that better men than he will be humiliated or destroyed both because it is fated, and because of their own nature (character, *ēthos*) and volition. Each experiences at least one pivotal moment where he faces either overwhelming odds, or straight-out and certain destruction, and he knowingly accepts that. As with Balin, or, say, Euripides's Iphigenia, this is never an act of resignation but an active exercise of will – 'I shall take the adventure' – an *ēthos* Arthur lives up to in his final hours, and Lancelot in a less martial and more purely personal sense of fidelity does with Arthur and Guinevere over their graves.

I am reminded again of Heraclitus on mortals living their deaths, immortals dying their lives (see p29 fn15), as well as how one steps and does not step into the same river (Heraclitus and Robinson 1987, 83-4). That is, one *must* see the necessity of repetition in the things of the world and of men, *and* nothing is the same from one instant to the next. In Malory's Arthurian world affairs are insistently both regular and stochastic.

Returning to cultural origins 'born,' in a quite literal sense in this case, from a sacrifice, Tristram in his predominantly historical narrative is for Malory the origin of the English gentlemen's customs and traits (375.23-29).

It is not merely a book, or even *the* book, of hunting and hawking that Tristram is credited with having written – it's the 'maner' by which one can deduce who is what, the very character or *ēthos* of a man, and thereby discern his true estate. When he returns to his stepmother and Melyodas from France, and until the age of eighteen, the relationship of the three parties is characterized by true love. This creates a personal ritual in a pattern of forced leaving and returning, to real or feigned reconciliation, that Tristram never quite escapes in his constant peregrinations. In a personal way, driven by desire triangles, and tied to contingent details always, Tristram recreates the Arthurian ritual of adventure departure, return, and storytelling inaugurated in 'The Wedding,' as discussed at length in the first part of this thesis.[44] And so once again, the greater themes of the work are gathered and retold, this time from a beginning in a historical rather than mythical mode.

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44 In turn, the adventure ritual established in 'The Wedding' in 'Arthur' is a mythic ritual counterpart not only for Tristram's personal (contingent and historic) habit, or conduct, but also for Balin as discussed in chapter one. Balin's expedition is the precursor for 'The Wedding' departure-and-return adventure ritual. Balin does not return; a necessary tragedy that prompts the ritual to embed the return as a requirement. Bearing in mind that we have no way to fix these events in a single timeline – Balin's sword for the narrative was, is now, and will be floating downstream in a stone – the ritual of departure and return is always *already* ritual. It persists within the past, present, and future in England, on the continent in book two, and, it seems, in Cornwall too.

Hence there are practical reasons for talking of beginnings in terms of how they work rather than as descriptors fixing when and where something happens in Malory, and in our contemporary sequenced serial narratives discussed in chapter three.

By contrast with Tristram's domestic troubles the love of all estates for him is a constant:

> Thus Trystrams enduryd in Lyonesse[45] unto that he was stronge and bygge, unto the
> ayge of eyghtene yere. And than kyng Melyodas had grete joy of yonge Trystrams, and
> so had the quene, his wyff, for ever aftir in hir lyff, because sir Trystrams saved hir
> frome the fyre: she ded never hate hym more afftir, but ever loved hym and gaff hym
> many grete gyfftys; for every astate loved hym where that he wente. (375.30-36)

The events that follow this reconciliation are characterized by, initially, Tristram's desire to ingratiate himself with another (for example, with Mark and Angwyshe) at the expense of a third, and, later more and more frequently, the envious ill will of a would-be rival is directed at Tristram because of his relationship with a third party. Configurations of Tristram as lover, beloved, and rival himself with various men and women occupying the other two slots of a triangle of desire, proliferate and form a real sense of continuity from 'Gareth' through the foundational stories of 'Tristram.' In each case the load, the weight, of the dilemma is emotional, whether he seeks love or honour or both. The underlying problems are isomorphic with Balin's when the latter's tale is stripped of its mythic elements. It is always a case of scapegoats, whether partially hidden in myth or revealed through history, violence, and mimesis.

By way of example, take the sequence involving Segwarydes's nameless wife, one of the most telling early sequence of episodes after the one involving Tristram's equally-nameless stepmother. Envy of Tristram's adultery with her is supplied in Malory as the original reason for Mark's lifelong hatred for him (396.3-10). Defending his country's knights' honour, including his cousin Andret's, earns Tristram esteem in the eyes of Round Table knights despite their humbling defeat. But after this same act his indebted kin Andret becomes and remains envious and ill-disposed towards him (398-9). 'Churls' cannot abide a debt of honour in Malory. Finally, while Blioberis and Tristram ultimately come to a state of mutual appreciation and form a gentlemanly agreement over her, Tristram discovers Segwarydes's wife will not return with him (400-1).

At root in the discord that now divides them is a variation on the theme from Chrétien's famous 'Knight of the Cart,' although it is simpler than in Chrétien, and not so much related to chivalric courtesy as it is concerned with human nature. Tact, a sense of propriety and respect for Segwarydes, despite Tristram's affair with his wife, was Tristram's perfectly valid and rational reasoning for not pursuing Blioberis immediately after her abduction. People, in Girard's hypotheses of mimesis, instinctively desire what others desire, but they also know that to too obviously desire the exact same object as another, and at the same time, invites conflict that always threatens to escalate into violence. Tristram suppresses his instincts, he is *civilized*, and earns Segwarydes's wife's contempt as a result. She holds that Tristram's desire for her ought to know no bounds if it is true love. In Chrétien de Troyes's 'Knight of the Cart' Lancelot hesitates – two steps –

Compare also with p120 fn15 above, on the Pentecostal Oath, which shifts easily in the narrative from something a knight does at a time and a place, to something inseparable from knights and knighthood regardless of time or place.

45 Caxton and the Winchester MS have 'Cornewayle' in error for 'Lyonesse' (n375.30).

to get on the cart for societal reasons of shame.[46] Tristram holds himself in check because human culture prohibits unfettered mimetic acquisition, a cultural imperative *that true love will not abide*.[47]

Hence we repeatedly come face to face with dilemmas where culture's dictates are in conflict with desire or love – prohibitions and ritual, social and religious law, face down the emotional scapegoat and would-be sacrificial victim. This is the common problem endings provide for beginnings to address, regardless of which characters are involved, or time and location. In this case, Segwarydes's wife and Tristram are both quite entitled by the narrative's logic to their mutually exclusive positions. From a thematic perspective it is another double bind. Implicitly, it is understood that if one is going to be adulterous it must be for true love, while couples are married for all manner of reasons. The marriage of Mark and La Belle Isode, and even that of Arthur and Guinevere, is not primarily characterized in the text as the product of true, mutual, love. Gareth and Lyones's marriage is an exception that, perhaps for that very reason, does not hold the narrative's attention beyond book four. Similarly, Isode le Blaunche Maynes and Tristram marry for love, yet it is everything but their love that the text is concerned with.

> 'But whan thou sawyste this knyght lede me away thou madist no chere to rescow me,
> but suffirdyst my lorde sir Segwarydes to ryde after me. But untyll that tyme I wente ye
> had loved me. And therefore now I forsake the and never to love the more.' (401.37-402.4)

The wife of Segwarydes and Tristram sequence iterates one possible result of the many the text shows triangles of desire can lead to. Additionally, we see that before he becomes permanently enmeshed in a triangular relationship with La Belle Isode and Mark, Tristram *can* discern something worth learning from the experience:

> 'I thanke you,' seyde sir Trystrames, 'but for her sake I shall beware what maner of lady
> I shall love or truste. For had her lorde sir Segwarydes bene away from the courte, I
> sholde have bene the fyrste that sholde a folowed you. But syth ye have refused me, as I
> am a trew knyght, I shall know hir passyngly well that I shall love other truste.' (402.31-36)

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46   From William W. Kibler's translation of 'The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)':

> 'My lady, if you will tell me what sin it was that caused me such distress, I am prepared to atone for it at once.'

> 'What?' the queen replied. 'Were you not shamed by the cart, and frightened of it? By delaying two steps you showed your great unwillingness to climb into it. That, to tell the truth, is why I didn't wish to see you or speak with you.'

> 'In the future, may God preserve me from such sin,' said Lancelot, 'and may He have no mercy upon me if you are not completely right.' (Troyes, Kibler, and Carroll 1991, 262)

Of course Malory's 'Knight of the Cart' has a quite different emphasis, and develops from the Vulgate's version of Chrétien's tale, as discussed at length in Vinaver's commentary (1592-4).

47   The single most obvious comparison would be with Lancelot's actions on Guinevere's behalf in the 'Morte.' Whatever other differences exist between the characters, no one questions Lancelot's right, or obligation for that matter, to save Guinevere from the fire. Similarly, while Uther's course of action to lie with Igrayne, or Palomides's many efforts for La Belle Isode's company or even attention, seem crude and less than honourable in themselves – they are also consistent with, and testament to, the men's real desires. They are *honest* to themselves and act with an *integrity* with respect to their desires. In *Le Morte Darthur* we hardly find the worth of such honesty discredited, or so much as even criticized.

A bullet dodged, then, in Tristram's opinion, but not a lesson learned it would seem. Neither he nor Lancelot nor any other major character in Malory, except Gareth, manages to stir themselves for an unattached beloved.

It seems extraordinary how categorical I can be about this, and how little the few seeming exceptions need detain us. I excepted Gareth but even he, like Alexander the Orphan (with Morgan), and Arthur (with Lancelot via Merlin's prophecy), has his love *defined in contrast with a rival* – one who is not loved by the lady in return (for Gareth and Alexander) albeit, but who has possession of her (in Alexander's case, of him) just the same. Interestingly, while Segwarydes is content, greatly pleased even, with this outcome, Mark, Tristram's rival in adultery, is now thoroughly set on destroying Tristram, and devises his scheme to see Tristram dead by proxy of a return trip to Ireland for La Belle Isode (403.8-15). It is clear that Mark and Andret have gone beyond rivalry with Tristram mediated by desire for a third party. Their envy is specifically directed at him. The nominal object of rivalry has become secondary. Mark selects La Belle Isode *because* Tristram esteems her and *because* it is likely to get Tristram killed. The marriage exists, in Malory's version, because Tristram seeking out Mark's future wife for Mark is a means to torment and destroy Tristram as a rival – even though at the time Mark and Tristram share no common beloved for their rivalry. In the absence of a rival, Mark creates one. Conversely, by coming to court and choosing a mentor between Gawain and Lancelot, Gareth's judgement creates a rivalry for his love where there was none before.

Tristram's sensitivity to the finer details of triangulated human desire is far from perfect, as attested to by this lengthy book's extensive protraction of conflict through variants of mimetic rivalry. He forgets his truce with Lamerok in order to revive their rivalry, to unearth his resentment over the slight of Morgan's horn redirected to Mark's court – and this despite Lamerok reminding him of their reconciliation.[48] Mongan discusses comparable strategies of extension in the troubled relationship triangle of Palomides, Tristram, and La Belle Isode.[49] These perversely prolonged conflicts, especially this early forgetting of fellowship with Lamerok, mark the beginning of the

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48 Lamerok redirects the horn from Arthur's court to Mark's (430.4-11) primarily because he feels dishonoured after Mark forces Tristram to fight him when he is weary from a successful day of jousting (427.34-429.27). That is, Tristram's resentment originates from Lamerok's redirection of Morgan's hate for Arthur, while Lamerok's own originates from Tristram who represented Mark, and so on. Envy and resentment are like parasitic infections that are communicable and can even re-infect a character. Galahad, the 'perfect' knight, is the significant and obvious exception.

Early in 'Lamerok de Galys' (443.21-444.12), Tristram and Lamerok are courteously reconciled with each other without fighting, yet Tristram insists they must have ado with each other for the old injury of Morgan's horn when they next meet in 'Madness and Exile' (483.4-484.2):

'Sir,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'that tyme that we were togydirs in the Ile of Servage ye promysed me bettir frendeship.' (483.10-11)

Both the pretence of a return of the original hostilities, and the revelation that this injury is unreal, are presented and set the tone for the rest of 'Tristram' to its ambiguous end. The triangles form a deductive sequence from general, coincidental, rivalry, to a fiercely personal one, particularly visible in the early tales in Mark's relationship with Tristram.

49 Mongan (2002, 84) draws attention to the maintenance of tension and rivalry as characterizing Palomides and Tristram's relationship to such an extent that it is almost the entire substance of their relationship at times, a scenario that is drawn out until the final pages of 'Tristram.'

loops of what are more properly speaking the many-threaded 'middles' of 'Tristram.' Before then we have at least one other significant beginning in 'Isode the Fair' – the role of Tristram's combat for Angwyshe.

It happens that, en route to Ireland, Tristram is blown off course to Camelot, where he is given an opportunity to save the life and honour of Ireland's King Angwyshe by taking his place as a champion in a combat to the death with Lancelot's kin Blamour, brother to Blioberis. Arthur and Lancelot are away at the latter's Joyous Garde. Tristram consciously ponders an internal conflict and the real possibility of a blood feud with Lancelot's kin:

> 'And nedis, sir Trystrames, thou muste sle me, other ellys thou shalt never wynne the
> fylde, for I woll never sey the lothe worde. And therefore, yf thou dare sle me, sle me, I
> requyre the!'
>
> Whan sir Trystrames herde hym sey so knyghtly, in his herte he wyste nat what to
> do with hym. Remembryng hym of bothe partyes, of what bloode he was commyn of,
> and for sir Launcelottis sake, he wolde be loth to sle hym; and in the other party, in no
> wyse he myght nat chose but to make hym sey the lothe worde, othir ellys to sle hym.
> (409.29-410.2)

Both of Tristram's options bode violently ill for his non-immediate future. A double bind, then, recalling the mythic narratives which undid Balin and the historic ones resolved with an attention to contingent detail by Torre and Gareth. Hypothetically, Tristram successfully gaining La Belle Isode for Mark, or making any progress in Ireland at all, would be almost impossible if he shames himself and King Angwyshe at Camelot. At the very least it would further compound the Irish queen's ill will towards him for the death of Marhalt. And, there is no dragon for Tristram to slay and so win the approval of the Irish in Malory's version. On the other hand, an Arthurian world where Tristram and Lancelot's kin are locked in deadly conflict is inconceivable. The hostilities are resolved in human chivalric terms, by good conduct, rather than through supernatural intervention, or any other external expedient. Tristram, like Gareth and Lancelot in their books before him, has no 'Sword in the Stone' equivalent.

Tristram negotiates a rational middle ground by appealing outside of the terms of the conflict to an independent, unbiased, judge and sense of justice. He requires the spirit of honour, fairness, mercy even, rather than the letter of the law demanded in a trial by combat and the uncompromising dictates of his opponent's chivalry. This 'higher appeal' is in fact an appeal to what is good and noble in the character and judgement of those *physically present*, and it supersedes the abstract 'laws' of custom. Further, if Tristram's opponent were not so absolute regarding his honour then there would be no double bind to resolve. Tristram forces a deferral to the local and temporary source of power, entreating King Carados, who with the other assembled judges almost has a chorus-like function, to understand the *contingent* details of the situation. In doing so Tristram escapes the violent logic and double bind of *abstracted* chivalric process:

> 'For, my fayre lordys,' seyde sir Trystrames, 'hit were shame and pyté that this noble
> knyght that yondir lyeth sholde be slayne, for ye hyre well, shamed woll he nat be. And
> I pray to God that he never be slayne nother shamed for me. And as for the kynge

whom I fyght fore, I shall requyre hym, as I am hys trew champyon and trew knyght in this fylde, that he woll have mercy uppon this knyght.'

'So God me helpe,' seyde kyng Angwyshe, 'I woll for your sake, sir Trystrames, be ruled as ye woll have me, and I woll hartely pray the kynges that be here juges to take hit in there hondys.' (410.8-18)

'[...] and rathir than he be shamed I requyre you,' seyde sir Bleoberys, ' lat sir Trystrames sle hym oute.'

'Hit shall nat be so,' seyde the kynges, 'for his parte his adversary, bothe the kynge and the champyon, have pyté on sir Blamoure his knyghthode.'

'My lordys,' seyde sir Beloberys, 'I woll ryght as ye woll.' (410.25-31)

Unlike the previous resolutions involving Andret and Mark, who appear to be ignominious special cases, the reconciliation negotiated incurs no resentment but rather unfeigned, lifelong, goodwill offered between all parties. Angwyshe's only regret is that Tristram will not marry his daughter Isode himself but would have her marry Mark (411.23-4, .31-5). On the other hand, we are told that for Tristram's handling of the battle Lancelot's kin will love him forever (411.6-8). Since Tristram's name is cleared with Angwyshe for the Irish there is no need, or suggestion, of Tristram entering Ireland incognito. He does not have to misrepresent himself as a strategy – in Malory this is surpassed by a context-specific, contingent, solution to the bad will in Ireland. All of this is possible only because when Tristram set off for Ireland 'and toke the see with all his felyshyp [...] a tempeste toke them and drove them into the coste of Ingelonde' (403.27-29). By chance not Fate, and by Tristram voicing and exercising his honour vividly under unusual circumstances, the result is *peaceful* and *good*. The narrative operates historically without requiring subterfuge, disguises, magic, or dragons.

The remainder of the first tale grouping continues along these lines, rarely departing from a concern with triangles, varying instead the placeholders and perspective rather than the structure of the successive dynamics. Briefly: the magic potion helps to establish Tristram's and La Belle Isode's love as permanent (when convenient to the narrative) and despite Tristram's character attribute of loyalty to the undeserving King Mark. It renders what would be mutually exclusive, a logical impossibility, totally possible, and even necessary, binding. There is also the addition of the noble (for the most part) Palomides, as a complementing alternative to the ignoble Mark.[50] Palomides revives rivalry with Tristram by regaining Brangwayne for Isode and exacting an undisclosed (if predictable) boon from her for doing so. Brangwayne's abduction was itself caused by the envious scheming of two other women.

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50 As doubles in rivalry with Tristram these two even partially triangulate with him – Tristram's alternating love and hate for each, Palomides's love for Tristram when Mark harms Tristram, and so on. There is precious little development of Mark and Palomides without respect to Tristram, however. Although Palomides's role for the rescue of the Red City is conceivably something to usefully contrast with Mark's role in the acquisition of Alexander's father's land.

In a variation of Tristram's behaviour with Segwarydes's wife, Mark lets Palomides take Isode from court unchallenged. Although this situation is clearly different, since Tristram is absent,[51] and not only is Mark married to Isode, she *is his queen*, the proximity of the two sequences and similarity between them are worth noting. In particular: Mark, like Tristram before him, believes another should really be the one to take up the rescue. This reaction is reasonable, rational, and *contrary to true love* as conceived above. That is, true love should not at all be constrained by social conventions or by reasonableness. I believe it adds some certainty to the hypothesis that Mark's past and future outrage at Tristram is not primarily concerned with his wife, but is more purely a matter of mimetic rivalry.[52] Isode, the object, is secondary to the relationship with Tristram for Mark. Long term, however, the situation with Palomides becomes considerably more complex, with the weight shifting from love for Isode, to envy of Tristram, to hatred *and* love for Tristram, and back again as this large tale repeats with variation after variation on the same theme.[53]

There are also the early outcast and exile sequences in this grouping, both engineered by Andret (426.12-31, 431.1-31), and with the second in particular prefiguring Mordred and Agravain's trap for Lancelot and Guinevere in the 'Morte.'[54] But, arguably the most significant development in the mapping of desire within 'Isode the Fair' is Tristram's desperate trip to Brittany to be cured of a poisoned arrow wound, since it is there that he falls in love with Isode le Blaunche Maynes and marries her.[55]

Barely constructed as a real character in her own right,[56] this second Isode seems to exist within Malory's narrative to excite reactions from other concerned parties – from La Belle Isode, from Lancelot, and, with something like an attempt at shrewdness, from Guinevere too.[57] Tristram,

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51   The absence of the (legal) lover is the condition Tristram offers to Segwarydes's wife (and the reader, Blioberis, perhaps even himself) that would have enabled him to rightfully pursue her. See above.

52   As always between these two over La Belle Isode, or Arthur and Lancelot over Guinevere, there is obviously the king's repute, his social worth, to be taken into account whenever the fidelity of the queen is publicly questioned. However, this too is, at core, the same thing as the king's honour pitted against the honour of each king's foremost knight's – it is enough to prompt Mark's envy and rivalry, if not Arthur's.

53   Note Mongan (2002, 77-78) on Palomides seeing Tristram as the one he worships, loves, and hates most.

54   Specifically: the twelve knights who ambush the lovers, 1165.14-18. There is a clear point of difference made not only in the comparative success of each troop of twelve, but also in what the narrator considers respectful to reveal of the lovers' conditions in each ambush. Compare 1165.11-13 and 431.4-7.

55   There are no reservations so much as hinted at that this is other than true and mutual love: 434.24-32.

56   She does accompany him in the adventure of the Isle of Servage (441-6) in 'Lamerok de Galys,' to La Belle Isode's dismay upon hearing of Tristram's chivalric exploits there. Then she appears to join Tristram at La Belle Isode's request in another sea voyage at the start of 'Madness and Exile' (481), but is never again mentioned as present in Malory.

57   There is a refrain in Vinaver's commentary when, pausing to critique a modification Malory makes, he argues it is something that, commonly observed, would somehow devastate or confound courtly chivalric literature. See, for instance, the discussion of Mellyagaunce, Lamerok, and Lancelot fighting over the fairness of their beloved in chapter one, 'The Unstable Chivalric World.' To Gareth's lines: 'thou to love that lovyth nat the is but grete foly' (322.3), Vinaver notes: 'No protagonist of a French romance of chivalry is likely to have condemned unrequited love in these terms' (n322.3). But, here again on the circumstances surrounding Tristram's marriage to Isode le Blaunche Maynes (n434.24-29), and with what seems a profound degree of frustration, he comments that Tristram's joy 'is in contradiction with the whole meaning of the episode in the French.'

for his part, seems to regard his conscience as clear because he has exploited Isode le Blaunche Maynes's extraordinary naivety in order to never consummate their marriage. Tristram's relationship with La Belle Isode (sexual and adulterous) is completely inverted with Isode le Blaunche Maynes (non-sexual and marital). The tale lists in rapid succession the oaths and letters exchanged between interested parties. Their import is clear – for Tristram, Lancelot's Cornish parallel self, to marry anyone raises questions for Lancelot that he has shown in book three he will not brook; while for La Belle Isode, herself married to Mark, a fully developed and malevolent character, the idea of having to compete for Tristram's affection seems an outrageous state of chivalric affairs.

> 'But sey ye to hym thus,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'that of all knyghtes in the worlde I have
> loved hym most and had most joye of hym, and all was for his noble dedys. And lette
> hym wete that the love betwene hym and me is done for ever, and that I gyff hym
> warnyng: from this day forthe I woll be his mortall enemy.' (435.14-19)

The intensity of Lancelot's reaction is telling. It is as if he has come face to face with his shadow self (see p9), and it parallels Gawain's oaths in the 'Morte' once he has accepted that it was indeed Lancelot who killed his brothers Gareth and Gaheris. While it is safe to take Lancelot's reaction at face value – outrage that a knight would betray his love for his lady – the extreme intensity, and categorical rejection of the behaviour, is consistent with Lancelot seeing Tristram as his double, identifying with him, and refusing to acknowledge his own similarities with respect to love. In other words – just beneath the surface this is primarily to do with the two men's relationship, and not with the two Isodes.[58] Lancelot's closest friend in knighthood has instantaneously, if briefly, become his sworn enemy on account of Tristram choosing a real and available lover over an unavailable one.[59] Later, for Gawain, it is on account of a seemingly broken faith in knighthood that he severs his connection with Lancelot.

Guinevere, however, at the end of 'Isode the Fair' proposes some inadvertently amusing words of wisdom and comfort for La Belle Isode over this chivalric debacle:

> And so in this meanewhyle La Beale Isode made a lettir unto quene Gwenyvere
> complaynyng her of the untrouthe of sir Trystrames, how he had wedded the kynges

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While undoubtedly true, what Malory tends to reveal at such moments is the unsustainability of not just specific chivalric tropes but, almost invariably, of mimetic human relations too. The characters rarely learn from these revelations – they return to conventions that have been critiqued time and time again. In other words, the narrative replicates mimetic mechanisms, understands them and the alternatives, and yet is also aware of the general incapacity of knights and ladies to do differently than they do. The cycle is as much a human one as it is a narrative device. Dynadan's role is conspicuous in this process.

58 Furthermore, the parallel that Lancelot may be overcompensating for in his rejection of Tristram, it seems to me, is far less likely to be concerned with Guinevere (whose love he does indeed hold to throughout), but for the love he owes to Arthur *and* Guinevere. It is the loss of Arthur's love in the 'Morte' that pains Lancelot more than anything else. Right up until Arthur's death it stays uppermost in his mind. Indeed, more so even than the safety of his own lands and people during the siege of Benwick.

59 Compare with Tristram at the Joyous Garde where he has to be dragged back into the world of 'active' chivalry from a domestic contentment (see the introduction's 'The Good and the Hero'). Loving, or hunting, *in peace* is not their lot – it is even at times, as here by Lancelot, *despised*.

doughter of Bretayne. So quene Gwenyver sente hir another letter and bade her be of goode comforte, for she sholde have joy aftir sorow: for sir Trystrames was so noble a knyght called that by craftes of sorsery ladyes wolde make suche noble men to wedde them. 'But the ende,' quene Gwenyver seyde, 'shulde be thus, that he shall hate her and love you bettir than ever he dud.' (435.33-436.8)

Leaving aside the actual magic potion that may or may not be the sole reason for the love between La Belle Isode and Tristram, and the non-existent, not to mention certainly unwarranted, hate that Tristram never summons for Isode le Blaunche Maynes, it is hard to ignore the irony of Guinevere charging Isode le Blaunche Maynes with sorcery when this is precisely the popular, slanderous, and ill-founded opinion amongst women of Guinevere's hold on Lancelot.[60] Elaine, of course, resorts to such methods to conceive Galahad by Lancelot, but at this stage in the narrative such charges amount to nothing more than *noyse* – itself something Guinevere has even more reason to fear than most. No one seems entirely beyond the reach of envy, slander, or the compass of mimetic rivalry.

Beginnings are not a cut and dry issue in Malory. Nor are they entirely so with the start of each of Vinaver's eight book divisions. Even the 'Isode the Fair' group of episodes that 'Tristram' starts with consists of a variety of beginnings – a set of foundational tales (Tristram's birth, the formative experience with his stepmother, his education and character development, the combat with Marhalt, and so on), and a conflict between at least three parties is established as fundamental to each of the major character relationships, and many of the minor ones. The typical outcome of this conflict is violence, while the atypical outcomes explored through Tristram's character traits have various difficulties and consequences for him. Further, overlying the 'Isode the Fair' sequences, with their concern for the mechanics and logic of relationships, is the series of character motivations, focussed on their desires. Complicating that, in turn, is the conflict between trusting in and operating upon the surface, the local and contingent, with those who wilfully manipulate the same, specifically through misrepresenting truth and honour to their own ends. Mimetic rivalry and triangles of desire are essential to the narrative of 'Tristram,' and *Le Morte Darthur* more generally.

Finally, what holds true of the sequenced serial narrative continuity across Vinaver's divisions holds equally true for those macro-segments of Sanders (1987). In fact, we have so far followed a continuous network of threads from the opening of book one through to the first tale of book five. The continuity disguised in the 'beginnings' of the remaining books need not detain us long as these have been admirably dealt with in the same article, and besides, the continuity of books six through eight is hardly contested today. Instead it is more profitable for the remaining chapters to emphasize what is discontinuous in the apparent continuity from 'Tristram' to the 'Morte.'

While each individual episode could be considered in isolation as possessing an independent beginning, middle, and end, they are also components of greater sequences. To pretend otherwise is to do violence to the subtleties that do indeed persist within the work. Instead, as with serial music,

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60   As the damsel informs Lancelot once he has defeated Perys in book three, 270.22-27. See chapter three.

the beginnings establish the composition of the sets for future variation; as with minimalist music, the beginnings establish the processes for achieving that variation within time, for modulation of emphasis. These are ways, *modes*, of telling a narrative. The sense of beginnings appropriate to Malory belongs to the gathering of precedent-setting events and configurations of relationships rather than 'beginning' in the sense of marking a time and place. Once established it is the business of the middles to explore variations and to deduce patterns from them, and of the endings to unravel new conditions that future tales will in turn attempt to engage with. I believe this is both more formal than typical readings of Malory suggest, and more fluid than book and tale divisions allow.

This chapter has necessarily had to address endings in order to usefully discuss beginnings. As a result the next short chapter is limited to a brief reassessment of a few significant transitions from the perspective of narrative endings, built into a discussion of the role of Nietzsche's eternal return, after Deleuze, in Fate, willing of chance, affirmations more generally, and Malory's heroes who think, feel, and act in that tragic spirit. Taking and willing the *aventure* is not quite the same as taking and willing its outcome, over and over.

V. Endings – Willing

> The problem of critique is that of the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their *creation*. Evaluation is defined as the differential element of corresponding values, an element which is both critical and creative. Evaluations, in essence, are not values but ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge. This is why we always have the beliefs, feelings and thoughts that we deserve given our way of being or our style of life. (Deleuze 2006, 1-2)[1]

The last sentence in the quotation above may be read as reproach or challenge. As with the many similar sentiments in Malory,[2] it would be a mistake to read this as a moral issue, one invoking notions of guilt, just desert, blame. The sentiment, its assumptions and conclusions, are, however, ethical acts of evaluation. For Nietzsche, Malory, and Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (2006), the significant issue is always the self-evident *character* of the person in question. A subjectively defined character, an *ēthos*, that resembles the ethics of classical tragedy and fine heroic epic of every era. Morality in this context is a pale shadow that pretends to an objective reality.

 Instead, ethics tells us: the hero is good, knows it, and is known as good by others without deference to criteria external to him or her; the hero's values are good because the hero selects and esteems them from the many as the best and noblest. Not a few qualms readers have had with Malory over the centuries vanish once we recognize this, including: adultery (love is good, in and of itself); the distinction between tricks or masks and treason proper (the hero disguises for various reasons of tact or sport, the villain only to ruin the hero, and to destroy what is good); the question of what 'honour' and 'worship' are supposed to be (they *are* what the noble esteem in themselves and one another); the inconsistencies of heroes (their values are subjective, not separate from themselves and their actions, they are not objective); and, the perceived resistance of these heroes

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1   The translator, Hugh Tomlinson, notes 'element' in the excerpt above should, in addition to the usual senses, include 'environment' and 'grounds for existence' (188). In itself that may not seem to clarify Deleuze's argument. However, shortly after this Deleuze emphasizes how these differentials always, and necessarily, occur within a field or ground where multiple forces are at play. In other words, and as opposed to atomism, the environment *is* the elemental.

2   Examples can be found throughout his work. In terms of a character's worth and *ēthos* consider the following from 'The Red City' in 'Tristram':

> We had a kynge that hyght Harmaunce, and he was kynge of the Rede Cité, and this kynge that was oure lorde was a noble knyght, layrge and lyberall of his expence. And in all the worlde he loved nothynge so muche as he ded arraunte knyghtes of kynge Arthurs courte, and all justynge, huntynge, and all maner of knyghtly gamys; for so good a kynge and knyght had never the rewle of poore peple. (711.25-32)

Note in particular the sequence of propositions: we had a king; he loved the good (best); our king was good (the best). Or, from the 'Conclusion' to 'Tristram,' and as will be discussed towards the end of this chapter, the same figured in more concrete personal terms when honour recognizes honour (841.17-31).

as well as the tales themselves to any absolute, universal, or providential design (these are alien to the contingent and local environment, or, to the elemental for evaluations in Deleuze's sense).

Heroes do not answer to the standards of others, or of abstractions. Standards, if they exist in any meaningful sense, do so by reference to the deeds and values of heroes. As with classical epic and tragedy (amongst other similarly motivated works of other periods, including *Beowulf*[3]), the absence of such a design, the stubborn presence and frequent assertion of subjective values without need or attempt at deference to morality or universals, is not at all the same as a narrative world without any values. As we have seen, and will continue to observe, Malory's world is *not* nihilistic; its values, judgements, and heroes are instead resolutely situated in the here and now of the tales, and failure exists to the extent that the contingent and local are disregarded or rejected. The world is not despised or denied in favour of the transcendental; God and Fate, in so far as they do operate, operate within that world and not apart from or above it.

Such general observations, once backed up with evidence from the text, would alone be of some interest, but I will push on to a more significant feature of the endings in Malory: willing. And specifically the willing of chance and necessity, an idea sometimes associated with Nietzsche's 'tragic spirit.'

The previous chapter was concerned with establishing how beginnings are more the swaddling clothes of the narrative than they are births proper, hopefully without undercutting how they very much are beginnings in the usual sense for the stories in a sequential series of episodes, and frequently abrupt beginnings at that. To that end I felt compelled to discuss endings to such an extent that it seems hardly necessary to revisit those aspects here. There is, however, this separate and equally unique aspect to Malory's endings. As well as the scattering of *sens* already mentioned, the 'throwing out there' of leitmotifs when closing down a tale, these endings very often and in ways quite distinct from his models, feature what Nietzsche (or Deleuze, after him) might call a noble affirmation of the eternal return,[4] visible in what I have been referring to as the *ēthos* of the characters and also in the structural repetition of narrative forms. In the process I will, however, draw attention to the previous chapter's concerns except from the perspective of endings rather than beginnings. The loops of narrative middles themselves are best left for the next chapter, but the will to affirm those loops – the casting of the die, and its fall too – can be found in many of the prominent narrative endings.

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3   Fate, character, and both in so far as they belong to the best of warriors and the hero's will, are asserted in various ways by Beowulf and the narrator. For example, lines 465 and 572-3:

　　'Fate goes ever as it must!' (1999, 16)

　　'Fate will often spare / an undoomed man, if his courage is good.' (1999, 20)

4   The first (§276) and penultimate (§341) sections of book four in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* are classic references for the eternal return – a combination of *amor fati* and an overreaching of oneself (Nietzsche 1974, 223, 273-4). The idea has prompted near innumerable interpretations, but for Deleuze's purposes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, and mine with respect to Malory, the stakes are primarily axiological, while the mood is imperative.

Willing the End

Let us return once again to 'Balin,' since it has behaved as a paradigm for adventure thus far:

> 'Allas!' sayd Balan, 'that ever I sawe this day that thorow myshap I myght not knowe
> yow! For I aspyed wel your two swerdys, but bycause ye had another shild I demed ye
> had ben another knyght.'
>
> 'Allas!' saide Balyn, 'all that maade an unhappy knyght in the castel, for he caused
> me to leve myn owne shelde to our bothes destruction. And yf I myght lyve I wold
> destroye that castel for ylle customes.'
>
> 'That were wel done,' said Balan, 'for I had never grace to departe fro hem syn that I
> cam hyther, for here it happed me to slee a knyght that kept this iland, and syn myght I
> never departe, and no more shold ye, broder, and ye myght have slayne me as ye have
> and escaped yourself with the lyf.' (90.11-23)

Shortly after this Merlin gives his prophecies, and sets to work arranging amongst the remnants of this tale things of significance for much later, while themes are scattered that will be taken up in 'The Wedding' that follows.[5] In this 'Balin' passage, however, there are at least two further important factors. Balin and Balan satisfy the conditions for destroying the custom by their mutual destruction. There is no knight left to hold the island. The death of each brother at the other's hands breaks an otherwise endless cycle: the ill custom would have continued destroying good knight after good knight for the entertainment of those at the nearby castle. Secondly, Balin's 'yf I myght lyve [...]' oath affirms both his resolve to destroy the custom and, not entirely indirectly, each of his preceding, fervent, commitments to *aventure* he has taken thus far. His past willing of chance is re-affirmed by an act of will now, along with the present outcomes of that past willing, and what shall come to pass in the future as a result of this act of will. Since he dies with his brother the custom is broken; there is no living defender on the island. The doubles die to destroy the violent institution. But, Balin swears that if he lives he will destroy the castle, and so the custom. The most recent of these *aventures* he has 'taken' just before this final battle, after a damsel has pitied him for the changing of his shield, is one such assertion that is reaffirmed:

> 'Me repenteth,' said Balyn, 'that ever I cam within this countrey; but I maye not torne
> ageyne for shame, and what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe, I wille take
> the adventure that shalle come to me.' (89.1-4)

Balin is, then, selective: he chooses to will the adventure. But he imposes no conditions on his willing: be it life *or* death, he *will* take it, and he offers no other criteria of outcome, or anything else for that matter, to limit how much he wills the operations of chance and Fate. Deleuze has much the same attitude towards Nietzsche's eternal return, figured as a throw of the dice:

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5   Balin's sword, of course, but also the marker for Lancelot and Tristram's future battle, the couch of
     madness, and so on. See 'Prophecy' and 'Modal Motivation' in chapter one above on these remnants and
     prophecy, the sacred that Merlin scatters for the narrative world after Balin's death.

'My doctrine is "Let chance come to me: it is as innocent as a little child!" ' What
Nietzsche calls *necessity* (destiny) is thus never the abolition but rather the
combination of chance itself. Necessity is affirmed of chance in as much as chance itself
affirmed. [...] There are many numbers with increasing or decreasing probabilities, but
only one number of chance as such, one fatal number which reunites all the fragments
of chance, like midday gathers together the scattered parts of midnight. This is why it
is sufficient for the player to affirm chance once in order to produce the number which
brings back the dice throw. (Deleuze 2006, 24-5)

In this conception of the eternal return we can see the mythical narrative's Fate, bound together
with the historical's stochastic and contingent, as one and the same from the point of view of a
noble *ēthos*. There is no separation of gathering and scattering, nor of the contingent and the fated,
they are doubly affirmed and bound in the same moments. Of more specific interest for our present
purposes with Malory, on the pairings chance-necessity and chance-destiny replacing the
correlations causality-finality and probability-finality, note also:

Not a probability distributed over several throws but all chance at once; not a final,
desired, willed combination, but the fatal combination, fatal and loved, *amor fati*; not
the return of a combination by the number of throws, but the repetition of a dicethrow
by the nature of the fatally obtained number. (25-6)

Balin's final moments demonstrate not just this conscious, willed, 'dice' 'throw,' but the subsequent
moment when the 'dice' 'fall back':

Whereas the thrown dice affirm chance once and for all, the dice which fall back
necessarily affirm the number or the destiny which brings the dice back. It is in this
sense that the second moment of the game is also the two moments together or the
player who equals the whole. The eternal return is the second moment, the result of
the dicethrow, the affirmation of necessity, the number which brings together all the
parts of chance. But it is also the return of the first moment, the repetition of the
dicethrow, the reproduction and reaffirmation of chance itself. [...]
But Zarathustra knows that one must not play or let oneself be played, on the contrary,
it is necessary to affirm the whole of chance at once (therefore boil and cook it like the
player who warms the dice in his hands), in order to reunite all its fragments and to
affirm the number which is not probable but fatal and necessary. Only then is chance a
friend who visits his friend, a friend who will be asked back, a friend of destiny whose
destiny itself assures the eternal return as such. (26)

In such terms we can understand the truth of what the narrative itself tells us repeatedly: Balin is
the best of knights *and* he will die tragically at his brother's hands, he will save the realm for Arthur
and he will strike the Dolorous Stroke that brings about the Wasted Land. The mythic narrative and
the historical accounts agree across this binding – the best are the scapegoats that the many and
the weak destroy, and the best will it because chance and necessity demand it.

From almost the beginning of this thesis I have been at pains to point out correlations with
Girard's and Serres's hypotheses regarding scapegoats, mimesis, and sacrifice as a collective

murder. Yet these ideas are always conceived in terms and contexts quite opposed to what we find in Nietzsche and Deleuze: the valuing of blunt aggression, the primacy and inherent 'goodness' of unrestrained personal volition and action. I see these divergent perspectives (at root, perhaps, traceable to dispositions towards antipathy (Girard 1987, 264-70), hesitant acknowledgment (Serres 2012, 26; 2000, 113-4, 152-4), and enthusiasm (Deleuze 2006, 21-3, 26-7, 43-5) for Heraclitus), becoming one in Malory, and particularly so in endings that follow suit with 'Balin.' It seems fitting, in this theoretical context, to begin explaining the correlation by way of an aphorism and an anecdote:

First: *the strong must be defended from the weak*.[6] On the face of it we may assume the scapegoat to be synonymous with the weak, with the victim and all we might associate with victimhood. However sometimes in Girard with the short straw, certainly in Serres with Iphigenia, Herakles, Romulus, and others, and everywhere in Malory,[7] the scapegoat is the exceptional man or woman, the one who is recognized as unique, who is celebrated *and* destroyed as such. They are, at any rate, always singular when faced with the many. Deleuze elaborates on Nietzsche's claim by revisiting Callicles and Socrates's debate in *Gorgias*:

> Callicles strives to distinguish nature and law. Everything that separates a force from what it can do he calls law. Law, in this sense, expresses the triumph of the weak over the strong. Nietzsche adds: the triumph of reaction over action. […] It is not a law that every force goes to the limit, it is even the opposite of law. – Socrates replies to Callicles that there is no way of distinguishing nature and law; for the weak can only prevail if, by banding together, they can form a stronger force than the strong. […] Callicles […] begins again. *The slave does not stop being a slave by being triumphant; when the weak triumph it is not by forming a greater force but by separating force from what it can do.* Forces must not be compared abstractly; from the point of view of nature concrete force is that which goes to its ultimate consequences, to the limit of power or desire. (54-5, my italics)[8]

To start with it is clear Girard and Serres, Nietzsche and Deleuze, and Malory too, are not at all interested in the abstract on this count: love like anger or envy only ever exist in so far as they belong to a specific person who acts upon them. As 'forces' they are always expressed as locally

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6   This idea recurs frequently in Nietzsche's work, of course, but canonically contra Darwin in §685 of *Will to Power* (Nietzsche 1968, 364). Deleuze considers this concept central to Nietzsche's work, and it forms a refrain in his own *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

> We have said that active forces are the superior, dominant and strongest forces. But inferior forces can prevail without ceasing to be inferior in quantity and reactive in quality, without ceasing to be slaves in this sense. One of the finest remarks in *The Will to Power* is: 'The strong always have to be defended against the weak.' (Deleuze 2006, 54)

7   This is, I believe, self-evident, but in case there is any doubt consider whether any hero or indeed anti-hero in Malory dies as a consequence of weakness, or amidst any suggestion of personal weakness. The opposite is certainly the case for Balin, Arthur, Lancelot, Gawain, and Gareth, but also for 'monsters' and anti-heroes like the various giants and King Lott. See the earlier discussion of Malory's form of tragedy compared against those that trace a path through providence by a character's fatal flaw, 'Modal Motivation and Emotional Tragedy' in chapter one.

8   Deleuze goes on to discuss Socrates's '*ressentiment*' in the face of Callicles's 'rigorous reasoning.' Socrates assumes Callicles's 'desire' must be associated with pleasure-seeking rather than the exercise of will.

occurring, within the environment, and not as instances of ideals. As soon as we are clear that abstractions are not our authors' concerns, whether of Platonic origin or those of Old French chivalric literature, the defeat of the best by the weak becomes a clear and common thread for all involved. Lancelot's failures in book three, discussed above in chapter three, occur when he or others separate him from what he can maximally do (e.g., Phelot and Pedivere, but all the sequences that lead to Lancelot's mute return to Camelot); Balin is separated from his own identity, and brother, by mere maidens and nameless knights for their Roman holiday. In such terms we can understand not only the negative side of the equation, the spectrum of distaste through to outright contempt shown in Malory for the herd, the villain, and the ignoble,[9] but far more radically the work's consistent and positive affirmation of what is best and worthy of celebration. 'Noble,' 'worshipful,' 'honourable,' and so on, are not attributive adjectives overused so often as to become empty, they are used predicatively; they shine a spotlight on the fictional world to clarify the value of things.[10]

Second, an anecdote. For Serres's 'The Wolf and the Lamb,' after La Fontaine,[11] we can add Deleuze's 'The Lamb and the Eagle,' after Nietzsche.[12] There is no question of a dialectical synthesis of these. That would be meaningless. But they may be understood additively. The former accurately reflects the fiction and thought process, the reasoning, behind mythic sacrifice – the monster/lamb must die, because it is too strong and will destroy us. The latter reveals the values that prompt the mythic fiction and thought in the first place. But for the same reason we should be careful not to

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9   For instance: the famous parenthetic address 'Lo ye all Englysshemen' (1229.6-23).

10 Their great frequency, immediately evident from the most casual flick through Kato's (1974) *Concordance* for variant forms of 'noble,' 'honour,' 'worship,' and 'worthy,' does not necessarily reflect a poverty in the author's vocabulary, it is equally consistent with the work's need to *declare* what is good.

11 Serres (1982, 15-28) takes cues from La Fontaine's beast fable to argue for the violence, indeed death, due to the innocent that is inherent in dialectical reason since Plato, and which persists in modern science. In brief: the wolf argues he is the weaker, injured, party and so justifies dragging the lamb into the woods to eat. The lamb, for his part, claims only to be what he is at each stage of the trial. The wolf (the reason of science, philosophy, and war) attempts to convert each ordered comparative relationship in a series of directional models (causal, biological, ancestral, moral, and so on) into one where the lamb (or a surrogate for this innocent) is at a superlative, maximal, position. The wolf plays the lamb 'up,' himself 'down,' so as to justify a lethal revenge.

12 See §6, 'The Paralogism' in chapter four (Deleuze 2006, 114-6), although for the sake of symmetry I have taken the liberty of choosing an arbitrary species from the 'birds of prey' set referred to.

    'You are evil; I am the opposite of what you are; therefore I am good.' – Where does the paralogism lie? Let us suppose that we have a lamb who is a logician. The syllogism of the bleating lamb is formulated as follows: birds of prey are evil […]; but I am the opposite of a bird of prey; therefore I am good. […] [I]n the minor premise the bird of prey is taken for what it is: a force which does not separate itself from its effects or its manifestations. But it is assumed in the major premise that the bird of prey is able to not manifest its force, that it can hold back from its effects and separate itself from what it can do: it is evil because it does not hold itself back. It is therefore assumed that one and the same force is effectively held back in the virtuous lamb but given free rein in the evil bird of prey. Since the strong could prevent themselves from acting, the weak could act if they did not prevent themselves. (114-5)

    The paralogism tidily sums much of what Nietzsche, Deleuze, and I believe Malory too (consider the narrator's and the characters' relationships with King Mark) find most odious in an *ill ēthos*: misrepresentation of self and the other; denigration of what is strong and beautiful in the world, even of the world itself; the primacy of envy amongst the weak; and, the elevation of the petty and weak.

confuse Nietzsche and Deleuze's aggression with Girard and Serres's violence, we should not conflate the two lambs. To start with, the wolf's lamb and the eagle do not attempt to be other than they are. It is the wolf and the eagle's lamb who misrepresent their adversaries and themselves – for the wolf in so far as his lamb is a 'threat' while he is 'weak,' for the other lamb in so far as his eagle is 'evil' while he is 'good.' 'The Lamb and the Eagle' is primary: this lamb's law must prevail in order for the wolf to be 'weaker' and, by being weaker, win. In La Fontaine it is the lamb who is isolated, alone, singular beside the wolf's wood, just as for Deleuze it is the solitary, noble, eagle who the lamb and his flock hates.[13] Admittedly, aside from bravery and honesty, the only other senses in which La Fontaine's lamb could be considered strong is in dignity, honesty, and due respect for both who he himself is and who the wolf is ('Sire'). But, in the scheme of things, perhaps this is more than enough.

The strong must be defended from the weak because the weak are petty, plentiful, and pitiless in pursuing their end: destroying anything better than them. Balin, like Lancelot who 'at no tyme was […] ovircom but yf hit were by treson other inchauntement' (253.10-12), could not be destroyed outright, nor deterred from his *aventure*. Even the trap of the weak, whose custom's purpose is to destroy good knights one after another, is undone by Balin in the end. An ending that in turn wills this destruction if he lives, knowing it will otherwise be destroyed by his death. But he is misrepresented (the white shield), and separated from part of his own strength (his brother), which is set against him, the only force equal to the task at the time. In terms of *Le Morte Darthur* as a tale of these very forces, we find in every *ending*, whether a happening of fortune or misfortune, the strongest willing that same happening without reservation, just as they willed it beforehand.[14]

Further, in Malory this ending that affirms itself even in its death throes is, as has been discussed at length already, the foundation for the adventure ritual and, at almost every step until it is established against Lott and Royns, of Arthur's right to rule too. The latter is prophesied by Merlin repeatedly in 'Balin,' the former is prescribed by Merlin after the fact in 'The Wedding.'[15] Finally, for every one of Merlin's and the world's prophecies regarding Fate, Balin, and his deeds, there are corresponding utterances from Balin willing both what will come, what he must do, and, after the fact, a confirmation of that will. The correspondence is not one to one, but many to many, each present bound to multiple events past and future, for the vast bulk of both Balin's and Merlin's

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13   Although the eagle's lamb might well envision itself as alone against a convocation of eagles.

14   In so far as Fate, chance, and necessity are interwoven with character there are epic precedents in English, obviously including *Beowulf* and the *aMA*. More than just a point of difference from the French where those works are his primary model, this heroic spirit is never too far from the motivations in Malory.

15   As far as prophecies go, this tale is full of them, but take for instance the following exchange immediately before the battle:

> 'Alas,' seyde kynge Arthure, 'that ys grete pité; for I am muche beholdynge unto hym, and I have evill deserved hit agayne for hys kyndnesse.'
> 'Nay, nay,' sede Merlion, 'he shall do much more for you, and that shall ye know in haste.' (75.13-17)

Merlin presides over the adventure rituals in 'The Wedding' as a priest and highest advisor to the king: 102.24-27, 103.13-24, 108.25-109.3, 113.34-114.8, and 119.19-21. In the last case the king and queen are presumably following Merlin's lead from the preceding adventure ritual iterations – the process has become a cultural institution.

speech in this sequences of episodes, which in turn further adds to the narrative overloading for *sens*, while rendering the *matière* more clearly motivated than in any previous Arthuriad.

Ending 'Tristram'

The 'Lancelot and Elaine' sequence that begins the end of 'Tristram' is no less intriguing.[16] In terms of the narrative's logic it sets the stage; it is a gathering and scattering of material for the 'Sankgreal' and 'Lancelot and Guinevere,' and in so far as envy and mimesis motivate matters, this ending is directed at the 'Morte' too. Elaine, in Malory, has a perspective all of her own and a voice to share it. Generally speaking Malory's narrative tends to render information in brisk and direct dialogue rather than labour over it in indirect speech or explain things, but Elaine's voice, the content and tone of her speech, is more remarkable than most in this respect, and could hardly occur in the older French works.

In Malory, Morgan and the queen of North Wales, 'bycause [Elaine] was called the fayryst lady of that contrey' (792.16-17), are credited with causing Elaine's unenviable position, boiling alive indefinitely and waiting on Lancelot to rescue her, while there is no mention of it being God's will she not die as a result, as the French explains it.[17] So, envy, specifically female rivalry of precisely identified characters, rather than the mysteries of the Grail Castle of Corbenic, are the explicit origin for this adventure. Her rescue sequence of episodes is brought to a close by Elaine inviting Lancelot to 'gyff lovynge to God' with her in a nearby chapel (792.25-6).[18] Malory's work is no less religious for figuring intentional torment as a human invention and solace as divine. Shortly after, when Elaine has succeeded in sleeping with Lancelot, disillusioned him of her identity, and has defended herself from his wrath by appealing to his nobler instincts, Malory's Lancelot departs from her, 'myldely' (796.26). He even pauses, after forgiving her the deceit, for an intimate moment utterly foreign to the French *Lancelot*'s lengthy musings (3:164-165)[19] on 'flowers,' virginity, maids, womanhood, and the perfection now encircled in Galahad's pre-natal being:

> 'Fayre curteyse knyght sir Launcelot,' knelynge byfore hym, 'ye ar comyn of kynges
> bloode, and therefore I requyre you have mercy uppon me! And as thou arte renowmed

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16 See p121 fn19, above, on how the details of Percival's arrival at court, in Malory's 'King Mark,' are very close to those in the telling of the same in the *PVM Suite*, and at the end of the Prose *Lancelot*. In the case of 'Lancelot and Elaine' the text generally follows portions of the Prose *Lancelot*'s §§149-150 for Galahad's conception, (1993, 3:155-171), §169 for Bors's adventures at Corbenic, (1993, 3:264-272), and §§176-179 for Elaine's second bedding of Lancelot, his exile and madness, Ector and Percival, and Lancelot's return to Camelot, (1993, 3:315-338). Among the exceptions, Percival, of course, is not re-introduced to court. Vinaver notes the existence of borrowings from the Prose *Lancelot* in a number of *Tristan* MSS (1524). Field in his 1990 edition of Vinaver's text gives references to further *Tristan* MSS, including one episode that Vinaver thought original to Malory (n826.18-35).

17 See, for instance, Elaine's explanation to Gawain in §137 of the Prose *Lancelot* (3:99-103).

18 Not in known French variants.

19 In the absence of any adequate English translation rather than synopsis for these sections in *Tristan*, I refer to the equivalents in the appropriate sections of Lacy's (1993) Vulgate translation.

the moste noble knyght of the worlde, sle me nat, for I have in my wombe bygetyn of
the that shall be the moste nobelyste knyght of the worlde.'

'A, false traytoures! Why haste thou betrayed me? Tell me anone,' seyde sir
Launcelot, 'what thou arte.'

'Sir,' she seyde, 'I am Elayne, the doughter of kynge Pelles.'

And therewyth he toke her up in his armys and kyssed her, for she was a fayre lady
and thereto lusty and yonge, and wyse as ony that tyme lyvynge. (795.31-796.11)

To Lancelot's charge and questions Elaine does not attempt any further defence or explanation than
she has already given. She identifies his status, her name, and her father. This, her beauty, and her
mental excellence (wisdom in Malory is unusually often treated as self-evident, or possibly like 'the
good' is simply predicated by the narrative), are enough to turn Lancelot's outrage to his only
display of anything like passion for a woman, other than Guinevere, in the work.

Malory's Lancelot exhibits tenderness in his departing from Elaine that is lacking in the French,
where he 'wandered all day long sad and angry, asking everywhere for news of his cousin Lionel'
(3:165). Lancelot instead returns to Elaine's father, after which we are told of Galahad's early
childhood and his christening. Ideas of virginity and maidenhood are made brief, concrete, and
personal in Elaine's voice, rather than rambled on about at length in the narrator's abstracted and
liturgical voice (3:164-5).[20] In short, Malory establishes the interpersonal relationships, and the
states of mind of those involved, in quite clear and specific ways for a situation that could be, and
previously was, difficult. In Malory, vertical motivations and Fate, brought to pass as consequences
for the personal envy of Morgan, set up this sequence for Lancelot and Elaine, while their frank and
open dialogue, focussing on the specifics of the situation, the future, and their relationship, results
in their warm, physical, embrace of each other. The characters, good in themselves, recognizing the

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20 Batt's (2002, 120-3) reading of this scenario, for Malory's discourses of love, agrees on many points with
mine including this last, and even though I am concerned with it as a 'female heroic vocation' of sorts for
Malory. At the least, I believe Malory treats Elaine's will and her role with a deference not entirely
dissimilar to how he treats his knights. I don't suggest this is unproblematic from a feminist perspective,
but as before (see 'Interwoven *sens*' in the introduction), it is something of an 'equal opportunity'
(mis)representation.

However, Batt's earlier article (1997) has a quite different take on this passage, which troubles me given
how extremely careful and attentive it otherwise is to the text. Batt reads the occasion of Galahad's
conception as prompting Elaine to declare she 'is not going to charge [Lancelot] with the irrevocable loss
of her maidenhood,' and so 'he is under some obligation to her,' while she appeals to her 'own acceptance
of the workings of higher forces' as some kind of a disavowal of responsibility for her own actions (1997,
89). In other words, in this earlier reading Batt seems to assume the character has no choice, that she is a
victim. I can appreciate why we might read it this way, but I think this is a leap, for Malory, given it is
isomorphic with the scenarios of his fated knights on adventure, and they are neither without agency, or
victims, in this sense. Elaine, I believe, has an unambiguously active role in deceiving Lancelot by magic.
Besides, later there is the repeat performance at Camelot (804-5), which has nothing to do with conception
or destiny, and which Elaine wills since 'for all the worlde I love nat so muche as I do sir Launcelot'
(804.21-22). Elaine is obviously not a knight, but her attitude towards her will and her destiny is certainly
comparable with the best of them. We might read this as a further example of what Batt recognizes
elsewhere as: Malory's conflation of 'the language of male chivalric prowess and heterosexual love' (2002,
112) in the registers of Lancelot and Elaine, Palomides, and even in Lamerok's (seemingly loveless) love
complaint (579.23-25).

good in each other, together affirm the good of what has happened also, as does the narrative – or else what could we say of Galahad? The French works clearly struggle with the same from various doctrinal perspectives, and when these are insufficient it is enough to revert to the catch all motivation for all things: they happen because God wills it so. Clearly Malory takes the fundamentally different and more modern approach that for the most part things happen because people act on their will.

Galahad's conception is fated beforehand, willed by Elaine as necessary (but not by Lancelot), thrust upon him *by chance* (it is, after all, an *aventure* he takes) for Lancelot, and after the fact willed by both Elaine (a second time) and Lancelot as good. Figuratively this ending is where the *sens* and *matière* for the last three books is conceived, and literally so for the 'Sankgreal.' It is a dice throw that is completed in the affirming of chance and necessity before and after, and in Malory's work, just as we saw with 'Balin' where every subsequent adventure is a ritual and repetition of his fated sequence, it is an affirmation that never stops being reaffirmed – even by the perfect Galahad who affirms his father for who he is (1012.14-1013.24), just as the narrative and Lancelot himself do by the close of the 'Sankgreal' (1018.3-6). As yet another example of Malory's overloading for *sens*, rather than interweaving of *matière*, this sequence opens with the masses prophetic crying to him, knowing him by name, to rescue Elaine since only he can do so as the best in the land – the complementary opposite of the crowd's knowing Balin by name and cursing him for his Dolorous Stroke. Similarly the tomb built around Balin and Balan and prophecies related to it are translated into Lancelot fulfilling a tomb's prophecy by slaying the demonic dragon enclosed within (792.31-793.11), then conceiving Galahad on Elaine (794.21-795.23).

Malory's 'Tristram' may well be considered an example of how his narratives do not properly end in the senses we usually expect of stories, particularly since the narrator tells us he is leaving the third *Tristan* book (itself almost certainly a *Grail* variant). As always, I do not want to play down those aspects at all, since they are part of the enigmatic joy of reading Malory, but I do wish to draw attention to how the last books of 'Tristram' do indeed operate as an ending. Take the following from the close of 'Lancelot and Elaine':

> 'My lorde, sir Launcelot,' seyde dame Elayne, 'thys same feste of Pentecoste shall youre sonne and myne, Galahad, be made knyght, for he ys now fully fyftene wynter olde.'
>
> 'Madame, do as ye lyste,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'and God gyff hym grace to preve a good knyght.'
>
> 'As for that,' seyde dame Elayne, 'I doute nat he shall preve the beste man of hys kynne excepte one.'
>
> 'Than shall he be a good man inowghe,' seyde sir Launcelot. (832.7-15)

They are returning to Camelot, Winchester, for the feast of Pentecost and so the beginning of the Holy Grail quest. Lancelot's reticence, then manly understatement, even by his standards, helps detract from a factor crucial to understanding Malory's 'Sankgreal' – Galahad is necessarily the perfect knight, but the narrative is very often more interested in the good man, and Lancelot is the best of these. There is room in Malory's world for the morality, in the sense used to open this chapter, of the Christian world, and even the apocryphal workings of the Holy Grail adventures, but

the focus is on the ethics of a good man in this narrative world. Thus we read of the majority of the knights who turn to wandering, at a loss, descending for the most part into frustration, pointless rage, and even murder; while we do indeed conclude the 'Sankgreal' with the sequence of divine episodes for the three most perfect Round Table knights; but we also have as counterpoint Lancelot's summary of his adventures:

> 'I have sene,' seyde he, 'grete mervayles that no tunge may telle, and more than ony
> herte can thynke. And had nat my synne bene beforetyme, ellis I had sene muche
> more.' (1017.11-13)
> 'Sir,' seyde they, 'the queste of the Sankgreall ys encheved now ryght in you, and never
> shall ye se of Sankgreall more than ye have sene.'
>   'Now I thanke God,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'for Hys grete mercy of that I have sene, for
> hit suffisith me. For, as I suppose, no man in thys worlde have lyved bettir than I have
> done to enchyeve that I have done.' (1017.30-1018.6)

This recalls the conclusion to 'Tristram,' so far as sequences involving Lancelot are concerned, where more than gratitude or acceptance or resignation we also find the same (albeit 'manfully' understated, as above with Elaine) willing of the outcome (Fate) afterwards, that was willed as chance (*aventure*) beforehand, and in so far as it was necessity, chance, and what he willed.

> 'A, Jesu!' seyde kynge Arthure, 'I mervayle for what cause ye, sir Launcelot, wente oute
> of youre mynde. For I and many othir deme hyt was for the love of fayre Elayne, the
> doughtir of kynge Pelles, by whome ye ar noysed that ye have gotyn a chylde, and hys
> name ys Galahad. And men sey that he shall do many mervaylouse thyngys.'
>   'My lorde,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'yf I ded ony foly I have that I sought.' (832.30-833.2)

Lancelot is equal to affirming even that which drove him to madness. It is worth recalling the speechlessness he was left in at the conclusion of book three, 'Lancelot,'[21] and to note how the narrative presents this as the conduct of the *good* man immediately before Tristram and Palomides reconcile, and the latter is christened. This in turn sets a precedent for each of the remaining books: Malory closes a book with a Lancelot-related matter in such a way that the next book will take shape and 'become' that book in so far as this matter is a central issue, only then does the book close with the nominal topic of that book. 'Tristram' has the issue of Galahad, then the contention of Tristram and Palomides; the 'Sankgreal' confirms Lancelot as the best of men, then the Grail leaves the world along with Galahad and Percival; 'Lancelot and Guinevere' has Lancelot's refusal to leave Guinevere to ruin, *noyse*, or danger, then the 'Healing of Sir Urry,'[22] an apotheotic Malorian register of registers for the knights of the Round Table; while the 'Morte' reverses this to first finish with Arthur, who may or may not return, and then end Lancelot himself.

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21 See chapter three on the sequences in 'Lancelot' that culminate in his aphasic return to Camelot.

22 Even in the details of these stories there is much to confirm this process, particularly by the minor exceptions. For instance, in 'The Healing' (1149.4-11) we are first reminded of that fine worldly knight, Lamerok, who suffered a scapegoat's death, the myth largely revealed in historical narrative, and then of those two finest 'in holy dedis,' who died in divine circumstances. The narrative is done with the latter, but envy, mimesis, and the ethics of the good man are still open concerns that the work will keep returning to.

On the episodic level too, from 'Tristram' on the books have two dual endings: an affirmation of the past *and* its future return, in Nietzschean terms the willing of the becoming of chance and necessity, followed by a detailed look at the situation now, which is celebrated by the characters and narrative itself. In each case the narrative affirms the throw and the fall of the dice.

But, returning briefly to the 'Conclusion' for 'Tristram' – the crux of this episode, the reason it concludes 'Tristram' is more personal and momentous than the battle, the peace, or the christening. Palomides is *good*, and besides he already believes and conducts himself as a believer in Christ, while the two of them have reconciled numerous times before only to find themselves at odds again. The remarkable aspect, and the one that can end 'Tristram,' is that the eponymous hero finally 'understands' Palomides, and this understanding is mutual and *naked* in a sense far outstripping Tristram's lack of armour:

> 'A, sir Trystram!' seyde sir Palomydes, 'full well thou wotyste I may nat have ado wyth the for shame, for thou arte here naked and I am armede, and yf that I sle the, dyshonoure shall be myne. [...]'
>
> 'That ys trouthe,' seyde sir Trystram, 'I undirstonde thy valyauntenesse.'
>
> [...]
>
> 'Sir, I put a case,' seyde sir Palomydes, 'that ye were armed at all ryghtes as well as I am, and I naked as ye be, what wolde ye do to me now, be youre trewe knyghthode?'
>
> 'A,' seyde sir Trystram, 'now I undirstonde the well, sir Palomydes, for now muste I sey myne owne jugemente!' (841.9-25)

Each, at last, sees the other as not just a fine knight of prowess but ethically as a good man, as *another* good man in the world. As Lancelot's adventures around the rescue of Elaine recalled its complementary opposite in 'Balin,' so this episode recalls the battle of Balin and Balan because the doubles finally do see and recognize each other, that which is good in themselves in the other, and most importantly: they do *not* destroy each other.

Before the religious rituals of confession and baptism there is Palomides's final personal shriving before Tristram, after their last combat ritual (itself a formal *n*-th repetition of combat to the point of including Malory's 'as two wylde borys' (843.27) to describe the combatants[23]) at the point where Tristram and Palomides have traded places one last time in terms of advantage – who is better in terms of prowess has faded as a question in favour of whether they are equally good men. After this final exchange, where each in rapid succession experiences himself as vulnerable to the other's conduct when dominant, Palomides lists his offences with striking honesty. Forgiveness is asked and given (844.13-845.7).

La Belle Isode opens this short tale by demonstrating an understanding of how the envy of third parties damages her lover and herself because her lover is hurt. Tristram and Palomides

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23 Of the fourteen occurrences of 'bo[o]rys' just one is a reference to actual boars (821.20), while the only use of this figure (knights attacking each other 'as' or 'lyke' two wild boars) subsequent to Tristram and Palomides final battle is in the 'Poisoned Apple' when a disguised Lancelot is defending Guinevere's honour against Mador, her accuser (1057.20). The last occurrence (1070.20) describes instead knights 'holding together' as hunted boars. (Kato 1974)

esteem each other without disparaging themselves, and themselves without maligning the other. They are in concord over what is good and without pretence about the source of their quarrels. All that remains to be told of Tristram and Isode is the tragedy itself, a mythical tale since it is solely concerned with jealous rivalry and scapegoating, and one Malory fittingly leaves to *noyse*, as he did with Lamerok and Pellinor.

The quotation from Deleuze this chapter opens with continues on a note that it is suitable to conclude on:

> There are things that can only be said, felt or conceived, values which can only be adhered to, on condition of 'base' evaluation, 'base' living and thinking. This is the crucial point; *high* and *low*, *noble* and *base*, are not values but represent the differential element from which the value of values themselves derives. (2006, 2)

In Malory the stories, beginnings, endings, narrative logic, and characters' motivations are all inflected by what the work figures as, and affirms to be, *noble*.

VI. MIDDLES AND LOOPING – PROMISES AND FAITH

> If you're going through hell, keep going.[1]

Scholarly differences aside, readers of Malory seem to instinctively fall into one of two categories: those who enthusiastically latch onto those characteristics I grouped in the first part under the term sequenced serial narrative, and those who grudgingly put up with the same, celebrating those sections where the work appears to lapse into a more familiar, teleological, structural cadence. Malory's cadence for *sens*, for the most part, bears closer comparison with an instrumental music than a song, of a voice in language with its clearly identifiable signifiers and signifieds. The ways of telling, more so than the stories in the tales, raise most difficult questions of *Le Morte Darthur*.

Even less than the beginnings and endings, the middles, that which loops, in Malory is hardly bound to fixed passages of text in-between opening and closing sections – it is instead the narrative motivation, and the narrative present for each and every moment.

Sequences and the Moment

The repetition of types of episode (jousting; castle rescues; combat with giants or monsters; forest, fountain, and bridge, landmarks and paths of adventure; sea voyages; days of a tournament, and so on), especially when they form a rhythm within a sequence, or across overlapping sequences, provide a narrative texture just as musical phrase equivalents do for minimalist music. As with any texture, including the textures of simple cloth, the surface gives the appearance of depth and flatness – we are aware of both the subtle differences and the undeniable repetition across the same surface, and it works, is of any interest at all in its own right, only by highlighting both.

In the third chapter above I discussed two of several possible overlapping sequences of sequences that can be found in Malory's book three, 'Lancelot.' In telling these stories each episode falls into one or more of several recurrent types: the masking and revealing of identity; deals brokered and fulfilled; trapping and releasing; oaths and other points of honour, of dishonour; and, identifying landmarks, leaving them, and inadvertently returning.[2] There is no significance for the *story* attached to this kind of repetition – Lancelot's return to where he started in the forest, for instance, serves no clearly discernible purpose at all. But as with Kafka's corridors and rooms,[3] or

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1   This quotation, without record in his writings, is commonly attributed to Sir Winston Churchill. With respect to Malory's heroes, I believe it invokes Serres's 'hell' of mimesis as much as it does to Nietzsche's 'tragic spirit.'

2   I do not attempt an exhaustive list here. See 'The Young Barbarians at Play Again,' chapter three.

3   Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994), reading Kafka's work as a 'minor literature,' defined as an appropriation of a national language by a writer not represented by that nation's interests, note numerous characteristics that I believe have parallels with Malory's work, as well as his literary and historical contexts. An avenue of research that is, unfortunately, wholly outside this thesis's scope.

pretty much anything and everything in Beckett, our attention is very much drawn to the texture, the fabric of the moment because, be it déjà vu, nightmare, or dance, we are repeating and we don't know why.

In 'Lancelot' the deal, for example, can be brokered within a trap or on a victory, for a release or for an adventure. Sleeping is combined with several different motifs. Traps combine with various others again. Each type consists of readily identifiable characteristics.[4] But even though the types recur, the combinations used in each instance frustrate any attempt to systematize one-to-one correlations. Each instance of repetition is unique, while the narrative's repetition of types in these episodes foregrounds the moment of that instance. It is in this sense that I refer to the 'looping of the middles' – not the tedious recurrence of the similar, but the instant that is forever becoming from a texture that recalls a repetitive narrative past, and of the prophecies and promises that reliably assert both Fate and chance into the narrative future, that assert this future in the now. I hope to draw attention to this more profound looping in every instant of significance in a given sequence, or more accurately, looping as the very ground, the elemental, for marking, inscribing, significance of *sens* in a sequence. A marker that is itself marked in the act of marking (elsewhere) – a point without a centre.

The elements previously discussed all play a part in making this 'narrative moment' loop, which in the case of our heroes is also always a willed becoming and an affirmation of becoming. To complete this reading I will first consider oaths in Malory against promises in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, then the latter's pre- and post-historical hero against how Malory's narrative presents his heroes in their world.

Promises

Myth's prophecy does not leave the world when Nynyve binds Merlin under it (126.15-27).[5] But, we have not really discussed its historical correlate: the promise, a knight's oath, which never ceases to be at least as powerful within the narrative. An oath is something only a hero can make because only a hero has the strength and the character to uphold it – it is a specific, contingently willed (rather than mythically proclaimed) binding of the character with his or her future, and it is valid only in so far as we know that character through the narrative.

King Mark, of course, lacks both the integrity to make believable oaths and the strength of character to honour them (610.3-15). Mordred is frequently devious and towards the end

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4   To take one obvious example, where a character sleeps in a romance is hardly ever free of some, usually foreboding, connotation. 'Lancelot' is true to convention for episodes of what we might call the 'perilous sleep' type, such as was Dame Herodys's experience under the 'ympe-tre' in *Sir Orfeo*.

5   Although Nynyve's role as the Round Table's patron-enchantress once Merlin has left the narrative does seem to suggest a shift beyond violence for myth and magic – the motivation for her interventions are one way or another connected with her love for individuals (Arthur and Pelleas), rather than Fate or numinous forces. She is even introduced in these terms (1059.13-15) in the 'Poisoned Apple' tale, and before she reveals the sequence of human, mimetic, motivations that lead back to the murder of Lamorak.

increasingly sinister, but he is neither an unreliable oath maker nor an intentional oath breaker. Not even Pedivere is figured in the same league as the recreant King Mark, since while he misleads with his promise to Lancelot, he does not break his word literally.[6] The Brown Knight, a shameless liar, does not so much as attempt to make promises. Oaths that are broken by Fate, treachery, or chance are the source of horror and dismay for the heroes who have made them.[7] These knights blame the perceived source of the breach for bringing shame and 'disworship' upon them.

So, Malory does include characters: who exhibit a reluctance or refusal to make oaths; who make ambiguous oaths, or manufacture ambiguity in them after the fact; and, a good many others who simply fail to honour what were sincere oaths through no clear fault or ill intent of their own.[8] But, aside from Mark there are no key characters, and, very few minor ones either, who intentionally perjure themselves when they give their word.[9]

Counter to this, and emphasising both the unique occasion and the general rule, is Bedwere, whose attempts to keep Excalibur, rather than follow Arthur's instructions to hurl it into the water, detain the increasingly angry but quite helpless king (1239.1-35). Aside from developing narrative suspense at a crucial pass in the work, this exception illustrates conduct that we have long since taken as a given. Bedwere (a loyal supporter since the 'Roman War,' while his very recently deceased (1238.15-27) brother Lucan first appears early in 'Arthur') is not concerned with personal wealth, but values the sword for its beauty and nobleness, and would not have it lost to the world, presumably pointlessly lost so far as he is aware (1239.7-9, .20-21). After everything he has seen and undergone himself on this last day, this further loss to the realm is enough to prompt him to form his own ideas of what is best and to act on them, despite Arthur's commands and his promise to this dying king. Arthur, for his part, has started to lose faith and understanding for even this last remaining knight of his obliterated army, suspecting him of something so unlikely and petty at this pass as greed for riches (1239.27-31). The effect is to prefigure the first two instructions in Arthur's last words:

> 'Comforte thyselff,' seyde the kynge, 'and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in. For I wyll into the vale of Avylyon to hele me of my grevous wounde. And if thou here nevermore of me, pray for my soule!' (1240.31-5)

It is in Arthur that the realm has here, already, fallen. Faith in him, and his faith in his people is lost, not just for Lancelot, or even Mordred, but in Bedwere, the last of his knights. More than the

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6 And, as discussed, even Lancelot himself is not above such manipulations of the truth. See 'The Young Barbarians at Play Again' and 'Solve for *x*' in chapter three above.

7 Balin and Lancelot's promises of safe conduct in books one and three, for instance.

8 On failure and intent, see 'Conduct,' chapter two.

9 I am referring to actual promises made by individuals, and not the spatio-temporal extension of the Pentecostal Oath ritual, which, as we have seen, has peculiar properties – such that, for instance, the Brown Knight can be accused of breaking it when we have no reason to suppose he ever swore to it, or had so much as an opportunity to do so (not being a Round Table knight). See p120 fn15.

   Potential counter-examples to my claim exist. For instance, Lamerok *might* have lied to Gaheris when he uses Balin as a scapegoat, rather than being merely ill-informed (612.28-30).

   My assertion, however, is with respect to promises *for the future*, a knight's 'word,' vow, oath: *words* which bind a character to a specific future *act*, or to *a mode of conduct* in the future.

mythical drawing of the sword from the stone and its double from the lake, the return of the sword to the hand in the lake and the departure to Avalon, this loss of so central a tenet of knighthood, chivalry, goodness, as faithfulness (or what we might call integrity) identifies the spirit and character of the realm with Arthur's life, and Arthur's reign with the values, character, world, and the storytelling itself in Malory. Not only are there no more members of the fellowship (one Round Table knight cannot be considered a group), there is no longer even the spirit of that fellowship between knight and king.

This respect for the promise is the opposite of the situation in the *PVM Suite*, where it is Eric's lot to die because he is the exceptional – unique, we are told – knight who does not break his promise to tell the truth.[10] This concurs with the radically optimistic view Malory's work, despite itself at times I suspect, generally possesses of the Round Table knights in so far as they are basically good, an assumption extended to the great majority of the damsels, ladies, rural workers, hermits, and sundry others one comes across within the narrative world. It is not so much a rule as it is a disposition, against which we can compare the *PVM Suite*'s, where even the Round Table knights are at times conceived of as little more than a band of sword-wielding sinners, albeit rarely in quite so consistently critical a light as we might find in the French *Grail*.

Deleuze makes much of the role of promises for culture and pre-, post-, and historical peoples,[11] an activity that only the noble are capable of making and honouring, as opposed to Nietzsche's (unambiguously despised) masses.

> Culture endows consciousness with a new faculty which is apparently opposed to the faculty of forgetting: memory. But the memory with which we are concerned here is not the memory of traces. This original memory is no longer a function of the past, but a function of the future. It is not the memory of the sensibility but of the will. It is not the memory of traces but of words. It is the faculty of promising, commitment to the future, memory of the future itself. Remembering the promise that has been made is not recalling that it was made at a particular past moment, but that one must hold to it at a future moment. This is precisely the selective object of culture: forming a man capable of promising and thus of making use of the future, a free and powerful man. Only such a man is active; he acts his reactions, everything in him is active or acted. The faculty of promising is the effect of culture as the activity of man on man; the man who can promise is the product of culture as species activity. (Deleuze 2006, 125)

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10 §64 in the *PVM Suite* (5:69-75, specifically: 71-2). The narrator summarizes: 'Thus Eric made the most marvellous vow a knight ever made before or since' (1993, 5:72). The translator comments of the oath Eric makes: 'In the Old French the word *mentir* has both meanings: lying and breaking promises' (1993, 5:72 fn5). The 'marvel' of Eric's oath is that he forswears both senses before God, in earnest, and honours this at the cost of his own life during the *Grail* quest.

11 'Historical' as in belonging to human history, to a *culture* and civilization, and as opposed to belonging to pre-history or Nietzsche's post-history. The clash with the word as I have been using it is unfortunate, but hopefully in context there is no cause for confusion. Where necessary I refer to Nietzsche's historical with a preposition, such as '*within* history,' to distinguish it from that complement of mythical narrative.

Anyone more than passingly familiar with medieval literature may well smile at a theory that posits promise-keeping as key to the individual becoming a part of the Overman's post-historical epoch. Even by Malory's time it is esteemed by our somewhat conservative narrator with a distinct sense of nostalgia. However, chronological vectors are not necessarily identical with developmental ones, and besides, it seems fairly obvious Nietzsche was attempting to comprehend how classical Greece could possibly precede his nineteenth century Europe, how values could have become so 'decadent' in the interim.

'Forgetting,' in the above schema, is the ability and predisposition to 'let go' of slights, real or perceived – the opposite of *ressentiment*, the 'memory of traces,' which Nietzsche and Deleuze argue is a compulsive and petty sickness of re-*sensing* past hurts.[12] This opposition between the one who not only wills chance and Fate before, during, and after, as discussed in the previous chapter, but who is also as easy on the past as he is capable of creating and directing the future through promises is sufficient to differentiate Lancelot from Gawain, as well as Arthur from Mark.[13] The entirety of 'Tristram' is in one important sense the tale of Palomides and Tristram shifting from remembering hurts, and forgetting friendships, to honouring oaths of friendship, forgiving past injuries, and in Palomides's case: 1) becoming the sort of man who finally can commit to Christianity; and, 2) having become this sort he fulfils his promise by becoming a Christian.

In Tristram's case, it is easy to overlook how only by the 'Conclusion' to 'Tristram' can he be both La Belle Isode's lover and beloved and a knight for other knights. This last sequence has an almost systematic approach to the relationships Tristram has with others and himself, each now shown to opt in favour of local and personal values over the abstract and social hierarchical ones he favoured previously. He can be a knight in his own right at a tournament without La Belle Isode there, without her watching, and without the need for her as the third term, an object for rivalry with another knight, or indeed without any need for rivalry at all. Similarly, he can appreciate and understand her not attending for her own reasons, which on a personal level are reasons of concern for him and the damage that inevitably comes to him by way of her attendance. The envy and rivalry of Palomides and Tristram for each other have already been discussed – but in terms of Tristram's love, too, he has moved beyond mimetic logic.

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12   The French word is used as a term in Nietzsche's original texts. But there is for our purposes little, if any, difference between it and 'resentment' in English.

13   I refer to the Gawain of blood feuds and who turns on Lancelot after Gareth's death. Malory succeeds in creating a Gawain who is violently overwhelmed by Nietzschean *ressentiment* for considerable stretches of the work. But, there is no reason in Malory's narrative world, or our own, to suppose this Gawain cannot be the same knight as the one who genuinely loves and is loved by Lancelot at the opening of the 'Morte' and in his time of dying. It is in this sense that we can reconcile the narrative truth of Gareth's critical evaluation of Gawain at the close of 'Gareth' with Gawain's perfectly noble conduct throughout the same book.

Mark, on the contrary, has no redeeming characteristics at all – he is the weak 'man of *ressentiment*' (Deleuze 2006, 107-111), while Gawain is the good knight who is subject to it. They are examples of Malory's repetition with variation of modal character types, complementing the repetition with variation of episode types discussed in the previous section.

We understand why culture does not, in principle, recoil from any kind of violence: 'perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than mnemotechnics … Man could never do without blood, torture and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself.' […] – Nietzsche therefore offers us the following genetic lineage: 1) Culture as prehistoric or generic activity, an enterprise of training and selection; 2) The means used by this activity, the equation of punishment, the relationship of debt, the responsible man; 3) The product of this activity: the active man, free and powerful, the man who can promise. (Deleuze 2006, 125-6)[14]

Serres can helpfully intervene between Girard's culture institutionalized in violence, and Deleuze and Nietzsche's violence institutionalized in culture – Serres's culture 'is the continuation of barbarity by other means' (2000, 190).[15] An observation that still seems true and fair for the Nietzschean perspective so long as we add: 'which at long last, might even lead us beyond culture and barbarity.'

I don't think Nietzsche denies the ever-present potential for brutality in culture or its institutions, and Malory certainly does not. But, there is a potential for transformation in Nietzsche's culture that can be obstructed indefinitely within history, in much the same way as we have discussed the strong being triumphed over by the weak, without ceasing to be strong and weak, respectively. And that he and Malory's work share this is the most significant indicator of their optimism not just regardless of tragedy, or in spite of it, but in and through it as active willing participants in chance and Fate. Further, the theorists' works can also be correlated for other important terms – sacrifice for Girard is culture's making of memories for Nietzsche (a memory is created, but not necessarily the memory that might belong to a historical account of things); re-enacting ritual relieves a people's frenzy of mimetic tension, which is Girard's functional understanding of what for Nietzsche is a people's need to (mis)remember real horrors: classical myth and tragedy, in other words. An exhaustive itemizing of pairings, for instance Nietzsche's 'looking away shall be my only negation' (1974, 223),[16] against the role of blaming in Girard's work, hardly seems necessary – generally mimesis approximates reactive forces, while motivations like rivalry and envy correspond with the effects of Nietzsche's negation.

Where they differ is in considering the future. Girard seems logically trapped by a Proustian weariness: the conditions (mimetic rivalry, sacrificial logic, etc.) are forever discerned in people who never change; therefore the conditions never change, the conditions dictate the conduct of

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14   Deleuze's quotation from Nietzsche (1996, II 3, 42-3), included in my introduction (p19), speaks specifically and vividly to the correlations between the institutions of culture and violence we have been discussing.

The power of emotional pain, to motivate and to forge memory, is clearly evident in Malory's fictional world, whether the pain originates in treason, faithlessness, the death of another, or even in love itself, and far more so than the pain of physical injury. But it also, I believe, informs the meta-narrative in so far as it might possess a motivation; a correlation between pain, horrors, cruel necessity, and memory is in accord with a work that is romance, tragedy, and history, of heroes and of nations.

15   See p92 fn14.

16   See p145 fn4.

people, and so people will never change. This logic affects every ordering system he considers (including the biological, ethical, psychological, social, and philosophical) to find in people envy, in envy violence (murder), and in violence people – and it's hard to take seriously the proposed solution of a 'moral' yet unfettered capitalism.[17] Serres wavers between solutions, such as the Lucretian walled garden[18] (a variant of what Nietzsche would likely label nihilism, although Serres and Lucretius are clearly interested in a vigorously localized physics rather a wholesale rejection of living, life, and the world), and the redemptive power of literature to transform values.[19] Malory and Nietzsche take a different approach by not concerning themselves overmuch with how Girard's 'people' or Serres's 'crowd' constrain and conduct themselves – the best knights, like the post-historical Overmen, create, will, and act their own values.

Deleuze offers an axiological chart (2006, 136-7) for Nietzsche's will to power, correlating the mechanisms, principles, and products for six subcategories of active and reactive types (and so the corresponding qualities: affirmation and negation), that map in broad strokes surprisingly well onto Malory's chivalric world.

Nietzsche after Deleuze	Malory
Active force of: Dream and Intoxication. Mechanism: The excitants of life. Principle: Apollo and Dionysus. Product: The Artist.	Verve, a[d]venture, vocation, prowess, beauty. Chivalry (as a way of life, a mode of becoming)
Active force of: Consciousness. Mechanism: Repression of traces ('letting go'). Principle: Faculty of forgetting (regulative principle). Product: The Noble.	Forgiving, dignity, charity, strength, worship (above envy). Love and Fellowship.
Active force of: Culture. Mechanism: of violence, giving an *external* meaning to pain. Principle: Faculty of memory (teleological principle). Product: The Sovereign Individual / Legislator.	Oaths, lineage, honour (beyond treason). Knighthood (as an identity, a mode of being).
Reactive force of: *Ressentiment*. Mechanism: displacement (will not 'let go') and reversal (of values: good/strong -> evil, bad/weak -> good). Principle: Memory of traces, fictional values. Product: The blamer and perpetual accuser.	Envy, blood feuds, *noyse.* [Girard: escalating mimetic rivalry.]
Reactive force of: Bad Conscience. Mechanism: turning back (internalizes force) and changing direction (internalizes pain). Principle: separate force from potential, fictional guilt and self-accusation. Product: The man who multiplies his pain and the domesticated (herd), guilty man.	Unrequited lovers, unworshipful conduct, 'villains.' [Girard: mimetic desire is doomed.]
Reactive force of: Ascetic Ideal. Mechanism: making the previous two states bearable and expressing will to nothingness. Principle: fictional world beyond. Product: The ascetic man.	Dishonour, recreancy, treason, refusing the order of knighthood. [Serres: rejecting the contingent/local for the abstract/universal.] [Girard: scapegoating.]

17   See the introduction's 'The Good and the Hero,' and p18 fn49.

18   'The good lies in proximity, and evil in extension' (2000, 186). See: p88 fn10, but compare with the quotation from Serres (1982, 121-122), on p60.

19   See the block quotation from Serres on science and myth, p59.

In the previous chapter I discussed the doubly affirmative nature of the oaths Balin made to take the *aventure* at every step, the relationship this has to time, *ēthos*, and the eternal return. The narrative asserts, and the reader senses, that the deepest tragedy in this sequence of sequences is the mutual destruction of the brothers – which is hard to reconcile with their almost complete disappearance from the narrative,[20] particularly since the Wasted Land, Maimed King, and Grail are key for the 'Sankgreal' at least. Mythically, the adventure ritual that this paradigm demands follows in 'The Wedding,' as discussed previously, but the fabric of the world for Malory's romance is changed too: fulfilling his oaths to take the *aventure*, and, once mortally wounded, promising to destroy the castle and its ill customs if he should live, he and Balan destroy it in their death and so rid the world of a machine that would continue to destroy the best of knighthood indefinitely. So long as such a mechanism exists the path in every romance wood for the best knight would lead to this place. The logic of the narrative demands it since each best knight in his turn, theoretically until the world is empty of them, would find his way there by *aventure*. Not immediately perhaps, but consider Tarquin waiting for Lancelot,[21] or Elaine boiling alive and the dragon in the tomb, both also waiting for him, the wounded Sir Urry too, of course, and originally the damsel traveling from court to court with what would be Balin's second sword – eventually the hero marked out by the quest will 'happen' upon it. The promises of noble knights complete prophecy when the knights chance upon their conditions, and those prophecies only have meaning for these who promise.

More to the point: noble doubles, like Balin and Balan, no longer destroy each other; they will loop through outcomes alternative to mutual destruction until once again, and in their strength rather than separated from it as Balin and Balan were,[22] the doubles of Gawain and Lancelot break the cycle, tragically, historically, not mythically, and by noble example. The deaths of Balin and Balan allow romance adventure rather than war and unhappy mischance to dominate[23] within Arthur's realm, so Lancelot, Tristram, Palomides, Gareth, Lamerok, and for the most part Gawain too, *can* encounter each other unaware of the other's identity and neither party dies. Not dying being, of course, a reasonable requirement for repetition with these knights of a given narrative form in the tales' sequences. The mysterious resurfacing of a dead knight is also a more forgivable lapse under these circumstances – aside from those victims of Lott's sons' blood feud, good knights generally do not die.

Balin and Balan die destroying the singular castle that possesses the strength to destroy, indefinitely, the best of knights. Malory's counterpart castle, which destroys maidens, is destroyed by God at the end of 'Sir Galahad' in the 'Sankgreal' (1000-5), but only after Percival's sister willingly sacrifices her life to the custom.[24]

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20 See 'Modal Motivation,' chapter one, and p47 fn41 in particular, on the three mentions of Balin after his death (the narrator's when a prophecy is fulfilled, Lamerok's, and Galahad's). This *near* complete silence is what we would expect for the monster/victim of sacrifice.

21 See 'The Young Barbarians' and 'Another Reading' in chapter three, especially p100 fn22.

22 See 'Willing the End,' chapter five.

23 Although not replace either completely, of course.

24 See 'The Unstable Chivalric World,' chapter one, and p38 fn29, on Balin and his damsel visiting this castle.

Lamerok Leaves

More ought to be said about Lamerok's end in Malory in so far as it is given only in *noyse*.

In the *PVM Suite* his death is told immediately before Percival's arrival at court where the mute maiden esteems him in speech and, indeed, by virtue of miraculously speaking at all.[25] It is reasonable to suspect Malory would have been familiar with this version given its proximity to a number of stories he relates elsewhere, but it is completely omitted in favour of indirect accounts with quite a different stress. In the *PVM Suite*, §66 (5:79-83), Lamerok rescues Gawain from the Castle of the Ten Knights, a castle with customs not entirely unlike those of the castle and island in 'Balin.' He defeats the ten defenders and Gawain, thus taking his place as its prisoner and 'lord' in Gawain's stead. Gawain for his part, has recently, in §64 (5:69-75), been installed there by Eric, who escaped by defeating then abandoning Gawain on the field without recognizing him. Eric continues to a magical Spring of Marvels, where, amongst other amazing things, he faces, as he must in accordance with the enchantments of this place, Mordred, who had killed one of his cousins earlier that year.[26] The narrative is full of the usual Post-Vulgate fare – cross-references in every direction, mostly in some way or other connected with manifold blood feuds, magic, God, or some combination of these. The Spring of Marvels is, furthermore, one of the places that Galahad is destined to destroy once and for all.[27]

Lamerok, rather than stay imprisoned indefinitely, opts to marry the beautiful damsel of the castle, and shortly after this his brothers Aggloval, Drian, and Torre arrive. The four take their leave to visit Arthur's court, separate *en route* in order to maximize their chances for adventure, and so the unfortunate Drian happens upon Gawain, Mordred, and Agravain, whom Drian does not recognize; they attack to 'avenge the death of our mother and our father' (5:81). Drian acquits himself well against Agravain and Mordred, however he is defeated. Gawain argues against his brothers, who wish to behead him, and they reply: 'Don't worry about what men will say, as long as we are avenged on the sons of King Pellinor' (5:81).

Lamerok vows, if God wills it, to avenge his brother, and comes upon Gawain and his brothers whom he recognizes by their armour:

> Then he cried to Sir Gawain, 'Sir Gawain, you've dishonored me without challenging me except a long time ago. Now defend yourself against me, for, if I can, I'll avenge your killing of my brother.'
>
> […] 'Now we're in a good position to avenge ourselves, for here's Lamorat, through whom all our sorrows began, all alone.'
>
> Sir Gawain, who respected his chivalry, replied, 'Just because he's alone doesn't

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25 On the Malory's sources for the *matière*, but neither the ordering of episodes nor even any consistent selection criteria from those sources, see p121 fn19, and p151 fn16.

26 It is here that Eric makes his marvellous vow. See above, p160 fn10.

27 Galahad is also the one who knows how the marvel came about, but what this might be is never revealed (5:70, including fn4).

mean you've won. So help me God, he alone is worth more and can do more than
twenty such knights, I know. I don't know any knight of his age in the world whom I
would less like to attack than he. But since I see that I have to defend myself against
him, there's nothing for it but to charge.' (5:82)

Lamerok knocks Gawain from his horse, severely wounding him. The remaining brothers attack
a tired and recently wounded Lamerok together, knocking him down. Gawain rouses himself and
joins in for fear that Lamerok might get to his feet. Gawain demands Lamerok admit defeat or die,
and die in the same way as he killed Lamerok's father. This *news*, on top of Drian's recent fate, is too
much for Lamerok. In despair at having lived too long to hear this, he urges them to kill him before
passing out in great pain. Gawain, for fear of Lamerok's revenge should he live, beheads him and
throws the head away. A religious man arrives on the scene, horrified, while Gawain cannot help
but boast his victim's identity. After burying the body, the man takes the head, divinely preserved
for the week-long journey, to Arthur's court where Arthur laments Lamerok's death:

The king crossed himself at this wonder. All the others there did the same and said that
the head had kept its beauty by magic.

The good man replied, 'If there is any magic, I know nothing about it.'

He gave it to the king. The king took it, and as he held it between his hands it
became as black and discolored as it should be.

Then the good man said to him, 'King, now you may recognize and know that you
are kin to the man who killed him, for a maiden told me a little after he died that he
would never change color until he fell into the hands of one of his enemies. And since
he's so changed, I know it to be true that you hate him for some reason.'

Then he went away and out of the palace and would not stay, regardless of what
they said.

The knights there asked the king, 'Who was the knight whose head the good man
has brought to court?'

'It was Lamorat,' said the king, 'the best knight of his age and the most valiant I
knew in the whole kingdom of Logres. Therefore, his death grieves me, so help me God.
And it should do so to all worthy men in the world.' (5:82-3)

There are a very great many points of interest to note here: those things removed, and those
retained but only in *noyse*, or in so far as they are also present in *sens* of the episodes surrounding
the ellipsis in Malory's text. This *PVM Suite* tale emphasizes a number of ideas that are consistent
with recurrent motifs in Malory: Gawain's noble respect for his enemies; the repaying of favour
with hate (Lamerok, after all, rescued him); misrepresentation of responsibility (the dubious logic
that blames Lamerok for Gaheriet's act); and envy as a powerful motivator compelling dreadful
things.

But, it also takes a few things further than Malory might: the rightness asserted of vengeance in
blood feuds; the divine's judgemental counterpoint to that rightness, such that through some divine
will Arthur is revealed as infected by association, since he is kin to Lott's sons; and, further, the hate
that the religious man, and perhaps God too, believes Arthur to share in as an 'enemy' of Lamerok's.

It is not just the magical and sacred aspects of the tale that Malory has removed, the abstracted values of right and wrong, particularly the association these are given with any sacred universal status, are simply too foreign for his narrative world. The castle and its custom would also be out of place, since in Malory Balin's and Percival's sister's castles are singularities dealt with in foundational ways – as cultural sacrifices rather than rituals, they are not the proper material for repetition as types of encounter.

On the other hand, the episodes preceding and following the ellipsis of Lamerok's murder in 'King Mark' in 'Tristram'[28] includes everything from the French that is consistent with the Malory's values and world, even when his episodes deal with material unrelated to the *PVM Suite*'s telling:

> Than the kynge was gladde and so was all the felyshyp of the Rounde Table excepte sir Gawayne and his bretherne. And whan they wyste that hit was sir Lameroke they had grete despyte of hym, and were wondirly wrothe wyth hym that he had put hym to such a dishonoure that day. Than he called to hym prevaly in counceyle all his bretherne, and to them seyde thus:
>
> 'Fayre bretherne, here may ye se: whom that we hate kynge Arthure lovyth, and whom that we love he hatyth. And wyte you well, my fayre bretherne, that this sir Lamerok woll nevyr love us, because we slew his fadir, kynge Pellynor, for we demed that he slew oure fadir, kynge Lotte of Orkenay; and for the deth of kynge Pellynor sir Lameroke ded us a shame to oure modir. Therefore I woll be revenged.'
>
> 'Sir,' seyde sir Gawaynes bretherne, 'lat se: devyse how ye woll be revenged, and ye shall fynde us redy.'
>
> 'Well,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'holde ye styll and we shall aspye oure tyme.'
>
> Now passe we on oure mater and leve we sir Gawayne, and speke we of kynge Arthure, that on a day seyde unto kynge Marke [...] (608.6-27)

What follows is Mark's vow to be friends with Tristram, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and then the appearance of Percival at court, the mute maiden episode, and so on. Gawain will honour his promise, as Mark will not, but both are equally treacherous in their intent. Further, Arthur is thoroughly distanced from even indirect association with the envy, the accusations, and the treachery of Lott's sons. The sequence follows Lamerok's fine victory in a tournament, to Lott's sons' envy and plotting, to Mark's envy and deceit, to Percival's divinely sanctioned status, to Lamerok's love for Morgause and her son's matricide of her. In Malory Lamerok truly does love the Queen of Orkney,[29] it is not the slight Gawain accuses him of above as a response to the murder of Pellinor, while Lamerok's actual murder is deferred because he is not suitably dressed for dying.[30]

In each case the universal or abstracted ideas put forward in the *PVM Suite* are removed or they are transposed onto localized scenarios and concrete characters, while at the same time the rationale for Lamerok's murder, and even the conditions under which it can occur (he must be

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28 That is, the ellipsis that would be there *if* Malory were following the *PVM Suite*'s order.

29 See 'The Unstable Chivalric World' in chapter one.

30 On the ritualization of his murder see 'Tombs and Scapegoats' in chapter two.

armed but he will be outnumbered, and it will occur outside of direct narrative), all suggest mythical, sacrificial logic. In complementary ways Tristram's and Lamerok's sacrifice is promised without prophecy, one after the other; the last knight comes to court who will take part in the destruction of the female counterpart to Balin's castle and island, both this arrival and the future destruction surrounded by divine mysteries; the future murders will not be told as Balin's was, nor shrouded in obscure prophecies as Balin's and Pellinor's were, but are demanded by mimetic logic and will be related in *noyse* only; while Balin's and Percival's sister's castle-doubles demand there is no room in *Le Morte Darthur* for The Castle of the Ten Knights. Greater stories such as these linger vertically over the actual stories and even the narrative itself in Malory. The sequences certainly do repeat episode types, but the instance of an episode, and the moment within a sequence, has this more powerful characteristic again – the instant loops *sens*.

Lamerok's departure from the narrative is later in Malory (670.10-27), at the end of another tournament sequence, 'The Tournament at Surluse,' where Lamerok is this time accorded a celebrated second after Lancelot. Here the previously considered French passage is completed with the explicit inclusion of the 'no good deed goes unpunished' motif (itself frequent enough that it hardly seems necessary), and so everything consistent with Malory's world, values, and character is retained from the *PVM Suite*'s tale of collective murder, while no excess survives. In the interim the blood feud, as Nietzsche's 'memory of traces' and Girard's excessive mimetic rivalry, has been brought back to life in the present by both sides of the blood feud again and again. The future murder seems no more inevitable but consistently more imminent with each recurrence. After this last narrative sighting of Lamerok, we have something quite different: not a festering resentment, not an active blood feud, but a cultural memory.[31] And this is the exact same type of violent, bloody, sacrificial memory that Gawain will create for himself and with his own person in the 'Morte.'

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31 This is true for most mentions of his name left in the work as listed in Vinaver's index of names: 688 (Palomides tells Percival), 691-2 (Tristram to the brothers), 698-9 (Tristram laments to Dynadan, Gareth, and Palomides), 715-6 (Palomides tells Hermynde, Lamorak's cousin of the Red City), 809-10 (to Percival and Agglovale by their mourning mother), 1048-9 (where the murder is the explicit motivation for the 'Poisoned Apple' plot), 1059 (where Nynyve reveals this to all), 1149-50 (Sir Urry's healing catalogue), and 1190 (where Gawain boasts of it to Lancelot in 'The Vengeance of Sir Gawain'). Tristram and Palomides seem to have gathered the news by osmosis from the world. At any rate, the outrage associated with the *noyse* does not lessen over time.

As usual, Malory's exceptions are instructive: 829 (Percival identifies himself to Lancelot, mentioning the murder is needless and would suggest resentment), 1088 (Bors compares Gareth with Lancelot, Tristram, and Lamerok), 1112 (Lancelot would have supposed Gareth to be Lamerok based on his prowess, except Lamerok is dead), 1170 (North Wales and Cornwall side with Lancelot for Lamerok's and Tristram's sake respectively – the murder is not mentioned explicitly, but is implicit given they defend Lancelot from Gawain), and 1198 (Lancelot addresses Gawain, explicit mention of the murder would be a pointless, ignoble even, accusation, particularly given 1190).

In stark contrast to Balin, then, the murder is *actively remembered*. Yet, there is not one mention of Lamerok in the 'Sankgreal.'

Gawain Remembers

Lamerok's vain promises in the *PVM Suite* are replaced in Malory by the remembering of Lamerok after he leaves the narrative.[32] Gawain's oaths, from his formal 'promyse' near the beginning of 'The Vengeance of Sir Gawain' through to the end of 'The Siege of Benwick,' make up the majority of his utterances. Without qualification he is consumed with a singular mission of vengeance against Lancelot's person that transcends even the fervour of his blood feud with Pellinor's kin. It is barely even comparable in type to any of the varieties of violence attributable to mimesis, prone as they are to substitution when convenient, and bears little, if any, connection to mythical narrative or sacrificial logic.[33]

Lancelot has hurtled into a throng to halt the public sacrifice of Guinevere – as a singularity himself, and at least equally the subject of the king's wrath, Lancelot is a suitable substitute. Surrounded by the many, the one survives – itself a singular oddity. The many, this mass crowded around a staked woman set to be burned alive, are instead the ones who die. And yet in Malory, and utterly unlike any mythical narrative, or the mob Serres might write of, the collective set on murder in Girard, or 'the herd' in Nietzsche, the many were not all hostile; they were not uniform. There was at least one innocent[34] in the crowd who was also not weak, evil, or bad in the senses Nietzsche and Deleuze use, but unanimously considered good, one of the best, even. More to the point: Gareth is, along with Arthur, the bond between Gawain's kin and the other knights, and it is Gareth alone they recall as the exception when they remember Lamerok's murder. Further, when the murder itself is not the memory, but the chivalric qualities of Lamerok they see before them, it is Gareth that Bors and Lancelot are in fact regarding with approval and respect.[35]

However, Fate does demand Gareth die here and, by *aventure,* by Lancelot's (once Balin's, then Galahad's) sword. The narrative that recounts this is specific in the contingent details, it is historical rather than mythic as Balin's was, or shrouded somewhere between the two like Pellinor's, or the hybrid historical/mythical of *noyse* that Tristram and Lamerok succumb to mimetic rage and envy under. On the other hand, the scenario is precisely the kind that Serres describes as a 'star,'[36]

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32 As itemized for every mention in the preceding footnote.

33 See 'Sequences' in chapter four, especially p141 fn58, on Lancelot's fury, to the point of overcompensation, at Tristram for marrying Isode le Blaunche Maynes. Both Lancelot in his reaction to Tristram, and Gawain to Lancelot, would suggest in modal (as opposed to psychological) terms a shadow self they are violently denying, or a confrontation with an *extimité*, if one prefers Lacanian terminology (see p9).

34 Gaheris and Gareth are both unarmed and reluctant to be there (1176.29-1177.2), as they were also united in their opposition to Agravain and Mordred's plans at the start of the 'Morte' (1161.28-9). However, this is something of a change of disposition for Gaheris, the matricide and willing participant in his brothers' blood feud. Lancelot, it seems, is enough to polarize the brothers, separating Agravain and Mordred from the rest.

35 Again, see the itemised list in the footnote above: p168 fn31.

36 Of Mettius, a man undecided and multiple in his allegiances, which is also to say: divided in his loyalties, whose death is (vividly) described, specific and not at all mystical – his limbs form a 'star' as the horses pull them from him (Serres 1991, 50).

recalling the rending of Romulus,[37] at the same time as it recalls Girard's warning of the consequences for those civilizations that fail to abate escalating mimesis by collective murder.[38]

> 'Truly,' seyde the kynge, 'I shall tell you as hit hath bene tolde me: sir Launcelot slew hym and sir Gaherys both.'
>
> 'Alas,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'they beare none armys ayenst hym, neyther of them bothe.'
>
> 'I wote nat how hit was,' seyde the kynge, 'but as hit ys sayde, sir Launcelot slew them in the thyk prees and knew them nat. And therefore lat us shape a remedy for to revenge their dethys.' (1185.28-35)

Arthur's early zeal is quick to cool when it seems he can save face, be reunited with Guinevere, and put the rest of the misadventure behind him. Once his very real anger has been redressed he would have let go of the hurt, but Gawain will not 'suffir hym' (1190.17-22).

However Gawain's hatred only seems to gather more rage after his initial, already very clearly furious, statement of intent (1186.1-12). He allows the king his own will on the war (1199.5-10), but shortly after he qualifies exactly what sort of allowance this is: Arthur will lose Gawain's service if he accords with Lancelot (1200.13-20). No one and nothing, then, will dissuade him from his purpose. If necessary he will abandon even Arthur as the king he owes service to. He becomes entirely a man of resentment. The intensity of this reaction can be in part explained when compared with Lancelot's at Tristram on hearing of the latter's marriage to Isode le Blaunche Maynes[39] – hating most vehemently in others what one will not acknowledge about oneself, repeating behaviours that are displacements or condensations of one's shadow, and so on. Ultimately, all this hate is bound to the love he can no longer cope with imagining, and must now deny if he is to have someone to blame – Lancelot's and Gareth's for each other rather than him. And so it continues until his last vows for revenge:

> 'Traytoure knyght, wyte thou well I am nat yet slayne. Therefore com thou nere me and performe thys batayle to the utteraunce!'
>
> 'I woll no more do than I have done,' seyde sir Launcelot. 'For whan I se you on foote I woll do batayle uppon you all the whyle I se you stande uppon youre feete; but to smyte a wounded man that may nat stonde, God defende me from such a shame!'
>
> And than he turned hym and wente hys way towarde the cité, and sir Gawayne evermore callyng hym 'traytoure knyght' and seyde,
>
> 'Traytoure knyght! Wyte thou well, sir Launcelot, whan I am hole I shall do batayle with the agayne, for I shall never leve the tylle the tone of us be slayne!'
>
> Thus as thys syge endured and as sir Gawayne lay syke nerehande a moneth, and when he was well recovirde and redy within three dayes to do batayle agayne with sir

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37 See the introduction's 'Interwoven *sens*.'

38 On the 'extinction alternative,' see p72 fn25.

39 See p169 fn33, above. More generally, note also: 'Gathering' in chapter three, and 'Sequences' in chapter four.

Launcelot, ryght so cam tydyngis unto kynge Arthur frome Inglonde that made kynge Arthur and all hys oste to remeve. (1220.32-1221.18)

Gawain's wholly reactive purpose, separated as he is from what he could be for the kingdom, is turned against the kingdom's strength itself. Lancelot is left on the continent, but Gawain's pursuit of this war even into Lancelot's exile has in the meantime allowed Mordred to divide England as well. The weak, beginning with Agravain but progressively featuring Mordred too, and their plots, have indeed triumphed over the strong, breaking up the Round Table's collective strength and the strength of its individuals (Gareth, in a very final way, but Gawain too, in so far as he has been able to act at all – he can speak of, and do, nothing except to react against what was, after all, an accident).

In fact, this is precisely the substance of the dying Gawain's speech to Arthur, a remembering of his own conduct since his 'promyse' (1230.18-31). Arthur has lamented the loss of his greatest joys and trusts ('affyaunce'), that which he found in Gawain and Lancelot, (1230.11-17), while Gawain owns that he was the 'causer' of his own death; by breaking with Lancelot, he caused the war with Mordred, while preventing Arthur from succeeding in it because Lancelot is separated from him. 'And thorow me and my pryde ye have all thys shame and disease […]' (1230.24-25). Gawain uses the same language of concrete forces that Deleuze and Nietzsche use when they describe the strong being separated from what they can do by reactive forces, the triumph of slaves who do not cease to be slaves in the process.

After Gawain is shriven he writes to Lancelot (1231.8-1232.10) with an overflowing of respect ('floure of all noble knyghtes that ever I harde of or saw be my dayes'), and in the name of their love ('for all the love that ever was betwyxte us') he urges Lancelot to return over the sea to defend Arthur from Mordred. He describes the provenance for the stroke by which he will die as the wound Lancelot gave him outside of Benwick, and 'I woll that all the worlde wyte that I, sir Gawayne, knyght of the Table Rounde, soughte my dethe, and nat thorow thy deservynge, but myne owne sekynge.' Gawain urges Lancelot to visit his tomb and pray for him, repeats the genealogy of the stroke two further times, and closes by repeating the wish to have his tomb visited. Gawain's remembering is a creative, active evaluation that rejects past envy, regrets their separation, and wills Lancelot to be all he can be. Gawain's deathbed memory is that in his reactive weakness he attacked the strong and failed, as was right, just as we note the mob around Guinevere-the-would-be-sacrifice failed. And, he effectively tells Arthur not to make the same mistake; instead he must band with Lancelot.[40]

The strongest current throughout Malory, again as far back as 'Balin,' is the hero recognizing the primary importance of this personal *and* collective potential regardless of contingent circumstances, and regardless of Fate too. A potential of the strong to affirm chance and Fate, to make and be able to honour promises, not as a past-bound reaction for envy or vengeance, but as a

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40 A fruitless hope as the nation is divided (1233.5-10). Unlike the French, Lancelot does not arrive in England bringing war to Mordred's sons, nor is he able to do anything to 'save' the kingdom – in Malory Lancelot simply arrives too late. See: 'Modal Motivation…' in chapter one, in particular p50 fn46.

forward-looking act of transformation, of that which is noble and good. Both the characters'
memories of Gawain and the narrative's in Arthur's dream-vision that follows repeat this
affirmation, while Lancelot keeps going through hell because that's what one does when one's in it.

Arthur's dream-visions, first of Fortuna and then the narrative's remembering of Gawain,
follow almost immediately:

> So uppon Trynyté Sunday at nyght kynge Arthure dremed a wondirfull dreme, and in
> hys dreme hym semed that he saw uppon a chafflet a chayre […]
>
> […] And than so he awaked untylle hit was nyghe day, and than he felle on
> slumberynge agayne, nat slepynge nor thorowly wakynge.
>
> So the kyng semed verryly that there cam sir Gawayne unto hym with a numbir of
> fayre ladyes wyth hym. […]
>
> 'Sir,' seyde sir Gawayne, '[…] God hath gyvyn hem that grace at their grete prayer,
> bycause I ded batayle for them for their ryght, that they shulde brynge me hydder unto
> you. Thus much hath gyvyn me leve God for to warne you of youre dethe: for and ye
> fyght as to-morne with sir Mordred, as ye both have assygned, doute ye nat ye shall be
> slayne, and the moste party of youre people on both partyes. And for the grete grace
> and goodnes that Allmyghty Jesu hath unto you, and for pyté of you and many mo other
> good men there shall be slayne, God hath sente me to you of Hys speciall grace to gyff
> you warnyng that in no wyse ye do batayle as tomorne, but that ye make a tretyse for a
> moneth-day. And proffir you largely, so that to-morne ye put in a delay. For within a
> moneth shall com sir Launcelot with all hys noble knyghtes, and rescow you
> worshypfully, and sle sir Mordred and all that ever wyll holde wyth hym.' (1233.11-
> 1234.19)[41]

Arthur 'sees' Gawain in this vision (1233-4) – a form of miracle, if we take it literally, granted by the
grace and love of Jesus and God, aided by the supplication of the host of women Gawain has
defended in his life. Even after Fate's adder strikes from the heath bush, and the battle is over,
Lucan sees an opportunity to escape utter destruction; he remembers Gawain's last miraculous
promise to Arthur:

> 'Sir, latte hym be,' seyde sir Lucan, 'for he ys unhappy. And yf ye passe this unhappy day
> ye shall be ryght well revenged. And, good lord, remembre ye of your nyghtes dreme
> and what the spyryte of sir Gawayne tolde you tonyght, and yet God of Hys grete

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41 On Fortuna, see: 'Modal Motivation and Emotional Tragedy' in chapter one, and p32 fn23. Trinity Sunday is
   the Sunday following Pentecost, possibly meaning to suggest the tenth of May was the latter (the earliest
   possible day for it in our current religious calendars).

   Gawain's explanation of the women to Arthur recalls the Pentecostal Oath where it is a knight's duty to
   'strengthe hem in hir ryghtes' (120.22), but also 'The Wedding' tale that lead to the Oath in so far as it is a
   group of women who petition on his behalf to God (cf: the 'queste' of ladies assigned to judge him after
   adventure, but also the damsel who for Arthur's sake arranged Gawain's release after beheading a lady).

   Note also: 'the moste party of youre people on both partyes.' Even with the English divided and turned
   violently upon one another, this *active* Gawain does not understand Mordred's army as enemies, they *are*
   Arthur's people still, separated from what they ought to be.

goodnes hath preserved you hyddirto. And for Goddes sake, my lorde, leve of thys, for,

blyssed be God, ye have won the fylde: for yet we ben here 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!' (1236.28-1237.4)[42]

Perhaps there is something of Pellinor's 'God may well fordo desteny' (120.10)[43] in this, along with the sure knowledge that if He can, He won't. However, despite the massacre and unlike the War with the Eleven Kings in 'Merlin,'[44] which pales in comparison with the devastation at Salisbury, there is no hint that God is not on Arthur's side, quite the contrary, while the narrative suggests we ought to read Arthur's decision as a last defining act of knighthood:

'Now tyde me dethe, tyde me lyff,' seyde the kyng, 'now I se hym yondir alone, he shall

never ascape myne hondes! For at a bettir avayle shall I never have hym.' (1237.5),

Arthur takes the *aventure* in precisely the same spirit as Balin, Lamerok, Gareth, and Malory's other best knights. He wills chance and Fate in the venture to slay Mordred as the noble thing to do, whether by rolling this dice it falls (befalls him, 'tyde') to his life or death.

There are two further 'rememberings' of Gawain. Arthur laments Lancelot's absence; that he was ever against him and his own death as a result of this; and, Gawain's warning (1238.11-14). The work's last mentions of Gawain are in Lancelot's sequence from reading the letter through to the respect, ceremony, and largesse at Gawain's tomb (1249-50), his first task on arrival in England, and one he does not hurry. So, Lancelot returns to England – for a war that has already passed, leaving him instead to remember and, it seems, find some measure of grace before passing in turn.[45] The promises against Lamerok's life, his omitted murder, and the remembering of him are foundational for Gawain. He becomes utterly absorbed in vengeance against his best friend, then, too late, remembering what is at stake, and those who survive him lamenting the loss of unity, the separation of the strong from what they can do. Specifically, Gawain remembers Arthur and Lancelot. In allowing Gawain's dream-visitation of Arthur, perhaps Malory's God, too, believes the strong must be defended from the weak.

Lamerok's murder is omitted for direct narrative, while the looping that happens in the sequence at that omission contrasts with the increasingly furious coiling inward of Gawain's promises. His promises drive him, and all around him, on a trajectory to death. Against this in turn is Lancelot's peculiar living through the remainder of the narrative. Lancelot's ending in the narrative is like a tense loop, a compressed spring, that is gradually released for his brief tour of what remains in England, a farewell to Guinevere, and his own leaving of the world amidst some sort of divine aura.

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42   On Arthur's decision at this juncture, see p52 fn48 and 'Modal Motivation…' in chapter one.

43   See 'Prophecy' in chapter one.

44   The bloodshed was ended by Merlin's warnings to Arthur of God's wrath. (36.24-29)

45   While Arthur 'changes' his life (p26 fn7), Lancelot appears to change his mode (p50 fn46).

Violence creates deep cultural memories. Not the feeble memories of traces that feed the negative feedback loops of envy or resentment, nor the violence in the almost countless other 'quarells' with nameless knights encountered by those of the Round Table. Even the war with Mordred is a logical consequence of strength separated from what it can do – albeit Mordred and Agravain were critical in beginning the process where Arthur, Gawain, and Lancelot were pitted against each other, through mere whispers of *noyse*. In the 'Morte' Gawain and Lancelot, Arthur and Mordred, Guinevere and Lancelot, each break the other, but in every case they do so by what is best in them.[46]

The mythical foundations in the early books, and the retelling of foundations from a historical perspective from the opening of 'Tristram,' are told, looped, from a third, final, profound, and exclusively literary perspective in the 'Morte.' In the moment where the will is voiced (and the hero almost invariably voices it beforehand), the instant of chance and Fate, and the instant when the same hero can reiterate that will to *aventure*, the literature is also affirming that will. This will and these moments are without sacrificial bloodshed or murder, and without the endlessly deferred resolutions of mimetic cycles of desire. These moments affirm everything the work's realm has given value, and despite the kingdom's catastrophic collapse. They affirm because the memory created was not at the expense of the excluded third – a strong Lancelot survives the internecine feuds. The memory for culture, for us the readers, was created by the strong in their experience of the loss of what they loved most. This is true for Balin and Balan; Tristram and Isode; Gareth, Gawain, Arthur, and Lancelot.

The moments of the realm's collapse reiterate those of foundation in their collapse. They create a tiered, self-recursive, textual memory that brings to the fore the modes and *ēthos* of those who have been forever lost in the fictional realm, their faith and values, and the memory brings the same issues to mind for readers too. Namely, the values that the characters held in faith for one another, values that transcend mimetic logic, and that belong to those who will beyond what a Nietzschean 'herd,' and Malory's unworthy knights, are capable of. And certainly this is what Malory-the-narrator explicitly tells us in his parenthetic addresses when he warns us, when he urges us to remember.

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46   What is *worst* in Mordred's case, obviously.

Conclusion

> If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are stronger at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. (Hemingway 1962, 34: 249)

I have taken many detours. Perhaps no single one of them was absolutely necessary, while all of them taken together speak to Malory's narrative multiplicity. Attempts to schematize the work fail, and I am certain they fail necessarily – not because of any inherent fault in the work as it tells its own story, but because it is almost never a case of telling *one* story.

If, as I have asserted since the beginning, we disregard providence, sin, and the assumptions we usually make of works motivated by psychology, tragic flaws, or any primarily abstract schema, the deaths of Gareth through to that of Lancelot can be comprehended in purely literary terms by reference to modes, will, *ēthos*, and Fate, all internally consistent within the text itself. We follow those vertical motivations established in the foundations of the realm, some of which we have traced in their variations since ('Lancelot' and 'Tristram' in particular). A kind of motivation that in Malory bridges romance, epic, and tragedy – it allows the narrative to emphasize *sens* now in this mode, now in this other, and to repeat over similar *matière* overloading those *sens*.

Gareth fails to negotiate the division between Arthur and Gawain on one hand, Lancelot and Guinevere on the other, and this very specific contingent failure – neither intended by him, nor in any way attributable to him as a fault – is told, as history, to describe the circumstances of his death, itself an accident amidst an otherwise hostile crowd on the verge of collective murder. Almost entirely 'otherwise hostile,' that is, since Gaheris is a conscientious objector too. Rather than detracting from my argument, details like these confirm my hypothesis that Malory tells his historic account with jarring contingencies like these alongside the mythic narrative that rewrites for a smooth account, one that identifies a single scapegoat to take the blame and who must be killed. Further, if there is any identifiable transgression, breach, in Gareth it is in loving his king and the best knight of the realm for different reasons but with equal depth. He will not desert Arthur, he will not fight Lancelot. His *ēthos* is good, the best in fact, which for Malory, as for Hemingway in the quotation above, is very much the point for this sort of tragic narrative world. If he were not so very noble, he would either bear arms, or abandon his kin and king. Gareth enters the scenario of his death by way of his virtue.

His failure marks him as the sacrifice in the mythic tale. This tale brings back all of Gawain's singularly murderous mimetic purpose. It rewrites the past. It explains after the fact. The myth makes of an accidental death a horrifying transgression on Lancelot's part. It is in this sense only, of transgression as a mythic fiction within the narrative, that we can talk of 'sin' in Malory. It is always

distinct from human failure and, in so far as it 'causes' anything, it motivates further mimetic violence.

Lancelot fails by repeating his conduct from book three. His legendary bravery and prowess, his belief in the myth of himself that led him to take on entire castles, in this case leads him to hurl himself into the midst of the mob intent on the queen/scapegoat's collective murder. Lancelot desires to save Arthur from his own determination to have her killed, to save Guinevere of course, and to save the three of them in so far as Lancelot does truly love them both. As in 'Lancelot,' the idea that he can save anyone through mass violence and without consequence is one the world is not slow to disabuse him of. It is, of course, precisely the same thing as that noblest of knightly impulses, the one that prompts him to rescue the victim and destroy the transgressor at every pass in the work, regardless of potential harm to himself. Like Gareth, Lancelot does not intend to transgress, nor is there anything we would want to call a fault in this rescue, yet Lancelot fails because of it. Mythically, Lancelot is wielding Balin's sword, which only Galahad could possess without fatal consequences. The sword picks out Gareth and Gawain as the knights Lancelot loves best. Lancelot may save Guinevere, but mythic logic demands a substitute sacrifice in Gareth, who is innocent and at least equally loved. It seems hardly necessary to recall again how Lancelot is construed in myth by mimetic logic, and contrary to what we are told of his intent, as the treacherous monster par excellence that Gawain must destroy, and that this is possible because the rescue fails in historic narrative. Part of the joy of re-reading Malory is in discovering the forever different combinations of *sens* resonances in the narrative that are recalled in the time of reading.

The dynamic of history and myth operating on the same narrative presents a third term in the noble character's will. This will does not answer to the sacred at all. Lancelot survives, albeit tragically, to bear witness to a world where everyone and everything he loves has died, including the fellowship. After Guinevere's rescue, by refusing to react and by acting with respect to the local at every pass, it is his lot to die broken in the end by love lost, and not by the sword. Underlying every significant moment is a nexus of: chaos, chance, brutal in its particulars; Fate, necessity, numinous without schema, answerable to nothing; and the will that is affirmative, noble, and declarative – before, during, and after, come life or death – when the good take the *aventure*. After all, it is this spirit in Lancelot that the dying Gawain remembers and begs Arthur to reach out for.

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