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CHIVALRIC LIEUX DE MEMOIRE: NOSTALGIA, COMMUNAL MEMORY, AND THE BURDEN OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SIR THOMAS MALORY'S MORTE DARTHUR

by

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INTRODUCTION: MEMORY AND HISTORY

In book seven of the *Morte Darthur*, "The Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenevere," following Eugène Vinaver's edition, during the "Knight of the Cart" episode,[1] Sir Thomas Malory establishes the setting for his rendering of the well-known tale by opening with a disquisition on the nature of love. In providing what looks, at first glance, to be simply a defense of Guenevere's and Lancelot's romance, Malory specifically correlates "trew love" to the act of remembering:

> Wherefore I liykken love nowadayes unto sommer and winter: for, lyke as the tone ys colde and the othir ys hote, so faryth love nowadayes. And therefore all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver, for whom I make here a lytyll mencion, that while she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende. (649/30-35)

I analyze this section extensively in chapter five, but here I want to point out two critical features that wind like threads throughout the *Morte Darthur* and, in numerous ways, both hold the narrative together and energize the text's aspirations. These two issues underwrite not only Malory's overall project, they ground my argument that this is a text driven by a need for memory.

Malory's critique of love reproduces, in small, his overarching concern with the opposition between instability and unity. When he observes "I liykken love nowadayes unto sommer and winter," he tacitly acknowledges that the world has changed, that the past was something different; and he explicitly announces that the capacity to remain committed to one another is not on firm footing. The interest Malory expresses in the difficulties faced by human beings making their way through "this world unstable,"[2] a phrase he uses repeatedly, is accepted as a given by Malorian critics; certainly Malory uses the phrase enough throughout the narrative to support the belief that it is a crucial concern. For the *Morte Darthur*, inconstancy is a danger

that emerges time and again in narratives of civil war and social strife, in tales on the failures of knights to live up to their obligations, in reflections on love and fellowship. Tied directly to this concern over stability is Malory's desire for memory. As he makes clear in his comment on Guenevere, she is a "trew" lover, meaning she is at once constant, and she is committed to the act of remembering. Whatever else we might find ourselves saying about Guinevere, and throughout the ages people have said many things (mostly pejorative) about her, Malory locates in her that which will prove to be, for the *Morte Darthur* and for the society that Malory envisions as intimately bound to the narrative, a final redemptive value: for she is a site of memory. In *remaining* committed she fixes in place responsibility through devotion. Her "commemorative vigilance"[3] serves to exemplify what is valuable, preventing the past from being swept away by a changeable and inconstant world. Thus she has "a good ende."

From this brief analysis, what should emerge is a glimpse of a struggle that takes on monumental status in the *Morte*. That struggle, we will come to see, is defined by a traumatic loss of the past, or at least what is conceived to be the past. The conflicts within the *Morte Darthur* arise from a lack of unity, or wholeness; but that lack is itself an expression of a crisis reverberating throughout the age. Any text that concerns itself with the past must also face the possibility that the past is something lost. Any act of remembrance, then, is fraught with an almost elegiac mournfulness. As an act of reconnecting with the past, the *Morte Darthur* finds its memory gripped by an awareness of that past as vanishing. Thus the assurances of continuity that memory indulges are rendered problematic by a perception of history as loss. The critical focus of my analysis is concerned with the appropriation of that act of remembering by historical consciousness. Animating my research is an inquiry into the ethical construction of the recollecting subject, the individual called upon to remember, and how that subject is created in

its encounter with the past. I argue that it is impossible to understand the extent of the thematic and semiotic codes operating in this work if we dismiss the fact that medieval culture is, as Mary Carruthers notes in her ground-breaking *The Book of Memory*, a "memory culture."[4]

As the Middle Ages came to a close, the transformation taking shape in historical consciousness was one in which a living belief in the past's unity was giving way to a perception of historical difference, thereby fracturing the sense of continuity once ordering the conservation of collective remembrance. In *The Light in Troy*, Thomas Greene points up a feature of early modern historical consciousness that was already emerging even in the Middle Ages: "A civilization discovered its cultural paths by the light behind it of a vast holocaust, and it used this mythical light as the principle of its own energy."[5] That feature is a function of history, emphasizing the past as an enigma, a "ghostly reverberation," and stressing the impossibility of reconstituting it in any form other than that which is always-already lost. For myself, I see in this recollecting of the past a quality of mourning that is evident as a troubling concern for many medieval writers. In particular, my dissertation seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* brings to light within the psychological experience of the end of the Middle Ages the "vast holocaust" of a past that is at once utterly vanished and yet inescapably present. A growing sense of the "pastness" of the past, and a commensurate responsibility to resuscitate history, reveal a collapse in the cultural perception of historical continuity that had been a constitutive feature of medieval theories of memory. Malory exploits this breakdown in memorial continuity to consider, in the *Morte*, the profoundly personal and political topics of honor, love, and death as they inform his culture's capacity for remembrance.

This dissertation presupposes that texts are products of specific historical and cultural moments. In saying this, I do not mean to propose that my objectives herein are to simply

engage a positivist trajectory identifying historical traces emerging from or giving rise to the text. But I do believe that the *Morte Darthur* is fundamentally responding to both the ideological crises of its age, and its own troubled relationship with the past. The *Morte* is motivated, I argue, by a desire to locate itself within the warm embrace of collectively remembered values in order to overcome a fragmentation of identity inaugurated by the ideological crises besetting the dominant social classes of late-medieval England. Political turmoil brought on by a recurrent civil war; the tenuous shifting of allegiances as one group temporarily came to power only to be replaced by the other; the unprecedented mobilization of "new men" to replace a vanishing old guard (many of whom were executed for their perceived great-party affiliations); these are just some of the features defining the instability of fifteenth-century English political and cultural life and, most importantly, spelling out the challenges facing a text whose interests lie in an integration with tradition. This is a text that, as we will come to see, is aware of its complicated obligations, its indebtedness to what Malory takes to be the Arthurian narrative's cultural inheritance. It works to remember, in order to resist forgetting. But in that very act of remembrance, the text reinforces the distance it wishes to efface. The *Morte* speaks with a voice that, initially confident in its priorities, sets out to restore the glorious contours of an Arthurian past – only to grow acutely conscious of the impossibility of recuperating that past.[6]

My purpose, moving forward, is to articulate the way in which Malory's attempts to weave together a unified narrative from a collection of disparate texts situate the *Morte Darthur* at a crossroads between memory and history. Taking as my guide Pierre Nora's "Les Lieux de Memoire," I examine how the *Morte Darthur* struggles as an artifact of a memorial culture faced with the insistent pressure of a developing, but not fully realized, historical consciousness. Following Nora, I argue that this historical consciousness fragments and dislocates the individual

in relation to a communal identity which is itself founded on an understanding of the past that is memorial in nature. In order to do this, I draw on Nora's opposition between what he designates as "real memory" and the concept of historical consciousness, and the resulting need for "prosthetic memory," thereby establishing an operational model for my readings of Malory.

Nora's model relies principally on the dynamic between these three conceptual devices, authentic memory, history, and *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. Since understanding these terms is a necessary part of my argument, some grounding is called for. In summary, Nora proposes that there are roughly three modes for conceptualizing the past, and that it is the struggle between memory and history that produces the third operation, the *lieux de mémoire*. The function that Nora refers to as "real memory," is social in nature. It is an uncritical insertion of the present into the past, with no obvious distinction of differences between the past and the present, except perhaps in terms of quality. (In other words, the past might have been "better," but not necessarily different.) It is a way to organize experience; it is a living process in which its interpretations of its origins are unquestioned. It lives in tradition, it emerges often unconsciously in custom, and it underwrites both a community's identity and the individual's place within that community. In Nora's words, real memory is "unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory . . . that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth."[7]

History, or what I will refer to as historical consciousness, is a rather different procedure for organizing the past. It is an awareness of distance, of differences, and it arises from a self-conscious perception of its own operation as a reconstitution of what has been lost. As Nora describes it, "History . . . is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer."[8] Historical consciousness is invested in the trace, and finds its expression in the

analysis of ruptures and a capitulation to difference. Its intellectual energy, then, is derived from a sense that the past is only available through fragments, and that what is produced through the process of inquiry is merely a representation. History is a critical capacity for reflecting on the past that starts with the supposition that memory cannot be trusted, and that the institutions maintaining memory must be interrogated.[9] Thus, historical consciousness is driven, as an almost ethical obligation, to seize and dismantle the continuities that provide memory with its sense of coherence and unity.

This suppression of memory by historical consciousness, according to Nora however, produces a disquieting sense of isolation and fragmentation in the individual. Because real memory, authentic memory, is social in nature – which is to say it is maintained by and lives within a community – when historical difference is introduced to the institutions from which communities derive their identities then individuals can no longer trust their own connections to those institutions. A deep fund of shared experiences, of intimately connected discourses, vanishes, or at least comes under suspicion. This is historical anxiety. In order to resist this pressure, we still find ourselves called upon to seek memory, but we can no longer do so with any assurance of memory's validity. Thus *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, appear in those moments or locations where we feel the need to "buttress our identities" against history's withering gaze.[10] Sites of memory are deliberate attempts to crystallize memory in order to resist the impact of historical consciousness. It does so by introducing a new kind of memory, a "prosthetic" memory, that is no longer a vibrant, living part of the communal memory, but rather an entombing or monumentalizing of a remainder that we fear we are losing. As Nora points out, a *lieu de mémoire* "has become the deliberate and calculated secretion of lost memory. It

adds to life – itself often a function of its own recording – a secondary memory, a prosthesis-memory."[11]

Chapter 1. "Context: Nostalgia in an Age of Anxiety"

In chapter one I attempt to position the *Morte Darthur* as a response to the anxieties of a turbulent social period. To start, I establish the political and social climate of fifteenth-century England, drawing on the work of historians to demonstrate the disequilibrium of governing institutions, particularly during the Wars of the Roses. Utilizing the work of Johann Huizinga, I argue that the troubling political atmosphere of the period in question contributes to, and is reflected in, the ethically challenging behavior of individuals who are losing touch with an authentic continuity to the past. Together, political instability and social change are accelerating a process whereby historical consciousness is replacing authentic memory, and it is this dynamic that energizes the *Morte*. As a result, I argue, Malory turns nostalgically to the past in order to resist the corrosive influence of historical isolation. But what Malory discovers is that even his nostalgia accelerates the process in its acknowledgement of the past as past.

Chapter 2. "A Community of Time: Remember the Past and We Remember Ourselves"

According to Nora's model, one of the peculiar strengths (as well as weaknesses) of authentic memory is that it is plastic. That is to say, memory is capable of being deformed. It is open to forgetfulness, it is capable of being lost, and it is always under construction. Historical consciousness, on the other hand, is firmly aware of loss and it particularizes and atomizes events. Its objective is to isolate and differentiate, thereby breaking the smooth continuity of time into fragments devoid of thematic unity. In chapter two I examine the early stages of the *Morte* from the perspective of Malory's initial confident view of memory-history. As I make evident in chapter one, Malory's interaction with his text is an evolving and dynamic

relationship. At first assured of the authenticity of remembrance, Malory eventually finds that his project cannot be sustained. But in the first book, the Tale of King Arthur, the optimistic belief that the past can be realized in the present is the controlling theme and has not yet decomposed into the distance of historical isolation. Even the register of the text at this point, the well-documented chronicle style mixed with eruptions from the alliterative source, bears witness to the medieval preoccupation with letting the voice of the past speak in the present. My goal, in this chapter, is to demonstrate the ways in which book one valorizes the memorial, through the narrative process itself and the reinforcement of ethical subjectivities.

Chapter 3. "Arthurian Memory and the Chivalric Community"

Following Mary Carruthers' assertion that the people of the middle-ages constituted primarily a memorial culture, I begin chapter three by defining what that memorial culture was for the people of fifteenth-century England. Drawing principally on the work of Huizinga and of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, I examine how memory works in a communal capacity to structure both institutions and the individuals who make up those institutions in their relationship to the past. The purpose of this examination is to lay the groundwork for an understanding of the social memory of a specific group – the gentry, which is of course Malory's class identity – and its changing identification with the past. I address Malory's social memory by means of book five, in Vinaver's edition, of the *Morte*, focusing my energies primarily on the concept of "fellowship." The fifth book is motivated by the desire for unity, and this desire emerges in the conflicts and resolutions with which the text repetitively attempts to confirm social cohesiveness. Exploring the complexity of the relationships unfolding in the Tale of Sir Tristram, I investigate how Malory navigates the communal nature of real memory to reinforce what he believes to be is the social and cultural inheritance of his own chivalric community. In this chapter I explore how

the "Tristram" attempts to meet the instability of historical consciousness when it locates an imagined ideological unity specifically in the chivalric ethos making collective memory possible.

Chapter 4. "History, Responsibility, and the Quest for Individual Remembrance."

In chapter four I demonstrate how the impulse transforming memory into history in Malory's text finds its most pronounced expression in the Grail Quest. The focus of the text radically shifts away from the struggle of the community to remember itself and places the emphasis on the life of the individual. In the Grail Quest, accountability is the organizing concept, and this no longer appears to be applicable to the community as a whole. In fact, it is an isolating process of individuation in which the costs of individual responsibility must be weighed. A key theme to the Grail book is that the knights no longer find themselves in the world to which they are accustomed. Instructed to turn their backs on the world, the Grail knights are encouraged to "forget" their obligations to the Round Table and instead turn their thoughts to their individual salvation. The temporal sphere gives way to the spiritual. As a result, the influence of the chivalric ideal as a communally binding force is undercut by the responsibility of the self to bear witness to its sins. Given the spiritual critique leveled by the source text, Malory found himself caught between preserving his vision of an idealized fellowship and at the same time acknowledging the divisive impact of the Grail history. I argue that, faced with the overturning of the chivalric ideal as a valued social practice in the Grail Quest, Malory's only recourse is to reinforce, paradoxically, the differences and ruptures that the quest opens between the knights and even history itself. The result is that he can no longer rely on communal memory to resist the impositions of historical consciousness.

Chapter 5. "Sites of Memory in the Twilight of the King"

In the final chapter, I consider the way in which Malory, having essentially destroyed the Round Table in the Book of the Grail, attempts to insert the Arthurian narrative back into the temporal sphere. After the Grail Quest, one has to ask where we go from here – the end has arrived and still the world moves on. In the Grail Book, the overarching theme is the destruction of that concept of fellowship which Malory privileges. In book seven, the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere, Malory returns to romance as a socially engaging and communally restorative salve to the wounds opened by the Grail Quest's privatization of individual remembrance. However, this move is deceptive in that it is driven as a nostalgic return. And as I demonstrate in chapter one, nostalgia is a false representation of authentic memory – it is a prosthesis allowing the subject to substitute an illusory relationship with the past for a reassurance that has been lost in memory's "seizure" by history.[12] Examining books seven and eight, I show how the disturbing specter of forgetfulness haunts the Arthurian community and repetitively calls into historical consciousness the question of fidelity to the past. Indeed, the very notion of fidelity to the past becomes a challenge for faithfulness in general for the *Morte*. As I point out at the beginning of chapter five, "Malory seems to suggest that recognizing the distance between the absent and the present is in the end the only authentic form of connection possible with the past."[13] In his final, tragic glimpses of the shattered Round Table fellowship, Malory must recognize the futility of any desire to find comfort and a sense of community from the past. Instead, we are left with a prosthetic memory, a secreting of memory in those places where duty and obligation remain fixed, even when those sites emphasize the failure to remember.

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[1] All references to tales or books are derived from Eugène Vinaver's *Malory: Works* (2nd ed., Ed. Eugène Vinaver, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). In addition, all citations of passages from the *Morte Darthur* refer to Vinaver's edition.

[2] To illustrate this point, critics are fond of turning to the famous passage from the Grail Quest where Galahad tells Bors to take a message to his father, Lancelot, and to "'bydde hym remember of this worlde unstable'" (607/4).

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[3] See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1980): 7-24, p. 12.

[4] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[5] Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 10.

[6] "The final tragedy of Malory's *Morte* is its picture of Arthur desolate and cut off; this vignette speaks also for Malory's times, because his rendering of the story has cut his contemporaries off from the most precious of their illusions about the redemptive force and promise of their past" (Elizabeth Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971, p. 34). While I agree in large part with Pochoda's argument, my line of reasoning diverges from hers in that she is operating under the belief that "for Malory, chivalry was to be the *practical* means for instituting and maintaining the governmental structures which fifteenth-century political theory called for" (p. 32, italics added). I do not believe that Malory is searching for a practical policy for governance. Rather, his focus is on attempting to secure an ideological perspective that is in fact no longer secure, in order to resist the psychological fragmentation of identity that threatens a *sense* of community.

[7] See Nora, p. 8.

[8] Nora, p. 8.

[9] "History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism" (Nora, pp. 8-9).

[10] See Nora, p. 12, where he observes "The defense, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de mémoire* – that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. We buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them." Here, Nora is referring to those efforts on the part of various groups to vehemently protect their specific heritages by invoking the sanctity of tradition or custom.

[11] Nora, p 14.

[12] See Nora, p. 13.

[13] See chapter five, p. 273.

CHAPTER 1. CONTEXT: NOSTALGIA IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY

"Hit befell in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englond and so regned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornewaill that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme, and the duke was called the duke of Tyntagil" (3/1-4). [1] So begins the first line of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, placing the reader squarely in the midst of an ongoing civil war that would set the conditions for the birth of the legendary King Arthur. As Elizabeth Archibald has noted, Malory's brusque introduction to the narrative provides only the barest details for context, with virtually no historical, biographical, or source exposition for the story. [2] The opening lines operate with the expectation that the audience is already familiar with the story, and rather than waste time discussing what its audience was sure to recognize, it moves directly to its primary concern, civil war. From the start, this is a text that sees itself as participating in a common, shared background; and that background is derived from both a collectively held story and an intimate, shared experience of civil war. Civil war marks the site from whence their community emerges, and it is the dynamic driving the *Morte Darthur*'s plot. More importantly, civil war is a continuity shaping Malory's contemporary society, immersed as it was in the struggles of the Wars of the Roses and the disastrous consequences of the Hundred Years Wars. With Arthur's rise to the throne, the *Morte Darthur* holds forth the promise of unity and wholeness for a fragmented society. This sense of wholeness, however, is not simply the end of civil war – it is the restoration of a social order through the reassurance of its foundations. The text believes in community, it calls out implicitly to its audience to remember their connection to the past and to each other; but it is a community that is already shaped by fragmentation.

Civil war by definition pits a society against itself, and this is especially disruptive for a society that is held together through complex, hierarchical bonds of service and fidelity. Malory,

as a product of a social class that orients the world around the beliefs assuring the continuity of its own existence, is as well a product of the tensions emerging from the breakdown in the allegiances sustained by those beliefs. When formerly united groups find themselves splintered into factions, the very values that once defined the community are threatened. These disruptions can be even more fundamentally challenging for both individuals and groups when identity is constructed on values that no longer seem to have any validity. Arthur's birth, and for that matter death as we will see, frame a vast narrative bounded by civil war and the radical failure to maintain the principally chivalric institutions that connected the (imaginary) Arthurian past with Malory's present. For Malory, *Le Morte Darthur* is a reflection on the memory of a society: born out of civil war, its exploration of the failure to remember speaks to a subject in the process of losing an authentically communal sense of integration with the past.

This chapter will examine the conditions fundamental to Malory's unfolding relationship with the Arthurian narrative. The overall argument for this project is that the *Morte Darthur* emerges from a struggle between two forms of consciousness, memorial and historical, that reflect the tensions defining Malory's world. Utilizing Pierre Nora's articulation of the opposition between memory and history, I will show how this struggle within the text produces what Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, a prosthetic memory that stands in for an actual, intimate connection with the past.[3] While the *Morte Darthur* begins with a desire to inhabit a unifying ideological past in order to prevent the disappearance of a collective memory, by the end the text is forced to recognize the impossibility of such a dream of restoration. In order to establish the context for the proposition that the communal memory Malory desires is already vanishing under the sign of history's discontinuities, this chapter will pursue three primary objectives: (1) examine the political and social factors that reflect a culture in crisis; (2)

explore how Malory reproduces this sense of crisis; and (3) look at how Malory's nostalgia grounds his objectives in failure before he even begins.

If, as I propose, *Le Morte Darthur* calls forth a subject divided by ruptures in its identification with a specific value system – indicative of chivalric social consciousness in fifteenth-century England – then the first order of business should be to explain how the political and cultural crises affecting the period contributed to or reflected the destabilization of the text's ideological legitimacy. Doubtless there is something of a chicken-and-egg question challenging the historicism evoked in this analysis. Were these so-called crises of representation (i.e. ideological breaks) the direct effects of those historical events which define the period, or were these crises themselves the forces dynamically generating the events? This does not, I believe, require a lengthy analysis. Regardless of which comes first, or even if what we have is in practice a feedback loop, at this stage of the investigation I prefer to think of the historical events in question as reflective of profound disturbances in the continuous transmission of values that, for late Medieval English perceptions of social identity at any rate, assured the individual of the validity of his or her beliefs based on continuity with the past. And it is no coincidence that Malory's *Morte* was composed towards the end of the Middle Ages.[4] Malory's narrative exemplifies the ideological predicaments defining the Lancastrian and Yorkist histories, insofar as it mobilizes a chivalric past to defend against a disruptive present.

Since we are beginning with the historical context of late Medieval England it would be profitable to note the correspondences that appear to anchor the political strife of Malory's own age with that of his idealized Arthurian past. Thematically, Arthur's career is bracketed by civil war. Born in the throes of civil war, Arthur comes to the throne surrounded by threat and open resistance. Having been recognized by the people of London and receiving the coronation at the

hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arthur is confronted by the lords of his Northern territories, who refuse to accept his sovereignty: "they had no joye to receyve no yeftes of a berdles boye that was come of lowe blood, and sente hym word they wold none of his yeftes, but that they were come to gyve hym yeftes with hard swerdys betwixt the neck and the sholders" (11/20-24). The majority of the "Merlin" section of book one is then taken up with the matter of Arthur's efforts to subdue the five kings of the North in some of the most spectacularly violent and bloody passages of the *Morte Darthur*. Fast forward to the final chapters of book eight, and Arthur's reign comes to an end as he returns from the devastating and ultimately pointless war initiated by his own magnates, Lancelot and Gawain. Attempting to suppress Mordred's rebellion, Arthur is faced with a populace divided by broken loyalties and personal interests: "And so fared the people at that time: they were better pleased with sir Mordred than they were with the noble kynge Arthur . . . the moste party of all Inglonde hylde with sir Mordred, for the people were so new-fangill" (708/42-44, 709/3-5). The expression "new-fangill" is particularly telling, here, in that it conflates change with the collapse of a communal identity. The country fragments along lines of self-serving interests as it forgets its traditional allegiances. Thus the theme of civil war as a consequence of neglecting responsibilities to a greater unity provides the necessary and defining conditions of Arthur's rule. He comes to power in order to restrain it, and his kingdom eventually falls to it.[5]

We cannot help but note similarities between the civil strife of the text and the general breakdown of authority characteristic of fifteenth-century England. Malory himself insists on reminding his readers of the conflicts plaguing the English. When Mordred, having usurped the kingdom while his father is occupied with Lancelot in France, hears that Arthur is returning to retake the throne, he "made wryttes unto all the baronny of thys londe. And muche people drew

unto hym; for than was comyn voice amonge them that with kynge Arthur was never other lyff but warre and stryff" (708/27-29). There is little doubt that Malory taps into a level of discontent that would have resonated with an English populace wearied by the Hundred Years' war with France, in which the only possible winners could be a warrior aristocracy. The Commons, frustrated by years of taxes leveraged to finance the Crown's aspirations on the continent, were only too willing to show distrust and downright displeasure with their government. Indeed, such resentment had been a growing factor in political negotiations for decades. Maurice Keen relates a telling scene from as early as the 1376 "Good Parliament," in which "a knight 'of the south country' strode up to the lectern [before the Commons] and began to speak: 'My lords, you have heard the points put before Parliament, which are grievous matter, for they demand a tenth and a fifteenth of clergy and commons, which to me seems a heavy burden, for the commons are enfeebled by taxes and tallages of time past [. . .] and besides, all we have given for a long while we have lost, for it has been wasted and falsely spent" (147). Disgruntlement over what was often perceived as "wasted and falsely spent" taxes was particularly strident in the South and East – an area from which the Yorkists drew much of their support in their bid against the Lancastrian king Henry VI. And the dynamics of this resentment continued unabated well into the fifteenth century, significantly shaping the climate of political discourse particularly as Henry VI reached the age of his majority.[6]

Certainly by the early 1400's the Commons had established a strong position from which to negotiate with the Crown. Insisting that no financial actions could be taken by the House of Lords without their consent, the Commons demanded and received a ruling that officially limited the capacity for the monarchy or the Lords to sidestep the Commons' sanction:

> [W]hen in 1407 the Lords reported to the king what they deemed might be necessary in the way of a financial grant, the Commons protested hotly that this

was a prejudice to the liberty of their estate, and obtained a ruling that in future nothing concerning fiscal grants would be officially reported to the king until the Lords and Commons were agreed on it, and then by the mouth of the Commons' Speaker.[7]

The vocal recalcitrance of the Commons to the Crown's demands was a resistance (though not at this stage outright rebellion) to the pressures of a centralizing monarchical structure, which itself resisted the privileges that the Commons believed were theirs to demand. The political structure of England towards the end of the Middle Ages was very much characterized by financial maneuvering between court factions and what we would call the gentry as each sought to stake out its relationship to power. The relationships between these competing social entities was further complicated economically by the Crown's consistent accumulation of long-term debts as cash advances for war efforts that were, for all practical purposes, difficult to collect.[8] We are a long, long way from the feudal levy and the chivalric politics of Malory's "grete booke," in which the only issues of governance to be seen are war, the obligations between feudal barons, their lord, and each other, and the king's parceling out of land.

Be that as it may, the significance of the dialogue we see generated after the Hundred Years' War between the contested powers-that-be reveals not only the complicated nature of political life during the fifteenth century but, more to the point for Malory, this dialogue demonstrates a breakdown in tradition. It is patently non-aristocratic to argue about money – not to mention that the very fact of having to negotiate with the Commons most certainly has nothing to do with a feudal epistemology and its convenient partition of society into three mutually supportive estates. Negotiation means mediation, and mediation implies difference. It is the perceived disruption of the organic unity which had supposedly confirmed the naturalness of the social order that is slowly making itself felt and bringing the Middle Ages to a close: difference exacerbated between classes, between the present and the past, within communities themselves.

While medieval estates theory differentiates between classes and reinforces the separation of those classes, such divisions formed the basis for the model of an integrated hierarchy established through the concept of natural structure. But this model of a unified social structure was being directly challenged and the anxieties forged in that conflict appear in the representative texts of the age. Forced to confront ruptures in the idealized model, the subject imagined in Malory's Arthurian narrative is unable to insert itself into a collectively integrated social whole.

In spite of – or perhaps even because of – the confusion of historical records,[9] what we can identify about this period that is of singular importance to those cultural fears shaping the text's interest in civil war, has as much to do with propaganda as it does with actual strife. By and large, the period in question was not particularly violent; in fact the epithet "Wars of the Roses" is somewhat misleading. While early historians and writers contributed to the creation of a mythology of calamitous violence and bloodshed surrounding the Wars, from our current vantage historians have partially succeeded in removing some of the more lurid aspects that have stigmatized our critical perceptions of fifteenth century England.[10] We must, however, bear in mind that while it is one thing to admit that at least in England the material basis of life for the average citizen continued much at the pace to which it had long been accustomed, the political and social conditions for the ruling classes were in singular upheaval. The rapidity with which the fortunes of the gentry, the baronial elite, and the Crown itself changed were unprecedented and striking. The affinities that once allowed the magnates to work in concord were dissolving, reforming, and dissolving again under pressures of self-interest and plain old treachery. In the north, the bitter and violent feud brewing between the Nevilles and Percies had far-reaching implications for anyone unfortunate enough to get caught up in their rivalries, remapping the

social and political boundaries of the government and the political elite. As a case in point, scholars such as P.J.C. Field have put forward that if Malory were indeed a knight from Warwickshire, then there is the strong possibility that he might have thrown in his fortunes with the Earl of Warwick, Richard Neville. Neville (sometimes called the "kingmaker") was one of the principal players in the shifting tides of Yorkist and Lancastrian ambitions, initially siding with the Yorkists then switching to the Lancastrians after a falling out with Edward IV.[11] It is obvious that service to any great lord during this period was fraught with equally great peril, significantly so due to the fluid and dynamic lines of alliance.

Furthermore, evidence would indicate the profoundly unsettling impact that the mounting sense of civil disorder and political turmoil was having on people in a very pragmatic way. Keith Dockray notes the Lancastrian government's inability to secure its debts and financial obligations, resulting in its failure to maintain civil obedience:

> The year 1450, in particular, was a disaster for the Lancastrian regime. There is evidence of seditious bills, anti-government propaganda and rioting in London early in the year, as well as a substantial demonstration of hostility to the king's men in Kent: most dramatically, Henry VI's Keeper of the Privy Seal. . . was lynched by an enraged mob of unpaid soldiers and sailors.[12]

Growing discontent with the failures of government both to prevent the continual losses of holdings in France and to manage the fiscal abuses of the court led to the impeachment and exile of Henry VI's chief minister (who was later captured and executed by unidentified assailants); and a month later, in May 1450, Jack Cade's "formidable" rebellion exploded in the south-east: comprised of disparate members of society the uprising ranged from peasants to gentlemen and its inclusiveness heralded the extent to which seriously dangerous discontent with Henry VI's rule had spread.[13]

It has become a commonplace for historians to note that the success of a ruler in England during the Middle Ages required enough political acumen to be able to negotiate the competing demands of the aristocracy, but in addition the strength of will to be consistent in enforcing what was seen as the rule of law.[14] In examining the air of dissatisfaction and disgruntlement that seemed to lour over the age, it becomes evident that the axis around which the forces capable of producing civil strife evidently revolved was the monarchy. While several theories regarding the forces at work to generate the Wars of the Roses have been put forward, most historians agree that the Crown and its failures acted as a lightning rod for those social energies most disruptive of the consolidation of power necessary for the maintenance of order.[15] Though there is disagreement between historians and critics over the implications of the event, the fifteenth century begins with the deposition and execution of the last of the direct-line Plantagenet kings, Richard II. Henry IV's usurpation inaugurated a period of virtually non-stop rebellion and conflict. His son, Henry V, managed to weld the kingdom into a relatively unified instrument through indomitable willpower and war with France. It was, without doubt, Henry's strong hand guiding the country through a war of his own invention that allowed him to maintain political superiority, even when the English were again growing restless with the taxes raised for the war effort. With his death and the minority of his son, Henry VI who was only eight months old at the time of his accession, all the tensions that the Crown had held in check were set to take the stage.[16] And there is little room to doubt that during his minority, and worse when he reached majority, Henry VI was singularly incapable of carrying out the obligations required of the Crown to maintain peace: keeping the aristocracy in line and managing the finances of the country. J. R. Lander reminds us that Henry VI generated little respect amongst the English: "As early as 1442 many of [Henry's] humbler subjects were already calling him a fool, and saying

that he was more like a child than a man." It was, therefore, no surprise when "Henry conspicuously failed in the two most important tasks of a king: control of his aristocracy and control of his finances."[17] His inability to cooperate with the nobility continually sapped Henry's prestige, and the aristocracy and gentry "took to settling their differences by armed force, which, in turn, dragged into conflict their local adherents and dependents."[18] Even when Edward IV came to the throne, the situation changed little, as the crises and grievances instantiated by inept monarchies and their failures to build a unified community continued to challenge the crown until the Tudors enforced a new sense of obedience.[19] Thus, when Malory is determined to write his *Morte Darthur*, he writes from the position of a man who has had many years to reflect on the instability of the realm and the meaning of his own involvement in it.

The necessity of a strong, centralized government with an effective monarch at its head occupies a strategic position in the *Morte* as the text navigates the difficulties a successful king must face in binding together the community of the realm. A.J. Pollard points out, "Malory perhaps saw what we see, and some perceptive contemporaries saw, that the restoration of effective social peace and political stability lay not through the further encouragement of aristocratic independence, but through the enforcement of royal control and authority";[20] and, *initially* at least, the text seems to bear out that claim. In the first book of the *Morte*, it becomes patently clear how the country stands at the brink of civil war each time the king appears vulnerable. As long as Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, gives the appearance of wholeness, then he rules unmolested; but let anything deprive him of his potency and the kingdom is lost: "Thenne within two yeres kyng Uther felle seke of a grete maladye. And in the meanewhyle hys enemeys usurpped upon hym and dyd a grete bataylle upon his men and slewe many of his

peple" (6/28-30). Certainly in Malory's own day it would be difficult to avoid drawing parallels with the confusion initiated by Henry VI's collapse in 1453. This is not to say that Malory is specifically reimagining incidents from the Wars of the Roses as displaced images in his narrative. I would argue against the idea that Malory is writing an allegory, filled with imaginative retellings of contemporary political events. But it seems entirely probable that a text which seeks to confirm its connections with the past would not hesitate to observe similarities between current crises and those extremities haunting its history.[21] The recurrence of essential political imbroglios would demonstrate the cultural continuity on which a society given over to remembrance would situate itself. For the *Morte* and its audience, there is no *distinct* recognition of a distance of anything more than a gulf of years separating the contemporary from antiquity, at least not in the beginning of the narrative. If Malory is turning to the past to ground his conceptualization of the present, he does so initially unaware that the past is incompatible with the present. Further correspondences would only confirm this: as we see shortly after Uther's suppression of the usurpers, three days after his victory over the rebels, he returns to London to celebrate but is overcome by his illness "and therwith he yelde up the ghost" (7/11). The significance of this is immediately and dangerously made clear: "Thenne stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was mighty of men made hym stronge, and many wende to have ben kynge" (7/14-16). Obviously Uther's death points up the hazards inherent in a government that lacks an assurance of effective succession. The question of whether this "jeapordy" is a critique of an important weakness in the monarchy is less crucial than the observation that here, as elsewhere, Malory has deliberately evoked an *atmosphere* of political turmoil that in essence is no different from the troubles besetting his age.

What, therefore, are we to make of the continuity of political chaos that would seem to bind Malory's fifteenth-century England to its cultural memory of the Arthurian ideal? We know that this period was marked by a relatively fair degree of prosperity for ordinary people who, for the most part, would rarely have been touched by the hardships of war. And while the political machinations of Tudor revisionists led to the invention of the period as pure anarchy, we see virtually nothing of the destruction and terror that occupied France during the hard-fought collapse of English holdings there in the fifteenth century. As we have seen, what historians have been able to determine from the records is that the political dynamics of the fifteenth century and the Wars of the Roses in particular, exacerbated in England an already extant tension between monarchy and aristocracy; and between the Crown and that significant portion of society represented by the Commons there arose a powerful sense of entitlement and sheer resentment at the government's inefficiency and corruption. From a strictly historical point of view, the culmination of the dynastic struggles occupying the houses of York and Lancaster and the accompanying "political gangsterdom" (to borrow an expression from Lander) of the baronial class wove a dangerous network of self-serving individuals bent on pursuing personal agendas while the government impotently failed to maintain a sense of order. And though the bulk of the aristocracy as a class, too self-absorbed in staking and defending their familial claims, was loath to find itself involved in outright rebellion, they did nothing to try to preserve peace. [22] By the time the Wars of the Roses took place, what is most interesting about the critical responsiveness of the nobility and gentry to the unfolding drama surrounding the court was their lack thereof: for all intents and purposes, the political arena was a "free-for-all" in which anyone with enough determination and – for lack of a better word – chutzpah could impose his will on a malleable or open environment.[23] In effect, what we find progressively

developing throughout fifteenth-century England is a social disequilibrium in which the majority of the body politic, whose conservative attitudes had served as the necessary bulwark in preventing disorder, appeared now to be caught up in an unresponsive current, adrift and only occasionally aroused to the point of resistance,[24] struggling to find an appropriate response to the disruptive energies of powerfully ambitious and determined individuals.

Amid this political turmoil, Malory's direct criticism of his countrymen, appearing as it does during Mordred's usurpation, takes on added weight:

> Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was? For he that was the moste kynge and nobelyst knight of the worlde, and most loved the felyshyp of noble knyghtes, and by hem they all were upholdyn, and yet might nat thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym. Lo thus was the olde cutom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a greate defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thynge us please no terme. (708/34-41)

In one of those rare but instructive moments when he feels compelled to call particular attention to the stakes being wagered by his text, Malory forcefully asserts that the English are fickle ("for there may no thynge us please no terme"), negligent of their responsibilities for maintaining the corporate bond between society and Crown ("yet might nat thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym"), and blind to the essential importance of the ideological underpinnings securing their community ("For he that was the moste kynge and nobelyst knight of the worlde, and most loved the felyshyp of noble knyghtes"). The charges Malory brings to bear in this passage are certainly not unusual for medieval social critics. What is striking about his critique, however, is the vehemence directed at the failures of the English to be committed to a cultural epicenter located in the figure of Arthur as representative of an integrated social whole – "and by hem they all were upholdyn."

There are, it can be said, several critical frameworks on which we might articulate the figure of Arthur and what he represents in Malory's text. Certainly scholars have validly identified in him the idealization of chivalry, the politics of good governance, and of course militant nationalism. But it strikes me that what is at stake in Malory's presentation of Arthur at this stage is his force as a locus of unification, through which the community in its *wholeness* will stand or fall. By interjecting their differences, parts of the community forget their obligations to that which binds them together; this failure to remember invites dissension and the disintegration of the realm.[25] Wholeness and dissolution, therefore, are the controlling metaphors organizing Malory's narrative which yearns for stability and finds only the impermanent.[26]

This theme of foundation and eventual disintegration appears as a recurrent image throughout medieval literature and doubtless the move from one to the other provides the Arthurian narrative with something of its aura of tragedy; and certainly the story of the rise and fall of kingdoms is constitutive of the myth of English origins – from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* to Holinshed's *Chronicles*, to choose a particularly appropriate block of time, the authoritative "history" of the English people was a story of the ebb and flow of monarchies held together by genealogical descent as natural as the stream of time itself. But significantly, what in most medieval histories would appear as a cyclical event takes on a shadowy sense of isolation at the close of the Middle Ages in the fifteenth century. On several occasions Malory finds himself forced to admit that "things were different back then," and this intimation of difference opens the possibility of dissolution not as some sort of eternal recurrence, but rather as historical loss. When Malory begins the last book, "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon," he emphatically claims the irrecoverable essence of

the Arthurian past, speaking with the emotional immediacy of ruin: "so thys season hit befelle in the moneth of May a grete angur and unhapp(e) that stynted nat tylle the floure of chyvalry of (alle) the worlde was destroyed and slayne" (673/6-8). The finality with which Malory speaks embraces an understanding that endings, especially those with tragic consequences, are irredeemable. There are boundaries that cannot be re-crossed. If Malory's goal had originally been to locate the ideology of chivalric ethics in the Arthurian narrative as a means of enforcing a continuous, and thus collectively authorized, affirmation of the present in the past, what he discovers in the final book is that the grounds for the institutions securing that identification are disappearing. In other words, the community whose wholeness Malory yearns for in its past is as inherently fragmentary then as now – and its history attests to the illusory possibility of unity. Not only does the text recognize the unpredictability of its own age when forced to consider the fickleness of the English as a people, in turning to his memory for comfort Malory must confront the disquieting impermanence of history itself in the loss of an idealized past.[27] The flower of chivalry has been destroyed. The Round Table and its destruction are events whose unique singularity is the presence of an absence around which a social and cultural history congregates. And the *Morte* demonstrates that remembrance of things past, with a nod of our heads to Proust, will not efface the divisions besetting the present. The climax of the *Morte* in Arthur's death studiously denies the assurance of memorial continuity and emphasizes instead the discontinuity of historical loss.[28]

Arguably one of the most influential cultural critics of the Middle Ages, Johann Huizinga, has claimed in his seminal work *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, that the sources coming down to us from the end of the Middle Ages project an atmosphere – in keeping with the general air of those crises in political and social identity representing the fifteenth century –

peculiarly depressing and almost pathological in its consciousness of catastrophe: "A general feeling of impending calamity hangs over all. Perpetual danger prevails everywhere."[29] And while Huizinga's book was first published in 1919 and has since seen a great deal of criticism targeting its totalizing period description, it strikes me that much of what Huizinga has to offer us in terms of understanding the sociological tensions affecting the ideology of chivalry and its use in the *Morte* is still relevant. In brief, Huizinga's argument is that late medieval social consciousness was ruled by morose and despondent reflection, filled with images of the "danse macabre" and overwhelmed by a prevailing contradiction between the idealization of a cultural institution like chivalry and that institution's actual helplessness when faced with what we might call the "real." For example, Huizinga points out that, at least for a specific community, the idea of chivalry provides the conceptual constellation limiting their "sphere" of "thought"; but as it turns out, the "illusion of society based on chivalry curiously clashed with the reality of things."[30] James Simpson, in *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, succinctly summarizes Huizinga's view of chivalry when he observes "Huizinga argued that late medieval knighthood in all its forms . . . was an obsolete cultural form whose spectacular displays were both a symptom of and designed to disguise, its political vacuity and helplessness before the realities of late medieval warfare."[31] The importance of Huizinga's claim is not simply that, as his critics have often claimed, central institutions like chivalry are vacant gestures. Rather, the argument seeks to establish the conditions for an anxiety-riddled age whose conceptualization of itself was dominated by a tragic sense of decay and loss, of the failures of men and institutions. What we have are the grounds for a split consciousness in which the individual attempts to insert himself into a world modeled on a conceptual frame (an ideology for instance) that is in no way reflected by the actions in which either the individual or his contemporaries substantively engage. While

Huizinga's arguments about chivalry help to clarify the relationship peculiar to chivalry's manifestation and the class whose solidarity is idealized within that appearance, it is his assertion that the culture of the end of the Middle Ages was one of incessant and oppressing volatility that matters most for my argument. Nowhere is this better represented than in the attitudes expressed in the final book of the *Morte* as one event after another reinforces the impossibility of altering the path of destruction on which the members of the Round Table seem bent, creating a nightmarish world of intractable dilemmas and calamitous death.

After attempting to dissuade their brothers from their fractious desire to advise Arthur of Lancelot's infidelities, Gawain and Gareth despair "'Alas . . . now ys thys realme holy destroyed and myscheved, and the noble felyshsyp of the Rounde Table shall be disparbeled'" (674/17-19); and in doing so they articulate both the voice of prophetic doom and the fragility of communal allegiance. On the one hand, prophecy emphasizes the tragedy in which the characters are trapped – that they lack the wherewithal to modify the course of events imposes the demands of tragedy's inevitable incomprehensibility. It goes without saying that one of the key features of tragedy is its baffling refusal to fit into the way things *should* be. And that refusal to fit unfathomably isolates us, disrupts our grasp of the "what-should-be," and stresses human helplessness before a merciless and inexorable universe. The brothers Gawain, Gaheris, and Gareth are separated from their brothers Agravain and Mordred, isolated from that which has held them together: their sense of familial obligations. More specifically, they are torn between competing obligations; and as such they do not understand what they could do to prevent the unfolding of events. In effect, they become helpless victims of circumstances over which they believe they have no control. The apocalyptic force of the final chapter thus draws its strength from the way tragedy militates against the facile structure of ethical comprehension, such as we

commonly see in the genre of romance wherein characters make decisions and establish relationships based on their willingness to participate in the communal identification of right and wrong. Denying us the clearly marked boundaries of right and wrong, Malory's final book evades answering the question of responsibility. Malory does, it is fair to say, provide us with some signposts: introducing book eight with the announcement of the coming destruction of the Round Table, Malory observes that "all was longe uppon two unhappy knyghtis whych were named sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred . . . For [they] had ever a prevy hate unto the quene, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot" (673/9-12). But to lay the fate of the Round Table squarely at Aggravaine's and Mordred's feet would not allow us to elide the troubling questions raised by the actions of the other characters who seem to be aware of what is taking place and whose inaction is complicit in the fall of the fellowship. Indeed, the text indicates that the failure to act or resist is as futile as deliberate action in preventing the destructive energies unleashed on the Round Table. Gareth and Gaheris are unable to refuse Arthur and as a consequence they are killed by the man they love most in this world. Lancelot, urged to take arms in defense of the queen, accidentally slays Gareth and Gaheris. There is no reason for their deaths; there is no justification that can allay Gawain's grief. Lancelot's blind assault highlights the blindness and uncertainty that shrouds the judgment of those who are most responsible for maintaining the fellowship, emphasizing the impossibility of escape.[32] Until he learns of Gareth's death, Gawain's response at each turn is to weep and retreat to his room, unable to take more than a verbal stand against his brothers, his sons, and even his uncle. Even reason and speech have no power to defer the coming catastrophe.

Repeatedly we are told how Gawain tries to reason with his family – he points out in no uncertain terms to Aggravain and Mordred that the consequences of their actions will mean civil

war for the realm and the shattering of the fellowship: "'Nat be my counceyle,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'for, and there aryse warre and wrake betwyxte sir Launcelot (and us), wyte you well, brothir, ther woll many kynges and grete lordis holde with sir Launcelot" (673/33-35). Later, after Lancelot has fled and Arthur has condemned Guinevere to death for treason, Gawain, again trying to help others to remember their obligations to the chivalric community, remonstrates with Arthur to forestall Guinevere's judgment: "'My lorde Arthure, I wolde counceyle you nat to be over hasty, but that ye woulde put hit in respite, thys jougemente of my lady the queen, for many causis'" (682/23-25). Here, Gawain stresses not only Arthur's rash impetuousness ("I wolde counceyle you nat to be over hasty") but that there are "causis" for possible mitigation. He then proceeds to sketch out a masterfully well-reasoned account detailing why Lancelot might have been in the queen's chambers, how he got there "prevaly," and that if Arthur would only give Lancelot a chance to respond, the latter would surely prove by right of combat the lie upon his opponents (682). The passage is long and I do not wish to quote it at length. What suffices for my purpose is to recognize that with his "counceyle" Gawain intends two things: first, to provide everyone with an honorable and reasonable way out of the mess in which they've found themselves. He even tries to point out to Arthur that we really have no idea what happened except for the word of the men outside the door. Actions could easily be misinterpreted: "'for oftyntymys we do many thynges that we wene for the beste be, and yet peradventure hit turnyth to the warste'" (682/35-37). Second, and more importantly, Gawain concludes his argument in an effort to reinsert the issue into a chivalric context to remind Arthur what is at stake here: "'my lady, your queen, ys to you both good and trew. And as for sir Launcelot, I dare say he woll make hit good upon ony knight lyvyng that woll put upon hym vylany or shame'" (682/38-40). In other words, it isn't simply Arthur's pride that is at stake; rather it is their mutually

recognized chivalric values most at risk.   But it is of no use; Arthur is determined, and the audience I suspect begins to feel like Gawain, completely flummoxed by the enigmatic obstinacy of a human nature obsessed with pride, and bent on what can only be a mutually destructive revenge.

The purpose of Gawain's defense is motivated less by an attempt to convince Arthur of the veracity of his claims than by the desire to impress upon Arthur the importance of trust. It is unlikely that the audience would accept Gawain's reasons, any more than we should expect Arthur or the court to buy into them. Certainly Malory's audience would have been fully aware of a long literary tradition that recognized Lancelot's and Guinevere's romance. But the argument is a reminder that at stake is the innocence upon which their idealized community rests. I say "innocence" because regardless of the fact that Gawain's proposal is perfectly reasonable there is no expectation that it be true. Nor are we to read this passage as self-serving contingency: Gawain is not proposing a space in which they can lie to themselves. He is providing the Round Table with the means to retain its faith. The point, I believe, is that Gawain's "causis" depend for their functionality on a determination to maintain respectful consideration of another. In one of the most famous passages in the *Morte*, and justly one of the passages to garner the most critical attention, when Lancelot goes to Guinevere's chambers as the accomplices wait for him, Malory refuses to acknowledge what either of his potential sources freely admit: "For, as the Freynshhe booke seyth, the queen and sir Launcelot were togydirs. And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat therof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes" (676/1-4). As Vinaver makes abundantly clear in his notes, Malory's sources demonstrably announce that Lancelot went to bed with the queen.[33] While it is of course possible to argue that this is Malory trying to

protect his ideological investment in Lancelot from incrimination, Vinaver's comments demonstrate that critics have also recognized that Malory and his audience knew perfectly well what was taking place. What is important for the *Morte*, however, is the virtue of chivalric respect – not recognizing the dirty details of human behavior allows us to preserve our social obligations; and it is those obligations, as Gawain reveals, which allows the Round Table to continue functioning in its fraternal bond. In other words, the chivalric community expressed in Arthur's court only exists as long as its members are willing to believe in one another.

Ultimately, what Arthur risks is his community. But that community is founded on principles of fellowship; and as soon as the personal differences of certain members are allowed to shatter the faith that they maintain in one another, then a conceptual dilemma prevents the possibility of valid social cohesiveness. That dilemma is the framework for vengeance; most importantly for the *Morte*, however, vengeance reinforces separation, isolation, and difference as one's brother transforms into an other. When Arthur refuses to accept Gawain's advice, he does so, significantly enough, by refusing the very premise upon which his community is founded, their faith in chivalry: "'I woll nat that way worke with sir Launcelot, for he trustyth so much upon hys hondis and hys myght that he doutyth no man. And therefore for my queen he shall nevermore fyght, for she shall have the law'" (682/43-45, 683/1). While this passage does present us with an opportunity to examine a potential disjunction between chivalry and "the law," I do not believe that Malory is stressing that incompatibility. Rather than recognize the bonds that their chivalric brotherhood demands of its members, Arthur eschews his commitment to Lancelot in order to pursue a personal vendetta, driven by anger and resentment. In fact, he uses the law to help him achieve his private petty vengeance, in direct opposition to the *obligations* of chivalric rights. Gawain alone –ironically, given his temperament – appears to

understand that their obligation is an obligation to remember, that this is vital to the existence of their fellowship,[34] and that their failure will be the ruin of not just the realm, but more importantly the dissolution of that fellowship.

I have dwelled at length on Gawain's speeches in the beginning of book eight to better articulate the deep pessimism Huizinga notes as particularly rooted in the fifteenth century. When Huizinga suggests that in "the close of the Middle Ages, a somber melancholy weighs on people's souls,"[35] we might fault him for being overdramatic; but his insight is especially relevant to the climate of profound division and isolation reflected in the trajectory of the *Morte* as relationships are severed and the lines of communication break down between parties. Gareth and Gaheris are killed and Lancelot flees to France (684); Gawain, driven mad by the death of Gareth, goads Arthur into pursuing Lancelot (687); the entire kingdom splits and chooses sides between Arthur and Lancelot (687); Gawain refuses to be accorded with Lancelot (689); Gawain dies and Lancelot returns Guinevere, but is banished to France (697). And of course, many "good knyghtes" are slain. The destructive behavior generated on all sides of the conflict is particularly problematic in relation to the structure of an idealized society. But more to the point, the disorder challenging the Arthurian community expresses a fundamental despair over instability in general that marks the psychological investiture of literature throughout the late Middle Ages. Gawain, as an index of the confusion, inertia, and contradictory behavior characteristic of seigneurial politics at the end of the Middle Ages, demonstrates the traumatic effect that the dissolution in the concept of community can have as the grounds for action. As the world collapses around him, Gawain is himself no longer able to maintain the commitment required by his remembrance of chivalric brotherhood. Fueled by despair, by an inability to assimilate his brother's death into the apparent conceptual framework of fellowship which he has

vociferously tried to protect, Gawain finds himself torn apart by competing demands and actively seeking death. Felicity Riddy notes "In Book Eight . . . there is a loss of confidence . . . and a retreat . . . into various kinds of isolation . . . Nothing seems to hold together: not the fellowship, nor the characters, nor even language itself. Malory's version of the end of the Round Table is the product of his own and his generation's insecurities."[36] The insecurities driving the *Morte* ultimately toward a condemnation of the world highlight exactly what Riddy observes of Malory's historical situation: loss of confidence in the traditional institutions of the state, isolation from a communal entity, the failures of justice and reason. If Gawain's fears of annihilation and subsequent complicity in the destruction of the Round Table fellowship tell Malory's audience anything, it is the depressing view of the possibilities for a coherent world. Individuals no longer have the luxury of a contiguous association with the past as the ground for a sense of community. Bear in mind Gawain's repeated assertions that the subjects of the Round Table should *remember*. But even the act of remembrance fails to safeguard the community when Gawain, faced with the loss of Gareth, finds himself compelled to challenge the man who exemplified what held the Round Table together. Lancelot's blows did not just end Gareth's life – they fractured the actual community that Gawain had tried to preserve. This is the inevitability from which Malory can find no means of escape. Either Lancelot chooses the queen or he chooses the fellowship. Whether we examine Lancelot, Gawain, or Arthur, the final tale is one of subjects isolated from one another and divided within themselves. And overseeing the final drama is the omnipresent and terrifying feeling that everything is falling apart. This perception haunts the very conditions of Malory's world.

Emblematic of the general sense of insecurity surrounding the institutions to which people could turn in ordinary circumstances for explanatory frames of reference, the "strangely

troubled" careers, as Huizinga calls them, we see repeated in the annals of the period tell a bewildering story of discordant lives and fragmented identities:

> To realize the continuous insecurity in which the lives of great and small alike were passed, it suffices to read the details which Monsieur Pierre Champion has collected regarding the persons mentioned by Villon in his Testament, or the notes of Monsieur A. Tuetey to the diary of a Burgher of Paris. They present to us an interminable string of lawsuits, crimes, assaults and persecutions. A chronicle like that of Jacques du Clercq, or a diary such as that of the citizen of Metz, Philippe de Vigneulles, perhaps lay too much stress on the darker side of contemporary life, but every investigation of the careers of individual persons seems to confirm them, by revealing to us strangely troubled lives.[37]

The importance of this deeply pessimistic perception of a disruption in historical continuity is reflected in the profoundly unsettling events shaping the troubling behavior of individuals in the fifteenth century. To illustrate the way in which fifteenth-century England bears out Huizinga's claims we might look to Malory himself as an indication of the divisiveness instantiated by those crises besetting his community, for Malory's own life is representative of a fragile and dangerous world.

Most scholars are willing to accept the assertion that when Malory completed the final tale of his narrative, as he himself tells us, in "the ninth yere of the reygne of Kyng Edward the fourth" (726), he was in fact a "prisoner." While there is some room for doubt, the canonical view is that the author of our text, Sir Thomas Malory (presumably from Warwickshire), was a knight believed to be intermittently interned in prison for various crimes against his neighbors and the crown, during which time he composed the *Morte*.[38] The biographical history would seem to suggest that Malory was anything but the champion of chivalry whose voice fills the narrative with admiration for gallant deeds: accused of theft and robbery, rape and assault – on one occasion he broke into an abbey and stole its valuables (later he returned to "insult" the abbot) – he appears to have been a cattle rustler, an extortionist, and an attempted assassin

(having waited in ambush for the Duke of Buckingham).[39] The ledger of Malory's criminal acts reads like a recidivist's dream; more importantly, his many malefactions describe a man who is not only comfortable with violence, but who routinely settles disputes through force of arms.[40] Indeed, Malory is believed to have escaped prison on two separate occasions – one of which, if accounts are to be believed, involving daring exploits with "a variety of deadly weapons."[41] Curiously, as P.J.C. Field notes, Malory appears to have been one of a handful of malcontents who was excluded from the four general pardons that were issued when the shifting tides of war placed the Yorkist party in ascendance. When Malory was able to produce "evidence" in support of his release, the courts summarily rejected them.[42]   Harsh penalties were assigned those jailers who failed to keep close tabs on Malory which, as Field observes, was most unusual for the time. This would indicate a man who was believed to be dangerous enough that he merited "special" attention.[43]

All of this paints a troubling picture for many Malory scholars who have found it difficult to reconcile what appears to be, on the one hand, an ambiguously motivated brigand with, on the other, the author of one of the most important works of the English Middle Ages.[44]   The approaches adopted by critics toward Malory's colorful past are varied. For example, in his remarkably detailed analysis of Malory's career, Field avoids pursuing the dangerous implications of the author's life in connection to the desires evoked by the text; and Eugene Vinaver, in his famous introduction to Malory's *Works*, elides the problematic aspects of Malory's career by refusing to comment on any potential inferences that could be drawn between the text's aspirations and the author's actions. Oddly, however, Vinaver draws our attention *specifically* to Malory's troubled life, noting "the charges are so multifarious that it is difficult to ignore them."[45] Then he proceeds to do just that, ignoring the disturbing qualities of the deeds

by simply listing them as objective facts, as if the plain style and lack of interpretive critique would somehow obviate the ethical dilemmas evoked by the "multifarious" charges. Other scholars, recognizing that it is indeed "difficult to ignore" the paradoxical affront of a vicious reprobate married to an idealized chivalric ethos, have attempted more directly to tackle the difficulties raised by Malory's personal affairs. In particular, the responses to Malory's troubling life often hinge on the charge of "rape," which to our ears has a singularly disquieting effect that simply isn't matched by "cattle rustler." Much scholarly energy has been devoted to explications of the word "rape," in an attempt to prove that its meaning in a fifteenth-century context is not shared with us.[46] Regardless, those critics who have sought at length to explore the issue of Malory's criminal activities frequently attempt to identify the aforesaid actions as manifestations of cultural norms, the assumption being that normative behavior circumvents the ethically treacherous grounds literary historians find themselves treading.[47] Investigators who refuse to be apologists for Malory, however, stress the importance of pursuing not only the violence of Malory's personal history but the repressive responses of audiences embarrassed by the issue as well. The phenomena in question perhaps provide us with a glimpse into our own cultural investments, exposing a hidden violence underwriting our connection to the ethics of the text.[48]

My recitation of "Malorian" scholarship's biographical dilemma constitutes neither a digression nor a naïve capitulation to authorial intent. If I have so insisted on recollecting the "embarrassing" aspects of Malory's life and the general critical attitude towards them, then I have done so in the belief that by acknowledging the ethically challenging elements of Malory's life we can productively explore the way the *Morte* responds to a fundamental crisis affecting the late medieval self and its inability to ground a sense of identity in an appeal to tradition (i.e. chivalric ethics and the Arthurian narrative). There is a tremor running through the ethos at the

heart of the ideology by which the ruling classes determined their place in the world. Doubtless the "anxiety" evoked in Malory's critics and readers over the issue of his ruthless personal history ultimately finds its justification in the hermeneutic methodologies of our latent humanism, which are inspired both by an acceptance of cultural inheritance and that inheritance's foundation in ethics.[49] Our discomfort with the dichotomy between Malory's barbarous behavior and the romanticized text recapitulates the primary challenge faced by the author – legitimizing remembrance. The crux of the matter lies in an antithesis between a life of social disequilibrium and the desire for a harmonious world that belies the pursuits of the individual doing his best to fracture that world. If the past, for Malory, holds a positive affirmation of the present how is that connection to be made? How does a life beset with the sordid ventures of robbery, assault, rape, and what amounts to extortion, claim for itself and its society a chivalric redemption as its inheritance? What legitimizes Malory's claim for the ethical grounds of chivalry as a force for social cohesiveness when he himself is a prime example of its failure?

I have endeavored to demonstrate that the world in which Malory dwells and to which his book responds is one wherein the devastation of civil war and the humiliations of the Crown had far-reaching implications for the community as a whole. And as Felicity Riddy reminds us, "When Malory wrote *Le Morte Darthur* he was in prison for treason during the worst political crisis England had known since the Norman Conquest."[50] Coupled with the despair of his own imprisonment, Malory's tragic interpretation of historical community reflects a society in crisis and, as his life exemplifies, manifests a growing sense that the self can no longer be easily inserted into a distinctly articulated and secure vision of social congruity. I am not arguing that the subject emerging from the turmoil of the fifteenth century is a, to borrow from Stephen

Greenblatt, mobile "self-fashioning" individual such as critics claim is developing in the early-modern period. But I attribute the voice taking shape as the *Morte*'s narrative unfolds to a subject that is slowly coming unmoored from the grounds of an integrative, collective assurance in tradition and continuity. This voice expresses, however ambiguously, a profound break with its past; and at the same time articulates a desire to repossess that lost past, to deliberately fix in place a past that is no longer an actual property of the self's lived experience. The consciousness we see as characteristic of the age is a fragmented and "troubled" construct, at once prone to violence and yet overwhelmed by inertia – seeking coherence and integration it encounters instead the trauma of dissolution and difference.[51] This is the anxious subject defined by an era of uncertainty. Is it any wonder that historians have found so much of confusion and paradox in the examples of consciousness emerging from historical representations at the end of the Middle Ages? And no one serves as a better example of the contradictions inherent in a fragmented subject than Malory himself.[52]

The impasse at which any biographical interrogation eventually arrives is the question of how much, or even if, lived experience is *necessarily* congruent with the events of the text.[53] I agree with those critics who feel that the *Morte* does not mirror *specific* events during the Wars of the Roses[54]; however, Malory's lawless activities – while admittedly excessive even for the period – do argue for a general possibility of anarchic and unstable relationships with those institutions ordinarily responsible for maintaining social cohesiveness. These institutions typically preserve social memory in the form of tradition and custom, and as such they sustain a community's sense of identity. But uncertainty in the validity of institutions such as the family, government, even the church, finds its way in to the text with the failures of Malory's knights, overshadowed by the dissolution of the Round Table.[55] It has, for example, been routinely noted

that the pursuit of private vendettas and family revenge leads to more than one murder, and we would rightly consider this to be an ethically ambiguous and socially divisive element militating against the security of a stable realm. Certainly Malory makes it clear that, for instance, Arthur's nephews weaken the solidarity of the community with their adherence to family vengeance: "for evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conducions, he wythdrewe himself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyshyp, for he [Gawain] was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth" (224/20-23). And, equally well-established, Arthur's unwillingness to rein in Gawain leads to a mutually destructive war with Lancelot. Whether we are dealing with knights murdering one another; whether it's being trapped by competing social and familial demands; whether it's Arthur's inability to contain his feuding barons; the progressive breakdown in the capacity for traditional corporate entities like the fellowship, or the family, or a feudal aristocracy, to maintain a collective reassurance for the individual cannot help but repudiate the effectiveness of those institutions in the process of stabilizing cultural memory. In spite of Malory's attempt to locate his sense of cultural capital in the nostalgic comfort of tradition, the unfolding narrative reveals the impossibility of securing one's sense of identity in the past. What Malory discovers is that there is no security, no comfort to be had in the dream of the Arthurian narrative – a revelation that would appear to haunt the fifteenth century as much as it haunts the *Morte*'s own textual self-awareness. As Arthur himself puts it in the heart-wrenching final scene of his life, "'Comforte thyselff' seyde the kynge, 'and do as well as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to truste in'" (716/23-24).

James Simpson, in commenting on *Le Morte Darthur*'s political relevance during the Wars of the Roses, notes: "Malory's own deployment of Arthurian material is . . . profoundly pessimistic about the possibility of sustaining political power in a treacherous world . . . [and]

underlines the instabilities within chivalric society that lead to civil war."[56] And it is not difficult

to see how Arthur's assertion shares in this profound pessimism.   Not only do Arthur's

melancholy expectations remind us of the frailty of – what for Malory would have been – the

absolute pinnacle of political governance, they significantly reveal the fundamental emptiness at

the heart of the dream of a secure cultural inheritance.   Unlike his predecessors, when Malory

writes *his* death of Arthur, he injects a level of skepticism about Arthur that is singularly *not* part

of the tradition into which he is inserting his own text.   Besides Arthur's self-critique that in him

"ys no truste for to truste in," Malory further attenuates the stability of the Arthurian "history" in

concluding Arthur's death with a reference to the long-standing myth of the King's return in

which he undercuts the legend's ancient assurance of a timeless bond uniting past and future.   I

am, of course, referring to the famous epitaph "And many men say that there ys written upon the

tumbe thys: Hic Iacet Arthurus, Rex Quondam Rexque Futurus" (717/34-35).   That such is the

case is confirmed by his adaptation of the two sources on which he relied for the story of

Arthur's death.   Neither the French *Morte Artu* nor the English Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*

includes a comparable disingenuousness regarding Arthur's death.   In both sources we are aware

that Arthur is carried away on a barge and that Bedivere later finds a tomb that he believes to be

Arthur's.   In the French we also find Bedivere asking if he will ever see Arthur again in this life,

and Arthur responds in the negative.   In the English Stanzaic *Morte* we find a capitulation to the

tradition starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth, when Arthur notes "I will wend a little stound /

Into the vale of Aveloun, / A while to hele me of my wound."[57] In neither instance do we see the

reservations concerning the legend of Arthur's return that we find in Malory:

> Yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but
> had by the wyll of oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall
> com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse.   Yet I woll nat say that hit shall

be so, but rather I woulde sey: here in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff. (717/29-33)

Malory reinforces the reader's sense of historical loss in stressing a general lack of certainty regarding our ability to know the past. In choosing to describe one of the foundational events of English national identity as contingent upon a series of qualified statements regarding the authority of sources, Malory effectively displaces the authoritative status of the traditional legend with the limitations of current knowledge. "Many men say"; "som men say"; "I woll nat say"; the ambiguity inherent in these qualifiers forces the reader to approach the legend as speculation which, as such, resists precisely that desire for historical continuity fueling Malory's project to unify the Arthurian narrative. The narrative, bewildered by an inability to ground itself in a positive affirmation of historical integrity, projects an air of suspicion that envelopes not simply the past but the ideological horizon, marked by nostalgia, against which the divided subject had hoped to make a stand.

For the British of Malory's age the Arthurian narrative resonates in ways that history often fails to do for us. In fact, what we refer to as "history" is not a concept fully shared by medieval peoples. But as we have seen in this brief reflection on the death of Arthur, the meaning of the Arthurian narrative for the medieval English sense of memorial identity has been broken by Malory's realization that he cannot find a positive historical continuity in Arthur's death. While "some men" might say that Arthur remains in Avalon – as a trans-historical locus situated outside time and having no geographical identification it is immune to historical particularities and serves as the eternal present that obliterates distinctions in past and future – Malory cannot say so.[58] That the text moves in the direction of history is unquestionable. The most well-known historical chronicle of Malory's day, the Middle English prose *Brut*[59], clearly places Arthur along a seamless continuum uniting the mythological origins of the giants with late

medieval current events. Like Geoffrey of Monmouth's seminal *History of the Kings of Britain*, so-called historical accounts of the period such as the Middle English *Brut* found little reason to differentiate the past from the present, and mythical characters are as much alive in these narratives as "authentic" historical figures.[60] This approach to memorial "history" is usually conceived not as a past isolated from the present by specific, finite phenomena that must be comprehended within their temporal specificity, but rather an intimately experienced aspect of current circumstances. For example, were we to look at John Hardyng's *Chronicle* (of which we know Malory made use), we would see a document that gives the appearance of aspiring to present "history" but which turns out to be a piece of fifteenth-century propaganda aimed at establishing English claims to Scotland.[61] At no point is the text interested in "factuality" – what motivates the text is the desire to stake a united realm (united under English rule of course) on a belief in a former integrated society. If we bear in mind Foucault's Nietzsche-inspired assertion that "history is made for cutting," it is immediately obvious that histories such as the *Brut* or Hardyng's *Chronicle* are not attempting historical objectivity. They are texts whose cultural impulses are defined by the belief in and the need for wholeness and integration. If, as I have been proposing, Malory's *Morte* is a response to the fifteenth century's crisis in the communal identity of a society organized around a chivalric ethos, and brought about by means of the political instability of that society as it collectively failed to remember its obligations to its sense of community, then it is clear that we cannot speak of Arthur's death and the fall of the Round Table as simply failures of chivalry, as some critics have proposed.[62] The chronological interest of Malory's work is intended to be a vaguely nostalgic support holding "disintegration at bay"[63]; but with Arthur's death, Malory departs from the integrative continuity of his sources and introduces the fragmentation of historical loss as he reminds us that we can have no reassurances.

Unfortunately, at least for the *Morte*'s project, nostalgia is inherently troubled by its internal maintenance of the past as a necessary condition. If Arthur at first represented, for Malory, the locus of a chivalric tradition which would provide the fragmented subject of the fifteenth century with an assurance of historical continuity, then the ideological horizon marked off by Arthur's passing will be understood as the impossibility of such an assurance. For the "strangely troubled" lives we see emerging from the twilight of the middle ages, turning to the comfort of a collective heritage would seem to offer the self a chance to imagine itself as whole, since in the notion of a collective heritage the past lives intimately bound up in an integrative present. Undergirding the subject's belief in an undifferentiated process whereby the past and the present are bound together in communal life is the unquestioned unity and coherence of tradition, a conceptualization we often associate with nostalgia. Certainly Malory's desire for the security of tradition and appeal to conservative chivalric values has long been noted by critics as a nostalgic dramatization.[64] But what the critical tradition has implied by "nostalgia" hasn't always been clear. Oddly, Elizabeth Pochoda has argued that we should *not* see Malory's complicated relationship with the past as "nostalgia." Her dismissal of nostalgia revolves around a definition supplied by Rosemond Tuve which describes the desire for the past inherent in the romance genre as a "recreation of what is lost, a harking back and wishful return to a vanished past."[65] Leaving aside the thorny issue of whether or not we are actually dealing with a romance, the significance of Tuve's definition lies in the term "recreation" – to recreate necessarily implies a split between what has come before and what comes after. Obviously the "re" in recreate suggests the concept "again" or "anew." But this in itself indicates that the object being recreated is a new object made to resemble the previous, now defunct object. In other words, the consciousness of nostalgia is that the past is *lost* and the only way to access it is through

representation. As such, the effective use of nostalgia winds up reinforcing the very sense of "past-ness" that the desiring subject wishes to efface. Thus when Pochoda claims that Malory invokes Arthurian history not as nostalgia but rather as revival she bases this on an unstated assumption about the nature of romance as minor wish fulfillment, opposing it to revivalism as politically and socially active. The former, according to this view, is merely "quaint" while the latter is capable of – or in Malory's case *intended* to be capable of – real change in the cultural landscape. The difficulty with this claim is that it rests on the assumption that nostalgia is trivial and ineffective, as opposed to revivalism as effective and meaningful. It strikes me that there is no reason nostalgia should be opposed to revivalism. The key to nostalgia is the intention "to recreate." It is not at all clear to me what separates "to recreate" from "to revive" – either mode can be said to be a quest to disinter and resuscitate a past that has vanished.

I draw Pochoda's argument to our attention because it demonstrates the confusion over the use and misuse of nostalgia as a genuinely meaningful relationship with the past. Nostalgia in fact does, to borrow a fortuitous phrase from James Simpson, "hard cultural work" – for it is in the recreation of the past that both the individual and the social are able to reconstitute artificially the assurance that, for the anxious consciousness, was believed to have once resided in the memorial object and which is for the angst-ridden subject perceived as lost. The important point here is that the object of memory called forth by nostalgia's longing does not need to be perceived as an isolated and wholly personal encounter with the past. If it were, Pochoda would be correct in dismissing nostalgia as merely "quaint" for its effectiveness would be confined to a private or interior experience, incapable of engagement with the world. On the contrary, in the *Morte Darthur* nostalgia *works* incessantly in the effort to resist the corrosive discontinuities that threaten an authentic sense of memorial union by attempting to subdue those energies

responsible for a breakdown in the social order – the collapse of an authentic chivalric community. Desperate to stave off the political and social fragmentation of its world, the nostalgic text attempts to buttress its flagging coherence by working to *remind* its audience of stable connections between the present and the past. But the *Morte*'s resistance to the crises in political stability results only in an unintended deferral; eventually the text must face the fact that the grounds for such stability are unattainable. The very force calling the text into existence, the desire to search in what you believe to be the past for the key to validating your present, demonstrates the fact that this communal integrity is no longer binding and is under attack. Rather than embedding his idealized community in the comfort of an encompassing continuity, Malory finds himself writing a "boundary stone of another age" (to follow Nora's formulation).[66] In Arthur's death, Malory discovers that reconstructing his Arthurian past as a site or location on which a communal identity could be consolidated by the unquestioned and unself-conscious authority of a living memory can no longer be supported. As he points out with mute finality, "Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctorysed" (717/12-13), thereby suggesting that the historical silence is more evocative of absence than any commentary he could supply.

The silence of history is the silence of the grave, marking the end not just of an era but of the Arthurian narrative itself. In spite of the fact the book does not immediately conclude with Arthur's death – Guinevere is still alive, Lancelot lives and most of his kin are still alive – to all intents and purposes what comes after is akin to the proverbial nail in the coffin. Guinevere retreats to a nunnery, forsaking her romance with Lancelot. Lancelot abandons the chivalric life and becomes a hermit. Others join him; some go to the crusades. But the significance of these events, aside from clearing up loose narrative threads, resides in the way each of the characters

departs from the scene of the idealized Arthurian community. Even those who could carry on the tradition refuse to do so as they find themselves further and further isolated from one another and the world, to be united only in penance. The fellowship left for many of the survivors is that of the hermitage, itself an ironic commentary: the sole means to maintain their fraternity is by abandoning the very world they had sought to be masters of, a world that works ceaselessly to divide them. By now it should be obvious that for Malory the crisis defining his understanding of the cultural moment cannot be resolved by nostalgic efforts to restore to his destabilized community a valid sense of its connectedness. In the end Malory hammers home the point that even the act of remembrance, an event whose impulse is the restoration of a collective possession, is not viable when historical circumstances intrude and force on the remembering subject an inevitable sense of the "pastness" of the past.[67] As a final word on the issue, we might want to examine what is perhaps the most poignantly awful scene in all the *Morte Darthur* to see just how bleak Malory's vision has become.

After receiving his mortal wound from Mordred, Arthur is carried by Lucan and Bedwere "to a lytyll chapell nat farre frome the see" (714/16-17). The two faithful knights attempt to make Arthur as comfortable as they reasonably can when a terrible noise comes to them of people crying out from the battlefield. In response, Arthur asks Lucan to investigate the noise:

> [A]nd so as he [Lucan] yode he saw and harkened by the moonelyght how that pyllours and robbers were com into the fylde to pylle and to robbe many a full noble knyght of brochys and bees and of many a good rynge and many a ryche juell. And who that were nat dede all oute, there they slewe them for their harneys and their ryches. (714/23-27)

Aside from the flailing blows and blood of combat, Malory isn't ordinarily given over to richly visual descriptive detail. When he uses it, the reader takes notice. As a result, I find this passage to be one of the most visually haunting in all his work. The sense of loneliness and isolation is

heightened under a ghostly moon; we can imagine the shadows of darkened shapes falling across the dead and dying knights, stripping them of the ornaments of their prestige, and ignominiously slaughtering those too wounded to crawl away. It is a landscape of nightmare, denying Arthur's knights the earthly splendor that shone at the apex of their fellowship. Where is the honor and glory in this field of death now that the Round Table, broken for good, has sacrificed its integrity as brother turns against brother in a mutually self-destructive orgy of violence and division?[68] This desolate scene is not motivated, as some critics have suggested, by intractable internal flaws in a chivalric code that Malory wants to reveal as bankrupt. [69] The principal effect of the dead and dying knights despoiled as they lie staring up at the moon creates what Mark Lambert calls "a particular country of the mind,"[70] intended to magnify a perception of loss and despair. This perception of loss is integral to the text's project at this point, because it reinforces the sense of historical absence that Malory initially had hoped to overcome.[71] The text is trying to remember what has been forgotten – the glorious community that is no longer socially binding. The pessimistic conclusion that Malory discovers is that the only way to remember is through mourning.[72]

In this chapter I have tried to establish three fundamental points in order to build the grounds for my argument. First, that fifteenth-century England is a turbulent time of political instability and social unease; it is an anxiety-ridden world, the events of which and the individuals who call it home representing a general crisis in the late-medieval subject's ability to integrate itself into a coherent whole. Second, that Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is intimately bound to the crises of its age, responding to that general sense of anxiety and instability by turning nostalgically to an Arthurian past in order to validate an ideological community in an imaginary guarantee of continuity. Third that the inherent awareness of a past from which the

audience is cut off and that would appear to haunt any nostalgic venture, inevitably leads to a reinforcement of the very grounds for difference that the medieval understanding of community seeks to elide. Mary Carruthers has pointed out that the people of the middle ages were fundamentally a people of memory;[73] and while her primary interest lies in discerning the way their memory, both conceptually and as lived experience, functioned in opposition to or in conjunction with our modern experience of memory, her analysis reinforces the understanding that one's memory is an important defining characteristic in one's relationship with the past. The medieval understanding of the world was principally memorial and as a result it looked ceaselessly for continuity. But at the end of the Middle Ages, a consciousness of continuity was no longer recognizable. What we witness in the *Morte*'s struggle and ultimate failure to buttress its sense of collectively held values in an unmediated bond with the past, are the growing pains of a consciousness of history that is isolating and fragmentary, denying the self its longed-for assurance of integrated wholeness. It therefore remains the task of the next chapter to identify the specific culture and commensurate ideology to which Malory's text would appeal, and just what is at stake for members of that community threatened by their failures to remember what holds them together.

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, all Malory citations herein are taken from *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., Ed. Eugène Vinaver, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

[2] Thus, Malory "gives no historical or pseudo-historical background, of the kind we find in the opening stanza of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for instance . . . Nothing is said of Arthur here, it is assumed that the reference to Uther and Ygrayne will be enough to make the subject matter clear. There is no scene-setting . . . Nor is there any reference to the 'historical' era in which all this is happening" (Elizabeth Archibald, "Beginnings: *The Tale of King Arthur* and *King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius*," *A Companion to Malory*, Ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p.134).

[3] Throughout this project I explore Nora's model for the opposition between memory and history, and I frequently define or clarify aspects of the *lieux de mémoire* as support for my reading of the text. For a more specific summary of Nora's construction, please see the Introduction to the dissertation. However, for purposes of orientation, the

essential premise of Nora's *lieux de mémoire* is that we are increasingly losing authentic memory under the pressure of history's evaluation of our relationship with the past: "The remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility" ("Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1980): 7-24, p. 1). Whereas memory is lived in daily experience as continuity with the past, history insists on a rupture with the past – i.e. things are different now. As a result, we experience disequilibrium: "An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear – these indicate a rupture of equilibrium" (Nora, p. 1). And we often strive to restore the security of memory by attempting to secure or fix in place our memories. This is what Nora calls *les lieux de mémoire*, the places "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (p. 1).

[4] While I am aware that the difficulties inherent in specifying a period challenge our perceptions of what constitutes the "middle ages," it would be helpful for the context of my argument to define a closing date for the age. With that in mind, I am operating under the expectation that the boundary of the middle ages can be fixed shortly after the ascension of the Tudor kings, in particular with Henry VIII. Other scholars, however, have identified various significant dates for a cut off point; indeed, James Simpson argues for as late as 1530 to date the boundary marker in England.

[5] "In Malory, the greatest of chivalric fellowships ever known is brought down, not so much by the moral and religious shortcomings revealed by the Grail Quest, as happens in the French Vulgate cycle, but by the splitting of the kingdom into viciously hostile magnate affinities in a manner analogous to his own age of the Wars of the Roses." (Helen Cooper, "Counter Romance: Civil Strife and Father-Killing in the Prose Romances." *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 141-62.)

[6] It should be stressed here that even after the fourteenth century had come to a close and the demands of the monarchy during the Hundred Years' Wars were no longer in force, the dynamics driving the political discourse between the Commons and the monarchy could not be rescinded. Most significantly, when we consider that the nature of that political discourse emerging from the struggles for cash concessions is one defined by resentment and negotiation, there is little to marvel that a perception of government interaction would be one based on resistance and demands – or leverage. This shift in influence towards the Commons, once instantiated, continues to operate in the political consciousness of the fifteenth century. (See Keen, especially pp. 149-59, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages, 1348-1500*, London: Allen Lane, 1990.)

[7] See Keen, p.147.

[8] "A backlog of bad debt accumulated in this way could seriously sour relations between the government and leaders of local communities: that was another reason for the collapse in the fifteenth century of the efforts to maintain the Lancastrian conquests in France" (Keen, p. 149).

[9] As J. R. Lander remarks, "the fifteenth century is still, and will probably always remain, one of the most obscure centuries of English History" (*Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth-Century England*, 3rd ed., London: Hutchinson, 1977, p. 17).

[10] See, for example, Lander (p.12) who reminds us that Tudor historians like Edward Hall and Ralph Holinshed – not to mention artists such as Shakespeare – had much to gain from reducing the fifteenth century to a period of ruinous strife, and that it was largely because of their propagandist efforts that "the blood-curdling horrors of fatal strife, dynastic tragedy and extreme aristocratic mortality reigned supreme in the popular mind."

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[11] For a detailed account of the potential interactions Malory might have generated in service to Warwick, see P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993, 88-147). In particular, "It is natural to assume that Malory was imprisoned and excluded from pardon because of something he had done as a follower of Warwick, whose estrangement from Edward became serious in July 1467, and deepened until it reached outright rebellion in July 1469" (p. 132).

[12] "The Origins of the Wars of the Roses," *The Wars of the Roses*. Ed. A.J. Pollard. London: Macmillan Press, 1995, p. 83.

[13] In commenting on the rebellion, Keith Dockray observes that "involving gentlemen and yeomen as well as peasants and artisans, this rebellion was clearly a major challenge to the authority of Henry VI's government," p. 84.

[14] "In fact, success or failure at ruling in the later Middle Ages is almost indistinguishable from success or failure in handling the magnates" (Dockray, p. 80).

[15] Dockray's summary and analysis of the principal arguments regarding the origins of the Wars of the Roses is illustrative. Observing that the current strands of interest surrounding those issues productive of the civil war are polarized around two essential claims – that of K.B. McFarlane's emphasis on the incompetency of the crown and R.L. Storey's insistence on the local politics of individual families – Dockray states that "most recent historians of the Wars of the Roses have preferred to line up behind" the thesis that the driving force behind the "steady increase in local violence and a deterioration in men's ability to gain redress at law" was in fact the "significant inadequacy" of Henry VI (pp. 76-77). Oddly enough, *literary* historians, on the other hand seem to take the differing view. Many significant studies produced in recent years on "the immediacy of the relationship between literary culture and and social practice in Malory's time" (Thomas H. Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience: The Social Reading of Romance in Late Medieval England,* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006] p. 1) have focused on specific local conditions and individual politics. See, for example, Crofts or Raluca Radulescu's *The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*. For a counter example, see James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution*.

[16] As a side note, during Henry VI's infancy the government managed to run efficiently enough. But with the obvious tensions and political squabbles between the late King Henry V's brother Humphrey of Gloucester and the lords, under the leadership of Cardinal Beaufort and highly suspicious of Gloucester's maneuvering, it is fair to say that the operational façade of the government in place around the young king was anything but united. (See, for example, Lander, pp. 60-61.) More importantly, the governance of the French possessions – under the guidance of Henry V's brother John, duke of Bedford – began to collapse in 1429, only seven years after the death of Henry. And much of the enmities and resentments exploding in the Wars of the Roses can be traced to the failures of the English to consolidate and hold their claims in France. Indeed, Richard of York instigated his quest for power when he believed he had been slighted by Suffolk and as a result was unable to maintain his authority in France. (See Lander, pp. 69-70.)

[17] See Lander, p. 65, for a full analysis of the conspicuous failures which were perceived by the English to mark Henry VI's reign.

[18] Lander, p. 65.

[19] "All through the fifteenth century the head that wore the crown wore it very uneasily indeed" (Lander, p. 51).

[20] A.J. Pollard, "Society, Politics and the Wars of the Roses." *The Wars of the Roses*. Ed. A.J. Pollard. London: Macmillan Press, 1995, p. 15. I am not unaware that in using Pollard here I am, in no small measure, setting him up as a straw man. Pollard's claim, while certainly accurate, leaves open the charge leveled by Elizabeth Pochoda (*Arthurian Propaganda*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971, see especially p. 34) that Malory

desires a practical means of enforcing political stability. To my mind there is nothing "practical" about Malory's conception of government; that is, he is not looking for a real-world solution to kingship in the mode of the *Somnium Vigilantis* or a *Mirror for Magistrates*.

[21] To highlight the difficulty in attempting to assign contemporary events to textual instances we might consider the Battle of St. Albans as a case in point. In the first book of the *Morte*, Malory observes that when the barons rise up against the ailing Uther, he defeats them at "Saynt Albons" (*Works*, p. 6). There were, in fact, two real-world battles at St. Albans during the Wars of the Roses: the first (1455) was a victory for the Yorkists; the second (1461) a victory for the house of Lancaster. If we are tempted to situate Malory's battle in an actual historical context the first question we must ask is to which battle of St. Albans would he be referring? Identifying this would invariably lead to a specific political perspective. But the difficulty in tracing Malory's loyalties, in spite of the many attempts made to firmly seat him with one party or the other, has failed to be fully resolved.

[22] Lander, in speculating about the nature of the government's response to York's claims, observes that "the uncertainties produced by Henry VI's long minority, followed by many years of feeble personal rule, already seem to have produced a kind of *abdication of the will* in great men. The peers, and others, had developed a tendency to dissociate themselves . . . from responsibility" (italics added, p. 80).

[23] [The lords] "when faced with the choice of supporting or rejecting a fellow magnate, who had so recently come near to treason . . . shuffled away, too bewildered to find any other way out." Furthermore, the general inertia demonstrated by the bulk of the ruling class "may well have given [York] the impression that . . . he could, by sheer determination, impose his will upon a reluctant and leaderless group of men" (Lander, p. 81).

[24] Pollard, in describing the disintegration of the government and development of civil strife during the Wars, has a wonderful description of the general atmosphere of the period: ". . . growing economic and financial pressures, material loss and humiliation in France, the lurking doubt concerning Henry VI's title. They made civil war more likely. In the last resort it was Henry VI's incapacity after 1453 which tipped the balance. In the end . . . the ship of state was without a captain and, while the crew fell at each other's throats, she drifted onto the rocks" (quoted in Dockray, p. 80).

[25]In a critique of Charles Moorman, Pochoda outlines an important distinction about perceptions of Malory's idealizations of chivalry that weigh heavily on the understanding of Arthur at the end of the *Morte* and which need to be briefly evaluated here. Pochoda notes that early Malorian scholarship has principally seen the *Morte* as "satisfied with the glories of Arthurian society" and that, even where there has been doubt, "Malory . . . never [lost] confidence in the basic virtues of chivalry" (p. 25). Pochoda then observes that some critics, like Moorman, have slowly begun to recognize "that the book . . . damns chivalry in no uncertain terms" and that the "portrayal of chivalry is profoundly negative in the end" (p. 26). While her accusations are strong, and they certainly would appear to support her thesis that Malory wishes to exploit the failures of chivalry in order to "condemn" it as a way of life (p. 27), I find that they are misplaced. If anything "fails" in the *Morte* it is most certainly not chivalry. People fail. Kings fail. Governments fail. Most importantly for my argument, memory fails – it fails to save us from the divisions that the forces of history institute among us. If, as I argue, there is a crisis in Malory's ideology it is not for all that inherent in the value of that belief system, but rather in the consistent failure of people to accept their obligations to remember.

[26] "The last two books – and particularly the final one – are about fracture, separation, and the dissolution of wholeness" (Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, p. 140).

[27] To be sure, against the awareness of discontinuity for which I am arguing could be countered the popular medieval image of the dwarf-standing-on-the-shoulders-of-giants. Medieval authors were well aware of this simile

and made use of it to express not only their understanding of the continuity maintained between themselves and their ancestors, but also to demonstrate their respect for that connection. To this I would argue that the contiguity implied by the medieval understanding of the image in question was certainly not tragic in nature. It was celebratory and intended to demonstrate the way in which "moderns" heralded forth the attributes of the ancestors. Malory, on the other hand, distinctively employs tragedy in order to reinforce the idea of loss.

[28] "The cumulative effect of Malory's tragedy is that of separation from the past and from the notion of recreating the past" (Pochoda, p. 34). We need to unpack Pochoda's brief statement because in it reside two distinct and significant assumptions. On the one hand I agree with the claim that Malory eventually recognizes a "separation from the past." Indeed, it is this recognition of difference that will fuel the calamitous despair of Malory's project. Where I disagree, however, is in "the notion of recreating the past." Underwriting that assertion is the potential understanding that Malory is seeking to restore a lost past to the present. To say such is to deny a fundamental feature of the memorial culture to which Malory belonged. I recognize that I may appear to be splitting hairs, but in this epistemological frame it does not make sense to speak of restoring the past. In authentic memory, the past is not lost. Through memory the past contributes to a space of solidarity forged with the present and the future. The goal for Malory was never to restore the past – rather, he sought to safeguard memory, to prevent the past being lost.

[29] Johan Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), p. 20.

[30] Huizinga, p. 56.

[31] James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History, vol. 2, 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 260.

[32] "To consider the fall of the Round Table as a series of unhappy accidents that might well have been avoided, as Larry Benson and, to a lesser extent, Mark Lambert argue, is to diminish Malory's tragic vision" (C. David Benson, "The Ending of the *Morte Darthur*", *A Companion to Malory*, Ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 233).

[33] See Vinaver, Notes to Malory's *Works*, p. 774.

[34] Gawain, when confronted with his brothers' subterfuge to entrap Lancelot, tellingly reminds Agravaine and Mordred (and not incidentally the reader) of the responsibility they bear to recognize their allegiance to Lancelot: "'. . . ye muste remembir how oftyntymes sir Launcelot hath rescowed the kinge and the queen; and the beste of us al had bene full colde at the harte-roote had nat sir Launcelot bene bettir than we, and that hathe he preved hymselff full ofte. And as for my parte,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I woll never be ayenste sir Launcelot for one dayes dede, that was when he rescowed me frome kynge Carados . . . and saved my lyff. Also, brother . . . in lyke wyse sir Launcelot rescowed you bothe . . . And therefore, brothir, methynkis suche noble dedis and kyndnes shuylde be remembirde" (*Works*, pp. 673-74). Notice that Malory, in this one passage, twice calls our attention to the word "remember," and the word "brother." These two words are not used coincidentally for together they form the key to the Round Table's endurance.

[35] Huizinga, p. 22.

[36] Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 145.

[37] Huizinga, p. 20.

[38] This "standard" view is not, however, without its detractors and has sparked heated controversies. For a condensed account of the debate over Malory's identity see: Thomas Crofts, "The Text at Hand," *Malory's*

Contemporary Audience, Arthurian Studies lxvi. New York: D.S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 11-30. In spite of this, "It is Field's painstaking work that keeps the question of authorship not only alive, but relevant; given this, no consideration of Malory's texts can ignore the issue . . . Partially as a result of Field's weighty advocacy, the Newbold Revel candidate remains by far the most famous and widely accepted, and most scholars now concede that probability favors this knight-prisoner as author" (p. 15).

[39] See, for example, Eugene Vinaver's Introduction to the *Works*, p. v-vi.

[40] See also Felicity Riddy's comment that the book could be seen as "the legitimization of a lawless man's fantasies" (*Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 7).

[41] Vinaver, Introduction to the *Works*, v.

[42] For the most detailed account of the absurdly convoluted circumstances surrounding Malory's prison years, see P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. Field's account of the chaotic years between 1450-71, involving Malory's repeated appearances at court, imprisonments, fines, and shifting fortunes, borders on slapstick with its virtually improbable sequence of reversals.

[43] Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 117: "It must have been obvious that Malory was a special prisoner. The determination of the authorities to keep him inside [the prison], as expressed in penalties on his gaolers for keeping him safe, reached a record for mediaeval England."

[44] While it is difficult to assess the extent of Malory's influence, the *Morte* is generally recognized by scholars to have had a lasting impact: "In the English-speaking world, Malory has inspired major writers from Spenser to Steinbeck, not to mention a whole host of twentieth-century novelists of varying fame and distinction, as well as film-makers, right down to the inventors of video games and the construction of Las Vegas hotels." (Terence McCarthy, "Old Worlds, New Worlds: King Arthur in England." *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*. Arthurian Studies xlii. Ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., and Jessica G. Brogdon. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 5.)

[45] Vinaver, Introduction to the *Works,* v.

[46] For a thorough, and chronological, analysis of the history of discomfort the issue of "rape" has generated among Malory's critics, see Tom Shippey's "Dark Knight" (Rev. of P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. *London Review of Books*. 24 Feb. 1994: pp. 22-24).

[47] As a notable example, in his essay "The Morte Darthur" (*Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 103-10), C. S. Lewis notes, "At first sight [Malory's past] is a thing not only to shock our sensibilities but to puzzle our intellect" (p. 104). Referring to the need of "some" critics, like Vinaver, to "reconcile the book with the man" (p. 104), Lewis attempts to subvert the paradoxes between the idealism of the text and the harsh realities of the author by offering what amounts to an apology. "There is no need to suppose that Malory did all the things of which he was convicted: much less that those which he did do were necessarily crimes in his own eyes" (p. 105). Lewis then boldly declares, "Cattle-lifting has always been a gentlemanly vice. The 'robberies' and 'extortions' may have been acts of private war not only permitted but demanded by honor." And, what has proven most troubling to modern critics, "Rape need mean no more than knightly abduction" (p. 105). One wonders if Lewis is having us on.

[48] "Those critical perspectives that an outside point of view might claim are embarrassed by rape can offer some of the most rigorous, because self-aware, means of coming to terms with its function in literary and cultural contexts" (Catherine Batt, "Malory and Rape." *Arthuriana* 7, no. 3 [1997], pp. 78-99).

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[49] See, for example, Catherine Batt: "At the root of concern over establishing who and what Malory was lies perhaps a humanist anxiety about how to reconcile 'great writing' with a writer deemed 'unethical.'"

[50] Riddy, "Contextualizing Le Morte Darthur," *A Companion to Malory*, Ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 55.

[51] "The fragmentation of the self and the world underlies Malory's presentation of the end of Arthur's reign, but the longing to transcend this fragmentation is there also" (Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* 142).

[52] We might, in order to pursue parallels, cross the channel and examine the case of the French chronicler Mathieu d'Escouchy to grasp the widespread severity of these "troubled lives" haunting the late Middle Ages. Huizinga (pp. 20-21) notes that in reading d'Escouchy's chronicles of the Hundred Years' Wars we would draw the impression that he was "simple, exact, impartial, moralizing" and "that the author was a studious, quiet, and honest man." But this picture is immediately disturbed by the archival records. The quotation is extensive, but remarkable in its conflicting descriptions of a man who, much like Malory, defies our ability to place his paradoxical images into an integrated whole: Starting with his tenure as alderman, then provost, "we find him from the outset engaged in a family quarrel with Jean Froment, the city syndic. They harass each other reciprocally with lawsuits, for forgery and murder . . . The attempt of the provost to get the widow of his enemy condemned for witchcraft costs him dear" when he is imprisoned himself. "We find him again in prison as an accused on five more occasions, always in grave criminal causes, and more than once in heavy chains. A son of Froment wounds him in an encounter. Each of the parties hires brigands to assail the other." Huizinga remarks that even after this feud is no longer recorded, "others arise of similar violence." In spite of this, d'Escouchy's career continues unabated. "He is ennobled. He is taken prisoner at Montlhery, then comes back maimed from a later campaign." He marries and then, "once more, he appears accused of counterfeiting seals, conducted to Paris . . . forced into confessions by torture, prevented from appealing, condemned; then rehabilitated and again condemned." It goes on. The point of this lengthy examination is that the perplexing careers we see in people like Malory or in d'Escouchy are not unique. They are symptomatic of an age of fragmentation whose representatives can, on the one hand, aspire to ideals and purposes of great import and yet who are willing to engage in the most dialectically opposed actions.

[53] "Some have suggested that the *Morte Darthur* is in effect a *roman à clef* giving Malory's view of the politics of the time" (Field 123). For example, see Robert L. Kelly's "Malory's Argument Against War with France: the Political Geography of France and the Anglo-French Alliance in the *Morte Darthur*" (*The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, Arthurian Studies xlii, Ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., and Jessica G. Brogdon, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000, pp. 111-33). According to Kelly, "In the political context in which the *Morte Darthur* would first have been read, the pro-French, anti-war view the narrative advances could have been readily identifiable as a Lancastrian critique of King Edward IV's plans to reopen the Hundred Years' War" (pp. 132-33).

[54] For instance, the Battle of Towton is sometimes cited as the origin for Arthur's final battle on Salisbury Plain, a view that Field adroitly summarizes in "Malory and the Battle of Towton" (*The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, Arthurian Studies xlii, Ed. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., and Jessica G. Brogdon, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000, pp. 68-74).

[55] More subtle, however, than the obvious fracturing of these institutions is the general weakness of the Church. While it may be good for your soul, in the Arthurian narrative conceived by Malory the Church has seemingly little influence in the world. We might, by way of comparison, note "the insignificant role played by [the church] in the wars. Churchmen, for the most part, offered no intellectual response to the crisis in the state . . . the usual commentators were silent" (Pollard, p. 16). Hermits speak and no one listens.

[56] *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 111.

[57] *King Arthur's Death: the Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Ed. Larry D. Benson, Rev. Edward E. Foster. TEAMS Middle English Text Series. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994, p. 110, ll. 3315-17. This version remains faithful to the original in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*: "Arthur himself, our renowned king, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to" (p. 261).

[58] "On this matter of time, we shall see that Malory had a definite sense of an historical past of which Arthurian society is a part. He does not in any way regard the story as taking place in the eternal present" (Pochoda, p. 59).

[59] *The Brut or Chronicles of England*, ed. F.D.W. Brie, EETS, 2 vols (London, 1906, 1908).

[60] "Although there is greater circumstantiality [sic] in its treatment of current events, nevertheless the *Brut* assumes that Arthur is no more of a fiction than is Edward III or Henry V and that he inhabits their chivalric world" (Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 31).

[61] For more on Malory's use of Hardyng, see Edward D. Kennedy, "Malory and His English Sources," *Aspects of Malory*, Ed. Toshiyuki Takamya and Derek Brewer, Woodbridge: Brewer, 1981, pp. 27-55.

[62] "It is evident in the last four tales that on the most profound level the Arthurian ideal could not survive Malory's moral scrutiny, nor could it justify the initial political investment which he made in it" (Pochoda, p. 61). Pochoda's argument is that Malory deliberately dismantles chivalry in the *Morte* because its idealism is tainted by its failures and inherent flaws. I would argue, however, that the traditional view of Malory's idealism is more accurate: Malory does not lose his love for chivalry. The problem lies in the way members of a society fail in the demands that chivalry makes of them.

[63] Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 141.

[64] As C. David Benson notes, "The end of the *Morte Darthur* celebrates the greatness of the Arthurian world on the eve of its ruin . . . [the] tragedy is of such nostalgic nobility that the reader does not experience fear and pity so much as longing and comfort" (p. 221). I disagree in part with Benson's formulation because it seems to me that, more than any other book in the *Morte*, the end is precisely calculated to create "fear and pity." As Mark Lambert argues, "But in this tragedy pity matters more than terror" (*Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975, p. 124). Be that as it may, Benson accurately locates the motivational desire of the text in "longing and comfort" which are the central emotional components in nostalgia.

[65] Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 340.

[66] Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," p. 12.

[67] "Not only in these last tales, but throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, the narrative is consistently in the past tense, while [the works of his contemporaries and sources] make free use of the historical present. Thus, we are always more aware of the 'pastness' of what is being described in *Le Morte Darthur* that we are in the romances of the period" (Lambert, p. 131). Here, Lambert is drawing on the work of P.J.C. Field in *Chronicle and Romance*. What is most important for my present purposes, however, is the idea that the text is fundamentally concerned with history. Malory is responding to the failures of his chivalric society to remember its obligations to the community. By looking at the past he hopes to restore that lost sense of community – but the very fact of reminding us that it is the past invalidates his hope of a collective heritage in which an anxious age could immerse itself.

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[68] "The last battle, which brings in its train the end of everything, is a symbol of the chivalric world turning its nihilistic energy upon itself, and destroying its own possibility of continuity" (Riddy, "Contextualizing *Le Morte Darthur*," p. 72).

[69] It is not uncommon for modern critics to claim that Malory wants to show, or cannot help but reveal, the way chivalry fails to provide adequate support for the social needs of its members. For example, see Riddy in "Contextualizing Le Morte Darthur": "The estates theory on which Le Morte Darthur rests does not provide any way of analyzing the changing relations between peasants and landlords, and so the aristocracy's predicament can only be represented as the self-generated collapse of its own defining ethos" (p. 72). While I recognize that a political unconscious is certainly at work in the *Morte*, I fail to see how Malory has devalued chivalry. If anything, the dolorous end of Arthur's knights is designed to compound our sense of loss.

[70] *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur*, p. 124.

[71] "More than before we are conscious [in the last tales] of mediation between ourselves and the events described, and this mediation itself keeps us aware of two things: first, that . . . the speaker loves the heroes whose deeds he is recording; and second, that a great expanse of time separates those heroes from ourselves. Our awareness of these two things is inseparable from the meaning of the tragedy" (Lambert, p. 125).

[72] The concept of mourning as a responsibility that offers the only means of accessing what is lost will form the focus for my fifth chapter, "Sites of Memory in the Twilight of the King."

[73] "It is my contention that medieval culture was fundamentally memorial, to the same profound degree that modern culture in the West is documentary" (*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 8).

CHAPTER 2. A COMMUNITY OF TIME: REMEMBER THE PAST AND WE REMEMBER OURSELVES

After Arthur's decisive battle with the rebellious kings in the first book of *Le Morte Darthur*, "The Tale of King Arthur," Malory digresses from the main action with a brief interlude in which Merlin "toke hys leve of kynge Arthur . . . for to go se hys mayster Bloyse that dwelled in Northhumbirlonde" (25/19-20). This event seems strangely isolated from the rest of the narrative. It is strikingly unique – this is the only mention of Merlin's "mayster" in the book and it lacks any comparable classification in the order of events. There is no description of why Merlin needs to see Blaise and there appears to be no impact from their meeting on the text as a whole. All we are told is that Merlin relates to Blaise Arthur's battles and Blaise writes them down:

> And so Bloyse wrote the batayle worde by worde as Merlion tolde hym, how hit began and by whom, and in lyke wyse how hit was ended and who had the worst. And all the batayles that were done in Arthurs dayes, Merlion dud hys mayster Bloyse wryte them. Also he dud wryte all the batayles that every worthy knyght ded of Arthurs court. (25/24-29)

In spite of its brevity, this scene is richly suggestive of Malory's overall project, at least in miniature. Much as Blaise records Merlin's narration in a book for others to read, so too does Malory turn to his sources and transcribe what he finds for posterity. In transcribing his French and English sources, Malory would have seen in Blaise's brief episode the origin of a tradition which he himself was participating in and preserving. In recording Arthur's deeds, Blaise ensures that the experience of the Arthurian past will frame a narrative of history that is both located in a national identity, and supported by an ethical identity arising from the acts of "every worthy knyght." In the chorus of voices that made up the Arthurian heritage, Malory found hope

for unity with an ideology that transcended individual and local political claims and stressed what Walter Benjamin refers to as "communicable experience."[1] This experience is a continuity both temporal and ethical in nature, and which is grounded in the collective wisdom of a shared world emerging from the narratives a community constructs to remember its past. "The experience of a shared world," Paul Ricoeur tells us, "depends on a community of *time* as well as of space."[2] Ricoeur's point can clarify the communicability of Benjamin's "experience" as a collective identity that endures across generations, and it explains much about Malory's interest in the Arthurian past. In the stories an ideological community tells itself about its past, a "community of time" is consolidated under the banner of a remembrance that announces a shared origin and a shared mission connecting its past to its future.

Book one of the *Morte Darthur* seeks to ground the origins for Arthur's kingdom in an approach to the past that stresses an ethical commitment to communal integrity. Unlike books three through seven, which are primarily concerned with the evolution of the Round Table fellowship and the activities of knighthood, both books one and two are more interested in the legendary creation of the Arthurian kingdom. This is not to say that knighthood and fellowship and in particular chivalry are neglected in the first two tales; there are many instances where Malory explores appropriate chivalrous behavior, the desire for honor, even the founding of the Round Table code which will dictate the accepted and expected behavior of the brightest stars in the chivalric world. But the principal purpose of the initial section is to present the matter of Arthur's birth, his coming to the throne, and the battles fought to secure his crown; more importantly, it also serves to establish the ethical and socio-political grounds for Arthur's reign. Whereas in later books, like those of Sir Lancelot or Sir Gareth or Sir Tristram, the impulse of the narrative is to focus solely on the exploits of individual knights and their attempts to navigate

those behavioral conditions forging affiliations with other knights, book one is preoccupied with establishing the larger picture of the Arthurian past, the nature of its origins, and the inception of those virtues defining the chivalric world. It does so in part by exploring such themes as the desire for stability and order; the need for exemplary behavior, agency, and self-determination; the virtues of prudence and self-restraint; and the recognition of a code of conduct that emphasizes the individual's responsibility to others. In addition, because these themes are driven by a sociological imperative to *remember*, we will see how they shape a space for the individual's memory within the collective memory of social consciousness. As Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes, though the functionality of remembrance in fashioning an ethical subjectivity is inherently collective in nature, the motivation for that memorial activity falls squarely on the shoulders of individuals: "One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories."[3] Thus, while it is accurate to say that memory is experienced through the various discourses defining communities, it is still the individual who is *responsible* for remembering.

Malory intends to find this responsibility in recollecting what he sees as the shared world of the Arthurian past. Yet the text remains a product of its cultural present; as such, its interest in the past needs to be addressed in relation to those interests occupying the sociological conditions of Malory's fifteenth-century England. As my first chapter emphasizes, the backdrop of political history against which the first book should be read is one of dynastic upheaval, civil war, and cultural fluctuation. This chapter looks to the way in which Arthur was conceptualized by the later Middle Ages as history, and what that identification meant for the troubled cultural climate occupying Malory's England. The *Morte Darthur* is called into being in Malory's desire to turn

to a collective past for an assurance of the possibility of a better world which could unite his own fragmented society. This orientation towards the past as a representation for the potential of the present is at its most hopeful in the trajectory established by the first book and concluded in the second, when Arthur's throne is firmly grounded on his victory over the Emporer Lucius. "The Tale of King Arthur" presupposes this imaginative past as history.[4] By the light of that past, to borrow an expression from Thomas Greene, Malory would attempt to find his way through the crises affecting the fifteenth-century English political landscape.

Throughout the Middle Ages Arthur was considered an authentic historical figure by many writers, and the various narrative histories, chronicles, and romances testify to his continual appeal as a traditional component of the English past.[5] Critics have long recognized the hold Arthur exerted over conventional English historiography even in the early modern period. As Elizabeth Pochoda notes, in analyzing the "political bias inform[ing] Malory's reading" of the Arthurian narrative, one of the first things the literary historian has to acquaint him- or herself with is the "need to establish the fact that for the Middle Ages and especially for the later English Middle Ages, the Arthurian story claimed the status of history."[6] Having said this, however, it should be noted that alongside this tradition existed a counter-practice of skeptical scholarship, such as Ranulf Higden's fourteenth-century *Polychronicon* in which he noted his inability to "reconcile" the events of Arthurian chronology with various continental sources.[7] And it is clear that while the story may have "claimed the status of history," not everyone agreed as to the veracity of that history.

Regardless of this more critical treatment of the legend, the question of Arthur's historicity was still open to interpretation, right up through the English Renaissance;[8] in the fifteenth century it was still very much a part of the collective identity of, if not all England, at

least those social groups most attuned to the class consciousness vocalized in the Arthurian

ideology. Caxton recognizes and addresses this connection to the Arthurian past when he points

out how his own record of printing "hystoryes" has encouraged "many . . . gentylmen" to

approach him with requests for a history of Arthur:

> After that I had accomplyssed and fynyssed dyvers hystoryes as wel of
> contemplacyon as of other hystoryal and worldly actes of grete conquierours and
> prynces, and also certeyn bookes of ensaumples and doctryne, many noble and
> dyvers gentylmen of thys royame of Englond camen and deamaunded me many
> and oftymes wherefore that I have not do made and enprynte the noble hystorye
> of the Saynt Greal and of the moost renowmed Crysten kyng, fyrst and chyef of
> the thre best Crysten, and worthy, Kyng Arthur, whyche ought moost to be
> *remembred* emonge us Englysshemen tofore al other Crysten kynges.[9]

While there is doubtless some room to suspect whether the requests Caxton points to actually

occurred, what is evident in his opening statement is that he is aware of and directly appealing to

an interest in Arthurian historiography maintained and shared by his intended customers. To be

fair, Caxton does not say that he believes in Arthurian history; in fact, throughout his preface he

positions himself as someone who needs to be convinced of the veracity of the historical claims

made by those who do see in the imaginary Arthurian past "hystoryal and worldly actes." The

point, however, is not whether the belief in Arthur as history is fully accepted by society, or even

if Caxton is necessarily willing to grant it credence. What matters is that Caxton knows there is

at least a *desire* for an Arthurian past, and that desire informs the collective identity of a class.

That desire for the past expresses the interests uniting the narrative acts of remembrance in the

Morte Darthur with the aspirations of a specific social group.

There are two issues regarding conceptualizing the past that emerge most clearly from

Caxton's opening remarks and which frame my analysis of "The Tale of King Arthur." The first

issue has to do with the concept of the past as history; the second, with the representation of the

past through remembrance. Caxton, probably unwittingly, brings together two rather separate

approaches to the past. Felicity Riddy has pointed out that for Malory's contemporaries there were two "differing" means by which they could evoke the past under the guise of "history": the first is, as she emphasizes, "merely credulous, concerned with self-validating intellectual structures that are untested by other kinds of evidence."[10] This means of representing the past is unconcerned with making distinctions between the factual and the legendary,[11] weaving together whatever elements of the past best serve a subject's understanding of its own place in time. We find in this approach to the past an "undifferentiated" connection with the legendary and mythical – what Pierre Nora refers to as "real memory,"[12] the uncritical and public possession of narratives that assure collective identities of their continual existence. The second approach, as Riddy defines it, "sets different sources, and not only written ones, against one another in the pursuit of a truth that is understood as the truth of fact."[13] This form of historical understanding is akin to what we would think of as authentic history, or history that aspires to a science. Here we have the application of methods of inquiry to interrogate historical objects. The past becomes something that must be verified according to sources. Above all, this approach cannot be uncritical – it demands analysis and is fully aware of differences. For Malory the Arthurian tradition is a "self-validating" function of his contemporary social conditions. It should come as no surprise, then, that the form of consciousness we see engaging the concept of the past throughout the *Morte Darthur* is less that of history, and more akin to the function of remembrance. When Caxton says "whyche ought moost to be *remembred* emonge us Englysshemen," he is tacitly acknowledging a communal desire to escape the sequence of temporal disjunctions that separate the "modern" from the ancient. Caxton recognizes that the purpose of the *Morte Darthur* is to *remember*; it is called into existence in the act of conserving and validating traditional structures of collective identity. And it is in the initial books of the

Morte that Malory establishes the need for such an act of remembrance when he examines the unification of the Round Table.

Together, books one and two share in the purpose of exploring the foundations of the imaginary chivalric heritage supporting fifteenth-century English aristocratic and gentry attitudes towards the past. However, while books one and two form a unit with a shared approach to the imagined Arthurian past paving the way for the explorations of community that will take place in books three, four, and five, each book is in many ways strikingly different from the other in tone, content, and structure. I intend, therefore, to concentrate my analysis on the first book in order to isolate the specific conditions that called for Malory's version of that Arthurian past.

Structurally the "Tale of King Arthur" is, at first glance, a perplexing bag of disparate narratives. Working with the Winchester manuscript, Eugene Vinaver isolates six separate sections within the larger work, corresponding to the various stories presumed to be Malory's source material in the *Suite du Merlin*.[14] Each of these minor narratives is organized around the actions of specific characters and their contributions to the consolidation of Arthur's early kingdom. The first three consist of "Merlin," which follows Arthur's birth and Merlin's maneuverings to get him on the throne, along with the forging of Arthur's first alliances; "Balin or the Knight with the Two Swords," a tragic story of the knight Balin as he struggles with the consequences of his disastrous choices; and the "Torre and Pellinore," which consists of three separate adventures, hinging on ethical choices each knight must face. The last three tales are "The War with the Five Kings," showcasing Arthur and his knights in their glory; "Arthur and Accolon," a study in betrayal and Arthur's role as a model for chivalric behavior; and "Gawain, Ywain and Marhalt," rounding out the first book with three more exemplary tests, each designed to demonstrate the necessity of the individual's ability to reflect on the chivalric code and its

ethical injunctions. Each of these sub-tales contributes meaning to the *Morte*'s overall project of remembering the Arthurian heritage in order to move from the disorder and instability characteristic of the fifteenth-century world towards the stabilizing and unifying effect of a chivalric fellowship.[15]

The *Morte Darthur*'s gradual movement through violence and war toward a homogeneous, unified kingdom reflects the anxiety over a durable and cohesive community which we find alongside the fallout from the political and social turbulence of fifteenth-century England,[16] and exemplified in the Wars of the Roses. The instability of the world calls for a stable identity to resist the apprehension of groundlessness; and this stability will be located, at least imaginatively, in an integrative communal identity. When Arthur's father Uther dies, the kingdom's lack of a strong, central monarchy leads to political upheaval as the magnates of the realm vie for control: "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 been kyng" (7/14-16). Malory emphasizes the danger of the disintegration of those collectively reassuring bonds with which his community is maintained, thereby establishing the challenges of the political vacuum that Arthur's rule is meant to resolve. An important point to note is that the community Malory sees as under threat is not exactly the nation. What he has in mind, precisely, is the security of the ruling elite. When Arthur comes to the throne the initial value he brings to the community is the power to broker those accords, and support those affinities, that make a community even possible:

> Also thenne he made alle lords that helde of the croune to come in and to do service as they oughte to doo. And many complayntes were made unto sir Arthur of grete wronges that were done syn the dethe of kyng Uther, of many londes that were bereved lords, knyghtes, ladyes, and gentilmen. Wherefore kynge Arthur maade the londes to be yeven ageyne unto them that oughte hem. (10/32-37)

Here we see Arthur's first acts as king are to set right the grievances of a fractious aristocracy. Not only does he settle disputes between disgruntled parties as the dispenser of justice, Arthur also reflects fifteenth-century English political theory and its synthesis of individual need with communal interests.[17] In providing for the security of the members of his society, Arthur is securing the very stability of community itself.

Highlighting the social functionality of the monarchy, Pochoda's exploration of medieval English political theory brings to light an important aspect of Arthur's role as king. Pointing to John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (written around 1159), Pochoda observes that John's work is primarily concerned with "the idea of justice";[18] more importantly, though, is the stress on "the king's role as a *model*."[19] From a social perspective, the political function of the king's role as a model is to serve as an exemplar. On more than one occasion Malory illustrates this point with reminders of Arthur's influence on concepts of chivalric behavior. For instance, at the end of the "Merlin" section of book one, Arthur returns to "Carlion" having attained the sword Excalibur and its magic scabbard, and Malory describes Arthur's positive reinforcement of the court's social identity: "So [Arthur and Merlin] com unto Carlion, whereof hys knyghtes were passynge glad. And when they herde of hys adventures, they mervayled that he wolde jouppardé his person so alone. But all men of worship seyde hit was myrry to be under such a chyfftayne that wolde putte hys person in adventure as other poure knyghtis ded" (36/22-25). This example demonstrates that Arthur's role as king is not just to dispense justice and govern efficiently. Certainly those are important aspects of ruling well, and Malory bolsters that when he observes at Arthur's coronation speech, "and ther was he sworne unto his lordes and the comyns for to be a true kyng, to stand with true justyce fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf" (10/30-31). But Malory seems most interested here, and throughout Arthur's adventures, in Arthur's capacity to

lead by setting examples.[20] In fact, it is Arthur's role as a model for chivalric behavior that orients the narrative. Rarely do we see Arthur governing according to models that lie outside of the frame of chivalry, and when he does it is always a mistake. In setting the example for others, Arthur provides the grounds for the social context of a specific group's memory. In recalling Arthur's deeds, the individual learns the normative practices that bind together a community with shared ideals and aspirations. Halbwachs has observed that, "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections,"[21] and I would add that this is precisely what Malory wants to reinforce for his audience. To bolster the ideological unity of the chivalric class, Malory is turning to Arthur to establish those socializing frames of reference that the individual can recall in order to identify what he is as a member of society. This process is based on "function," and the examples of one's predecessors help the individual remember what distinguishing characteristics define his role in the community.[22]

There are two strangely interwoven threads concerning remembrance running throughout the "Tale of Arthur" that require some exploration in order to comprehend how the narrative works to stabilize Malory's overall project within the *Morte*. The first is the optimism inherent in Malory's turning to the past in a move designed to provide the present with a restorative assurance; the second, a more troubling view of the repressive determination of the present by the past. Throughout the Middle Ages there existed a strong rhetorical tradition that perceived in narratives of the past necessary exempla for the present; and this tradition defined the conceptual uses of history.[23] Implicit in this notion of history is the idea that the subject has a duty to respond to its heritage, but with the expectation that the subject has some sense of *agency*. The past has an inherent moral valence with which or against which we are expected to align ourselves, as I have noted in the passage on Arthur's role as a model for collective remembrance.

This means that the validity of one's existence rests with the proper reflection on the lessons garnered from the past. And the means by which one was expected to reflect on the past was primarily through meditation (*meditatio*, that is memorization and recollection) on texts. Mary Carruthers has shown how for the medieval mind, at least the medieval mind that was trained to read and write, the function of memory was an integral aspect of the development of one's ethical character.[24] The purpose of the encounter one experienced with a text, and in particular a text that resonated with the authority of one's predecessors, was "to use" that material "as a source of communally experienced wisdom for one's own life."[25] The goal, in other words, of immersing oneself in a text was to fill oneself with the voices of the past. Through recollection those voices would become part of the reader. To clarify this idea, and show the importance medieval people placed on memory's internalization of inherited wisdom, Carruthers offers an example from Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe morali* which I would like to briefly examine, because I believe that the conclusions Hugh establishes share in what Malory sees as the fundamental act of remembrance constituting the *Morte Darthur*.

Building on a long and profound rhetorical tradition starting with Aristotle and leaning heavily on Cicero's work, Hugh's argument is the construction of what he calls the "Ark of Wisdom," which in essence consists of the virtue of prudence. There are three levels to this Ark, corresponding to aspects of "moral judgment."[26] The importance of the first level, that of meditation (or the process of committing to memory), stresses the liberation ("libenter") of thought in order to contemplate "all things pertaining to moral life or to the exercise of the mind."[27] The next step follows the imperative to put that knowledge to use: learning to admire the virtues that exist in others leads me to "conform" my behavior in accordance with those others, which prepares me for the completion of my state of being as an ethical construct.[28]

When my subjectivity has internalized my external behavior I am at the final stage, "where knowledge and virtue become essential parts of me."[29] Hugh is concerned primarily with how to understand Scripture, but the motivation for his concern stems from a common desire to make sense of a world that often is distressing in its inexplicability; and this desire is a trope appearing again and again in the literature of the middle ages. Much like, for example, Petrarch's imaginative reconstructions of the past in his dialogues with Augustine, which were intended to develop prudence as "a remedy for distress,"[30] Malory's iteration of the Arthurian narrative can be read as a mind conversing with its heritage in order to build its Ark of Wisdom – not simply for solace in a distressing time. His is a subjectivity seeking in collective remembrance the virtues which will make possible a reliable world. We will see how the ethical trajectory pursued by the "Tale of King Arthur" follows the injunction to develop and internalize that project defining the Ark of Wisdom – the virtue of prudence. The emphasis, then, on this process of active integration on the part of the reader is built into the approach to the past that seeks to draw moral conclusions validating one's lived existence in the present through the agency of deliberate reflection.

The emphasis on deliberation can be traced back to Aristotle's division of prudence from temperance at the end of the first book of his *Ethics*. In describing the division of the "rational soul" he notes, "Now virtue also is differentiated in correspondence with this division of the soul. Some forms of virtue are called intellectual virtues, others moral virtues"; under "intellectual" Aristotle places prudence, and under moral he designates temperance.[31] It is difficult to determine the limits of Aristotle's influence on critical thought in the Middle Ages.[32] But certainly his impact on Latin rhetoricians was significant, and as a result if you had any

educational training in rhetoric you would have encountered Aristotle's ideas mediated by disciples like Cicero, who describes prudence as

> the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs. [33]

What should be immediately clear in this definition is that Cicero imagines the virtue of prudence as a three-part activity of mind that necessarily encompasses the condition of time; in fact, it appears to be the fundamental capacity to distinguish between successive phenomena, designate connections between them, and draw moral conclusions from them. "Prudence," as Carruthers explains, "comprehends not only all human knowledge but also temporality . . . its parts are temporally related, memory being of what is past; intelligence of what is; foresight of what is to come."[34] Picking up from Cicero, medieval thinkers like Hugh of St. Victor and his disciple Thomas Aquinas transform prudence from Aristotle's division of intellectual and moral virtues into a combination of both. It is the rational soul united in its work of determining moral outcomes – and it does so by meditating on time: evaluating what has happened, comparing that to the present, and imagining the future. This is, in fact, what gives prudence its essentially optimistic authority, because it deals in possibilities.

This leads us to the second thread, which is a less-than-optimistic interpretation of the past as a weight or a burden that determines for the individual whatever course of action he or she can take, a view familiar to anyone who has read Marx: while human beings do generate their own history, "they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on

the brain of the living."[35] Marx's point would not be lost on Malory – the *Morte Darthur* is a reflection on the past as a presence that must be "encountered"; but the issue for the *Morte* rests on whether or not tradition should be viewed with this negative lack of volition. Marx's summation of the past as a "nightmare" is not a necessity for Malory. The problem, so the *Morte* would suggest, is whether one is necessarily helpless before the "imperatives" the past places on individual action, or whether the subject has the capacity to identify when those injunctions can be ameliorated.[36] Malory's essential insight into the notion of the burden of the past has to do with the nature of the prompt's source and the way in which the individual chooses to respond to it. While it is correct to say that the *Morte* is compelled to its acts of remembrance by the weight of tradition, I would argue that for Malory the tradition of chivalry is intended to be liberating. In fact, the message book one expresses seems to be that chivalry offers a way to free society from a past, or the burdens of a past, that the community cannot sustain. And we will see, particularly in Balin's and in Gawain's inability to escape the compulsion of vengeance, how allowing the demands of the dead to overrule the obligation to be responsible for one's own actions can have disastrous consequences.

This quality of responsibility is vital to the *Morte*'s overarching theme, and one of the issues at stake in the text is whether or not individuals have the agency necessary to *be* responsible. Critics have often pointed to the events of the first book, especially Merlin's prophetic announcements, as signs of an inexplicable fate at work leading up to the final, inescapable tragedy.[37] The danger, however, in reading the narrative as the process of a fate that one can neither control nor explain is to risk the privilege of a subject who can make rational decisions and act according to those decisions – in other words, the individual's responsibility is problematized.[38] How can Malory reconcile prophetic announcements of future events and still

maintain the primacy of individual choice? Merlin's prophecies and Malory's own interjections of future events form a particularly difficult aporia between a perception of what Paul Ricoeur calls discordant time, in which the individual has no grounds for action, and concordant time, which allows for the decision-making process necessary to ground the virtue of prudence.[39] This aporia must be examined in order to ascertain just how Malory safeguards the conditions required for reflection – and the individual choices that have the potential to doom even the best judgment.[40]

In order to address the way the *Morte Darthur* harnesses the self-reflective capacity of decision-making to an overarching concern for social integration, I would like to look at a question that I have heretofore only indirectly touched on: what exactly is the subject's perceived relation to time? To be clear, I am using the expression "relation to time" to ground my investigation into the medieval subject's perception of the relation of the present with the past, in so far as that subject manifests in the *Morte Darthur*. Given that the *Morte* is conceived as an act of remembrance, responding to the specific way the narrative invokes a consciousness of time helps us to see how Malory's approach to the past argues for the possibility of individual responsibility within a communal framework.[41]

The difficulties ensuing from temporality in the first book are best summed up by the differences between a destabilized sense of time and a perception of time as a consistent and rational unity. Elizabeth Archibald has called attention to what she sees as the lack of chronological succession in the "Tale of King Arthur," which she believes is emblematic of "a constant tension between random and often incomprehensible adventures . . . and prophesied events or clearly motivated struggles."[42] This repeated movement from the "random" to the determined would appear to destabilize time, breaking up continuity and enforcing a

fragmentation of discrete events. It is common among critics to see in the shadowy interventions and prophetic announcements that fill the pages of the first tale the ineluctable workings of a master narrative guiding the development of the Arthurian story. In the history of Malorian criticism we repeatedly encounter such expressions as "inexorable destiny,"[43] "relentless prophecy,"[44] "an unalterable destiny beyond its control,"[45] "destiny ordained by God,"[46] "the *urgency* of the text" and "some hidden logic"[47] – the list could go on. But the point of all this is that there is demonstrably a long-standing interpretation of the text's foreshadowings, prophecies, and otherworldly orchestrations as evidence of an ambiguous force organizing and controlling the flow of events. At the very least it would suggest what Jill Mann refers to as "distance" – an inability to comprehend the "rationale" of events or to distinguish the impulses and reasons for the actions that take place.[48] At the same time, the textual phenomena that are seen as lacking in explanation have also been described as indeterminate, and riddled with chance and "meaningless juxtaposition."[49] The impression these perceptions generate seems to be one affirming the fruitlessness of volition for the Round Table knights.

Additionally, such a bewildering array of indeterminacy would seem to refuse the security of a reassuring history in this text. For example, when Uther explains to Ulfias how he is "'seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne'" (4/3-4), Ulfias counsels that he will go forth to seek out Merlin "'and he shall do yow remedy'" (4/5-6). We are told, then, how Ulfias "departed and by adventure he mette Merlyn" (4/7). Riddy has pointed out the odd use of the expression "by adventure" here, as it implies that Malory is inserting "randomness" into a narrative structure that should, in fact, rely on a strict "necessity";[50] in other words, Merlin's intervention in the ensuing events has already been decided. While the "by adventure" implies "by contingency," Ulfias does not just stumble over Merlin haphazardly. Not only does

Malory's intended audience, already familiar with the story, know that Merlin is waiting in the wings, so to speak; they would also be aware that Uther's desire for Igrayne is a set piece through which the glories of Arthur's future kingdom will, by Merlin's design, be initiated.[51] In suggesting that Ulfias as though by accident encounters Merlin, Malory appears to be challenging the certainty that the master Arthurian narrative is supposed to provide. And this destabilized narrative evokes a profound sense of disquiet. "Time," as one critic notes, "jars"; which is to say, "events do not always mesh and episodes are not necessarily part of a fluent continuity."[52]

Thomas Wright, on the other hand, has argued that Malory's "eagerness to identify characters and to connect cause with effect where his source rambles in obscurity"[53] provides a sense of cohesiveness for time, thus stabilizing its effects: "as a result his narrative unfolds in phases of action that are seen in relation to each other . . . The events of a given story may be conditioned by those in an earlier episode, and the whole narrative thereby acquires through the movement of time a new dimension."[54] The point, for Wright, is that chronology plays a significant role in Malory's determination of events, with the result that a subject whose comprehension of time is shaped in the contiguous "movement" of temporal connections will find confirmation of a unified order. As a case in point, Wright draws our attention to Malory's referring to prior episodes in the narrative as "chronological links" that establish the provisions upon which an understanding of current narrative events can be held.[55] Looking at the climax of the rebellion of kings in the retreat at Bedigrayne, Wright notes how this episode sets the stage for the "recurrence of this struggle in the Balin story": "so [the kings] kept hem togydirs the space of three yere and ever alyed hem with myghty kynges and dukis . . . And all thys whyle they furnyssed and garnyssed hem of good men of armys and vitayle and of all maner of

ablemente that pretendith to warre, *to avenge hemm for the batay[l]e of Bedgrayne*" (27/27-33, italics added). Wright reminds us that Malory deliberately includes details that are not found in any of his sources and which draw together various narrative threads into consistent action, explaining to the audience how one event causes another. This unity is important for Wright's analysis of "The Tale of King Arthur" because it illustrates what he sees as the general trajectory of the entire *Morte*, which is the move from disorder to order. I believe that Wright is correct in his summation of the general trend from disorder to order (see footnote 13), but I would argue that this movement is only in effect in the first half of the *Morte*. Once we reach the sixth tale, this path will reverse itself and we will move steadily towards disintegration. In any event, as far as the movement of the first book into the second is concerned the structure of the narrative does indeed encourage a perception of the expansion of unity and order. This is of critical significance for my argument because the subject who perceives his or her relationship to time as a coherent whole will thereby perceive the relationship between the present and the past, which informs the subject's place in the world, as a *continuity*. Out of this continuity rises the possibility for conceiving a shared world.

Between these opposing poles of time in the *Morte*, a discordant time and a concordant time, moves the subject who wants to construct a world of communal time. These concepts are, roughly speaking, analogous to what Ricoeur argues for in the division between Augustinian time and Aristotelian "emplotment." While I do not think it necessary to fully articulate here either Augustine's or Aristotle's conceptualizations of time, both contribute distinct ideas regarding a consciousness of time that can help us frame how Malory's concern with individual responsibility is impacted by the temporal conditions of human existence. The central question that needs to be addressed here is how do the temporal conditions of human experience make

action and self-determination even possible? The questions needs to be asked because book one is in large measure interested in carving out a space, amid the tangle of foreshadowings, prophecies, and intimations of divine providence, for the subject to claim agency.[56] For example, in the section, "The War with the Five Kings," we have one of the most telling scenes regarding Malory's desire to stake a claim for the primacy of the subject's capacity to determine its own history:

"'A,' sayde the kyng, ' syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure, purvey for hit, and putt hit away by youre crauftes, that mysseadventure.'"

"'Nay,' seyde Merlion, 'hit woll not be'" (76/21-23).

This brief scene contains the two essential issues that, comprehended within the dialectic of discordant and concordant time, complicate the desire for a world in which the subject would be reassured of the potential to make its own history. On the one hand, Arthur expresses the conviction that the subject has the power to determine the course of events. Most significantly, he emphasizes that power over one's *own* destiny. Merlin, on the other hand, expresses the belief that he is the victim of inescapable forces that will determine his fate for him. What is especially telling about this dichotomy is that both views are constitutive of self identity – but whereas Arthur's self-determination affirms the priority of the *subject* as that which determines the forces of the world, Merlin's submissiveness reflects not only the control of dominant structures on one's life, but the very constitution of the individual as an *object* of forces.

Thus what is at stake as the *Morte* struggles to navigate between these two views on the efficacy of action in the world is the hope that individual agency can be preserved even amidst determining forces – be they material or metaphysical – that would seem to dominate our lives. Malory leaves no doubt where we are to stand in regard to this opposition as he stresses the value

of Arthur's role over that of Merlin's. Merlin himself emphatically declares where our sympathies should lie when, after foretelling Arthur's death, he observes that in spite of errors Arthur will achieve great things and will be justly honored for them: "'hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be punysshed for your fowle dedis. But I ought ever to be hevy,' seyde Merlion, 'for I shall dye a shamefull dethe, to be putte in the erthe quycke; and ye shall dey a worshipfull dethe'" (29/41-44). And this discourse on where individual action falls in the question of honor and shame is particularly important to Malory's efforts because it sets the criteria for the relevancy of his faith in chivalry and its core values as a means of restoring a faltering society.

What determines the boundaries for this contest between self-determination and submission is the legacy of a consciousness of time, an Augustinian discordance and an Aristotelian concordance. The core of Augustine's presentation of time, in Ricoeur's analysis, is that it is paradoxical in nature – in brief, it fluctuates between aspirations for the eternal and sublime, and the recognition of change and the transitory.[57] These horizons, the eternal and the transitory, form a spectrum for Augustine's investigation into temporal experience, and they correspond to our investigation into the *Morte*'s juxtaposition of accident with determined or teleological event[58] through the dialectic of contingency and divine providence. The disquiet that is produced from this paradox, however, is what primarily concerns me here because, as Ricoeur has observed, the aporia that emerges from this enigma of time troubles not just our understanding of temporal order but our sense of self as well. Augustine himself makes this quite clear in his *Confessions* when he struggles to articulate the difficulties he is having in understanding the recollection of forgetting:

> O Lord, I am working hard in this field, and the field of my labours is my own self. I have become a problem to myself, like land which a farmer works only

with difficulty and at the cost of much sweat. For I am not now investigating the tracts of the heavens, or measuring the distance of the stars, or trying to discover how the earth hangs in space. I am investigating myself, my memory, my mind.[59]

The point here is that thinking about the paradoxes of time does not simply involve an experience of the world; a consciousness of time demands an understanding of subjectivity itself. If that understanding of self is thus rendered enigmatic, then it is no surprise to see the difficulty Malory would have found himself in when trying to determine how to handle the sheer strangeness of the prophecies and dreams that fill the first book. In the disconnected episodes making up his sources in the *Suite du Merlin*, Malory would have found little to support his conviction in the shared heritage of a collective chivalric identity. Instead, he would have faced the challenge of a series of discordant events (what Wright, as we've seen, referred to as the "obscurity" of Malory's sources) that would only exacerbate the anxiety of a subject who was seeking to escape the isolation of fractured time. If his goal was to move from the disorder and fragmentation characteristic of a world lacking in collective identity towards the order and unity binding a shared world in a communal time, how would he effect this transition? Malory finds his solution in the concordant time of narrative.

Again, I cannot do full justice to Ricoeur's analysis of the differences between the Augustinian and Aristotelian perspectives; but we can isolate a key effect of Aristotle's understanding of narrative that explains how the *Morte Darthur* moves from the disjointed, episodic events informing the bulk of the extant Arthurian material, towards a unified conceptualization of history as a shared heritage. The effect is the universalizing function of concordance that results from the determined effort to impose a logic on a series of events that is in fact not chronological but rather based on causal connections.[60] Chronology explicitly relies on dating. Those critics, like Archibald, who have noted that there is little in the way of

chronological succession are indeed correct – with the exception of holiday feasts and vague references to the passing of days, there are no clear time constraints given in the *Morte*, much less any calendar dates ascribable to "our" time. The *Morte* is not a chronicle. As we have seen already in Wright's analysis, what it does have that distinctly separates it from its sources is the determined application of *causality*. There are far too many instances in the text for my analysis to be exhaustive, but time and again Malory interrupts the flow of events to establish the connections between actions. He provides causation when he reminds his audience that some event in the future will be the result of the action at that point in the story – for instance, the fact that Gawain will one day kill Pellinore for the death of his father Lot.[61] Malory supplies explanations when he informs us of a character's intentions – Lot will forever hold against Arthur because Arthur committed adultery with his wife.[62] And the narrative is perpetually anticipating events – thus we learn that Culombe's tomb will one day be the site of a battle between the two best knights in the world.[63]

While critics have noted that Malory seems just as willing to omit explanations that exist in his source as he is willing to supply causal connections, I do not believe that this calls for a reading in which Malory is effectively undercutting the power of reason.[64] Vinaver has asserted that Malory's primary goal in removing many of the elucidations and additions from his source material was the "unfortunate" result of his attempt to streamline the profuse elaborations of French narrative style into a more condensed and direct style, with fewer digressions and interlaced plots.[65] Though we might accuse Vinaver of damning with faint praise, his perception of Malory's narrative choices is accurate. Rather than seeing Malory's omissions as deliberate critiques of our desire for explanations, a more probable answer is that in streamlining the narrative he recognized those rationales that most suited his purposes and left out the ones that

did not seem to add anything to his interests at that moment. In other words, he is primarily motivated by the demands of the plot.[66] If he feels that the plot necessitates an explanation then he provides it; if not, then no explicit clarification is called for. Ultimately, what impels this decision is in large part due to the drive for a universal narrative. It does not matter why a brachet or a hart suddenly runs into a hall; what does matter, however, is how one reacts to it. The contingent circumstances of the sudden, mysterious appearance are nothing more than an origin point for Malory's real concern, which is to explore the causes and effects of his knights' attempts to come to grips with the event. It is in the action of the quest itself that we find the unfolding of those causal connections which orient the narrative towards collective wisdom.[67]

In deliberately effacing the episodic narrative with a causal narrative, held together by an internal logic of action, Malory seeks to establish a universal story to which individuals can relate. This universal story (at least, universal as far as the chivalric class is concerned) is the foundation Malory must establish in order to ground his developing concept of the core values upon which chivalry will depend for its communal aspirations. If the Arthurian heritage can be called a heritage at all for Malory, it is so because he sees in it a universal quality that makes it accessible to his social group through remembrance of their shared origins and communal interests. Benjamin has noted that the point of "every real story" is that it provides "counsel" for its audience: "It contains, openly or covertly, something useful"; as such it relies on the "communicability of experience."[68] Without a shared sense of social practices, without the frameworks for understanding that provide any society with the commonality inherent in communal experience, there would be no perception of the continuity of life and wisdom. A belief in wisdom is conceived, in other words, in the belief that what has happened to me can happen to you – and vice versa. Clearly this is directly related to the desire for exemplarity

which we find throughout the text. The stories in which they are tested make the Round Table knights models for normative behavior.[69]

What I am stressing here is that the view of the individual Malory is proposing is that of a subject who is deliberately fashioning a shared world by means of the universal narratives that impart to his community a collective wisdom.[70] This collective wisdom is a public discourse where the ethical and the political unite the individual with the social. Much as Aristotle condemns the contingency of the episodic narrative, Malory affirms the necessity of the causally connected narrative as a unified, self-contained field of reference. The contours of this field are shaped by the three qualities of concordant time that generate a well-organized plot: completeness, wholeness, and an appropriate magnitude.[71] In brief, completeness is found in the self-contained quality of a narrative, since the necessities generating the story are not accidental or dependent on circumstances outside the text; wholeness refers to the traditional beginning-middle-end structure we associate with a story, in which only the beginning is free from necessity; and an appropriate magnitude would be the limiting factors such as time constraints that would make the action seem possible. These three functions of narrative shape the way authentic memory possesses its past, because together they are the continuity that remembrance seeks in the collective experience of the past. The particular strength of communal remembrance, in fact, lies within the organization of those stories that assure the community of its unity and wholeness. That is to say, the continuity of collective memory is found through the causal connections of social narratives.

An argument for causality is, therefore, an argument for unity and wholeness. In the movement from discordant to concordant time, Malory attempts to invoke the continuity of causal necessity in order to suppress the anxiety over his unstable world. But what is it that

grants wholeness to the sphere of self-contained or collective understanding which is supposed to be the Arthurian heritage? The answer to this lies in the fact that Malory begins his "history" of Arthur by rejecting chronological succession, and adopting the causal necessity of a narrative plot. Unlike so many other "histories" of Arthur, in beginning his historical narrative Malory simply ignores the long genealogy of British kings and the founding of England which preoccupy many of those Arthurian narratives claiming an investment in the past.[72] Instead, Malory starts his history with the conception of Arthur:

> Hit befell in the dayes of Yther Pendragon, when he ws kynge of all Englond and so regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornewaill that held warre ageynst hym long tyme, and the duke was called the duke of Tyntagil. And so by meanes kynge Uther send for this duk, charging hym to brynge his wyf with hym, for she ws called a fair lady and a passynge wyse, and her name was called Igrayne. (3/1-7)

The fact that Malory leaves out the genealogy behind the founding of Britain and the placement of Arthur in an illustrious lineage, is striking. In determining how he will initiate the history of the Round Table, Malory has two options – he could start with the customary invocation of a long past in which the events of Arthur's reign form yet another link in the historical identity of the nation; or, as Malory apparently chose, he could begin *in media res*, as it were, avoiding the episodic gestures of a history formed in temporal succession and instead focusing on the moment of creation for a new order. In doing so, the underlying conditions for the shared Arthurian heritage that Malory wants to remember are called forth in the practical application of wisdom.

   The emerging conditions of a shared heritage then occupy Malory's attention with the nature of origins, particularly in book one; and this is so because memory materializes a sacred past, in the story of a foundation, as the ground for a practical present. The goal in the *Morte* is not simply to venerate the past, with the assumption that by doing so Malory's readers will venerate themselves.[73] Doubtless this relationship with the past is at work in the *Morte* as a

structure of class consciousness – no class worked harder in the Middle Ages to preserve the past than the aristocracy. More importantly though, Malory's decision to start with Arthur's conception demonstrates, according to the Aristotelian logic behind concordant time, that for Malory Arthurian "history" is a plot made whole with beginning, middle, and end – and that the point of the plot is to make visible not just history but the origins of the values uniting the members of the chivalric class in their shared ideology.

Therefore, the choice as to how to begin is not neutral as either preference has ramifications for both the narrative structure of the text, and the political function of the past in the text's objectives as well. Malory's decision to start with the conceiving of Arthur indicates his lack of interest in the greater story of the English nation state. In contradistinction to the nationalist ambitions expressed by the "noble and dyvers gentylmen of thys royame of Englond" cited by Caxton, I would argue that Malory's choice to start the *Morte* by deliberately avoiding Arthur's genealogical inheritance is a calculated move to distance Arthur from the master narrative of England as a whole, and instead focus on Arthur's origin in terms of the memory of an aristocratic ideology.[74] "Memory," Nora tells us, "is blind to all but the group it binds,"[75] and this is significant because it affirms that the collective remembrance in which Malory is engaged has as its central organizing feature the origins of a specific group – the chivalric class. Malory is not primarily interested in what Arthur means for England; but he is interested in what Arthur means for his social group. This is not to say that Arthur is wholly freed from the political affiliations of English cultural identity; but it is clear that Malory wants to harness Arthur for another purpose and the Arthurian historical narrative that is driven by the need for English identity is not all together necessary for Malory's interests.[76] In any event, Malory's choice to restrict the narrative's field of operations to the specifically Arthurian, not just English, past by

beginning with Arthur's conception demonstrates a subject whose consciousness of the temporality of history is a duration composed of those events that most suit its drive to integrate the past with the present. Memory is under no compulsion to be faithful to the past; it uses the past to assure its own beliefs.

This imperious power of memory to selectively reorder the past according to those perceptions most amenable to the subject's position in the present is a key feature of the medieval approach to history. As Jacques Le Goff has pointed out, "The man of the Middle Ages lives in a constant anachronism, ignoring local color, and attributing to ancient people medieval costumes, feelings, and modes of behavior."[77] The point, of course, is that the past is always under interpretation, it is always being re-imagined by the present, but in such a way as to assure for the present confirmation of its identity in that past. To be sure, this passage through the memorial is not uncontested, as the distinctions between the two forms of addressing the past outlined by Riddy – the skeptical and the credulous – suggest. Additionally, rapid advances in the ability to precisely calculate time and dates, especially later in the Middle Ages, saw an increasing correspondence in attitudes towards what constituted time and the past.[78] This evolving conceptualization of time emphasized specificity and the fragmenting of time into highly discreet movements or units – what we would think of as historical consciousness, in which fidelity to an objective time demands that events be ever more particularized and identified as individual moments. Indeed, I would argue that the clash between these two modes of consciousness is particularly pronounced in fifteenth-century England, fueled by the perception of social instability and reflected in the anxieties expressed by those authors in the period that concerned themselves with history and politics.[79] In spite of this opposition, however, memorial consciousness remained the more common method of accessing the past during the

Middle Ages, in particular because of its integral relationship with rhetoric and ethics, which together point memory in the direction of a specifically communal effectiveness.[80]

Given that the medieval self's relationship with the past is principally memorial, and that the functionality of that memory is ethically conceived, we can identify a fundamental quality of the subjectivity whose desires frame the *Morte Darthur* – the self can only be described as a rhetorical and communal presence. According to Carruthers, what best describes a "self" in the Middle Ages is less like the modern notion of an "autonomous" individual, and more akin to a "subject-who-remembers."[81] In this case, a subject is defined as an activity. Defining *what* that subject remembers and *how* the subject remembers, therefore, are critical aspects of the activity through which the subject comes into existence. Malory's goal in remembering his Arthurian heritage has the express purpose of constructing an ethical identity, both for the narrative he is writing, and for the audience who will share in that collective remembrance. "The Tale of King Arthur" is structured in part around the development of a subject who can act with an ethical consciousness – the principal virtue of which is *prudence*. In developing and practicing the virtue of prudence, Arthur will found *his* kingdom on an ethical substratum, set apart from his forebears who are simply conquerors. This is meant to be an origin in every sense available to ritual and mythical time, for it will set the stable conditions on which to ground an ideological coherence. In founding the Round Table fellowship, Arthur will provide the moral code that will serve as the communal focus for the chivalric class which Malory idealizes. And this collective class identity will be possible because its devotion to remembrance unites its members in a subjectivity that fills the past, present, and future. Indeed, prudence is the virtue of memory *par excellence* and, as Cicero and Hugh make clear, it sets the conditions for moral judgments. In the three-fold process of prudent reflection concordant time will provide the continuity needed to

sustain the community when collective identity is challenged by the potentially disruptive dangers of excess.[82] Here, unlike say the virtue of temperance which merely tells us how to be good (i.e. you must grant mercy), prudence demands that we associate phenomena according to collective wisdom in order to determine a course of action. Malory demonstrates the properly social aspect of prudence in the battle with the rebel kings.

One of the cardinal difficulties Arthur must face in the battle at the forest of Bedgrayne is the decision on how to proceed after his French allies admonish him to respect his foes:

> 'A, sir Arthure,' seyde kynge Ban and kynge Bors, 'blame hem nat, for they do as good men ought to do. For by my fayth,' seyde kynge Ban, "they ar the beste fyghtynge men and knyghtes of moste prouesse that ever y saw other herde off speke. And tho eleven kyngis ar men of grete worship; and if they were longyng to you, there were no kynge under hevyn that had suche eleven kyngis nother off suche worship.'
> 'I may nat love hem,' seyde kynge Arthure, 'for they wolde destroy me.'
> 'That know we well,' seyde kyng Ban and kynge Bors, for they are your mortall enemyes, and that hathe bene preved beforehonde. And thys day they have done theire parte, and that ys grete pité of their wylfulnes.' (23/19-31)

We would not be remiss in noting the potential call for temperance on Arthur's part toward the rebel kings. Recognizing the need for self-restraint is a practical issue that becomes ethical when one is forced to confront the very human demand for mercy and understanding. But self-restraint is not necessarily limited to temperance. In fact, it is only possible as the result of a rational consideration of appropriate behavior. This is attested to by the stipulations king Ban and king Bors make regarding the rebel kings' behavior: "for they do as good men ought to do."

Ban and Bors are not, however, asking Arthur to show leniency – they are *reminding* Arthur that the rebels ultimately serve the same principles that Arthur himself follows. Even at this early stage of Arthur's career, prior to the formal establishment of the Round Table, anterior to the inception of the Round Table code, before even the completion of the fellowship, there exists for the knightly class an inherent ideological structure distinguishing honor from shame.

Ban and Bors are, admittedly, equating "good" with "honorable"; but for Malory that is precisely the point. To be prudent here, according to Cicero's directive, requires that Arthur consider the qualities of right and wrong, that is honor and dishonor; compare those qualities to his own actions, thus inserting himself into a broader communal perspective; and recognize that his foes are not "other," but rather his own reflection. The ethical content of prudence, therefore, is the channeling of the individual's will into a collective understanding. These men are bound together in their mutual commitments to what can only be described as a higher calling, regardless of their personal differences. And it is in the recognition of this shared heritage that Malory wants to believe salvation attainable, for it makes fellowship possible based on the capacity for respect.

Unfortunately, a key difficulty that Malory must address regarding the honor on which mutual respect can be grounded is that the sole means for validating what constitutes chivalric honor rests on combat and violence. As though in response to the increased awareness of the prowess demonstrated by the rebels, the battle with the eleven kings gains in intensity; Arthur's warriors press the eleven kings with ever greater forcefulness, and the rebels respond with such ferocity that "kynge Ban and Bors had grete mervayle consyderyng the grete slaughter that there was" (24/29-30). In fact, the "slaughter" was so violent that Malory describes how Arthur's and his allies' "horses went in blood up to the fittlockys" (24/27-28). At last, Merlin appears "on a grete blacke horse" (24/32) and points out that Arthur's over-zealous prosecution of the battle at Bedgrayne will lead him to ruin if he doesn't restrain himself. More significantly, however, Merlin seems to be stressing the sheer scale of the human tragedy: "'Thou hast never done. Hast thou nat done inow? Of three score thousande thys day hast thou leffte on lyve but fyftene

thousand! Therefore hit ys tyme to sey "Who!" for God ys wroth with the for thou woll never have done'" (24/33-36).

Andrew Lynch has argued that Malory is engaging chivalric ideology here in such a way as to safeguard it against the intensely disturbing excess of violence which would seem to threaten the code of chivalry with serious moral doubts about killing. [83] Lynch's point is that Malory's "intense ideological labor" unsuccessfully masks his unwillingness to face the moral accusations lingering over the magnitude of death and destruction,[84] especially in the context of the war with rebel kings. Indeed, the level of violence enacted during Arthur's unification of the realm is remarkably detailed and occasionally quite shocking. For instance, in one scene during the battle Malory appears to focus on unnecessarily gruesome particulars of the combat:

> Whan Brastias behelde Lucas the Butler that lay lyke a dede man undir the horse feete – . . . and there were alwayes fourtene knyghtes upon sir Lucas – than sir Brastias smote one of them on the helme, that hit wente unto his tethe; and he rode unto another and smote hym, that hys arme flowe into the felde; than he wente to the thirde and smote hym on the shulder, that sholdir and arme flow unto the felde. (20/1-7)

There is, in the straightforward depictions of the atrocities that haunt the battlefield, an intimation of moral ambivalence, as though to say that prowess somehow supersedes the claims for understanding imposed by human suffering in the narrative. Thus, Lynch argues that Malory's handling of excessive violence is appropriated by chivalric ideology as an "inevitable" and therefore acceptable consequence of the honorable pursuit of chivalry.[85] If we agree with this, then we are faced with the dilemma that the narrative disingenuously seeks to avoid a question of moral "culpability" that could potentially challenge the "privileged" status of chivalric warfare in the *Morte*.[86]

My contention, however, is that Malory is not trying to avoid the challenges excessive violence poses for chivalry. In fact, I believe that he deliberately raises the specter of

particularly gruesome results of combat in order to emphasize that one cannot escape having to face the traumatic experience of war. The images and experiences that are internalized during service in war can have an unsettling effect on the individual's sense of identity – particularly because the continuity that describes our sense of self is disturbed or fractured by the radical encounter with the terror and *strangeness* of death. We know that Malory was no stranger to combat: having served in the retinue of the Earl of Warwick he likely would have supported the forces of Edward IV at Northumberland in 1462, and would have fought at the sieges of Bamborough and Alnwick.[87] There is, in addition, some evidence to suggest that he may have served with Warwick at the siege of Calais in 1436.[88] Malory's military experience means that he had some familiarity with the inevitable atrocities of war; the images of severed heads and limbs we imagine in his text would have been before his eyes in an enduring memory. In recalling that memory of war, Malory is drawing on images of bodies whose suffering could not be legitimately explained away, and we can hear that anxiety in Merlin's cry "'Hast thou nat done inow?'"

Malory does not have to draw our attention to excessive violence in order to subvert the ideological obstacles presented by such excess; he could just as readily gloss over it or not even dwell on it. There are countless instances of combat in the *Morte* that do not attain the scale of death and dismemberment that we see in the battle of Bedgrayne. The question that should naturally occur is why Malory would elect to deploy such details in one area and not in another. If the ethical difficulties that we sometimes encounter in the *Morte*'s heavy-handed scenes of violence refuse to be ignored, it may be that such impasses are intended to serve as markers for contemplation. I do not believe that Malory wanted, in every case, to avoid that terror and strangeness which death, especially excessive death, brings into the world. The *Morte Darthur*

is, after all, an *act* of remembrance. For Malory, to have turned away from the drama of human suffering would have constituted a failure to recognize the sacrifices that were made in order to create the conditions for the Arthurian fellowship. The inheritance handed down by Arthur and his fellowship comes with, so Malory would seem to say, an enormous demand – the injunction to remember. And to ignore that lesson is to fail in a core aspect of remembrance as an activity equal to the demand for respect. In one particularly poignant scene, Ban and Bors are described as fighting so fiercely that "[their] strokis redounded agayne fro the woode and the water. Wherefore kynge Lotte wepte for pité and dole that he saw so many good knyghtes take their ende" (22/10-12). Doubtless this passage is intended to evoke pathos in its audience; more specifically its appeal is to pity and fear, the key emotions of tragedy. In the sweep of Arthur's conquest we are not allowed to forget the tragic consequences that attend the glories of his triumph. The rebels are in no way vilified by Malory, but neither are we asked to retreat from embracing Arthur's victory; as a result the reader is enveloped in what Malory intimates as the profound mystery at the heart of the chivalric ideal.

Regardless of chivalry's real-world content, in its imaginings of itself there is a fundamental belief in the value of service, of duty, and of respect. These attributes, as self-serving as they may be for ideology itself, are noticeably oriented towards the concept of a subject putting others before his or her own needs, and all are united in a promise to remember – principally to remember what is owed. Those locations in the *Morte* where we find excess, be it an excess of violence or even an excess of emotion, are sites on which are grafted special demands whose disturbance of the narrative derives from the compulsion, for good or ill, not to forget. And the violence left to hang over the events of the war with the rebel kings is fully intended to challenge the reader; because it is in the recognition of the gravity of the demands

imposed by chivalric ideology on those who are committed to its ethos that the means for reaffirming their belief in the superiority of their ideals provides some measure of assurance against a world that too often defies comprehension. In the promise to remember lies the desire for a stable world. The dead are not silent witnesses to Arthur's greatness; the images of their suffering, and the suffering of those who care about them, speak with the authority of a greater collective need that can only be addressed through the demand to remember. Excess marks the impossibility of closure; as such it resists forgetting.

It should be clear, by now, from my analysis of violent excess that the *Morte Darthur* does not seek, for the sake of ideological closure, to overwrite the difficulties we face in the expression "oute of mesure." And this recognition brings us to a question: what are we to make of what appears to be, at first glance, a disjunction between the call to remember and memory's selective forgetting? Prudence demands, as both Cicero and Hugh of St. Victor made clear, that one recollect prior experience in order to make wise decisions. Excess serves as a reminder not to forget and as an aid in keeping that which is to be remembered firmly in mind. And yet memory, as Nora points out, is open to the possibility of forgetting.[89] Here we arrive at a critical juncture; for prudence would seem to be at odds with excess. How, therefore, does prudence work in relation to excess within authentic memory's frame for remembering and forgetting? The answer, it seems to me, lies with the capacity to determine what obligations the recollecting subject must release, and what to hold on to. Malory is always concerned with death and killing – in general he does not try to avoid the issue. Throughout the *Morte*, knights are placed in predicaments in which they must make decisions about killing. There are, as well, frequent instances when accidents occur and knights are unable to alter those circumstances; but just as often they are called to account for what has happened.

We might, for example, consider Gawain's failure during the "Torre and Pelinore" section of book one to grant mercy to the knight he has defeated in the quest for the hart and compare that with a similar test for clemency which Torre undergoes and which he does *not* fail. During the wedding feast of Arthur and Guinevere, a "'straunge and a mervailous adventure'" (63/23-24) disrupts the festivities. Three successive events follow on one another's heels, each a call for a quest in its own right: as Merlin points out, "'thes adventures muste be brought to an ende" (63/43). Of the three adventures proposed, Arthur gives the first to his nephew Gawain who has just been made a knight; the second he gives to Torre, who also has just been knighted. Gawain's task is to return with the white hart that had been chased by a white brachet. Gawain sets forth with his brother Gaheris and, eventually stumbling over the mysterious hart, he releases his hounds to track down the beast. Unfortunately, the dogs kill the deer. Suddenly a knight appears who kills the dogs in retribution for the hart. Gawain flies into a rage and accosts the strange knight: "'Why have ye slayne my howndys? For they dyd but their kynde, and I wolde that ye had wrokyn youre angir uppon me rather than uppon a dome beste" (65/37-39). They fight and Gawain overcomes his opponent who then asks for mercy. In his fury Gawain makes the rash decision not to spare the life of Sir Blamoure, unleashing terrible consequences: "But sir Gawayne wolde no mercy have, but unlaced [the knight's] helme to have strekyn of hys hede. Ryghte so com hys lady oute of a chamber and felle over hym, and so he smote of hir hede by *myssefortune*" (66/6-8, italics added).

Even though Malory emphasizes that Gawain has committed this awful act by accident, it is the direct result of his having failed to show clemency to the knight who requested it. As a result, when Gawain finds himself beset by four knights who, apparently, saw his refusal to grant mercy, he is told "'Thou new made knyght, thou hast shamed thy knyghthode, for a knyght

withoute mercy ys dishonoured. Also thou hast slayne a fayre lady to thy grete shame unto the worldys ende, and doute the nat thou shalt have grete nede of mercy or thou departe frome us'" (66/35-38). Things are looking grim for Gawain when suddenly several ladies appear and beg for mercy for Gawain. He is forced to return to Camelot in humiliation with the dead lady's head and he must relate the sorry affair before the court. Arthur and Guinevere are displeased and summon a panel of women to judge Gawain.: "they juged hym for ever whyle he lyved to be with all ladyes and to fight for hir quarels; and ever that he sholde be curteyse, and never to refuse mercy to hym that askith mercy" (67/37-40).

According to Elizabeth Edwards, "the incident of the beheading remains a puzzle, an enigma which causes a slightly surreal atmosphere entirely typical of Malory's work."[90] While it's hard to argue with the claim that there is a "surreal atmosphere" shadowing the text, it is difficult to see what exactly is enigmatic about this episode. The entire "Torre and Pellinore" section appears to be, on the surface at least, a lesson in prudence and self-restraint as each of the participating knights is tested on his compassion and understanding; not only that, but the three episodes constituting this section – Gawain's quest for the hart, Torre's quest for the brachet, and Pellinore's quest for the lady – point toward a more profound acceptance of the demands that others can place on us. Gawain's test starts with the strange knight slaying his dogs. In the fight that follows, Gawain is justifiably enraged. The principal issue to bear in mind is that Gawain's anger is not so much due to losing his possessions, but rather that the knight has killed innocent animals. Gawain's sense of injustice is clear when he accosts the knight for having slain the dogs just for doing what comes naturally to them. As he demands, "Why have ye slayne my howndys? For they dyd but their kynde and I wolde that ye had wrokyn youre angir uppon me rather than uppon a dome beste" (65/37-39). The point is that Gawain's anger stems from a

desire for good; an injustice should always be fought, and in his mind the slaying of a "dome best" for no valid reason is an affront.[91] The problem, however, is that Gawain initiates a pattern of behavior that will dominate his actions throughout the *Morte Darthur*. In his fury he takes things too far. Regardless of whether or not he is outraged over what he perceives to be an injustice, granting mercy takes precedence since the asking and the granting of mercy create the bonds necessary for not just a community but a fellowship. In failing to recognize that key condition of authentic knighthood, Gawain *forgets* his responsibility as a knight – as Gaheris reminds him with a stunning rebuke, "Alas . . . 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" (66/9-11). Attending only to his hate, Gawain becomes obsessed with avenging a perceived wrong and he cannot hear the voice of prudence reminding him that his primary obligation is not to avenge, but to forgive. Prudence would dictate that to forget the obligation to avenge a wrong is a necessary step in restoring the integrity of the community. And we know from the analysis of historical approaches that there are two paths Gawain can follow: he can both accept what *has happened* and build a new relationship; or he can remain chained to the *accidents* of the past and simply re-enact those mistakes.[92] Choosing the latter, Gawain exemplifies that most dangerous aspect of memory which the *Morte* repeatedly struggles to overcome; in answering the call of the dead, he remains trapped by the past – and this theme will haunt the *Morte* until its very end.

Two issues of singular importance to Gawain's test emerge from the wreckage of his failure. The first point of departure surfaces with Gaheris's admonition that the shame incurred "shall never frome you." Implicit in Gaheris's accusation is the understanding that Gawain's characterization in society will be defined by his accidental killing of the lady – not, we should

add, his failure to give mercy. While that failure certainly led to the slaying, it is not what Gawain will be remembered for. Nor does it become a defining characteristic for Gawain's self perception. Gawain, as an historical figure alongside Arthur, has a long tradition of storytelling behind him as well. There is, one could say, a collective social memory of Gawain himself, and that memory is a discourse traversed by shifting perceptions of Gawain as both a cultural hero and a foil for the qualities of authentic knighthood.[93] Malory does seem aware of this, and he responds to this shifting discourse by reproducing the discordances he finds in Gawain's past to suit whatever his purposes are at the moment. At times, Gawain is the soul of courtesy; at others, he is the bane of the Arthurian fellowship. This conflicting personality will have a number of results on the narrative, especially in the "Gawain, Marhalt, Ywain" section, where his underhanded dealings with Pelleas directly offend against the obligations of knighthood to serve others. But, paradoxically, Gawain's shame will contain the kernel of his redemption, not just castigation. As we have seen, upon returning with his shame to Arthur's court, a panel of ladies summoned by Arthur and Guinevere places on Gawain the obligation that "for ever whyle he lyved to be with all ladyes and to fight for hir quarels." By including this, Malory is, on the one hand, reaffirming the memory his audience presumably already has of the Arthurian heritage and Gawain's location in it. It serves to explain how Gawain came to be the model for *courtoisie* that the middle ages expected him to be. More importantly, however, Malory is examining the way the past, even a disturbing past, has the potential for positive ramifications in the future. Because of the shame incurred in the accidental beheading, Gawain will eventually become one of the foremost defenders of women. Indeed, such will be his renown that Malory will invoke it in Arthur's dream, just before his final battle with Mordred, to save Gawain's soul.[94] The point I am stressing here is that Malory recognizes that even shame can be restorative because it places

the individual in the ethical category of *having to respond* to social memory. Gawain's "accident" is no longer an accident, but a link in a greater communal story.

The second issue, to which I have already alluded in the passage where Gaheris rebukes him, involves the difficulties Gawain faces in forgetting himself. In isolating his response to the injustice of the dogs' death, he loses sight of the very obligation that provoked his ire – the duty to respond to another's need. The capacity to respond, to answer the call, is implicit in Gaheris's point that "a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship," just as much as the desire to avenge an injustice. The stumbling block for Gawain seems to reside in his inability to gauge those distinctions of communal importance which prudence would ordinarily require him to navigate. Gawain fails to weigh the consequences of his actions, and he fails to contemplate the properly social dimensions of the competing demands for a response: that is to say, a personal and negative perception of injustice or a positive communal reinforcement. The real threat that lurks behind Gawain's failure is the narrow obsession of his rage. Even as he responds to what he believes to be an injustice, he isolates himself from the larger community. While it may be a knight's duty to punish wrong-doing, in granting mercy the knight allows his opponent the opportunity to "make amendys," as Sir Blamoure requests, which in turn creates concordance out of antagonism. Overcoming enemy knights and integrating them into the Arthurian community will become one of the major themes occupying books three, four, and five; but here, in refusing to grant mercy, Gawain's actions contribute nothing to the greater good of the social order. By comparison, Malory follows up Gawain's rather disheartening quest with the more successful adventure of Torre, who exemplifies the challenges of competing demands and the successful resolution of that conflict through prudence. This will prove to be a recurring theme, and it serves to test what appropriate behavior requires of the individual.

At first glance, Torre's adventure hardly seems like a success; in his final confrontation,
Torre too refuses to grant mercy and beheads his foe. But several significant decisions on
Torre's part channel the potential interpretation of his actions towards a more positive outcome.
And we know his actions to be valid because, upon returning to court, Torre is lauded by the
king and queen who "gaff an erledom of londis" to him, while Merlin assures them all that Torre
will "preve . . . passyng trew of hys promyse, and never shall he outerage" (71/16-18). Torre's
test starts much as Gawain's did, with a fight. Just as Gawain encounters a knight who
challenges him to combat, Torre meets two knights who will not let him pass unless he joust with
them. Gawain, in his test, kills his opponent with a tremendous blow to the head which his
brother Gaheris notes "was a myghty stroke of a yonge knyght" (65/23). Torre strikes his
opponent "on the helme a grete stroke" (68/26) as well, but Malory takes pains to point out that
Torre's strike does not kill his opponent. Torre's opponents yield themselves to his mercy and
he sends them off to Camelot. This comparison draws our attention to an important difference
between Gawain and Torre. Whereas the former lacks restraint and, as Gaheris's comment
emphasizes, demonstrates the headstrong volatility of his youth, the image Torre presents is that
of a conscientious knight who knows how to restrain himself and avoid killing his foes when
possible. It should be noted that Malory is not making an argument about Gawain's and Torre's
respective *moral* worth. Rather, the point seems to be that those knights who lack the capacity to
maintain control over their desires and reflect on the consequences of their actions will
inadvertently bring suffering to themselves and others.

This point is further emphasized by the fact that Torre, unlike Gawain, takes the time to
talk to a hermit and hear mass. While Beverly Kennedy's assertion that this difference in actions
demonstrates Gawain's and Torre's degree of piety is well-taken,[95] the significance is not simply

a concern with religious duty, but in addition an evocation of an approach to experience that accentuates the contemplative side of awareness. Differentiating himself from both Gawain, who goes before him, and his father Pellinore, whose narrative arrives after his, Torre is not single-mindedly obsessed. Gawain's obsession with avenging a wrong leads (just as Pellinore's obsession with completing his quest will lead) to drastic errors in judgment. Torre, in contrast to Gawain and his father, is meant to exemplify ideal judgment in action. In *taking time* to attend to his spiritual needs, Torre demonstrates his thoughtfulness and that perspicacity of the rational soul that strives through *respectful recognition* to achieve an ethical understanding of its own potentialities.[96] Though it is accurate to say that Malory does not show us directly the inner workings of Torre's mind, what he does provide us with is the image of the temperate, prudent *type* of knight[97] whose behavior can be emulated. In striving to be "like" Torre, the individual actualizes within himself, if we recall Hugh of St. Victor's formula, those habits which will aid him in developing the capacity for a reflective consciousness. Having accepted the simple lodging offered by the hermit, Torre and his dwarf "rested them all nyght tylle on the morne, and herde a masse devoutely and so toke their leve of the ermyte. And so sir Torre prayde the ermyte to pray for hym, and he seyde he wolde, and betoke hym to God" (69/25-29).

As paradoxical as it may sound, Torre's apparent interest in his own spiritual needs is actually the deferential quality necessary for authentic service. And by deference I do not mean submissiveness; rather, I am suggesting that Torre's actions demonstrate the active recognition of the respect or esteem due to something that occupies a hierarchical level above one's own. It illustrates a mind that, in opposition to Gawain's insular world view,[98] is open to a world outside itself. This is most evident in the statement Torre makes when he takes the brachet and tells the lady "'I shall abyde what adventure that commyth by the grace of God'" – a statement that

Malory is fond of and which is frequently misread as a positive sign of the individual putting himself under the *control* of a superior power. Mann has argued that the idea of "taking the adventure" that God sends your way is a "submissive acceptance" of randomness and contingency, in which the knight opens himself to metaphysical unity with the course of events by "accepting without understanding" the essential mystery of what I can only take to mean the world.[99] It is difficult to see how this submissive lack of self-determination is true of the text, which, in fact, seems to have a great deal invested in the necessity for understanding, precisely as it pertains to the subject's inhabitance of the world. The concept of responsibility for Malory depends on a conviction in the efficacy of individual agency guided by the memory of socially organized models for behavior. Indeed, what will save Torre from Gawain's failure is a self-awareness derived from his prudent, temperate *understanding* of the world of experience. And this prepares us for the way Torre will handle the essential crisis he faces when, trapped by equal demands, he must choose between mercy and justice.

Having retrieved the brachet, Torre is returning to Arthur's court when he is accosted by a knight who demands the return of the dog; whereupon they begin a long and bloody fight. Eventually Torre gets the better of the knight, Abelleus, and "bade hym yelde hym" (70/3). Abelleus, however, refuses to accept Torre's offer of mercy "whyle lastith the lyff and the soule in my body" (70/4-5). Torre's predicament, however, is now compounded by the arrival of a lady who begs a gift of him. Since it is a knight's obligation to help women, Torre agrees. Unfortunately, the lady asks for "the hede of thys false knyght Abelleus, for he ys the moste outerageous knyght that lyvith, and the grettist murtherer" (70/14-16). What is Torre to do? He asks the maid to let him spare Abelleus's life that he might "make amendys," which is precisely what Blamour had begged of Gawain. In other words, we see that Torre is clearly resistant to the

idea of killing his opponent, and that he recognizes the overriding social demand putting communal integrity before personal vengeance. The maiden is not swayed by Torre's request and presses him, in a passage that appears to be of Malory's own design, with evidence to indicate that Abelleus is truly an evildoer, reinforcing the obligation of a true knight to punish those who disturb social harmony and order.[100] To make matters worse, Abelleus now experiences a change of heart and begs Torre to have mercy on him. Torre now finds himself in an extremely difficult situation, and he must decide whose claim on him is the stronger.

Here is where Torre demonstrates the absolute necessity of prudence as the core value of the chivalric code. Without it, Malory argues, a coherent social order cannot be sustained. Malory's best knights never simply react; they are shown time and again evaluating what is required of them in any given situation. There are times where the decisions they make are incorrect, but in general those knights who respond rationally to the ethical dilemmas they face are consistently praised. Torre must choose between honoring his vow to the maiden or giving Abelleus the opportunity to redeem himself and make amends. However, the dilemma is not quite that simple. Torre is being asked to choose between the demands of the living and the dead – the same argument, it would appear, that constrained Gawain. The point of the passage that Malory *added* lies in the damsel's passionate plea on behalf of her dead brother. Abelleus must die, she says,

> 'for he slew myne owne brother before myne yghen that was a bettir knyght than he, and he had had grace; and I kneled halfe an owre before hym in the myre for to sauff my brothirs lyff that had done hym no damage, but fought with hym by adventure of armys, and so for all that I coude do he strake of hys hede. Wherefore I require the, as thou arte a trew knyght, to gyff me my gyffte, other ellis I shall shame the in all the courte of kynge Arthure.' (70/19-25).

We could accuse Malory of laying it on a bit thick here in a scene where the pathos seems to stack the odds against Abelleus. But the essential quandary remains the same, regardless of the

damsel's plaint. Torre occupies a space in which any action he chooses will be bound between an injunction to seek vengeance for the dead, and the obligation to allow the living a chance to put things right. Torre opts to withdraw his offer of mercy to Abelleus in what seems to be a rather dubious rationale: "'I may nat now [grant mercy] but I sholde be founde false of my promyse, for erewhyle when I wolde have tane you to mercy ye wolde none ask" (70/30-32). Torre then cuts off Abelleus's head.

The question we must ask is: how is this any different from Gawain's adventure? In spite of the maiden's emotional pleas, Torre makes his decision, according to his own admission, based on two factors: first, and this is clearly a ridiculous argument, Torre retorts that he doesn't *have* to offer mercy because Abelleus turned it down the first time. Does this mean that Gawain would have been within his rights to have slain Blamour after he refused Gawain's belated offer of mercy? The rationale Malory provides Torre is specious at best. Second, and this is much more telling, he does not want to be shamed. The damsel warned him that should he fail her request, she would humiliate him in Arthur's court. The answer to Torre's dilemma derives from Halbwach's assertion that "no memory is possible outside the frameworks used by people in society to determine and retrieve their recollections." I pointed out previously that this explained the stress placed on exemplars for medieval people as communal models for normative behavior. The framework here that defines Torre's options for solving his ethical dilemma is structured by the concept of shame. Unable to determine which claim has a privileged status, Torre makes his decision based on what *would seem* to be an ethically neutral base. But for Malory, shame (and its opposite, worship) is the determinate factor in identifying the moral valence of any action. More specifically, it is the community's recognition of one's deeds that inscribes a value judgment on them. In the end, Torre does not make his decision based on some abstract concept

of justice or of mercy. He comes to his conclusion because he recognizes that if he allows mercy to take precedence in this case, he will be shamed in the court. Where Torre diverges in essence from Gawain, is his ability to remember the Arthurian community and its standards; apply those standards to his current situation; and imagine what the future will hold for him.

In contrasting Torre with Gawain, Malory wants to preserve the subject's privileged space as the origin of responsibility; *but* that responsibility must be taken up by social frameworks and located in appropriate behaviors that are memorial in nature, and most importantly re-affirm the value of the community as the arbiter of the individual's function and worth. The difficulties, the questions of obligation, the excesses and conflicts that his knights repeatedly find themselves in do not have a moral valence for Malory. What people actually *do* in response to those questions, however, speaks volumes. Do they think critically about the choices they are asked to make? Do they allow collective wisdom to help them make decisions based on their rational experiences that will contribute to the integrity of the community? Or do they allow decisions to be made for them because they have given up their rational autonomy to desires or demands that ultimately unravel the ties binding together an authentic community? It does not matter whether Gawain was "wrong" or Torre was "right." What matters is whether their actions were consistent with the community ideal. "We are oriented," Ricoeur says, "as agents and sufferers of actions, toward the remembered past, the lived present, and the anticipated future of *other people's* behavior."[101] That is, for Malory's knights the fundamentally temporal understanding of what they do and what they experience is the very beginning of responsibility because, as the structure of *prudence*, it makes possible the demand to imagine or comprehend the social repercussions of any action. As a result, it is the individual's capacity to make choices by remembering the demands of his or her collective

identity that determines the ethical content and, thus, the responsibility for any acts that occur as a result.

No analysis of book one would seem complete without addressing the tale of Balin, or "The Knight with the Two Swords," partly because Balin's story has long been one of the more popular episodes of the book for critics.[102] Most importantly, however, for my concerns is that the tale of Balin demonstrates emphatically the dangers of failing to recognize the responsibility the individual bears to consider his or her actions in light of the impact on the broader social spectrum.[103] Balin's lack of prudence illustrates his failure to grasp that he is an *agent* as much as a sufferer of actions. Each of the narratives in the "Tale of King Arthur" that focuses on the activities of Arthur's knights is a test designed to emphasize the struggle in which a subject finds himself when attempting to navigate the obligation to respond to competing demands, as we have just witnessed in the analysis of the "Torre and Pellinor" section. Balin's inability to recognize just what is being asked of him, his failure to weigh the consequences of his actions, and his refusal to accept his own instrumentality, will result in a cascade of crippling events that harm not only himself but those around him. In brief, the goal of the Balin narrative is to set the necessary conditions calling for a comprehensive ethical structure of self-determination, responsibility, prudence, and communal integrity – the characteristics that we find shaping the development of the rest of book one.[104]

The first issue that must be addressed when examining "The Knight with the Two Swords," is Balin's refusal to return the sword he alone can draw from the scabbard. Every critical interpretation of the story rests with how we are intended to read Balin's decision.[105] My argument is that Balin's refusal to relinquish the sword is, as paradoxical as it might sound, the relinquishing of his responsibility to be an *agent* oriented toward, if we recall Ricoeur's formula,

social relationships founded on an axis running from remembered past to anticipated future. The Balin section begins, as so many tales begin, with a challenge to the court. A damsel from the Lady Lysle of Avalon arrives, girt "with a noble swerd" (38/13-14) which "doth [her] grete sorow and comberaunce" (38/17-18). According to the damsel, the sword can only be drawn "by a knyght, and he muste be a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (38/19-21). In a passage on which, oddly, critics seem seldom to comment, Arthur gets the action underway by being the first to hazard himself in the test: "'If thys be soothe I woll assay myselffe to draw oute the swerde, nat presumynge myselff that I am the beste knyght; but I woll begynne to draw youre swerde in gyvyng an insample to all the barownes, that they shall assay everych one after othir whan I have assayed'" (38/26-29). We should not underestimate the significance of Arthur's words. In effect, he tries to appropriate the criteria on which success or failure in the test will be judged by locating it in a communal context. There is a hidden danger in what the damsel is proposing – if the sword can only be drawn by "a passynge good man," what does this say about the man who cannot pull out the sword? The problem here is the sword test's potential for releasing an alienating individualism by means of localizing self-identity in a contingent accident. Arthur understands this and so he moves to ameliorate the danger by setting an example for his knights. But the "insample" Arthur sets is not simply having the courage to attempt the test; he is, rather, re-directing the function of the test. Instead of proving some internal, accidental moral worth, Arthur attempts to shift the burden of shame or honor on to the shared activity of the community as a whole so that the test becomes an affirmation of communal integrity rather than individual moral value. Examples are distinctly important for medieval self-identity because they bridge the

individual and the social. And that is precisely the problem for Balin; he fails to comprehend the implications of Arthur's efforts.

When it seems as if no one in the court can draw the sword and the damsel has "made grete sorow oute of mesure" (38/42), the "poore knyght" Balin begs leave to try his hand. The damsel is unsure of Balin because he is "pourely arrayed"; Balin points out that his worth should not be judged according to his clothes or lack of money, and that he is "'fully assured as som of thes other'" (39/17-18). Balin's emphasis here is brief, but clear – he evaluates his potential based on his comparison with the other knights of the court. The damsel, however, remains doubtful and Balin repeats his argument, reiterating that "'worship and hardynesse ys nat in arayment'" (39/29-30).[106] She relents, and Balin "toke the swerde by the gurdyll and shethe and drew hit oute easily, and when he loke on the swered hit pleased hym muche" (39/33-34). At this point, Arthur's maneuvering stands on a knife's (or perhaps, sword's) edge. His barons, themselves unable to comprehend Arthur's lesson, resent Balin and the atmosphere turns sour. Worse yet, Balin compounds the tenuousness of the community when, in response to the damsel's request that he return the sword to her, Balin replies "'Nay . . . for thys swerde woll I kepe but hit be takyn fro me with force'" (39/41-42). Even after the maiden warns him that the sword will lead to his destruction and that he will slay his own brother with it, Balin refuses to take her admonitions seriously, retorting "I shall take the aventure . . . that God woll ordayne for me. But the swerde ye shall nat have at thys tyme, by the feythe of my body!'" (40/3-5) Balin's aggressive, almost threatening response is difficult to reconcile with the views of critics who see in his statement a "humble acceptance of 'a destiny laid on him, not created by him.'"[107] Robert Kelly, though, seems closer to the mark when he describes Balin's rejection of the damsel's warnings as an "Oedipus-like challenge to providence," which emphasizes for Malory the

"problem of destiny, in particular . . . the role that choice plays in shaping one's destiny."[108] In other words, critical understanding of Balin's adventure moves between two poles: surrendering the self to whatever fate deals out or confidently asserting the privilege of the self.   But while Balin's challenge certainly stresses the "problem with destiny," it strikes me that his attitude has less to do with an opposition between humility and pride, and more to do with the antithesis between openness and resistance.[109] In this dialectic, which we have seen played out in the differences between Gawain and Torre, the self emerges as an identity either oriented toward others, or closed off in an insular and ultimately irresponsible concentration on the personal.

Thus, two distinct issues emerge from Balin's assaying of the sword test: first, the threat to the priority of the community; second, the role of responsibility in justifying individual choice. Shortly after refusing to hand over the sword, Balin's first act with it is to behead the Lady of the Lake, who has come to court to ask a boon of Arthur in recompense for Excalibur. Arthur tells her that he will give whatever is in his power to give, and the Lady asks in return the head of Balin, or the head of the maiden who brought the sword. We are suddenly thrust into the midst of a long-standing blood feud, in which Balin apparently "slew her brothir, a good knyght and a trew," while the damsel "was causer of [her] fadirs death" (40/43-45). Arthur, ever sensitive to the solidarity of his social group, points out that he cannot give what she asks because to do so would be dishonorable. A key point is made here: though Arthur is aware of what he owes, he evaluates that obligation in light of the competing and more privileged social demands. When Balin realizes that the Lady wants him dead he retaliates, "[a]nd with hys swerde lyghtly he smote of hyr hede before kynge Arthure" (41/11). Not only is this sudden rash move a thorough violation of etiquette, it is an insensitive shattering of those social conventions that are intended to limit the excesses that personal interests can pursue before the integrity of the community. [110]

Arthur is, naturally, horrified – just as the audience is expected to be: "'Alas, for shame!' seyde the kynge. 'Why have ye done so? Ye have shamed me *and all my courte*, for thys lady was a lady that I was much beholdynge to, and hyder she come undir my sauffconduyghte. Therefore, I shall never forgyff you that trespasse'" (41/13-16, italics added). The outrage Balin has committed is not simply that he has killed a woman. Balin's real violation is that in pursuing a personal obligation he demonstrates a lack of respect for the honor of the court. Balin thinks nothing of propriety, or of the consequences of his actions. In fact, he never fully understands why Arthur is outraged. Balin responds by offering up an excuse, saying that he is sorry Arthur is angry, *but* "'this same lady was the untrwyste lady lyvynge, and by inchauntement and by sorcery she hath been the destroyer of many good knyghtes, and she was causer that my modir was brente thorow hir falsehode and trechory'" (41/17-21). From the perspective of his blood feud, he is responding to the call to avenge a past wrong. But much as we've seen with Gawain, Malory's point is that a knight must be able to look beyond the narrow confines of a single mode of thought that privileges those actions which contravene the collective need. Arthur's response makes clear that Balin does not have his priorities straight: "'For what cause soever ye had,' seyde Arthur, 'ye sholde have forborne in my presence'" (41/22-23). Arthur is emphatic – it doesn't matter what your personal reasons are, you have to think about the impact of your actions on the community.

It is possible, as at least one critic has pointed out, to see Balin's slaying of the lady as perfectly reasonable within the context of heroic literature.[111] I agree, however, with the perspective that sees in Balin's adventures a cautionary tale about the dangers of vengeance;[112] a point driven home by René Girard's claims regarding the disruptive social challenges of vengeance and which bolsters Malory's position that Balin's imprudent actions are a direct

offense against social cohesion. Girard's emphasis, in effect, is that the desire for vengeance is a desire that cannot be sated; once begun it self-perpetuates, endlessly reiterated, with no satisfactory conclusion for any party involved. Worse yet, it threatens to engulf all of a society in its obsessions.[113] Its effects cannot be isolated, particularly in a close-knit social group, because there is no room in such a society for anonymity. Everyone is connected to everyone else in a communal, let alone familial, relation. As Balin discovers, there are consequences for simply "striking while the iron is hot." Much like Gawain, who cannot see outside the narrow focus of the need for vengeance, in heeding only the call of the dead Balin remains trapped in a story of the past that his community does not share. If, as prudence dictates, we are to recollect, evaluate, and anticipate, Balin clearly stops at the first step, rashly ignoring that the practice of remembrance is to fill in the contours of collective memory.

From the standpoint of the *Morte Darthur*'s chivalric code, however, this picture of revenge is not complete. While it is true to say that vengeance has the potential to be socially divisive, the difficulty with identifying it as a blanket term stems from the fact that Malory is not necessarily opposed to the concept of avenging a wrong. There are numerous instances where knights want "vengeance" for a slight to their honor; in fact, when one's honor is at stake then chivalry not only permits, it demands one seek restitution. The very act of attempting to win back honor is honorable. Rather, what Malory seems to be concerned about is the failure to reflect on the price to be paid.[114] When the results of one's actions will lead to shameful or communally destructive behavior, then one must re-evaluate the obligations one owes because, as Malory repeatedly emphasizes, the past is meant to guide us not oppress us. Again and again Balin is put in situations where he must think through the consequences of his actions.[115] In failing to do so he abdicates his right to shape a destiny that affirms the wholeness of his

community, and instead succumbs to the problematic weight of unsustainable demands. Each mistake forges a link in the long causal chain that begins in Balin's own thoughtless desire to avoid accepting his responsibility to help fashion a shared world. Instead, he will kill his own brother; he will dishonor the Round Table fellowship; and in spite of his clear military prowess, Balin will fracture the very land itself when he strikes down king Pellam. Balin's assertion regarding taking the adventure that God ordains is neither hubris nor humility, nor even an opening of the self to possibility, but rather a refusal to face his own complicity in the unfolding story. He refuses to accept the damsel's warnings, placing the onus for what will take place in the hands of providence. When Merlin warns him that, because he failed to save Columbe, he would "'stryke a stroke moste dolorous . . . and thorow that stroke three kyngdomys shall be brought into grete poverté, miseri and wrecchednesse'" (45/32-36), how does Balin respond? He refuses to believe what Merlin says. As a result of his constant refusal to understand the consequences of his actions, the dolorous stroke will fall and the wasteland will erupt from his failure to take destiny into his own hands.

Thus, what is at stake throughout Balin's story is precisely the question of responsibility as the justification for agency, and we see time and again his failure to grasp what Arthur later makes explicit to Merlin: "' syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure, purvey for hit, and putt hit away'" (76/21-22). From his resistance to the damsel's warning, to his unwillingness to heed Merlin's prophecies, to his refusal to turn back from the final sign, Balin persists in simply submitting to the inexplicable. This is highlighted when Balin, hearing the dreadful horn wailing "as it had ben the dethe of a beste" (55/44) offers what seems the most fatalistic expression in all of book one: "'That blast,' said Balyn, 'is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede'" (56/1-2). Balin acts as though he were helpless, no longer able to turn aside, moving

forward because there is nowhere else to go – and perhaps more than any other scene in "The Knight with the Two Swords," this impresses with the sense of an inexorable fate drawing the hapless Balin towards his doom. But the text has urged us all along to see this movement not as incontrovertible fate, but an object lesson in the harm that results when we refuse to recognize our responsibility to remember our shared world. "Do after the good and leve the evyl," Caxton advises his readers, 'and it shal brynge you to good fame and renommee";[116] and that injunction is just as relevant to the conclusion of the story of Balin. The "good," for both Malory and his astute reader Caxton, is the normative practices that reaffirm in their unfolding the integrity and cohesion of the community. And in following those practices, the individual commits him- or herself to the active and deliberate renewal of a shared world. To give up your responsibility is to abandon your agency, and it comes at a terrible price.

It has become something of a common practice for critics to describe the story of Balin as a "microcosm" for the *Morte Darthur*. I find this claim both exaggerated and over-used. Having said this, however, I recognize that the plot of "The Knight with the Two Swords" contains in its push for a concordant narrative time a condensed version of the theme organizing all of book one. It is a reminder that the past can be a blessing or a burden, and that the act of collective remembrance can never be free from an ethical and political context. This context is the public theatre in which the subject-who-remembers appears as an agent and a sufferer of actions. These actions, whatever their appearance at any point, are part of the stories that for the community and its members are invested with the responsibility to live up to a shared heritage. Out of this shared inheritance of the Arthurian community emerges a shared time; that is, a continuity uniting the remembered past with the lived present and the anticipated future and forming the potential for a coherent world. If, as I believe, Malory's primary motivation was to find in a

collective act of remembrance the possibility for restoring his fragmented cultural landscape to a former wholeness, however imaginary that may in fact be, then the wholeness of an historical narrative that urged its audience to remember the values and practices supporting a shared world would seem to offer the means for achieving that goal. But in order for this to work, Malory understood that the collective wisdom giving shape to the individual's course of action within the greater good of the community requires that one have the capacity to reflect on how his or her choices not only impact others, but fit within the social frameworks for understanding. And he hit on prudence as the principal virtue by means of which the subject-who-remembers mediates the internal operations of the self with the external public demands of the community. While it is fair to say that the passions and causal events that will ultimately lead to the downfall of the Round Table are initiated in "The Tale of King Arthur," it is just as reasonable to point out that Malory saw in the inception of the Round Table a cause for hope. For even in the final hours of the *Morte Darthur*, when Bedivere finds Arthur's tomb, the very last comment Malory gives us regarding Arthur and his rule is unbearably poignant as well as a meaningful summary of what all along he tried to show us in book one: "here in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff" (717/33). It is a remarkable testament.

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[1] See Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968, p. 83.

[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 113, italics added.

[3] Maurice Halbwachs , *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 40.

[4] "That the Morte Darthur pulls in the direction of history seems obvious; although Malory never uses the word, Caxton presents the book as a 'noble and joyous hystorye of the grete conquerour and excellent kyng, kyng Arthur, somtyme kyng of thys noble royalme thenne callyd Bretaygne.' Caxton writes here as if Arthur were a historical

figure, and in this many of his contemporaries might have agreed with him" (Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, p. 31).

[5] "The most widely-read version of British history in the fifteenth century was, after all, the *Brut* chronicle which accepts the existence of Arthur as fact and allots him a place in the grand historical scheme that begins with the creation of the giants in England and ends with the contemporary scene . . . the *Brut* assumes that Arthur is no more of a fiction than is Edward III or Henry V and that he inhabits their chivalric world" (Riddy, p. 31). Riddy is referring to *The Brut or Chronicles of England*, ed. F.D.W. Brie, EETS, 2 vols (London, 1906, 1908).

[6] Elizabeth Pochoda, *Arthurian Propoganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971, p. 29.

[7] See Riddy, p. 32.

[8] We should not forget the well-known Tudor political applications of the Arthurian legend to validate their own regime, as well as Spencer's recognition of Arthur in a core British identity espoused in the *Faerie Queen*.

[9] William Caxton, Preface to Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur, Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Eugene Vinaver, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. xiii. Italics added.

[10] Riddy, p. 33.

[11] "Medieval writers made little distinction between what we would call history and legend" (Elizabeth Archibald, "Beginnings: 'The Tale of King Arthur' and 'King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius'," *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards. New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 133). While this statement is partly accurate it does not provide the whole picture. Many medieval writers were unaware of the distinction between "real" history and legend, but not all authors. The distinction has to be drawn between two modes of consciousness having to do with the self's understanding of the past: history, as analytical and critical recognition of the trace, and memory, as the undifferentiated immersion in the continuity of tradition. Both modes are available to the writers of the middle ages; but the propensity for writers to fall in the latter category is a common practice.

[12] "Real memory," according to Nora, is "all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth" (Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1980): 7-24, p. 8.

[13] Riddy, p. 33.

[14] It should be noted here that while these subdivisions of the "Tale of King Arthur" are in fact insertions on the part of Vinaver, there is some hard textual evidence to support Vinaver's separations. To begin with, several sections end either with an *explicit* or a passage reflecting on what will come next; and some are followed in the next section by a reiteration or summation of previous action. Regardless, for my purpose following Vinaver's divisions provides a convenient framework on which to articulate my readings and it follows the format with which most readers will be familiar.

[15] See Thomas L. Wright: "In its own terms Malory's narrative follows a course from disorder and rebellion to the oath of chivalry, itself a code that grows out of the wedding quests and is proved in the adventures that close the "Tale of King Arthur" ("'The Tale of King Arthur': Beginnings and Foreshadowings," *Malory's Originality*, Reprint ed., ed. Robert M. Lumiansky, New York: Arno Press, 1979, p. 21). Wright also emphasizes that the presentation of these quests differs significantly from the order established by the tradition of Malory's sources,

which indicates that he was consciously manipulating those narratives which would best express his "new version of Arthurian matter" (p. 21). This supports the view that Malory was not simply copying his sources but was rather "remembering" them in such a way that his recollections would support a history most amenable to his own views.

[16] This fact has been noted by virtually every historian and literary historian working with fifteenth-century culture. Maurice Keen, for example, describes the tremendous social change competing with the very real desire to believe in the strength of medieval estates theory, even as radical cultural forces were hard at work altering the political landscape. Pointing to the medieval belief in a well-ordered, hierarchical, and deferential society based on the three estates, Keen concisely breaks down those historical forces that were diligently undermining the static view of society and introducing differences that the traditional cultural model could not accommodate. (See the chapter "Social Hierarchy and Social Change," *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, New York: Penguin, 1990.)

[17] See, for example, Pochoda's analysis of medieval political theory, in particular her critique of Sir John Fortescue's well-known work *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*: "The purpose of government and the role of the king . . . according to Fortescue are to assure the safety of the individual and consequently the stability of the realm" (p. 50-51). The one stipulation I would like to add to this is that by "realm" the *Morte Darthur* is conceiving "class," which is to say that it is concerned specifically with the members of a specific social group. Thus, when critics like Pochoda point to the *Morte*'s interest in governance, we must remember that such an interest expresses the interests of a limited social group.

[18] "The emphasis throughout the work is upon the idea of justice . . . Law is the external means by which justice is *perpetuated*" (Pochoda, p. 41, italics added). Pochoda's use of the the word "perpetuated" is an especially fraught term, because it highlights the necessity justice claims for itself as a response to a past imbalance. One of the key issues book one attempts to deal with is the extent to which justice, in the form of vengeance, can demand our commitment to remember.

[19] "It is important to recognize that in describing kingship John does not dwell upon the king's knowledge of the law or on the legal aspects of his office. He stresses instead the king's role as a model whose behavior is dictated by an innate sense of equity" (Pochoda, p. 41).

[20] Indeed, this point will be made explicit in "The Book of Sir Tristram" when Palomides denies that the knight he just encountered could have been Arthur. Tristram's well-known response not only proves Palomides wrong, it also strengthens Arthur's importance as the fulcrum for the Round Table's aspirations: "'Sir, I may never beleyve,' seyde sir Palomydes, 'that kynge Arthure woll ryde so pryvaly as a poure arraunte knyght.' 'A,' sayd sir Trystrams, ' ye know nat my lorde kynge Arthure, for all knyghtes may lerne to be a knyght of hym'" (453/24-27).

[21] Maurice Halbwachs, p. 43.

[22] Hannah Arendt has pointed this out in her analysis of Walter Benjamin: "[N]o society can properly function without classification, without an arrangement of things and men in classes and prescribed types. This necessary classification is the basis for all social discrimination, and discrimination . . . is no less a constituent element of the social realm than equality is a constituent element of the political. The point is that in society everybody must answer the question of *what* he is . . . which his role is and his function" (Introduction to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968, p. 3, italics in original).

[23] "The past is not just the past . . . it is, even before any exegesis, the bearer of religious, moral, and civic *values*" (Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 5).

[24] "Medieval culture remained profoundly memorial in nature, despite the increased use and availability of books for reasons other than simple technological convenience. The primary factor in [memory's] conservation lies in the identification of memory with the formation of moral virtues" (Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 156).

[25] Carruthers, p. 162.

[26] Carruthers observes that these levels are "correct" knowledge, usefulness, and habit. The first is study and memorization, the second is the application of that knowledge to my actions in the world, and the third is when understanding and virtuous living are united in my "state of being." See p. 162.

[27] Carruthers, p. 162.

[28] Carruthers, pp. 162-63.

[29] Carruthers, p. 163.

[30] See Carruthers, p. 164.

[31] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. H. Rackham, Eds. E. Capps, T.E. Page, and W.H.D. Rouse, The Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann, 1926, I xiii 20, pp. 67, 69.

[32] Beverly Kennedy notes the importance Aristotle held for medieval writers, particularly in light of their belief that reading was meant to instruct the audience in morals and ethics: "Medieval rhetoricians took for granted that writers write for the moral edification of their readers. They were familiar with Aristotle's *Ethics*, if not his *Poetics* . . ." (*Knighthood in the Morte Darthur, Arthurian Studies* xi, Dover, NH: D.S.Brewer, 1985, p. 56).

[33] Cicero, *De Inventiones*, Trans. H.M. Hubbell, Eds. T.E. Page, et al, The Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann, 1949, II 160, p. 327. See, also, Carruthers, p. 66. I am indebted to Carruthers analysis of Aquinas on Cicero for the bulk of this argument.

[34] Carruthers, p. 66.

[35] Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonapart*, New York: International Publishers, 1964, p. 7.

[36] Indeed, Thomas Crofts argues this very point when, in commenting on the interaction between Lords Talbot and Berkeley which led to the infamous battle of Nibley Green, he observes, "It is a sort of powerlessness before chivalric imperatives . . . that Talbot conjures in his letter to Berkeley . . . It is such a tradition that weighs on Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" (Thomas Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience*, Arthurian Studies lxvi, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006, p. 4.). To be fair, I believe Crofts is accurate in his assessment of ineluctable forces shadowing the *Morte*. Malory often presents situations where his knights make poor decisions or react hastily and without adequate reflection, driven by impulses they do not fully comprehend. Where I differ, however, is with the assigning of that role to chivalry. It strikes me that those imperatives under which the Round Table fellowship experiences its most profound capacity for positive development are precisely when it recognizes the demands placed on it, principally in the demands imposed by ethical responsibilities.

[37] For instance, Charles Moorman points to Malory's selective inclusion of Merlin's prophecies from the French sources, concluding that, "They bear witness to the pervading presence and influence of a kind of fate which is everywhere discernible and operative in the book . . . the whole tragedy of the Round Table is foreordained" (*The Book of Kyng Arthur: The Unity of Malory's Morte Darthur*, Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1965, p. 67).

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[38] Moorman further emphasizes the presence of an incontestable fate in the *Morte* when he argues, "In all probability, Malory thought of tragedy in the familiar medieval terms of Dame Fortune and her wheel, by which even the most deserving of heroes were eventually overthrown by forces outside themselves and by events which they had neither precipitated nor deserved" (p. 68). Moorman then, perplexingly, adds contradictory explanations of what he believes "Malory's concept of the tragic nature of chivalry" includes: "the fall of Arthur's court . . . was thus predetermined, fated if you like, *but also* self-ordained and self-created by agencies within itself" (p. 68, italics added). The question remains – is the eventual fall of the Round Table due to "forces outside" itself, or "agencies within itself"? I believe Malory would argue for the latter.

[39] I am borrowing the concepts of discordant and concordant time from Paul Ricoeur's analysis, in *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, of Augustine's conceptualization of time.

[40] Wright sums up the importance of self-determination when he stresses "In Malory's hands Logres is transformed from a battle-doomed kingdom where fortunes are determined by blind prophecy into a nation that shapes itself under the particular burden of a code of chivalry" (p. 62). While I find the use of such expressions as "blind prophecy" or "nation" to be problematic, Wright is correct in shifting the focus for the fate of the Arthurian fellowship away from invisible and intractable forces to the deliberate aspirations and desires of the members of the Arthurian community.

[41] At this stage I am relying on any number of assumptions about what constitutes the thing called "the past" and that which is called "the present." For now, these terms are synonymous with, respectively, the common usage of "that which has already happened" and "that which is enduring now." I will seek to explore these terms at greater length in chapter 4 when I inquire into the historical consciousness of subjectivity.

[42] Archibald, p. 136.

[43] Archibald, p. 140.

[44] Eugène Vinaver, Commentary on *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., v. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 1277.

[45] Moorman, p. 70.

[46] Wright, p. 27.

[47] Elizabeth Edwards, p. 25, 28.

[48] Mann argues that the attributes of reason often cannot help the characters connect with one another or with the events themselves. These frequent moments, for Mann, are isolating and fragmentary and can only be "bridged" in the narrative through the desire for "worship": "An intellectual understanding of the rationale behind the unfolding of these events; an ability to identify motives or consequences in such a way as to feel confident in categorizing actions or people as right or wrong; a corresponding ability to establish intuitive sympathy with a victim – any of these would . . . put their spectators (that is, both us and the court) 'in touch' with them. But the distance between the court and the adventure is not to be bridged by any of these means: it is to bridged by 'worship'" ("'Taking the Adventure': Malory and the Suite du Merlin," *Aspects of Malory*, eds. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981, p. 74). Mann's point stands in direct opposition to what I am claiming in that she sees those moments when Malory fails to provide an adequate explanation for a course of action as a deliberate isolation of character from understanding. For Mann, the issue rests with the idea that Malory is rejecting the mastery that comes with the efforts of identifying, categorizing, and determining events. Malory wants to emphasize precisely the need to identify, categorize, and determine action.

[49] See Edwards: "the absence of . . . registers of explanation distances the reader from the text, and the knight from his adventure. It also reduces the events of the tale to a random pattern of chance, of meaningless juxtaposition" (p. 26).

[50] See Riddy, p. 39-40. My explanation of Merlin's intervention in the story at this point essentially paraphrases Riddy's interpretation.

[51] "The apparently contingent passion of Uther for Igrayne, and the war that it has caused, turn out to be related to a more wide-reaching plan of Merlin's: no less than the conception, birth and upbringing of Arthur. Uther has his desire, but so does Merlin" (Riddy, p. 39).

[52] See Riddy, p. 40. "The experience of time that is offered by the *Morte Darthur* is one in which the coherence required for the fulfillment of prophecy may not apply." As an alterative, see Edwards, p. 28-29: "The force of prophecy is the result of an inversion of time, and because this inversion is 'unnatural,' it contributes to an eerie sense that events are not only known in advance, but are caused by their own prophecy." While both critics emphasize the unsettling aspect of time, each points towards different identities for temporality that can be applied to the Morte. Riddy's argument is that the subject's perception of time is being potentially destabilized by the text, such that the subject is denied the assurance of continuity. Edwards' argument, on the other hand, posits time as the effect of a continuity of events, only "inverted" in the sequence of expected order. The point I am stressing in the paragraph above is that Riddy's assertion about the randomness of events seems to bolster the idea less of an inversion, which still appeals to a specific order of events, and more of the sense of a breakdown in unity.

[53] Wright, p. 15.

[54] Wright, p. 18.

[55] Wright, p. 19.

[56] Riddy identifies the importance of history in book two as a means of assuring the effectiveness of political engagement and I would argue that this is just as much a concern in book one as together the books shape the trajectory of Arthur's rise to power and consolidation of the kingdom: "In 'King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius' 'history' is a means of expressing confidence in the existence of the world 'out there' and thus in the validity of public action. By asserting an identity that derives from solidarity with one's fellow countrymen and with a national cause, the writing of history provides a way of transcending isolation" (Riddy, p. 47). This is, of course, the point behind remembrance– in the act of bringing the past into the present one seeks to find a way to escape the alienating loss which historical consciousness enforces on the subject.

[57] See Ricoeur on "The Contrast with Eternity," *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, pp. 22-30. In addition, while I cannot provide a fully articulated analysis of Ricoeur's arguments regarding Augustine, the key concept to bear in mind when thinking about the understanding of time that Augustine hands down, is the past-present-future range as states of mind occupying an eternal "now." In other words, what we think of when we think of the past, the present, and the future is a past-now, present-now, future-now. "[B]y entrusting to memory the fate of things past, and to expectation that of things to come, we can include memory and expectation in an extended and dialectical present which itself is . . . neither the past, nor the future, nor the pointlike present, nor even the passing of the present" (p. 11). Ricoeur emphasizes the point by quoting Augustine: "'It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. Some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I can see'" (p. 11).

[58] The narrative, as one critic observes, operates in a "constant tension between random and often incomprehensible adventures . . . and prophesied events or clearly motivated struggles" (Archibald, p. 136).

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[59] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, New York: Penguin, 1961, X, 16: 222-23. Ricoeur notes that we are indebted to Jean Guitton for pointing out "that the aporia of time is also the aporia of the self" in Augustine's concern with time and consciousness (p. 231).

[60] See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, pp. 40-41.

[61] In book one, Gawain tells his brother Gaheris "'Yondir knyght ys putte to grete worship, whych grevith me sore, for he slewe oure fadir kynge Lott. Therefore I woll sle hym'" (63/9-10). Malory had already alluded to this future act in "The Knight with the Two Swords" when he observed that 'sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the ten yere aftir he was made knyght, and slew kynge Pelynor hys owne hondis' (48/41-43).

[62] "And for because that kynge Arthure lay by hys wyff and gate on her sir Mordred, therefore kynge Lott helde ever agaynste Arthure" (48/29-31).

[63] In book one, after king Mark inters Columbe and her lover Launceor, Merlin appears and announces "'Here shall be . . . in this same place the grettist bateyle betwyxte two knyghtes that ever was or ever shall be'" (45/10-11). The prophecy is later realized at this spot when Lancelot and Tristram, in a case of mistaken identities, battle one another in book five.

[64] See Mann's argument, pp. 71-72.

[65] See Vinaver's Commentary on *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., v. 3, pp. 1275-78.

[66] I should point out here that this holds true primarily for the first few books. Once we get to book six, the grail section will take on a radically different purpose, fundamentally altering Malory's appreciation of and approach to the concepts of agency and indeterminacy.

[67] As an example of Malory's attempts to consolidate and unify the disparate threads of his sources, Vinaver points to the opening passages of the "Gawain, Marhalt, Ywain" section in which Malory weaves together the "distinct episodes" of Uwain's exile and the assassination attempt on Arthur with the magic mantle. The failure of the assassination leads to the uncovering of Morgan's plot, which leads to Uwain's banishment (he is, after all, Morgan's son), which in turn leads to Gawain's presence on the quest. "In this way Malory's narrative acquires more coherence and unity than can be claimed for its source" (see Vinaver's notes to the *Works*, p. 737).

[68] Walter Benjamin, p. 86.

[69] "In short, it is the plot that has to be typical . . . action takes precedence over the characters. It is the universalizing of the plot that universalizes the characters, even when they have specific names" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 1 p. 41).

[70] "The kind of universality that a plot calls from derives from its ordering, which brings about its completeness and its wholeness. The universals a plot engenders are not Platonic ideas. They are universals related to practical wisdom, hence to ethics and politics" (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, p. 41). In other words, the internal logic of causal necessity that establishes a particular plot produces the "universality," or communal understanding, that makes possible those normative practices on which any social relationships can be founded. It goes without saying that collective activities, such as collective remembrance, claim for the objects of their attention the status of universals in their coherent traditions. "A plot engenders such universals [i.e. the normative practices belonging to the collective] when the structure of its action rests on the connections internal to the action [i.e. necessary and self-contained] and not on external accidents [i.e. contingent and random events]. These internal connections as such are the beginning of the universalization" (p. 41).

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[71] "I have posited that tragedy is an imitation of an action that is whole and complete in itself and of a certain magnitude" (Aristotle, *Poetics*,). While Aristotle is speaking directly of tragedy, I believe that his insights apply to all narratives. See Ricoeur, as well, in *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, pp. 38-41.

[72] The classic example of this is seen in the beginning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Trans. Marie Borroff, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1967) where "Since the siege and the assault was ceased at Troy" (l. 1) we are told how "high-born Aeneas and his haughty race" (l. 5) dispersed across the known world, conquering and settling "well-nigh all the wealth of the West Isles" (l. 6). From this we learn how Felix Brutus founds Britain "Where war and wrack and wonder / By shifts have sojourned there, / And bliss by turns with blunder / In that land's lot and share" (ll. 16-19). This is essentially standard history for Britain at the time, and the writer is of course telling his audience what they most likely already know. The important part, however, is the tactic used by the author to insert Arthur into this "history." Pointing out that though since the founding of Britain there have been many great kings, of those kings "King Arthur was counted most courteous of all" (l. 26). Arthur is here noted as the flower of chivalry, and it is squarely in this view of Arthur as the focus for the chivalric world that we find the *Morte*'s figuration of the Round Table fellowship.

[73] Nora points out that when a society perceives itself as losing contact with the sacredness of its past it adopts a thematic view of itself through the shift from progress to decadence. Such a society becomes fascinated with origins because it wants to establish an absolute reference for" greatness": "Progress and decadence, the two great themes of historical intelligibility . . . , both aptly express [the] cult of continuity, the confident assumption of knowing to whom and to what we owe our existence – whence the importance of the idea of 'origins' . . . The greater the origins, the more they magnified our greatness. Through the past we venerated above all ourselves" (p. 16).

[74] It could be argued that book two is the culmination of an English nationalist ambition since Arthur's reign reaches all the way to Rome. What starts in book one as the unification of England extends to the consolidation of an empire. Indeed, we might see in Arthur's domination of the Roman Empire, a uniquely English appropriation of the history of western civilization. It is hard to deny the political ramifications of Arthur's conquests. For myself, however, I see what is of fundamental importance to Malory as not necessarily English rule but the concordance of an ideological group; if it so happens that the greatest representation of that ideological function was located in England then so much the better for Malory. In other words, it is not England but Arthur that is foremost in Malory's thought.

[75] "Memory is blind to all but the group it binds – which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs has said, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual" (Nora, p. 9). Nora's point here has particular relevance to what Malory is trying to accomplish by divorcing Arthur from historical genealogy; in this context, memory is collective in the sense that it is interested in those communal practices that help us make sense of our relationship with a perceived past. As such it binds us to a group because it is shared. But memory is individual as well, because as abstract entities societies cannot remember; it is individuals who actually remember.

[76] See, for instance, Shunichi Noguchi, "Englishness in Malory," (*Aspects of Malory*, eds. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981) for a concise view of English national identity in the *Morte*. Malory himself on more than one occasion speaks directly of England or the English in passages that are not contained in his original French sources. But I want to make clear that while Malory may invoke the English as an abstract entity, or as settings wherein the audience localize its sense of spatial memory, what motivates him are the interests specific to that chivalric class of which he believes himself to be a part. As a location, England functions in the *Morte* as a figure onto which can be mapped those associations that Malory expects his audience to make between the events of the narrative and the social energies at work in his class and its conception of itself.

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[77] Le Goff, p. 13.

[78] Le Goff notes how "at the end of the Middle Ages, the past is increasingly understood in relation to the time of the chronicles, to progress in dating, and to the measuring of time brought about by mechanical clocks" (p. 13).

[79] Raluca L. Radulescu, "'Oute of mesure': Violence and Knighthood in Malory's Morte Darthur," *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur*, Eds. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, Arthurian Studies lx, Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005, p. 119.

[80] For example, using the conversation between Abelard and Heloise in their famous letters to explore the social dimension of a consciousness of writing during the Middle Ages, Carruthers reminds us how medieval literature is, by nature, rhetorical and that rhetorical quality defines the ethical structure of the text in question – "the entire ethical situation in Ableard's account is socially and rhetorically conceived: it requires a recollecting subject, a remembered text, and a remembering audience" (see "Memory and the Ethics of Reading" in *The Book of Memory*, especially pp. 182-83). It is no leap of the imagination, then, to see how the "Tale of King Arthur" operates within this framework for remembrance as an ethically motivated and communal operation. Malory, as recollecting subject, accesses what he desires from the past; that is, his focus on Arthur's conception. He locates this "memory" in a remembered text, which would be the traditional Arthurian narrative; then he mediates that memory with an audience who is expected to already know the details of Arthur's lineage.

[81] "There was no concept of an autonomous, though largely inarticulate 'individual self,' to be defined against social norms . . . So instead of the word 'self' or even 'individual,' we might better speak of a 'subject-who-remembers,' and in remembering also feels and thinks and judges" (Carruthers,, p. 182). While I do wish to make use of the phrase "subject-who-remembers," for practical reasons I find it difficult to do without the terms "self" and "individual."

[82] A case could be made, and in fact has been made, that one of the primary virtues argued for by the *Morte Darthur* is that of temperance; citing Malory's frequent use of the expression "oute of mesure," Radulescu draws the conclusion that the violence and lack of restraint implied by the expression implicitly call out for temperance as a morally rectifying force, well-known and "recommended" by a variety of texts during the Middle Ages (see Radulescu, p. 121). To be clear, I do not disagree with Radulescu's conclusions about the impact of excess on the tragic action of the *Morte*; however, I find that simply reading "oute of mesure" from the perspective of temperance creates a number of difficulties, requiring multiple definitions of the appropriate context for temperance, that could be more readily resolved by applying a judgment regarding prudence. In order to determine whether or not a moral judgment based on temperance is called for when dealing with the question of excessive violence, we find ourselves separating excess into differing categories; violence must have mitigating criteria, emotional extravagance must be evaluated based on circumstance. Temperance as a category for analysis presupposes the principles of differentiation and association that mark the three-fold phenomenology of prudence. "Temperance," Cicero tells us, "is a firm and well-considered control exercised by the reason over lust and other improper impulses of the mind" (*De Inventiones*, II 164, p. 331). What is this "well-considered control" if not the discerning eye of prudence? The concept of temperance surely has a vital role to play in the *Morte*, given its importance to the English gentry and aristocracy in fifteenth-century culture. But I am convinced that Malory's essential concern in shaping the ethical identity of the Arthurian fellowship is to reinforce the need to reflect on the results of one's actions. Prudence would offer a greater capacity for self-reflection.

[83]Lynch notes that a "reification of ideological closure" takes place in the traditional chivalric romance which elides the moral of killing by incorporating death into "an assurance of the rightness of the hero's actions." In other words, "The issue of moral motivation tends to be avoided by this approach, because it reconstructs and underwrites the

dominant ideology of these texts" ("Ideology, Context, and Excess in Malory's War," *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur*, Eds. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, Arthurian Studies lx, Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005, p. 30).

[84] "One must always acknowledge the intense ideological labour needed to displace the material horror and moral questionability of war to the extent that Malory normally does" (Lynch, p. 31).

[85] "Beyond the practical, political requirement to kill some opponents, there is a matter of ideological discourse: a knight cannot *be* properly "good" in Malory . . . *unless* he fights. That granted, when fighting occurs, grievous wounds and death must sometimes be the inevitable consequences, but then, simply *because* they are inevitable, they are to be accepted" (Lynch, p. 26-27, italics in original).

[86] See Lynch, p. 26-29.

[87] See Eugène Vinaver, "The Knight Prisoner," Introduction to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., v. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. xxv.

[88] See P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

[89] "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (Nora, p. 8). It is clear from this passage that Nora does not equate authentic memory with simply remembering. It is an act, or perhaps process would be better, that is always under construction; it is not a permanent inscription, a monument to the past. It is, rather, the "life" of a society. Nora's description looks a lot like the modern concept of language as a field that is in constant flux; language ties us to the past and projects us into the future. But in spite of that internal continuity that makes any language possible, we all recognize that what we speak changes over time. It grows and adapts with our evolving world. Memory, according to Nora, is the same. It connects us to our past, but it will change along with us as we adapt to new experiences.

[90] Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory's Morte Darthur, Arthurian Studies* xliii, Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001, p. 1.

[91] Kennedy's dismissive comment that Gawain is overreacting because "hunting dogs can be replaced" (p. 63) seems to miss the point. Gawain is not reacting to the loss of his dogs, he is responding to what he sees as an offense against the helpless. This point is made immediate at Gawain's first insistence "I wolde that ye had wrokyn youre angir upon me *rather than* upon a dome best" (italics added).

[92] Any reader familiar with the *Morte* will be aware of just how much trouble results from Gawain's inability to forego his compulsion to answer what he sees as the demands of the dead to avenge them. In avenging his "dome bestes" he incurs the humiliation of killing a lady. In avenging his father, he will slay two of the best knights of the Round Table. In avenging his brother, he will contribute to – though he does not cause – the fall of the Round Table. I want to stress again, however, that Gawain's desires stem from a noble intent: he is responding to what he perceives to be an injustice. The problem is that he lacks the ability to think through what his actions mean. Lacking prudence, lacking self-reflection, he cannot recognize when he needs to forget.

[93] Think, for instance, of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the tradition of seeing Gawain as the most courteous knight of the Round Table, *especially to women*, is used against him in Bertilak's castle to keep him off balance and eventually humiliate him. At times admired, at others mocked, Gawain occupies practically a sub-genre of the romance where he is implicitly identified as the exemplar of courtly love and *courtoisie*. Unfortunately for Gawain, this also means that he is possessed by a cultural memory that locates him specifically in networks of

relationships with women. It is no coincidence that in the "Tale of King Arthur," Gawain's tests are weighted less on his prowess as a warrior, and more on his handling of women.

[94] Just before the final battle, Arthur is roused from a horrible nightmare of falling amongst serpents and worms. Arthur, "nat slepynge nor thorowly wakynge," is granted a vision in which he is overjoyed to see Gawain appear accompanied by "a number of fayre ladyes" (711/33, 35). When asked who all the ladies are, Gawain responds "all thes ar tho that I ded batayle fore in ryghteuous quarels, and 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" (711/41-44). What stands out most strikingly in this passage is that Gawain has been granted a last opportunity to speak to Arthur, in a scene that clearly demonstrates his moral and ethical capital, because the ladies ask that he may do so. Gawain's redemption comes at the behest of those he has aided.

[95] See Kennedy, p. 80.

[96] I am indebted to Frederick C. Copelston's analysis of Thomas Aquinas's views on "the possibility of an ethical system based on rational reflection" for my argument here (*A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990, p. 189-90).

[97] I am borrowing from Kennedy's argument regarding types of knighthood in Malory's text (see the chapter "A Typology of Knighthood" in *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*). In particular, she quotes Matthew of Vendôme to demonstrate that the concept of character was intended to be "typical" or representative of general traits in order to "exemplify that nature" towards which individuals were supposed to strive – "It is not important, therefore, that the character be fully realized; it is important only that he be typical of his class and that whatever individualizing traits his author gives him should not obscure 'the nature of the subject,' that is the particular type or class of human beings which he exemplifies" (p. 56-57). This, of course, supports Halbwach's assertion regarding the social memory of the individual. As a type of character, Torre's actions represent "frameworks" for socialized behavior.

[98] We should note, in passing, that Malory frequently uses Gawain to demonstrate a mind that fails to recognize when it has cut itself off from the larger concerns of the Arthurian community. One need only think of Gawain's obsessive desire to avenge his father – even after he has slain Pellinore he finds that he cannot let the need for vengeance go, and must prosecute it to the detriment of the Round Table's integrity. I do not believe Malory sees Gawain as inherently "evil." The point he wants to make with Gawain is the danger of forgetting the *prior* demands of the community which take precedence over the individual.

[99] "Malory's conception of 'taking the adventure' . . . 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" (Jill Mann, p. 90). I must confess that I find Mann's attempt to maintain the un-mediateable Kantian division between inner subjectivity and external world as grounds for "union" difficult to fathom. How does one "match oneself to," how does one "take into himself" an event if one does not comprehend the event? What does such a "union" even mean?

[100] See Kennedy, p. 63: "The circumstances of the case are Malory's invention. In fact this entire passage . . . is not to be found in Malory's source. Malory is making the same point made by Sir Gilbert Hay in the *Buke of Knychthede*. Knights are supposed to punish evildoers. Any knight who is himself guilty of a crime like rape, theft or murder, is not a 'verray' knight. He is a 'false' knight, 'unworthy for to lyve.'"

[101] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, volume 3, pp. 112-13, italics added.

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[102] See P.J.C. Field, "Malory and his Scribes," *Arthuriana* 14:1 (Spring 2004), p. 31. Additionally, Edwards notes that "this story has incurred more critical attention than any other comparable stretch of the *Morte*" (p. 25).

[103] See Edmund Reiss: "The story of Balin is in its own right a tragedy comparable to those in the Greek drama. Balin, the rash man, may be viewed as learning how significant all human actions are. From confidently accepting whatever comes his way, Balin proceeds until he learns that there is a web joining together everything he does as well as everything that happens to him" (*Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Sylvia E. Brown, Twayne's English Authors Series, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966, p. 49). See also Carolyn Martin Craft's treatment of the issue of Balin's responsibility in her unpublished dissertation "Free Will in Malory's Morte Darthur and in some Earlier Arthurian Writings" (University of Pennsylvania, 1973, p. 26).

[104] Pochoda emphasizes the crucial placement of the Balin story before the unification of Arthur's realm (p. 63). This highlights the atmosphere of disequilibrium that Arthur's rule is supposed to address. As Reiss has pointed out, "the story of Balin may be regarded as showing in striking fashion the need in the land for ideals and order" (p. 53); and this need is intended to be met with the consolidation of the Round Table.

[105] Every critic who interprets this pivotal moment sees in it far-reaching implications for the meaning and structure of the ensuing story. For example, Robert Kelly sees Balin's insistence on keeping the sword in spite of the maiden's dire warning as the tragic flaw of hubris ("Malory's 'Tale of Balin' Reconsidered," *Speculum* 54: 1 (Jan. 1979) 85-99, p. 90). Jill Mann argues that this represents Balin's humility and submissive acceptance of the destiny that he cannot control (p. 90). Beverly Kennedy tries to take the middle road and proposes that Balin "bows meekly before the will of God," but also "presumes to know better than the damsel what God's will is" (p. 222). Kevin Whetter, following Kennedy's lead, claims that "neither Malory nor Arthur criticizes the keeping of the sword," and that in keeping it he is fulfilling the values of epic-heroic literature ("On Misunderstanding Malory's Balyn," *Reviewing Le Morte Darthur*, eds. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, Arthurian Studies lx, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 153-54).

[106] It is tempting to see in Balin's argument the claim that the individual is the measure of his or her worth. But it strikes me that Balin's point is exactly what Halbwachs urges us to recognize – the individual may be responsible, but he or she can only understand what that means in the context of frameworks supplied by society. Balin may assert that "'manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person'" (39/27-28), but these values only have meaning in the context of others' perceptions and potentialities.

[107] This is Kennedy's description of Mann's claims regarding Balin and the question of individual choice in shaping destiny (p. 222). While this view of humility appears to be a common reading, it is not all together clear to me that Mann actually *means* humility when she describes Balin's actions; in fact, what she seems to be stressing particularly in Balin's "taking the adventure" is the "arbitrariness" and "hidden mysteriousness of man's nature" (p. 77). Mann's key point is that adventure is "revelatory rather than confirmatory" (p. 77) and that Balin's "taking the adventure" is not simply bowing before a higher authority, but rather the *anticipation* of possibility and openness to the future which produces the "mysteriousness" of a liminal state in Balin.

[108] See Kelly, p. 90.

[109] While it might be objected that the oppositions "humility and pride" and "openness and resistance" are in practical terms the same thing, I want to avoid a discourse focused on humility and pride. One can be open to another without necessarily being humble, just as one can be closed or resistant to another without implying pride. By moving my analysis into a discourse on closure and responsiveness, I hope to highlight not the implicit theology behind the contrast of humility and pride, but the inherently social mediation of openness and resistance.

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[110] See Reiss: "To maintain his family honor as well as his own, Balin not only violates the honor of Arthur's court and attacks a person to whom Arthur is indebted but also kills a lady. The rashness and insensitivity seen in this action might be seen as Balin's tragic flaws" (p. 47).

[111] See Whetter's argument that Balin is simply living up to the expectations for a worshipful knight's honor (pp. 154-55), in particular his claim that "Since the blood-feud is never condemned by Malory or other characters, and since even Arthur's anger stems not so much from the fact that Balin slew the lady but that he did so in Arthur's presence while she was under his 'sauffconduyghte,' Balin's vengeance seems justified" (p. 154). Aside from the fact that every blood feud in the *Morte* results in the slayings of some of the best knights of the Round Table, I would question just how such feuds avoid disastrous consequences for the Arthurian community. Furthermore, is it not true that in pursuing his blood feud Balin is led directly to the offense against Arthur?

[112] See Kennedy: "Malory's "Tale of Balin" shows that the pursuit of vengeance brings misfortune not only upon the avenger but also upon his society" (p. 230).

[113] "Vengeance, then , is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body. There is the risk that the act of vengeance will initiate a chain reaction whose consequences will quickly prove fatal to any society of modest size. The multiplication of reprisals instantaneously puts the very existence of a society in jeopardy" (René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, pp. 14-15). See Beverly Kennedy's "Happy and Unhappy Knights" in *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*, pp. 228-29.

[114] Reiss emphasizes this when he points out that people do get to make choices in the *Morte Darthur*, and that Malory positions his characters such that they are seen making both wise and reasonable decisions, and terrible mistakes: "It is not that everything is predetermined, for the story emphasizes over and over the consequences of human actions, both the rash and the well thought out" (p. 46).

[115] Thomas Rumble sees in this "rash" behavior a comment on the *Morte* in general. His point is that the Balin story reinforces a condemnation, borne out in the movement of the overall theme of Arthur's rise and fall, of those knights who neglect to consider the consequences their actions will hold for the future: "its ["The Knight With the Two Swords"] main characters have the same opportunities to stem the seemingly fateful course of events, and fail to do so though the same rash heedlessness of forewarned consequences (p. 84).

[116] William Caxton, Preface to Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, p. xv.

CHAPTER 3. ARTHURIAN MEMORY AND THE CHIVALRIC COMMUNITY

"The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones" has a long tradition among Malory scholars of garnering harsh criticism. In 1922 E.K. Chambers declared that Malory "would have done better to have left the *Tristan* alone" and this view remained unchallenged by critical consensus for years after.[1] The objections that many critics have had to the Tristram apparently stem from prejudices about presumed "structural and thematic" demands on which Malory supposedly fails to deliver.[2] Occupying the center of *Le Morte Darthur*, the "Tristram" is a pivotal section in which we move from the developing glories of the Round Table to the eventual decline of the Arthurian world. Because it is a transitional piece, even as the text glories in the successes of the initial four books the shadow of the last three books falls over the work with the arc of their eventual tragedy. The "Tristram" has a foot in both worlds; it lingers at the threshold of Arthurian grandeur, unable to commit wholly to the splendor of the court at its brightest and unwilling to move towards the final darkness foreshadowed in the slayings of Lamorak and Tristram. In fact, this hesitancy explains the lavish length of the Tristram and what critics sometimes feel is an interminable list of repetitious adventures and protracted combats with no obvious objectives.[3] The broad narrative space in which the "Tristram" section moves is partly the result of Malory's desire to keep the chivalric order alive as long as possible – he doesn't want it to end.[4] In addition, however, the tale's discursiveness and at times episodic character underlie the annoyance felt by those readers who see a lack of consistency in Malory's approach to the traditional story. It need hardly be stressed that the purpose of the *Prose Tristan*, whence from some unknown variant of which Malory drew his version of the tale, was to follow the tragic romance of Tristan and Isolde. Malory, however, seems little interested in the romance of Tristan and Isolde, depriving them of the force of their looming fate and refusing even to show

Tristram's hapless end. While Malory occasionally acknowledges what his audience must know, the narrative never actively engages Tristram's murder at the hands of the treacherous King Mark. Nor, for that matter, does Malory show us Lamorak's death – it is simply reported after the fact.[5] Such deviations from what would appear to be the original plot of the story could contribute to a sense that Malory's grasp of the *matière* was incoherent and that, as a result, he failed to keep the promise of his exemplar. The belief that the "Tristram" is a "devitalization,"[6] however, is not an accurate assessment of the text; nor do such accusations do justice to the profound depth and deliberate complexity of a tale whose significance to Malory's overall project is reinforced precisely through his alleged failures.

In the broadest of terms we can say that the "Tristram," as the culmination of a general movement towards unification and ennoblement of the Round Table, is about the Arthurian community.[7] Which is to say the tale is concerned primarily with the interests and interactions binding together a specific group of people – in this case knights. More specifically, the "Tristram" explores the codes of conduct, the standards of behavior, and the ethical criteria on which a chivalric class of men establish their way of being in the world.[8] My goal is to look at the way the "Tristram" functions as a response to Malory's troubled reading of his own world, as outlined in Chapter 1. Having established that the political and social climate of fifteenth-century England produced in its inhabitants a profound sense of crisis, I argued that Malory believed the fragmentation of his age could be resolved by a turn to collective memory: in remembering their past, Malory's audience would presumably find the responsibilities and commitments that bound them together as a cohesive social group. In this chapter I will explore how the "Tristram" attempts to meet that culture of instability with a proposed restorative gesture

utilizing an ideological unity located specifically in the chivalric ethos making collective memory possible.

Malory's aperçu regarding chivalry is that it offers a way out of political and social fractiousness through the vehicle of fellowship. Where book one of the *Morte* is concerned with the founding and reinforcement of those virtues most amenable to the consolidation of the Arthurian community, in "The Book of Sir Tristram," Malory turns his attention from the origins of the fellowship to the interactions of the community as it works to maintain its equilibrium. Fellowship is not, for Malory, a simple concept, and much scholarly discussion has been dedicated to its involvement in shaping his vision of the Round Table community. For instance, Elizabeth Archibald has explored the history and meaning of the word in Middle English, arguing that the idea of fellowship has a relevance in the *Morte* that is not reflected in Malory's sources.[9] Recognizing that it is a crucial source of unity for Malory, Archibald codifies the two principal modes in which the term is conceptualized in reference to the Round Table: it is both an expression of the temporary bonds of companionship arising from a shared adventure or goal; and it is an articulation of the more-or-less "permanent" ties defining a community.[10] And Kevin Grimm has shown that the concept of fellowship would have resonated in an age that saw the flourishing of secular orders of chivalry: although the rise of orders of knighthood reflected aristocratic fears of social mobility, these chivalric orders maintained a belief in the inherent equality shared amongst their members.[11] Companionship, loyalty, friendship and genuine affection – fellowship, for Malory, is a socially cohesive practice occupied by a variety of conditions that come together in the effacing of differences and the reinforcing of a desire to draw close to another.

But fellowship is, in part, also a strategic mechanism that Malory repeatedly turns to in the "Tristram" in order to explore ethically challenging situations that potentially tear the social fabric. As a socially constructed strategy, fellowship is implemented through the psychological mechanisms of honor and shame. These instruments of social adaptability reinforce the bonds that unite the members of a social unit; more importantly for Malory, the "Tristram" serves to exemplify codes of conduct whose models for understanding are based on an authoritative continuity with the past in which the present seeks to recognize itself. As Johann Huizinga sums up this point, "The life of a knight is an imitation";[12] for Malory's intended audience of knights and gentlemen, imitation meant following the examples set by one's ancestors, and this sense of continuity united them in a shared identity. This shared identity was an integral aspect of the fellowship experienced by the knights in their chivalric orders – not only were they united in their social obligations to and affections for one another, they were drawn together in their common recognition of their heritage.

While I have addressed communal memory throughout Chapters 1 and 2, I want here to clarify a defining feature of what I take to be "collective memory," and that is its organizational functionality for a specific social group. Collective memory is a rather vague concept and, as Jay Winter has demonstrated, prone to many abuses by modern critics who are invested heavily in the term without adequately clarifying what it means.[13] Following Winter's formulation, "Collective memory may be understood as a set of signifying practices linking authorial encoding with audience decoding of messages about the past."[14] I want to add to this the further stipulation that "signifying practices" should refer to those social, political, or cultural activities that specific groups perceive as the defining experiences and habits of their own group identity, which has been handed down from previous generations. We can see this process of

generational continuity emerge in the numerous instances in the text where Malory draws to our attention the connection between the present and the past through formulas or customs which codify a structure of kinship or solidarity within his class. For instance, twice in the "Tristram" Malory reminds his audience "that all maner jantylmen hath cause to the worldes ende to prayse sir Trystram and to pray for his soule," because it was Tristram who gave them the terms used in hunting and hawking.[15] Malory emphasizes the continuity not just between his age and the (imaginary) past; he projects it into the future as well, evoking out of the progression of generations a sense of unity that both transcends time and that resists any potential for violation or fracturing of tradition. One of the operations of collective memory, then, is to map a *perception* of fundamental stability on to an ideological field; and it does so, Malory suggests, through what Kenneth Hodges has described as the "willingness and ability" of the members of the *Morte*'s audience to subscribe to shared social practices.[16]

But we can take this harnessing of the desire for a past to an ideological identity further. Malory shows he can use that appreciation for the past as a strategic tool for highlighting how customs face the possibility of coming unmoored from tradition, setting the stage for social instability.[17] Historians are well aware that the people of the Middle Ages were particularly susceptible to a nostalgic belief that the past was always better than the present, and this is especially true of moralizing literature which, in a common rhetorical trope, is concerned with exposing how "bad" people are now compared to previous generations.[18] As a result, it is no surprise that the fifteenth-century English would perceive in the political turmoil of their era an expression of the ongoing disintegration of the world. However, Malory's use of this literary trope is with the express purpose of reminding his audience of their obligations to live up to their heritage. The point, in most cases, is not to say "we are so different"; the purpose is to bring

forth exemplars whom we must emulate. Take, for instance, Malory's assertion that in the past his society did not make distinctions between types of "murder." Not only that, but murders were settled the good old fashioned way: man-to-man. Malory describes how King Angwysshe of Ireland stands accused of treason for the murder of Sir Blamour's cousin: "So whan the kynge herde hym sey his wyll he understood 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, other ellys to fynde another knyght for hym. And alle maner of murthers in thos dayes were called treson" (252/36-41). Malory would seem to approve of this old custom; as he points out, Angwysshe answers Blamour "knyghtly." Ultimately, the effect of these admonishments is to provide chivalry with the shape of a glorious and coherent past that can be restored through imitation.[19]

In translating from his French sources, Malory takes every opportunity to accentuate "problems of chivalric conduct"[20] not only in order to provide models of appropriate behavior for knights, but also to stress the importance of communication in reinforcing ethical commitments. Malory eschews as much as possible the traces of the fantastic that occupy many other Arthurian narratives; his interest, instead, is focused on how knights engage one another both in combat and out.[21] As a result, while the narrative takes perpetual delight in its innumerable battles and jousts, it is extensively punctuated by dialogue, speeches, oaths and exclamations.[22] In fact, the text's enthusiasm for speech signifies an important aspect of the chivalric culture that sometimes is occluded by the attention devoted to thematic interests.[23] Battles are frequently preceded by conversation; often interrupted to continue the conversation; sometimes resolved through dialogue; and always concluded with a speech (assuming the combatants survive).[24] Jill Mann, among others, has drawn attention to the fact that the structure of chivalric combat in the *Morte*

is crucial to the comprehension of self identity and that its significance depends on an expectation that knights discover what it means to be a knight primarily through "aventure."[25] Her argument, in essence, is that the "structure" of the combat creates "revelatory" opportunities, moments when the knights are granted access to their own interiorities.[26] While Mann's pairing of structure and chance appears antithetical, the point she seems to be making is that the environment defined by chivalric procedures is one which encourages knights not to fashion their own identities but rather learn what they already are. The duality, then, that Mann invokes in order to describe the experience of knightly identity is an opposition between a subjectivity that is oriented towards the external and social, and one that is self-reflectively inward-turning and open to, in an almost Augustinian implication, those transcendent values that would legitimize a private world.[27] And for Mann, this activity is centered on the hazarding of the knight's body in the trial by arms.[28]

I bring up Mann's observations because it seems to me that what is "revelatory" about the event in which chivalric combat takes place is that it helps its participants *remember* themselves. To place the self within the specific rules of engagement, the codes of conduct, that make chivalric combat not only possible but a distinct function determining what the chivalric class is, is to insert the self into an institution that unites the members of that group. But these institutions are in fact the memory of the social group for they establish not only what constitutes the public domain in which the activities of the knights can take place; the repetition of such acts also reinforces the continuity of the available modes for making sense of the world – their participants in effect "commemorate" the established models of behavior.[29] Memory, or at least what we have been calling authentic memory, is inherently a social activity. This is partly why the conduct imposed on combat is so crucial to the understanding of self. Indeed, the identity

that the knights "discover," to use Mann's phrase, is a class identity. What they learn about themselves through the structure of combat, through the repetition of rituals and communal practices, is an institution with a highly developed sense of cohesion linking its members across time and across singularities of individual existence.[30] Speech plays a vital role because if, as Mann indicates, the battle between knights is an internalizing, isolating activity by means of which the individual withdraws, self-reflectively, into himself, then the commitment to appropriate standards of behavior is the re-inscription of the private experience of the body in an ethical system, which is itself communal. Malory certainly wants his knights to be self-reflective, but internal subjective experience only has meaning when it is incorporated into social frameworks for understanding. The distinct order or conduct of behavior imposed on what is potentially a disruptive and fractious event, and emphasizing an ethical obligation, locates the individuals within a space that is dedicated to the re-enactment of "social cues" and cultural forms.[31]

In Tristram's first battle with Lamerok, for instance, Malory uses dialogue to show the complicated demands that chivalry makes of knights, demands that do not begin and end with the temporal boundaries marking the event of the physical confrontation itself. Tristram's initial encounter with Sir Lamerok takes place because he is instructed by King Mark to joust with Lamerok. Tristram attempts to dissuade Mark by reminding him of a key obligation in knighthood – that, as Lamerok has been fighting all day and is likely winded, it would be dishonorable to have Tristram take advantage of Lamerok's fatigue: "'Sir,' seyde sir Trystrames, ' mesemyth hit were no worshyp for a nobleman to have ado with hym, and for this cause: for at this tyme he hath done overmuch for ony meane knyght lyvynge. And as me semyth,' seyde sir Trystrames, 'hit wer shame to tempte hym ony more, for his horse is wery and

hymselff both'" (269/1-5). Mark ignores Tristram's remonstrance and orders him to joust. Tristram responds by reinforcing the lesson to which he has been giving voice, namely that he is being asked to do something unethical and he knows it: "'ye bydde me do a thynge that is ayenste knyghthode . . . And wete you well that he woll take hit for grete unkyndenes, for ever one good knyght is loth to take another at avauntage'" (269/11-15). Stressing that he is also aware that he must obey his king, however, Tristram readies himself and gives Lamerok a fall, just as he predicted.

On the one hand, this articulation of warfare through verbal intercourse reinforces the formal nature of chivalric combat as it is submitted to rules of behavior, as we will see in Lamerok's issuance of challenges to Tristram, and the latter's demurrals. More importantly, though, the interweaving of discourse and armed conflict demonstrates that, for Malory, speech and battle are mutually constitutive forces organizing and actively sustaining the Arthurian community.[32] As soon as he is unhorsed by Tristram, Lamerok demands for the sake of his honor to fight on foot. Tristram refuses him: "'Nay, sir!' seyde sir Trystrames, 'I woll no more have ado wyth you, for I have done the overmuch unto my dyshonoure and to thy worshyppe'" (269/25-27). In the back-and-forth that ensues, as Lamerok insists that Tristram fight him, and Tristram tries to explain why he will not do so, what emerges is the effort Tristram is undergoing in order to mediate multiple demands. First, he cannot refuse Mark; but Mark asked only that he joust, so Tristram sticks to the letter of the word. Second, as his confession makes clear, Tristram has acted dishonorably according to the chivalric code by taking advantage of Lamerok's weakened state: "'Sir Lamerok . . . I undirstonde your harte is grete, and cause why ye have to sey the soth, for hit wolde greve me and ony good knyght sholde kepe hym freyssh and than to stryke downe a wery knyght; for that knyght nother horse was never fourmed that

allway may endure'" (269/42-44, 270/1-2). Third, and most significantly, there is the intimate demand that one knight places on another for *understanding*. As Tristram points out to Lamerok, he knows how Lamerok feels; he knows that Lamerok has not failed, but rather that it is he, Tristram, who has failed, for he has failed his brother in arms.

In objecting to Mark, Tristram shows that while "a nobleman" is expected to follow the demands of his liege he is also obligated to remind his lord when appropriate social conventions are being violated;[33] in addition he is required to contemplate the consequences of his actions. Tristram reminds us of an ethically crucial responsibility when he asserts "'wete you well that he woll take hit for grete unkyndenes.'" Here, the text emphasizes not only Tristram's awareness of protocol and the impact on his honor; significantly, he is showing that honor is dependent upon fellowship. It would be easy to say that Tristram simply does not want to besmirch his reputation by violating an ethical injunction: good knights do not do such-and-such. But Tristram's avowal gives voice to the recognition of the impact of his actions not just on himself, but on Lamerok as well. Thus, dialogue and assault are not necessarily prohibitive, but rather have the potential to be inclusive. At times, defeated knights are brought into the fold, forced to abandon their isolationist ways and join the Round Table. At others, enemy combatants simply wish to identify their opponents. And as the prior example illustrates, the intersection of combat and dialogue makes possible a world of intimate contact that might otherwise disappear in symbolism or violence. The convergence of speech and battle repeatedly make evident the concentration on socialization and community building.

It is, then, within the context of the chivalric class and its internal operations that we must look for Malory's faith in a restorative practice that will renew and consolidate the fragmented world. That practice, according to the *Morte*, is chivalry – the ethos that Malory perceives as

fashioning a space which gentlemen can occupy *as a community* bound together through mutual ethical and physical commitments. The praxis of chivalry in *Le Morte Darthur*, however, does require some clarification if we are to understand how it supports collective memory. To begin with, how does Malory define chivalry? First and foremost, in Malory's time chivalry was not an abstract concept but a quality that resided in a "rigid code"[34] that could be followed to the letter. In the well-known scene at the end of "Torre and Pellinor" we find Arthur establishing the ethical context of the Round Table by proposing a series of rules that would bind his knights within a shared code of conduct:

> [T]han the kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes and gaff them rychesse and londys; and charged them never to do outerage nothir mourthir, and always to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfeiture of their worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evermore; 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. Also, that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarrell for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table Rounde, both olde and younge, and every yere so were they sworne at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste. (75/36-44, 76/1-2)

We can see immediately that the regulations stipulated by Arthur focus on two primary considerations: maintaining the civil order by not engaging in disruptive or disreputable behavior; and securing the privileges and defense of women. This is perhaps the clearest example of what Malory sees as the responsibilities underwriting the activity of chivalry,[35] responsibilities that his audience certainly would have perceived as profoundly woven into their own conceptions of themselves and their actions in the world.[36] More importantly, the very rigidity of the code enforced a sense of formalism that acted as a structural framework with clearly delineated objectives that would close off loopholes or potential distortions of order. Thus, Malory establishes for his audience the principles by which a social group is able to rein in

potentially destructive behavior, contributing towards the cultivation of communal integrity, and which reinforce the solidarity of a specific class consciousness as a unifying experience. [37]

What I am most interested in, however, regarding Malory's presentation of the chivalric ethos is the way he emphasizes both the repetitive renewal of the vows, indicating that their force is derived from a periodic instauration, and the curious "both olde and young" phrase, which deliberately evokes an appreciation of custom and the flow of continuity. Having the knights renew their vows at the feast of Pentecost serves not only to revitalize their dynamic connection to the past through an act of commemoration, it also ties that act to a foundational moment in Christian theology. While Pentecost is the celebration in Christian belief of the descent of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, it is in many respects a commemoration of the very origins of the Church itself, given that it "remembers" the founding of the Christian brotherhood. As a result, the intersection of the Round Table origin with the origin of the Christian community is a totality of connected remembrances that brings together two pillars of collective memory and upholds a continuity of tradition for its intended audience. The appeal to custom works to ground the chivalric experience in the "living force of tradition,"[38] which is evident in the continuity established between the young and old, a succession that implies not only the persistence of the past, but a projection into the future. And such reverence for custom in the *Morte* extends to "bad" customs as well – even justifying behavior on the part of Malory's knights that would strike us as shocking.

A most pronounced example of how Malory uses the sanctity of tradition as a means of navigating ethically treacherous dilemmas can be found in the unsettling scene when Tristram returns from Ireland with Isolde and is forced to participate in the "'foule custom and a shamfull custom'" kept by Sir Brewnor. This "'olde custom,'" so goes the text, is such that '"whan a

knyght commyth here he muste nedis fyght with oure lorde, and he that is the wayker muste lose his hede. And whan that is done, if his lady that he bryngeth be fowler than is oure lordys wyff, she muste lose hir head. And yf she be fayrer preved than ys oure lady, than shall the lady of this castell lose her hede'" (258/36-41). When Isolde is judged the better beauty Tristram takes Brewnor's lady "and with an awke stroke he smote of hir hede clene" (260/6). While we might find this execution in potential violation of the Round Table oath, Tristram defends his action by saying that the custom has weight and it is only appropriate that those who live by it should die by it. Given the opportunity to extend mercy, Tristram finds that tradition, even a "foule" tradition, trumps other claims through the force of justice. And this devotion to tradition is intended to strengthen the perception in the members of Malory's community that the validity of their existence rests on the authority of previous generations.

This brings us to the question of what precisely Malory's "community" is. Since I will have recourse throughout this chapter to the term I want to make clear that when I refer to Malory's class I am referencing what most historians perceive as multiple social groups: gentry, nobility, and aristocracy. The meaning of the *Morte* is encoded by an author for a specific kind of audience who, we would assume, knows how to read its messages. Thus it is necessary to recognize what comprises the collective identity informing Malory's understanding of his text and mediating that text's message for his audience. One of the central problems at stake in identifying Malory's concept of class is the issue of the gentry; most scholars are aware that, in contrast to the outmoded model of the three estates – the warrior aristocracy, the clergy, and those who labor for a living – by the fifteenth-century social mobility had produced numerous groups who could not be placed with any accuracy in the traditional structure of society. Much critical attention has been paid to the group of knights and country gentlemen to which Malory is

believed to have belonged, the gentry, and it is commonplace to see this classification as a distinct caste separated from the nobility.[39] More troubling, however, for our understanding of the imagined community binding Malory to his perceived audience, is the widely-accepted understanding that the historical class of "gentlemen" was constituted from men who were not necessarily members of the warrior aristocracy.[40] This complicates matters because it would suggest that the shared cultural practices assumed to be underwriting the possibility of a community are simply not there. It is clear, though, from Malory's own account that he does identify with a specific class of "jantyllmen" and that he does belong to it. Malory refers to himself as a knight in the colophon at the end of "The Tale of King Arthur," – "This was drawyn by a knygtht presoner, Sir Thomas Malleorré (110) – and his commonly accepted identification with the old Warwickshire family of Newbold Revell[41] would support the idea that he belonged to the gentry. Furthermore, Malory refers repeatedly to his knights as gentlemen and demonstrates his own conceptual affinities when he lingers almost lovingly over debates of honor and prestige between knights, such as Tristram's and Lamerok's lengthy contestation over who should have the honor of yielding to the other (296/4-18).[42]

What needs to be stressed here, however, is that regardless of whether the historical record indicates that the social class of gentlemen consisted of disparate members identified by disparate functions, Malory himself *does not* conceive of the gentry in such a framework. In fact, there seem to be only three classes in Malory's imaginative world: gentlemen, yeomen, and villeins. As I have indicated, on two distinct occasions Malory reminds his readers that they have Tristram to thank for those customs that help distinguish "jantyllmen" from other groups. We have already looked at the second occurrence, but the very first time Malory brings this recognition to our attention he is emphatic about what he is sees as the divisions for comparison

that define his social class: "Wherefore, as me semyth, all jantyllmen that beryth olde armys ought of ryght to honoure sir Tristrams for the goodly tearmys that jantylmen have and use and shall do unto the Day of Dome, that thereby in a maner all men of worshyp may discever a jantylman frome a yoman and a yoman from a vylayne" (232/15-19). There are several issues emerging from this passage that need to be identified. The first is what exactly Malory means by gentlemen, and he is quite clear about what that is. For Malory, the "jantylmen" class is the class that engages in chivalric pursuits; more specifically, the men who understand the formalized *language* of hunting are "jantyllmen that beryth olde armys" and it is they to whom Malory writes.[43] To be clear, Malory is not saying Tristram handed down the custom of hunting; instead, he is emphasizing that Tristram gave posterity an important strategy for *classification*. As Hannah Arendt has pointed out, "no society can properly function without classification, without an arrangement of things and men in classes and prescribed types."[44] Tristram's legacy, then, is in fact culture – or at least, a stable identification within society of what constitutes that society.[45] Thus the gentlemen to whom Malory refers form the basis for a social category, knights. And what distinguishes for him the collective identity of his class is the commitment to specific conventions that have been handed down and practiced along an historical continuum. The term "gentry" as we use it would be meaningless to him.[46] As a result, I prefer to use the term chivalric class when speaking of Malory's perceived social category to describe those members of a group who are bound together through their shared enthusiasm for and practice of chivalry.

The second issue emerging from Malory's homage to Tristram that bears on our understanding of his communal identity is the association with historical continuity. This is of critical importance because it shows how Malory's project is invested in maintaining a crucial

connection between the practice of chivalry and its imaginary past. The stipulation "jantyllmen that beryth olde armys" is not interjected simply to assert an equation of gentlemen with knight; it is a calculated gesture designed to reinforce in his audience respect for tradition and remembrance of ancestral establishments. The expression "olde armys" refers to coats of arms and the import of Malory's insistence on mooring the conditions for inclusion in the chivalric class not just to an individual's actions but also the individual's location in a constellation of names conveys the importance of heritage for self identity. More importantly for Malory, the act of remembrance signaled by heraldic identification defined the boundaries of the chivalric world.[47] As the preservation of hereditary badges of honor, coats of arms belong to the discipline of heraldry, though the latter term originated more often with such insignia as they appeared on the battlefield.[48] Nevertheless, one of the central functions of heraldry as a "science" is its collective memory. The responsibilities of heralds progressed over time from simply identifying individual combatants to the recollection of entire memorial narratives;[49] what did not change, however, was the core recognition of identity with achievements and class values, replete with examples of social virtues founded on glories, personal and familial, both past and present.[50] The importance of this function should not be underestimated. Armorial bearings "are a record not just of the arms of individuals, but also of the culture and aspirations of the noble society in which they moved";[51] as a result, they worked systematically and over time to consolidate a perception of a single chivalric class with a shared history and united ideals. Within its framework for remembering, family crests, arms, all the testaments to the honors and privileges of one's family and caste, are formalized as a communal identity.

The point here is that by amalgamating the genealogical with the ethical,[52] heraldry unifies an ideology of class through a *performance* of social remembrance. Part of what

generates the communal aspect of the heraldic memory function is not just that it is a collective in the sense of being a set of signifying principles possessed by or of a communal organization; in providing roles for its members heraldry articulates the memory of the community in a present activity. It is not simply the past – it is the past made present. Thus the particular strength of heraldry for the chivalric class lies in its capacity to define an *actual* community, rather than simply postulating an ideal. As an institution it makes a shared memory possible by making the memorial real, by locating memory in time and place.[53] Through heraldry the entire community is called to witness the past being summoned to verify the present as a genealogical and ethical memory. Heraldic "history" is the voice of a specific social class and its memory of itself made manifest.

To be isolated from this voice, to be excluded from the communal acts of remembrance that forge a reality of bonds and affiliations is to have no identity. Thomas Greene reminds us that, "As individuals and as communities, we learn who we are by means of private or collective memory,"[54] and this is no less true for the characters in the *Morte* than it is for those members of Malory's audience who, by and large, found themselves called upon by chivalric lives of service and duty to *remember*. The knights in the *Morte* engage in quests and battle one another in order to station themselves within the framework of social recognition – that is, the pursuit of worship and the avoidance of shame. This framework, however, is fundamentally an act of remembering as it asks the individual to reaffirm perpetually his or her inherited obligations. In doing so, by fulfilling the charges imposed by a life of imitation, the knight receives the consolation of purpose and meaning. Malory was all too aware of this; and the clearest expression of what happens when a knight loses his capacity to recollect his chivalric heritage is found in the episode of Tristram's madness.

"An amnesiac" Greene observes, "is considered sick and unfortunate because he doesn't know who he is. When he recovers his memory, he recovers his identity,"[55] and this theme clearly dominates the "Madness and Exile" passage as Tristram *forgets* himself in the woods. The themes of madness and exile as ruptures in social continuity have a well-established literary tradition behind them -- Lancelot himself will go mad in "The Book of Sir Tristram," flinging himself from a window into the thorn bushes after being rebuked by Guinevere during the "Lancelot and Elaine" episode,[56] and will be forced into exile after being caught in the queen's chambers in book eight. What needs to be singled out in Tristram's narrative, however, is that unlike Lancelot, who is responding to a direct injunction imposed on him by Guinevere, Tristram's madness is a self-imposed isolation stemming not from his lover's rejection, but his own inability to cope with the burdens of his role as the jilted lover. Believing that Isolde has been unfaithful to him, Tristram, inconsolable, takes it upon himself in a moment of violent self-abandonment to flee Mark's court and wander the countryside. Faced with the trauma of Isolde's perceived betrayal, Tristram is overwhelmed and, unmoored by the disruption in the integrity of his role as a lover, he makes a crucial symbolic gesture that is missing from Lancelot's run with madness – he deliberately removes his chivalric identity: "Than upon a nyght he put hys horse frome hym and unlaced his armour, and so he yeode unto the wyldirnes and braste downe the treys and bowis" (304/44, 305/1-2). In removing the distinctive reminders of his social existence, Tristram loses his self identity.[57] The practical as well as symbolic act of throwing away his knightly accoutrements reinforces the disintegration of his class-constructed unified sense of self.

One of the first questions to make itself felt in this episode is what we are to make of the fact that it is Tristram himself who renounces his social identity. This is perplexing given that

the import of Tristram's madness is the danger in forgetting one's identity. Whereas Lancelot's madness can be seen as a trope in which the romance subject plays out the expectations of a courtly lover who has been ordered away by his love object, Tristram's actions represent an inner fragmentation as the narrative underwriting his sense of self begins to unravel and the integrity of his chivalric character fails to provide a stable experience. A crucial separation thus emerges: Guinevere demands Lancelot go, so he responds by carrying out that injunction to its extreme conclusion – but not, we should note, in violation of those parameters defining the responsibilities of the romance lover. Indeed, Lancelot is actually recognized on several occasions during his exile, corroborating the enduring continuity of his selfhood. [58] But Tristram is rendered unidentifiable, even in situations where we would naturally expect his companions to recognize him. One cannot help but question how it is that even Isolde is incapable of seeing her lover as himself; and we should not dismiss this as an overly-simple plot device. Malory is reminding his audience that, through the mechanism of Tristram's madness and the corresponding loss of Tristram's socially recognizable identity, a coherent self comes into being when it is integrated through the social frameworks defined by the collective memory of a community. But while the loss of Tristram's communally encoded chivalric identity is part of the problem, that appears here as something of a symptom, not a cause. The specific question that occurs at this point is what precisely leads to the deliberate rejection of his social self? Obviously, as far as the narrative is concerned the stimulus for Tristram's renunciation is his mistaken belief in Isolde's infidelity to him. Thematically, however, the question of Tristram's motivation is contextualized within the dynamics of a class psychology that differentiates between individual and collective remembrance. And the answer resides in the break that occurs within Tristram's sense of self-identity as a result of the peculiar nature of the trauma he suffers.

In essence, the problem for Tristram is not that he has no recollection of the past; rather, he has too much memory. Or at least, memory itself becomes entirely dominated by an inescapably private pain. As a result, he rashly rejects *all* memory because he cannot expunge *some* memory and is thus unable to fashion a coherent response to the ordeal of his knowledge of, or belief in, Isolde's infidelity. Faced with the trauma of Isolde's imagined betrayal, Tristram is obsessed with his own personal experience of the event. As the weight of that experience bears down on him, Tristram tries to reject the memory of what he believes to have taken place – only to find himself further ensnared by the event the more he struggles to free himself from remembrance. The symbolic as well as practical impact of throwing away his armor is the abandoning of himself absolutely to an intensely personal, private, interior struggle that can be neither articulated nor shared; and which, in all its overwhelming and excessively unreasoning power, shatters the chivalric form that is given shape only as a communal entity – for it is that reference to a communal existence that makes human understanding conceivable.

The communally referential aspect of self-identity is vital to Malory's project because it emphasizes the importance of interpersonal connections – a point Charles Taylor summarizes when he observes that

> one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors . . . A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'. It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of 'identity', offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community.[59]

While Taylor is speaking more directly of what he understands to be "modern" formations of the self, his point emphasizes what Malory instinctively comprehends – Tristram's subjectivity is only an identifiable "self" so long as it actively participates in "webs of interlocution," or as we

might say networks of signification. To reject communication is to reject society; after all, this is the man who, according to the "history" chivalric culture maintains, has given them the *language* that distinguishes their class. Worse yet for Tristram, in renouncing his community he renounces his potential for human agency. It is the knowledge of his function in human society that gives Tristram his humanity. But that knowledge is intimately connected to his memory. Lacking that, there is no ethical self, there is no political self. Tristram's madness reflects the fragmented self, divided from its "defining community" and incapable of reflection and self-realization.

As a result, Tristram begins to wither away, no longer a man, certainly not a knight. He attacks other knights like a savage. And the final insult to his identity arrives when he becomes the favored pet of a group of herdsmen and shepherds: "And than was he naked, and waxed leane and poore of fleysch. And so he felle in the felyshippe of herdemen and shyperdis, and dayly they wolde gyff hym som of their mete and drynke, and whan he ded ony shrewde dede they wolde beate hym with roddis" (305/10-15). Reducing Tristram to a beast serves several purposes. On the one hand it fits the topos of the courtly lover driven mad by the actual or perceived rejection of the love object and who can only be restored to sanity when he is restored to her grace. More significantly, however, for Malory's purpose this episode allows him to express the connection he sees between one's social existence and one's humanity. These are not separable identities in Malory's world. In abandoning his knighthood, Tristram loses his selfhood; he is, in respect to his perception of the world to which he is supposed to belong, unconscious.

Identity, consciousness, and selfhood – these are admittedly not concepts that would have been readily available to Malory.[60] Instead, Malory was forced to articulate the function of social consciousness as a boundary marker for a knight's being-in-the-world through the

metaphor of madness and bestiality. In any event, it is evident that Tristram's "madness" is a tangible reminder that to lose one's place in the world is to lose that characteristic of mind that allows one to see oneself in relation to others – or, in the case of the *Morte*, one's peers. In losing the ability to identify one's connections to other members of the community, the entire ethical framework organizing the self as a functioning member of a collective is obliterated. Along with the loss of society goes the connection to culture and with that any continuity with the past. And the lesson Malory would seem to imply is that these stabilizing networks of social existence are fundamentally tied to acts of remembrance. As such, as Greene puts it, "Not to remember is intolerable because a past is formative: visibly or obscurely it shapes us, filling our names with content and setting the conditions of our freedom."[61] Thus, for Tristram to return to his senses he must become conscious of – that is, remember – his function in the community.

Oddly, the pivotal passage in which Tristram is fully restored would appear at first glance to have the opposite effect, in that the result of Tristram's return leads immediately to his physical exile. Having been discovered in the forest, Tristram is captured and brought to Mark's court as a novelty. The point to bear in mind is that no one recognizes him. In his madness, Tristram is impossible to identify – a fact we would expect given that he is possessed of no intrinsic identity. Or perhaps we should say, of no *social* identity. For it is one of Isolde's brachets that discovers Tristram, indicating that only another creature marginalized from the collective remembrance of the court can "see" him, as it were. Tristram's lack of identity, then, brings to the fore the crucial role played by communal memory as a responsibility binding together the self and the community in a reciprocal recognition. Just as the individual's obligation to remember is important, so too is the demand on the community to remember. Thus it is that we find Tristram fully stepping into his frame of social reference at the moment he is

being exiled from the court. At his departure, Tristram, standing on the shore of the sea, turns to those assembled to see him leave and reminds them, in a gesture that will be mimicked in exacting detail by Lancelot in book seven when he must go into exile as well, that just as he is required to live up to the demands of society, the community itself depends on him:

> 'Grete well kyng Marke and all myne enemyes, and sey to hem I woll com agayne when I may. And sey hym well am I rewarded for the fyghtyng with sir Marhalt, and delyverd all hys contrey frome servayge. And well am I rewarded for the fecchynge and costis of queen Isode oute off Irelonde and the daunger that I was in firste and laste. And by the way commying home what daunger I had to brynge agayne queen Isode from the Castell Pleure! And well am I rewarded whan I fought with sir Bleoberys for sir Segwarydes wyff. And well am I rewarded whan I faught with sir Blamoure de Ganys for kyng Angwysh, fadir unto La Beall Isode.' (310/11-20)

Tristram continues in this vein for two more passages, reminding the court of all the deeds he has performed in service to them. It is Tristram at his most dignified and noble, who remembers what the court will not.[62] And it is at this moment that Tristram announces in the most vocal manner his re-possession of memory and corresponding avowal of his identity. In Taylor's terms Tristram is reinforcing the "webs of interlocution" by defining both the position from which he speaks and that of those to whom he speaks.

Tristram's speech demonstrates the way in which the chivalric social group conceived past obligations as the foundation for a unified community through a culture of service. Because Malory is concerned with the issue of social integrity (at least for the estate to which he belonged), for him the inherent divisiveness or instability of men is a problem troubling the unity and order of a realm that is itself organized for the specific purpose of providing his class with the means to its existence. Mary Carruthers has demonstrated that the Aristotelian notion of the individual being completed *in* society is vital to the medieval understanding of the individual as a communal entity.[63] We have seen as well how such an understanding underscores what for

Malory is the traumatic experience of his age: the feeling that class solidarity and collective identity are losing ground in a world where people are either forgetting their responsibility to the foundation of social order, or even lacking the basic connections to those responsibilities. While this dread of class divisiveness is imbedded in the text as a controlling motif or image of instability, we find it most clearly expressed in those passages like Tristram's exile where it appears that collective remembrance itself breaks down in the failure to recall the debts owed to the individuals who make up the community. In a society oriented towards a concept of service in which the group's members are encouraged and even rewarded for unquestioningly placing the self at the disposal of another, Tristram's defense of his assistance and the failure on the part of others to recognize that service, achieves two significant effects. First, he shames the community by revealing its fragile commitment to upholding its own ideals in its willingness to turn on its own members. More importantly, he emphasizes how much he remains a member of the community, regardless of the move to exile him. It is a reminder that service binds not just society to its provider in the obligation to fulfill a debt, but the extent to which human bonds are forged between the benefactor and the recipient. Tristram is bound to those he helps as surely as they are to him, as his actions are woven into the lives of the individuals who make up that society. In announcing each of his deeds, including the names of those for whom he fought or with whom he fought, the network of social affinities is revealed as a web of personal relationships. For Malory, the demands of service imposed by chivalry write a social history that remembers not only who we are in relation to one another, but who we strive to be.

Romance was the perfect vehicle for championing the chivalric culture of service, as its idealistic integration of a specific social group's values with individual aspirations gave Malory ample room to explore the triumphs and failures of putting another before one's self. The genre

typically struggles with fears of social fragmentation and the desire for a restoration of communal identity and it is the intrinsic nature of romance to yearn for a better world, to strive for a society whose ideals are glorified expressions of what is believed to be possible in the realm of real historical forces.[64] For Malory, the romance determines both his desire for a social order perfected in chivalric ideals, and his anxiety that humans are – through their own confused and petty actions – unwilling to see that conviction through.   According to Fredric Jameson, the romance genre was called into existence specifically to address for the chivalric class a self-referential concern with the question of evil – that which challenges one's ethical injunctions for the way things *should* be. As he puts it, the "romance" was originally "a symbolic answer to the perplexing question of how my enemy can be thought of as being *evil* (that is, as other than myself and marked by absolute difference), when what is responsible for his being so characterized is quite simply the *identity* of his own conduct with mine, the which – points of honor, challenges, tests of strength – he reflects as in a mirror image."[65]

While Jameson is speaking of the romance in general, I would argue that same criteria apply to Malory's perception of chivalry itself; in fact, romance and chivalry are inseparable forms, the one being a vehicle for the other's expression. Both the genre of romance and the ethos of chivalry have at their cores the desire for stable identity. With the romance, that stability is achieved via the communal encoding of designated social practices on the figures that represent forces opposed to group cohesiveness. In chivalry, so the *Morte* suggests, lies the possibility of overcoming that penchant for discord to which humans, and especially those men whose world horizon is bounded by conflict, seem so prone. If my enemy is in truth a version of myself, that is, not wholly other, then it is through recognition of our mutual responsiveness that we come to terms with our essential fellowship.

Thus, communal identification is organized within a field where both challenges to and reinforcements for the social structure are engaged. More than any other of the books in the *Morte*, the "Tristram" is concerned with knights identifying one another. For example, in the battle with Sir Marhalte, Tristram's first authentic encounter as a knight, Tristram must identify himself and his lineage before Marhalte will agree to fight him (235). This is, of course, common courtesy; but more importantly it establishes the grounds on which they can interact with one another as equals. In effect, Tristram is saying "I belong to the same community as you." Or, again, when he fights Lancelot's cousin Sir Bleoberis, Tristram is asked to identify himself, demonstrating his civility and his equality with Bleoberis. After stating his name Tristram asks Bleoberis his in return; as a result of the exchange, Bleoberis is able to devise a peaceful resolution to their differences (249). Recognition, as a theme, appears to be an integral function of combat, shaping the possibility of fellowship.[66] Examples abound throughout the *Morte* of this process of inclusion, where defeated knights are obliged to become members of Arthur's court and where nameless knights must speak and be identified. The model for this is found in the "Tale of Sir Gareth," with Beaumains' defeat of a series of knights who are subsequently welcomed into Arthur's court and richly rewarded. In the "Tristram," however, we have a twist on that model; the hero, rather than the foe, is not yet part of Arthur's court and must be induced to join. On several occasions Tristram comes to the aid of the Round Table (saving Arthur from certain death, encouraging the kings to stay the execution of Lancelot's cousin, and so forth), building his reputation and establishing his worthiness to be part of Arthur's court. Throughout the early episodes of the *Morte* knights actively seek out other knights with the express purpose of convincing them to join their fraternity, and in particular much of the initial "Tristram" narrative is taken up with the process of getting Tristram to the court.[67]

Malory emphasizes the value of Tristram's participation in the Round Table community by stressing the desire of the court to pursue him. At one point Arthur, upset because Tristram has vanished after his outstanding feats of arms at the Castle of Maidens, peevishly rebukes Lancelot for having hurt Tristram during the encounter and supposedly driving him off. Lancelot responds by pointing out that he would have forborne but that he had been commanded by Arthur himself to attack Tristram. More importantly, Lancelot reminds Arthur that he (Lancelot) is in Tristram's debt: "'And, my lorde,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'ye shall understonde that sir Trystram ys a man that I am ryght lothe to offende to, for he hath done more for me than ever y ded for hym as yet'" (330/39-41). It is particularly important that Lancelot remind Arthur of his debt because, by recognizing what he owes, he reinforces the web of communal alliance through obligation and responsibility. What is at stake here is not so much the banal notion that we often associate with debt – I owe you and thus I cannot be free until I've paid you back. It would be a mistake if we interpreted Lancelot's motivation as the rejection of the burden of responsibility. Rather, Malory seems to be articulating a bond that takes place in a group when its members *accept* their responsibility to and for each other. In a scene of the utmost solemnity, Malory has his greatest knight, Lancelot, along with ten of the most renowned knights of the Round Table, swear to find Tristram and urge him to return to the court and be inducted into their high order. Having a book brought forth upon which to swear, Lancelot announces a profound oath:

> "Here we ar ten knyghtes that woll swere uppon thys booke never to reste one nyght where we reste another thys twelve-month untyll that we fynde sir Trystram. And as for me," seyde sir Launcelot, "I promyse you uppon thys booke that, and I may mete with hym, other with fayrness othir with fowlnes I shall brynge hym to thys courte, other elles I shall dye therefore" (330/41, 331/1-5).

This is not an oath lightly undertaken, and by including it Malory affirms that Tristram *belongs* with Arthur's court. In Tristram the court confirms its own values.

Though Tristram begins his career as a knight by defeating and slaying Marhalt, one of Arthur's knights, in a battle for the "truage" of Cornwall, by the end of the tale he takes Marhalt's seat at the Round Table. While the progress of Malory's "Tristram" shifts course from the tragic romance of the original to the eventual embrace of Tristram by Arthur's court, it is shaped just as much by Tristram's convincing Palomides that he is ready for baptism.[68] These two events, being admitted into the court and being admitted into the faith, are the most important structural details of the narrative for they emphasize that Malory's primary concern is with social integration; and as Helen Cooper has noted, "the key word of the whole *Book* is 'fellowship'."[69] While it is a commonplace that chivalry holds an ideological value for Malory that goes beyond mere interest in the social pedigree of knighthood, what is most meaningful for Malory's fascination with an idealized community is that the praxis of chivalry stems largely from his belief in the *ethics* of chivalry. It is a binding force capable of meaningful social cohesiveness.

For example, the willingness to recognize the needs, conditions, and constraints of one's fellows – indeed, to recognize Jameson's point that one's enemy is a reflection of oneself – is of paramount importance to Malory's knights. Frequently in the "Tristram" we find the most dedicated of foes taking time out of their feuds to sympathize with their opponents or to refuse to take advantage when they have the upper hand.[70] Even in situations that might, at first, strike us as mundane we see touching human connections made not simply over grandiose claims of honor and military strength, but in those claims that people exert on one another in their most defenseless and candid conditions. In a remarkable scene of sympathetic detail, Malory can

evoke the genuine love his knights feel for one another, even for those with whom they find themselves at odds. As a case in point, throughout much of book five Tristram and the Saracen knight Palomides are locked in feud with one another, principally over their love for Isolde.[71] They engage in a vicious battle at the tournament of the Castle of Maidens and their anger with one another is maintained at a fever pitch, even as they return to their lodgings with the knight sir Danam after the tournament. When, thanks to the treachery of their host, Tristram, Palomides, and Dinadan find themselves imprisoned, "every day sir Palomydes wolde repreve sir Trystram of olde hate betwyxt them"; however, "whan sir Palomydes se that sir Trystram was falle in syknes, than was he hevy for hym and comforted hym in all the beste wyse he coude" (333/2-6). While Palomides may feel compelled to antagonize Tristram because of their rivalry for Isolde, that compulsion is imposed on him by rules of engagement that define the very class to which he and Tristram belong. Competitiveness is self-obviously part of the chivalric code – armed conflict is not just a way of life, it is a means for resolving differences and earning "worship," that is recognition from your peers. But it would be a mistake for us to see in the conflicts between knights an animosity preventing accord. As Malory makes clear in the prison scene, his knights are intimately bound to one another not simply through their competitions but also through their *appreciation* of each other.[72] It is perfectly acceptable to excoriate your opponent when the two of you are capable of opposition – the opposition itself makes you equals and validates you. But when faced with your rival disadvantaged by tragic circumstances, you are suddenly aware of the frailty of the existence which your rivalry has mutually constructed.

As the realities of fifteenth-century political strife suggest, social and cultural tensions were in fact altering the foundations of English social unity.[73] In England, internecine politics, civil war, social mobility, even the technology of war, seemed to indicate that the praxis of

chivalry which provided the upper classes with a pole star around which to turn had devolved to little or no relevance.[74] They were, so this argument goes, forced to confront the illusion of their ethical system as an effective means of dominating the world.[75] But as Johan Huizinga illustrates, the more illusory chivalry's status becomes, the greater the demand to validate it.[76] In the act of reinforcing the system of beliefs that gave their presence in the world a valid purpose, the chivalric class would see even greater need for conforming to a structure that promised to give form and meaning to a threatened historical and political life. Thus chivalry becomes more important than ever. Outside his text, Malory can see that the chivalric world is failing to preserve the social order it supposedly substantiates. But this does not mean that chivalry is valueless; rather, more needs to be done to salvage it. For Malory, the possibilities inherent in chivalry to provide a stable community are worth pursuing and preserving because we must beware the general trajectory of our world towards instability. The point is that those events which strike us as tragic in nature – accidental deaths, illness, and inexplicable reversals of fortune – underscore a world outside the capacity of our social systems to order and control. When the participants are faced with dire circumstances that cannot be incorporated into the chivalric culture's normative practices, then the system is problematized and the resulting tension drives the observer to re-engage routines or customs that would be perceived as restorative. Palomides can easily put aside his conflict with Tristram in the face of Tristram's illness because their rivalry is not a threat to their constructed world order. Tristram's illness, on the other hand, *is* a threat precisely because it represents the conditions of an unstable world against which the structure of fellowship is opposed. Malory's insight into the problematic issue of internal class division is the understanding that what makes the chivalric ethos work as a consolidating social force is its emphasis on recognizing the needs of others.

To better understand Palomides' ability to switch roles in response to Tristram's illness – moving easily between indignant adversary and caring companion – it helps to conceive of the chivalric world within which they dwell in its structuring role as an artificial or *illusory* world. Similar to some modern sports, chivalry is a game. But by "game" I do not mean to imply that it is a childish or irrelevant exercise designed for amusement or diversion. I mean that it is a system of regulations and models of behavior inhabited by violence and deep personal commitment, on the part of both actors and audience, which is highly structured and coherent, and in which each participant has a *meaningful* role to play. Tournaments, those arenas in which the chivalric ideology could be manifested in reasonably controlled fashion, were first and foremost "spectator sports";[77] as such, they made chivalry accessible in its participatory activity, in the sense that a society could be organized around its interaction with the spectacle. But for those most intimately involved in it, the impact of chivalric combat and the associated social approbation or condemnation could have profound effects on the narrative of one's own life. The "game" does not preclude injuries; it does nothing to ameliorate violence and the threat of feuds. The very reason Tristram finds himself in prison with his companions is that his host, Sir Darras, takes offence over Tristram's having accidentally slain three of Sir Darras' sons during the tourney at the Castle of Maidens. Violent opposition, virulent speech, contests in which there are real winners and losers – this is a game with significant stakes that occasionally result in death or serious injury.[78]

This "game" is a construction that, in addition, is underwritten by a singular objective: to establish the rules by which social equilibrium could be maintained in the face of an unstable world. Evidence for the widespread appeal of chivalry as a socializing value is not hard to find; as many critics have pointed out, chivalry as a normative practice was re-emerging in the

fifteenth-century in particular with renewed force and vigor.[79] Chivalric culture was, in effect, an epistemology providing a specific class of men with the belief that they were responsible for the very existence of the social order. While English society in the later middle ages (what I will consider to be roughly 1350-1500) had long ceased to be a feudal organization,[80] it yet kept before itself an image of feudalism by which it measured itself and interpreted its actions in the world. Regardless of the reality, the belief in the three estates and their specific roles maintained a strong hold on the imagination. This "image" of "feudal society," as Maurice Halbwachs points out, displayed "a group whose members perform a variety of functions, especially those which safeguard the material integrity of the group and allow it to grow in greatness and power."[81]

Halbwachs' point is crucial to following Malory's understanding of the role his knights play in establishing fellowship: as those whose function in society is to keep the communal body intact, they have a greater sense of responsibility than anyone else for defining and protecting that social order. More to the point, "These functions . . . maintain order and a certain degree of uniformity."[82] The essential function of the chivalric class, then, is to provide a foundation for order and *coherence*. As a result, they perceived their world as fundamentally organized around their interests and pursuits which, to their way of thinking was only appropriate – as the guardians of culture they were the most important part of culture.[83] And Malory takes every opportunity to remind his readers of their innate superiority. In chapter xi ("The Red City") of the book, Palomides is told by the citizens of the Red City how two servants of their rightful king rule as tyrants over them. Malory then underscores the destabilizing fears of class conflict as a problem in medieval England:

> "Gyeff a chorle rule and thereby he woll nat be suffysed, for whatsomever he be that is rewled by a vylayne borne, and the lorde of the soyle be a jantylman born,

that same vylayne shall destroy all the jeauntylmen about hym. Therefore all the astatys and lordys, of what astate ye be, loke ye beware wham ye take about you" (433/28-32).

While the obvious class censure speaks to those fears which the ruling elite held of being displaced through the aspirations of the "upwardly mobile," what emerges from this passage that is of particular interest is the reinforcement of the "janteylman['s]" *obligation* to maintain effective social discipline. Implicit in Malory's argument is the idea that the desire of inferior social groups to advance their standing in the world leads to disorder; should a servant become a lord he will not understand the inherent connections to duty which bind the noble. Thus a "janteyleman" bears a responsibility to protect society from those members who would disturb it.

The term "soyle" lends an intriguing interpretation to Malory's primary interest in the concept of fellowship. At stake in Malory's choice of the word "soyle" is an evocation of collective identity: it lies at the confluence of cultural uniformity and remembrance, and is the basis for a perception of the chivalric community as a consciousness tied to the past. In tying authentic lordship to the soil, Malory makes several claims. He deliberately invokes a sense of nobility as "rooted" in the land.[84] Historians are well aware of the old belief that in order to be noble one had to own property and derive one's living from the land. But there is more to this belief than such a simple reduction, and we can hear it voiced in the association Malory makes. This is a rather subtle equation, but by using the expression "soyle" Malory suggests that authentic lordship is derived from the land – that is, the lord of the soil is an emergent property of nature itself, and that property is linked directly to the lifeblood of the community. The connection to the soil argues for continuity between the lands, the lord of those lands, and the generations which, metaphorically speaking, have sprung from the rich loam of those lands.[85] It is the past making the present possible.

Halbwachs has shown how the presence of the noble in medieval society shaped the community's ability to understand its local environment and the individual's place in that environment. I quote a singular passage of his here because it suggests something of the relationship Malory sees between noble families and communal identity:

> [The] assemblage of lands, forest, hills, and prairies has a personal physiognomy arising from the fact that it reflects the figure and history of the noble family that hunts in its forest, walks through its lands, builds castles on its hills, supervises its roads – that noble family that brought together its lands acquired through conquest, royal gift, inheritance, or alliance.[86]

Halbwachs' point is that, according to the medieval understanding of the world, that space which is occupied by the various communities of the body politic becomes inseparable from the genealogical tradition of the noble families who not only inhabit the region, but who give the land an identity which is itself, across the succession of generations, integral to the formation of the collective memories of the populace The soil conjoins those who live on it and those who lived on it in the past and those who will live on it in the future. As a result, it is clear that any collective identity belonging to a relatively enduring medieval community living in specific locations would be seen as a continuity traversing the past, present, and future of the land of which they were part, and with which they perceived the face of their subjectivity. It is evident that in reminding his readers of the "janteyleman's" connection to the land, Malory draws on a perception of gentility as a geopolitical space that is bounded by a heritage. That heritage is viewed as a continuity organized around the lord's identity, and providing the center or nexus for the wisdom emerging from a whole field of collective experiences. The wisdom of the grandfathers, the knowledge of crops and weather formations, the memory of harsh winters and harsher hungers, the slow wheel of the heavens – this was a world whose phenomenology of time had a face; and that face was the visage of the family whose affiliations, whose successes

and failures, whose births and deaths gave the land a name. In that name, nobility as a characteristic would not be necessarily a matter of individual greatness, [87] but rather the result of having consolidated oneself with custom and experienced the force of tradition.[88] In short, to have a collective identity is to be a member of a body that stretches beyond oneself in both *time* and subjectivities.

For Malory, then, an authentic community is a continuity rooted in a particularly conservative defense of the memorial found in the concept of inheritance. And as far as the chivalric class was concerned it was a social existence founded on their heritage that provided the grounds for any authentic community to exist. Just as that memory located in the operations of heraldic genealogy worked to stabilize tradition, so too does the commitment to inheritance provide a core element for the chivalric class in privileging and preserving the continuity of a stable social order on memorial land. Thus it is no surprise that the defining theme of Palomides' adventure at the Red City is the restoration of an inheritance. With the deposition of the rightful king, Harmaunce, the people are reduced to "muche wepying and grete dole" (432/33). When Palomides asks what is wrong, it is clear that the problem is not simply that the rightful king has been slain, but rather that the natural order has been broken. As the knight Sir Ebell points out to Palomides, the king failed in his responsibility to maintain the continuity of the kingdom when he neglected his family: "'And all kyngis and astatys may beware by oure lorde: for he was destroyed in his owne defaute; for had he cheryshed his owne bloode, he had bene a lyvis kynge and lyved with grete ryches and reste'" (433/7-10). Malory's point, here, is that Harmaunce's principal error was not simply that he elevated men who were not of the appropriate class. His mistake was in privileging those who did not have a blood relationship with the "soyle." In cutting off his own family and supplanting them with upstarts, Harmaunce

has broken the continuity on which the community depends. As a result, the men he has favored over the rightful possessors of the land "had dryvyn all the lordis of his bloode frome hym" (433/25-26); even more telling, since they have no collective identity in the land, they lack any fundamental sense of communal responsibility and fellowship. In their selfishness they "ever thought to have more" power (433/27), going so far as to commit the most egregious of sins – they betray their lord. Even Palomides' battle with the faithless knights reinforces the impression of their incivility and callous disregard for their responsibility as knights to maintain the protocols distinguishing the chivalric class. Ignoring chivalric etiquette and their ethical obligations as knights, the brothers attack Palomides at the same time, betraying their honor as much as the bonds demanded of "the high order of chivalry."

The issue, thus, for Malory is that in breaking with tradition and custom, Harmaunce disrupts the natural order and that disruption in turn leads to the effacement of the noble house which gave form and identity to the community. The implication for Palomides' adventure is that in restoring the rightful lord he will remove the break in continuity with the land itself and as a result make the community whole. After he slays the traitorous knights, Palomides is offered the lordship of the Red City as a reward for avenging its fallen king. But Palomides wisely refuses, having "prayde them all to take kepe unto all the lordeship of kyng Harmaunce" (438/21). Palomides' statement is, unfortunately, grammatically vague; and, since we cannot go back to Malory's lost source to verify it, we are left to interpret its meaning. But the phrase "take thee unto all" is voiced with the admonition that one should recall those bonds both of duty and affection shared by everyone in the community. In essence, Palomides recognizes that he has obligations to his own king that take precedence; but he is also reminding the people of the Red City that they ought to recall their allegiance to their rightful lord. I would suggest here that

Palomides is reinforcing the foundations of the chivalric world view by deliberately reinserting Harmaunce into the narrative in an almost ontological capacity. In leaving the people of the Red City with the remembrance of Harmaunce, Palomides localizes or re-contextualizes the absent monarch in the living present and thus it is as though Palomides reinstates him in his presence as political power. The result of the reiteration of the authentic ruler is the reintegration with the collective past; this, it can be said, comes with the expectation that Harmaunce's family will be restored, since it is the familial heritage which defines the identity of the community. We know that Harmaunce's family yet lives because Palomides himself had to prove to Harmaunce's brother that he was qualified to avenge the king. The natural course of events would favor the return of Harmaunce's brother, who himself was prepared to set matters right before Palomides arrived.

The belief that the chivalric class held in the foundational nature of its own role in society was, as already demonstrated, an illusion of class consciousness.[89] Much of what constitutes the chivalric world occupied and created by Malory's knights – the quests, the tests, the problems and resolutions, the demands for appropriate action, and the failure to meet those demands – is artificial and insular. Like any other community, it exists due to strict protocols regarding what does and does not belong to it. The paradox of any community is, of course, that it is not universal; it reaches out and closes off in one and the same gesture. This becomes particularly problematic when a community is faced with its inability to sustain those boundaries (i.e. illusions) which ordinarily reinforce its sense of a privileged space. Many historians and critics have seen in the chivalric class as it existed at the end of the middle-ages a community founded on a way of being in the world which was, in fact, a grand deception. As Huizinga explains,"[i]n order to forget the painful imperfections of reality, the nobles turn to the continual illusion of a

high and heroic life . . . It is an amazing self-deception."[90] That is to say, the belief in its own superiority that generated for the warrior elite a privileged boundary marking off where their social class began and ended was belied by a reality of fluid class boundaries, challenges to feudal institutions, and military tactics that rendered old notions of combat obsolete.

In many respects, Malory's conception of chivalry stands as a protest to this idea that the chivalric life is an empty symbolism, evacuated of real content. In the best of his knights, Malory wants to articulate what he sees as historical examples of stable subjectivity organized around virtues that can be performed by his contemporaries, fulfilling the desire for social integration.[91] What I want to stress here is that illusions are not necessarily "false" – they are capable of expressing an imaginative experience at work in reaffirming a positive "social ecology," to borrow a phrase from James Simpson.[92] More importantly, this imaginative existence is unthinkable outside the world of memory, for what is remembrance if not the re-imagining of prior experience? In pursuing the "illusion" of former greatness, Malory's contemporaries convince themselves that what in reality is over and gone, is in fact present. Ultimately, chivalry is deeply embedded in the acts of continuity bounded by its recollection and inevitable re-imaginings of the past. Chivalry is the stage on which memory gets to play.

Even in the "real" world of the later middle-ages chivalry is expressed with a vigor that would seem to indicate a greater degree of faith in its ethos than one might expect of an "illusory" cultural paradigm. In this way, the chivalric "game" often proved to be a way to resolve conflicts that could not be amended by any other satisfactory means. Throughout the *Morte* we hear knights crying out for combat in order to "ease their hearts"; they "requyre" and they "beseche" and they beg to be slain outright rather than live with their shame. The point being that the ethos of chivalry is fundamentally aware of the vicissitudes besetting the heart

bound by honor, and it provides for the expression of passions that have no other outlet. A famous example of the power chivalry held over the imagination is the Battle of Nibley Green (1470), as described by Thomas Crofts. Enraged that his family had lost in court a legal dispute over lands contested by the Berkeleys, the young Thomas Talbot, 2nd Viscount Lisle, issued a challenge to William, the 12th lord of Berkeley, to meet him on the battlefield and settle their differences: "I require the of knighthode and of manhode to appoint a day to mete halfe way, there to try between God and our two hands all our quarrel and title of right."[93] To this, Lord Berkeley responds by pointing out that Talbot has no right to claim land by trial of combat, and that in fact his demands are contrary to the laws of the land: "As for the determining betweixt our two hands of thy vntrue clayme and my title and right of my land and true inheritance, thou wettest right well that there is noe such determinacion on land in this realm used."[94]

Nevertheless, even after pointing out that the Viscount Lisle doesn't have a proverbial leg to stand on, Berkeley agrees to meet him. "And where thou desirest and requirest mee of knighthood and of manhood to appoint a day . . . I will appoint a short day to *ease thy malitious heart* and thy false counsaile that is with thee."[95] While one way to look at this event is to see in it an example of the failure of the legal system to restrain the impulses of self-willed men whose behavior could sometimes border on outright lawlessness, an alternative approach is to consider the import of easing one's heart. The expression "ease thy malicious heart" is not an idle phrase; it deliberately invokes a field of reference in which knights would recognize the parts they were responsible for playing.[96] (How could we forget the poignant challenge issued by Gawain to Lancelot for the death of his brothers: "Let us ease our hearts" [703/32-33]?). This is a formula, of course, but the formula expresses a trenchant understanding of what the chivalric code calls for from those men who are its adherents. It implies that the respondent sees in his opponent's

challenge a violent passion to which the issuer stands a victim. Chivalry is not meant to be easy; it makes demands of those who follow it. It exerts pressures on one's self-identity. For instance, it would seem that Berkeley's response need not take any other form than the pertinent reminder to Talbot that there are in fact no laws in England supporting Talbot's assertions. As far as the law is concerned, the property is Berkeley's. And yet, in spite of this, Berkeley agrees to the battle even though, on the face of it, he would appear to have nothing to gain – and everything to lose.

But this view that Lord Berkeley has nothing to gain is deceptive. As Crofts points out, "The Battle of Nibley Green may have been a performative anachronism, but it was not cynical or insincere" because it presupposes "more than one kind of prize: at stake are forms of capital both economic . . . and symbolic."[97] For Berkeley, the symbolic costs of refusing young viscount Lisle would have been his loss of standing amongst his social group. It does not matter who is in the right; it does not matter who did what to whom; all that matters is that a particular tension has been brought to the surface in the issuance of the challenge. To refuse that challenge would be to ignore disequilibrium and risk a loss of honor. The injunctions placed on the individual by his willingness to participate in the chivalric mode of life are harsh; but it is that very belief in the strictness of the code and the knight's determination to live up to that responsibility which provides him with the assurance that his social class is superior. It is the individual knight's desire to maintain his place in a social ecology framed by duty, remembrance, and honor that makes his life possible.[98]

Writers of the period attest time and again to the popularity of chivalric pursuits as an ideal for self improvement and as a means of settling disputes, not simply as entertainment. Huizinga reminds us, "Chivalry would never have been the ideal of life during several centuries

if it had not contained high social values";[99] and this fact was not lost on the early readers of the *Morte*.[100] In his famous preface, Caxton introduces the *Morte Darthur* to the public by announcing, with some political hucksterism, that herein anyone wishing to learn how to be a member of the chivalric class "may see and lerne" how to do so by turning to these examples from "tho dayes." There is both good and evil, Caxton assures his audience, but most of all there is the potential to learn the inviolable quality of *responsibility* – the duty to live a virtuous life, to punish the wicked, and essentially be "noble":

> And I, accordyng to my copye, have doon sette it in enprynte to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyle and vertuous dedes that somme knyghtes used in tho dayes, by whyche they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke; humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce, and to folowe the same; wherein they shalle fynde many joyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble and renomed actes of humanyté, gentylnesse, and chyvalryes.[101]

It is tempting to think that Caxton's preface extends the appeal of the chivalric ethos to a far larger audience than Malory would himself have intended with his addition of "al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of." It is unlikely that Malory would have agreed with this, and it highlights one of the difficulties facing a life of imitation – that *anyone* can turn to the past and find those qualities one believes are just as relevant in the present and which, by study and application, can be emulated. Once this happens, it becomes possible for the social ecology to readapt and reinvent its connection to the past; which is precisely what occurs.[102] What Caxton's preface tells us about Malory's culture is the stress it places on the chivalric code not simply as a way to further one's glory (though there is certainly that); nor simply as "playsaunt hystoryes" meant for pleasure and diversion. What stands out for me is the injunction of "remembraunce." At its core, Caxton's preface is a call to action – don't just read, *do*; take these lessons to heart,

recall them when you are unsure how to act, and carry out the good and refrain from the bad. In remembering this lesson, you will actualize yourself in the social world.

In the conclusion to book five, Tristram and Palomides again appear ready to settle their conflict once and for all. Departing from Joyus Garde to attend the feast of Pentecost, an unarmored Tristram sets forth equipped with but a sword and spear, only to encounter Palomides not a mile and half from the castle. Spotting Tristram, Palomides calls out a challenge: "'Sir Trystram, now be we mette, for or we departe we shall redresse all oure olde sorys!" (507/22-23.) Tristram, of course, refuses to turn from Palomides; in fact, he charges Palomides and breaks his spear upon him. Palomides, for his part, suddenly realizes that Tristram is unarmed and as a result does not strike back. When Tristram accuses him of cowardice, Palomides responds, "'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'" (507/42-44). To this one might respond that it is simply an expression of a social code that reinforces aversion to shame; in other words, that the behavior of knights is nothing more than outward show, a display whose true purpose is the aggrandizement of the knight himself. But we must not overlook the effects on self-identity of a code of conduct that labors to fashion the knight into an individual possessed of a sense of responsibility. While the manifest moral would appear to be an almost axiomatic rule regarding the shame of attacking a knight while he is unarmed, the more profound suggestion is that Malory wants to reinforce a quality his knights should possess of being able to reflect on the implications of their actions. As Tristram makes emphatically clear, being an accomplished knight means more than having just a strong arm: "'manhode is nat worthe but yf it be medled with wysdome'" (428/33-34).

Immediately following his observation about "dyshonoure," Palomides engages Tristram in a dialogue that, on the surface, might appear to be nothing more than a bit of machismo, but which is fundamentally important as a vehicle in which to express the bonds of their fellowship:

> 'And well thou wotyste,' seyde sir Palomydes unto sir Trystram, 'I knowe thy strengthe and thy hardyness to endure ayenste a goode knyght.'
> 'That ys trouthe,' seyde sir Trystram, 'I understonde thy valyauntenesse.'
> 'Ye say well', seyde sir Palomydes. 'Now, I requyre you, telle me a question that I shall sey unto you.'
> 'Than telle me what hyt ys,' seyde sir Trystram, 'and I shall answere you of the trouthe, as God me helpe.'
> '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,' syede sir Trystram, ' now I understonde the well, sir Palomydes, for now muste I sey myne own jugemente! And, as God me blysse, that I shall nat be seyde for no feare that I have of the, sir Palomydes. But thys ys all: wyte thou well, sir Palomydes, as at thys tyme thou sholdyst departe from me, for I wolde nat have ado with the.'
> 'No more woll I,' seyde sir Palomydes. 'And therefore ryde furth on they way!'
> 'As for that,' syede sir Trystram, 'I may chose othir to ryde othir to go.'
> (507/44, 508/1-21)

I have quoted this passage at great length because it seems to me that several significant mechanisms are at work to ameliorate the tensions threatening to spill over into irrational behavior. Certainly, Palomides works to deflect Tristram from the rash decision to fight when he is at a disadvantage. And we can note the delightfully funny exchange of "okay, you can go / well, I'll go when I want to" anchoring the narrative in an architecture of equality. But what is most telling about this passage is the reflective process in which Palomides recognizes Tristram's danger and his corresponding efforts to make Tristram aware – and to do so while avoiding the perception of commanding Tristram.[103]

To be clear, when I speak of this moment of apprehension and acknowledgement as a process of reflection I am not imagining some form of inwardness – I do not have introspection

in mind. Reflection is, in the *Morte* and especially so in the "Tristram" section, a tactical engagement between a self and that self's understanding of another. Three difficulties emerge then from this formulation: self, another, and the self's understanding, all of which demand explanations in order to be useful. I will, however, start by taking for granted Malory's conception of self and other as nothing more than the individuals who are part of a collective. The key insight, it seems to me, lies in Malory's attempt to get at the self's understanding of another. Malory is seldom interested in figuring out what individuals *are*; but he is very much concerned with their relations to one another, because it is through the interaction with members of one's social group that the individual finds his (or her) identity. The purpose of reflection in the *Morte* is to place individuals under the injunction that they must see themselves as accountable to others for their actions. It is, in short, a function of remembrance in which one recalls the duties and obligations that in turn call the life of a knight into existence.

Again and again Malory hammers home the point that the knights are engaged in establishing and understanding the boundaries that reinforce their commitments to one another. Fellowship is not achieved by mere *bonhomie*; it is the result of conscientious decisions, of choices made and paths pursued informed by recognition of another's honor. Take, for instance, the scene in "Madness and Exile" when Tristram and Lamerok meet again. Tristram, furious over Lamerok's involvement in delivering a magic horn to court that was intended to dishonor Isolde, challenges Lamerok to a fight. Lamerok reminds Tristram that the latter owes him more consideration for their time together on the Ile of Servage: "'Sir,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'that tyme that we were togydirs in the Ile of Servage ye promysed me bettir frendeship" (295/40-41). The terms of the debt, of which Lamerok tries to remind Tristram, are a call for "frendeship." This is significant because it shows that Lamerok is not concerned with the violence of their encounter;

rather, he is troubled by Tristram's anger and desire for vengeance. In any event, Tristram, unwilling to listen to reason, "laysshed at sir Lamerok, and thus they faught longe tylle aythir were wery of other" (295/42-43). Much like many other battles in the "Tristram," this battle is therapeutic and will end peacefully. But there are two issues with the resolution of the conflict on which I want to focus. The first is simply to recall how Malory uses combat as a practical means for his knights to work off their aggression. We see this again and again, and once Tristram and Lamerok have had time to run out of breath, then Tristram has had time to cool down, as it were, and think rationally – and do we not often say of this condition that one has "remembered" oneself?

The second issue, and much more profound, is how Malory makes out of conflict the necessary conditions for a true fellowship. We could surmise that there is, for Malory's knights, a heightened sense of the intensity of their encounters with the possibility of death. While Malory typically avoids dealing directly with death, the possibility of grievous bodily harm cannot be far from his mind or that of his audience. The weight of that knowledge lends an integrity to his battles that is difficult for those of us who have never experienced real combat to fathom. What it also suggests, however, is that there exists a connection between the combatants that is more real, more meaningful, for the very fact that their lives are in each others' hands. Much as the Tristram and Palomides' prison scene articulates a rather paradoxical ethical relationship that is not open to members of a differing social category, Lamerok's reminder to Tristram of a basic precept of fellowship reinforces the idea of the unique bond between knights that others cannot share unless they too are part of the experience. This bond is for Malory what makes his fellowship particularly poignant. Thus, when Lamerok surrenders to Tristram saying "'for youre renowne and your name I woll that ye have the worship'" (296/4-5); and Tristram

responds with "'ye shall nat do so, for well I know youre profirs are more of your jantilnes than for ony feare or dreade ye have of me'" (296/7-9), we are not in the realm of a frivolous sentimentalism or an empty formalism.[104] If ethics is, at its heart, a recognition of the demands that others place on us to respond, then by placing the perceptions of others before our own we create the space where a genuine unity can take hold. And this is precisely when we see Lamerok and Tristram "sware that never none of hem sholde fyght agaynste othir, for well nother for woo" (296/17-18).

For Malory, the behavior *is* the ethical self. And the social machinery at work enforcing or at least establishing the parameters by which members of the chivalric class are able to navigate the ethical demands necessary for fellowship is principally the acquisition of "worship" and the avoidance of shame. As public frameworks for a self's identity, these modes of communal evaluation organize much of the narrative action in the *Morte*. And as Mark Lambert has pointed out, Malory's style is clearly indebted to a shared understanding with his audience of the privileging of the public over the internal: "The narrative style of the *Morte Darthur* . . . works well with an emphasis on public recognition rather than private knowledge. Guilt may matter in Lancelot's world; [but] in the imagined world of *Sir* Lancelot, where one's official, social identity is one's real identity, shame is more significant."[105]

This bears some explanation because the meanings underwriting Lambert's assertions about honor and the "imagined world" are central to understanding what may strike the reader as contradictory behavior, both on the part of Malory's knights and by extension the chivalric world defining Malory's own culture. A fully developed reading of what shame means to Malory's narrative "solves more puzzles than it creates" in the *Morte Darthur*,[106] and most importantly for my analysis, the recognition of shame as a motivating force in social dynamics stresses an almost

ontological orientation toward a self that is socially constructed along the lines of what we might consider an "image." We have a tendency to think of an inner life as being somehow more real than our outward behavior. Thanks in part to modern psychology and romantic notions of selfhood just as much as a Western and Christian heritage, we are given to a belief that guilt-oriented cultures that stress the inner "soul" of the individual are "more civilized" than cultures founded primarily on principles of shame recognition.[107] Because of our propensity to privilege an internal "reality" to an external "image," we find many events in the *Morte* that strike us as paradoxical or even downright ludicrous. For instance, it is difficult given this model to understand how Tristram can speak of dishonoring Mark by running off with Isolde, yet his sense of propriety is unruffled by his amorous doings with her behind Mark's back. When the king of Ireland, Isolde's father, tells Tristram that "'I had lever than all the londe that I have that ye wolde have wedded hir yourself'" (257/25-26), Tristram responds "'Sir, and I dud so, I were shamed for ever in this worlde and false of my promyse'" (257/27-28). Tristram is far more concerned about what it would look like were he to openly break a promise.

The text argues, therefore, that the force of morality derives its proper course from prohibitions about custom and appearance – both of which are grounded in external forms. This is hardly surprising given that the chivalric class is, as I have noted, obsessed with the visibility of its members' relations to one another through ritual display, badges of honor, formulas and traditional expressions. Tristram is not "guilty" of loving Isolde. In fact, the question of guilt is irrelevant. This is not a cross-examination in court with the purpose of determining who did what – such an analysis starts with the assumption that a crime has been committed and we need to determine the "true" culprit. But Malory starts with no such assumption; for him, Lambert argues, "honor and shame are more *real* than innocence and guilt."[108] What is true is that they

love one another, and there is nothing inappropriate or inadmissible about their actions, from Malory's perspective, because they are not interfering with the sanctity of social convention. What matters is that the private world does not intrude upon the public space. As long as their love is not "noised about" then the spectacle can continue.[109] That, however, comes to an end when Tristram and Isolde flee to Joyous Garde. In doing so, they break with the expected order and produce a tension that can only be resolved by returning to Mark's court.

While this analysis of shame is useful in exploring some of the moral conundrums plaguing the *Morte*, what interests me principally is the way the frameworks of social life appear no less real than what we like to imagine is the "inner truth." What this suggests is that the *Morte* reinforces a conception of the world the individual inhabits as the result of a socially constructed activity. Though Malory might lack an appropriately sophisticated language with which to fully articulate this insight, his text makes apparent the means by which order becomes valuable as a socially symbolic and, thus, structuring act – that one's actions fit into prescribed forms of behavior maintaining the visible consolidation of communal institutions. That order is a collection of traditions and customs. Therefore, what is valued is not an individual's internal state of being; rather, emphasis for determining what is ethical, what is "good," is placed on the strength of custom. Malory does not deny that human beings have individual experiences, or that those experiences are relevant. But he does try to show how behavior modeled on idiosyncratic preferences can be particularly destructive and must be submitted to consensus. In a particularly representative episode, Lancelot and his cousin Bleoberis are riding through the forest when they come upon the knights Lamerok and Mellyagaunce fighting over which queen is more beautiful, Morgause or Guinevere.[110] Lancelot is enraged at the perceived accusation that Guinevere is not the fairest in the land: "'And therefore make the redy, for I woll preve

uppon the that quene Guenyver ys the fayryst lady and most of bounté in the worlde'" (298/29-31). Lamerok realizes that perhaps fighting over personal preferences is not the wisest course of action when Lancelot is involved. He attempts to dissuade Lancelot by pointing out that no one can help their subjective responses to love, but that this is hardly a great offense to another:

> 'Sir,' seyde sir Lamerok, 'I am lothe to have ado with you in thys quarrel, for every man thynkith hys owne lady fayryst, and thoughe I prayse the lady that I love moste, ye shold nat be wrothe. For thoughe my lady quene Gwenyver be fayryst in youre eye, wyte you well quene Morgause of Orekeney ys fayreyst in myne eye, and so every knyght thynketh hys owne lady fayryste.' (298/32-37)

Interestingly, the narrative stresses that what grabs Lancelot's attention is not that they have separate opinions; what stops him is the reminder from Bleoberis that Lancelot is acting irrationally, that Lamerok is speaking "full knightly" and that Lancelot is forgetting the honor and respect due to a member of the high order of knighthood (298-99). The implication is that Lancelot is acting un-knightly for opposing Lamerok, whose reasonableness is viewed as knightly behavior. Lambert's claim that the imagined world is somehow more real, or more "valuable," than the factual world – because it represents one's "real" self – here demonstrates the authority of the chivalric ideal for society. The image that one projects into and which itself is sustained by the community bears the weight of *value*; the private world is a dangerous and unsettling space. While the self may, in this context, be a form of public theatre it is also the stage on which the social group can enact itself. More specifically, the *Morte* insists that the communal identity *is* the world; what is private may have meaningful import for the individual *as* an individual, but it is the sense of self which is aware of itself as a social entity that makes the phenomenological world accessible to understanding, which is to say capable of being shared with others.

In concluding this chapter I want to return to Greene's observation on the challenges of historical understanding, because the passage succinctly points out an essential aspect about memorial identity that has been the focus of this chapter; namely, that just as individuals can only understand who and what they are by ordering their experiences according to their perceptions of their own origins, so too do communities find themselves in their past. Communities seek to remember those antecedents which define for their members their roles in society and ways of being in the world. In Malory's conception of the Arthurian heritage, individuals and their communities find a past that seems to offer the possibility of stable social identities (regardless of the actuality of such an identity). What this tells us is that this identification with the past is collective in nature. Remembering only makes sense when it is part of a social framework. Thus, when Malory turns to Tristram's and Palomides' final confrontation to conclude book five, he does so with the anticipation of constructing a stable past out of stable social relationships. This chapter started with a simple supposition that any social group – but especially those in the Middle Ages – cannot be grasped except in terms of how it perceives its immediate conditions by way of *reminders* of the meaning and impact of any actions in relation to customs, habits, or traditions. The inclusion of the individual into social frameworks that are intended to promise a stable identity is, at a fundamental level, an act of remembering in which the recollecting subject perceives him- or herself as conforming to models for social behavior originating in the past and preserved in memorial institutions.

Since Malory intended to provide his contemporaries with a particular perspective of the past, an Arthurian memory we might say, as a set of normative practices and values which could frame their own troubled time, the conclusion to book five testifies to the dream of a restorative social order that possessed Malory's project – and which, even as he traced it, suggested to him

the difficulties in achieving it. In the final, penultimate battle between Tristram and Palomides that closes out Sir Tristram's tale, Malory in one sense sums up his argument for the absolute value of the chivalric fellowship as a way of life, while at the same time intimating what threatens the sustainability of that fellowship. We have already seen how, in the conclusion to book five, Palomides refuses to fight an enraged Tristram because he recognizes the implications were he to take advantage of Tristram's unarmed state. But the episode does not end there. Instead, Tristram and Palomides, having had a chance to calm down, are exchanging pleasantries when Tristram observes "'I mervayle greatly of on thynge, that thou arte so good a knyght, that thou wolt nat be crystynde'" (508/21-22). This seemingly innocent query is the trigger for the final confrontation. Regardless of the fact that Tristram and Palomides are maintaining their civil conversation, the fundamental conflict between them that has defined their relationship and driven the course of the narrative has not changed. If he is going to provide the narrative with the appearance of a unified end, Malory needs a mechanism by which he can have his knights engage one another *as knights*, which is to say equal members of an ideologically coherent social group, and not simply as foes.[111] In other words, what Malory is searching for in the final battle between Tristram and Palomides is something that reinforces his belief in unity and fellowship, rather than dissension and difference. What he lights on is the medium of combat as the ultimate bond of knighthood. Palomides' response to Tristram is that he cannot yet be baptized because of a "vowe" he took many years ago, though "'in my harte and in my soule I have had many a day a good beleve in Jesu Cryste and hys mylde modir Mary,'" for "'I have but one batayle [left] to do, and were that onys done I wolde be baptyzed'" (508/25-28). Tristram then counters Palomides' statement by proffering to fight Palomides' last "batayle" with him, thus helping him

complete his quest: "'Be my hede . . . as for one batayle, thou shalt nat seke hyt longe. For God deffende . . . that thorow my defaute thou sholdyste lengar lyve thus a Sarazyn'" (508/29-31).

While it is tempting to read Tristram's offer as a sarcastic retort, I believe that Malory is trying to evoke a genuine atmosphere of generosity and consideration, in direct contrast to the anger that initiated their contact. Much as Lord Berkeley's offer to Lord Talbot to "ease thy malicious heart" was to be construed within the language of chivalry as less of a challenge and more the meeting of two minds, Tristram's pledge to Palomides is presented in the spirit of fellowship. For Tristram to *not* give Palomides the opportunity to complete his quest would be a failure on his part to respond to Palomides' need. For Malory, the demand on knights to perceive one another's needs, to recognize the import of one's reputation, to feel sorrow at the trials of other knights – in short, to *care about* your fellows, allows the knights' primary purpose in war to transcend simple violent contact and become a connective force enriching their lives and forging social bonds whose strength resides in a passionate concern for the each individual's presence in the community.

Malory is thus attempting to restrict the motivating factors for Tristram's and Palomides' final confrontation to the integrity of the social group and concern for another, not to the divisive passions of resentment and anger. The focus is brought to bear on an identity constructed through socially recognized acts or the lack thereof. When Tristram turns to Sir Galleron to ask for the loan of his armor in order to fight Palomides, he responds to Galleron's warning that Palomides "'ys an hardy knyght as ever I mette wythall'" (509/2), by emphasizing Palomides' reputation and the fact that he is yet un-christened. Sir Galleron acknowledges Tristram's point with dismay "'that so good a knyght and so noble a man off armys sholde be unchrystynde'" (509/8-9). Two conjoined issues are made apparent in this exchange: first, the

weight placed on reputation; second, the status of the baptismal act. The objective of this combat, it should be stressed, despite assertions to the contrary is not really concerned with converting Palomides; Malory takes care to stress that Palomides is already a convert who believes in his "harte" and "soule." Significantly then, Tristram's interest in battling Palomides is not founded on the desire to convert him – his impetus is derived from the desire to *help* him. I want to caution against assuming that "to help" automatically means "to convert," or at least, to convert from one faith to another. Here, Malory tries to shift the process of integration away from a hegemonic struggle of conversion from one culture to another, or from the perspective of the "other" to "another." Instead, the work of community building that we see taking place is the move from the isolation of individualism to a subject who conforms to the customs and traditions of his social group. Palomides' resistance to the baptism is the mark of his private world clashing with the public identity of acceptance and "normal" behavior. What Tristram does, in essence, is to break down what he sees as a wall separating Palomides from everyone else; he wants to efface not Palomides the "Sarazyn," but rather Palomides' *insistence* on a distance between himself and the rest of the Arthurian community. It is not the circumstances of Palomides' birth that separate him, at least according to Malory; it is his vow that prevents him from adopting a normative practice of his society. The point was never about making Palomides a Christian; it was about Palomides performing an act whose value lay in its visibility as an institution conserving the continuity of the collective memory.

When, after a long and difficult struggle, Tristram knocks Palomides' sword from his hand Malory gives us a brief but instructive glimpse into Palomides' heart that is at once poignant and decisive in its finality. As Malory describes it, "sir Trystram smote sir Palomydes swerde oute of hys honed, and yf sir Palomydes had stouped for hys swerde he had bene slayne.

And than sir Palomydes stood style and *behylde hys swerde wyth a sorowfull harte*" (510/1-4,

italics added). On the one hand, it is clear that Palomides' "sorowfull harte" is an expression of

his recognition that he has lost. But it is also a testament to *what* Palomides has lost. For it is at

that moment that Palomides must accept the fact that he will give up the vow that has, until now,

defined his sense of self. It is, I believe, a bittersweet realization. Throughout the narrative,

Palomides' sense of self has been constructed by his vow not to take the sacrament until he has

fought a set number of momentous battles. This vow, we could say, has driven him to perform

deeds that would win him the honor and respect of his chivalric society; but it has also marked

him as unique. This is not to say that he is marginalized or excluded. Malory goes to great

lengths throughout the "Book of Sir Tristram" to present Palomides as one of the best knights of

the Round Table fellowship. But Palomides is also powerfully driven by personal passions – his

love for Isolde, and his resentment and anger at not being the best knight, for example – that

interfere with or challenge his social commitments and restrict his prowess. At the Tournament

at Lonezep, for instance, Palomides loses much of the respect he had won in the tournament

because he turns against the party with which he was originally allied. Everyone there observes

"'hit seemed that Palomydes ys passynge envyous'" (466/12); and Guinevere sums up the

community's approbation when she points out that "'all men of worshyp hate an envyous man

and woll shewe hym no favoure'" (466/15-16).[112] Because Palomides is prone to thinking of

himself *as* an individual, he fails to put the broader community first and as a result is often put to

the worse by those who are more courteous. More significantly, this reminds us that Palomides'

desire for honor and worship can be a danger for the community when such motivations provide

distinctions in self-identity that are not part of the collective memory. By putting his subjectivity

at the mercy of his personal vow, Palomides occupies a past whose mark of distinction is an

experience that cannot be shared. For Malory, Tristram's purpose in this closing scene is to reinforce a sense of unity in the Arthurian community by completing Palomides' vow and forcing Palomides to give up his claim for difference – a move that will prove to be undercut by Palomides' hunt for the questing beast.

Western culture in the Middle Ages, much like any culture, was defined by sets of practices and beliefs one of whose "modalities" (that of remembrance) strove to ensure the living presence of the past in the present; in doing so, this memorial mode set the conditions for which and by which its societies could actively produce and comprehend their own constitutive phenomena.[113] What I sought to consider in this chapter was not only how authentic memory's relationship with the past established a modality of existence for the medieval subject, principally in fifteenth-century England, but also how that relationship conditioned a primary institution responsible for maintaining collective frameworks for remembrance – chivalry. It is clear that the function of communal memory in respect to Malory's class identity, in Greene's words, "visibly or obscurely" works on the present to provide meaningful content on which to structure that identity. Unfortunately, what we will find is that Malory is at the point where he cannot deny that the pursuit of stability impelling his grand act of remembrance is riven by the very history he has sought. While the fundamental quest of the *Morte Darthur* up to this point has been the search for a stable past on which to ground the origins of a class of men who see themselves as the conservators of that past which, in itself, guaranteed the continuity of their social world, Malory must face the fact that the dream of restoration is on the point of collapse. In book six, the history of the Grail Quest will shatter the fellowship, and nothing will be the same. Malory's final words before he must address that history show his reluctance to accept it and his knowledge that it can no longer be postponed. Rather than face Tristram's death at the

hands of Mark, Malory leaves us with the comforting image of Tristram returning to Joyous Garde where we know La Bealle Isolde awaits him. Shadowing this resolution, however, is Palomides' return to a quest that can have no satisfactory conclusion and which, more than anything else he could have said, suggests Malory's fear of private pursuits that can have no shared experience: "And than sir Trystram returned unto Joyus Garde, and sir Palomydes folowed aftir the questynge beste" (510/43-44). To the image of Tristram's return belongs the assurance of a longed-for dream made whole in its happy conclusion; but to the image of Palomides and his solitary departure belongs a dream that can never be satisfied and never be shared, and will lead the self alone into the wilderness.

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[1] See Thomas C. Rumble, "The Tale of Tristram: Development by Analogy," *Malory's Originality*, ed. R.M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), pp. 118-19.

[2] "Because it seems so disproportionately long, so needlessly interruptive of the central story, and so casually abandoned before its well-known tragic end, Malory's 'Tale of Sir Tristram' is perhaps difficult to see as belonging integrally to the larger structural and thematic plan of *Le Morte Darthur*" (Rumble, p. 118).

[3] As Maureen Fries opines: "Not even a partisan of Malory's art can deny the relative diffuseness and exaggerated length of this tale" ("Indiscreet Objects of Desire: Malory's 'Tristram' and the Necessity of Deceit," *Studies in Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak, Medieval Institute Publications. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1985, p. 98).

[4] "Malory himself obviously delighted in writing it. The prose Tristan, despite its length and complexity, is closer in sprit to his own work than any of the Vulgate romances, and he seems to have found it more congenial to his tastes than any of the French works he had previously used" (Larry D. Benson, "The Book of Sir Tristram," *Malory's Morte Darthur*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp. 109-10).

[5] For instances when Malory refers to the deaths of Lamorak and Tristram, see p. 398 for the report of Lamorak's demise to his brother Percival; and p. 398 at the end of "Alexander l'Orphelin" for mention of Tristram's eventual death at the hands of Mark. Further citations can be found at pp. 666, 681, and 420.

[6] "Malory's treatment of the 'Tristram' is regularly characterized in one way or another as the further devitalization of an already devitalized legend" (Rumble, p. 118).

[7] Felicity Riddy observes, in *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1987), "More than any of the preceding tales in the *Morte Darthur*, *Sir Tristram* deals with men and women in society" (p. 84). Furthermore, she argues that the "personal relationships" grounding the "social experience" of those men and women is one "in which aggression, competitiveness and hostility appear to be almost the norms" (p. 84). For Riddy, the impetus of the "Tristram" is a general trend towards disintegration: "fellowship is continually caught, held momentarily and then

dissolved in the restless pattern of human relationships out of which the tale's depiction of men in society is formed" (p. 112). Against Riddy, however, I would argue that while the text demonstrates the destructive aspects of human relationships it is equally obsessed with resolving or obscuring those confrontations in a relentless effort to overcome social disruptors. Regardless of the harmful actions of certain individuals, the tale seems to indicate that we are still in the presence of a society that is capable of absorbing those defects and maintaining its general cohesiveness.

[8] As Helen Cooper reminds us, one of the primary purposes of the "Tristram" is to explore the core values of chivalry. While the text is rich in narrative possibilities the tale is first and last *about* chivalric culture: "It falls to the *Tristram* to display Arthurian chivalry at its height" ("The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones," *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 183). What this means is that the text will serve as "a kind of *education sentimentale*": "Malory follows the adventures of a large cast of characters, either interlaced or as autonomous narrative blocks within the larger structure of the Book, in a way that shows as much concern with definitions of chivalry and models of chivalric behavior as with event for its own sake" (p. 185.)

[9] See p. 317 of Elizabeth Archibald's "Malory's Idea of Fellowship," *Review of English Studies* xliii (August 1992) 311-28. In addition, Archibald points out that the word fellowship "seems to be singularly lacking . . . in Middle English romance generally" and it appears to be drawn primarily "from moral or religious texts, or historical documents" (p. 315).

[10] There are "two important kinds of fellowship associated with the Round Table: the friendship of individual knights our pursuing adventures and 'worship' . . . and the permanent bond of all the Round Table knights" (Archibald, "Malory's Idea of Fellowship," p. 316).

[11] While there "were many" factors involved in the development of the orders of knighthood, "all the orders shared some common concerns. One was the stipulation that only noble and honorable men be admitted to the group, which . . . reflects a late-medieval impulse to define and defend the aristocratic world against the increasing social mobility of other groups" (Kevin T. Grimm, "Fellowship and Envy: Structuring the Narrative of Malory's *Tale of Sir Tristram*," *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 20, Ed. Edelgard E. DuBruck and William C. McDonald, 77-95, 1993, p 77). But more pressing for our understanding of fellowship in the *Morte* is what Grimm calls "the parity of status that existed within a given order" (p. 77). Fellowship, according to Grimm's analysis, means far more than companionship; it bears the weight of a political and social apparatus that normalizes relations through the leveling of distinctions: "Within an order, all were equal brothers, regardless of wealth or social title" (p.77).

[12] Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York: Dover Publications, p. 60. Additionally, he highlights a principal example of the power imitation held over the minds of medieval aristocrats: "No one was so consciously inspired by models of the past, or manifested such desire to rival them, as Charles the Bold. In his youth he made his attendants read out to him the exploits of Gauvain and Lancelot. Later he preferred the ancients. Before retiring to rest, he listens for an hour or two to the 'lofty histories of Rome.' He especially admires Caesar, Hannibal and Alexander, 'whom he wished to follow and imitate'" p. 60.

[13] For example, in referring to the tendency of critics to assume we all "share common memories" Winter notes the un-interrogated use of the term "collective memory" which could refer to almost anything: "One of the greatest problems with the contemporary memory boom is precisely this error. People refer to collective memory . . . without reflecting on what these terms actually mean" (*Remembering War: the Great War between memory and history in the twentieth century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 185).

[14] Winter, p. 197.

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[15] Sir Thomas Malory, *Malory: Works*, 2nd edition, ed. Eugene Vinaver, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 416.

[16] See Kenneth Hodges, *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 18.

[17] I want to be wary, however, of making a flat statement about Malory's tactics to draw our attention to the past. There are occasions when Malory uses expressions such as "in those days" to point out not continuity with tradition, but those spaces or gaps in perception where the modern age has forgotten its connection to the past. I am thinking specifically here of the famous "May passage" in "The Knight of the Cart," where Malory opines that lovers nowadays no longer know what virtuous love is. It is in such moments that Malory's applications of continuity break down, and a consciousness of historical difference intrudes.

[18] "Chivalry is, among other things, a moral code, and those who admire chivalry are by definition moralists. Morality, of whatever sort, was always better in the past, is always sadly declined in the present, and is therefore always in need of revival" (Benson, p. 145).

[19] "In an age which looked instinctively to the past for examples of wisdom and of virtuous living, the literature which retailed these traditional stories under-pinned the values of chivalry by providing them with a faultlessly antique and highly evocative pedigree" (Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 102).

[20] "Whereas his French sources often related bare adventures and left them unexplained, Malory desired that the reader should understand the significance of every episode which involved problems of chivalric conduct" (Eugène Vinaver, *Malory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, p. 60).

[21] See Benson: "It is a straightforward tale of chivalric adventure, spiced with humor and realism and very nearly devoid of the supernatural. Even the famous magic potion is of little importance in this version of the story and serves simply to reinforce a love that has already begun in the more human and naturalistic manner that Malory apparently preferred" (p. 110).

[22] Benson has an excellent presentation on the liveliness of speech in the "Tristram," p. 114.

[23] In *Malory's Book of Arms*, Andrew Lynch notes, "although Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is dominated by a . . . rich fight discourse, its critics have often tended to downplay the importance of the fights, or to treat them separately from what they see as the story's deeper interests and structures " (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997, p. xiii).

[24] This is a point emphasized by Grimm as well: "Eugène Vinaver's notes bear repeated witness to Malory's preference for direct speech . . . and other critics have remarked upon the effect Malory's use of dialogue has on our perception of his characters. But it has not been generally observed that the frequent use of dialogue keeps us focused on the social intercourse of the knights" (pp. 85-86).

[25] "It is the discovery of self, not the creation of self, that is the function of knightly 'aventure'" (Jill Mann, "Malory: Knightly Combat in the *Morte Darthur*," *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 1, Medieval Literature, Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition, ed. Boris Ford, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1982, 331-39, p. 334). Here, Mann's point is at least suggestive of Erich Auerbach's famous assertion that "the feudal ethos serves no political [i.e. social] function . . . It no longer has any purpose but that of self-realization" ("The Knight Sets Forth," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Task, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 134). The point Auerbach makes is that the purpose of chivalric adventure is the realization of an *ideal* way of life, not a practical application of existence.

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[26] "The importance of knightly combat is that if offers a structure within which 'aventure' can operate, within which the revelatory movements of chance can realize themselves" (p. 334). What Mann calls "chance" is not, it should be emphasized, chaos or authentic randomness. It is the risk attendant upon the unknown. It is similar to the "chance" ordained in faith, when one can have no proof or assurance – one simply hazards oneself under the enigmatic aegis of providence. This is also reminiscent of Auerbach's statement that "adventure" does not bear the same meaning for modern audiences that it held for the medieval: "When we moderns speak of adventure, we mean something unstable, peripheral, disordered, or . . . something that stands outside the real meaning of existence. All this is precisely what the word does not mean in the courtly romance. On the contrary, trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight's ideal existence" (p. 135).

[27] I am thinking here of the way in which Augustine legitimized self reflection as the search for God. By examining his memory, Augustine's inwardness became a means for understanding or discovering his present. That is to say, the very act of reflection is an exploration of one's past which in turn is the uncovering of one's identity. But this understanding is only accessible when it is integrated into the social frameworks organizing the world in which the individual dwells. By structuring the experience as something specific to a group and that group's activities, an individual's act of recollection is socialized.

[28] See Mann, pp. 335-36, for the importance of the body in knightly combat.

[29] See Jay Winter, p. 22: "When people enter the public domain and comment about or commemorate the past . . . they bring with them images and gestures derived from their broader social experience. As [Maurice] Halbwachs put it, their memory is 'socially framed.' When people come together to remember, they enter a domain beyond that of individual memory." For my analysis, I see the capitulation to the public sphere of chivalric action as a veneration and repetition of culturally encoded forms of behavior that are perceived to have a distinct history whose past is continuous for all the members of the knightly class.

[30] Here I am following the definition of social memory put forward by Michael Schudson: "Memory is social. It is social, first of all, because it is located in institutions rather than in individual human minds [i.e. experiences] in the form of rules, laws, standardized procedures and records, a whole set of cultural practices through which people recognize a debt to the past (including the notion of 'debt' itself) or through which they express moral continuity with the past (tradition, identity, career, curriculum)" ("Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," *Memory Distortion*, ed. Daniel L. Schacter, Cambrige, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 347).

[31] Schudson reminds us that the movement of individual recollections "remain social and cultural in that" they are constituted *within the domain of language*, and that they are stimulated "in response to" socially patterned "cues": "[authentic memories] operate through the supra-individual cultural construction of language . . . they generally come into play in response to social stimulation, rehearsal, or social cues – the act of remembering is itself interactive, prompted by cultural artifacts and social cues, employed for social purposes, and even enacted by cooperative activity" (p. 437). I would argue that this description accurately reflects the activities ordering knightly combat and incorporating it, through the "cultural construction of language," as an act of social recollection.

[32] Lynch has explored at length the way the language encapsulating combat in the *Morte* functions as a cohesive force. As he points out, "The language of Malory's combat episodes, consistent but polyvalent, far more than it [*sic*] imposing master pattern of divided loyalties and moral conflict, binds 'together' the participants and their actions in a volatile structure of imaginative relations" (p. xiv).

[33] For an analysis of Mark and Tristram's exchange in this passage, and the effect on Tristram's relationship with Lamerok, see Lynch, pp. 87-88. Lynch argues that the complications arising from the rejection of "good counsel," and the occasional willingness to ignore their own ethical injunctions, stresses "the need to negate closure so that the

same knights' encounter can occur an indefinite number of times." This open-endedness is significant, according to Lynch, because it makes possible further reiterations of the "combat display" and "reconciliations" that exemplify the fellowship (pp. 87-88). Eventually, such interactions are meant to foster fellowship as they increase the "worship" of the participants: "these narratives of mistake or forced rejection of one's better judgment are designed to produce a friendly outcome, leaving both combatants with equal honour and further narrative potential" (p. 88).

[34] See Benson, p. 148.

[35] See Stephen H.A. Shepherd, n. 6, p. 77, of his Norton Critical Edition of *Le Morte Darthur* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004): "Vinaver calls the oath Arthur has his knights swear, which is not found in Malory's known Arthurian sources, 'perhaps the most complete and authentic record of Malory's conception of chivalry.' Although the oath does not have a match in the known sources, it does reflect the oaths of actual chivalric orders in Malory's day; for instance, the ceremonial for making Knights of the Order of Bath, which, as Richard Barber has observed, is very close to Malory's oath."

[36] See Benson: "Malory's Arthurian tales . . . reflect the real chivalry of the time, heightened and idealized but based firmly enough on reality that the gentlemen for whom Malory wrote could recognize the contours and many of the actual details of the chivalric life of their own day" (p. 139).

[37] Richard Barber reminds us that about the same time chivalric romances begin to grip the imaginations of the aristocratic class we also find the introduction of manuals on knighthood, meant to provide knights with codified forms of behavior that would limit the repercussions of what is an essentially violent mode of life: "Knights were powerful and potentially anarchic figures in society, physically able to dominate their neighbors. It was in the best interest of both secular and spiritual rulers [not to mention society as a whole] to ensure that their power was channeled and regulated" ("Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*," *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 22). As an interesting side note Caxton's first publication in England was Ramon Lull's *Book of Knighthood and Chivalry*, originally composed in the thirteenth century.

[38] [38] Maurice Halbwachs , *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 129.

[39] "The fifteenth-century gentry, of whom [Malory] was himself a member, included knights, esquires and gentlemen, who were increasingly distinguished from the nobility and divided among themselves" (Felicity Riddy, "Contextualizing *Le Morte Darthur*," *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards. New York: D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 56).

[40] As Riddy reminds us, the gentry consisted of men who "acted as agents of the king's justice in the shires, as estate managers, lawyers and bureaucrats of various kinds, and not simply as warriors" ("Contextualizing *Le Morte Darthur*," p. 56).

[41] See chapter one, pages 34-38 for my discussion of the historical character of Thomas Malory.

[42] Examples such as this demonstrate the models for courteous behavior that the gentry often sought in their book acquisitions. See Raluca Radulescu's chapter "The Political Interests of the Gentry and Their 'Grete Bokes'" (*The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*, Arthurian Studies LV, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), in particular pp. 39-47, for an account of the demand amongst fifteenth-century gentry for books on chivalry and courtesy; and "Gentry Values in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," especially pp. 83-95, for the importance of chivalric models of behavior. As Radulescu has demonstrated, the gentry market for "Arthurian romances, chronicles, 'mirrors for princes, courtesy tracts and political texts" exploded in the fifteenth-century (pp. 40-41) with the result that ever-greater demand was placed on gathering chivalric romances into what amounted to "reference" libraries on chivalry

(p. 41). Radulescu points to the circulation and dispersal of these texts "involve[ing] both worship and education in the spirit of gentleness and courtesy" (p. 90) as illustrating the desire of "any gentleman who wants to perfect himself in knighthood, a common fifteenth-century concern for the gentry" (p. 92).

[43] See, also, Hodges, who observes that "The three-fold distinction among gentleman, yeoman, and villain cannot be made simply by a binary distinction of whether someone knows the hunting etiquette or not; it has to be a question of how well they know the terminology" (p. 19). Hodges' point is that Malory's emphasis recognizes that there is some confusion over "partial participation in this community of gentlemen" (p. 19) by men who practice the customs without really belonging. Thus, according to this scheme, knowing the language and the history of the customs are just as important in defining one's participation in the class as is the ability to practice the customs. Interestingly, Hodges seems to contradict his statement that Malory was acknowledging political confusion over the usage of hunting terminology when he observes that "in earlier passages [Malory] has encouraged a sense of community with the knights he writes of: Trystram's vocabulary is part of a living tradition that unites gentlemen" (p. 29).

[44]Hannah Arendt, Introduction to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968, p. 3

[45] While I fundamentally disagree with Hodges' conclusions, I do agree with his assertion that moments like this in the *Morte* reflect anxieties about hierarchy and change afflicting Malory's social class: "The effort to define the basis of identification between modern audiences and the old knights reveals the strains that threaten the sense of continuity. The need to restrict the community to those 'that beryth olde armys' is a reminder that gentlemen are constantly being created, and so the community is not as stable through time as the narrator wants" (p. 18). This is a point that I will return to in my discussion on heraldry. But I want to stress that the fear or anxiety about the stability of the social and political structure is a motivating force in the creation of the *Morte Darthur*. As a result, it becomes more important than ever for Malory to try to shore up his claims for continuity.

[46] See Radulescu's chapter "Gentry Values in Malory's *Morte Darthur*" (*The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur*) for an analysis of the aspirations and motives of the gentry class that identify it as a separate social category set apart from the aristocracy. However, although Malory was likely to have been a member of the fifteenth-century English gentry, the cultural desires expressed by the *Morte Darthur* are not necessarily evocative of that social class's beliefs. In fact, the views expressed by Malory are thoroughly aristocratic in origin and intent. While Radulescu claims that events in the *Morte* such as Gareth's rise from obscurity "suggested to gentry readers that, with good material (inner virtues), one can start fashioning a knight's identity" (p. 92), it strikes me that the text in no way endorses this view. Radulescu goes to great lengths to promote the gentry's rather bourgeois belief in self-fashioning as a means for social advancement and how that appears in the text. I would argue that the text enforces a very strict and aristocratic expectation regarding the sanctity of bloodlines and genealogies. See my analysis in this chapter on the importance of the noble family as a foundation for memory, pp. 34-38.

[47] "Wherever romances of knighthood and of courtly love were read or recited, wherever crowds gathered to witness jousts and tournaments, wherever families looked back over their record of honourable achievement and association, heraldry was in consequence a significant consequence" (Keen, p. 128).

[48] Keen has an excellent summary of the evolution of armorial bearings over the course of the middle ages from personal blazons to familial crests: "At first depicted on the shield, heraldic devices came soon to be displayed also on the surcoats of knights and on their horses' trappings, as also on their seals, and on their tombs and effigies. They also came to be accepted as more than just individual marks of recognition. In true heraldry, devices painted on shields are not merely individual marks of recognition; they are hereditary to particular families" (p. 126).

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[49] See Keen: "Arms could be made to recall a story, or a part of one." For example, "The chains in the arms of a group of Navarrese families . . . were . . . supposed to commemorate the part that their ancestors had played in the great victory of Sancho the Strong over the Muslims at Las Navas de Tolosa, where the Navarrese were the first to break through the chains surrounding the enemy camp" (p. 131).

[50] "The instinct to make of arms more than a mere mark of recognition, to make them convey messages of pride in loyal service, martial achievement and family connection, and to exemplify special virtues, was at work from the beginning" (Keen, p. 131).

[51] Keen, p. 127.

[52] "Emphatically, the language of heraldry was the language of honour not just in its genealogical, but in its ethical sense too" (Keen, p. 132).

[53] If we should have any doubts about the importance of heraldry or coats of arms, we might consider the famous case of Scrope vrs. Grosvenor, in which Geoffrey Chaucer is recorded having testified to the authenticity of the Scrope family arms. While this case was brought before the High Court of Chivalry in 1385, some 80 years before Malory wrote the Morte Darthur, it does illuminate for us the importance placed on protecting one's coat of arms and ensuring that their history was part of a communal memory. "Sir Richard Scrope," Donald Howard tells us, "had brought an appeal against Sir Robert Grosvenor challenging his right to bear the arms *azure bend or*" (*Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987, p. 389). What is most striking about this case is Chaucer's testimony. It is a perfect example of how important it was to a collective to establish its social structure based on memory's ability to organize continuity between the present and the past. All the questions that have remained from Chaucer's testimony are concerned with ancestors and heritage. For example: "Q: How do you know that the said arms belong to Sir Richard? A: By hearsay – from old knights and squires, and that they have always continuously possessed those arms, and that in all my time these have always been reputed to be their arms, as common fame and public voice urges and has urged. And when I saw those arms on banners, on stained-glass windows, on paintings, and on clothing, they were commonly called the arms of Le Scrope" (p. 390).

[54] Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 10.

[55] Greene, p. 10.

[56] See p. 487/34-38. We might also consider the madness-in-the-woods motif evoked by Yvain in Chretién de Troye's *Yvain* as an early example of the theme in medieval romance.

[57] I am aware that in using the expressions "identity," "self," or even "individual," throughout this chapter I am not fully interrogating the terms; as a result, many of my assertions regarding these concepts are dependent on assumptions regarding the nature of subjectivity and the dialectic of interiority versus exteriority. These are, to be sure, important concepts that need to be engaged at length to draw a better understanding of the interaction between the *Morte* and its audience. My goal, however, is to tackle the difficulties with medieval subjectivity and the *Morte Darthur* in Chapter 4. For now, my assumptions about the individual or the "self" rest on a belief that for Malory, the issue is straightforward: in the *Morte*, individuals exist. Malory perceives his characters as autonomous beings, in the sense that they reflect on their actions and make decisions. The key, here, is that Malory sees social identity being formed when a "self" consciously adopts the conventions of its social group. This is not some process in which the individual is determined under the totalitarian gaze of the collective. Rather, following Aristotle, we should see the individual as lost until he or she completes him or her-self by *imitating* the social. This is why imitation is so significant in the lives of the chivalric class.

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[58] Having been tricked yet again into Elaine's bed – when he is supposed to be in bed with Guinevere – Lancelot is caught by the queen, in flagrante delicto, and in a fit of pique she demands that he stay away from her: "'A, thou false traytoure knyght! Loke thou never abyde in my courte, and lyghtly that thou voyde my chamber! And nat so hardy, thou false traytoure knyght, that evermore thou com in my syght!'" (487/27-29). Lancelot goes mad with shame and grief and he throws himself out a window, setting in motion a series of adventures when the whole court rides out to search for him. What is most important, however, is that as he runs amok Lancelot is recognized by a dwarf who points out to his master that he has seen Lancelot before at the tournament of Lonzep (496/32-34) Even more telling, when one of her maidens brings Elaine to the sleeping Lancelot, Elaine is able to identify him immediately (499/31-33). This contrasts markedly with Isolde's failure to recognize Tristram.

[59] Quoted in David Aers, Introduction, *Culture and History 1350 – 1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing,* ed. David Aers, Hertfordshire UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 1.

[60] Paul Ricoeur observes that these terms were primarily developed by John Locke. "It remains that John Locke is the inventor of the following three notions and the sequence that they form together: identity, consciousness, self" (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 102). While it may be that we can credit Locke with having developed the modern *concepts* of identity, consciousness, and self, my contention is that the objects or psychological systems we label with these expressions exist regardless of our naming them as such. Much as Newton did not invent gravity, it would be more accurate to say Locke discovered these functions.

[61] Greene, p. 10.

[62] Interestingly, Fries ("Indiscreet Objects of Desire: Malory's 'Tristram' and the Necessity of Deceit," p. 100) characterizes Tristram's speech here as part of a pattern of "deceitfully defensive" discourse maintained by Tristram whenever he is engaged in a wrong-doing. Aside from the fact that I do not grasp why "defensive" is *necessarily* correlative with "deceitful," Malory would most likely not have seen Tristram's actions as a subterfuge; rather, he is emphasizing through Tristram the importance of remembering social obligations.

[63] As Carruthers makes clear, in the middle ages a well-trained memory was considered a constitutive factor in the formation of a fully functioning human being. From a rhetorician's perspective, to meet Aristotle's criteria for human and ethical development it was necessary that the individual be conscious of and reflective on his or her past: "A person without a memory, if such a thing could be, would be a person without moral character and, in a basic sense, without humanity" (Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 13).

[64] "Though its idealism can express itself at many social levels, romance is inherently aspiring . . . it aims not at pure escapism or fantasy but at the conviction of reality. It is not satisfied with the trappings of realism but strives for the conviction that the world it projects has existed in some past golden age or will be in some millennium to come, or might be *if men were more faithful to their ideals* than experience suggests them capable of being" (W.R.J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, New York: Longman, Inc., 1995, p. 4, italics added).

[65] Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 118. Italics in original.

[66] "The hostile knight, in armor, his identity unknown, exudes that insolence which marks a fundamental refusal of recognition and stamps him as the bearer of the category of evil, up to the moment when, defeated and unmasked, he asks for mercy by *telling his name*" (Jameson, pp. 118-19 [italics in original]).

[67] Tristram finally is brought to the Round Table after his battle with Lancelot, which ends in a draw, and this closes out the sixth chapter of Vinaver's edition.

[68] According to Benson, "The main stages of [Tristram's] quest are to attain a seat at the Round Table, which he achieves at the end of the sixth chapter . . . , to win full possession of his lady, which he achieves in the tenth chapter, and to bring the Saracen Palomides to baptism, which he does in the final paragraphs of the tale" (p. 116). However, I have chosen not to include the winning of Isolde because it does not seem to fit with the general theme of inclusiveness. If anything, Tristram and Isolde are forced to retreat from the court to Joyous Garde; this is, following the plot, a conflict that must be resolved and community restored. Isolde must return to Mark, and her stay with Tristram at Lancelot's castle is merely a delaying of their responsibility to the unity of social order.

[69] Helen Cooper, p. 184.

[70] Lynch comments frequently on the importance of not taking the "avauntage" when it is presented: "The combatants each desire to win, but also want the battle itself to be as hard as possible. Advantage must be gained, not the fruit of chance" (p. 131). Not only is forbearance a mark of nobility, it is a grace accorded to equals.

[71] It should be noted here that while the narrative indicates that Palomides and Tristram are locked in debate because of Isolde, the real reason for their quarrel stems from something much subtler and, to Malory's eye, more dangerous. Palomides' resentment originates in his refusal to accept that Tristram is a better knight than he. In terms of combat, Palomides would seem to be able to hold his own against any of the knights of the Round Table – he is listed as one of the greatest knights of Arthur's court. But while his skill in arms is never in doubt, he never quite equals the Lancelots and the Tristrams of the world. Thus, he sulks and pouts and engages in disagreeable and frankly un-chivalrous behavior out of pure envy. As Malory points out, "for well knew sir Palomydes, whan sir Tristram wolde put forthe his strengthe and his manhode, that he sholde gete but lytyll worshyp" (p. 455/23-24). The message, Malory suggests, is that authentic worship is gained not simply through one's feats of arms but through one's ability to respond with generosity and admiration for others.

[72] For an alternative reading of Tristram's and Palomides' relationship as a privileging of the homo-social bond over that of the hetero-sexual, see Olga Burokov Mongan, "Between Knights: Triangular Desire and Sir Palomides in Sir Thomas Malory's *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyoness*," *Arthuriana*, vol. 12, num 4, Winter 2002, 74-89.

[73] As Helen Cooper emphasizes, the "Tristram" is vitally connected to real-world political destabilization. In examining the network of affinities and tensions that "increasingly" evade Arthur's ability to control them, Cooper describes the motivations that energize the "Tristram" as the fall out from knights failing to put the community first and pursuing damaging "private" endeavors: "the Wars of the Roses were fuelled by just such local faction-fighting and private vendettas as the *Tristram* shows getting increasingly out of hand. The models of good and bad knighthood offered by the book were not the escapism of an age of declining chivalry, but an implied appeal to those who wielded political and military power . . . to use it for good" (p. 198).

[74] "As a military principle, chivalry was no longer sufficient. Tactics had long since given up all thought of conforming to its rules" (Huizinga, p. 91).

[75] Huizinga reminds us, "In spite of the care taken on all hands to keep up the illusion of chivalry, reality perpetually gives the lie to it, and obliges it to take refuge in the domains of literature and of conversation" (p. 89).

[76] "For the history of civilization the perennial dream of a sublime life has the value of a very important reality" (Huizinga, p. 82).

[77] See Barber, pp. 21-22.

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[78] Mathieu d'Escouchy tells us, for instance: "King René of Anjou in 1446 organized near Saumur jousts according to the terms established by the knights of the Round Table, had a wooden castle called 'Joyeuse Garde' constructed; and introduced into the pageantry lions, tigers, and unicorns (?) from the royal menagerie. There were kings of arms, judges of the field, a dwarf dressed like a Turk, bearing the royal shield, and a lovely damsel leading the king's horse. This like other jousts was stopped because of a fatal injury," (Roger Sherman Loomis, "Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle," *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 556).

[79] See, for instance, Barber (pp. 29-32) who notes in particular Edward IV's interest, along with that of his "circle," such as the Woodvilles who "were enthusiastic jousters" (p. 31). Also, see Benson, who observes that "Malory lived and wrote in the late Middle Ages, when, for the first time in Western civilization, noble gentlemen actually jousted to gain honor and please their ladies . . . and attempted to realize in their own lives the ideals of romance chivalry" (p. 138).

[80] "This, by and large, is the function that Arthur's knights have, even in *Le Morte Darthur*, despite the fact that by Malory's day the theory of the three estates . . . was an anachronistic fantasy" (Riddy, "Contextualizing *Le Morte Darthur*," p. 56).

[81] Halbwachs, p. 126

[82] Halbwachs, p. 126.

[83] "Beneath the fiction of noble blood titled gentlemen had sincere convictions. They really believed that their group was the most precious and irreplaceable – and also the most active and beneficent – part to the social body. In a sense, they believed that they embodied society's reason for being" (Halbwachs, p. 126).

[84] "[The] noble quality of the lord or of his tenant was rooted in his land. Behind the fields, forests, and fertile lands the personal face of the lord is perceived" (Halbwachs, p. 123).

[85] "The voice of the laborers answering the question of to whom these lands belong . . . is the voice of the land itself" (Halbwachs, p. 123).

[86] Halbwachs, p. 123.

[87] "The medieval view of lineage and nobility is thus one which focuses not simply on birth as the determinant of caste so much as on family traditions of honour and privileged position founded in past achievements, and offering an example to future generations" (Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 160).

[88] "For his own particular achievement a man might be ennobled, but gentility implied something more, the forming of a tradition and manner of life and conduct which had stood the test of time into a second generation" (Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 160-61).

[89] As Huizinga explains, "chivalrous ideas . . . are regarded by common consent as a more or less artificial revival of ideas, whose real value had long since disappeared. They would seem to be an ornament of society and no more" (p. 82).

[90] Huizinga, p. 69.

[91] Elizabeth Pochoda has argued to the contrary in *Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971) that the purpose of the *Morte Darthur* is to express Malory's rather cynical view that the ideals of Arthurian chivalry were bankrupt: "The failure of Arthurian society

lies mainly in its self-deception and in its idealization of itself" (p. 100). Pochoda's argument is that Malory himself sees in the connections between fifteenth-century English politics and the knightly idealism expressed in the "Tristram" inherent flaws that cannot be supported or resolved by the chivalric ethos. As she emphasizes, "Instead of reinforcing the merits of Arthurian civilization as an historical model and a political ideal, they begin in the last sections of Tale V through Tale VIII to betray the shortcomings of the Arthurian code. Malory's idealization ebbs as the dangers of the Round Table's own idealization of itself becomes more apparent" (p. 100). As is clear from my argument, I draw a rather different conclusion. While I can accept that the reality of historical forces determines that the chivalric ideals are in fact incapable of saving society, it is clear to me that Malory *wants* them to and that he believes sincerely in the efficacy of chivalry as a means of uniting his fractured world picture. It is people who fail, not the ideals themselves.

[92] Simpson defines the work of a "social ecology" in his analysis of the structure of the romance genre: "[Romance] narratives work to define what might be called a social ecology, since the individual trajectory necessitates that a whole system readjust and provisionally reform itself, where the readjustment involves both victims who must be ejected from the system, and new arrivals who deserve accommodation" (*Reform and Cultural Revolution*, The Oxford English Literary History, vol.2, 1350-1547, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 275). I like Simpson's definition because it highlights the interactive quality of the individual and the social. Both are perceived not as static and inflexible determinations, but rather as plastic and capable of deformation. Given that my argument accepts as a central tenet the concept of authentic memory as a dynamic process, capable of reinvention and alteration, it seems plausible to me that Simpson's "social ecology" elucidates the integrative aspect of the collective use of memory.

[93] See Thomas H. Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience*, Arthurian Studies lxvi, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006, pp. 1-2.

[94] Crofts, p. 2.

[95] Crofts, p. 2.

[96] This has, for us, all the hallmarks of a sort of communal theatre. But if it is theatre, it is one with serious consequences and in which the models for action and self-understanding determine one's real identity. That is to say, actors recognize that they are playing roles; that they have a core identity which then adopts or plays at an alternate identity. There is no sense of that in the actions of the Berkeleys and Talbots. They are, in fact, adopting behaviors that they see as constitutive of their very selves *as* communal identities.

[97] Crofts, p. 4.

[98] I differ somewhat in my interpretation of this event from Crofts, who argues "It is a sort of powerlessness before chivalric imperatives, we observe, that Talbot conjures in his letter to Berkeley" (p. 4). Crofts' point is that the men of the chivalric class are unable to see outside of the historical forces that bend them to performances that they have no control over. This ultimately Marxist perspective may be accurate; but it is my contention that the desire on the part of the participants (and Malory himself) that such a world *should be* true is the primary force making it real.

[99] Huizinga, p. 94.

[100] Arthur Ferguson has observed that Caxton may have published the *Morte Darthur* out of a conviction "in the efficacy of chivalric literature for the planting of socially desirable virtues" (*The Indian Summer of English Chivalry*: Studies in the Decline and Transformation of Chivalric Idealism, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960, p. 46).

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[101] William Caxton, "Caxton's Preface," from *Malory: Works*, 2nd edition, ed. Eugene Vinaver, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, xv.

[102] During Malory's own day, Edward IV was known for elevating the status of any number of families through advancement, marriage, and alliances, creating many "new men" in an effort to build loyalty. But in doing so, Simpson's social ecology must find a way to "distort the past" in order to reinvent a history that did not exist: "At a time when the renewal and the enlarged recruitment of the noble class was the order of the day, the whole society had to accommodate itself to these infringements and to find a way to legitimize those men who entered the nobility by breaking in, without title, without sponsors, without kin. It was necessary for society to reorganize and to modify to some degree the frameworks of its memory" (Halbwachs, p. 134).

[103] Radulescu reminds us that "the Morte Darthur has often been descrived as a narrative lacking in psychological insight into the characters' actions, motivations, and inner lives. It has been a feature of criticism to emphasise this particularity in Malory's writing, especially if viewed in contrast to his French sources" ("'Oute of mesure': Violence and Knighthood in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Re-viewing Le Morte Darthur*, eds. K.S. Whetter and Raluca L. Radulescu, Arthurian Studies lx, Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005, p. 120). Yet, for all the criticism that gets leveled at Malory for being an unsophisticated translator of more adept French sources, moments like this are priceless examples of Malory's comprehension of the subtleties of dialogue and demonstrates his own willingness to explore the possibilities of conversation.

[104] As Mann remarks, "The image of fighting men on their knees offering their swords to one another is . . . an odd one, but it is a frequent one in romance, and expresses the spirit of the romance world. It does not imply a rejection of battle; on the contrary, it symbolizes the acceptance of engagement with the unknown that is at the heart of battle. Thus opposition becomes a means of achieving union" (p. 338).

[105] Mark Lambert. *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975, p. 179. Italics added.

[106] "When we think of Malory as a writer to whose imagination shame and honor were more vivid than guilt and innocence a good many things in *Le Morte Darthur* make more sense than they did before . . . Inconsistencies remain, of course; here as elsewhere Malory's imagination recasts but does not reblend [sic]. Yet the reader will find that a shame-reading solves more puzzles than it creates" (Lambert, p. 180).

[107] Lambert has a short but useful discussion on the topic of Western culture and the privileging of guilt over shame. Citing classicists E.R.Dodds and Bruno Snell, he points to a tradition of value judgments fostering the belief that "shame cultures are 'primitive,' guilt-cultures 'more sophisticated'" (p. 180-81).

[108] Lambert, p. 179 (italics added). I want to be careful with this use of the word "real." I believe that this usage does not indicate that Malory did not believe in a modern understanding of guilt or that guilt was in some fashion illusory. Rather, what needs to be emphasized in Lambert's use of the term is its level of importance. Shame matters – guilt does so to a much lesser extent. It is important to remember that Malory is driven by a concern about how to maintain social cohesion. Questions about guilt and innocence cannot be adequately answered by the chivalric ethos – but questions about honor and shame can. And because those are terms that bear the full weight of communal approbation, they offer the community subjects upon which it can reinforce its own structure.

[109] D.S. Brewer (Introduction to *Malory: The Morte Darthur, Parts Seven and Eight*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) argues that shame as a socializing force occupies and defines the actions of Arthur's court when dealing with questionable events such as Guinevere's infidelity to Arthur: "If honour does not necessarily depend on virtue, it certainly depends on reputation, on what people *say*. Thus, although Guenevere's honour and shame . . . do not depend on her chastity, they do depend on not being talked about (p. 29, italics in original).

Brewer's point is that the reality in which the characters dwell is one constituted in large part by speech. Shame is an expression of that reality, and it is created by the community.

[110] It should be noted that this passage has elicited a significant amount of scholarly criticism in the past. Vinaver, in his notes, compares Malory's version to the original French in order to demonstrate "one of [Malory's] most significant additions" (Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 1469). Unlike the French text, in which Lancelot is not told why Mellygaunce and Lamorak are fighting, Malory makes sure their reasons are clearly stated.

[111] Again, Lynch has an extensive analysis of not only the complicated relation between combat and fellowship, but more specifically the opposition between Tristram and Palomides (pp. 108-33). As Lynch pointedly asks, "How is the reconciliation, or its illusion, to be achieved?" (p. 96) He observes that "conflicting political forces" are often "resolved by a hero's 'means' of prowess and wisdom" (p. 96).

[112] On the complications of envy as both a danger and an essential contribution to the social order, see Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, pp. 87-91. Also, see Grimm (pp.81-82), who notes "that which caused discord in the real world was a useful, even necessary, generator of action in the fictive world."

[113] "*memoria* can be considered as one of the modalities of medieval culture . . . It has identifiable and verifiable practices and procedures that affect a variety of cultural phenomena . . ., and it also is a value in itself, identified with the virtue of prudence . . . It is in this way that I think we can meaningfully speak of the Middle Ages as a memorial culture, recognizing that . . . as a modality of culture it had a very long life as a continuing source and reference for human values and behavior" (Carruthers, p. 260).

CHAPTER 4. HISTORY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE QUEST FOR INDIVIDUAL REMEMBRANCE

Throughout the *Morte Darthur*, Malory's efforts to remember the chivalric glories of the Arthurian past had been controlled by his desire to respond to the social anxieties of fifteenth-century England. Malory's response to the fears of social fragmentation produced by dynastic upheaval and political flux was to propose a restorative communal identity located in his chivalric ideology's connection to a shared past. His search for wholeness, that is social and psychic integrity, depended on what Pierre Nora calls "real memory,"[1] securing in the past the validation for the collective beliefs of the present. Unfortunately, this unsustainable project collapses in book six, "The Tale of the Sankgreal," a roughly straightforward translation of a lost manuscript that itself appears to have been closely derived from the French *Queste del Saint Graal*. [2] The collective assurance of the chivalric ideology, which I have explored at length in chapters two and three, is threatened by a world in which the ordinary expectations of the grail knights have no authority and their knightly conduct no efficacy. In translating from his source Malory is forced to recognize a history that would seem to abrogate the chivalric values he had thus far identified as the socially cohesive practices required of the virtuous knight.[3] Denying the worldly successes and expectations of the Arthurian knights and attacking the cornerstones of chivalric service, the *Queste* appears to condemn the fellowship itself as the majority of the knights seeking the Grail find only heartbreak, loss, and death.[4] From Lancelot's humiliation, to Gawain's accidental kin-slaying, to Bors's refusal to defend a fellow knight from his maddened brother, the text condemns actions and attitudes that until this point had promoted the chivalric enterprise in the world.[5] As one of the numerous Grail hermits tells Gawain in the French *Queste*, "'For know thou well that in this Queste thy earthly chivalry cannot avail thee, if the Holy Spirit help thee not in all the adventures that may befall thee.'"[6] In contrasting the earthly

with the divine, the author of the *Queste* appears to insert the Arthurian knights into a world for which they are ill-equipped and in which their greatest strength, that is their commitment to the chivalric fellowship, becomes their greatest weakness.[7]

As a result, when it came time for Malory to transcribe the deeply spiritual *Queste* into his Arthurian history, he was faced with some confusing decisions regarding the Cistercian-influenced *Queste*'s pious criticism of those worldly interests underwriting the *Morte*'s primarily secular and sociological narrative.[8] How, given the spiritual critique leveled by the source text, could he preserve the substance of his beloved fellowship and its social integrity while at the same time respecting what he saw as the truth value of the Grail history? He attempts to do so, paradoxically, by reinforcing the differences between them.[9]

In confirming the gap between the spiritual "truths" of the Grail legend and the communal values of his chivalric society, Malory is forced to negotiate a shift from memorial to historical consciousness. At the heart of historical awareness is a conceptualization of difference;[10] a concept that imposes a recognition of otherness that is crucial to Malory's exploration of the Grail quest and the quest's impact on the court. Within a perception of the past as given to us through discontinuity, rather than continuity, in which institutions that ordinarily maintain a cultural identity – such as family or social groups – are denuded of their former assurances of solidarity, distance becomes the principle by which history organizes the sensible world.[11] For example, in commenting on another great French historian, Michelet, Michel de Certeau observed that the relationship with the past evoked by the historian is defined by the limitations of the dead as an endless quest for the other that we "honor" through our respect for that other's difference. [12] That is, because the "object" of history is presumed to be beyond our reach, essentially lost to us across the insoluble divide separating past and present, or

the dead and the living, any attempt to make the past speak or reveal itself is a doomed enterprise. The absence that is our experience of the past is a call to which the historian responds by recording traces; what is under examination, then, in the exploration of the past is not the past in itself but its remainders. The object that is remembered in the act of recalling the past is recollection itself.[13] In that call to respond, a responsibility to the past, to the other that is the vanished past, takes shape – but such an obligation appears in a devotion to *recognizing that otherness*. The historian cannot take anything for granted, cannot assume a connection that does not exist, and must always be willing to accept that difference is a fundamental attribute of any interaction with the other. It is this alterity that Malory will turn to in an effort to keep at bay the spiritual criticisms of his idealized temporal society.

It is curious that Malory chose for his source a text that was fundamentally opposed to his own project when he could have selected a source more agreeable to his views. It is commonly accepted that Malory had access to several different sources for his Grail quest, some of which would have been far more forgiving of the Round Table; instead he chose to concentrate on the French *Queste del Saint Graal*, a text whose metaphysical interests committed him to exploring a narrative that, unlike other versions of the Grail quest, would not accommodate the phenomenal world of the fellowship.[14] Critics have also frequently noted that, compared to the rest of the translations comprising the *Morte Darthur*, Malory makes far fewer alterations and additions to the source text for his Grail quest.[15] Taken together, Malory's twin decisions to adhere to a radical critique and to sustain the fundamental message of that critique is thoroughly perplexing in light of his overall project. While some critics, notably Eugéne Vinaver, have claimed that Malory reduces the theological interpretations and biblical references of his source text in order to reduce the spiritual claims leveled against his knights,[16] others have been quick to respond that

Malory's Grail quest can only be understood in the context of Eucharistic piety and that the influence of biblical tradition imposes the burden of Christian morality on the narrative.[17] If, as Vinaver claims, Malory sought to "secularize" the Grail theme, one must ask why he simply did not choose the already more secular versions available to him.[18] The implications of this choice must be emphasized because, I argue, by selecting the text with the stronger scriptural claims Malory is responding to a history he believes has greater authority than the seemingly more secular texts. Malory's acceptance of the truth value ascribed to the more spiritual *Queste* means that he *deliberately* chose a text whose language expressed critiques he was not comfortable altering to the extent that he was willing to manipulate his other source texts. That history, however, seems to be written at the expense of the Arthurian fellowship. Given Malory's principal desire to reaffirm the value of chivalric ideals in a unifying historical and communal identity, his reliance on what he perceived to be the "truest" narrative[19] would dictate a paradox in which the very authority he seeks dismantles or discredits the memorial continuity he had seen fit to inscribe on a disparate corpus of Arthurian literature. The question then remains, what compelled Malory to choose a text that would clearly confront him with the shortcomings of a community on which so much had been staked?

A clue to Malory's understanding of the Grail history lies in the colophon leading into the Grail quest where Malory notes that the "Tale of the Sankgreal" "is a tale chronicled for one of the truest and one of the holiest that is in this world" (513). Malory's special emphasis here indicates the importance he placed on the *authenticity* of his history, a point not lost on his audience. William Caxton remarks in the preface to his edition that the "noble jentylmen" who entreated him to publish the *Morte* "requyred me t'imprynte th'ystorye of the sayd noble kyng and conquerour kyng Arthur and of his knyghtes, wyth the'ystorye of the Saynt Greal" (xiii).

There was no doubt, at least in the minds of those to whom the book was marketed, that the Grail narrative was indeed history, and history with a unique emphasis. A more intriguing question, though, is why Malory would have seen the *Queste* as more authoritative, not just in comparison to other versions of the Grail quest, but in relation to the various Arthurian narratives comprising the *Morte Darthur*. And here lies the crux of the matter: while Malory's project for the *Morte* was to construct a socially binding continuity out of the chivalric community's association with its Arthurian heritage, the method he adopted to deal with the apparent failures of that legacy will further heighten the tensions between historical consciousness and real memory.

The enterprise to "remember" is fraught with history; and when Malory privileges the source text that seems to best illustrate the individual experiences of the Round Table knights, he does so because he unconsciously accepts a model for the past imposed on him by historical consciousness. In other words, even as he searches for authentic memory Malory is already subject to the methodologies imposed by historical consciousness, unwittingly replicating history's critical demands. Malory's privileging of historical "truth" in his Grail narrative suppresses the essential aspect of memorial consciousness that he had been seeking – its uncritical self-assurance. As I've emphasized throughout these chapters, memory's un-self-conscious position is derived from its collective or social integrity. Historical consciousness, on the other hand, inherently mistrusts this collective aspect of authentic memory and works incessantly to dismantle it.[20] If Malory's initial dilemma was to maintain the validity of chivalric virtues in the face of the withering critique proposed by the Grail quest – without in turn invalidating the objectives of the Grail quest – then he needed to ensure that the convictions of the social and the theological would not emerge from the narrative as comments upon one or the other. He found what he thought was the solution in an absolute divide between the earthly

accomplishments of the Arthurian knights, and their spiritual challenges. They are different; one is not an extension of the other.[21] Indeed, the religious symbolism and metaphysical vagueness in his source *emphasizing* the divide between the earthly and the divine appealed to Malory precisely because he needed to keep the accomplishments of the Arthurian community in a separate order from the achievements of the Grail quest.

But the crucial difference undergirding the distinction between the earthly and the divine is the emphasis on the individual opposed to the communal. That motif becomes the contested metaphorical terrain of the text, in which memory gives way to history. What emerges from the text with essential clarity is that the difference between the chivalric world of Arthur's court and the spiritual realm of the Grail is an opposition between two forms of commitment: the former, social and communally binding; the latter, solitary, isolating, and socially fragmentary. The former is the site on which Malory located memorial consciousness because he recognized the Arthurian fellowship's ideological cohesiveness. But with the intrusion of the Grail event, Malory is faced with the theological imperative to privilege the individual soul over the community's identity. At its core this imperative reflects the injunction issued by historical consciousness and predicated on the individual's obligation to bear witness. As Nora observes regarding memory's subjugation to history, it is the "transformation" of the past from an inclusive social presence to an individual, alienated subjective practice that destroys continuity.[22] In trying to separate the two realms, Arthur's Camelot and the Grail's Corbenic, Malory breaks the very unity he had been seeking in the *Morte Darthur's* affirmation of an enduring past. This breach opens the continuity of memory to history's critical articulation, compromising authentic memory's promise of wholeness with a narrative of social destabilization.

The Grail narrative, in the *Morte Darthur*, consists of loosely connected adventures orbiting the central matter of Galahad's appearance and fulfillment of the Grail quest. Beginning with the knighting of Galahad and ending with the return of Bors to Arthur's court, the "Tale of the Sankgreall" seems barely organized as the order of events does not follow a linear construction between the opening and closing of the tale. While the tale does have a coherent beginning and end, in between these units is a series of shorter narratives given over to the adventures of Percival, Lancelot, Gawain, Bors, and Galahad, with minor characters making appearances as well. These units were first assigned rubrics by Caxton, summarizing the various adventures following the failures and successes of individual Round Table knights, thematically united by their relevance to Galahad's progress. Vinaver further organized these units with corresponding titles: The Departure; The Miracles; Sir Perceval; Sir Launcelot; Sir Gawain; Sir Bors; Sir Galahad; The Castle of Corbenic; The Miracle of Galahad. Each unit functions not so much episodically in the overall Grail narrative, but as a frame for crucial details specific to the meaning of the Grail and its strain on the fellowship. In particular, the separate events making up the Grail story reinforce subjects of isolation, loss, social fragmentation, and critical history. While the Grail is often described as the Eucharistic vessel, its meaning for the Arthurian community is complicated by a history whose otherness differentiates between an infinitely remote spiritual world and the world of knightly endeavors.[23]

The Departure begins when a "jantillwoman" appears at court and mysteriously requests that Lancelot follow her to a forest. Lancelot agrees and is led to an abbey, where he finds his cousins Bors and Lionel waiting for him. Here, Lancelot is asked to knight his son Galahad, who oddly refuses to return with Lancelot to Arthur's court. Upon Lancelot's return to the Round Table a series of strange events take place – words writ in gold appear on the seats, indicating

who is to be seated where; a stone, floating in the river, appears with a sword stuck in it; Galahad suddenly arrives at court and is able to draw the sword from the stone; and to a great shock of thunder and light, the Grail appears before the court. Finally, after the Grail vanishes, Gawain vows to see it again and along with him the rest of the court vows to undertake the quest as well. Arthur prophetically bemoans the parting of the fellowship, and holds a last tournament in which Galahad handily defeats the other knights. Shortly thereafter, having met up at the castle of Vagon, the knights take council with one another and decide "that they sholde departe everych form othir. And on the morne they departed with wepyng chere, and than every knyght toke the way that hym lyked beste" (524/32-4). With that, the Grail quest is under way.

The events of The Departure provide narrative context for the story, but also serve to stress two key issues: first, that Galahad is intended to be a foil for the chivalric community; and second, the severing of the individual from a broader community. While it is Gawain who appears to initiate the quest following the miracle of the Grail's sudden appearance in Arthur's court, by rights the quest itself begins with the arrival of Galahad, whose success has been foretold. Not only did Malory forecast as much in the first book of the *Morte*,[24] but we are reminded of Galahad's unique connection to the Grail throughout book six as hermits and priests, even the very objects surrounding the Round Table itself, testify to his triumph. Before Galahad comes to Arthur's court lettering on the Siege Perilous miraculously appear and indicate that the time for the one who is destined to sit upon it has arrived: "Four hondred wyntir and four and fyffty acomplysshed aftir the Passion of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryst oughte thys syege to by fulfylled" (516/35-7) appears on the seat and it is Lancelot who calculates that, indeed, the very day was upon them. When Galahad makes his appearance at court, the writing on the Siege Perilous responds to his coming, rewriting itself to announce: "Thys ys the syege of sir Galahad

the Hawte Prynce" (518/44). In fact, it would not be fallacious to note that there is only one knight on the Grail quest: Galahad, who is himself fond of pointing this out to others. As he says on more than one occasion, "thys adventure ys nat theyrs but myne" (520//1-2). It is clear from the start that, noble as their objective may be, Arthur's knights are not meant to achieve the Grail. It is intended for Galahad and every aspect of The Departure conspires to prepare us for this eventuality. As the court collectively observes "'Thys ys he by whom the Sankgreall shal be encheved'" (519/13) – a point that is later lost on everyone when the Grail appears and, entranced by its presence, the knights allow their desire for it to obscure what, as a community, they cannot avoid. The Grail is beyond them.

Among the many interpretively challenging scenes of book six, the appearance of the Grail at Arthur's court offers us some difficult questions regarding both the meaning of its presence and the knights' response. Specifically, two questions demand to be answered: first, why does the Grail make itself known to the court? That is to say, the Grail's presence signifies something crucial about the fellowship itself – what is that? Second, what are we to make of Arthur's knights and their vow to pursue the Grail, even when they have already recognized that it is Galahad who will achieve it? The Grail's appearance occupies a space without context or intelligibility. It enters, the hall is filled with wonderful odors and every knight is served the food he most desires, then it is gone as mysteriously as it materialized. The only significant clue Malory provides is the detail that just before the Grail becomes visible, a sunbeam brighter than the day illuminates the knights of the Round Table "and all they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste" (521/38). In the midst of this divine radiance, the knights perceive one another – according to lines that appear to be wholly Malory's invention – as though more beautiful than ever: "Than began every knyght to beholde other, and eyther saw other, by their semyng, fayrer

than ever they were before" (521/38-40). A slew of difficulties plaggues our reading of this passage. To begin with, how are we to read "fayrer"? In fifteenth-century English this can mean beauty or even gentleness. The knights appear gentler, nobler, more transcendental, and more *desirable* perhaps – whatever interpretation we choose, the light of divine grace appears to exaggerate or illuminate those qualities that for Malory highlight the idealized perfection of the chivalric class. This idealization, in addition, resolves the issue of what such grace means for our understanding of the fellowship and the Grail's impact on it. If, as those critics following Albert Pauphilet suggest, the Grail is a rebuke of Arthur's secular world, why are the knights granted "the grace of the Holy Goste"? It is clear that Malory sees this as a positive reinforcement of the values of the chivalric brotherhood. In locating his knights within an ideologically heightened framework, Malory is asking his audience to secure for the Round Table community its essential worthiness in the light of divine approval. In effect, Malory is positioning the Arthurian order such that *before* the quest can work to separate and destroy its members, their value has already been established. Regardless of what critiques take place as the narrative unfolds, the foundation for the Round Table has clearly been identified as ideologically whole.

This wholeness, however, is not without problems. To be specific, we must ask whether the image of concordance presented by the ecstatic idealization of the fellowship is actually an effect of Galahad's presence, and not an inherent feature of the chivalric brotherhood. Jill Mann has pointed out that the Grail's arrival at court is a sign recognizing the culmination of the Round Table in Galahad's joining. As she puts it, "The appearance of the Grail at the evening supper consecrates the completion of the Round Table, the eradication of its one remaining gap, but it also initiates the quest which will scatter the fellowship, and sever some of its members from it

forever."[25] While Mann is correct both in noting that the Grail "consecrates" the fellowship and in reminding us that the fellowship will be scattered in the quest, her claim that the Grail celebrates "the eradication of its one remaining gap" needs to be taken under consideration. This is a particularly problematic issue because Mann's argument here depends on a reading of the Grail event as focused on Galahad, not the fellowship. In effect, the Grail is not sanctifying the fellowship according to Mann's assertion; it is rather acknowledging Galahad's coming. To be clear, I am not postulating that the Grail *doesn't* support the ideological valence of the chivalric class; as we have seen, Malory deliberately invokes divine grace to sanctify chivalry and prevent its censure. The issue at stake in the Grail's appearance at court is whether we are to see in the Grail's bestowal of grace a confirmation that is dependent on the community of the Round Table knights, or a result of Galahad's perfection.   This has dramatic consequences for any interpretation of the lines Malory added: while for Malory the goal all along has been to establish communal memory as the basis for a restorative social unity, the separation that Mann observes as a characteristic of the Grail quest would redirect any potential salvation away from the community and place it squarely on the shoulders of an individual elected by divine providence and who cares nothing for fulfilling the conservative gesture of communal memory. In this light, are we to read Malory's addition as a tacit comment on the importance of the fellowship or as a sign orienting us toward Galahad's presence?

The question of whether the Grail offers a confirmation of the fellowship or of Galahad is resolved in Malory's addition through his veneration of the knights themselves. By pointing out how the fellowship looked to one another, Malory implicitly stresses not that they are completed in Galahad, but in each other. Elizabeth Pochoda has argued that the Grail's appearance offers the fellowship an image of solidarity. Rather than focus on Galahad as the completion of the

order, Pochoda's point is that the presence of the Grail shows the fellowship what it could be were its members fully functioning, not just as part of the community but as individuals as well.[26] While I do not accept Pochoda's claims against the Round Table's failures to support the individual, I do want to stress her key insight, which is that the focus of the Grail's benediction is on the community of knights, not Galahad. Her recognition that the emphasis of Malory's addition falls on the knights rather than Galahad reminds us that Malory's interest is located in the bonds holding together a social group. This unity is precisely what Malory sought as a restorative for his own conflicted society. The fact that Malory is willing to add these lines at this particular moment is not an idle issue, given that he is hesitant throughout this text to make significant changes to his source. The issue is further complicated by an aporia implicit in the tensions motivating and differentiating Malory and his source text. This aporia takes shape between a source that clearly did see Galahad's rejection of secular chivalry as the focus of the Grail quest and Malory's revision which is desperately trying to balance a respect for the source's wishes and his own need to find security in the Arthurian past. As a case in point, in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, when the knights are preparing to venture forth on the quest, they gather together to swear their oaths on holy relics as a testament to the sanctity of the quest's inception. In a scene that Malory deletes, Bagdemagus deliberately asks that Gawain not swear first, and instead asks that Galahad take the lead, arguing that it is he who leads them: "'Sire,' said King Baudemagus, 'saving your grace, let not Sir Gawain swear first, but he whom we should hold as lord and master of the Round Table; let Sir Galahad precede us all.'"[27] The point being made by *the source* is that the Round Table finds its purpose and direction in Galahad, its "lord and master." In removing this scene, Malory significantly whittles away at the source text's focus, reducing the force of Galahad's presence as he retreats into the background.

As for the question regarding the vow itself, there exists some debate over how to decipher Gawain's proposal to search for the Grail. After the Grail's disappearance from court, Gawain, in a fairly lengthy speech, explains his desire to search for the Grail and swears an oath to pursue it. This passage not only tells us what Gawain intends to do, it comments on his motivation as well:

> 'Now,' seyde sir Gawayne, 'we have bene servyd thys day of what metys and drynkes we thought on. But one thyng begyled us, that we myght nat se the Holy Grayle: hit was so precyously coverde. Wherefore I woll make here a vow that to-morne, without longer abydynge, I shall laboure in the queste of the Sankgreall . . . and never shall I returne unto the courte agayne tylle I have sene hit more opynly than hit hath bene shewed here.' (522/10-17)

Two issues in this passage affect our understanding of Gawain's motivation and, by association, our perception of the Round Table's purpose in the Grail quest. First, there is the matter of Gawain's use of the word "begyled"; second, there is the more critically contentious subject of the desire to see the Grail "more opynly." In Middle English the word "begyled" typically means cheated or deprived; thus Gawain's initial statement expresses a profound sense of being denied access. For Gawain, the drive to seek out the Grail emerges from his perception of loss and the expectation that the Grail can assuage loss by supplying a missing grace. Unlike Arthur who, as soon as the Grail vanishes, gives thanks for the miracle they have been granted, Gawain gives in to his usual impetuousness and fails to heed Arthur's direction. One of the crucial details frequently ignored by critics is that Arthur's speech provides an important comparison for evaluating Gawain's response: "'Sertes,' seyde the kynge, 'we ought to thanke oure Lorde Jesu Cryste gretly that he hath shewed us thys day at the reverence of thys hyghe feste of Pentecost'" (522/7-9). This isn't just a formulaic response. I would argue that it is in fact the *proper* response to the Grail's appearance. Arthur recognizes the Grail for what it is – a miraculous event; and he responds with the respect due to the experience of grace.[28] This comparison also

suggests that Gawain, on the other hand, foolishly wants more and as a result he loses sight of the essential "otherness" of the Grail event. Rather than respecting the distance between the Grail and the Round Table, he pursues a desire for a closeness that is simply not possible.

The two principal paths of critique for explaining Gawain's desire to see the Grail more openly follow either the understanding that the Grail rebukes the hubris of temporal subjectivity or the expectation that it complements the world of chivalric achievements. The distinction hinges in particular on whether or not Gawain's desire is a violation of the difference that Arthur sees in the miraculous event. Indeed, Arthur accuses Gawain of having destroyed both himself and the Round Table community: "'for thorow you ye have berauffte me the fayryst and the trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde'" (522/24-26). While Arthur notes that the fellowship will never be whole again, we should be wary of reading this as nothing more than narrative foreshadowing. The force of Arthur's speech marks his understanding of the Grail's significance; he recognizes that the Grail is not an object to be possessed, is not in fact a mere object at all. It is a distance that cannot be crossed.[29]

According to Pauline Matarasso, in the French *Queste* Gawain's impulsive vow is particularly nettlesome from a Cistercian point of view, because it involves an unwillingness to accept divine will and instead exert one's own will on the ineffable. The discursive heritage contextualizing the opposition between the individual and the divine recalls Saint Bernard's famous attack on Abelard, in which the saint accused the philosopher of a fundamental disrespect for what Bernard saw as the mysteries of God. As Bernard argues, "He [Abelard] sees nothing as an enigma, nothing as in a mirror, but looks on everything face to face."[30] Deriving this image from Saint Paul, Bernard couches the well-known conflict between reason and faith in terms of prideful desire and humble acceptance. According to this view, even though the knights

are served all that they could ask or think, they need more – desiring full access to those mysteries that can only be apprehended through religious awe.[31] Sandra Ness Ihle, on the other hand, describes Gawain's wish to see the Grail more openly as only simple curiosity, evoked not by the Grail's mysteries but by the concrete detail of its being partially covered by a cloth. Ihle's argument is contingent upon her claim that the Grail is an object that the knights are *supposed* to seek, and as such it would not make sense to interpret Gawain's desires as impertinent or a violation. Indeed, she argues that Malory deliberately reduces the mysteriousness of the Grail, eliminating those references from his source that emphasize the celestial over the terrestrial, and generally making it more accessible to the Round Table "in keeping with" the notion that the Grail event is open to all who are worthy, not just Galahad.[32] In a similar vein, Mann proposes that Gawain's intent to access the Grail is bound not by a desire to possess it, but simply to see it, which she interprets as the need to more fully actualize the Grail's promise of seeming wholeness: "The motive for the quest is the same impulse towards closeness that characterizes knightly engagement in adventure elsewhere."[33] Despite the obscurity of Mann's claim, her emphasis on "closeness" reminds us that chivalric pursuits are social practices intended to overcome separation and reduce difference. As she, along with others, has been quick to point out, Gawain's response is a typical representation of what knights are, under ordinary circumstances, required to do.[34] For critics like Mann, the crucial motivation for the *Morte Darthur* resides in the push for stability; and the Grail, according to her, is particularly demonstrative of Malory's idealization of unity and coherence.

While I find myself in agreement with those critics who see a fascination with the struggle between instability and unity as the *idée fixe* of the *Morte Darthur*, it is Matarasso's insights that strike me as most pertinent to an understanding both of the Grail's symbolic

meaning and, given the heavy-handed separation of the secular and the religious that we find in the *Queste*, its resonance with those interests motivating fifteenth-century devotional practice.[35] In spite of the criticism leveled against those scholars who see a deliberate Cistercian influence on the Grail story, Matarasso's exceedingly thorough comparison of the French *Queste* with Saint Bernard's writings demonstrates a vast field of correspondence that is difficult to dismiss.[36] In addition, Saint Bernard's writings on spiritualism and theology would, throughout the middle ages, provide a discourse in which to situate the meaning of the Grail event for its audience.[37] Of the many threads running through the Grail narrative, the most significant strand to be traced is a line of thought that, emerging from the debate between Abelard and Bernard over the limits of knowledge, concerns itself with a crucial interpretation of subjectivity. As we will see, the *Sankgreal* manifests this conflict over subjectivity in an opposition between the individual and the social, between unity and discord. And the decisive point separating these motifs will hinge on defining the nature of human responsibility.

The legend of the Grail and its received history were especially suited to providing a framework for the conflict between internal subjectivity and the external world. It is because they are intimately connected that *both* the Grail legend and religious mysticism need to be addressed within this climate of struggle between the inner self and the outer if we are to understand not only how Malory envisioned the impact of the Grail's presence, but how his audience would have been expected to read and comprehend the desire to see the Grail more openly. The Grail legend was particularly important to the English because of the well-known claim that it was Joseph of Arimathea, the supposed keeper of the Grail, who converted Britain and founded the monastery at Glastonbury.[38] Benson has pointed out the popularity of the Grail story in fifteenth-century England along with the "growing cult of Joseph of Arimathea," the

legendary figure who was to be appropriated and transformed into virtually an English saint.[39] And R. S. Loomis has demonstrated the English Church's sense of its own prerogatives based on its belief that Josephes, the son of Joseph, was presumed to have been the first Christian bishop.[40] At the same time, the Grail's indebtedness to Eucharistic devotion and the customs and images associated with the Eucharist – which, we might note, are found throughout the "Tale of the Sankgreal"[41] – not only speaks to the popularity of the Real Presence in devotional practice, it also appeals directly to a need for Christian mysteries in a period marked by cultural fatigue, social anxiety, and political instability.[42]

What was it that the Grail, both as an ideal and as a cultural narrative, offered people in the fifteenth century? To begin with, the central question for most of the laity was how to live well in the world and this necessitated trying to balance the imperatives of both individual isolation and social practice. This question is just as significant for Bernardine mysticism which itself must balance the struggle between divine and carnal desires. The unity of self that was derived from an internalized sense of duty to God found expression in the Grail quest through the priority of the individual soul. This would resonate for a medieval public concerned with, and critical of, institutions which were increasingly unreliable as stable platforms for subjectivity. As Benson points out, the Grail knights appear to confirm the belief that a devotional practice which espoused modeling oneself after Christ would provide the practitioner with relief from the divisive anxiety of the temporal world.[43] But, as Benson also notes, works that allegorize knightly endeavors in spiritual quests begin to grow, throughout the later Middle Ages, increasingly less interested in stressing the rejection of the world: "The contemplative life," he observes, "seems less an alternative to worldly adventure . . . than a suitable conclusion to a chivalric career."[44] The solitude that defined the mystic's search for God, and which extended

into popular devotional practice, stressed what Pauphilet describes as the particularly Cistercian ideal of the contemplative life as a chivalric service dedicated to God.[45] The goal is a life of service, which is the defining characteristic of both pious belief and the chivalric code. But it is a service dedicated to the care and nurture of the inner self, the soul. Thus, the import of Cistercian mysticism for later medieval devotional practice is the conviction that by making one's self *like* God through promotion of the inner contemplative life, that sense of wholeness the individual hoped to find within himself or herself can provide a space to resist the alienating influences of a fragmented society.

But this turning inward is exactly the opposite of what Malory had hoped to achieve with the *Morte Darthur*. Indeed, all along his goal had been to restore a social and communal memory; now he is face to face with a text, "one of the truest and . . . holiest," arguing that what he wants is not just impossible, it is inauthentic.

The broader discursive context that fundamentally informs the source material on which Malory relies in order to contextualize a narrative that seems to be dismantling his own goals for chivalric unity has a long tradition of debating the concept of wholeness through an opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, when Bernard accused philosophers like Abelard of "attempting to bring the merit of Christian faith to naught because he supposes that by human reason he can comprehend all that is God,"[46] his demand for a distance from divine mysteries that cannot be comprehended, at least through reason, is part of a larger movement to attack or restrict a *kind of* rampant subjectivity, to borrow a phrase from Karen Armstrong, that was seen as a threat to the affective life.[47] While Armstrong's "unbridled subjectivity" isn't precise, I take it to refer to what Bernard saw as most dangerous about Abelard's methodology: faith as "private judgment."[48] To be clear, when Bernard refers to "private judgment" he is not directly

invoking an antinomy between the individual and the communal; rather, he is postulating a division opposing the singular to the universal. As paradoxical as it may sound, the singular (subjectivity) is found in the public sphere – the universal (objectivity) is approached through private experience. The public or social arena is the temporal realm of contingency, circumstance, and "opinion." The universal is the space of absolute truth, of divine revelation. Therefore the only way to experience the divine universal was to let it speak to the subject who was able to tune out the importunities of the world. Bernard and his followers feared that verities determined through what appeared to be contingent circumstances opened the possibility of uncertainty regarding matters that faith held to be certain.[49] Abelard had put forth as the central tenet of his dialectical methodology that where matters of theological dispute emerged from contradictory statements or views of church fathers and scripture itself, not only were we obliged to investigate the inconsistency, but the only way to resolve it successfully was by means of comparative methodologies that took into account differences in language and historical circumstances.[50] This way, so Abelard reasoned, we should be able to determine what the "best" reading is.[51] Bernard and his advocates, on the other hand, saw in Abelard's analysis of the uncertainty in scriptural claims the primacy of the individual intellect over divine revelation. For Bernard, the idea that divine mysteries could be made sensible by human reason was to submit them to "opinion,"[52] which is to say they would be defined by subjectivity.

In arguing that certainty is only possible through the granting and acceptance of divine mysteries, Bernard advocates a break between the human and the divine that is not possible to cross through the intellect, while Abelard's dialectical method seemed to hold out the promise of precisely that.[53] Bernard accuses Abelard of *devaluing* the mysteries of faith by subjecting them to dialectical critique. He positions Abelard as a violator whose "lack of decent modesty in the

face of divine mysteries" is an affront to the sanctity and assurance that faith in divine superiority can provide.[54] This is, of course, not quite accurate and is representative more of the way the contest between Bernard and Abelard was represented, principally by Bernard himself.[55] A crucial aspect of Bernard's attack is that it sees Abelard's methods as dangerous to faith. Nevertheless, the opposition that Bernard initiates with Abelard was to prove a defining contest between scholasticism, humanism, and speculative mysticism for centuries to come. While we might be inclined to question whether a doctrine of mystical devotion conceived in the twelfth century is even relevant in the fifteenth century, it continued to impact theological and, more importantly, devotional thought well into the fifteenth century. I am not, by any means, suggesting that Malory was familiar with thinkers such as Bernard of Clairvaux or Peter Abelard. Rather, the doctrines and treatises proposed by such philosophical luminaries are reflective of larger social trends and their thoughts are definitive of the intellectual life organizing world views of the western Christian cultures of which they were members. Certainly, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a boom in mysticism as more and more people, both lay and clerical, reacted with hostility to the perceived barrenness of theological dispute. [56] The popularity of texts like the *Cloud of Unknowing* or Walter Hilton's books of spiritual guidance reflect extant communal as well as private concerns with devotional practice, under the auspices of speculative mysticism, which shaped fifteenth-century lay culture. Even lay movements in spirituality were inevitably formed within a climate of thought derived from a philosophical dispute over the limitations of knowledge. Furthermore, abundant evidence suggests that devotional mysticism and the cult of the Grail were widespread in fifteenth-century England.[57]

At its heart the conflict between rationalism and affective intuition, or divine revelation, is a struggle over knowledge as, on the one hand, penetration of (and thereby dominance over)

divine mystery through the will; and on the other an acceptance or comprehension of the impossibility of accessing that mystery through one's will. This modality informs the experience of mysticism in which the Grail story is contextualized; more importantly, the contest over forms of understanding that either ignores or recognizes absolute otherness sets the stage for a passage from a misguided collective experience to a responsible individual expereience. The quest abounds with examples that typify the struggle of coming to terms with the individual's capacity to submit one's self to the infinite.

For example, the theme of the Miracles section, which follows the Departure, starts with the chastising of Bagdemagus for daring to take the holy shield in the monastery and continues to the end of the section with Gawain's refusal to do penance. Bagdemagus, who is warned by one of the monks watching the shield that "'thys shylde oughte nat to be honged aboute the nek of no knyght but he be the worthyest knyght of the worlde'" (525/17-19), persists in removing the shield. Bagdemagus is soon struck down by an unidentified figure in the guise of a knight who, when asked his name, announces his affiliation with the secrecy of the divine by saying only that his name cannot be known: "'Take thou none hede of my name . . . for hit ys nat for the to know, nother none erthely man'" (525/42-3). Furthermore, when asked by Bagdemagus's squire why no one can take the shield, the anonymous figure declares that "'Now syn thou hast conjoured me . . . thys shelde behovith unto no man but unto sir Galahad'" (526/3-4). The expression "conjoured me" is an odd choice as it would suggest that the apparition is responding to a demand on the part of the squire to fix or stabilize itself as an object for inspection. The figure acts as though he is under compulsion to reveal himself (more openly perhaps), to submit himself to the squire's gaze. He then, however, immediately undercuts the demand to reveal and asserts his intangibleness. Far from being an explanation, the apparition's statement is more of a

command; that the shield belongs solely to Galahad only furthers the enigma as it tells us nothing about the shield, why Galahad is the only one who can wield it, or why others who try are struck down. The nameless knight is absence made manifest, a signifier pointing the way toward that which cannot be spoken but whose authority cannot be questioned. The knight's namelessness combined with his simple injunction serves to highlight the unbridgeable distance between the Round Table knights and the divine other which eludes all efforts to be made known and refuses to be put into words. All that is expressed is the power and command, through which faith finds acceptance in taking at face value the essential secrecy of the infinite.[58]

Nowhere is this space between the human and the divine more evident than in Gawain's adventure during the Miracles. Arriving at the monastery where Galahad has removed the red-cross shield, Gawain is annoyed to hear that he has missed Galahad. Gawain wishes that he could catch up with Galahad for if "'I may mete with hym I woll nat departe from hym lyghtly, for all the mervaylous adventures sir Galahad enchevith'" (534/13-14). Whereupon one of the helpful monks points out that Galahad would have nothing to do with Gawain, seeing as how Gawain is an unrepentant sinner. The point, however, is not that Gawain is in any simple sense "evil," but rather that he is too much of this world, the sensuous, material world of identifiable things ruled by "opinion" – a point supported by the fact that Gawain only wants to find Galahad because the latter is having "mervaylous adventures" while Gawain has found none. Gawain is, naturally enough, disturbed by the monk's assertion and when, on leaving the monastery, he encounters a hermit, Gawain tells the hermit what has happened to him thus far, mentioning how the monk "'called me wycked knyght'" (533/5). The exchange that then follows between Gawain and the hermit offers a crucial insight into the importance of responding to the divine other. Telling Gawain that rather than a life of "'knyghtly dedys and vertuous lyvyng'" (535/7)

he has "'lyved myschevously many wyntirs'" (535/7-8) the hermit expounds on the meaning of Gawain's sins and their impact on his quest. The hermit then tells Gawain that he must do penance; Gawain, however, refuses, saying "'I may do no penaunce, for we knyghtes adventures many tymes suffir grete woo an payne'" (535/27-8). Gawain is not being unreasonable, insofar as his understanding goes; but his flaw exists in failing to realize that this is not a question of reason. There is no negotiation here; there is no cutting a deal with the invisible. The injunction is laid down and the individual is called upon, in the willingness to do penance, to respect the priority of the other. This is a testament to Bernard's first and most important dictum, itself drawn verbatim from Benedict's Rule, "that the first duty of anyone who would serve God is to renounce his own will."[59] In trying to reason his way out of submission to the absolute,[60] Gawain turns back to the world he understands and is lost in the affairs of men. Indeed, as soon as he rides away from the hermit, Gawain almost immediately chances upon fellow knights of the Round Table: "And by adventure he mette wyth sir Agglovale and sir Gryfflet . . . and so they three rode four dayes withoute fyndynge of any adventure" (535/31-3). In allying himself with members of his social collective he has limited himself to those worldly perspectives defined by the community of men; and in doing so he cuts himself off from "ony adventure."

In comparison to this complaisant self-affirmation, Lancelot's compliant response in the Miracles when he too is told to do penance for his worldliness stands out in relief. Unlike Gawain, Lancelot *respects* the compulsion to efface his own will before the imperative of humility. In his *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae*, Bernard defines the sin of pride as "the desire to see oneself excel"[61] and the adventures of the knights in the Miracles must be understood according to the degree of their comprehension of pride's interference with the desire for wholeness. Bernard attributes pride to two essential divisions: "blindness," which is the

result of ignorance, and "vainglory," which stems from a willful disregard of modesty and a capitulation to opinion.[62] Shortly after Lancelot and Percival are unhorsed by Galahad and each decides to go his separate way, we are told that Lancelot stumbles upon a dilapidated "olde chapel" in the waste land "and there he wende [expected] to have found people" (536/25-26). Try as he might, he cannot find the way in; so "passyng hevy and dismayed" (536/34-35) he takes his rest outside the chapel. Half asleep and half awake – itself a very old motif for spiritual sloth – Lancelot watches as a sick knight approaches the chapel and is healed by the miraculous appearance of the Grail. Lancelot finds he is unable to move or respond; the now-healed knight then appropriates Lancelot's armor and weapons, divesting him of those tools by which he can exert his mastery over the world. Not only are a knight's accoutrements the devices of class standing,[63] they are as well the instruments of his interaction with the world. They are his image and his shell, his projection of an identity and the sign of his dominance which others cannot penetrate. On waking Lancelot hears a disembodied voice announce "'Sir Launcelot, more harder than ys the stone, and more bitter than ys the woode, and more naked and barer than ys the lyeff of the fygge-tre! Therefore go thou from hens, and withdraw the from thys holy places!'" (537/39-42) Downcast, Lancelot discovers that his horse and armor and weapons are gone and he is utterly devastated, concluding that he was being punished for his worldliness: "'My synne and my wyckednes hath brought me unto grete dishonoure! For whan I sought worldly adventures for worldely desyres I ever encheved them'" (538/7-8). Lancelot is keenly aware that the trappings of his knighthood and their loss is tied directly to his achievements; he rightly recognizes that as the expression of his will in the world, they are the devices by means of which vanity can supersede the prerogative of divine grace. Most importantly, though, he realizes that there is a distinction between the kinds of adventures to which he has aspired and

that in which he is currently engaged: "'And now I take uppon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges, now I se and undirstonde that myne olde synne hyndryth me and shamyth me'" (538/10-12). Unlike Gawain, who fails to heed the call to reject the sensorial order and instead chooses to reassert the priority of a mode of thought that is dependent on his social experience, Lancelot recognizes that the affairs of the public world which constituted the environment of his successes could only encourage his desire to excel; this would in turn reinforce the separation from the infinite as it leads the distracted mind away from love of God.[64]

Lancelot is coming to terms with the fact that the Grail quest is unlike any other adventure he could undertake. The concept of "adventure" in Middle English is ripe with meaning, including risk, chance, and fate; but in this context Lancelot is using it to mean an enterprise, experience, or circumstance. The impetus of the adventure falls on outward movement and its essential import is activity in the world. But, as Lancelot suggests, the Grail asks something completely different of him. Indeed, he lacks the very words necessary to articulate the inward, contemplative orientation called for by the Grail's non-responsiveness. What is ventured in the Grail quest is the willingness to put oneself at the command of that over which one has no control, defined as the organizing principle of Bernard's doctrine on the medieval mystic's experience: a call for a devotion that passes beyond the limitations imposed by sensibility. As finite creatures we cannot *measure* the demand imposed by the infinite; but we can respond, so the mystic tradition claims, with a love that can "exceed all measure,"[65] which is to escape from that which makes measurement possible. Before anything else, we are creatures called into existence by what is owed to the absolute. Thus, according to the doctrinal heritage bequeathed to the French authors of the *Queste*, it is "the love of God as the first love due from man" that calls us into being.[66] And it is this obligation, this call that Gawain fails to

hear and which Lancelot recognizes, but to which he cannot adequately respond, that Malory inherits and attempts to reinforce.

Remembering the respect owed to the divine other, then, crystallizes Lancelot's failure as the inability to turn his devotion to public life toward the service of God. Walking with a heavy heart away from the ruined chapel, Lancelot comes upon a hermitage. Here he tells the hermit he encounters about his experience at the chapel and confesses his sins: "than he tolde there the good man all hys lyff, and how he had loved a quene unmesurabely an oute of mesure longe" (539/5-6). Much has been made of Lancelot's confession and it would be easy at this point to say that Lancelot targets his love for Guinevere as the source of his sin and the reason for his punishment.[67] However, Lancelot's self analysis during the confession makes evident that the difficulty he finds himself in arises not from any sinfulness in having loved Guinevere but rather in having put worldly affects before the desire for God: "'all my grete dedis of armys that I have done for the moste party was for the quenys sake . . . And never dud I batayle all only for Goddis sake, but for to wynne worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought I thanked never God of hit'"(539/7-11).[68] What is at issue here is the nature of service and submission. In serving the queen, in striving to earn the love of those around him, Lancelot, just like Gawain and so many other knights of the Round Table, has turned from the very first duty – which is to put God, the author and origin of duty, before all else, especially those things that would seek to distract us with the clamor of necessity and contingency whose sole purpose is the shaping of the material world.[69] As the dominant theme of the Miracles this injunction to respect the hidden origin of responsibility plays out in the adventures of the individual knights, but also serves as commentary on the very desire to pursue the quest in the first place.

While Lancelot is struggling to deal with the implications of his inability to respond to the priority of God's claim on him, the hermit reminds Lancelot of a crucial aspect of his desire by which, even as he berates himself, he blinds himself. In clarifying Lancelot's vision for him, the hermit reminds us that Lancelot is unique in the proportion of virtues that God has lent him: "'He hathe yeffyn the fayrenes with semelynes; also He hath yevyn the wytte and discression to know good frome ille. He hath also yevyn prouesse and hardinesse, and gevyn the to worke so largely that thou has had the bettir all thy dayes of thys lyff" (539/31-36). As Bernard is quick to point out, even though we are commanded to love God before all other things, we are also subject to another aspect of this love which in itself is not necessarily "evil" but which can interfere with our ability to hear God's call. He defines this distracting voice as "carnal love," which is "'that love by which man loves himself, for his own sake and before all else.'"[70] While Bernard recognizes that we are compelled to love God, he points out that carnal love is a necessary feature of human existence, since it is a basic requirement for survival: without it we would not live long enough to contemplate the divine, and because of this "primary necessity" its impact is a vital component in all human endeavors.[71] Culture, society, science – these are the products of carnal love.[72] Necessity and invention, as expressions of carnal love, form the temporal sphere which for Bernard marks an integral step towards divine love; indeed, the temporal world is the first step, and this observation explains the hermit's admonition that Lancelot needs to reflect on his attributes and material capabilities.   Thus, according to the hermit, Lancelot's love of his own abilities and what he can achieve in this world through those abilities are predicated on the idea that such virtues should direct his attention toward God. He is not being asked to abandon the world; the world serves as a signifier that both points to and, in the pointing, obscures the presence of the divine.

The difficulty of resolving love of God and love of world is the theological enterprise at the center of the Grail quest, and this operation mirrors the theological enterprise at the heart of those doctrines inherited from Bernard. This forms the backdrop against which the Grail-quest knights move. The challenge in resolving these two apparently opposed forms of love is this: if the goal of the mystic's ecstatic union with God is the freeing of the self from the very network of relations that constitute the self, then are we not caught in a paradoxical impasse? Love of self becomes the means by which we access love of the other, which in turn asks us to turn our backs on the self. These seemingly contradictory demands are reflected in Lancelot's despairing confession and the hermit's recollection for Lancelot of his great fortune in having so much temporal success: "'ye ought to thanke God more than ony knyght lyvynge, for He hath caused you to have more worldly worship than ony knyght that ys now lyvynge'" (538/31-32). On the one hand Lancelot recognizes the right of the divine over his own subjectivity; on the other he is being asked to remember his own carnal successes not as character flaws, but as *surety* for divine approval of his self-identity. Thus, the hermit is not castigating Lancelot for his worldliness, but rather his perceived ingratitude. Following Bernard's assertion that carnal love is the first step in discovering divine love, the hermit suggests that the key to God's grace is recognition of the priority of duty, which itself is founded on love of the self and its accomplishments. As the hermit emphasizes for Lancelot, "'And therefore ye ar the more beholdyn unto God than ony other man to love Hym and drede Hym, for youre strengthe and your manhode woll litill avayle you and God be agaynste you'" (538/39-42). With that, the hermit assigns penance and, in direct contrast to Gawain, Lancelot humbly accepts his hair shirt as a sign of his obedience.

But gratitude or recognition does not resolve the paradox of mutually exclusive categories such as self and other, an opposition that consistently haunts the desire for wholeness

that invests both the Grail quest and Malory's vision for the *Morte Darthur*. If union with the absolute other is only achievable through the effacing of a subjectivity that itself is a necessary condition for respecting the other, how does the mystical embrace get around this aporia? The answer, it would seem, lies in redefining what we mean by the "ecstatic union" with the godhead that is typically associated with the mystical project. To begin with, we must be careful not to confuse the mystic ecstasy with the beatific vision.[73] While they may appear to be similar in the sense that they are both states in which the self is caught up, unable or unwilling to move under its own volition, they are quite different ontologically. Crucial to both mystic rapture and the beatific vision is the sense of submission, that here is nothing one can do of one's own power to make the other appear and reveal its secret face, and that one must accept one's helplessness. For instance, at the very end of the Lancelot section, another mysterious figure in the form of a knight wordlessly attacks Lancelot, slays his horse, and disappears offering no explanation or cause. How does Lancelot respond to this inexplicable event? "And than he toke hys helme and hys shylde, and thanked God of hys adventure" (558/4-5). Lancelot's acceptance and thankfulness in the face of those events that defy our ability to make sense of them define the key virtue of faith. Such gratitude forms a correspondence between the mystic's ecstatic vision and the beatific vision which is only open to the divinely immaterial soul. But unlike the latter, the former is bound by the temporal world in which it takes place and is merely a reflection of beatitude's authenticity.

Lancelot's mystical rapture is a momentary union. It must be momentary because, unlike the beatitude it simulates, it is temporally framed: it takes place in bodies, in time. But it is still conceived as a union, because it is a type of wholeness or unity in which the self is temporarily in harmony with the soul. For Lancelot, this ecstatic union only occurs when he is knocked

unconscious. Held in a state akin to death, Lancelot is the closest to achieving internal unity, since in his ecstasy he has momentarily lost the ability to move himself. The ecstatic vision is motivated by desire. Beatitude is without desire. The one is grounded on the very premise of a need for unity. The other is unity. According to Gilson, Bernard's word for "ecstasy" comes from "excessus," which was intended to signify a movement towards the absolute which is itself unmoving.[74] Furthermore, this motion could not be driven by the will of that which was seeking God. The individual "moves" under a form of momentum in which the will plays no part because the soul is *following its true nature*, not the commands of the will.[75] The assumption in mystical thought that the subject is necessarily torn between the worlds of divine and carnal love leads to the emergence of an entity divided between the self, as an object on which the material world imprints its structures and sensibilities; and the soul, which exists as an irreducible core or kernel within the self and which is divine in nature. The expression "movement," in this context is not inherently a physical passage but rather a spiritual transformation in which the self is welded to the singular objective of the soul which "itself" is being drawn back to its source. And since the self is the seat of the will, to maintain the will would be to maintain distance between the self and the soul. In submitting the carnal to the divine, the will is quashed, and the subject begins a movement towards unity not with the absolute, but within itself. In other words, one does not *will* oneself into unity, one *lets* it happen. This acceptance is at the core of submission necessary to internal unity. But since it is a self driven by desire that enters this state, the unity cannot be permanent, at least within the temporal sphere.

In the literary history of the Grail, and by derivation for Malory's vision of the Grail as well, this theme of internal unity is evoked by the concepts of virginity and chastity. Virginity plays a vital role in both the Old French *Queste* and in Malory's rendering as a tool for narrative

development and as an anchor for the ideologically tenuous ideal of wholeness.[76] Its most important contribution to the Grail theme, virginity's representation of wholeness combines a fragile physical integrity with a spiritual asceticism that symbolizes a specific quality of unity sought in the mystical experience. The list of references to virginity and its role in shaping the adventures of the Grail quest is extensive and emphatic: just before he dies, Galahad is visited by Joseph of Arimathea who tells Galahad that he can see Joseph because they are both virgins (606/38-42) – this in spite of the legend that Joseph's son was the first bishop; Percival (549-50) and Bors (570-71) are repeatedly tempted by devils in the guise of women; Bors must abandon his brother to presumed death in order to save a maiden from losing her virginity (567-68); Percival's sister becomes the center of a bizarre ritual involving the blood of a virgin (590-92). But virginity's presence as a physical condition has an ambiguous status as well which makes it particularly open for spiritual signification. When in the Galahad section Bors, Galahad, and Percival escort Percival's sister through a "waste foreyste" and they spot "a whyght herte which four lyons lad" (589/1-19) the text presents what is at once a vision and a material occurrence that combines the mystic's desire for a truth unburdened of temporal contingency with a purity that seeks to paradoxically transcend the flesh *in* the flesh. Following the hart-and-lion troop, the quartet is led to a chapel where the experience culminates in their all being struck senseless. Awaking, they discover a hermit who not only recognizes them – "'ye bene they unto whom oure Lorde shall shew grete secretis'" (590/1) – but interprets their vision for them as well: "'well ought oure Lorde be signifyed to an harte'" notes the hermit, explaining that the hart's turning white as it grows old is a return to its youth, and is a metaphor for the resurrection (590/1-4). In addition to reminding us that the "secretis" or hidden face of the divine can be accessed, the hermit points out that the significance of the hart's whiteness lies in Christ's taking

on of flesh, but not being trapped by the iron law of materiality and death: "'Ryght so commyth agayne oure Lorde from deth to lyff . . . And for that cause appeared oure Lorde as a whyght harte withoute spot'"(590/4-7). The hermit's claim thus points to the possibility that the promise of wholeness does reside within the phenomenal, material world but only with the overcoming the disjunctive breaks that mark the succession of time – that is, a temporal world without an absolute linear time.

To be clear, the hermit is not positing a simple dialectical opposition between the material and the spiritual, an idea that informs the beatific vision. Here, again, the difficulty resides in devoting oneself to the infinite without in fact crossing over into the infinite; and this seems to be the purpose of virginity in the Grail narrative. Constantly under assault, perpetually pulled in the direction of worldly participation, virginity is maintained only through a disciplined devotion to the spiritual. As a representation of a core value within mystical experience, virginity in both the source and Malory's version, crystallizes in a material aspect the devotional practice necessary for the subject's internal unity. What matters is whether finite individuals can enter the service of an infinite universal, thus securing, if only temporarily, a place for themselves in an operation (i.e. experience) that goes beyond the boundaries of worldly contingencies and imperatives.[77] *The physical state itself becomes the very condition for opposing the material world.* Analogously, while the resurrection points to the temporary suspension of the tyranny of time, virginity becomes in the Grail quest emblematic of this same suspension by holding in a delicate balance the material and the spiritual. We have already seen how Bernard's understanding of the human condition relied on the materiality of the body as a cardinal function of the mystical experience – one cannot escape the temporal so long as one lives. But, as we will come to see with Lancelot's ecstatic vision at Castle Corbenic, the

importance of the mystic experience for the self's internal unity is the *momentary* suppression of the temporal. The mystical experience takes as a founding assumption the idea that the vision is only temporary.[78] The recognition of the mystic's "fleeting glimpse" is reflected in the fragile purity of virginity.[79]

But this purity also sets the subject at odds with the world, differentiating the individual from the social. In Gawain's famous dream of the black and white bulls, for instance, the color white is used to represent the purity (or virginity) of the Grail knights – but it is also a metaphor signifying distance from the material world. Through the irreducible association of virginity with whiteness, virginity thus presents in a physical attribute a spiritual characteristic that is identified with integrity of self; and this integrity is the goal of a devotional practice. The commitment to the absolute other forces the individual to turn inward in order to silence the multitude of demands put forward by the world, both in its material and social conditions. The single-minded faithfulness of the subject who is un-swayed by the contingencies of the world is, for lack of a better word, to be pure or unmediated; and to be "withoute spot" is to be uncontaminated by temporal affiliations. As a parallel to Lancelot's vision at the ruined chapel, Gawain too happens upon "an auncyant chapell which was wasted, that there semed no man nor woman thydir repayred" (558/33-34). Gawain falls asleep and in the ensuing dream "[it] semed he cam into a medow full of herbis and floures, and there he saw a rake of bullis, an hundrith and fyffty, that were proude and black, save three of hem was all whyght, and one had a blacke spotte" (558/41-42, 559/1-2). Inevitably, Gawain meets a priest who offers to interpret his dream for him, and the priest observes that the bulls signify the Round Table knights (561-62). The three white bulls, however, represent Percival, Galahad, and Bors: "'The too whyght betokenythe sir Galahad and sir Percivale, for they be maydyns and clene without spotte, and the

thirde, that had a spotte, signifieth sir Bors de Gaynes, which trespassed but onys in hys virginité" (561/44, 562/1-3). The significance of the dream of the bulls is that purity has the capacity to isolate or cut off the self from a social group; in effect, purity is at once a mark of difference and a submission of carnal love to divine love. The critical differentiation rests not on virginity as a diametrical opposite to fleshly lust; rather what separates the bulls is pride. The hermit observes of the characteristic herding of the black bulls together is that they are "proude" – they do not know "humilité and paciens" (561/30/40). The white bulls, on the other hand, are white because "there ys no pryde smitten in them" (562/6-7). Thus their chastity is seen as a measure of their humility, or rather their willingness to abstain from vainglory. And if we recall Bernard's definition of vainglory as the subject's capitulation to opinion, which is to say submitting the self first and foremost to the prejudices of a social body, then it is clear that pride is constituted *within* the practices of a collective. We can sometimes think of pride as being socially divisive; but in this context we see that pride is in fact corporately constructed – it is a sin simply because it interferes with the responsibility of the individual to devote the self exclusively to God. The purity "without spotte" that we find in both Galahad's vision and in Gawain's dream, signals the interiority in which the search for God calls into being a private, psychological relationship with divine origins.[80]

The implications of the mystic's devotional practice remand us to the opposition of divine and carnal love. For the mystical experience to be an experience its foundational condition is the necessity of an individual ; that is to say, there must be a "self" in place in order to have an experience. The movement that seeks to weld the self to a devotional practice is in fact the isolation and reification of that which constitutes the individual: as Riddy has observed, "the quest for the Holy Grail is a solitary search for God which must be pursued in isolation,"[81]

and this theme of isolation defines every aspect of the Grail quest.[82] But to reiterate, solitude is the path of the self who seeks not just God; it is intended to be a devotion that will make the knights whole in themselves. Radically opposed to self-fragmentation, the unity of purpose driving the individual's solitary search is implied in the critique of social identity. Shortly after counseling Gawain on the meaning of his dream, the hermit tries to make Gawain understand that he needs to give himself up to God in order to save himself (563/31-35). In one of the book's saddest and most profound attacks on what has been, up to this point, Malory's cherished ideal, the text subtly undermines the value of fellowship.[83] Instead of listening to the hermit, Gawain interrupts to hurriedly exclaim "'Sir . . . and I had leyser I wolde speke with you, but my felow sir Ector ys gone and abithe me yonder bynethe the hylle'" (563/36-37). Gawain is not acting out of evil or malicious intent. The point is rather that, blind to anything outside his commitments to his fellows, Gawain cannot embrace an imperative that privileges the individual over the community. Since Gawain cannot separate himself from the perspective of the Round Table's socially constructive ideals he will fail to find the spiritual path to devotion and he will wander lost in the waste – not only will he be denied what he seeks at every turn, he will accidentally kill his cousin Uwayne (560-61) and the good knight Bagdemagus (599). Try as hard as he might, Gawain will never find Galahad because he is unable to put the expectations of the chivalric community behind him.[84]

If we contrast Gawain's desire to find Galahad with that of Bors or Percival we see the way the text uses desire itself to sever social bonds and isolate the Grail knights from the larger Arthurian community. Whereas Gawain pursues Galahad out of the same mistaken intent that motivated his vow to seek the Grail, namely his expectations and understanding of the material world, Bors and Percival on the other hand desire to be with Galahad out of an abiding love and

affection. As Percival points out to his aunt, it is for the devotion he owes to God that he wishes to accompany Galahad: "'And for Goddis love, fayre awnte, can ye teche me where I myght fynde hym? For much I wolde love the felyship of hym'" (542/11-13). Here adoration of God is equated with reverence for Galahad. We are not given any explanation for Percival's desire, nor are we expected to need one – if the soul's "natural" state is to seek out God then Percival is, out of the natural "goodness" of his heart, inherently obeying the priority of the call to follow divine love: "'be my good wyll,'" said Percival, "'I woll never have ado with sir Galahad but by wey of goodnesse'" (542/10-11). This marks an important moment in the narrative because Percival did not begin his search for Galahad under such auspices. Instead, his initial purpose in seeking out Galahad was under the constraints of common chivalric practice – he wanted to gain honor. Upon encountering his aunt, who has herself withdrawn from society to live as a recluse in the wild, Percival announces that he wishes to find Galahad so that they may fight one another: "'I shall never be well at ease tyll that I know of that knyghtes felyship and that I may fyght with hym'" (540/41, 541/1). Thus, at the start of his quest Percival is operating according to the parameters customary to chivalric behavior. In both instances, at the beginning and end of his discussion with his aunt, Percival employs the word "felyship" with starkly different meanings. Combat, being the preeminent activity of the knight, is as much a socially constructive practice as it is destructive. When Percival identifies fellowship with fighting he gives voice to an ideologically cohesive view of a social exercise. But by the end of his talk, Percival has maneuvered fellowship out of the socially binding class occupation of chivalric combat and into a personal, affective, devotional act of individual responsiveness. Rather than seek Galahad compelled by a desire for the communally sanctioned recognition of honor, Percival discovers

through the transition from exteriority to interiority the other half of the irresolvable human equation. He reaffirms the precedence of the love for the divine other.

The opposition between the communal and the private, between love for another and love for the infinitely other, is easily translated into the tension erupting in sexual desire. Both Percival and Bors find themselves in their adventures tempted by offers or demands of sexual gratification. While we can say that these are direct physical appeals to desire, more significantly these temptations are tests of internal resolve. When Bors is riding through the waste lands and he encounters the false priest who leads him to a high tower seemingly inhabited by many knights and fair ladies, Bors is placed in a situation that will highlight the challenge of carnal love for the individual seeking God (570-71). When the lady of the tower tells Bors that she loves him above all other knights and tries to get him to return her love, Bors "was ryght evyll at ease, but in no wyse he wolde breke his chastité, and so he wyste nat hoe to answere her" (570/36-38). Hoping to put her off, Bors tries to explain that his brother is dead and now is not the time for such talk. The lady is unmoved and continues to work over an increasingly resistant Bors. When she realizes that Bors will not be moved from his determination she climbs to the highest parapet with her ladies and all cry down to Bors that if he had any mercy in him at all he would grant her request else they will all throw themselves from the tower and die. Bors's response to this most pathetic appeal should strike us as callous, if not downright brutal: in spite of the fact that he felt pity for the ladies, Bors "was nat uncounceyled in hymselff that levir he had they all had loste their soules than he hys soule" (571/20-21). The point, of course, is that Bors demonstrates the priority of the responsibility to God over the demands that even the most fundamental of virtues, mercy and pity, would seem to exact of us. Given that Bors is not a virgin, it makes no sense to claim that he is protecting his soul by protecting his sexual integrity.

Rather, it is his commitment that is being challenged. Does he, out of care for other human beings, reject the devotion to God which is embodied in his chastity? Or does he, in a vaguely Platonic movement, turn his gaze from the figures of the material world and direct it towards the divine truth of his soul? For the devotion to God expressed in his commitment to remain chaste is the fulfillment of the individual as an immutable responsibility.

Percival too must face and overcome a similar temptation, though his response appears at first glance to be less reasoned than Bors's. But this in itself reminds us that Percival is a step further removed from the world than Bors, whose "spotte" is a vivid reminder of his connection to temporal affairs. Passing through the Waste Forest, Percival encounters a "jantillwoman" who, when pressed, recounts her history in a thinly-veiled allegory of the fall of Lucifer (549). Percival, too naïve to catch her drift, succumbs to the indolence in which the lady dwells: the weather warm, her pavilion rich, and surfeited with meat and drink, Percival begins to desire the "damesell" and proffers her his love (549). She, playing coy, declines and makes him work harder to get her affection, knowing that "he sholde be the more ardente on hir" (549/43). Eventually, she agrees to submit to his desire, under the condition that he swear to be her "'trew servaunte'" (550/2). Percival, having worked himself into a lather, agrees most heartily and they go to bed: "anone she was unclothed and leyde therein. And than sir Percivale layde hym downe by her naked" (550/10-11). What is particularly fascinating about this exchange is that in every way it conforms to the expectations of chivalric and courtly practice. The setting is like so many scenes scattered throughout the very genre of romance itself. The behavior of the two lovers, the "love" of the knight, the coy pretenses of the lady, the demand to be her knight – nothing here is out of the ordinary. And yet the point seems to be that Percival is in the greatest danger he has faced so far; for his will, lulled into complacency, has turned from the original

desire, to love God, and focused all his attention on idolizing the love object. Attacking not merely sexuality but the *social conventions* in which sexuality is coded and expressed, the text implies that the ever-present dangers of the temporal world's carnal love tempt the knights by dividing them from themselves, luring them away from the origins of their responsibility. As Percival is lying naked in bed with the lady "by adventure and grace" he spots his sword (naked as well, Malory notes) and his eye is drawn to the red-cross in the pommel (550/11-13). Seeing the sign of the crucifix he "bethought hym on hys knyghthode and hys promyse made unto the good man tofornehande," and Percival instinctively makes the sign of the cross on his forehead (550/13-15). Suddenly, the pavilion is turned upside down and disappears in a cloud of black smoke (550/16-17). But what is it, precisely, that Percival recalls in thinking on his "knyghthode and hys promyse"?

The text at this point is not at all clear about what Percival is recollecting. Even more telling, this particular line is not found in the source text. There, Percival randomly crosses himself when he sees the sword pommel. Malory's addition, while slight, speaks volumes regarding his interpretation of the event. And while we cannot determine with certainty what the promise is to which he refers, the fact that the promise is united semantically and contextually with "knyghthode" suggests that what matters to Malory here is central to knighthood as self-identity; and that, once again, is responsibility. With sexual desire comes the fragmentation of identity in Percival as he forgets his obligation to serve God. Through dedication and service (chastity) his integrity (virginity) remains intact.[85] But in succumbing to the temptation to turn his loyalty elsewhere, he risks losing the very promise on which his identity rests – the commitment necessary to being an authentic knight. Thus, in thinking on his knighthood his identity is restored as a responsible subject. In turn, Percival feels compelled to chastise himself:

taking his sword in his hand, Percival cries "'Sitthyn my fleyssh woll be my mayster I shall punyssh hit,'" whereupon he thrusts the sword into his thigh (550/28-29). We would be mistaken, however, in claiming that this was merely an attack on the body. The significance of Percival's wound is far more than a rejection of the body; it is, rather paradoxically, an acceptance of his body. By turning his attention to his body Percival is tacitly recognizing the site on which and in which the human struggle takes place; again, as Bernard emphasized, to be human is to be riven by the pull between divine and carnal love. But it is in the body that we experience this divide, and consequently the body becomes the possibility of subjectivity. Thus, in stabbing himself, Percival masters his desire, turning its force inward and "re*member*ing" himself as a coming-to-consciousness in which the self is aware of itself through the singularity of its willingness to suffer for the divine other.[86] The point of Percival's tale is that desire is not repressed; rather, in keeping with Bernard's doctrine, desire is to be controlled, dominated, and directed toward its source.

Bors and Percival serve as lessons on the responsibility of pursuing the Grail vision. Much as the mystic's desire for God derives its singularity from the individual's obligation to turn inwards and discover in his or her own interiority the care and maintenance of the divine other, so too must Bors and Percival discover the absolute commitment, beyond or exceeding all other obligations, in which the self is united within itself by its desire – what Thomas-à-Kempis called the "desire to feel compunction."[87] Bors and Percival, as much as they differ from one another, reflect the commitment necessary to achieve wholeness.[88] In the decision to remain chaste no matter what the cost the knights find that condition of sacrifice necessary to promote a consciousness of grace commensurate with the demands of the Grail vision. To discipline the flesh is to focus the knight on his own individual subjective responsiveness. This is the

significance of their chastity. And chastity thus becomes the mark of that devotion which differentiates those unified subjects who submit carnal love to divine love from those who, bound by their connections with the world, remain trapped in a dissociative state – the ramifications of which lead to death and the repetition of self-fragmentation, as evidenced by Gawain. A "spotte" on one's virginity is not, then, a rupture between the self and an unmediated immersion in the divinely other; it is a break within the individual him- or herself, a flaw in the purity of the subject's determination to give the self over to God.

Bors and Percival represent a radically different experience from that of Galahad, the authentic Grail knight. The distinction between the knights is constituted by differences in the conceptualization of wholeness represented in the mystic vision and the beatific vision. For the mystic, the functional characteristic defining union is that of an integrated subjectivity in which the love of self is submitted as much as possible to the love of God; in doing so, however, the gap dividing the individual from the absolute is not effaced since the responsibility for submission falls on the individual and the individual alone to affirm. Much as the hermit warns Lancelot in the Miracles "'ye shall no more com in that quenys felyship *as much as ye may forbere*'" (539/14-15, italics added), the text recognizes that as finite creatures the knights are limited by the constant and inevitable struggle between carnal and spiritual love, and that the best they can do is *work at* devoting themselves to God. In the beatific vision, on the other hand, theologians posit an actual union with the Godhead, not a merging of the two conditions of love defining human existence. The natural state of the knights throughout the Grail narrative is one of confusion. The knights are seldom able to see things for what they are and are often mistaken in their judgments or interpretations; this is one reason for the consistent use the text makes of the hermits and priests as advisors. More importantly this condition of befuddlement represents

the consternation of being trapped between two orders of desire, the carnal and the divine. This confusion finds itself expressed in the challenges and temptations the knights face and, in some cases, fail. But of all the characters presented in the Grail quest Galahad alone never faces any serious challenge, and is never lost.[89] Both Bors and Percival are tempted; Galahad is not. Bors must overcome an array of inducements designed to draw him away from his commitment to God's causes and the state of his own soul; Percival must learn to remain steadfast in his faith.

Galahad, on the other hand, is never forced to endure temptation and never finds himself in situations where his loyalties or obligations are under threat. The nearest instance of Galahad approaching moral confusion is in the scene where he and Bors and Percival have slaughtered the knights of castle Carteloyse (587-88) and he is concerned that he may have committed a wrong, only to have a priest confirm that he was carrying out God's divine retribution (588-89). Galahad exists on a plane wholly removed from everyone else, even that of his fellow Grail knights. Unlike the other knights of the Round Table, Galahad's "natural" state is typically one of certainty. He is never placed in a situation where he must overcome the division of human desire pulled between the earthly and the divine. Even in his most intimate connections with the other knights, Galahad never loses sight of his distance from the world. His very last message to Lancelot is not a reminder of their love but an admonition to remember that their world is defined by the instability of the human condition: turning to Bors, Galahad commands "'salew me unto my lorde sir Launcelot, my fadir, and as sone as ye se hym bydde hym remember of this worlde unstable'" (607/3-4). His is the clearest expression of the wholeness necessary for union with the godhead. This is also why he is the only knight who can achieve the Grail: his experiences are of a different order.

Again and again the primary themes of the Grail quest work to reinforce the essential difference of Galahad as he is systematically divided from the other knights; he is not like them and does not participate in their community, a point brought home forcefully when Guinevere tries to draw Galahad into polite conversation. Thinking that she would give him an opportunity to reveal his origins, that is to say, demonstrate his connection to the Round Table, she asks Galahad "of whens he was and of what contrey" (523/16-17). Though Galahad is willing to state from whence he arrived, he refuses to acknowledge that his father is Lancelot. When pressed, Malory tells us Galahad "seyde nother yee nother nay" (523/18-19). His reticence seems to trouble the queen, who assumes that Galahad must be embarrassed, either by his parentage or by the demands of social convention. Trying to help, Guinevere notes that Galahad shouldn't feel any shame or discomfort and that he should feel proud of his connection to Lancelot: "'ye darf nat shame, for he ys the gooodlyest knyght, and of the beste men of the worlde commyn'" (523/20-21). Oddly, Malory tells that it is at this moment that Galahad becomes "a lityll ashamed" and his almost surly response to Guinevere can only strike us as impolite: "'Madame, sithyn ye know in sertayne, wherefore do ye aske it me? For he that ys my fadir shall be knowyn opynly and all betymys'" (523/25-27). In spite of his claim for openness Galahad is not at all forthcoming about a matter that under ordinary circumstances would be a subject of polite social interaction. In identifying one's lineage one is positioned as a member of not only a social order but of a community that is founded on bonds of lineage. From a sociological perspective, identifying oneself is a way for other members of the community to position one in a constellation of names. Belonging to a genealogy means that the individual participates in a social memory constructed out of the actions not just of that individual but that individual's ancestors. According to the memory of social groups your identity is bound to a past and your

way of being in the world is a condition of your continuity with the things of that past. Galahad's refusal to engage in a role that Guinevere takes for granted is a refusal to participate in a socializing function of authentic memory: he does not acknowledge, in fact he tacitly refuses, continuity with those customs that validate and sustain not just a community, but an arrangement of temporal connections. To pursue the Grail is to be alone.

Galahad's difference is even manifested in the organization of the Grail knights. It is tempting to see in the coterie of Bors, Percival, and Galahad a mini-community of the Grail; but it becomes rapidly clear that Bors and Percival are not Galahad's peers. To begin with, just as Percival must learn to reject his temporal chivalric understanding of the world, Bors's primary motivation at the start of his quest remains oriented toward social status: "'I am a knyght that fayne wolde be counceyled, that ys entirde into the queste of the Sankgreall. For he shall have much erthly worship that may bring hit to an end'" (564/7-9). Here, "erthly worship" suggests the approval of his peers. Bors has not moved beyond the circle of the fellowship. While Galahad begins the quest already in a state of interiorized subjectivity, Bors must learn to turn inward. The "religious man" with whom he discourses appears to second Bors' assertion, but he reminds Bors that one of the stipulations for achieving the Grail is purity: "'Sertes,' seyde the good man, 'that ys soothe without fayle, for he shall be the beste knyght of the world and fayryst of the felyship. But wyte you well ther shall none attayne hit but by clennes, that ys pure confession'" (564/10-13). The important point here is that the "religious" does not say that Bors will *complete* the quest; in fact, he points out that Galahad, without mentioning his name, will be the one to bring the quest to its conclusion. Instead, the "good man" notes that if Bors wants to attain or *reach* the Grail he must unburden himself of his sins. Two crucial issues for understanding the Grail event come to the fore in the interchange between the hermit and Bors:

first, Bors's adventure begins with a fine distinction put into play – the difference between completing the Grail quest and reaching the Grail. They are not one and the same, and this distinction marks a radical departure from the expectations of a regular quest objective. It draws a line between those who are worthy to see the Grail's mystery and those who are meant to become part of that mystery – which, as we will see, has a distinct bearing on Lancelot's experiences at Castle Corbenic. Second, it denotes confession as one of the means for realizing "clennes" or purity; along with virginity and chastity, confession is here proposed as yet another aspect of wholeness.

The topic of confession is broached repeatedly throughout the early stages of the Grail quest and Malory turns to it more than once as a stop-gap measure for explaining events whose niceties at times eludes his comprehension.[90] Confession is hardly the exclusive provenance of Cistercians or Bernardine mysticism, since it occupies an essential aspect of Catholic devotional practice especially after the Fourth Lateran council of 1215 decreed confession a mandatory once-a-year custom for every Christian. Certainly Malory's heavier reliance on confession, compared to its uses in his source, illustrates the greater space it occupied in the minds of fifteenth-century laity. In any event, Malory retains the emphasis on confession in Bors's speech with the priest much as it appears in the source, only without the extended explanatory discourse with which the "good man" accompanies it. Still, it must be pointed out that confession, like chastity and virginity, represents an important part of the search for wholeness. When, in the French *Queste*, the "good man" explains to Bors that "'when a knight, or any man at all, commits a mortal sin he takes the enemy into himself and cannot stop his dwelling cheek by jowl with him thereafter,'"[91] it is clear that the priest is referring to the divided subject that the mystic longs to overcome in the search for God. Though Malory abbreviates this passage, the point

remains – confession has a role to play in unifying the self. It does so not, as we might assume, by externalizing the internal subjectivity of the self. As the text has made abundantly clear, the external is the space of temptation, strife, and contingency; it is the "worlde unstable" that, as more than one critic has pointed out, "the fifteenth-century gentry, with their private pews, their personal chapels and their cultivation of devotional texts which nurtured the inner life," viewed with deep suspicion.[92]   What is crucial in this environment to the activity of the confession is that it demands introspection which in turn requires self-awareness. It would help to remember that the confession is not necessarily a public performance. Indeed, it is a very private exercise intended to encourage the individual to explore his or her conscience with the understanding that whatever is uncovered is owed only to God. The confession, as Augustine so admirably demonstrated, is the discovery of an interior self that is psychological, individual, and subjective; that is, the shaping of a self that, in its inwardness, is opposed to the social and collective.[93]

In demonstrating that there is a subtle distinction between completing the Grail quest and attaining the Grail, Bors's discussion with the priest opens the possibility that there are differing kinds of success – or perhaps we should say, different objectives constituting the Grail quest on which the knights will be judged. In addition, by locating this difference in the context of the confession, the priest ensures that the separation being invoked reinforces the self-critical internalizing of duty which is experienced as subjectivity.   While Galahad represents the movement of the ecstatic soul towards union with God, Bors and Percival have another purpose, and that is the coming-to-consciousness of their own interiority, the transformation from the fragmentation of identity to integration of soul.[94] This will have important implications as well for reading Lancelot's achievements and Gawain's failures in the quest; more to the point, it reinforces a difference between Galahad and everyone else, even the other Grail knights. We are

reminded, then, that Bors is not to be summarily lumped in with Galahad in some coterie of Grail peers. His successes, along with those belonging to Percival, will not be on a level with Galahad's. In spite of the priest's use of the word "felyship," the implication is not that of a band of equals, but rather an order with all the divisions of quality entailed by rank and distinction. This is further highlighted by the objectives and tests pertaining to their individual quests. Bors and Percival are granted the grace necessary to pursue the Grail *in order to be witnesses* to Galahad's achievements. There is a distance between them that cannot be crossed.

Thus, to achieve the Grail means to achieve union with God. Unlike the mystic vision which grants only a glimpse into divine unity, the unassailable integrity of the beatific vision is a radical alterity that has no place in the temporal world. This is most clearly manifest in Galahad's adventure at the city of Sarras. Leaving the Grail castle, Galahad, Bors, and Percival re-board the ship they travelled with Percival's sister. On the ship they find the silver table of the Grail. Upon entering the ship, "Galahad felle on hys kneys and prayde longe tyme to oure Lorde, that at what tyme that he asked, he myght passé oute of this worlde" (604/44, 605/1-2). Now that Galahad has seen the Grail and perceived its significance he also understands that the world holds nothing for him; in order to attain union with God the temporal world must be abandoned. His request is met with not so much a promise as a direction by the disembodied voice of the spirit: "'Sir Galahad, thou shalt have thy requeste, and whan thou askyst the deth of thy body thou shalt have hit, and than shalt thou have the lyff of thy soule'" (605/4-6). This is nothing less than the simple understanding that the transcendental project cannot be completed in this world; and it follows the basic Pauline tenet that the flesh is death and the spirit, life. Blown by unknown winds across the sea they find themselves at the city of Sarras where Galahad repeats Christ-like miracles and he and his companions are thrown into prison. With the death of

the old king, Galahad is chosen to succeed him on the throne in an obvious analogy to the overthrow of the old law by the new. Galahad's first act as king is to "lete make abovyn the table of sylver a cheste of golde and of precious stonys that coverde the holy vessell" (606/14-15) – an act whose significance is found in the establishing of the Church. A year after he becomes king of Sarras, which by now we recognize as analogous to Jerusalem, Galahad is finally ready to achieve the Grail. Once again the heavenly voice resounds and commands Galahad: "'Come forthe, the servaunte of Jesu Cryste, and thou shalte se that thou hast much desired to se'" (606/25-26). Reminding us that the quest began with a desire to see the Grail more openly, Galahad's adventure makes clear that this sight comes at a steep price. It is not open to eyes that see the world. "And than he began to tremble ryght harde when the dedly fleysh began to beholde the spirituall thynges" (606/27-28). But we are not told what these "thynges" are; and this is likely because there are simply no analogues by which to compare or comprehend them. Every mode of understanding the world fails us before the truth of the Grail and we are left with only a silence, an "absence,"[95] in which the signifying process itself breaks down. Shortly thereafter, Galahad passes from the world. To gaze upon the Grail in its purity one must be absolutely pure oneself. That is, unalloyed and unmixed, the knight who achieves the Grail must transcend the human condition. To be whole in this context is to be a thing apart.

Mann has argued that the adventures experienced by the knights during the Grail quest oscillate between categories of rupture and attempts at coherence: "they enact an elaborate interplay of distance and closeness, fragmentation and integration, separation and union."[96] It would be impossible to cite every example since the text is constantly bringing knights together only to have them separate. But one case should stand out as emblematic, and that is Lancelot's reunion with Galahad, particularly because the presumed bond between father and son would

seem to indicate a connection between Lancelot and Galahad that is reinforced in their new role as companions.

Before going to the Castle of Corbenic, Lancelot meets his son Galahad on a ship. We are told that "no tunge can telle what joy was betwyxte them" (594/37) and that they had many random adventures. After they had "dwelled . . . within that shippe half a yere" (595/5), one day a strange figure in the guise of a knight approaches them and tells Galahad that it is time for him to leave. Father and son accept this command without question, and in the midst of their tearful parting the anonymous figure announces a final and lasting separation: "'Every of you thynke for to do well, for nevermore shall one se another off you before the dredefull day of doome'" (595/27/28). While it might be tempting to see such moments as reinforcements of bonds – familial, social, or just plain human – that unite the characters in the text, they are in fact preludes to fragmentation.[97] Lancelot's final encounter with Galahad takes place for one purpose: so that they may say goodbye. All reunions that exist outside Arthur's court are doomed. They are encounters that highlight the state of dissolution which characterizes the Grail world; always searching, forever losing, the knights are never allowed to remain together, at least not until the survivors return to Camelot.

This interplay is in many respects reenacting the mystical theology put forward by Bernard as the vacillation between love of God and love of self. As we have seen, pulled in two directions the knights exist in a disjointed state. The condition for their mode of being is, following Mann's formula, a movement towards integration – but an integration which is always in movement because it is consistently denied them.[98] Indeed, it is understood that this motion "can never be complete in this life" – it is a seemingly perpetual attempt at a transformation. Furthermore, this movement is defined by the lack of a clear vision; one never knows precisely

what one searches for. With no *sensible* understanding, the goal must therefore remain in flux.[99] Since it is movement itself, the experience then cannot be the stillness of the beatific vision; it is rather a resemblance or intimation thereof. And ultimately this character of resembling is what matters most about the distinction between mystical ecstasy and beatitude. It "makes the soul," in Gilson's words, "*like* God."[100] While homologous in appearance, similitude carries with it a fundamental heterogeneity that differentiates one from another. Thus it can be said that mystical ecstasy is not so much a destruction of the self, but rather the perfecting of an interiority that is possessed of the image of God. The self's wholeness is then not a union with the other but a devotion to the other.

What is enacted, then, in Percival's and Bors's internal movement towards a singular devotion is the broad social interest in mysticism and Eucharistic piety that we find in lay and ecclesiastic groups, which takes as its point of departure a debate over the value of participatory belonging.[101] At its heart, this debate concerns solitude and community, difference and unity. What is at stake for the religious life, not just intellectual life, of the fifteenth century is the belief in the urgency of social restoration.[102] Mysticism *seemed* to offer an age riddled with anxiety over political and cultural insecurity the promise of stability founded in a communion with God. We see this again and again in the writings of speculative mystics throughout the Middle Ages. But that promise is illusory since it is dependent on fashioning a site of resistance to the "worlde unstable." The self's wholeness can only be achieved by isolating and unifying individual subjectivity through transcendence of the world that is ordered out of the rational use of our senses and accessing our own interiorities. The rational world is also the world of commerce, of contingency, and of social action. But to be successful in the Grail quest is to leave all this behind. Percival, as we have seen, only manages to overcome his trials not through his reason

but by remembering himself; which is to say that his identity becomes one with a reflexive intuitiveness.[103] Just as he is about to succumb to the temptations of the disguised demon, Percival recalls himself to himself through a process of interiorization that is reflected in his *instinctive* reaction. The text of the Grail quest works tirelessly to emphasize the dangers of interpreting the world based on our exterior perceptions and our senses.[104]

But to "leave everything behind" is to abandon every position of speech, every place of sensible experience, every affiliation by which we are incorporated into epistemological frameworks for understanding. This movement, according to the mystic doctrine underwriting the Grail narrative, is to "transcend one's intellect" and it appears in the distance separating the divine from the sensible as an experience of the duty that cannot be subjected to any form of economy or logic.[105] To experience the divine, to let the infinite talk to us, one must learn to be dumb – this is the obligation imposed by the subject's recognition of the desire for God's love. The more we attempt to approach the infinite by means of dialectical exclusion of opposites, the less we can say about it; the more we try to *see* the absolute, that is render it intelligible, the more veiled it becomes as we push it further from us.[106] Lancelot will illustrate this point when, upon waking from his Grail-induced trance at Castel Corbenic, he opines that he lacks the means for understanding what he experienced during his divine vision: "'I have sene . . . grete mervayles that no tunge may telle, and more than ony herte can thynke'" (597/36-37). To speak in such a way as to be understood is to occupy a shared discursive space – be it class-based, ideologically manifest, or discipline-oriented – that is socially constructed and defined by the possibility of mediation. While Lancelot's difficulty in speaking, his inability to put the infinite into finite words, expresses the impossibility in trying to render the divine sensible, additionally this break down in language is a silence suggesting the inaccessible distance that separates the self from the

other. In order to give oneself over in wholeness to the divine other, one cannot make the other

speak; one cannot submit the other to a discourse. And Lancelot's struggle will be to learn to let

the other speak to him precisely from the position of its otherness.

Lancelot's adventures at the Castle of Corbenic show us how a knight's reliance on the

sensible world will fail him in the demands imposed by the Grail event. In contrast to Galahad's

unassailable purity, Lancelot's "inner fragmentation" will leave him torn between two worlds,

unable to abandon his temporal responsibilities, and at the same time fully aware of what that

costs him.[107] After Lancelot and Galahad say their goodbyes, Lancelot is driven in the boat with

no sails or oars alone and helpless across a nameless sea, and finds himself deposited one day

upon a strange shore, right at the foot of a castle "whiche was rych and fayre, and there was a

posterne opened toward the see" (595/37-38). Lancelot's journey on the ship without sails or

oars is sometimes seen as a metaphor for the religious life[108] and his ecstatic joy on entering the

ship has been referred to by one critic as "without doubt a mystical experience."[109] There is

certainly some validity to these claims if we recall Bernard's stipulation of the religious mystic's

experience as volition-less movement. Carried by a bark that lacks any means of allowing him to

exert his own prowess or self determination over his course, Lancelot submits to the force of a

will whose motives remain secret and a voyage whose path is unclear. In a haunting scene,

Lancelot comes to rest at the back of Castle Corbenic, illuminated by the light of the moon, and

sees that the gate to the castle is guarded by two lions. The back of the castle suggests something

furtive about his approach,[110] but it also indicates the penitent's humble recognition of the

servant's entrance. Lancelot, however, immediately embraces the appearance of the lions as a

threat and he reacts the way he would in any other physical contest: "Thenne he ran to hys

armys and so armed hym, and so wente to the gate and saw the lyons. Thenne sette he hand to

his suerd and drew hit" (595/43-44). Trusting to his arms Lancelot fails to appreciate that the rules of engagement which long dictated his success in the material world no longer apply in the present circumstances. While Lancelot can see that this is a test, he cannot see that the test demands not that he demonstrate his own superiority, but rather that he can open himself to the superiority of that which lies beyond or "outside" the self.[111] The appropriate gesture is to observe his utter lack of prowess and he is reprimanded for his audacity: "So there cam a dwerf sodenly and smote hym the arme so sore that the suerd fell oute of his hand" (596/1-2).[112] Lancelot then hears a voice accuse him of a *mistaken* faith: "'O, man of evylle feyth and poure byleve! Wherefore trustist thou more on thy harneyse than in thy Maker?'" (596/3-4). Lancelot's reliance on his own ability, his faith in the attributes of self-love, distract him from his first obligation to love God –which is thus not to have faith at all, at least as it is defined as devotion to the other. It is the spectral voice, the bodiless command that brings him back to the core of his duty and reminds him of the choice he must make.

Critics often point to Lancelot's challenges in the Grail castle as evidence of his "backsliding."[113] That is to say, the usual reading of the text sees Lancelot's progression through the Grail story as a gradual purification, in which he makes mistakes, is corrected and then makes new mistakes and is corrected and so on. All the while his progress is hampered by what Lancelot calls his "olde synne," which could be interpreted variously as either his love for Guinevere or his desire for honor and "worshyppe." More specifically, though, sin in this context suggests Bernard's carnal love, or the world of human affairs to which the social self is subject. As a result of his inability to break free from the demands expressed in both the efficacy of action and the call for responsiveness, Lancelot finds himself trapped by legitimate affects of the temporal sphere. The lions signal to Lancelot that he is supposed to do something; but that

something is to place himself at the mercy of the other, since it is impossible for him to know whether God will or will not save him. In any other context Lancelot would have acted appropriately, so he is not "wrong" for obeying the injunction to respond to the trial as best as he can determine. But "context" implies just those contingent spaces that define and make sensible the interactive human world; and the lessons taught at Corbenic all point to the abatement or perhaps limiting of concessions to those social networks that create human agents out of the demand for responsiveness. The subject submits its own sense of agency before the prior command to devote oneself to God – even if that should come at the expense of one's fellow human beings. At first Lancelot moves unhindered through the castle until "at the laste he founde a chambir whereof the doore was shutte" (596/16-17) and he could not enter. Lancelot realizes that the Grail lies beyond this sealed entrance. Kneeling and praying "'that Thou [God] shew me somthynge of that I seke,'" (596/27) Lancelot is granted a vision of what appears to be a Eucharistic service presided over by the Grail while at the same time a disembodied voice again rings out and commands that he not enter the room: "'For and if thou entir thou shalt forthynke hit'" (596/33). During the service, Lancelot becomes aware that the officiating priest is frail and struggling with the burden of the host: he "thought the pryste was so gretly charged of the vygoure that hym semed that he sholde falle to the erth" (597/1-2). Seeing none rush to the old priest's aid, Lancelot is justifiably disturbed; his sense of moral obligation, his respect for the needs of his fellow human beings, the very foundation of chivalry's call to action, all demand that he assist the old man. He can do no less.

And yet, this ethical conviction is paradoxically the problem and the source for Lancelot's lapses or reversions according to the Grail narrative. Approaching the door to the Grail chamber, Lancelot prays "Fayre Fadir, Jesu Cryste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe the

good man whych hath grete need of helpe'" (597-4-5). Lancelot understands that helping those who are in need is the foremost duty of the chivalric calling; unfortunately, this does not mean that he gets to negotiate with the absolute. The injunction has been laid down and submission to that law precedes all contingent situations. Putting forward his *reason* for breaking his duty to obey, Lancelot braves the room and immediately "he felte a breeth that hym thought hit was entromedled with fyre, which smote hym so sore in the vysage" (597/6-7).[114] Struck by this mysterious breath that burns like fire, Lancelot "felle to the erthe and had no power to aryse, as he that was so araged that had loste the power of hys body and hys hyrynge and syght" (597/9-11). The common critical interpretations of Lancelot's disobedience range from recognizing his "presumption" to perceiving it as an example of his "sincere intent and goodwill."[115] The point, of course, is that it is both: Lancelot, out of a sincere belief in his obligation to help, boldly believes that his intentions are enough to circumvent the devotional commitment to the law. The ethical itself, then, becomes a trap when we are faced with the obligation to put the absolute before other commitments; any system of moral imperatives that defines the individual's appropriate responses to members of his or her community is open to the charge of privileging a social exteriority over a unified interiority. Similarly, the thorny issue of whether or not we are to view Lancelot's "failure" to approach the Grail as a rebuke neatly encapsulates the difficulty of trying to understand the Grail world from the perspective of a world driven by social dynamics.[116] There is a gap that cannot be crossed.

Complicating any reading of this passage is whether or not we are expected to see in Lancelot's removal from the Grail chamber a condemnation. It is too facile to simply claim here that Lancelot is barred from access to the Grail as punishment for his past sins, as many critics of both Malory and the original French author do. Indeed, there is a decidedly ambiguous air about

the scene that suggests the duality of Bernard's doctrine on the mystical rapture. In describing the state to which Lancelot is reduced when he attempts to approach the Grail, Malory, following the tradition established by his French sources, supplies "araged" to indicate the state of Lancelot's incapacitation. In Middle English this word means to be enraged or frenzied. The condition is important because it demonstrates that Lancelot is not necessarily unconscious or catatonic, but rather caught up in a rapture – a point emphasized by the text: "Than felte he many hondys whych toke hym up and bare hym oute of the chambir doore and leffte hym there semynge dede to all people" (597/12-13). In commenting on the French text, Gilson notes that Bernard describes the rapture of the mystic experience as a slumber in which "The soul is freed from the use of the bodily senses; this constitutes ecstasy properly so called."[117] And critical consensus regarding the tale has been weighted in favor of seeing Lancelot's trance brought on by the breath of the spirit as the ecstatic dream state of the mystical vision.[118] Certainly Lancelot's experience of being struck unable to speak or move is representative of the way "raptus" is understood to be a transformation in which the soul is caught and held by a power beyond its own.[119] More importantly, though, this dream state only *appears* to be a slumber because the diminution of the external senses reduces the internal senses to an object seized and carried by the absolute other's radical alterity towards truths released from the obscurities of the carnal world.[120] Pauphilet has described how Lancelot's trance, in the French exemplar, while still a sign of his sin, is also a pleasurable experience filled with the inexpressible delights of heavenly visions.[121] Following his source's lead, Malory makes clear in his version that Lancelot's trance is, for all intents and purposes, a state of grace as Lancelot is accorded a measure of contact with the infinite that is not a union with the godhead, but a simulacrum of what the beatific vision holds. Thus when at the end of twenty-four days Lancelot returns to the

sensible world, he looks sorrowfully at those around him and says "'Why have ye awaked me? For I was more at ease than I am now. A, Jesu Cryste, who myght be so blyssed that myght se opynly Thy grete mervayles of secretnesse there where no sinner may be?'"(597/32-34) Having been exposed to the silent recesses of heaven, Lancelot's sorrow at being forced back into the noise of the active life would indicate that far from being a punishment his encounter with the deepest mysteries of faith was a profoundly happy moment.

Lancelot's rapture and his response to it when he awakes, however, reinsert us into that perplexing difficulty we encountered when the Grail first made its appearance. If the Grail event signifies a critique of the Round Table, and given that he is the *sine qua non* of the Round Table knights, why would Lancelot be granted a momentary sensation of grace? Lancelot marvels at his ability to see more openly those secret things that in most circumstances are veiled from human sight. Does this not recall the central problem of the Grail quest for the Round Table Knights? It is hard not to see in Lancelot's exclamation "who myght be so blyssed that myght se opynly Thy grete mervayles of secretnesse there where no sinner may be" a correlation with Gawain's desire to see the Grail "more openly" that began our investigation into the nature of the Grail quest. Where the two events separate, however, is in the nature of desire itself. As I have demonstrated, the wish to see the Grail more openly is potentially an infringement on God's authority as it puts one's own interests before respecting the very alterity of the divine. Lancelot does not disobey the prohibition out of a desire to invade the privacy of the Grail sanctum – he fails to obey out of a confused belief in the priority of his responsibilities. But if it is simply the case that Lancelot is barred because he belongs to an order of sensibility that has no place in the Grail world, how is it the case that he should be included in the visions that are richly evocative of the mystic's desire, a glimpse into the unspeakable glories of the infinite? Very little in the

text offers itself as a guide to understanding Lancelot's encounter with the Grail and his subsequent trance. Even when Lancelot himself wonders whether his twenty-four day ecstasy was "ponyshemente for the four-and-twenty yere that he had bene a synner" (597/41-42) it is still not clear whether we can accept his interpretation – so far during the quest Lancelot has proven himself to be a thoroughly unreliable commentator who often fails to comprehend the spiritual import of his adventures. Two things, however, we can posit with some measure of confidence: first, the best that we can achieve when we are torn between the temporal and the spiritual, between the human and the divine, is a momentary glimpse of those unspeakable mysteries constituting the silent heart of God. Second, it is Lancelot and Lancelot alone who achieves this vision.[122] As the ideal of the chivalric order Lancelot can go only so far. But that is far enough. As Lancelot himself observes to do more, to *want* more, is not only immoderate, it is impossible: "'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 tha I have done to enchyeve that I have done'" (598/13-15).[123] Lancelot's vision is not a reward for his failure to obey – rather it is transformed into a testament to his greatness.

Lancelot's adventures at Corbenic not only reflect the riven quality of the human condition which Bernard posits at the center of his understanding of the mystic experience; they illustrate as well the intractable exclusivity of the Grail world which was brought to the fore by Gawain's desire to see the Grail more openly.   Some critics like Matarasso or Ihle claim that Lancelot is a kind of "Everyman"; in Matarasso's words, Lancelot represents "in so far as all men are sinners and all stand in need of conversion" the universality of the redemption narrative.[124] But to say that Lancelot is Everyman strikes me as an exaggeration; one might just as well say Bors is Everyman in his struggle to remain devoted to God, or Gawain is Everyman

because he demonstrates the universal need for salvation. I would argue that regardless of Lancelot's representation of the human condition, he is not to be read as "everyman"; rather he is the "ideal" man. It is not Lancelot's universality that draws the audience to him. His appeal within the context of a narrative of social fragmentation lies in his uniqueness. To the extent that he represents a common restless human striving for God, Lancelot does reflect the struggle to move from carnal to divine love that Christian tradition argues is the core value of human existence. At Corbenic we follow Lancelot's desperate but confused attempts to consummate his longing for God when he enters the castle and interrupts the Grail procession. But Malory always makes it clear that Lancelot is *better* than everyone else. For Malory, Lancelot *matters* because he can do what no one else can do – or, better yet, he is granted something no other knight is permitted to see. The distinction I am drawing may seem overly subtle, but its importance relies on emphasizing the degree of difference between Lancelot and his fellows, a point that Gawain stresses when he observes Lancelot would be like us *except* for his ability to do more: "he ys as we be but if [i.e. except that] he take the more payne uppon hym" (558/28-29). Within that "but if" lies an aporia: Lancelot tries harder than everyone else and as a result he excels all others; but all the trying in the world, or we might say *of* the world, cannot bridge the gap between the self and the other. Lancelot must learn to accept that difference. Lancelot's so-called failure is a lesson on the impossibility of achieving an integrated subjectivity when the self is fragmented by even the most virtuous of affections. But to condemn that as a failure seems to be missing the point. Lancelot's recognition that he has done as much as anyone *could* do points up the indelible paradox that to be human means to be subject to an impossible responsibility in which the very means for pursuing the ideal announces its own limitations.[125]

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the Grail narrative marks the collapse of Malory's project. The unfortunate effect of the Grail quest on Malory's vision is the invasion and repression of memorial consciousness by historical consciousness and the demands exerted on the individual by that form of understanding. The point of the Grail story is difference, and as such it is the site where a re-evaluation of the past as the past, as something cut off from the present, takes shape. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the world of the Grail is in the past – but it is a past that, through its emphasis on difference, on its quest for isolation and alterity, argues against continuity. It does so in part by attacking the world of our ordinary expectations. The sensory, intelligible world is also the social world in which we navigate relationships, understand bonds, and deal with the competing demands of various communities, i.e. the temporal world. But it is also the realm of "opinion," of honor and of shame, of ideologies and ideals and most importantly ethical considerations, like chivalry itself. Malory believed that this world of social affiliations mattered – that within it could be found the means for a restoration of his troubled community. The Grail story tells us otherwise. The ethical relationships that define our understanding of the world depend on a belief in the universality of social claims over us – a conception of universality that, according to the Grail mystery, cannot mediate the priority of the absolute other's authority. The pursuit of the Grail means abandoning fellowship and abandoning the world.[126] It means that accepting responsibility is to be responsible only to your own soul, not to others. And it means recognizing that any encounter with the past is necessarily conceived out of loss; that the past represented in the Grail experience was, to use Nora's words "a separation experienced as radical difference," not "a filiation to be restored."[127] Malory observes the absolute finality of this past when he notes that with Galahad's ascension the Grail disappears from the world, never to be seen again: Bors and Percival "saw com frome hevyn an

hande, but they sy nat the body, and so hit cam ryght to the vessell and toke hit . . . and so bare

hit up into hevyn And sythen was there never man so hardy to sey that he hade seyne the

Sankgreal" (607/9-12). While the real question driving the medieval mystic's desire for unity

was concerned with how best to live in *this* world, the practical results of the Grail narrative's

shifting the responsibility for remembering onto the individual reflects and grounds a disavowal

of the continuity promised by those communal institutions responsible for preserving and

maintaining social memory. When Lancelot is struck down for rushing to the old man's aid, the

implicit point is that devotion to God is not found in turning toward those obligations connecting

us to our fellow human beings: that is to be lost in carnal, or earthly, love. Instead we are called

to work at resisting our fragmented desires by subordinating the temporal world to an

inconceivable priority. The only unity of the subject then to be found, according to the Grail

story, is formed in a mystical movement toward God, encapsulated in the absolute recognition of

the other as absolutely other.

In this light, Gawain's vow to see the grail more openly, while characteristic of an

impetuousness that is consistently critiqued throughout the *Morte*,[128] signals the failure to *accept*

the Grail's essential difference. When Gawain insists on seeing it more openly, he wants to close

off that difference, fill in its absence. In seconding him, the other knights fall victim to a desire

for which there exists no suitable object on the Grail quest. For they follow Gawain out of the

customary desire to share in the collective experience of romance adventure; that is to say,

proving themselves in the quest to earn glory among their peers transforms the Grail from an

event whose otherness demands their respect into an object completed within a communally-

sanctioned network of understanding. Even Lancelot, who comes closer to attaining the Grail

than anyone other than the chosen three, cannot accept the Grail's fundamental difference from

the temporal world. In response to Arthur's despair at the imminent dispersal of the Round Table, Lancelot attempts to console the king, but he does so by reinforcing those social parameters expressed in the heroic language of the chivalric community: "'A, sir,' sayde sir Launcelot, 'comforte youreself! For hit shall be unto us a grete honoure, and much more than [if] we dyed in other placis, for of dethe we be syker [i.e. certain]'" (522/36-38). And as we have seen, Lancelot mistakenly thinks at Castle Corbenic that he can mediate the absolute's call to recognize it when he posits an ethically just action as having priority. Drawn by carnal love to a world that, through its shaping of the desire for inclusion, seeks to suppress difference, the knights simply cannot help but repeat those movements designed to guarantee the stability of their social order – even in the face of a quest that will consume them in the fires of radical exclusion.

Up until the Grail text, Malory has been free to believe that the ideological positions adopted by his knights, the chivalric quests, the winning of honor, service and brotherhood and fellowship, were the restorative values offered to his society by an intimate association with an Arthurian heritage. But as the very mark of difference itself, the Grail proposed a counter-narrative that, regardless of his attempt to ameliorate the explicit criticism of his idealized knights, only exacerbated for Malory the breakdown of memory's social collaboration. Additionally, in spite of the common critical assumption that for Malory the Grail is the Eucharistic vessel,[129] we must be wary of simply assuming that the implied Eucharistic traces frame a community in which God and men are united in a shared experience of transformation.[130] While we cannot deny that the Grail possesses features of the Eucharist, we cannot so readily accept it as a medium for the human and the divine to comingle if saying such were to commit us to a breach of the absolute division between the private and the public. The

case for the Grail's exclusivity would have been bolstered by the sense of separation evoked in the Eucharist itself.[131] It was a customary practice in the medieval church to reinforce the structure of difference by not allowing the laity to participate in the consecration of the wine during the communion ceremony.[132] Even a fifteenth-century lay audience for the Grail story would have been familiar with the idea that the Grail occupied a space to which they were not invited.

Therefore, even in its Eucharistic references the Grail narrative prepares its audience for a history that is exclusive, that is not shared, and whose purpose is the unfolding of a series of traces pointing to an inaccessible subject. The subject is rendered inaccessible in its historical isolation (its *pastness*) and through its expression as individualization. Rather than functioning as mediation between the same and the other, throughout the *Morte* traces of the event do not communicate so much as they discombobulate, generating a need for meaning as opposed to providing meaning. When these traces are pressed into service as means of interaction with the past they produce a distance or a sense of alienation as the interlocutor, be it with the gaze or with speech, encounters a presence whose singularity resists the familiarization that takes place in conceptualizing the other within the same-ness of received tradition. In what might be the most enigmatic passage in an already nebulous episode of the Arthurian narrative, after Percival's sister leads Galahad to the waiting ship where he finds Bors and Percival – filled with joy at his arrival – the narrative begins to fragment as a series of mini-narratives introduce into the Grail history even more remote events from the past. Our heroes are blown by a mysterious wind once again across the waves, only to find themselves deposited amid two rocks, "passynge grete and mervaylous" (579). Here, the Grail knights discover *another* ship which they must board. At the entrance to the second ship they find a warning stating that the vessel they are

about to board, in a clearly allegorical mode, is Faith (580). But it is also a physical object constructed by the wife of the biblical Solomon for the express purpose of passing the sword of the strange girdle down to Galahad (582).

Finding the sword of the strange girdle, along with two spindles green and white, the knights are then treated to a series of rambling disquisitions by Percival's sister about the various historical figures who have entered the boat or touched the sword; about the origin of the spindles, carved from the tree of life; about Solomon and his wife and the fashioning of the boat; about the making of the sword whose blade belonged to king David and whose hilt was fashioned from the bones of mythological beasts; and how the sword awaits the coming of one who will fashion a new girdle for it from the spindles. There is little in the way of temporal or narrative continuity. The episodes related by Percival's sister function more like short vignettes, elicited not according to the structure of a unified narrative but by individual themes. And running throughout these jumbled narratives is a motif stressed repeatedly that this ship and its contents are intended for one man – as Percival's sister reminds them, "'the drawynge of thys swerde ys warned to all sauff all only to you'" (581/11-12). All are destined for Galahad, and it is Galahad alone who gives the discontinuous matter an orientation. Those who touch the sword, no matter how good or pure of belief, suffer some consequence. But even more perplexing than the seeming randomness of the stories related by Percival's sister is that they have no meaning. Or perhaps I should say their meaning is Galahad. The content of the disjointed "history" provided on the ship of Faith tells us absolutely nothing except one thing – the coming of Galahad. There is no instruction; there is no doctrine; there is no explanation; there are no secrets to uncover; there is no understanding of the mind of God. There is simply Galahad. Thus, the narrative of the past to which Galahad is heir is not a history whose meaning is

accessible to all. Indeed, it is a history outside history, as it operates solely for Galahad's benefit. It is a history whose culmination is the production of an absence as Galahad, ultimately unable to communicate or mediate his experiences in any way, is taken up and vanishes along with the Grail.

Galahad and the Grail quest leave behind a troubling legacy; even though Galahad works wonders in the city of Sarras, even though he manages to heal Pelles, the maimed king of the Grail castle, and even though Galahad achieves the Grail and union with the divine other − in spite of what seems like an impressive array of feats, what has Galahad actually accomplished in the world? Unlike any ordinary romance hero, our "hero" does not return to court; nor does he bring back the object of the quest. If the goal of chivalric adventure is the restoration of the social order with the reinsertion of the knight into the community along with confirmation of the values uniting that specific social group, then it is clear that Galahad not only fails to validate the community, he actively undermines it. The Arthurian community, upon which so much has been staked, cannot absorb the disjunction introduced by the Grail. Knights will slay one another; they will be humiliated at every turn; and they will fail again and again to find Galahad or marvels of any kind, with the result that those left alive will return to a broken court. The most salutary effect of Camelot's presence has been the image it projected of unity and wholeness. After Galahad, that image of integrity is rendered irrecoverable and we are left with the "worlde unstable." Finally, with Galahad's ascension the tale turns to Bors to carry out the now displaced romance function of the return − a function that has been deprived of its restorative value, closing the Grail book with an uncanny and disturbing reminder that the dream is not what it seems.

Volumes have been written about Malory's artistic and literary style.[133] But I want to bring this discussion to a close by drawing our attention to a common thematic device of which Malory makes particular use throughout the *Morte Darthur*. Much like Shakespeare in his comedies, Malory is fond of closing out his tales with a double-sided gesture that, on the one hand ostensibly offers us a joyful resolution to the order of events, and on the other hand leaves us with an uncanny or unsettling suggestion that something terribly important has not been resolved, that something dangerous lingers at the margin of the story that we are not willing to face. Bors's return to Camelot signals not only the end of the Grail quest, but the return for Malory to his most prominent concern, the Arthurian fellowship. But amid the joy and celebration of Bors's homecoming, two critical issues haunt the court's instauration. First, there is the nagging doubt regarding the efficacy of the Grail quest – what has the fellowship gained? All that remains of the event is Bors, himself a trace standing in as witness not only to Galahad's greatness but to the rest of the court's failures. Second, and perhaps more significantly, there is the at once comforting and yet troubling statement made by Lancelot at the very end of the Grail story that at first glance invites us in to the warm embrace of familial bonds restored. After all the horrors of the Grail adventure, the loss of brothers and comrades, assaults on the values of the fellowship, even fellowship itself, here at the end in a touching scene added by Malory himself, Lancelot takes "sir Bors in hys armys" and not only reaffirms his absolute love for his cousin, he welcomes us back as well. Just as Bors finishes relaying Galahad's final admonition for his father, Lancelot holds Bors close and says:

> 'Cousyn, ye ar ryght welcome to me! For all that ever I may do for you and for yours, ye shall fynde my poure body redy ate all tymes whyle the spyryte is in hit, and that I promyse you feythfully, and never to fayle. And wete ye well, gentyl cousyn sir Bors, ye and I shall never departe in sunder whylis oure lyvys may laste.' (608/4-8)

In spite of everything the Grail has taught us regarding the "worlde unstable" – indeed, in the very face of Galahad's last injunction reminding us of that lesson – what do we find Lancelot engaged in if not the reconstitution of the self-same bonds that the knights have been told they must abandon? In one brief motion Malory, through Lancelot, attempts to close the gap opened by the Grail between the divine and the carnal, the spiritual and temporal. Yet, it is impossible to deny that divide; and we will see in book seven that this so-called return is but a "boundary stone" at which we stop to linger and look back with longing for a time when we were happy. With Bors's final words, the last words completing the Grail narrative, we are returned to the world – but a world that will never be the same: "'Sir,' seyde he, 'as ye woll, so woll I'" (608/9).

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[1] Nora's essential argument stipulates that there is a "difference between *real memory* – social and unviolated [sic], exemplified in but retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies – and *history*, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past" ("Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, Spring 1989, University of California Press, 7-24, p 2, italics added).

[2] It is generally recognized that Malory derived his text from a lost manuscript of the French *Queste del Saint Graal*: "Apart from omissions and minor alterations, it is to all intents and purposes a translation of the French *Queste del Saint Graal*, the fourth branch of the thirteenth-century Arthurian Prose Cycle. And yet the actual text which Malory used is not to be found in any one of the extant MSS. of that branch" (Eugène Vinaver, Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. Vol. III, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 1534).

[3] As Larry Benson reminds us, Malory's choice to use romance as a vehicle to promote his Arthurian history was a well-established path for instruction in a moral life: "in [Malory's] age romance dealt not with the remote and dreamlike but with the contemporary and real concerns of the class to which he belonged, presenting at once an exemplification and a *vindication* of the chivalric life to which virtuous men aspired" (*Malory's Morte Darthur*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 201, italics added).

[4] Benson summarizes the general scholarly attitude concerning the French *Queste*'s presumed Cistercian interpretation of the "secular" values of the Arthurian fellowship: "The *Queste del Saint Graal* flatly condemns the Round Table and its values, and the *Mort Artu*, on which Malory drew for the tale of Arthur's death, is a demonstration of the weakness of the chivalric code, an account of the catastrophe to which it, like any earthly value, must inevitably lead" (p. 207).

[5] Given the importance played in the Grail narrative by the word "world" and its shifting semiotic content, I want to qualify its meaning as the temporal sphere of human interaction and analysis. While the word is often used to denote simply the earth, my interest is tied specifically to the world of human sensibilities and affairs.

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[6] See Vinaver in *Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), pp. 72-3. Vinaver reminds us that the "worldly achievements" of the Arthurian knights "are described . . . with the greatest care" in the Prose Cycle in order "not to praise chivalry, but to condemn it; to show how 'he who rises high' in the world of Arthur will sink to the lowest depths in the world of the Grail" (*Malory*, pp. 72-3).

[7] See, for example, Elizabeth Pochoda (*Arthurian Propaganda*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971) who argues that the danger of the Grail quest lies in its exposure of knightly behavior as essentially destructive: "The Grail quest is [for Malory] the turning point of the book; it reveals that the Round Table has impoverished itself as a group ideal by neglecting both the spiritual ties between its members and the spiritual resources of each individual" (p. 115). Pochoda's point is that the communal function of knightly behavior in the rest of the *Morte* is of no use when the "quest tests the spiritual resources of the individual" (p. 116).

[8] The debate over whether the Grail quest is a Cistercian-influenced attack on knighthood or an appropriation of religious imagery confirming the value of chivalry was first put in place by Albert Pauphilet and Jean Frappier. Pauphilet's influential book, *Etudes sur la Queste del saint Graal* (Paris: E. Champion, 1921), argued that the Grail text serves to chasten the secular pursuits of chivalry, while Frappier ("Le Graal et la chevalerie," *Romania* 75 [1954], 165-210) countered that the Grail narrative functions to emphasize the potential of chivalry. See Jill Man's "Malory and the Grail Legend" (*A Companion to Malory*, Arthurian Studies xxxvii, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 206-08) for a succinct articulation of Pauphilet's and Frappier's opposition and the response to it.

[9] This in direct opposition to Sandra Ness Ihle, who claims "there is no longer [in Malory's text] a sharp division between secular chivalry and the quest for the Grail as set forth in the French" (*Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983, p. 146). In fact, it is exactly this "sharp division" that recommended itself to Malory as not only granting a superior authority to his chosen source, but also providing a way to conserve a core value for his fellowship.

[10] See Nora: ". . . it is difference that we are seeking, and in the image of this difference, the ephemeral spectacle of an unrecoverable identity" (pp. 17-18).

[11] See Nora: "With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history" (p. 8).

[12] "The other is the phantasm of historiography, the object that it seeks, honors, and buries" (Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 2).

[13] As Nora emphasizes, in memory that is dominated by historical consciousness, the act of remembering becomes a form of personal restitution in which the individual's "salvation" or restoration (what we have all along been calling "unity") is a self-identity founded on the activity of perpetually putting oneself into a relationship with the past that is shaped by the inaccessibility (or otherness) of that past: "What is being remembered? In a sense, it is memory itself. The psychologization of memory has thus given every individual the sense that his or her salvation ultimately depends on the repayment of an impossible debt" (Nora, p. 16).

[14] Felicity Riddy notes that Malory's decision to use the "symbolic mode" of the *Queste* has important repercussions for the *Morte Darthur's* narrative strategies given that he could have chosen another "vehicle" more agreeable to the predominantly "literal" understanding of the rest of the text: "I say chosen because there were alternatives available: instead of drawing upon the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* Malory might have used the Grail story from either the prose *Tristan* or Hardying's *Chronicle*, both of which he seems to have known and either of which would have allowed him to cast his version of the Grail quest in the literal mode of the rest of the *Morte Darthur*. By turning to the *Queste* Malory has committed himself to a narrative method in which the literal and physical are not what they

seem and require to be reinterpreted in moral and spiritual terms" (*Sir Thomas Malory*, Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1987, p. 114).

[15] See, for instance, Vinaver: "Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreall* is the least original of his works" (Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. Vol. III, p. 1534).

[16] Vinaver famously argued that Malory discredited his source's attack against knighthood when "he reasserted the ideals of earthly chivalry." According to Vinaver's influential claim, "where the French monks attempted a moral tale of sinful knights, [Malory] saw the earthly beauty and the undying charm of Arthur's kingdom. The greater their mundane achievements the greater their religious sin, thought the Cistercian monk while writing his endless stories of Lancelot, Gawain, and Arthur. But Malory only half followed him" (*Malory*, p. 78). Thus, Malory did not share in the Cistercian's view and he "unwittingly" undercut the authority of the source's judgments: "He relentlessly cut out the theological comments of the *Queste*, and said nothing that could arouse a suspicion of the sinful nature of knighthood" (*Malory*, p. 78).

[17] See, for example, Sandra Ness Ihle, who argues that "the meaning of the Grail . . . is the Eucharistic vessel" (p. 110) and that, while Malory may have stuck fairly close to his source, he "consistently narrows and concretizes references to it in order to make what in his source is ineffable into something simple which we can know fully" (p. 32). The point, for Ness Ihle, is that "Malory systematically eliminates narrative that takes attention away from his major interest: how earthly knights, with the Christian vocation that knighthood implies, ought to act to be worthy of seeing the Eucharist unveiled in this world" (p. 113). Unlike Vinaver, who sees in the Grail quest "the substitution of the Arthurian for the Christian scale of values" (Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. Vol. III, p. 1536), Ness Ihle points out that the purpose of the Grail quest in Malory is indeed to demonstrate the appropriate Christian duties required in order to achieve the Eucharist Grail.

[18] "And so throughout the story Malory is primarily concerned with 'erthly worship', not with any higher purpose, and his one desire seems to be to secularize the Grail theme as much as the story will allow" (Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. Vol. III, p. 1535).

[19] See Malory's colophon to the Grail Quest: "The Tale of the Sankgreal, briefly drawn out of the French, which is a tale chronicled for one of the truest and one of the holiest that is in this world" (Sir Thomas Malory, *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., Ed. Eugène Vinaver, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 p. 513).

[20] "History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," p. 9).

[21] This, in direct opposition to Vinaver's seminal claim, "In Malory's eyes the quest of the Holy Grail is only one of their adventures, perhaps the most attractive and the most pious, but hardly a sustaining chord in the whole epic" (*Malory*, p. 70). Vinaver's point is that Malory did not distinguish between earthly and divine chivalries, and the adventures of the Grail quest are "only one" more adventure in a long list of adventures.

[22] In discussing the "passage from memory to history" (p. 15), Nora emphasizes that in historical consciousness our experience of the past is perceived as a duty to remember, but which also stresses the separation of the individual from the social: "An order is given to remember, but the responsibility is mine and it is I who must remember . . . The transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from . . . the social to the individual" (p. 15). To be sure, Nora is referring to what he calls "contemporary memory," but I see this transformation taking place as part of historical consciousness regardless of its modernity.

[23] As Mann reminds us, "In both the French *Queste* and Malory, the Grail is thus a Eucharistic vessel. The mystery that surrounds it is a religious mystery: it renders visible the transformation of bread and wine into body and blood,

a transformation which is normally accessible to Christians only on the plane of belief. But why, one might ask, should such a penetration of the mystery of the Eucharist be the goal and climax of knightly endeavor?" ("Malory and the Grail Legend," pp. 206-07.)

[24] As Merlin points out in the "Torre and Pellinor" segment of book one, "'in the Sege Perelous there shall nevir man sitte but one,'" (62/44 – 63/1) – an allusion to Galahad's coming, a fact of which Malory is expecting his audience to be aware. Furthermore, in the "Balin" section Malory overtly points out to his reader that the book of the Sankgreall has already established Galahad's claim on Balin's sword and its scabbard (58/30-44).

[25] Mann, "Malory and the Grail Legend," p. 210.

[26] According to Pochoda, "The transitory revelation holds out to the Round Table the possibility of a harmonious political fellowship re-established through the spiritual fulfillment of each individual" (117). Her argument all along has been that Malory tracks throughout the *Morte Darthur* the failures of the Arthurian order to provide its members with the appropriate psychological machinery necessary for the individual to function as an individual. In other words, she recognizes that the fundamental purpose of the Round Table is concentrated on the importance of community; but she sees in that emphasis the downfall of the Arthurian world because it cannot sustain its members when they are forced to act on their own. This is a significant point, particularly in the Grail chapter because the knights are, essentially, on their own. Where I disagree with her, however, is that Malory sees in the Round Table a deficiency. It is not the Round Table society's "fault" that its members fail; it is their fault for not living up to expectations of the social order.

[27] *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. Pauline M. Matarasso, New York: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 50. See also Pochoda, who points out that the significance of this passage rests on the court's acceptance of Galahad as its "spiritual leader" who "sets the tone of the quest" (p. 117).

[28] To be sure I am not arguing, à la Etienne Gilson, that the Grail itself *is* grace ("li Saint Graax, ce est la grace del Saint Esprit"). See Matarasso, pp. 180-81. But it is clear that Malory is pointing to the Grail's effect on the Round Table as a temporary experience of grace.

[29] Here I am responding in particular to Mann's observation that the Grail "introduces another barrier to be eradicated, a distance to be closed" (p. 210). Certainly from Gawain's point of view, this is correct. But from Arthur's perspective that desire to close the gap between the Grail and the self is the impetus to break with the community and seek completion in the "other."

[30] See Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, pp. 203-04.

[31] "Gawain, as spokesman for the court, wants to see 'apertement'. He and his fellows have just been served by the Grail, each knight 'de quanqu'il demandoit et pensoit'. But this is not enough; they want to see the spiritual reality behind the material veil" (Pauline Matarasso, *The Redemption of Chivalry: A Study of the Queste del Saint Graal*, Histoire des Idée et Critique Littéraire vol. 80, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1979, p. 183).

[32] "Malory removes the intimation of predestination found in his source, making the Grail experience potentially available to any knight who is 'clene of hys synnes.' This is in keeping with what we have learned so far of Malory's altered conception of the Grail itself; if the Grail is the Eucharistic vessel . . . it follows that knowledge of the Eucharist is possible for every man who lives a good Christian life" (Ihle, p 43).

[33] Jill Man, "Malory and the Grail Legend," p. 211.

[34] As a case in point, Pochoda notes how the Round Table knights insist on "conducting" themselves during the quest as though they were on any other quest: "They depart with their former ideals and sins still intact" (p. 118). Pochoda argues, and I would agree with this, that the Grail quest is a radically different experience from common romance adventures, and those knights who insist on interpreting their experiences based on their ordinary understanding of the duties and activities of knights will be lost. For example, "Gawain persists in conducting himself as though he were on his way to a tournament and continually adopts companions who wonder why they never have any adventures" (118). Interestingly, Vinnaver makes much the same claim when he writes that the Grail quest for Malory becomes "primarily an Arthurian adventure," offering the knights "an opportunity . . . "to achieve still greater glory in this world" (Notes to *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 758). Obviously, while both critics recognize that the story is concerned with knightly activities, they draw diametrically opposed conclusions about the expressed value of those activities.

[35] Felicity Riddy emphasizes the appeal "The Tale of the Sankgreall" would have for its audience: "The book's introspectiveness and its Eucharistic-centred piety are very much fifteenth-century concerns" (p. 113). Riddy supplies a list of well-known aristocratic households that owned collections of pious texts dedicated to the devotional life (p. 113).

[36] For instance, Mann takes advocates of the Cistercian influence to task by stating that claims for "parallels with Cistercian writings and practice . . . are . . . weak and unconvincing" (p. 207). Mann's evidence for the "weak" support of Cistercian influences, however, is if anything more unconvincing since it relies entirely on the supposition that the Grail story is a romance and that monks were disinclined to write romances (see pp. 207-08). Leaving aside the thorny issue that "The Tale of the Sankgreall" is hardly a romance in the strict sense of the term, she does not show how the evidence mustered by such critics as Matarasso or Pauphilet fails to evoke the "parallels" with Cistercian writing which they claim.

[37] For a brief account of Bernard's political influence during the twelfth century, see Armstrong, pp. 203-04. Also, when it comes Bernard's impact on the spiritual life of Christians, in particular the role of mystical experience on affective life, see G. R. Evans *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, pp. 120-23. In addition, we should remember Matarasso's admonition about Bernard's legacy for the Church: "Not for nothing has he been termed the last of the Fathers" (p. 208).

[38] See Riddy: "From the late fourteenth century the cult of Joseph of Arimathea was assiduously propagated by the monks of Glastonbury Abbey who claimed him as their founder" (p. 114).

[39] See Benson, who is referring to the work done by Valerie Lagorio in her essay "The Evolving Legend of Joseph of Glastonbury" (*Speculum*, 46 [1971], pp. 209-31). Benson, following Legorio, notes "the tale of the Grail became more popular in England in the fifteenth-century than it had ever been" (p. 207).

[40] "French clerics, following Robert de Boron, enormously elaborated the account of Joseph and the conversion of Britain, explained the presence of the vessel in the castle of Corbenic, and provided the standard version of the Quest. The conversion legend was gradually adopted by Glastonbury, and at the great Church councils of the fifteenth century the English delegates claimed precedence over the French and Spanish on the basis of Joseph's mission" (Roger Sherman Lewis, "The Origin of the Grail Legends," *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, 274-94, p. 294).

[41] See Ihle's chapter "The Grail in the *Queste* and in Malory" for a thorough analysis of what she views as Malory's reduction of the Grail's more diffuse imagery from the French *Queste* to its simplest Eucharistic associations.

[42] See Johan Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999) for the case that the end of the Middle Ages was marked by a general cultural and social milieu of anxiety and despair. I cover this

at length in chapter one; however, the attitude that the fifteenth century, particularly in England, was defined by political instability and social angst is a common-place amongst historians and literary critics in large part due to the Wars of the Roses.

[43] "Those who succeed in the Grail quest are indeed those who pattern themselves on Christ and turn aside from the ways of this world" (Benson, p. 215).

[44] See Benson, p. 216. Furthermore, Benson points to an extensive body of literature that, by Malory's day, formed a well-developed genre known as the "pilgrimage of life," which commonly made use of allegorical representations of knightly deeds and quests to illustrate the movement of the soul toward God (pp. 215-16). As he makes clear, the appeal of these texts resided less in any presumed disparagement of the world, but rather in their capacity to comfort troubled souls, especially those who were not long for this world (p. 216).

[45] Pauphilet, p. 62.

[46] Armstrong, p. 203.

[47] See Armstrong, p. 204.

[48] See Evans, p. 212.

[49] "First, a man's *aestimatio* is his private judgment; it is what he personally thinks. That, says Bernard, is to reduce the mysteries of the faith to a level where each person may think as he pleases about them, and describe them as he will; and it is also to imply that the mysteries of the faith remain uncertain, that opinions about them may change when, on the contrary, they rest upon a solid and unshakeable foundation of truth" (Evans, p. 212).

[50] It might be noted in passing that Abelard's concerns were quite orthodox, given that he inherited them from an Augustinian patristic tradition. See Evans, p. 93.

[51] See Frederick C. Copleston, S.J., (*A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972, pp. 81-4) for a brief account of Abelard's methods, in particular his contention that universals were not "real," but rather ideas about words. But it was Abelard's *Sic et Non* which compared contradictory scriptural authorities that most infuriated Bernard. See also Evans, pp. 213-114.

[52] "In calling faith an *aestimatio* then, Abelard has not only stripped it of its certainty, but thoroughly confused the spheres of human knowledge of God. He has brought the highest mode of knowledge, faith, down to the level of the lowest, opinion" (Evans, p. 214).

[53] "Only faith provides access by certainty to things beyond intellectual knowledge. If mere understanding tries to look on God it is an intruder" (Evans, p. 213).

[54] Evans, p. 164.

[55] In all fairness, Bernard's accusations against Abelard do not address the desire on the latter's part to ascertain certainty. Abelard is looking for verity as surely as Bernard. The issue is really about respect; for Bernard, Abelard's refusal to accept a divine mystery (as encoded in scripture, say) is the height of intellectual arrogance because it intrudes on the secrecy that makes the divine absolutely other.

[56] As Frederik C. Copleston observes, "What could be more natural . . . than that the religious consciousness should turn in disgust from the arid and inconclusive discussions of Thomists, Scotists, and nominalists to a line of thought which emphasized 'the one thing needful'?" (p. 277).

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[57] See Riddy, as well, who points out that "Malory's perspective as a fifteenth-century layman" was "profoundly affected by" a cultural appraisal of the divide separating the individual from the social, and which was reflected in popular texts of the period as an investigation into the value of the active versus the hermetic life (p. 123-24).

[58] I am here thinking of Jacques Derrida's formulation in the *Specters of Marx* of what he calls the "visor effect." In essence, Derrida wants to understand the distinction between absolute alterity (which in our text is occupied by the name of God) and the supposedly mediated form of the apparition, which we can think of as similar to the signifier which only exists in its gesturing towards something else. It is alterity given an intelligible form ((*Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 6-7). What is important to take away from this distinction, and what Derrida is trying to get at, is the force of law. In brief, he considers the authority that makes faith possible to be based on the untouchable sanctity of the very concept of the absolute, that which cannot be interrogated, only accepted. That is, "since we do not see the one who orders 'swear,' we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice . . . [it] can only be taken at [its] word. As essentially blind submission to . . . the secret of [its] origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction" (p.7).

[59] Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, London: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1940, p. 29. "This is of the first importance for anyone who would understand St. Bernard" (p. 29).

[60] In referring to the "absolute," we might want to recall Anselm's influential decree that "God is that beyond which nothing can be thought."

[61] Evans, p. 208.

[62] See Evans, pp. 208-09.

[63] Benson reminds us of Gawain's assertion in the tale of Sir Tristram, "'What is a knyght but whan he is on horseback?'" (p.213).

[64] St. Gregory prefigures Bernard's desire for mystical union: "Fully to possess God we have to be perfectly detached from ourselves" (Gilson, p. 19).

[65] Gilson, p. 36. This is, in Etienne Gilson's words, "a love without reserve, a love that exhausts all man's capacity for loving."

[66] Again, see Gilson, p. 37.

[67] Riddy, for instance, offers a reading of Lancelot's discretionary confession that focuses on Lancelot's "adultery" with the queen and his hesitancy to name her in that accusation as recognition of adultery's socially disruptive difficulties and "gentlemanly" respect for privacy (pp. 119-21). While such hesitancy may be derived from Malory's own orientation in the social world, it strikes me that Lancelot's downplaying of Guinevere is intended to remind the reader that it is Lancelot's devotion to the queen, not his suspected adultery that is being called into question.

[68] To be accurate, Malory is following in the footsteps of his exemplar, since the prioritization of Guinevere over God is made explicit as well by Lancelot in the French source (see Matarasso, *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 89). However, it is another hermit in the French source who specifically announces the sexual nature of Lancelot's interest in Guinevere (p. 141).

[69] In the famous and oft-discussed "May" passage that opens The Knight of the Cart, Malory explicitly points out the importance of putting loyalty to God before loyalty to all other things in this world. As he says, "lat every man of worshyp florysh hys herte in thys worlde: firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promysed hys

feythe unto" (649/15-17). However, whereas the May passage suggests a mediated hierarchy of value designed to assist those who wish to "flourish" in this world, the message of the Grail book seems to be that it is precisely "thys worlde" that is the problem with dedicating oneself to God. These conflicting claims on the individual are never resolved by Malory.

[70] Quoted in Gilson, p. 37.

[71] See Gilson, p. 39.

[72] "This primary necessity throws ramifications over the whole field of human life, giving rise to the arts – of clothing for instance, of building, of curing bodily ills, and in short all those major occupations that absorb most of the energies of the human race" (Gilson, p. 39).

[73] See Gilson, pp. 19-20.

[74] Gilson, p. 26: "All things move towards God as towards the motionless Sovereign Good."

[75] "The effect of this 'excessus' is to make him who loves 'fiat totum in toto amato,' in such a way that there now remains nothing for him to will of his own will" (p. 26).

[76] See Mann, p. 214: "Like blood, the body is an image of wholeness, expressed in the form of virginity. Galahad's perfection is manifested above all in the fact that he is 'a clene virgyne above all knyghtes' (600/22; XVII. 5), and it is the magical power of his virginity that works to heal King Mordrains and restore his youth (600/15-26)."

[77] I confess that here I am thinking vaguely along the lines of Alain Badiou's conceptualization of St. Paul's link between the momentary grace of an event and the universality of what he calls "the True": "Everything hinges on knowing whether an ordinary existence, breaking with time's cruel routine, encounters the material chance of serving a truth , thereby becoming, through subjective division and beyond the human animal's survival imperatives, an immortal" (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 66). Though Badiou is not referring specifically to the core experience of mystics, much of what I see as Bernard's doctrine of mystical experience is related to what Badiou observes regarding St. Paul's metaphysical objectives concentrated within the temporal (Badiou would say secular) sphere.

[78] "A brief and fleeting experience," Gilson calls it. "It is merely . . . a momentary effort on the part of the creature to attain to [the beatific vision] without having yet passed through the death of the body" (pp. 19-20).

[79] Also, see Mann, who observes that virginity's "very vulnerability gives it a quasi-magical status" (p. 215). She quotes Bors's justification for saving the maiden who is about to be raped by her cousin: "'if I helpe nat the mayde she ys shamed, and shall lose her virginité which she shall never gete agayne'" (568/16-18). While Mann's claim is not exactly clear, I take this to mean, following Heidegger's conceptualization of death, that virginity is purely unique to the individual; once you lose it, it is gone and there is no resurrecting it. It is an absolute mark of the individual.

[80] Interestingly, Bors's "spotte" will turn out to be much more than a sign of his sexual transgression. It is, in fact, the sign of his one great weakness, that which in the end he cannot abandon and which will tie him to the temporal world. For of the three Grail knights, it is Bors who does not die and ascend to heaven. Indeed, Bors is drawn back to the court through his spot. While the single blemish is indicative of his affair with Elaine it is also representative of his love for Lancelot. Bors seems to be aware that he is not going to join Galahad or Percival in their ascensions and he waits the day when he can go home. As Malory makes clear, after Galahad's death Bors remains with Percival to bear witness to his passing, but Bors "chonged never hys seculer clothing, for that he purposed hym to go

agayne into the realme of Logrus" (607/19-20). With Percival's death, Bors returns to Camelot where he is reunited with his cousin Lancelot. This attachment to the world marks Bors by opening a space in his otherwise pure devotion.

[81] See Riddy (p. 127) for an analysis of the way the quest works to undermine relationships.

[82] This interiority in which the quest for the divine takes place has a very long tradition in Christian thought. Heralded by Saint Augustine, the belief that one finds God by finding oneself plays a vital role in both common orthodox Christian and speculative mystical practice. Indeed, it is a given that one of the crucial aspects of religious thought throughout the middle ages was the tension between an interior affective life and an external intelligible world. This tension which can never be fully resolved, which must remain open, produces a dissociative identity in which a subject is fragmented, as Bernard pointed out, by multiple and competing desires. As a result, under Bernard's doctrinal influence the affective mode takes on a greater responsibility for by-passing the instability of interpreting a contingent world. Unity, in this context, is not just another word for simple faith; it is a singularity whose foundations are laid in the act of turning oneself over to a power that instructs one in the acceptance of helplessness. The will is subjected as much as possible to the will of the infinite. Again, I am thinking of Badiou: "It is not the singularity of the subject that validates what the subject says; it is what he says that founds the singularity of the subject" (p. 53). In other words, one becomes "true" (or authentic) when one gives oneself up to truth.

[83] See Riddy: "The idea of fellowship is criticized here as nowhere else in the *Sankgreal*" (p. 125).

[84] As Pochoda notes, "Gawain is incapable of proceeding alone" (p. 118).

[85] Matarasso has an extended discussion on the relevance of chastity and virginity in the chapter "The Hierarchy of Virtues." Most importantly she notes, "the author did not mean it [virginity] to be seen in purely physical terms" (p. 144). She argues that virginity in the *Queste* symbolizes "the total gift of self to God" (p. 145) and that chastity "is seen to stand for integrity of soul" (p. 159).

[86] I am leaning heavily here on Derrida's commentary, in *The Gift of Death* (trans. David Willis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), on Jan Patočka's description of the dialectic within Christian theology between "orgiastic mysteries" and Platonic, or philosophical, mysteries. The upshot of Patočka's division, according to Derrida, is the introduction of what we have come to think of as the authentic individual subject; this subject is rooted in a disciplined responsiveness that "subordinates" the exteriority of what Patočka calls the orgiastic (that is, a state of consciousness prior to the awareness of responsibility) to the interiority of the soul's "inner dialogue" (pp. 11-13). As Derrida remarks, Patočka derives his conceptualization of the interiority of the soul from the *Phaedo* and the representation of death, noting that this derivation "describes a sort of subjectivizing interiorization, the movement of the soul's gathering of itself, a fleeing of the body towards its interior where it withdraws into itself in order to recall itself to itself, in order to be next to itself, in order to keep itself in this gesture of re*member*ing" (p. 13). What Derrida describes is the integrity of self that the mystic and, by way of Cistercian thought, the Grail knight seek in their struggle to devote themselves to divine love.

[87] Thomas-à-Kempis, the great fifteenth-century German mystic who wrote the influential devotional book *Imitation of Christ*, spoke for the spirit of the age when he said "What do genuses and species mean to us . . . I desire to *feel* compunction rather than to know its definition." While "compunction" belongs to a disturbingly expansive semantic field, Thomas suggests a very real need for a sense of wholeness that doesn't appear to violate the uniqueness of the other – which is to say a relationship based on an intimate and intentionally vague resistance to articulation. More importantly, this sense of unity is derived from a feeling – that is, the love of God. To *love* is to *know*; but specifically it is to *give*.   Such an association found in the affective mode the basis for a self whose

singularity does not become one with God, but rather becomes the ravished object of the divine. To submit is to *be* a subject.

[88] The disparity between the older, wiser, and certainly not virginal Bors with the young, impetuous, naïf Percival highlights the importance of their individual subjectivities.

[89] "Galahad's superiority is not a result of his trying harder, or of his resisting temptations more successfully; on the contrary, it is manifested in the fact that he is simply not tempted, as Percival and Bors are. His preeminence consists in his wholeness, which is his from the beginning, and which the events of the narrative are designed to express" (Mann, p. 210).

[90] I am thinking, for example, of Malory's rewriting of the scene with Melyas de Lyle who is severely injured when, faced with the left- and right-hand paths, he begs Galahad to let him take the left-hand way. Much like Bagdemagus with the white shield, he finds a crown which he attempts to take and he is struck down by yet another strange knight (529-30). Malory follows his source to the letter, until the injured Melyas is taken to a monastery to be healed and an accommodating monk offers to explain why Melyas's choice was disastrous. In the source text, the monk makes it clear that Melyas's choice was driven by ignorance, which left him open to attack by the sin of pride (see *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, trans. Matarasso, p. 70-71). But Malory seems to miss this point completely; in his version, Melyas is left vulnerable to pride because he does not confess before starting out (530/14-18). Not only is this not stated in the source but it is a direct contradiction of the monk's assertion that Melyas was in fact confessed when he was knighted (*The Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 70).

[91] *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 176.

[92] Riddy, p. 130.

[93] Here I am drawing directly on Nora's claims about the differences between history and memory, and in particular what happens to memory when it is subjugated by historical consciousness. With the assumption that any "self" is constituted out of a relationship with the past, what we have in the private experience of the confession is the construction of an epistemology that is, in Nora's words, "voluntary and deliberate, *experienced as a duty*, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective; but never social, collective, or all encompassing" (p. 13, italics added).

[94] See Matarasso, for instance: "That Galahad . . . should be seen to represent that pilgrimage of the soul towards ecstatic union is not in question" (p. 38).

[95] See Riddy, who obseves "Galahad's final vision of the object of mystical contemplation is presented as a gap, or an absence: something not fully comprehensible, and beyond the reach of sight as of language" (p. 137).

[96] Mann, p. 209.

[97] See Riddy, for example, who notes "Such moments of companionship as there are . . . do not last long. Ywain's last words – 'But whan ye com to the courte recommaunde me unto my lorde Arthur . . . '– reach back to another time and another place" (p. 130).

[98] Pointing to Galahad's vision at Corbenic, Riddy makes much the same claim when she argues that the text repeatedly frustrates our attempts to understand what the Grail is by denying us access to what individual's like Galahad see when exposed to the divine reality (p. 137). This "emptiness," according to Riddy, holds forth a "haunting possibility of the Sankgreal – that the Grail may yield no meaning beyond itself, that at the heart of light there is only silence" (p. 138).

[99] Gilson, p. 27: "[The unity of self sought in this life] will be consummated only in the next. In the meantime, this fusion of the soul in love is an analogical participation in beatitude."

[100] Italics added. "The excessus thus makes the soul like God because it remodels the image on its exemplar" (Gilson, p. 27).

[101] Riddy, for one, has demonstrated that Malory is operating under the "perspective" of "a fifteenth-century layman" which included "a revaluation of the *vita active* and thus of the idea of commitment to a life led . . . among one's fellows" (p. 123). But Riddy raises an important and troubling point when she notes that for "English mystics, who were increasingly widely read by fifteenth-century laypeople," there was an implicit sense that one could not cultivate the inner life without the active life as a "necessary precursor" (p. 123). Thus, she surmises, "men and women who were themselves contemplatives and whose religious sensibilities had been nurtured in isolation and withdrawal, nevertheless argued the necessity for, and validity of, a preliminary experience of [a] way of life directed towards one's fellows" (p.123). I raise this issue, because it strikes me that the dilemma regarding isolation or social action that Riddy points to is already an issue for Bernard when he defines the human condition as a tug-of-war between divine and carnal love. What is important, however, is not whether we are supposed to choose a life dedicated to our fellows or a life dedicated to God – that decision has already been made. The concern is, rather, how one finds within a life lived in the world, that is to say lived with one's fellows, a commitment to God. One does so, according to the Grail mysteries, by nurturing the self through recognition of the individual's responsibility.

[102] As Copleston reminds us, regardless of the particular movements incorporating mysticism "there was the belief that the regeneration of society could be attained only through a religious renewal and a deepening of the religious life" (p. 278). It is, in fact, this "deepening of religious life" that is going to interfere with Malory's political aspirations for the *Morte*.

[103] "It is significant that Perceval is not saved by a moral struggle culminating in a deliberate choice, but rather by a semi-instinctive physical reaction prompted by chance – by adventure" (Mann, p. 215).

[104] The long history of this concept would be too difficult to work out here; but it is clear that "Augustine, and Bernard too, believed that we cannot see God clearly now because we are limited by our senses, our minds trapped in our bodies" (Evans, p. 126-27). It is only pure spirit, what Derrida thinks of as absolute alterity that can perceive God clearly.

[105] Derrida observes much the same in his analysis of Patočka: "To subordinate responsibility to the objectivity of knowledge is . . . to discount responsibility" since the onus for responding falls not on the individual's absolute obligation but rather on contingent circumstances whose possibility is defined and validated by knowledge (*The Gift of Death*, p. 24).

[106] By embracing the insensible, faith brings us closer to the infinite but leaves us with no recourse to reason: "The face of God will remain shrouded in 'a mystic and secret silence" (Armstrong, p 274). This is, of course, the heart of mysticism.

[107] See Mann: "If Galahad embodies inner wholeness, Lancelot embodies an inner fragmentation. As Galahad's wholeness is expressed in his virginity, Lancelot's fragmentation resides in [i.e. is represented by] his relationship with Guinevere" (p. 216). It might also be worth noting that what Lancelot discovers about his own fallibility here at Corbenic, that which he is divided over, informs the strange scene in The Healing of Sir Urry when he breaks down and weeps "as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn" (668/35-36).

[108] See Benson's comparison of the *Queste* with Deguilleville's *Pélinerage*, p. 216.

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[109] Refer to Matarasso (p. 135) who argues that the scene wherein Lancelot enters the ship without sails or oars and is infused with "intense spiritual joy" evokes the language of not only several Biblical passages but St. Bernard's *De Gradibus Humilitatis* as well.

[110] See Vinaver, *Malory*, p. 75.

[111] In *The Cistercian Heritage* (Westminster, Md: Newman Press, 1958), Louis Bouyer notes "Faith is just this, to receive from *outside* a view of things which comes from God and not from ourselves" (p. 105, italics added).

[112] This also offers us one of those terribly amusing malapropisms when Malory doesn't quite get his French right. According to Vinaver, Malory misreads "dwarf" (*nain*) for what should have been "hand" (*main*) in the original: "si regarde contremont et voit venir une main toute enflembee . . ." See Vinaver's Notes to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2nd ed. Vol. III, p. 1579. While situations like this are rather hilarious they bespeak a real problem in interpreting Malory and especially in dealing with those textual sites where he makes changes to his source text. And that has to do with just how much credit we can give him for insertions that seem to alter readings of the narrative. It is because of this mistrust that I find it more compelling to believe that Malory wanted to be faithful to his source and primarily introduced distinctive readings because he himself did not understand what is being said in the source.

[113] Lancelot "constantly backslides into earthly error; his past sins prevent him, in spite of sincere intentions, from seeing the spiritual truth behind earthly events" (Ihle, p. 87).

[114] Matarasso, in her translation of the French Grail quest, observes in an end note to this scene "The Old Testament is full of these burning winds" (*The Quest of the Holy Grail*, note 72, p. 301) and she provides several examples.

[115] Edmund Reiss explains that Lancelot's sin is the failure to be sufficiently humble, and as a result he fails a key test of faith: "Lancelot enters the forbidden room, again committing the sin of presumption, again showing a lack of faith" (*Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Sylvia E. Brown, Twayne's English Authors Series, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966, p. 136). Ihle, on the other hand, sees Lancelot's failing as a measure of his inability to understand or distinguish between the earthly and the spiritual: "Lancelot, in a gesture of good will, forgets himself . . . his past sins prevent him, in spite of sincere intentions, from seeing the spiritual truth behind earthly events" (p. 87). It should be noted that Lancelot does not "forget" anything, as he takes the time to point out to God that he knows he is offending against the command to not enter the room.

[116] See Benson, who notes "The impulse to help the weak is admirable in earthly terms . . . But earthly generosity has no place here" (p. 214). I agree that in temporal matters Benson's view is correct. The distinction, however, implicit in "earthly generosity" suggest an opposition between spiritual and material generosity that is unsustainable. The real issue is that Lancelot is pulled by his ethical commitments to those around him – that is by generosity itself – into ignoring the command put forward by the spiritual which he is expected to obey.

[117] Gilson, footnote 149, p. 104-05.

[118] In speaking of the history of criticism occupied with the French Grail quest, Matarasso observes: "With one exception the critics, with Gilson in the van, have seen in Lancelot's twenty-four-day trance an example of 'le sommeil de l'extase.'" Matarasso, in her footnotes, quotes extensively the views of Pauphilet, Gilson, and M. Lot-Borodine comparing the mystical vision to Lancelot's slumber which I will refrain from reproducing here. I will add, however, that Matarasso takes a rather conservative approach to this theory, noting that "Gilson was perhaps led to overemphasize the ecstatic nature of Lancelot's trance by his own identification of the burning wind in the *Queste* with 'le soufflé de l'extase'" (p. 140). While I respect Matarasso's reservations (see her dispute with Gilson, pp. 138-42) it does strike me that the similarities observed by so many critics between Bernard's description of the

ecstatic vision and Lancelot's experience of the Grail are too strong to be coincidental. Furthermore, her claim, following W.E.M.C. Hamilton, that "It has never yet been seen that ecstasy is the reward of disobedience" (p. 139) does not adequately account for Lancelot's joy at the experience and despair at having to awake from it. What, one must ask, is the nature of Lancelot's punishment if indeed he is being punished? The point, it seems to me, is not that he is being punished; rather, the likeliest answer is that Lancelot is simply unable to access the Grail. That is, he lacks the spiritual preparedness that would unify him with the Grail. The Grail remains other.

[119] "That is the exact sense of the word *raptus*. It means . . . that the soul thus ravished has no part of its own to play in the operation" (Gilson, p. 106).

[120] "The slumbering of the external senses is accompanied, in the mystic slumber, by an 'abduction' of the internal sense . . . [which] is carried away by God, who illumines it. This state therefore has all the appearance of a sleep, but is quite the opposite of a torpor" (Gilson, p. 105).

[121] "Lancelot falls into a kind of dream, lifeless and akin to death, which symbolizes and punishes his sin. But this dream of the flesh is as well an ecstasy of the soul, full of celestial visions. So much so, that upon waking Lancelot regrets the end of the delightful punishment. "(Lancelot tombe en une sorte de sommeil inerte et voisin de la mort, qui symbolize et punit son péché. Mais ce sommeil du corps est aussi une extase de l'âme, emplie de visions célestes. Si bien qu'en se réveillant, Lancelot regrette la fin de ce châtiment délicieux [quoted in Matarasso, p. 138, translation mine]).

[122] One might put Bors and Percival forward as indicative of Lancelot's failure. Unlike Lancelot they supposedly achieve the Grail with Galahad. This is a point that I will return to momentarily. But as an admonition I would suggest that Lancelot's experience of the Grail is a radically different experience from that of Bors and Percival – and that is precisely because Lancelot is the best the world has to offer. Bors and Percival are not the best of this world. In fact, as we will see Bors's "success" is predicated not on his being the best, but rather as a measure of his distance from this world.

[123] It should be noted as well that these lines are not in Malory's French original. This would suggest the extent of Malory's own confusion regarding the dilemma posed by the Grail rejecting Lancelot.

[124] "More generally [Lancelot] is the mystical Adam, the old Adam which St. Paul bids us put off, for the *Queste* recounts in the adventures of Lancelot the redemption of Adam in the guise of the conversion of a sinner, and in so far as all men are sinners and all stand in need of conversion he is a type of Everyman. It is true he is Everyman cast in a Cistercian mould, viewed through Cistercian spectacles, trained and disciplined after the manner of a Cistercian novice" (Matarasso, p. 116).

[125] Technically we might argue that Malory is inaccurate in his assessment since Bors and Percival appear to do more. But there is something fundamentally problematic about assuming that Bors and Percival are successful when Lancelot is not. Neither Bors nor Percival are granted any greater visions than Lancelot. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, Bors and Percival are not even looking for the Grail – they are looking for Galahad. Lancelot's success or failure, if such words even apply in this context, should not be measured against Bors or Percival. It should be measured against Gawain.

[126] For example, Riddy notes in referring to Galahad's last meeting with his father that "Galhad's separation from Lancelot emphasizes the other half of the opposition between action and contemplation, as well as the sense in which the quest for the Holy Grail is a solitary search for God which must be pursued in isolation" (p. 127).

[127] Nora, p. 16.

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[128] Refer, for example, to my second chapter, pp. 36-41, where I explore the difficulties introduced by Gawain's impulsiveness.

[129] Again, see Ihle, who argues that Malory "eliminates all elaboration of the Grail's meaning which does not correspond to his intended representation of it as Eucharistic vessel" (p. 43).

[130] Though I can concede Matarasso's point that "whatever interpretation one puts upon the Grail, one cannot deny its Eucharistic role. It may be the symbol of grace [but] it is also the dish of the Last Supper" (p. 49), I'm not sure that I can accept the conclusion that this role leads to the idea that "the Grail is a symbol of the union on earth of God with men and of men one with another, as realized in the eucharist [sic]" (p. 188). This idea that simply because the Grail has Eucharistic association we are to see it as a union not only of God and men, but men with each other, strikes me as over-determined. Everything in the text seems to militate against social union. If there is a union, it seems to be the spiritual union that mystics find in solitary contemplation of the infinite.

[131] See Riddy, who notes that "there is a way . . . in which Malory's eucharistic reading of the *Queste* both arises out of and reinforces the laity's sense of exclusion from the sacrament," deriving, she tells us, from "the infrequency with which people were expected to receive communion, and from the fact that the wine consecrated as God's blood was reserved to the clergy" (p. 135).

[132] Again, see Riddy: The exclusivity of the sacrament was designed in the "very structure of many medieval churches, in which the nave and the chancel were separated by a roodscreen through which the congregation had to peer at the ritual being enacted on the other side" (p. 135).

[133] See, for instance, P.J.C. Field's *Chronicle and Romance: a Study in Malory's Prose Style* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1971) and Mark Lambert's *Malory: Style and Vision in Le Morte Darthur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

CHAPTER 5. SITES OF MEMORY IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE KING

The closing moments of the *Morte Darthur* center on the burial of Guinevere and the subsequent death of Lancelot. The scene in which Lancelot mourns over Guinevere and Arthur at their tomb is not only a poignant expression of Lancelot's suffering for the loss of his lord and lady it is also a painfully critical self-reflection on the nature of his own responsibility in the destruction of the Round Table. After he inters Guinevere next to Arthur, Lancelot is overcome with emotion and falls into a faint at the tomb. He "laye longe stylle" until a "hermyte came and awaked hym" (723/17-18). The hermit, thinking Lancelot is excessively bemoaning the loss of the woman he loved, accuses Lancelot of indulging an unseemly affection, "for ye dysplese God with suche maner of sorowmakyng" (7223/20). Lancelot replies

> 'Truly,' sayd syr Launcelot, 'I trust I do not dysplese God, for He knoweth myn entente: for my sorow was not, nor is it not, for ony rejoysyng of synne, but my sorow may never have ende . . . whan I remembre me how by my defaute and myn orgule and my pryde that they were bothe layed full lowe . . . wyte you wel' sayd syr Launcelot, ' thys remembred, of their kyndenes and myn unkyndenes, sanke so to myn herte that I myght not susteyne myself.' So the Frensshe book maketh mencyon. (723/21-32)

The crucial aspect of this passage is that Lancelot's testament to Arthur and Guinevere is not actually about them. While Lancelot does recognize that Arthur and Guinevere "were pereles that ever was lyvyng of Cristen people" (28-29), what is most significant about his speech is not the extolling of the virtues of the departed; it is not a witnessing of the glory of Arthur and the nobility of Guinevere. We would not be faulted for expecting Lancelot here to offer the traditional eulogy for the dead in which those left behind look back and summarize those qualities of the dearly departed that the living want most to remember. Instead, what Lancelot holds on to at the very end is his own character as a witness. As a survivor he is a remainder and a reminder, and we expect the remainder to make possible for us a shared experience in what has

been lost. Yet the nature of the connection that Lancelot establishes is not a bond in which the absent are made present; he does not give us the true character of what has departed. Rather, Lancelot's testimony depicts a relationship emphasizing the inability of what is left to cross the distance between the living and the dead. In the end Lancelot can speak *of* the dead, but he cannot speak *for* the dead.

If any moment in the *Morte Darthur* could best summarize Malory's own predicament with respect to his failed attempt to revitalize the Arthurian legend it is this. Not only is he forced to accept the fact that he is no closer to his imaginary past than he was when he started the project; he must also recognize the impossibility of even the best knights in the world remaining committed to the integrity of the Round Table. The closing acts of the *Morte* testify to the failures not of the Round Table and its dream of chivalry, but rather the failures of those tasked with maintaining it. The idealized fellowship that defined Malory's conceptualization of the Round Table is an idealized community; and this community existed because men and women believed in it and strove against those forces, both internal and external, that worked to dissolve it. But the final books of the *Morte Darthur* bear witness to the folly of those who fail to remember their obligations to the fellowship. From Lancelot's adultery to Gawain's inconsolable rage to Mordred's betrayal, we watch as the narrative holding together the Round Table community unravels under the pressure of conflicting demands and personal desires. Most importantly, Malory seems to suggest that recognizing the distance between the absent and the present is in the end the only authentic form of connection possible with the past.

By now, critics of Malory know that the statement "the Frensshe book maketh mencyon," is deeply suspicious; indeed, it has become something of a cliché to note that when Malory says "the French book sayeth," often the French book "sayeth" no such thing. But Malory's attempts

at misdirection are particularly important in a reading of the *Morte Darthur* because they emphasize those cruces when the author felt most compelled to alter his source material, and was most concerned about what those changes meant. For a text that has diligently sought to confirm its audience's connections to its mythical past, willful emendations or even added interpretations of those connections are fraught with the knowledge that a fundamental break has taken place.[1] All while Malory was attempting to recreate an imagined past as a hegemonic and socially cohesive ideology, he found himself at cross purposes – the fragmented identities of historical authenticity, those moments when one recognizes real differences between the past and the present, clashed with the communal embrace of memory. And for all its inconsistencies the *Morte Darthur* returns again and again to a coherent theme, the powerful injunction to *remember*; nowhere are we reminded more crucially of this obligation than in books seven and eight. From Malory's opening accusation against Lancelot to the final admonitions in Lancelot's and Guinevere's parting, the last books follow an arc that can best be described as a struggle against loss, tracing the repeated failures of the Arthurian court to live up to the expectations of a society bound by memory.

In this, my final chapter, I want to begin by summarizing where my argument stands in relation to my progress so far in analyzing the *Morte Darthur*'s overall project, the obligation to remember. I started this work by proposing that the *Morte* is a reaction by Malory to the unsettling events of his own tumultuous era – changes in society, re-appraisals of government, alterations to the economic landscape, and of course the fallout from civil war, all contributed to what Johan Huizinga identified as a climate of anxiety affecting most of late-Medieval Europe.[2] It was in this atmosphere of apprehension that Malory's re-reading of the Arthurian legend evolved. Starting with the concept that Malory engaged the stories of the Round Table initially

with the hope of returning his audience to the security of memory and tradition, I suggested that as Malory's rewriting of that imagined past unfolded he was forced to come to terms with the impossibility of such a restoration. Taking my cues from Pierre Nora's theories regarding two modes of consciousness that arise when conceptualizing the past – authentic memory and history[3] – I proposed that Malory's intention to immerse his society in a living continuity with its chivalric traditions was already consumed in the transition toward historical awareness. This transition is defined as a perception of the past as something essentially different, or radically isolated from the present.[4]

The difficulty, however, with this transformation of the past from a unified social presence to a fragmented assortment of individual experiences is that it is not absolute. We are left with an alienating demand to be responsible to the past, and an impossible-to-fill desire for the presence afforded by memory. Such an intolerable opposition produces, according to Nora, *les lieux de mémoire* or "sites of memory." Two key features of these sites of memory need to be defined here since they will dictate in large measure my approach to the final books of the *Morte*. First, *les lieux de mémoire* emerge from the determination to respond to the oppression of memory by history. As Nora points out, "there must be a will to remember";[5] which is to say that sites of memory exist when we encounter the slippage of an uncritical belief in the past and we desire to halt that momentum. Second, since the purpose of *les lieux de mémoire* is to resist the process of forgetting then they can only do so if they are capable of being transformed. That is, sites of memory share with authentic memory the capacity to embrace changes in meaning that reflect changes in the communities to which they belong.[6] The point, here, is that the elements constituting the presence of the *lieux de mémoire* must solidify or maintain a meaningful content and at the same time be open to adjusting that content to reflect the life of a

remembering society. The difference, then, between sites of memory and authentic memory is a subtle one: whereas authentic memory assures the continuity of values and institutions for a community by stretching its functionality across time and generations (what we do now is no different from what we did back then), *lieux de mémoire* are singularities invested with whatever current hopes or dreams that society has either for its future or its past, and they function comparatively (i.e. remember when we used to . . .). Again, the distinction is subtle, but it stresses the lived quality of authentic memory in comparison to what Nora calls the "crystallizing" or nostalgic securing of a society that has already lost – if it ever had at all – the past that it has envisioned for itself. Simply put, sites of memory exist because we recognize that our connections to the past are in fact not on solid footing.

In Nora's exposition of authentic memory the past is believed to be a dynamic aspect of the present: it is communal, capable of change and adaptation, and intimately tied to social identity through a presumed integration of generations. In chapters two and three I sought to demonstrate how memory, as a cohesive social function, produced and sustained the Arthurian ideal that Malory believed was still a vital element of his own late medieval community. Through analysis of virtues such as prudence and social institutions like knighthood and genealogy, I posited that the practices which Malory saw as the essential defining structures of his culture were for him inclusive communal identities that could overcome or resist destabilizing events. However, as chapter four argued, in his attempt to integrate the vast array of memories constituting the legend into a unified chivalric narrative, he was forced to recognize those locations in the story that refused to be controlled by his understanding of the past. In essence, as I noted in chapter four, by the time Malory must deal with the story of the Grail, he comes to realize that the message of the text is dismissive of or even actively dismantling social

practices as an ideal. By the end of the Grail legend, Malory can no longer deny that the past is a restricted or lost space that cannot be communally restorative. The explicitly social content that defined chivalric culture was an impediment in the Grail quest, distracting the individual from his or her singular purpose, which was care for the state of the individual soul. At the end of chapter four we observed that the attempt to return both the knights and the audience to the social space of the court was shadowed by the lingering doubt as to what a return could authentically mean, faced with the question of how anything could simply go back to the way it was. The wholeness promised by the image of returns as a reaffirmation of the chivalric social body was fraught with the failures of the Arthurian society, and the final books of the *Morte* emerge from this fragmentation of communal memory by difference and isolation. In this context, history is a record of what is lost.

Thus Malory's desire for memory is ruled by the demands of history, and the sequence of events we call the *Morte Darthur* unfold as a dynamic response to Malory's shifting expectations about the past. Because the desire for memory arises from the threat of memory's loss, Malory's response to the conflict between memory and history is to situate, or "crystallize" the act of remembering. It would be inaccurate to claim that the *Morte Darthur* is one long extended *lieu de mémoire*; rather, the text is filled with sites of memory. Taken as a whole, the *Morte* is never fully memorial or fully historical – it consists of events caught between these conceptualizations and reflects Malory's attempts to revive inherited narratives within a world to which those narratives struggled to speak, a world that often failed to be consistent with the messages the narratives carried. The task for this final chapter, then, is to examine how the last books navigate the disappearance of memory, locating expectations or desires regarding an imagined past in objects that are fundamentally incapable of grounding those expectations.[7]

Picking up right after the actions of the Grail narrative, the final events of the *Morte* are invested in the question of returns and the desire for wholeness that concludes book six.   Book seven of Eugène Vinaver's edition of the *Morte Darthur*, which Vinaver calls "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," is divided into five units: "The Poisoned Apple," "The Fair Maid of Astolat," "The Great Tournament," "The Knight of the Cart," and "The Healing of Sir Urry."   Critics recognize the book as Malory's most extensive reworking of his inherited Arthurian material, with "The Great Tournament" and "The Healing of Sir Urry" as outright additions manufactured by Malory himself.[8]   Malory's willingness to alter source material warrants special mention because not only does it demonstrate Malory's greater confidence over the matter at his disposal, but more importantly it indicates that he felt strongly enough about the space between the Grail adventures and the actual demise of the Round Table that he was compelled to add material that would bridge a perceived gap between the return to court and the fall of the Arthurian order.[9]   Various attempts by critics to explain just how book seven maneuvers the Arthurian narrative out of the Grail quest and into the Death of Arthur attest to the scholarly recognition of book seven as a transitional text. That is to say, critics often see the book as merely paving the way for book eight, introducing or anticipating the forces that will bring about the ruin of the Round Table.[10] However, while there are numerous instances of book seven foreshadowing the troubles of book eight, it is clear that the events we recognize under the rubric of book seven possess a continuity defined by restoration and wholeness, opening with Arthur's joy at the reclamation of his court and closing with the healing of Sir Urry's damaged body and his inclusion in the Round Table fraternity. If the events of book seven anticipate the tragedies of book eight then they do so not simply to set the stage for the coming storm but rather to put off or delay that end.[11] Its focus is on preserving, not letting go. It is made up of stories

that remind us of the importance of fidelity, duty, honor and love; in short, narratives that resist fragmentation and dissolution even as those destructive forces gather like clouds on a horizon.

Thus, preservation and loss define the closing chapters of the *Morte Darthur*; and it is in light of a past that is vanishing, of a world order that is being undermined, of a society whose institutions were struggling to secure collective values – including the value, indeed, of the collective itself – that we should read the final books of the *Morte*. Arthur himself had noted at the commencement of the Grail quest that the quest would spell the end of the Round Table.[12] Arthur's point, of course, is *not* that the quest signaled the end of chivalry or the Round Table as ideals; rather, he recognized that the quest would lead to the deaths of many of his knights. It marked then the end of an era, and the absence that is evoked by Arthur's tears is the loss of friends he will never see again. This sense of destitution that hangs over the Grail quest adds a note of poignancy to the celebration heralding Lancelot's return. Book seven greets the homecoming of Lancelot and of the surviving knights of the Grail quest with the particular recognition that the cheer experienced by the court is a bittersweet joy tempered with remembrance of those who have been lost: "So aftir the quest of the Sankgreall was fulfylled and all the knyghtes that were leffte on lyve were com home agayne unto the Table Rownde . . . than was there grete joy in the courte, and enespeciall kynge Arthure and quene Gwenyvere made grete joy of the remenaunte that were com home" (611/1-5). The very first notes of the text sound a bell calling us to remember, and overshadowing the pleasure of any return, then, is the awareness that there remains a distance that cannot be effaced. The continuity or wholeness held out as a promise by true memory has already disappeared and the text is left clinging to its relics, the court reverencing its evening lights before the fall of night. If, as I have argued, Malory's project started with the belief that he could restore his society to its (mythical) past,

which is to say restore chivalric culture to its self, then after the Grail event he must explore the results of a memory that has been, in Nora's words, "seized by history."[13] This expression, "seized by history," is particularly important because it is out of the impact of historical awareness on memorial consciousness that the final actions of the *Morte* take shape.

Because the text is ruled by an obligation to remember, understanding how that obligation appears in the narrative clarifies the struggle between memory and history. What is of crucial importance to the conceptualization of the past, be it memorial or historical in nature, is that the relationships defining our contact with time are relationships based on expectations about responsibility. One thing that should be clear in reading the *Morte Darthur* is that modes of interacting with the past are defined by differing responsibilities: the ideological continuity maintaining a community; the obligation to be mindful of the otherness of the past; and the resistance evoked out of the confrontation between continuity and fragmentation. One of the best examples in the *Morte* of the diverging roles emerging from shifting perceptions about time can be found in the conclusion of "The Poisoned Apple" episode. Here we see the contrast between memory's organization of an event and the impact upon that construction by the pressures of history's distance.

Much has been written on the role played by "The Poisoned Apple" in Malory's vision of the Arthurian saga, with criticism falling roughly into two camps: one claiming that the episode lays bare the forces destroying the fellowship, the other stating that it works to recuperate the fellowship after the scathing criticisms leveled against earthly chivalry in the Grail quest. Elizabeth Pochoda observes, for instance, that no tale better represents "the gap between Malory's political ideal and the actual behavior of the Round Table" than "'The Tale of Lancelot and Guenevere.'"[14] Citing the failure of Arthur to command the respect and loyalty of his

knights as evidence of a critique by Malory of the social ideals of Arthurian chivalry, Pochoda argues that the "Poisoned Apple" episode brings to the surface the inherent flaws of the chivalric society.[15] In contrast, as Larry D. Benson argues, there is the view that "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" in addition to returning us to the subject of a worldly chivalry that was abandoned in the Grail quest is also driven by a thematic interest in reaffirming the values and social order expressed in that worldly chivalry.[16]

Both interpretations have merit since, structurally, the text is moving towards the failure and collapse of the order while at the same time lingering over its glories; but what is important about the episode is that it is most invested in re-establishing connections and projecting those connections into the future.[17] I would argue that just as earlier books stressed the strength of the Arthurian community as a worthy ideal, so too does book seven repeatedly ask us to consider and respect a society that functions in accordance with processes of communication, interaction, counsel, and prudence, all of which are evoked in the notion of remembrance. Malory himself seems to emphasize these community-building functions when he points out that "back then" no one, not even a king, was above the law – "for such custom was used in tho days: for favoure, love, nother affinté there sholde be none other but ryghtuous jugemente, as well uppon a kynge as uppon a knyght" (618/7-10) – confirming that a social body is held together not simply through a hierarchy but through the mutual recognition of one another's value. For Malory, to remember someone is to affirm a bond of deep personal commitment. Such commitments are intended to provide a sense of stability that, during times of crisis, anchors the individual within the social. When those bonds break then ruin is inevitable, as we will see when Arthur, having separated from Lancelot in book eight, is forced to confront insurrection at home without the aid of his closest friend. If book seven can be said to prepare us for the collapse of the Arthurian

world in book eight, it does so primarily by interrupting the direct trajectory of the Arthurian narrative in order to dwell on the challenges (as well as the pleasures) facing individual will in a community of memory. And the closing scene of "The Poisoned Apple" episode highlights both the communal function of authentic memory and the obligations placed on the act of remembrance when it is compromised by the fear of forgetting.

The central narrative arc of "The Poisoned Apple" was well known to medieval audiences, first appearing in the French *Mort Artu* and later in the stanzaic English *Le Morte Arthur*, and it focuses on the trial of Guinevere for the murder of a knight at a party she was hosting in Gawain's honor. Following a trial by combat in which Lancelot, defending Guinevere from sir Mador de la Porte's accusation of murder in the poisoning of his cousin sir Patryse, "proves" the innocence of the queen, Malory adds a crucial invention to his inherited story – Nynyve's recitation of the events surrounding the poisoning and her clarification of the motivating agents. In a scene not included in Malory's known sources, the damsel of the lake, who is married to sir Pelleas, miraculously arrives to clarify the responsibility for sir Patryse's death:

> And so hit befelle that the Damesell of the Lake that hyght Nynyve . . . cam to the courte, for ever she ded grete goodness unto kynge Arthure and to all hys knyghtes thorow her sorcery and enchauntementes. And so whan she herde how the quene was greved for the dethe of sir Patryse, than she told hit opynly that she was never gylty, and there she disclosed by whom hit was done, and named hym sir Pynel, and for what cause he ded hit. There hit was opynly knowyn and disclosed, and so the quene was excused. And thys knyght sir Pynell fledde unto hys contrey, and was opynly knowyn that he empoysynde the appyls at that feste to that entente to have destroyed sir Gawayne. (620-21/42-44, 1-8)

Malory's deviation from his sources indicates that he was uncomfortable enough with the original that he was obliged to add what seems like a *dea ex machina* in order to clear up any lingering doubts about Guinevere's guilt. But it would be a mistake to assume that Malory needs

Nynyve's testimony as a way to settle the truth of a matter that had already been proven in the trial by combat.[18] I would argue that Nyneve's account bears not the burden of proof, but rather establishes the means by which the event will be remembered. By ordering the events and arranging them in a coherent structure Nynyve has provided the court with not only a narrative, but the grounds for a shared experience in which all the members of the social unit can publicly enact a "truth." Indeed, Malory uses the word "opynly" three times in that one passage, stressing not the truth of the description but the need for everyone to be part of it – not just known, but known to all. Instead of uncovering a hidden truth, the point of Nyneves's narrative lies in engaging a social body in a collective act of memory. The official understanding of the event becomes a story that is authorized by the community telling it. As such it will be told and retold, passed from person to person, even unto the murderer's own land, confirming a social reality the way tradition gets established – through repetition and collective *behavior*.

The question that should naturally occur here is just how a socially recognized narrative enacts collective memory. A criticism could be leveled that simply sharing information amongst members of a social group is not necessarily memory. Collective memory, broadly defined, is an act, voluntary or not, of association between a current stimulus and a reconstructed, or better yet re-imagined, past event that is *mediated* by the perceptions of others. Maurice Halbwachs notes the capacity for collective memory occurs when individual experience becomes meaningful through the possibilities of understanding that others have provided us.[19] Understanding becomes possible only through integration. Most importantly, we must remain aware that this definition of memory is dependent upon a perception of memory as an activity. If we think of it simply as a storehouse in which past experiences are filed for future reference then we will fail to grasp the significance of collective memory as a process. As Walter Benjamin points out,

"memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre."[20] From this we understand that the thing we call memory is both public, in the sense that it is socially meaningful, and enacted, in the sense that it is a story in which the individual plays his or her part. Thus, when the court organizes an understanding of the event around a narrative that will be passed to others, it is the court that defines how the event can be remembered – which is to say, how the story can be told. When others think back to this moment, their perceptions will be shaped by the story that makes the past event intelligible. Collective memory then is created through the framework making possible the reconstruction of the event. It is this limiting of the understanding of the event that will bind one remembrance to another,[21] and which reinforces the community that Malory envisions when he stresses that "hit was opynly knowyn."

The openness that Malory evokes in the court's consolidation of an event's remembrance is particularly important to the study of collective memory because it is a function of social agency sometimes referred to as "fictive kinship." Jay Winters describes fictive kinship as a set of relationships unifying people as a group through activities normally associated with filial bonds. That is to say, we have here groups who are held together not necessarily through blood, but by means of the emotional and psychological contexts that families experience as inevitable conditions shaping their contact with one another – even the difficulties that sometimes divide them.[22] It strikes me that Malory is not in the least upset at the prospect that his beloved characters argue, fight, misunderstand, and sometimes resent one another. Critics who feel compelled to find in these conflicts evidence that the Round Table is somehow a failure (often because they read outward from the Grail quest) seem to be missing the point. To be human is to be flawed; and while this is certainly a cliché, it is just as certainly a deep truth with which any society *must* come to terms in order to survive. Malory is not a fool, and he is not

looking for a utopia. But he is seriously concerned about the mechanisms available to a community that can help it to survive with its institutions intact. For all its troubles and strife, the *Morte Darthur* works at holding people together. And until the very end, it does so successfully, regardless of the challenges that arise from living in a world of contingency. What matters is not that Lancelot and Mador opposed one another; the important issue is that they have a means of recourse by which social conflict can be regulated. Even more importantly, the conflict and its resolution constitute a process of binding. After the trial by combat, Mador actively seeks Guinevere's forgiveness. Rather than harbor resentment and anger, Mador *publicly* eschews these divisive feelings in order to reaffirm a community-building impulse: "And than sir Madore sewed dayly and longe to have the quenys good grace, and so by the meanys of sir Launcelot he caused hym to stonde in the quenys good grace, and all was forgyffyn" (621/21-23). Regardless of any suspicions we might maintain with Mador's "true" feelings, the explicit message seems to be that through Lancelot's mediation Mador at least pursues social restoration.

While a doubter of this apparent accord might reason that it rings hollow, the text gives us no overt indication that Malory *wants* us to distrust this resolution. Indeed, the book uses the failure to settle matters through combat as confirmation of the privileging of chivalric activities. For example, in "The Knight of the Cart" we see how the failure to support the function of knightly combat in the formation of communal cohesion leads to greater mischief. Having dishonorably abducted Guinevere, Meleagant compounds his infractions by using archers to slay Lancelot's horse, and then in a fit of cowardice begs Guinevere to call Lancelot off before an actual fight can take place. More significant than a simple abduction, Melleagant's dishonorable activities are the real threat since they constitute the eruption of energies that trouble the

cohesiveness of the very institution intended to bind the fictive kinship together – chivalry. Melleagant's failure to engage Lancelot in honorable combat means not only that the disruptive forces unleashed by Meleagant cannot be effaced, but as a result they will continue to plague Lancelot and Guinevere. Much as the trial by combat served not only to determine the verity of Guinevere's innocence in "The Poisoned Apple," it tellingly functioned as a release valve, offering the injured parties a chance to work out their frustrations and mediate the conflicts in such a way that the difficulties involved would no longer be seen as an immediate challenge to the collective. These actions then become part of the collective story that shapes how the episode will be remembered by the community. But with Guinevere's intervention in "The Knight with the Cart," individual diplomacy rather than a public confirmation of chivalric violence interrupts the value system that holds the group together. In treating Lancelot and the queen "full shamefully . . . and cowardly" (41/655), Meleagant has introduced elements that are corrosive to the socially responsible values of honor and respect. In turn, for Malory, the failure of Meleagant to meet Lancelot means that their divisive grievances are not worked out. Thus the conflict has not been resolved, as demonstrated by Lancelot's misgivings: "'there ys nother kynge, quene ne knyght that beryth the lyffe, excepte my lorde kynge Arthur and you, madame, that shulde lette me but I shulde make sir Mellyagaunte harte full colde or ever I departed frome hense'" (5-8/656).

Again and again the text seems to argue that getting conflicts out in the open and resolving them as knights, that is to say through combat, reinforces the value and the cohesion of the chivalric community, one that is founded on the very principle of combat as a defining way of life.[23] The confirmation of their mode of being in the world grants the knights consistency and community that sustains them, so long as they remain committed to one another. Ultimately,

what these individual members gain from their "kinship" is a sense of wholeness derived from the continuity of their experiences and their values.

However, there is another troublesome issue with Malory's attempt to find wholeness in the act of collective memory. We cannot avoid the fact that Nyneve's recitation of the events culminating in Guinevere's reconciliation with Mador is a *representation*. This is why historical methodologies are distrustful of memory – its failure to be self-critical or self-aware, and its failure to respect the pastness of the past. In historical consciousness the past is viewed in its singularity (which is to say its quality of once-having-been-but-being-no-longer) as something to which we owe an ethical obligation to be truthful. That quality of truthfulness is dependent upon our striving to let the past be itself in its difference and its undeniable ambiguity.[24] It is obvious from this description that such a perception carries with it a prohibition against rewriting the past to serve the purposes of extant institutions – our understanding of what or who we are is predicated on knowledge of what we are no longer. The past is not "ours" and it is not shared. It is other. But that "otherness" is precisely what authentic memory allows us to ignore; so the knowledge that one is unavoidably reconstructing an event is the pressure exerted by historical consciousness on memory. This awareness that one is representing or reconstructing the events produces a destabilizing effect because it leads one to question the authenticity of one's memory.

Aware that the plasticity of memory evoked in the telling of a story means that the story is open to change, Malory gives in to his critical suspicions about memory and he turns to his source for reassurance. Rather than leave us in the embrace of a shared experience, Malory goes back to his original text for a solidifying instance and thus incorporates Sir Patryse's tomb in order to fix in place the memory of the event:

> Than was sir Patryse buryed in the chirche of Westemynster in a towmbe, and thereupon was wrytten: HERE LYETH SIR PATRYSE OF IRELONDE,

SLAYNE BYSIR PYNELL LE SAVEAIGE THAT ENPOYSYNED APPELIS
TO HAVE SLAYNE SIR GAWAYNE, AND BY MYSSEFORTUNE SIR
PATRYSE ETE ONE OF THE APPLIS, AND THAN SUDDEYNLY HE
BRASTE (621/11-15).

The addition of the tomb's inscribed summary is unnecessary, at least in a formal sense, since Nyneve's story is supposed to shape our remembrance and we know what has happened. But external to the world of the narrative the tomb's reiteration of Patryse's death speaks to Malory's fears about his responsibility in preserving or maintaining memory, and which implies the discomfort he experiences with his own imaginative retellings.

We can certainly understand why Malory is uncomfortable leaving the truth value of an historical event up to the collective reconstructions of what is essentially storytelling. The past's validity rests on re-tellings, which are also re-imaginings. In memorial consciousness the onus of responsibility emerges from a demand for social or cultural cohesiveness. Since the focus of collective memory rests on maintaining the stability of a communal identity, those practices and institutions that grant the community a sense of continuity are privileged. The past, then, cannot be something different; it must be integrated. The past is literally part of the present as the process of remembering is consistently rewriting that which is remembered. This also highlights an essential paradox of memory in that the act of remembering relies on a belief in continuity with the past even as it is rewriting and losing that past, a point Jonah Lehrer makes clear when he summarizes modern neuroscience's understanding of memory as an activity: "The biggest lie of human memory is that it *feels* true. Although our recollections seem like literal snapshots of the past, they're actually deeply flawed reconstructions, a set of societies constantly undergoing rewrites."[25] This quality of plasticity means, unavoidably, that memory is unstable; and Malory is apparently uncomfortable enough with this realization that, driven by historicity's impulse to preserve the past, he finds himself unable to accept the conclusion he has attempted to craft for

"The Poisoned Apple" episode. Unable to participate in the communal act of remembrance that he has inserted into the text, Malory struggles with acceptance of the fact that the act he turns to in order to preserve the memory of an event is by its very nature doomed. Memory is always open and subject to change.

This mutability of memory is particularly problematic because it challenges the ethical demand imposed by historical consciousness which says that we are not only to remember, but that such remembrance must be truthful. The need for something solid on which the representation can be fixed, as it were, in the hope of staving off forgetting becomes an ever-present concern for the mind preoccupied with resuscitating the past. Faced with the uncertainties of a past that exists as imaginative representations, Malory gives in to his own anxiety over the potential collapse of the group's ability to maintain unity in a shared remembrance. In an effort to prevent future transformations of an ambiguous memory, Malory attempts to reinforce the validity of Guinevere's innocence by locating it in a monument that testifies to the authenticity of the past and insures that this authenticity will be perpetuated:

> Also there was wrytyn upon the tombe that quene Gwenyvere was appled of treson of the deth of sir Patryse by sir Madore de la Porte, and there was made the mencion how sir Launcelot fought with hym for quene Gwenyvere and overcom hym in playne batayle. All thys was wretyn upon the tombe of sir Patryse iin excusyng of the quene (621/16-20).

By taking the narrative away from a communal, participatory act, and preserving it in a fixed location, Malory has ensured that the truth of the event is not, in fact, held by the community. What this tells us is that Malory is already preoccupied with historical consciousness – he sees the past as something that needs to be fixed in place. Thus, his desire to immerse himself in the past is consistently troubled by the fear that such a connection is impossible, or at the very least that such connections are constantly slipping away. In this context of historical anxiety Malory

reproduces what he wants to be his past in the form of a *lieu de memoire*, a site of memory. As a result, when we reach the conclusion of "The Poisoned Apple" episode, we find that the note of closure Malory attempts to inscribe on the text is haunted by an irresolvable tension between a communal assurance of the past and a mistrust of the validity of such social continuities.

If the *Morte Darthur* can be said to have a unified desire, more than anything else it dreams of wholeness. And this is to be expected since the text is perpetually haunted by the failure to achieve wholeness, moving between poles of disintegration and sustaining order. When Malory succumbs to his anxiety over the fragmentation of memory, he then pivots and tries to overcome the challenges to an authentic social memory, such as the difficulties produced by the presence of the tomb. This point is brought home when he caps off the "Poisoned Apple" episode with a dubious re-assertion of communal integrity: "And than sir Madore sewed dayly and longe to have the quenys good grace, and so by the meanys of sir Launcelot he caused hym to stonde in the quenys good grace, and all was forgyffyn" (621/21-23). Here, Malory highlights the desire for a resolution that can cross the distance opened up by the tomb's impression of memorial instability. Mador's wish to be forgiven by Guinevere is a reflection of the text's implicit need for integration.[26] But one cannot simply efface sir Patryce's tomb and the shadow it casts over the Arthurian community. This shadow is the nagging doubt that any effort aimed at restoration can only be temporary in a world that is subject to change and loss. The real mystery is why, even when Malory can see that the dream is just that – a dream – he continues to chase it.

It should be understood that the desire to preserve memory, the desire Malory has to hold on to a past that he feels his society is losing, is experienced as an injunction. The anxiety that is encountered in the *Morte*'s inability to dwell in an authentic memory is partly the result of the overwhelming pressure of a responsibility to what is gone. The return to the tomb as a means of

shoring up memory against fragmentation is an effect of a consciousness that feels disconnected not only from its past but from its future; and it seeks to ground continuity in the "materiality of a trace."[27] But it does so under the impact of necessity. Malory wants to have the past as a living presence in the present; and he wants to preserve that presence for the future. In a word, he seeks the reassurance of tradition. But his consciousness of history tells him that the inherent assurances of collective memory are always vanishing. As we saw with Lancelot's refusal to make the absent Arthur and Guinevere present, the connections that, in terms of authentic memory, confirm our shared experiences are losing their validity in the *Morte*. Thus Malory cannot prevent the fragmentation of memory as the past slips out of continuity with the present; but he can resist it. This is the fundamental purpose of the *lieux de mémoire*, answering the charge imposed through an anxious necessity to secure our connections with the others who constitute our past, and thus make up our present. In order for this resistance to take place, pieces of the past must be situated as touchstones offering access to what has passed; and Malory attempts to anchor the past in those moments most expressive of duty, love, and devotion – it is through an active responsibility that one maintains continuity with an other. As Nora has emphasized, however, this responsibility that emerges from the transformation of memory into *lieux de mémoire* shifts the weight of remembrance from the social to the individual.

I think it is important that we do not underestimate the simple fact that the individual is a problem for Malory. To be clear it is the individual *as* an individual (which is to say as an agent whose actions cannot be readily situated in a shared understanding) that renders wholeness problematic in the *Morte*. Much has been made of the importance of the public-private opposition in medieval literature, especially in Arthurian romance where the conflict between an inner self and an external world forms the backdrop for most knightly adventures. I agree that

this opposition plays a vital role in the *Morte Darthur*.[28] But instead of locating the individual's problematic relationship with wholeness in the well-established dialectic of private-versus-public subjectivity, the text seems to focus our attention on an aspect of the private-versus-public encounter that emphasizes the ways in which those modes defining social being can paradoxically produce a solitary experience that is impossible to resolve. When the very things that are supposed to bind us together, the principles that supposedly establish connections between us, like duty, honor, and love, inexplicably divide us, it is here that Malory locates the problematic issue of the individual.

In the context of a society organized around the principles of authentic memory, in which the events forming an individual's experience are rendered sensible through continuity with communal experience, those events that resist inclusion in the community, events that establish more than anything else the inability to conform individual, private experience with collective, shared understanding, turn out to have a profound and devastating impact as the twilight of the Round Table settles in. The result is that, when the forces that bind us in fact divide us by creating within each of us solitary or isolated experiences, authentic memory becomes difficult if not impossible to achieve. This point is brought home in "The Fair Maid of Astolat," which offers a direct contrast to the collective participation espoused by the court's confirmation of Guinevere's innocence. With Elaine's death, the court is confronted by an enigma of private experience which cannot be rationalized or mediated. In the end, it is the very recognition of their inability to reach out to Elaine that unites the court – the recognition of an impossible responsibility, so movingly addressed in Guinevere's sorrowful enjoinder to Lancelot on Elaine's death: "'ye myght have shewed hir som bownté and jantilnes whych myght have preserved hir lyff'" (641/29-30). To which Lancelot responds, in essence, what? What could I have done?

Elaine's love was a thing that could not be shared. Her dying for it was a thing that could not be made sensible.

The episode begins with a traditional community-building gesture as Arthur calls "a grete justyse and a tunrnement that sholde be at that day at Camelott" (621/26-27). Following immediately on the heels of "The Poisoned Apple's" resolution this would appear to be an attempt to reinforce a sense of normalcy – everything is back in place. A list follows of all the great lords who would attend, confirming the festive social gathering that tournaments generally facilitated. This atmosphere of social bonding is, however, just as quickly undercut when Guinevere states that she would not accompany Arthur "for she was syke and myght nat ryde" (621/37), and Lancelot, the most important knight of the Round Table, declines to participate. We might read Guinevere's statement with some suspicion, an inclination of which the text is already aware since Guinevere takes Lancelot aside to admonish him for "sitting this one out" as it were: "'Sir, ye ar gretly to blame thus to holde you behynde my lorde. What woll youre enemyes and myne sey and deme? "Se how sir Launcelot holdith hym ever behynde the kynge, and so the quene doth also, for that they wolde have their pleasure togyders." And thus woll they sey' seyde the quene" (622/12-16). Regardless of our reservations, the text gives us no overt reason to distrust Guinevere here; she may very well be sick. She certainly isn't remaining behind so that she can be alone with Lancelot, as her speech indicates. But there are two issues that come to the fore at this moment: the first is that Guinevere's justifiable fears demonstrate that the holes in the public's trust of her that were opened during "The Poisoned Apple" episode have not been closed;[29] the second is the implication that Guinevere's and Lancelot's actions can isolate them from the Arthurian community, adding fuel to a fire that, in its divisiveness, will consume them all. Malory makes explicit in "The Poisoned Apple" that many of the people at

court were displeased with Bors's defense of Guinevere, retorting that while they loved Arthur, "'as for quene Gwenyvere, we love hir nat, because she ys a destroyer of good knyghtes'" (617/12-14). In spite of Bors's reasoned denial of these accusations, we are told that many refused to accept his plea (617/31). This tells us that the court is already fragmenting over its loyalty to the queen, and this attitude towards Guinevere will be exacerbated in the final book as the Round Table disintegrates.

The point here is that even if Guinevere has done nothing substantially wrong – and so far the text has not placed her in the position (in flagrante delicto) of committing a crime – the narrative is strengthening a view of her as an outsider. Though she is not doing it deliberately, Guinevere is dividing the community; or at least she is becoming more than ever a focal point for division. To her credit Guinevere is sometimes aware of the disharmony, of which she is part, and in "The Fair Maid of Astolat" she tells Lancelot to, in essence, stop feeding the rumor mill and go to the tournament. For his part Lancelot judiciously agrees but, tellingly, he fails to comprehend the crucial point of Guinevere's fears: that further isolating themselves is not just shameful but potentially dangerous. When Lancelot tells Guinevere that he will go to the tournament, but on the condition that he is disguised, he refuses to accept the warning Guinevere gives him: "'Sir, ye may there do as ye lyste,' seyde the quene, 'but be my counceyle ye shall nat be ayenst youre kynge and your *felyshyp*, for there bene full many hardé knyghtes of youre bloode'" (622/24-26, italics added). Guinevere's counsel to avoid putting himself at odds with the fellowship is a reminder to Lancelot that the integrity of the Round Table is most at stake and points up the fragility of its fellowship, or at least the rifts between its members that will erupt in book eight. Lancelot, of course, ignores her admonition and does what he always does, pursues personal glory which, to be fair, is what a knight is often expected to do. By disguising himself,

Lancelot will be able to challenge himself to the utmost, fighting the best knights in the world. Guinevere's note of caution then is recognition that they are being scrutinized by the court, and she warns Lancelot that now is not the time to engage in business as usual; that the times call for a more conscientious effort to shore up the stability of the Round Table. Throughout book seven, one wonders whether Lancelot is simply oblivious to the conflicts that surround him.

Under ordinary circumstances chivalric competition was expected to bring out the best in knights, and the pursuit of honor, what Malory calls "worshyp," was seen not as fractious but as a confirmation of the values that defined and sustained the community. But here the implicit suggestion is that Lancelot's pursuit of glory is no longer a self-evident virtue; in fact, it is being superseded by a responsibility toward the chivalric fellowship, not just its ideals but the people who constitute that community. Time and again the *Morte* asks us to think about its characters not just in their social roles but as people – agents who think and act and suffer through individual choices. Book seven in particular is vitally concerned with the individual's connections to others, a theme that forms the core of meaning for "The Fair Maid" episode.[30] Lancelot's failure to recognize that he has a responsibility foremost to his fellows opens an ideological wound that is physically instantiated in his own body with the significant wounding by his cousin Bors who, unable to see through Lancelot's disguise, inadvertently pierces his side with a lance. And that is only the beginning of the trials set in motion by Lancelot's decision to put himself at odds with the rest of the fellowship, a decision that will ultimately lead to the sad, pointless death of Elaine.

Felicity Riddy has pointed out that "nothing presents more poignantly the inscrutable otherness of other people than the baffled death of The Fair Maid of Astolat, who understands her own predicament even less than the other characters do theirs."[31] Riddy's point is that

Elaine's personal story shows us more than anything else not just that other people have a startling capacity for being different from oneself, but that this difference often renders the individual unknowable to themselves. In this case, not only is the community unable to locate the individual's motivations within a socially manageable construct, but the individual finds him- or herself unable to corroborate his or her experiences with that which, as Halbwachs pointed out, makes experience sensible. While the Elaine episode in some ways might seem like an extended digression, it is tied intimately to the way in which the promises held out by memory are beginning to collapse. It is the otherness of others that makes responsibility possible, but otherness is also what renders the assurance of continuity problematic. In order to be responsible there must be a subject who is fundamentally aware of him- or herself as that which makes a choice to respond. To respond implies that one has the capacity to give of one's self what the other's self requires. But what if one cannot give what the other requires? What if there exists no possibility to requite, no chance of mediation that can efface the differences between us? These are the questions that haunt the final moments of "The Fair Maid of Astolat" and, regardless of the consolations provided by Arthur, will continue to resonate even in book eight. The veneer of social unity, of the Round Table's integrity, that defines the motivation for "The Poisoned Apple" episode gives way here to the stark realization that regardless of the dream of wholeness to which an entire society can aspire, there is the fundamental, stubborn fact of the individual's personal, and inexplicable, differences; differences that take shape in the failure to grasp the implications of, or motivations for, one's own acts.

When Lancelot meets Elaine at the home of her father, Barnarde of Astolat, we are told "she was so hote in love that she besought sir Launcelot to were uppon hym at the justis a tokeyn of hers" (623/27-29). The text emphasizes repeatedly that Elaine is madly in love with Lancelot,

and the reason she wants him to wear her sleeve to the jousts is clearly as a demonstration of her affection. It is understood that when a knight accepts such a token he is accepting the affection, albeit symbolically; thus there is a moment of emotional reciprocity. It should also be noted that this symbol of a lady's favor was commonly referred to as a *guerdon*, which explicitly indicates that there is an acknowledgement of the lady's attention *as* a reward. While Lancelot at first refuses to accept Elaine's sleeve, for reasons which we will discuss shortly, he relents when "he remembird hymselff that he wolde go to the justis disgysed" (623/33). Lancelot realizes that Elaine's token will make it much more difficult for the knights who know him to penetrate his disguise, since Lancelot is known specifically to never wear a lady's guerdon. This is a pivotal moment for it puts in motion two primary conflicts in this narrative episode. The first is that it fans the flames of Elaine's desire – a desire over which, as will become increasingly clear, she has no rational control and for which she can offer no rational explanation. Indeed, this incomprehensible passion resides in the core of Elaine's identity and it is, I would argue, what makes her a singular being. Second, and again this is an issue to which we will return, Lancelot's rather thoughtless acceptance of Elaine's deep gesture of love is in more ways than one a break with his own identity. In spite of Malory's "he remembird hymselff," Lancelot in fact forgets himself.

To understand why Elaine's unrequited love for Lancelot is a problem, we should try to recognize that for Malory Elaine is not being deliberately foolish. It would perhaps be easy to read Elaine's love and subsequent death as the romantic self indulgence of a young person who simply refuses to be reasonable. But the expectation that we be reasonable, that we are intentional decision-makers, is predicated on assumptions that Malory is unwilling to accept at face value. Malory presents Elaine as essentially a victim, someone whose desires are not

simply willful affectations but deeply moving injunctions erupting from the core of her very being. With Elaine, and Lancelot's inability to love her in return, Malory finds a profound mystery residing in the heart of human behavior – the unfortunate fact that we are often unable to be what others need us to be, and that our inner lives are often unable to be shared. Elaine tries with all her heart to get Lancelot to love her; she does everything in her power to care for him while he is recuperating from the wound he received at the tournament. Malory clearly wants us to be impressed by Elaine's devotion: "and ever thys maydyn Elayne ded hir dilygence and labour both nyght and day unto sir Launcelot, that there was never chylde nother wyff more mekar tyll fadir and husbande than was thys Fayre Maydyn . . . wherefore sir Bors was gretly pleased with her" (635/26-30). Bors feels compelled to point out to Lancelot that Elaine's love is remarkably commendable and that, from any rational perspective, he ought to love her in return "'For she ys a passyng fayre damesell, and well besayne and well taught. And God wolde . . . that ye cowed love her'" (635/9-11). But in spite of her attributes commending her love, in spite of even Bors's assurance that Lancelot should love her as well, Lancelot's attitude is summed up in the cutting remark to Bors "'by no meanys I cannat put her fro me'" (635/7-8). It is difficult to hide the note of exasperation in Lancelot's comment, highlighting the divide between him and Elaine and foretelling the inevitable confrontation when Lancelot must decisively end Elaine's dream.

As Lancelot prepares to return to Camelot, Elaine knows that this is her last chance and in a moment of anxious courage she straightforwardly approaches Lancelot and asks him to marry her. The ensuing discussion between Lancelot and Elaine presents a powerful picture of desperation as Elaine fights her last battle to win Lancelot's affection and Lancelot attempts to weasel his way out while trying to maintain his dignity. However, Lancelot does not come out

of this with his integrity intact. For all his love of Lancelot, Malory recognizes that there is simply no way out of this situation – Elaine must suffer, and nothing Malory does will change the simple fact that Lancelot can do nothing either. Indeed, Lancelot's attempts to assuage Elaine read as pathetic, ranging from lies of omission to concerns about his responsibility as a guest in her father's house to outright attempts to buy her off, which is probably the most hurtful thing Lancelot could do. Fending off Elaine's proposal of marriage, Lancelot claims that he has vowed never to marry. This is not exactly accurate, since Lancelot is simply constrained by circumstances such that he cannot marry the woman he loves.[32] When Elaine then says that she will throw propriety to the winds and be his mistress, Lancelot feigns shock and says that it would be dishonorable of him to repay her father in such wise for his hospitality.[33] Lastly, when Elaine tells him that she will die from sorrow Lancelot shrugs it off with "'Ye shall nat do so'" (638/25) and he "magnanimously" presents her with an offer: "'wheresomever ye woll besette youre herte uppon som good knyght that woll wedde you, I shall gyff you togydirs a thousand pounde yerly, to you and to youre ayris'" (638/29-32). While it is difficult to see Lancelot's disregard for Elaine and his lack of honesty here as anything but disturbing, I think Malory recognizes that neither of these characters has a way to escape. Lancelot's seemingly thoughtless attempts to buy off Elaine demonstrate, just as much as Elaine's willingness to demean herself by becoming Lancelot's paramour, the ugly truth of a relationship that is immitigable. There is no social apparatus that can resolve this. There is no way for reason to work this out. Lancelot's "reasons" sound particularly hollow in the face of Elaine's pain. And this point, that there exists no means by which we can plug Elaine's suffering into a communal continuity, means that her experience is impossible for us to know.

Once Lancelot rides away and leaves the inconsolable Elaine, we are told that she "made such sorrow day and nyght that she never slepte, ete, nother dranke, and ever she made hir complaynte unto sir Launcelot" (639/24-26). Eventually, Elaine's body can take no more and "she fyebled so that she muste nedis passe oute of thys worlde" (639/27-28). And, lest we feel inclined to criticize her for this, it should be noted that Elaine's passing is suggestively similar to Lancelot's behavior at Arthur and Guinevere's tomb, foreshadowing Lancelot's own grief-stricken death. But what stands out as particularly remarkable about Elaine's death is her touching defense of her emotions in a scene that is entirely Malory's addition. In Malory's source, the *Morte Artu*, Elaine's death isn't even mentioned – she just shows up at Camelot on the black barge.[34] This indicates that Malory found something of such importance in Elaine's death that he was compelled to make his readers face it. In fact, he gives Elaine what might be one of the finest speeches in the *Morte Darthur*. When her priest comes to shrive her, he presumes that Elaine is being willful. He tries to get her to see reason, as it were, telling her simply to "leve such thoughts" (639/30). Elaine responds with an impassioned "'Why sholde I leve such thoughts? Am I not an erthely woman?'" (659/31) Whereas the priest locates her actions within a foolishly self-destructive obsession, Elaine sees in her absolute commitment the redeeming essence of her very humanness. Elaine's argument appeals to a validity in her identity as a human being that is authorized by its interiority. That is to say, the love that is destroying her is not something that she creates; it is not something for which she made a choice; nor is it an expression of willful desire. Instead, the force of her love is the experience of an inner state that is seized by a power beyond the institutions of man: "'And all the whyle the brethe ys in my body I may complayne me, for my belyve ys that I do none offence . . . unto God, for He formed me thereto, and all maner of good love comyth of God'" (659/32-35). To

deny her love is to deny the truth of her selfhood; and to deny the truth of her selfhood is to deny God, the origin of her being. Thus, Malory creates in Elaine's suffering a private space whose interiority is defined not by being located within a social continuum, as we saw with authentic memory, but rather by an origin that exists outside any community.

Elaine's impassioned defense of her love, that it springs ultimately from the source of all goodness, God, and thus wells up as the source of her subjectivity, points to the incontrovertible singularity of the individual soul. Upon her death, Elaine is placed on the black barge and floated down the Thames to Camelot. There, Arthur and Guinevere spy the barge and send Kay to investigate. Finding a letter in Elaine's hand, Kay reports what he has discovered and Arthur reads the letter. In the letter, Elaine discloses that she has died for love of Lancelot and, curiously, she asks "'unto all ladyes'" (641/33) that they pray for her soul. The force of Elaine's appeal is unfortunately diminished here in her call to solidarity with fellow women, presumably playing to the idea that it is women who understand what she has gone through; but this should not distract us from Malory's purpose. For in the ensuing dialogue Lancelot and Arthur reinforce the unavoidable opposition between the self and others.

As Guinevere asks Lancelot whether he could have done anything for Elaine, if he could have ameliorated her suffering in some fashion, Lancelot points out that he simply could not give Elaine what she needed: "'For, madame . . . I love nat to be constrained to love, for love muste only aryse of the harte self, and nat by none constraynte'" (641/36-38). Here Lancelot seems to be implying, along the same lines as Elaine, that it is love that defines the singularity of an individual and that such a localized experience is ultimately not something that can be transcended within a communal identity. At some point along the continuum of a self that is socially constructed and mediated we run into a core experience that cannot be mediated; and the

suggestion then is that this core self is in some way *privileged*, a point that Arthur then appears to support when he backs up Lancelot's claim. Arthur notes that for Lancelot to do other than be true to the profoundly mysterious origins of his own self would be to lose that self, which Elaine had suggested was to be contrary to an intimate relation with God: "'That ys trouthe, sir,' seyde the kynge, 'and with many knyghtes love ys fre in hymselffe, and never woll be bonde; for where he ys bonden he lowseth hymselff'" (641/39-41). We must follow the mandates of our hearts; is this not, in essence, what Arthur defends when he notes that a knight cannot be constrained to love? But by doing so, one is necessarily appealing to a force that has no counterpart for mitigation in society as a whole. Not only is Arthur's claim a validation of Lancelot, it is a justification of Elaine as well. But what is particularly interesting about Lancelot and Arthur's defense at the end of "The Fair Maid of Astolat" is that we don't know whether to trust them. One must ask the question here: are these characters expressing a belief for which we the audience are to approve? We might note that Arthur's validation of Lancelot's claim is implicitly a prophetic apology for Lancelot's behavior with Guinevere. Embedded in Arthur's endorsement of Lancelot is the pointed observation that for a knight to do otherwise than follow his heart is to lose himself. Yet that is exactly what Lancelot does. Indeed, losing one's self takes on a double meaning because we are composed of two selves – an inner, private self and a socially constructed self. And what "The Fair Maid of Astolat" demonstrates is that when one's inner subjectivity no longer conforms to or can be mediated by the frameworks of collective identity, then wholeness cannot be achieved.

Again, I want to stress that the tragedy for these characters is not necessarily that they choose to willfully engage in socially disruptive acts; rather, it lies in the fact that they often lack the capacity for understanding themselves. Using Elaine's sad example, Malory does not make

an impassioned plea for the authority of internal subjectivity. Instead, he is showing us that human beings cannot escape the constraints of private experience. In a perfect world, Lancelot would do exactly as Bors advises – love Elaine. But of course a perfect world doesn't exist. To live in the world is to live as a thing divided. And this is forcefully brought home in Lancelot's lack of foresight when he ill-advisedly accepts Elaine's token of affection. By doing so, Lancelot is losing himself. In addition to putting himself at odds with the Arthurian fellowship, Lancelot's decision to enter the tournament disguised leads him to engage in an act that he would not do under ordinary circumstances and as a result he loses contact with a continuity of behavior that has ordered his self-identity. For instead of clinging to a set of values, a code of conduct, that has defined who and what he is, Lancelot abandons that public identity in order to disingenuously pretend to be something else.   Gawain, for example, observes Lancelot's performance at the tourney and though Gawain identifies Lancelot by his prowess in battle, he cannot see past Lancelot's deception: "'Sir' seyde sir Gawayne, 'I wolde say hit were sir Launcelot by hys rydynge and his buffettis . . . But ever mesemyth hit sholde nat be he, for that he beryth the rede slyve uppon hys helmet; for I wyst hym never beare tokyn at no justys of [a] lady'" (625/37-40). Even though he can see that it is Lancelot on the field, Gawain cannot perceive him as such because he cannot correlate the physical attributes with his understanding of Lancelot's identity. Gawain's remarks show how intimately self-identity is tied to public perception. And the confusion that swirls around Lancelot's forgetting of himself, that is to say the collapse of his primary obligation to the fellowship, cannot but contribute to the fragmentation of the Round Table. In particular, we will see this reinforced in "The Great Tournament," an episode that continues to explore the ways in which the duty to remember is

experienced as a solitary or isolating commitment, contrary to the best interests of the community.

The issue of remembrance is contextualized then in the closing tales by the opposition between a desire for the restoration promised by an authentic communal memory, and the impossibility of individuals' achieving such wholeness when experience is bound by personal responsibility. From the very start of book seven Malory signals the importance of a self's commitments to remember when, in the space of some 75 lines, the issue of "remembraunce" appears in no less than three separate instances: Malory chastises Lancelot for forgetting the promise made during the Grail quest; Lancelot chides Guinevere for forgetting that he made the promise; and Bors accuses Lancelot of forgetting who he is. And, as we saw at the start of this chapter, Lancelot remembers Arthur and Guinevere by recounting the unfulfillable obligations he owes them. The point I want to stress here is that in this opposition between two forms of experience, a social and a private, Malory is not necessarily painting the individual as in the wrong. While he is certainly privileging the social over the individual, tales like Elaine's demonstrate that for Malory there is a validity to the self's singular contingency that emerges necessarily from the inescapability of that individual experience. This is why remembrance is so important to the Morte: it is the arena in which these two forms of experience compete for the meaning of our lives as responsible human beings. Just as we must remember our obligations to others, the *Morte* reinforces our need for others, which is evoked in the desire for restoration. But this desire for restoration that haunts the stories is a haunting precisely because it is lost and because it cannot be regained.

At the end of "The Fair Maid of Astolat" Malory has placed us in a rather difficult position, and at first glance when we turn to the next tale, "The Great Tournament," we might be

tempted to read it as a reactionary move retreating from the painful and inexplicable tragedy surrounding Elaine in order to re-stabilize the Arthurian community in its core ideals. As usual, when forced to confront disturbing realizations regarding his dream of wholeness Malory wants to backpedal and restore the integrity of his vision; and in many ways "The Great Tournament" episode *appears* to be a simple reassertion of the values that Malory wants to hold on to as long as possible. If Elaine served to show the way our private experiences cannot always be overcome, the tournament puts us squarely back in the social world. But one of Malory's great talents as a writer is the way he seems to destabilize the very things that are meant to provide closure; and in "The Great Tournament" we will see that he very subtly reinforces the notion that the divisions growing between the members of the Round Table are anything but effaced in the vision of a united community. Before we too hastily ascribe a regression to Malory's "Great Tournament," we should consider that within the broader evolution of the final books we have a general movement towards fragmentation and collapse, and that "The Great Tournament" participates in that trajectory. Indeed, I would argue that the episode, a generally recognized fabrication on Malory's part, serves to reinforce the issues brought up in "The Fair Maid of Astolat," and continues to move us toward the inevitable confrontations dissolving the fellowship. Malory knew all along in book seven that his turn to the social world after the isolation and fragmentation of the Grail Quest was an impossibility; and it seems clear to me that he was not simply engaging in nostalgia. Rather, every episode of "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" works to show how the cracks opened up by the Grail Quest can no longer be closed. We can still dream, and certainly Malory finds some measure of worth in that dream. But there is the implicit admonition that this is in the end a dream, one that must come to an end because we are inevitably cut off from it. This becomes more evident when we consider

two crucial issues occupying "The Great Tournament" – Lancelot once again disguising himself to oppose the Round Table, and Gareth's feelings of obligation toward Lancelot.

Although Vinaver asserts that "The Great Tournament" was primarily inserted to temporarily keep at bay the disturbing events of "The Knight of the Cart,"[35] the episode continues to explore the crucial thematic issue of the collapse of authentic memory as we watch the bonds uniting the fellowship crumble before individual priorities. Moreover, it sets the stage for the coming divisions of the Round Table by emphasizing the unavoidable complications of divided loyalties.[36] The episode begins, much like "The Fair Maid of Astolat," with Arthur calling a tournament in another community-building gesture. Once again, Lancelot decides to oppose Arthur's party just as he did in the previous tale; and again, he decides to go disguised in spite of the disastrous consequences of that choice in the last episode. It should be noted here that not once in book seven do we see Lancelot fighting *for* the Round Table. In nearly every episode, with the exception of "The Knight of the Cart," Lancelot fights against the king's party or against individual members of the Round Table; and I would argue that this should serve as a warning that something is amiss. One would naturally ask whether Lancelot had learned anything from the previous difficulties of the last tournament, but all he seems to have learned is to be more cautious. This time he will wear Guinevere's sleeve and, following Guinevere's recommendation, he will notify his own kinsmen so that they will steer clear of him during the mêlée.[37] Furthermore, Bors will advise Gawain's brother Gareth of the deception so that he can avoid engaging Lancelot as well. It is difficult not to see in this maneuvering a none-too-subtle orientation of the political parties that will dominate the ruin of the Round Table. Most importantly, this dividing of forces signals a dividing of loyalties. Whereas in "The Fair Maid of

Astolat," Lancelot is the figure isolated from the rest of the fellowship, here he is an agent of division as he actively separates the Arthurian community *because of* his love for Guinevere.

On his way to the tournament, Lancelot falls asleep beside a well and is accidentally shot in the buttocks with an arrow delivered by a lady huntress. Just as the wound Lancelot opens in the fellowship during "The Fair Maid" episode is expressed in his own body, here again we find Lancelot being wounded; only this time, the wounding serves as a cautionary monition. The arrow in the buttocks is most suggestive of an attack on pride and it bears the hallmarks of those lessons imparted during the Grail Quest. Lancelot adds credence to this when he complains "'I may calle myselff the moste unhappy man that lyvyth, for ever when I wolde have faynyst worshyp there befallyth me ever som unhappy thynge'" (644/12-14). To which one might add, yes – didn't you learn this already Lancelot? Only now, Malory has altered the dynamics of pride as it was experienced in the Grail Quest. There, we saw that pride was conceived as a turning to the world and an abandonment of the self's intimate relationship with God. Here, the obverse is in effect as Lancelot's pride interferes with his ability to connect with the world around him. Indeed, the wounding merely intensifies Lancelot's self-absorption, as he petulantly complains about the impediments blocking his desire to fight his own fellowship. By now, of course, Lancelot has made a career out of ignoring or failing to heed warnings and he resolutely continues along a path of confrontation with his fictive kinship: "'I shall be in the fylde on Candilmas day at the justys, *whatsomever falle of hit*'" (644/15-16, italics added).

There is a kind of recklessness to Lancelot's behavior that will become increasingly difficult to ignore. This pursuit of a desire "*whatsomever falle of hit*" has of course been a standing feature of the *Morte Darthur* and is often expressed in the openness of taking the adventure that God sends you. But throughout the final books, this risk taking seems less

interested in openness and more concerned with a blind, closed-off determination; a determination that in fact fails to remember promises made, oaths taken, and loves that bind. Book seven, as I have noted, opens with Lancelot abandoning the vows he took during the Grail Quest. Lancelot abandons his own code of conduct. In perhaps his maddest moment, he tears the bars from Guinevere's window in "The Knight of the Cart" and joins her in bed, jeopardizing them both. Book eight will carry this recklessness forward as it starts with Lancelot refusing to take any precautions whatsoever in his relationship with Guinevere, which will indirectly lead to his killing not only Gareth but Gawain; Arthur's forgetting his love of Lancelot and, in a moment of jealousy, allowing his nephews to try and trap Lancelot with Guinevere; and of course Gawain's abandoning of reason all together in order to seek vengeance on Lancelot. It's as if there is a madness growing amongst the main characters that not only accelerates them towards destruction, but also clearly impairs their ability to put the community first in their priorities. In a famous passage, Saint Bernard describes the impact of individual's pursuing private concerns: "they become obstinate in error to the point of refusing to listen to anyone. These are the destroyers of unity, the enemies of peace . . . What greater pride hath the heart of man than thus to prefer his own judgment to that of the whole congregation?"[38] I want to stress here that Bernard's criticism has to do with the way personal desire interferes with the good of everyone else. This view defines better than any other the medieval preoccupation with the conflict between the self and society, and it is profoundly shared by the *Morte*. But most importantly, it describes the attitude of recklessness dominating the final books. In pursuing internal drives one necessarily breaks with what makes it possible to be connected to others – a shared past, or even a shared future. In one sense, to be "reckless" is to be absorbed in the here and now. One has no thought for the future; and as we have seen authentic memory ties the past to the future through a

belief in continuity. The recklessness occupying the final events of the *Morte* propels us towards a fundamental break, and Malory recognizes that this rift cannot be healed. What marks Malory's view is that he doesn't necessarily denounce his characters because they pursue these private experiences. As Elaine shows us, this is an inevitable outcome of our uniquely human existence. Indeed, these private experiences are an expression of the lack of authentic memory for, as Malory had come to realize, we no longer live in a world of memory. We live with history and the knowledge of loss.

When Lancelot enters the tournament, identity concealed, Bors singles out Gareth and advises him on recognizing Lancelot's disguise. Seeing Lancelot beset by many of the best knights of the Round Table, Gareth finds himself in a difficult position. Bors observes that he is sorely afraid that Lancelot is, for all his prowess, overmatched against the full might of the Round Table (645/43-44), and Gareth cannot abide leaving "'the same man that made me knyght'" to fight on his own (646/1-3). This apparent divide in Gareth's loyalties points to a crucial issue at stake in the story's narrative structure of "The Great Tournament" and which haunts Malory's overall mission throughout both books seven and eight; and that issue has to do with the nature of responsibility. In a very telling moment Bors recognizes that Gareth is about to betray his fellows, and instead of talking him out of it Bors advises that Gareth must disguise himself as well if he is to help Lancelot. The implicit suggestion here is that they know they are doing something wrong. Gareth is not concealing his identity so that he can win glory; he is hiding himself so that he can evade the consequences of his betrayal. Gawain reinforces the understanding that something is going awry when he states: "'I drede me ever of gyle. For on payne of my lyff, that same knyght with the rede slyve of golde ys hymselff sir Launcelot'" (647/19-21). Unlike the previous tale, in which Gawain was unable to pierce Lancelot's disguise

because he was unable to imagine Lancelot as someone outside the identity by which he was publicly known, here Gawain has no problem seeing through the façade and unmasking both Lancelot and his brother. What, one must ask, has changed? This is a pivotal moment because it tells us something important about the way perception is changing. Gawain stresses that he is suspicious of deceit, which indicates that he now has the ability to see Lancelot as someone who is capable of participating in deception. The fallout from Lancelot's and Gareth's turn against the fellowship is the potential collapse of trust, and it highlights the fundamental lack of stability that defines the closing chapters.

Eventually the hidden identities are revealed and, in a moment that is deceptive in its simplicity, Malory gives us a picture of a Round Table that is united in love and admiration. Arthur, angry at his nephew for apparently betraying him, "blamed sir Gareth because he leffte hys felyshyp and hylde with sir Launcelot" (648/14-15). Gareth, in a defense that feels prescient when we get to book eight, observes that "'he made me knyght, and when I saw hym so hard bestad, methought hit was my worshyp to helpe hym'"(648/16-17). Arthur appears to grasp the issue at stake for Gareth in having to make a choice and, in recognizing the validity of Gareth's decision, emphasizes not only that Gareth is forgiven but that he is more trustworthy than ever: "'Now, truly . . ., ye say well, and worshipfully have ye done . . . And all the dayes of my lyff . . . wyte you well I shall love you and truste you the more'" (648/21-24). On the surface, Arthur would appear to resolve a problematic tension regarding trust by reinserting a variable into his socially-cohesive ideology – Gareth has not disrupted the social order, according to Arthur, but he has confirmed it since "'ever hit ys' seyde kynge Arthure, 'a worshypfull knyghtes dede to help and succoure another worshypfull knyght when he seeth hym in daungere'" (648/24-26). Arthur's point is that Gareth's actions should not be seen as a potentially dangerous rejection of

the Round Table; he emphasizes that Gareth responded out of the principles governing their unity as a group. But that is not, to be accurate, why Gareth acted. He rushed to defend Lancelot because of his sense of responsibility to Lancelot. Lancelot "'made me knyght," Gareth declares, thus denoting a personal and intimate connection that apparently trumps the connections he supposedly shares with the rest of the Round Table. It is that private connection that Arthur, directly or not, tries to efface with his speech. On the one hand, Arthur's efforts add a sense of legitimacy to Gareth's deception by claiming to reinforce his love; on the other, Arthur indirectly calls attention to what the audience is aware of – that Gareth did not act out of any sense of preserving the stability of the Round Table.[39]

In closing out "The Great Tournament," Arthur *seems* to offer an apology for private experience; just as he validated Lancelot's, and inadvertently Elaine's, personal feelings here Arthur justifies Gareth's turning against his brethren to support Lancelot by appropriating his individual connections for a social framework of understanding. Again, Malory is not trying to implicate his beloved knights in petty or willful acts. Instead, what he gives us through Gareth is a reflection of the way even the best knights are pulled in multiple directions, torn between their commitments to the fellowship and their individual responsibilities. How, then, can one hope to preserve a sense of continuity when one is at one's core divided by the very thing that is supposed to maintain our connections across distance and time – responsibility itself? And here is one of the crucial aspects of responsibility that drives the narrative machinery of the *Morte*: responsibility exists as something indivisible from time. If, as Malory has come to realize, he cannot have the assurances of continuity provided by authentic memory that would give him the wholeness that he craves, then he is left with only one option for a commitment to stability, and that is to accept responsibility. And responsibility, as book seven works so hard to show us, is

ultimately derived not from a community, but from individual or private experiences. What Malory keeps constructing over and over with the iteration of tales leading into book eight, is a series of *lieux de mémoire*, sites that locate us between what connects us to others and what we have forgotten about those connections. Trapped by an irrevocable otherness and perpetually gesturing towards an irrecoverable wholeness, sites of memory work to prevent forgetting by paradoxically fixing in place the notion that something is gone. At the end of "The Great Tournament," Malory crystallizes a moment that captures the crossroads of commemoration and forgetfulness, reminiscent of a responsibility for a connection that no longer exists: "So than there were made grete festis unto kyngis and deukes, and revell, game, and play, and all maner of nobeles was used. And he that was curteyse, trew, and faythefull to hys frynde was that tyme cherysshed" (648/32-35). On the one hand, Malory gives us an image of solidarity as the social activities appear to reinvigorate the fellowship and the knights' love for one another. On the other hand there is the implicit suggestion that this fidelity that binds, a mutual commitment in which those who love are cherished in return, either no longer has meaning or will soon lose its capacity to hold people together. The force of a moment that perpetually traces both a connection and the disappearance of that moment is a defining characteristic of a site of memory. And for Malory, it is the unique relationship with time that occupies responsibility and the work of remembrance at these sites.

Responsibility shares with authentic memory a sense of continuity across time – it is committed to a past and it projects that commitment into the future. But with history it derives the sense that that to which one owes one's debt is "gone," and thus the obligation cannot be commuted. Responsibility does not correlate to a simple one-for-one resemblance; it is not an account in a ledger of debts. It is trans-economic, in the sense that one does not pay off one's

debt. It is both stabilizing and destabilizing, confirming an indelible relation and promising failure, especially as those who are capable of remembering inevitably die. And it is always bound up in loss and the will to remember, the very understanding of time as such. Nowhere is Malory more explicit in his efforts to grasp this conflict between remembering and forgetting than in books seven and eight; in particular, far from being an attempt to defer dealing with the problems suggested by "The Knight of the Cart," the "Great Tournament" episode's fascination with the duality of responsibility forms a thematic connection between "The Great Tournament" and "The Knight of the Cart," explored in the "May" passage as a conceit opposing old love to young love.

Malory's extended meditation on the ways in which love and memory are inseparably bound, the famed "May" passage, as critics have come to call it, is notable not just because it is an addition on Malory's part to his source. What stands out for most readers is the insight Malory seems to provide us on his own understanding of love. In the annals of Arthurian literature "The Knight of the Cart," originally written in the twelfth-century by Chrétien de Troyes, occupies a strategic and in some ways indomitable position. Anyone even remotely familiar with the Arthurian legend would have been aware of this story, since it introduces into the Arthurian history the central components of Lancelot's affair with Guinevere. While I am not here concerned with exploring Malory's construction of his version of "The Knight of the Cart," his addition of the "May" passage leading into the tale not only establishes a thematic connection with "The Great Tournament," but also it shows how Malory is attempting to deal with specific ethical as well as structural problems arising from the inclusion of "The Knight of the Cart." Malory did not need to include the tale. He could have left it out. He could have drastically emended it. He has shown himself willing, despite some anxiety, to alter tales to suit

his purpose. If his goal had been to simply propagandize or apologize for Lancelot's adulterous affair with Guinevere then there were easier options available to him. Instead, he includes a rather damning story, but with the inscription of important observations about love. Although the structural implications of Malory's defense of love are clear – by planting in the reader's mind an expectation that an unwavering love is the strongest expression of fidelity, Malory makes the audience more likely to accept Lancelot's devotion to Guinevere as a virtue rather than a sin – what is of equal importance is the emphasis Malory places on *time*. There are two points Malory makes in his speech on the significance of May for lovers on which we need to focus our attention. The first is that love is a responsibility that only has meaning because it is continuous. As Shakespeare will later say, "Love's not Time's fool"; and while Shakespeare may have been surreptitiously critiquing love, Malory is eminently serious in his appraisal that love is something that *resists* the collapse of memory. And is not resistance all that is left to the *lieux de mémoire*? Second, while highlighting the priority of love's ability to maintain a connection to something in spite of the instability of the world in which it finds itself, Malory also undermines this stability by pointing out that such love is no longer possible – it is a thing of a vanished world. We can look back and marvel, but we cannot participate.

Malory begins the "May" passage with a traditional encomium to the power of spring to inflame lovers with the growth of the verdant world: "And thus hit passed . . . that the moneth of May was com, when every lusty harte begynnyth to blossom and to burgyne. For, lyke as trees and erbys burgyneth and florysshyth in May, in lyke wyse every lusty harte that ys ony maner of lover spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and florysshyth in lusty dedis" (648/37-41). There is nothing unusual about this tribute to spring, and certainly Malory's primary audience would have been aware of the literary tradition to which it belonged. However, Malory then redirects the

expectations attendant on growth and exuberance to shift us away from generation to recollection. In other words, where we would expect a dedication to the flowering of young love, Malory completely undercuts this to emphasize *old* love: "for than all erbys and treys renewyth a man and woman, and in lyke wyse lovers callyth to their mynde olde jantylnes and olde servyse, and many kynde dedes that was forgotyn by negligence" (649/3-6). Thus the text invites us to re-evaluate love from the perspective of its ability to reconnect us with the past.

By now it should be clear that that is precisely what Malory had been after from the very start. While by this point he had lost his hope that the Arthurian heritage could offer his society the assurance of continuity, in his critique of love Malory recognizes that the only stability left in the relevance of the past, the only means of resisting the disintegration of a self atomized and divided in an unstable world is through the intimate, individual, and frankly mysterious machinery of love's will to remember. "For, lyke as winter rasure dothe allway arace and deface grene summer, so faryth hit by unstable love in man and woman, for in many persones there ys no stabylité . . . anone we shall deface and lay apart trew love" (649/7-10). Time, Malory indicates, destroys our commitments. It erases and defaces the wholeness of our summers with the winter's killing age. Just as it destroys the world, it breaks down the bonds that hold us together and it is our determination to stay committed to one another that grants us at least the grace of seeking redemption. This will to remember "olde jantylnes and olde servyse" coincides less with a vindication of Lancelot and Guinevere, and more perhaps with a plea for our sympathies; as Malory observes "all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver . . . that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefore she had a goode ende" (649/32-53). Reminding us that Guinevere understood that

the love inspired by May meant being true to a past shared with another, Malory builds the case that love is not simply desire, but rather the acceptance of responsibility.

In asking us to recall Guinevere, however, Malory is asking us to reflect on the fact that even a love like hers is lost to us. It belongs to another world. In effect, Malory subverts a common understanding of love in order to emphasize how far removed his audience is from an experience of an intimate connection that was once possible but is no longer so. It is not simply that the audience fails to be as authentic as its predecessors – they are different. One lives in a world where time necessarily interferes, and one's understanding of love is not shared with the past. For "modern" love is desire defined by instability: "nowadayes men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres" (649/22-23). Before we jump to the too hasty conclusion that Malory is saying merely that people in the past were patient and people now are impatient, we should bear in mind that the point of Malory's analysis had to do with the importance of remembrance. The point of separation for Malory is that the old love was embedded in maintaining bonds across time, in committing oneself to one's past. By contrast, the new love is defined by its pursuit of the moment, regardless of pleasure or grief. Sometimes hot, sometimes cold, it moves randomly with the conditions of one's emotions: "Wherefore I lykken love nowadayes unto sommer and winter: for, lyke as the tone ys colde and the othir is hote, so faryth love nowadayes" (649/30-33). Malory emphasizes the past and the present repeatedly – he multiplies "nowadayes" and notes that people understood love differently "in kynge Arthurs dayes" (649/29). The past does not coincide with the present; for every generation, for each new audience, the past is perpetually someone else's past. Lancelot and Guinevere's love may be a monument to devotion, but as such it speaks to us across the remoteness of its disappearance.

I want to conclude this analysis by looking at the way Malory locates in Lancelot's and Guinevere's parting the fullest expression of what I, in reflecting on sites of memory, identify as that vigilance that secretes the past within, and opposes it to, its own vanishing. Lancelot and Guinevere's love is the ultimate statement of an absolute commitment to wholeness (i.e. stability) but it is one that can never be fully redeemed. It is a commitment that is always in suspension. If anything can be said to lie at the heart of the burning desire for wholeness that drives the *Morte Darthur* it is the need for redemption. To be faithful to the past, to make what is lost present in its absence, is the closest we get to a redemptive meaning. Responsibility to what has gone, to what is no longer, is the will to remember, the determined attempt to stay connected to the past. But this effort is capable of change and of being forgotten; that is the ever-present danger. What this means for the *Morte* is that those locations in the text that reinforce the concept of obligation or duty point to the fixing in place of memory, even when those sites emphasize the failure to remember. Reminding us of what we have lost is obviously a way to remind us of our obligations; but more significantly, we cannot efface that loss. Grief, a refusal to let go, recognition of an incalculable debt that cannot, indeed *must not* be paid off – this is the necessary condition not only for closing the inaccessibility of what one has lost, but as well in crystallizing this absence. In short, for Malory the responsibility that maintains memory seized by history emerges in the act of an indelible mourning.

When the Round Table falls and the kingdom collapses, Malory does not end there. We follow Lancelot as he moves through the wasteland of the lost realm, trying to reconnect with a series of absences – Gawain's tomb, too late to grant forgiveness; Arthur's tomb, too late to ask forgiveness – until at last he finds his way to Guinevere in her nunnery. Here we might expect the reunited lovers, free of any impediments, to fall once and for all into the blissful arms of an

intimate union that will wash away the past and grant us, in the manner of all happy endings, the promise of a new future. Instead Malory, in keeping with his sources, denies to Guinevere and Lancelot the reconciliation that would make them whole, at least in the bonds of being committed solely to each other. Having tracked Guinevere down, Lancelot is brought before her and, before he can speak, Guinevere offers up a speech to the assembled ladies and her lover, in which she both takes the blame for the destruction of the Arthurian world and rejects Lancelot. In a profoundly emotional and beautiful statement, Guinevere lays out the conditions in which any act of memory will take place: "'Thorow thys same man and me hath all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the most nobelest knyghtes of the worlde'" (720/15-16). Setting aside the question of whether Guinevere is strictly accurate in her assessment of their complicity, her recognition that she and Lancelot bear a responsibility to those lost establishes the grounds for her rejection of Lancelot. Guinevere knows that as the survivors they have a responsibility never to efface their own connections to what has been lost, never to abandon the loss itself.

A less forgiving critic might see in Guinevere's actions the desperate retreat of a woman terrified of her sins. Certainly Malory's sources emphasize that the reason Lancelot and Guinevere enter their respective monasteries is out of fear for their souls; but Malory seems to suggest that their withdrawal is principally driven by love.[40] Guinevere's love of Arthur demands that she cannot be with Lancelot: "'for thorow oure love . . . ys my moste noble lorde slayne'" (720/16-17). Lancelot's love of Guinevere demands that he cannot simply forget her and go about his daily affairs. As Lancelot notes in his response to Guinevere's request that he return home and settle down with a nice wife, "'Nay, madame, wyte you well that shall I never do, for I shall never be so false unto you of that I have promysed'" (720/35-37). And an even less forgiving critic might accuse Guinevere of an outrageously pathetic act of self-promotion – a

sort of "too little too late" response. What, one might ask, is the point of rejecting your lover now that the harm has been done? But of course, therein lies the point that Guinevere seems implicitly to recognize – they don't get to be happy. Vinaver notes "There is no moral to be drawn from this, no comfort for those who live to see the Day of Destiny,"[41] and he is correct, at least in the sense that Malory relentlessly denies us a message of hope or a restoration of wrongs righted and evils punished. But perhaps what we can draw from the final partings, the lesson that we get from Malory, is that while the unity of authentic memory is in the end a failure, that does not absolve us of the demands that love places on us – particularly a love for the departed. To abandon responsibility would be to abandon memory for good. This is a line that Malory cannot cross, and in their commitment to what they have lost, Guinevere and Lancelot find, at least from Malory's perspective, the redemption that is all that remains of wholeness. This remainder, so it would seem, is the *Morte*'s redemption as well.

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[1] Scholars recognize that medieval authors and audiences shared a more open view of texts as emendable objects or conversations into which readers could insert themselves through commentary and notation. See, for example, Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 212-14) where she describes the production of Anselm's *Proslogion* as a "socialization" in which the author includes his audience's commentary as a necessary part of the work. But the fact that Malory insists on drawing attention to his emendations suggests that he was not comfortable with the changes, or at least that he felt insecure enough about whether audiences would be comfortable with the changes that he needed to invoke an authority.

[2] Huizinga's exact description is of a general air of pessimism afflicting the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries: "At the close of the Middle Ages, a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls. Whether we read a chronicle, a poem, a sermon, a legal document even, the same impression of immense sadness is produced by them all. It would sometimes seem as if this period had been particularly unhappy, as if it had left behind only the memory of violence, of covetousness and moral hatred, as if it had known no other enjoyment but that of intemperance, of pride and of cruelty . . . [I]n the fifteenth century . . . it was, so to say, bad form to praise the world and life openly" (*The Waning of the Middle Ages*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999, p. 22). See my chapter one for more details.

[3] While I have extensively covered the difference between memory and history in my previous chapters, I want to also note that Nora takes great pains to articulate not only what memory is, but how it has become transformed under the influence of historical modes of awareness, or as Nora refers to it "Memory seized by history." Nora's point is that we still utilize the term "memory" and we still employ it as a mode of awareness about our interactions

with the past, but "[w]hat we call memory today is . . . not memory but already history." Thus, while we still recognize memory's importance to our lived experience, we are, according to Nora, actually referring to an aspect of historical consciousness: "we should be aware of the difference between true memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions . . . and memory transformed by its passage through history . . . voluntary and deliberate, *experienced as a duty*, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective; but never social, collective, or all encompassing" ("Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, Berkley: University of California Press, Spring 1989, 7-24, p. 13, italics added).

[4] See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire": "Given to us as radically other, the past has become a world apart . . . it is difference that we are seeking" (p. 17). Also, Paul Ricoeur has a short but useful summarization (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 147-51) of the primary uses to which concepts of otherness and difference are put by historians.

[5] Nora, p. 19.

[6] As Nora emphasizes, "if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial … all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that lieux de memoire only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications" (p. 19).

[7] As Nora points out, "all *lieux de mémoire* are objects *mises en abîme*" (p. 20). Such objects, like the tales Malory drew on for the *Morte*, are at one time part of a collective memory; they speak to a community and reflect for that community its understanding of itself. But then these objects slip out of fashion, they no longer address or belong to a particular collective and they lose their importance. Then, one day, they are given new life by a new community of meaning, "once again [entering] the collective memory, a different one this time, but still capable of being forgotten and revived in the future" (Nora, p. 20).

[8] See Larry D. Benson (*Malory's Morte Darthur*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 225): "To the two episodes that he drew from the first part of the French [*Mort Artu*] – 'The Fair Maid of Astolat' and 'The Poisoned Apple' . . . – [Malory] adds 'The Great Tournament' (apparently his own invention), 'The Knight of the Cart' (drawn from the prose *Lancelot*), and 'The Healing of Sir Urry' (probably also his own invention)." See also R.M. Lumiansky ("'The Tale of Lancelot and Guenevere': Suspense,'" *Malory's Originality*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964, 205-32) for an analysis of the structural techniques and divisions that separate Malory from his sources.

[9] It should be noted that Malory gives us no indication that he conceived of the closing events of the *Morte* as separate books; what Vinaver calls books seven and eight are merely editorial divisions that are at times misleading. For example, calling book seven "The Book of Lancelot and Guinevere" fails to take account of the fact that book eight is itself bracketed by and invested in Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere. The Death of Arthur does not end with Arthur's death; its dénouement would seem to be Guinevere's closing rejection of Lancelot. It is not unreasonable to assume that Malory conceptualized the narrative following the Grail event as a bloc united within a movement from the return of Lancelot to the discovery of his affair with Guinevere to the fall of the Order and Lancelot and Guinevere's final parting.

[10] C. David Benson ("The Ending of the *Morte Darthur*," *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, Rochester, NY: D.S.Brewer, 1996, 221-38), for instance, notes that while the last sections of the Morte "form a discrete unit" heralding the end of the Round Table, the collection of tales Vinaver organized as book

seven are united in the purpose of establishing the grounds for book eight: "Whereas the final part is a continuous narrative of the fall itself, the penultimate one is composed of five separate narratives whose various events and settings prepare us for the fall. The penultimate part sums up the achievements and limitations of the Arthurian world in anticipation of its destruction" (p. 222).

[11] Cf. Felicity Riddy (*Sir Thomas Malory*, Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1987), who observes "The last two books – and particularly the final one – are about fracture, separation, and the dissolution of wholeness" (p. 140). Riddy's point is that the final unit of the <u>Morte</u> derives an effective sense of consistency between the relentless disintegration of the bonds holding the court together and the attempts to stave off that collapse as long as possible. As she notes, this "coherence" becomes most apparent "at the final point of collapse, as if the new form provides Malory with a means whereby the narrative itself *can hold disintegration at bay*" (p. 141, italics added).

[12] "'Now,' seyde the kynge, 'I am sure at this quest of the Sankegreall shall all ye of the Rownde Table departe, and nevyr shall I se you agayne holé todgydirs'" (Sir Thomas Malory, *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Eugène Vinaver, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 520/39-41).

[13] See Nora, p. 13. As Nora makes evident, the search for memory, or the quest to be reunited with a past, is an endeavor possessed and defined by the demands of historical consciousness: "What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history. The quest for memory is the search for one's history" (p. 13). Although Nora argues that this development in the relationship between history and memory has only come into its own in the modern age, even he recognizes that the struggle appears throughout tradition al attempts to record the past; with the adoption of "scientific methodology" the historian's attempts to formulate a critical or "true" past has only "intensified" since the nineteenth- century (p. 9).

[14] Elizabeth Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971, p. 123.

[15] "Though critics have often assumed that this tale functions as Malory's last fling with the glories of Arthuriana, his alterations in the sources and his two major additions, 'The Great Tournament' and 'The Healing of Sir Urry,' direct our attention instead to the flowering of those disruptive tendencies which emerged in Tales V and VI" (Pochoda, p. 123).

[16] See Benson, p. 225: "Most important, the world of Arthurian chivalry must be reestablished and its virtues reasserted. Earthly chivalry had been so debased in the *Queste* that we must again be brought to admire Arthur and Lancelot so that we can understand that the final catastrophe is tragic rather than merely retributive." Benson's point is that, rather than see the final tales as indicative of the failures of chivalry, we should see them as directing us away from the criticisms leveled in the Grail quest. The purpose of book seven is to show the central heroic figures as a culmination of the best the Round Table has to offer so that, when the fall comes, we experience it as a tremendous loss, not simply justice served.

[17] Riddy elucidates this point as well when she observes that the concerns of book seven are the concerns of people, and that the text is oriented around the interactions between members of a community: "After the *Sankgreal*, then, Book Seven re-establishes the ground of action as being the place where other people are, where their intentions collide as they love, quarrel, defend or betray one another, and the realistic mode both assumes and asserts its validity" (p. 144).

[18] See Eugène Vinaver, who claims that "Malory seems to find the evidence insufficient and brings in the Lady of the Lake to make the truth 'openly known'" (*Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, Note 620, p. 769).

[19] "[I]ndividual memory is nevertheless a part of an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over – to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu" (Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Ed. and Trans. Lewis A. Coster, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.53). Thus, memory is a process of making experience sensible by thinking about what has happened according to how others would perceive the event: "It means to perceive in what happens to us a particular application of facts concerning which social thought reminds us at every moment of the meaning and impact these facts have for it . . . we cannot consider them except from the outside – that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others – and that in order to retrieve these remembrances we must tread the same path that others would have followed had they been in our position" (p. 53).

[20] Qtd. in Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 183.

[21] Again, see Halbwachs, p. 53: "In this way, the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other."

[22] See Winter, p. 136, "They share the imprint of history on their lives, and act as kin do in other contexts. They endure together, they support each other, they quarrel, and they act together."

[23] It is, of course, entirely possible that one might counter this claim by noting a general sense of hypocrisy in the notion of chivalric violence as a means of keeping the peace. I would, however, posit this as the result of a long-standing humanist critique in which Malory would likely have had little faith. Regardless of its inherent flaws, Malory seems to at least desire for chivalry the capacity to overcome differences.

[24] Ricoeur has a definition for the ambiguousness of history's responsibilities that doubles as well to describe the conflict Malory is facing in his own struggles to accommodate history and memory: "History wants to be objective, and it cannot be. It wants to resuscitate and it can only reconstruct. It wants to make things contemporary, but at the same time, *it has to restore the distance and the depth of historical time that separates it from its object*" (qtd. in Jaques LeGoff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. p. 105, italics added).

[25] Jonah Lehrer, "When Memory Commits an Injustice," *The Wall Street Journal,* 13 April 2012, n.p., Web, italics added.

[26] One might note that this moment is retrospectively rendered suspicious when, in the episode "Slander and Strife" in book eight, we see Mador's name amongst those knights who dishonorably attempt to capture Lancelot with the queen (675/15).

[27] See Nora, p. 13: "Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image . . . The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs – hence the obsession with the archive." While Nora is primarily interested in what he sees as the wholesale consumption of memory that has taken place since the 19th century, the experience of a memory constrained by history can still be localized in specific moments informing any text that takes the past as its object.

[28] On the importance of the private-versus-public dialectic for medieval conceptualizations of the self: "the antagonism between the desires of the individual and the demands of society provided one of the great topics for literary exploration throughout the Middle Ages; it is hard, for example, to think of a medieval romance . . . that does not deal with just this topic . . . the dialectic between an inward subjectivity and an external world that alienates

it from both itself and its divine source provides the fundamental economy of the medieval idea of self-hood" (Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p. 9).

[29] Guinevere's concerns are corroborated when Malory observes that "many demed the quene wolde nat be there [at the tournament] because of sir Launcelot, for he wolde nat ryde with the kynge" (622/3-4).

[30] As Riddy observes, "Book Seven reestablishes the ground of action as the place where other people are" (144), meaning that the attention is not, like book six, on the individual alone, but the self in relation to others..

[31] Riddy, p. 144.

[32] Most critics will recall that Lancelot does indeed make the vow never to marry, but his reasons for doing so are not as straightforward as they might appear. In book three, "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," Lancelot encounters a damsel in the forest who offers to help him find adventure (156/29-38). After defeating the dreadful Sir Tarquin, Lancelot and the damsel are riding through the forest when she observes that "it is noysed that ye love Quene Gwenyvere, and that she hath ordeyned by enchauntemente that ye shall never love none other but hir" (160/40-2). To this Lancelot replies "I may nat warne peple to speke of me what hit pleasyth hem. But for to be a weddyd man, I thynke hit nat, for that I muste couche with hir and leve armys and turnamentis, batellys and adventures" (161/1-4). While Lancelot's claim for preserving his status as a knight errant seems in keeping with his character, the claim is also a handy cover for his love of Guinevere. Certainly his relationship with Guinevere is already a matter of gossip at the court and opens the possibility that Lancelot's vow, however well-intended, is circumspect.

[33] Of course, one might feel compelled to ask how Lancelot would justify this in terms of his own adultery with Guinevere. But then, the text is very ambiguous about the nature of Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere.

[34] See Eugène Vinaver, Commentary to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, vol. III, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 1604, n. 1092.

[35] See Vinaver, Commentary to *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, vol. III, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 1591.

[36] See Vinaver's Notes on "The Tale of the Death of King Arthur" (Sir Thomas Malory, *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Eugène Vinaver, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 773) for a concise description of the way Malory interprets the forces breaking apart the fellowship as a series of divided loyalties.

[37] "Than quene Gwenyver sente for sir Launcelot and seyd thus: 'I warne you that ye ryde no more in no justis nor turnementis but that youre kynnesman may know you, and at thys justis . . . ye shall have of me a slyeve of golde . . . 'I charge you, as ye woll have my love, that ye warne your kynnesmen that ye woll beare that day the slyve of golde uppon your helmet'" (642/34-40).

[38] Gilson, p. 57.

[39] On more than one occasion, critics have observed that Gareth is something of an odd-man-out in the history of Arthurian literature. While technically a member of the court, Gareth is seldom there. He frequently doesn't attend court functions and is often absent from tournaments. Gareth seems to prefer life away from court. This is sometimes attributed to his domesticity and desire to be near his wife; but it can just as easily be seen as a veiled rejection of courtly life and the people who make up that world. Certainly Malory makes it clear that Gareth doesn't approve of his brothers and consistently tries to distance himself from them.

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[40] See Vinaver's Notes on "The Tale of the Death of King Arthur" (*Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., p. 773) for a comparison of Malory's adjustments to his sources in dealing with Lancelot and Guinevere's parting.

[41] See Vinaver's Notes on "The Tale of the Death of King Arthur," *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed., p. 774.

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ABSTRACT

CHIVALRIC LIEUX DE MEMOIRE: NOSTALGIA, COMMUNAL MEMORY, AND THE BURDEN OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SIR THOMAS MALORY'S MORTE DARTHUR

by

WILKIE COLLINS

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Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Sklar

Major: English

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation attempts to position Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* as a response to the anxieties of a turbulent social period. To start, I establish the political and social climate of fifteenth-century England, drawing on the work of historians to demonstrate the disequilibrium of communal institutions, particularly during the Wars of the Roses. Utilizing the work of Johan Huizinga I argue that the troubling political atmosphere of the period in question contributes to, and is reflected in, Malory's exploration of a narrative tradition that no longer maintains an authentic continuity to the past. Drawing on Pierre Nora's theoretical opposition between memory and history, I demonstrate how political instability and social change are accelerating a process whereby historical consciousness is replacing authentic memory, and it is this dynamic that energizes the *Morte*. Through close reading of the text, I argue that Malory turns nostalgically to the past in order to resist the corrosive influence of historical isolation, only to discover that his desire to resuscitate the past must acknowledge the fact that the past is lost.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Wilkie Collins attended Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, where he earned both his B.A. and M.A. in English literature. Shortly after graduating, he moved to Germany. When he returned to Michigan he began teaching at Oakland Community College. Following his interests in Medieval and early modern literature, he decided to pursue his Ph.D. Receiving a Rumble Fellowship he joined Wayne State University, where he earned his Ph.D. in English. His work focuses on the historical and cultural forces shaping the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with an emphasis on the fifteenth-century, the cusp of the turn to the early modern period.