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"REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS"

The Chronology of Camelot in *Le Morte d'Artur*

Elizabeth McIntosh

Thomas Malory closes the account of King Arthur's death by giving the inscription on his tomb: "Rex quondam rexque futurus" (517). This phrase has figured prominently in Arthurian legend—in use as early as 1125; it surfaces in medieval and modern tellings alike, notably furnishing the title for T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (Lacy 381). Though so often parroted, the epitaph is infrequently analyzed. However, this epitaph deserves closer examination since it establishes Arthur's past and future, but completely ignores his present, and it even inscribes Arthur in a chronology that has abandoned linear time for a cyclical alternative, while simultaneously creating a King who never reigns uniquely in the present moment. Of course, taken alone, the inscription is merely an interesting descriptor. Read, however, within the total context of *Le Morte d'Artur*, "rex quondam rexque futurus" assumes a special significance. It becomes indicative of larger narrative trends, a kind of motto for the chronology of Camelot. Examining the peculiar qualities of time in *Le Morte d'Artur*, this paper will argue that the work employs a multi-temporal narrative structure—that is, a structure in which a character's past, present, and future coexist. It will explore examples of this chronology on a textual level, noting particularly the role of rhetorical device, prophesy, supernatural

objects, and dreams. Extensively unpacking these mechanisms of temporality, it will then assign them a fuller meaning within the context of Malory's total project. Finally, using passages from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* as a lens through which to interpret the chronological construction of the work, the paper will suggest that the unique temporality of *Le Morte* creates coherence in a chaotic text.

A Prophetic Text: Prolepsis and Analepsis

The epitaph “*rex quondam rexque futurus*” employs two rhetorical devices, prolepsis and analepsis. Prolepsis describes the assumption of Arthur's return, and analepsis, the past fact of his reign. These devices, which would typically achieve contradictory effects, work to confound the reader's experience of narrative chronology. The phrase asks the reader to inhabit two times simultaneously, yet, more confusing still, neither of these moments occurs in the present. This is not a unique sentence construction in *Le Morte*, for Malory often introduces characters with such descriptions.

One such moment occurs in Book I when Arthur meets King Pellinore questing in the wood. Having exhausted his own horse, Pellinore asks to borrow Arthur's steed, and Malory follows this request immediately with a sentence summarizing Pellinore's entire life: “His name was King Pellinore that that time followed the Questing Beast, and after his death Sir Palomides followed it” (22). Apparently, Pellinore exists simultaneously in the past and the future, or, that is to say, the text presents the major facts of his life without concern for chronological disruption; it is of little importance that the present and future coexist, for the essential facts of Pellinore's identity exist outside of the present. Like Arthur, who embodies “*rex quondam rexque futurus*,” Pellinore is a character whose whole history unfolds all at once. This history of Pellinore's also engages strangely with time when it predicts the outcome of his quest, and then follows that quest as it becomes the errand of other knights. In a sense, the text prophesies its own conclusion, rejecting a linear representation of time for a complex chronology of interrelation.

This sentence-level chronology surfaces in Malory's introductions of other characters as well. After Arthur returns from his coronation in Rome, many

knights present themselves at Camelot, and the first among these warriors is Sir Lancelot du Lake. By prefacing Lancelot's adventures as a knight of the Round Table, the text does not limit itself to Lancelot's past and present but also focuses on his future. Readers learn within the first paragraph of the "Noble Tale" that "in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms . . . he passed all other knights . . . wherefore Queen Guenivere had him in great favour above all other knights, and so he loved the Queen again above all other ladies all the days of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry" (Malory 95). The sentence thoroughly rehearses Lancelot's prospects and gives readers a lens with which to interpret all of his future deeds, for we, as readers, never fear that he will succumb to a temptress, or doubt his courage in seeking adventure. But this prolepsis also augurs more sinister events. Even in this great moment of flourishing, when Knights pledge themselves by the hundreds to chivalrous service, collapse haunts Camelot. Consequently, the future influences the reading of the present, inviting readers both to make early judgments about the characters they encounter and to wonder about the unlikely fates assigned to these men and this woman.

Lancelot and Guenivere are not the only "multi-temporal" lovers of *Le Morte*; the text introduces the romance between Sir Tristram and La Belle Isolde by simply suggesting its conclusion: making "good cheer" one night, "either drank to other freely . . . and they loved each other so well that never their love departed, for weal nor for woe . . . and thus it happened first the love betwixt Sir Tristram and La Belle Isolde, the which never departed all the days of their life" (Malory 195). Here, Malory insists on the endurance of the couple's love not once, but twice. Isolde and Tristram will love each other until the day they die, and this unassailable fact about the future informs the reader's experience of their entire romance. Like Lancelot and Guenivere, the couple becomes timeless; they live in a world where the future exists alongside the present.

Similarly, we can see that this same type of sentence-level prophecy treats events, just as it does characters. After Balin wounds King Pellam, Malory ruptures the present action of the narrative to tell us that "King Pellam lay many years sore wounded, and might never be whole till that Galahad the haut prince healed him in the quest of the Sangrail" (Malory 45). This particular prolepsis appears in the "Tale of Balin and Balan" long before readers meet the full complement of Arthur's court. Lancelot has yet to enter *Le Morte* and his son, Galahad "the haut prince" has not been conceived. In short, this scene forecasts the grail quest before its major players have even been introduced. In dealing

with the Sangrail, *Le Morte* looks not only to the future but also to the past. Five books after the “Tale of Balin and Balan,” Galahad is following rumors of the Sangrail from court to court when he happens on a city tyrannized by seven brothers. Here, a priest gives Galahad a prophecy made by the daughter of the city’s duke to the seven brothers: “Ye have done great wrong to slay my father and my brother . . . ye shall not hold this castle for many years, for by one knight ye shall all be overcome.” The priest concludes, “Thus she prophesied seven years ago” (Malory 325). This analeptic construction recalls a moment occurring after the “Tale of Balin and Balan” but before Galahad arrives at Camelot. More than any other sequence in *Le Morte*, the “Tale of the Sangrail” constantly connects episodes, disregarding the laws of time in order to construct a narrative that reflects both forward and backward on itself.

Real Prophecy

If these proleptic and analeptic portions of text confuse Camelot’s chronology, then real prophecies disrupt the court’s temporality entirely. One scholar estimates that *Le Morte*’s first book alone contains 55 prophecies (Kapelle 69), and thus so saturated with future events, the present seems to coexist with its subsequent results. In places within *Le Morte*, time conflates entirely. One such moment occurs just after Arthur’s encounter with King Pellinore, during which, “like a child of fourteen years of age,” Merlin comes to Arthur and, beginning an extended prophecy, exclaims, “I know what thou art, and who was thy father, and of whom thou were begotten; for King Uther was thy father, and begot thee on Igraine” (Malory 22). Arthur reacts badly to this announcement, responding, “I will not believe thee . . . for thou art not so old of years to know my father” (Malory 23). In many ways, this exchange epitomizes the complicated temporality of *Le Morte*. Opposite a youth with pretensions to the knowledge of old age, Arthur faces the non-linear chronology of his world, and like a reader questioning the meaning of a textural “flashback” (an analeptic sentence), Arthur asks how the past fact of his conception could present itself now in the form of a boy younger than himself.

Discouraged by Arthur’s reaction, Merlin returns a moment later “in the likeness of an old man of fourscore years of age,” to finish the prophecy. He warns Arthur: “ye have done a thing late that God is displeased with you, for ye have lain by your sister, and on her ye have begotten a child that shall destroy

you and all the knights of your realm” (Malory 23). Merlin predicts Camelot’s collapse before its formation—unmarried in this scene, Arthur lacks even the Round Table that will embody his chivalric fellowship. From a man who can be at once young and old, Arthur learns the facts of both his birth and death; knowing these details, he confronts a chronology that is more cyclical than linear.

In such an organization, Merlin’s knowledge of the future gives him the power to shape the present. Through his prophesy, he claims a kind of authorial omniscience, and so like an author, he instigates events, explores their causes, and knows their outcomes. During Arthur’s battle with King Nero, Merlin holds “[King Lot] with a tale of prophecy, till Nero and his people were destroyed,” which exemplifies the influence of the future over the present in Malory’s work. Captivated by stories of events still distant, King Lot forgets about the war that rages around him, and, as a result, Arthur wins a battle he would have otherwise lost. It is a mark of the future’s importance to characters in *Le Morte* that King Lot overlooks his duties to listen to Merlin. Lot later confesses himself “ashamed . . . for this faitor with his prophecy hath mocked me” (Malory 40), and while describing Merlin as a “faitor,” or imposter, Lot recognizes he has been tempted in the present by a false future. In other words, Merlin has lied to Lot and given him a prediction that will never come to pass. By doing so, Merlin uses true foreknowledge to secure Arthur’s success and false foreknowledge to ensure Lot’s failure.

In addition to Merlin, many other characters in *Le Morte d’Artur* prophesy: holy men, hermits, damsels and witches who all occasionally see the shape of things to come. However, readers expect the foresight of these supernaturally skilled men and women because their abilities align with the cyclical model of time proposed above. Thus, more remarkably, regular couriers also predict the future. Consoling La Belle Isolde after Tristram’s marriage to another woman, Guenivere tells Isolde that she “[shall] have joy after sorrow,” writing, “He shall hate her and love you better than ever he did” (Malory 208). Guinevere’s assertion arguably exceeds the terms of feminine intuition addressed, as it is, toward Tristram’s new wife, a woman the Queen has never met. King Pellès displays a similar prescience when he knows “well that Sir Lancelot should beget a pucel upon his daughter, which should be called Sir Galahad . . . and by him the Holy Grail should be achieved” (Malory 283). This knowledge surpasses any human intuition in its specificity, for Arthur and Lancelot also foresee precise details of the Quest of the Sangrail. In fact, Lancelot predicts the exact date on which

the quest will begin (Malory 308), and Arthur calculates that the endeavor will take the lives of many of his best knights (Malory 318). Bliss characterizes these predictions as “places where prophecy proper blurs at its edges,” and she highlights the difficulty of determining whether they stem from natural, or supernatural impulses (Bliss 7); thus Bliss rightly notes the obscure distinction between prophecy and intuition—the two conflate completely in the world of *Le Morte*. This overlap indicates the looseness of Camelot’s chronology. In a narrative that gives the past, present and future simultaneously, regular men and women possess extraordinary prescience, and so they therefore participate in the temporality of their story.

But the characters also practice another sort of quasi-prophecy by including the phrase, “Ye shall see.” When Merlin says that Uther “shall have his intent and desire,” he could be either prophesying or planning; perhaps he is doing both (Malory 4). However, Merlin warns Arthur not to joust with King Pellinore, explaining, “Ye shall see that day in short space that ye shall be right glad to give him your sister to wed for his good service” (Malory 30). This phrase could reflect the thinking of either a political strategist or a prophet—perhaps Merlin makes no distinction between the roles. The knights of Camelot actually often employ the same phrase during tournaments in order to forecast the outcome of a particular match. During one example of such a forecast, discussing Sir Gaheris’s prospects with Arthur, Lancelot says, “Ye shall see him do marvelously” (Malory 263). Similarly, in another example, Tristram predicts, “Ye shall if that I enforce myself, that the noise shall be left that is now upon him” (Malory 264). Thus, from these two examples, far from being an idle boast, the expression “ye shall see,” appears only with reference to sure outcomes since Arthur’s knights accurately judge skill at arms through combat experience; however, their precise knowledge of tournament results may actually also stem from their loose placement in a legible chronology. In conclusion, the tense’s usual sense is called into question by the multiple temporalities of the text in which it appears.

Prophetic Objects

We’ve seen how *Le Morte Darthur* engages with time through prophecy and rhetorical device; however, it also does so through a number of remarkable objects—the most notable of these being the Round Table that King

Lodegreance gives Arthur as Guenivere's dowry. The chairs of this magic table give the names of Camelot's current knights and, more interestingly, the names of knights still to come. When Tristram arrives at Camelot for this first time, "the King [sees] . . . letters that sa[y], 'This is the siege of the noble knight Sir Tristram.' And then King Arthur ma[kes] Sir Tristram a Knight of the Round Table" (Malory 232). Predicting the future, the Round Table shapes the present, for it gives Arthur confidence in his decision to knight Tristram, confirming and sanctioning his current plans through physical assertion of their future realization. In addition, the table changes to reflect the changing future it represents. Returning from services one Pentecost, Arthur and his knights enter the hall and discover fresh inscriptions: "Four hundred winters and four fifty accomplished after the Passion of Our Lord Jesu Christ ought this siege to be fulfilled" (Malory 311). Later on during the feast, Galahad arrives at Camelot, announces his intention to follow the Grail quest, and, as predicted, fills the Siege Perilous. Even as it disrupts the laws of linear time, the table also situates Camelot in a historical chronology, for it is the only moment in *Le Morte* that dates Arthur's reign relative to real events. As a 5th century king, Arthur rules, nevertheless, in a world without linear time.

Other objects in *Le Morte* also exhibit certain prophetic qualities, such as several swords that identify the knight who will wield them. For example, Arthur wins his kingdom when he finds a sword that reads: "whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all of England" (Malory 8). Like Tristram's seat, Arthur's sword both predicts and makes possible his kingship; it presages his rule at the same exact time that it endorses it. Yet another example of this is when Galahad reveals himself as the Grail knight once he retrieves a sword with an inscription that has been reserving it for the use of the "best knight in the world" (Malory 312). One last example that does not actually include a sword is when, visiting King Pellas, Lancelot discovers a tomb that predicts: "Here shall come a leopard of kings' blood, and he shall slay this serpent; and this leopard shall engender a lion in this foreign country, which lion shall pass all other knights" (Malory 282). Readers can readily interpret the symbolism of this passage—Lancelot is the leopard who slays the serpent and fathers the lion, Galahad—because although this passage appears in the middle of *Le Morte*, the future events it describes have already been rehearsed in previous prophecies. Therefore, it is a mark of the looseness of the work's chronology that readers can identify characters they have yet to meet.

Objects, then, join with characters in anticipating the future and remembering the past, for they partake in Le Morte's cyclical vision of Arthurian history.

Dreams

Many characters dream (though this is not a phenomenon limited to the supernaturally gifted), but Arthur's dreams in particular influence the way time unfolds in *Le Morte*. Immediately after he fathers Mordred with his half-sister, Arthur dreams of a "land of griffins and serpents, and he thought they burnt and slew all the people in the land; and then he thought he fought with them and they did him great harm and wounded him full sore, but at the last he slew them" (Malory 21). Like the beasts on the tomb found by Lancelot, the griffins and serpents of Arthur's vision clearly signify the armies that Mordred will raise against his father. This dream, following so closely on Mordred's conception, explores the consequences of the King's sin before he knows he has committed it. The dream seamlessly bridges past and present to show relationships between actions and their results.

Much later, just before the fateful battle with Mordred, Arthur has another dream. Sleeping, he dreams "that he sat on upon a chaftlet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made." Strangely, Arthur dissociates himself from the King of his dream; he does not say, "I sat in the richest cloth of gold." From this distanced perspective, he surveys the totality of his life, not in the mortal manner proposed by Boethius, but rather in its divinely omniscient opposite. "Under him, far from him," the King notices "a hideous deep black water, and therein was all manner of serpents and worms and wild beasts, foul and horrible. And suddenly the King thought that the wheel turned upside down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb" (Malory 510). This disturbing image reprises a popular medieval metaphor for Fortune, which was also first conceived in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. In this metaphor, during her visit to Boethius in his prison, Fortune explains, "Inconstancy is my very essence; it is the game I never cease to play as I turn my wheel in its ever changing circle, filled with joy as I bring the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top" (Boethius 25). Arthur then watches the future decrease of his fortunes, as he looks back on past moments of kingly glory, all while he sleeps through his final night on Earth in the present.

Further pieces of evidence complicate this first, obvious interpretation. For example, Arthur envisions a cyclical imagery for the chronology of his life, and since a turning wheel suggests the possibility of regeneration and return, Arthur's vision signifies that, although now low, he may once again rise high. After all, he is the "rex quondam rexque futurus." Thus, inscribed in a cyclical temporality, Arthur takes part in an eternal vision of time. Dissociated from himself, he enjoys the kind of atemporal omniscience Boethius describes when he explains, "What may properly be said to be eternal . . . lacks nothing of the future and has lost nothing of the past" (134). Like God, Arthur comprehends his past, present, and future simultaneously, but Malory and readers enjoy this same perspective, when, surveying the many prophecies of *Le Morte* in all their forms, they understand the work in its total temporality. Therefore, this dream serves as a metaphor not only for the chronology of Camelot, but also for the experience of the reader and author.

Timeless Ideals

Malory's interest in chivalric ideals may also be an important cause of the timeless quality of *Le Morte d'Artur*. Critic Jane Gilbert astutely observes that "the Arthurian scene is never now," but rather, "its chivalry always lies in a past discontinuous from the present or in some fantastical elsewhere, contemplated at a distance by a consciously 'modern' commentator" (155). This is not exactly the summation of time proposed above; Gilbert does not explicitly suggest that the reader surveys Malory's project from a multi-temporal perspective. Instead, she recognizes that, in the process of articulating chivalric ideals, Malory creates a world out of time—a place lacking a clear chronological situation, which captures something of Malory's present and also something of the history he's recounting. Gilbert insightfully recognizes distance between the reader and the events of the narrative (155–167), which occurs when the reader comprehends *Le Morte* from a Godlike temporality and creates moral patterns from on high. In other words, *Le Morte*'s function as a kind of fable elevates the reader to a position from which he can discern the 15th century political and social ideals in which Malory interests himself. The following sections of the paper will explore the significance of such a perspective.

Why This Chronology?

We have seen how Malory interrupts the linear progression of time to flash forward and backward through his narrative. Through proleptic and analeptic descriptions, his text exits a traditional chronology to give context to a character or episode. Merlin's prophecies conflate the past, present, and future of *Le Morte*. Speaking with prophetic certainty about the outcome of future events, regular men and women show their awareness of this simultaneous vision of time, for even the everyday objects of courtly life manifest the exigencies of *Le Morte's* particular temporality as they anticipate the adventures of their future owners. Arthur's dreams, occurring at the beginning and end of the work, reinforce this cyclical temporality while also predicting the future and rehearsing the past. Finally, we've seen how Malory's commitment to a moral message elevates the reader's perspective to the point where he can discern the larger ethical movements of the text. The reader then enjoys a privileged view of Arthurian history; *Le Morte's* narrative places author and audience in role of divine witness. We will now concern ourselves with the reasons for this multi-temporal construction, asking why it appealed to Malory and how it engages the particular challenges of the Arthurian project.

Many scholars note a certain amount of "randomness" in the organization and presentation of events in *Le Morte d'Artur* (Kapelle 75 and Bliss 1). Characters ride in and out of the narrative, seemingly without reason, while simultaneously beginning quests that lack conclusions and forming fellowships with knights they do not know. One suspects that the recurrent randomness of the narrative results from its conception as an interpretive project that synthesizes many sources to fashion a foundational account of Arthur's history. In her article, "Back to the Future: Malory's Genres," Ruth Morse explains that Malory "amalgamated, compressed, and reinterpreted a series of already-existing tales, an epic, a history, a long prose fiction, a novel, a redaction of French sources, a romance, a tragedy [and] a translation"(100). Malory often concludes an adventure with something like, "Here endeth this tale, as the French book saith," as if to cite his source and draw upon its corroborative authority (81). Of course, this French book means not one text but a variety of earlier medieval romances, and Malory actually drew from a host of English sources as well. In fact, at the time, he was writing in 1460 when tales of Camelot appeared in languages ranging from Norse to Hebrew and Portuguese (Cooper viii). Caxton himself remarks that "Arthur is spoken of beyond the sea," where "books made

of his noble acts . . . be . . . in Dutch, Italian, Spanish [and] French” (Malory 529). This is not to say that Malory used or even knew of all these texts, but only to show that a terrific variety of sources were available to him. Naturally, these sources contain conflicting descriptions of events and characters; moreover, the different genres reprise Arthur’s story with very different aims. No single telling presents exactly the same set of stories that Malory does, so he’s clearly interpreted and integrated a variety of Arthurian accounts.

Much of the seeming “randomness” of the text stems from this integration of accounts. In her introduction to *Le Morte*, Helen Cooper suggests that Gawain’s unpredictable personality results from the blending of French and English sources. For example, although the hero of English verse, Gawain also appears the “antitype of knightliness” in the French prose *Tristan*, and so his character in Malory’s *Le Morte d’Artur* varies from scene to scene, according to the source interesting Malory at the time (Cooper xvi). Thus, Gawain’s actions appear like those of two, or even three, different characters; though sometimes chivalrous and noble, Gawain can also be vengeful, dishonest, and unruly. In the end, his fluctuating conduct makes him a difficult man to trace throughout the narrative.

Therefore, one of the greatest challenges of Malory’s project is to create coherence from chaos. In her article “Prophecy in the *Morte Darthur*,” Jane Bliss discusses the role of cyclical organization in this attempt, stating “readers and critics want to find unity in Malory’s work, partly because it is a ‘brief prose cycle’ whose tragic ending is clearly signaled by prophesy near the beginning. In this it is like a single-cut from a fall-of-Britain history, predicting and mirroring nothing but itself” (3). Thus, Bliss proposes that prophecy creates a temporality in which the past predicts the future and the future reflects the past. She rightly suggests that this structure gives a kind of unity to the work; jumping forward and backward in time, readers perceive relationships between characters and events that might have otherwise remained obscure.

The multi-temporal narrative serves Malory well in this endeavor because it allows him to present a character’s entire story at once, revealing the consequences of an apparently senseless episode. For example, during the wedding celebration of Arthur and Guenivere, a white hart enters the great hall, leading a whole hunting party, complete with dogs and a lady on a white palfrey. Initially causing great havoc among the plates of feasting knights, the hart suddenly disappears from the narrative. Apparently without reason, a knight steals the hunting dog of the lady on the white palfrey and departs from the hall

(Malory 54–55). None of the actors in the scene appear in later moments in *Le Morte*, and so readers naturally might wonder, Who are these characters, and why are they significant? As in so many already-mentioned instances, Merlin’s omniscience gives significance to these events, framing them in a broader context while also motivating Arthur to lead the Pentecost chivalry oath (Malory 57). For “Merlin did make King Arthur that Sir Gawain was sworn to tell of his adventure, and how he slew the lady, and how he would give no mercy unto the knight” (Malory 56). Merlin’s compulsion offers the offense requisite to inspire an explicit statement of Arthurian chivalric code. In this way, prophetic vision transforms a random narrative thread into the inspiration for Camelot’s foundational vision of knighthood, and a seemingly incidental detail becomes an important piece of the text’s total pattern.

Noticing such episodes, critics Jane Bliss and Rachel Kapelle both propose that Malory uses prophecy to probe the relationships between events in a chaotic narrative. They see prophecy as a means by which they can elicit meaning from a superficially random text; as in the case of the white hart, prophecy allows readers access to “the inner workings of a narrative world” by situating a portion of text in a broader context (Kapelle 59). But this paper has shown that prophecy is not the only means by which Malory provides his readers with a broader view of events because we’ve seen, for example, that mundane objects like swords and tombs may also contribute to this multi-temporal perspective. Similarly, character’s dreams and speech patterns do, too. Even certain rhetorical constructions allow readers to simultaneously glimpse past, present, and future. This “prophetic effect” is then a much more pervasive phenomenon than either Bliss or Kapelle suspect—its truly encompassing scope allows readers to escape the limited perspective of linear and mortal time and to instead glimpse the broader narrative significance of events in every aspect of their encounter with the text.

In other words, Malory, his readers, and even sometimes his characters, witness the Christian cause-and-effect logic of the Arthurian world. Our “encompassing vision” affords us the distanced perspective crucial to understanding the reasonable relationships between events, as they unfold according to Christian moral logic. Arthur, for example, falls at the hand of the son he incestuously engendered; Lancelot fails during the Grail Quest as a result of his adulterous affair with Queen Guenivere; and Galahad takes the Grail to heaven because God ordains that he should. From the viewpoint of a divine observer, the relations of action and result crystallize into several general categories:

events result from divine will, human impulse, or chance; sometimes it is a combination of the three. Interestingly, Boethius proposes a similar theory of cause and effect in his *Consolation of Philosophy*:

If Providence sees something as present, it is necessary for it to happen, even though it has no necessity in its own nature. God sees those future events which happen of free will as present events, so that these things when considered with reference to God's sight of them do happen necessarily as a result of the condition of divine knowledge; but when considered as themselves they do not lose the absolute freedom of their nature. (136)

Thus, Boethius suggests that free will and Divine foreknowledge compatibly coexist. Perceiving the broad patterns of human life, God determines the outcome of events without depriving men of freedom of choice. Events may seem random to mortals inscribed in linear time because divine time alone possess the perspective required to discern over-arching meaning. The patterns of life require from their interpreters a simultaneous comprehension of past, present, and future. Malory appropriates this model in order to give coherence to a complicated and chaotic narrative; he and his reader become like God in their comprehension of narrative relationships.

Conclusion

Le Morte d'Artur tells a history that transcends the timeline. Treating past, present, and future simultaneously, Malory weaves a coherent history from a diversity of conflicting sources. In his preface, Caxton instructs, "Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown" (Malory 530). He has interpreted the moral implications of *Le Morte's* multi-temporal structure and enjoins his readers to take advantage of their divine perspective and learn about the cause-and-effect morality that governs the Christian life. Surveying the rich tapestry of Malory's text, readers discern moral patterns of cause and effect as they emerge in the diverse relations between events and characters. In short, *Le Morte d'Artur's* complicated chronology is not utilized simply for organizational purposes; instead, it also allows the book to participate in the wider Christian moral tradition defined by scholars like Boethius. Understanding the profound ethical patterns of the narrative, readers may more readily interpret events within their own lives.

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