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Reducing the Round Table: Visual and Textual Narrative Redaction in Medieval Arthurian Romance

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Abstract
In a powerful image in an illustrated manuscript of La Mort le Roi Artu, King Arthur sits atop the Wheel of Fortune as three other figures cling to the wheel below him. The image -like the ominous dream that inspires it- perfectly captures King Arthur’s liminal status as he transitions from a powerful monarch leading a strong coalition of knights to an enfeebled leader attempting to hold together an increasingly fragmented alliance. The image is evocative of the Round Table itself, where Arthur would be seated at the center with his knights spread out on either side of him in the ultimate embodiment of egalitarian rule. In this context, however, the Round Table is pitched on its side to become the Wheel of Fortune, with men desperately grasping the sides rather than stoically seated around it. King Arthur, perched atop the wheel, occupies a precarious position, waiting to be pitched from the wheel at the whim of the female representation of Fortune, who stands at the center of the image.

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Reducing the Round Table:
Visual and Textual Narrative Redaction in Medieval Arthurian Romance

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In a powerful image in an illustrated manuscript of *La Mort le Roi Artu*, King Arthur sits atop the Wheel of Fortune as three other figures cling to the wheel below him. The image — like the ominous dream that inspires it — perfectly captures King Arthur’s liminal status as he transitions from a powerful monarch leading a strong coalition of knights to an enfeebled leader attempting to hold together an increasingly fragmented alliance. The image is evocative of the Round Table itself, where Arthur would be seated at the center with his knights spread out on either side of him in the ultimate embodiment of egalitarian rule. In this context, however, the Round Table is pitched on its side to become the Wheel of Fortune, with men desperately grasping the sides rather than stoically seated around it. King Arthur, perched atop the wheel, occupies a precarious position, waiting to be pitched from the wheel at the whim of the female representation of Fortune, who stands at the center of the image.

This miniature demonstrates the powerful position that images occupy in manuscripts containing Sir Thomas Malory’s source material for *Le Morte Darthur*. In the manuscript, the illustration anticipates the scene it describes, in which Arthur envisions his clash with Fortune in a portentous dream. The image is a harbinger of future events while hearkening to the past, as it looks ahead to Arthur’s eventual downfall while recalling a time of unity and stability with its evocation of the Round Table. The image encapsulates the conflict and turmoil in the *Mort le Roi Artu*: King Arthur is simultaneously a ruler and the ruled, in command of a once strong coalition of knights yet the subject of Fortune, his reign characterized by legendary unity and an equally notorious disintegration.

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1 MS Addl. 10294. British Lib., London. Fol. 89r.
ne le roy artu outre

Re dist li contes que quit l'rois artus sen su partis del cors mon seigni s' quil ot guste vers la cite de camalot. Al son convint
In this paper, I will discuss the function of images throughout manuscripts that contain source material for Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* in order to examine the impact that such images might have had on Malory's editorial technique as he compressed several works of Arthurian legend into a single volume that still serves as the ultimate English source of Arthurian tales. Images in manuscripts have the ability to transcend the temporal narrative, as above, recalling past actions while foreshadowing events to come. As an integral element of the manuscripts they occupy, miniatures help to frame the textual narrative and guide a reader through the text, highlighting significant events and characters and assisting the reader in remembering key events so that she might read the text before her in a particular context.

Sir Thomas Malory, who completed *Le Morte Darthur* between 1469-70,\(^2\) was himself preoccupied with performing many of the same functions during the course of compressing and adapting his source material for a fifteenth-century audience. In fact, the similarities between Malory's work and the editorial functions of images within manuscripts highlight some of the challenges that Malory and his contemporaries experienced when reading the texts that comprised his source material. He combines events and characters in order to simplify the plot and work out the complexities of interlaced narrative. In order to ensure narrative continuity in his work — a patchwork of Arthurian source material — Malory adds explanatory passages and character description to texts, alters the order of narrative and supplements his sources with transition passages. Each of these techniques — like the images in manuscripts — results in a more readable text infused with forward momentum and narrative continuity. While Malory embosses the text with his own style and

alters his sources to adapt to a continuous storyline that he maintains throughout his *Le Morte Darthur*, his work as editor remains grounded in much of the same work as images in his source texts.

At the same time, however, the differences between Malory’s work as editor and the function that images in source manuscripts perform can provide us with just as much insight into Malory’s process. Miniatures, when placed within texts, call attention to the same interruptions that Malory smooths over in his work; they underline the complexities of Old French romance rather than reducing them. Mallory must thus work against the function of images in some instances, though he can use some of the same attributes of miniatures in order to achieve his own narrative goals. He draws upon the mnemonic function of images to turn these interruptions into effortless transitions in his own work, reducing the plot tangle of his source texts into the more straightforward plot line of *Le Morte Darthur*.

Similarly, images work against Malory’s cohesive narrative that incorporates a vast array of Arthurian material in one volume. Images complement the texts they accompany by highlighting significant actions, characters and places — and what is important to one tale may be insignificant to others. Thus, while images perform a local function, elaborating on the principal textual elements of a specific tale, Malory’s mission is more global. In his work as editor, Malory must work to overcome the predominance of certain elements in particular tales, and any knowledge of programs of illustration would help guide him through the text as he attempts to determine which elements will help him achieve his broader purpose and which are too specifically geared to one particular source.

In this paper, I will argue that the pictorial tradition of illuminations in source manuscripts influenced the way Malory approached, conceived and presented his own text,
both as he worked with and against such programs of illustration. By embracing certain elements of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts and at the same time using these images to determine elements he wished to downplay or excise, Malory achieves his goal of a cohesive, self-contained narrative.

The actual manuscripts from which Malory worked are still unknown, and his identity is still unclear, but illuminated manuscripts containing Arthurian romances had a definite presence in England during Malory’s lifetime. To take one example, Alison Stones observes that “Of the 50 or so partial or complete manuscripts of the Mort Artu, some 34 are illustrated, and 25 contain more than one illustration.” Further, his sources would have been relatively close at hand — according to Helen Cooper, “Copies of the Lancelot-Grail are known to have been available in England — it seems rarely or never to have circulated complete, even in France — and Malory would probably not have needed to go to France to find his source romances.” Finally, his source texts at hand as he composed Le Morte Darthur most likely tell only part of the story of Malory’s history with Arthurian texts; Malory repeatedly indicates that he often filled in gaps (though sometimes inaccurately) from his extensive working knowledge of source material. Malory was therefore in a good position to have encountered, in one form or another, illuminated manuscripts that contained his source material, whether or not he ultimately used such manuscripts as his primary source texts.

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It is impossible to tell if Malory worked from illuminated sources, but the very function of illuminations would have made them memorable if Malory did ever encounter such texts. Throughout the Middle Ages, images in manuscripts severed a largely mnemonic function. Malory’s source texts — especially the *Lancelot en Prose* — are lengthy and complicated, and miniatures help readers to recall key elements as they make their way through the texts. Therefore, the iconography of the manuscript can be just as important as the text itself, and is the avenue through which a reader like Malory could have recalled such a text.

My argument will focus on the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, an Old French cyclical romance that developed out of the Arthurian tales of Chrétien de Troyes. Attributed to Gaultier Map, the *Lancelot-Grail* was written in the early thirteenth-century. Comprising five different works of unclear authorship, the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* most likely began with a core of three works: the *Lancelot en Prose*, the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort le Roi Artu*; it was later expanded to include the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Suite du Merlin*. Malory drew heavily on the Cycle for his material, using the *Queste del Saint Graal* practically wholesale for his tale of the Sankgreal, and using large pieces of the *Lancelot en Prose* and the *Mort le Roi Artu*.

The *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* presents many problems for an editor like Malory. The *Cycle* is written, like other French Romances, using the technique of *entrelacement*, in which several plot lines progress in parallel fashion, constantly interrupting one another. Carol Dover observes “The sheer size of the *Lancelot*, coupled with the intricacy of its

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composition, raises the key question of how readers could keep track of the action across
large expanses of storytelling and also interpret as they went along. As a possible solution
to the difficulty of navigating through the text, Dover describes "landmark images:" "a set of
crucial signposts to meaning along a dense and shifting trail." These landmark images are
located at key points in the narrative, giving readers the opportunity to reflect upon what they
are reading as they aid in his or her interpretation of the text through their visual appeal.

Structurally, illustrated manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* provide exactly the
same "kernels of reflection" through illuminations that visually augment the verbal imagery
to which Dover refers. These can link together stories that alternate in quick succession with
others — depicting a particular character at the opening of a section to signal a return to his
or her storyline — or provide a broader linkage that alerts the reader to the *Cycle's* status as a
self-contained work. For example, Galahad's retrieval of a sword from a stone floating in a
river at the opening of the *Questa del Saint Graal* dramatically recalls the pre-history of the
Round Table and Arthur's famous feat to prove his worthiness as monarch.

There are over one hundred extant manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, the
majority of which are heavily illustrated, in addition, many of these were present in
England during Malory's lifetime. Decoration varies in extant illuminated manuscripts;
hiustioriated initials tend to populate thirteenth-century Parisian manuscripts, while
miniatures are more common in *Lancelot-Grail* manuscripts to the north. While the
provenance of many illustrated manuscripts is difficult to verify, BL MS Royal 14.E.III is

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9 Ibid 91
10 Ibid 110. See also BL MS Royal 14.E.III, fol 91r. (Fig. 1 in appendix)
12 Ibid 132
13 Ibid 133

Malory could have procured his source material from any number of book-owners in England, and Carol Meale notes that "There is ample evidence of books being loaned amongst groups of people who lived within the same social or geographical sphere."\footnote{Ibid 105-6} In particular, Meale addresses the possibility that the Wydville family, whose remaining books (though few) "indicate a fairly high level of literary and aesthetic discrimination on the part of their owners."\footnote{Meale, "Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons in Fifteenth Century England." 118-19} Still, the Wydvlles did not acquire their only known Arthurian text (Royal 14.E.III) until after Malory's death.\footnote{Ibid 122} But while his precise sources continue to evade scholars, the presence of such illuminated Arthurian manuscripts in England during Malory's lifetime provides the possibility that Malory used an illustrated manuscript as a reference, or at least encountered such a manuscript during his life.

Additionally, the function of illuminations in texts throughout the Medieval period provides further indication that Malory would have taken special note of programs of illustration if he ever did encounter Arthurian texts which contained them. Images are a key method of understanding and remembering for medieval texts, and though mental images are one form of such a mnemonic device, miniatures and other visual elements of manuscripts
provide a useful outlet for medieval readers to remember the most important elements of any text. Miniatures and text combine to provide a holistic experience for medieval readers, and readers understood images that accompanied texts to be just as important as words themselves for understanding the text.\textsuperscript{18} Most importantly for Malory, who is deeply familiar with Arthurian material and who at times works by recalling elements from various texts without manuscripts before him, “manuscript decoration is part of the \textit{painture} of language, one of the gates to memory, and the form it takes often has to do with what is useful not only to understand a text but to retain and recall it too.”\textsuperscript{19} Medieval readers understood texts to contain both \textit{painture} and \textit{parole}, or visual and aural elements. Both are key components of a text that help transmit knowledge from text to reader, and each works in the same way upon the mind. Miniatures are not a prerequisite for the presence of \textit{painture}, the scope of which includes mental pictures that the text elicits from readers.\textsuperscript{20} Connections between text and image abound in the Middle Ages; scribes were often described as painters,\textsuperscript{21} and young readers were instructed to remember specific passages through ascribing memorable mental images to such sections.\textsuperscript{22} The significance of such techniques persisted through Malory’s time: in the \textit{Winchester} manuscript, a head drawn in the margin appears, which “clearly indicates that this reader understood drawings of heads to be a part of a book’s mnemonic apparatus.”\textsuperscript{23}

In the same way that images aid readers in their understanding of the \textit{Lancelot-Grail Cycle} with its layerings of interlaced tales, these images would have proved especially

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Carruthers 226
\item Ibid
\item Ibid 223
\item Ibid 225
\item Ibid 245
\item Ibid 248
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
helpful to Malory as an author-editor. Illuminations present themselves as vivid markers of section breaks and remind readers where a branch last left off, serving as a powerful aid in separating out the deeply interwoven storylines of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. One of Malory’s most innovative unravelings of *entrelacement* takes place near the end of *Le Morte Darthur* as he separates out two major storylines in *Le Mort le Roi Artu*, the final branch in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*.

The first two sections of Malory’s *The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* are *The Poisoned Apple* and *The Fair Maid of Ascolat*, two narratives that unfold simultaneously in Malory’s main source for the section, *La Mort le Rois Artu*. As Malory carefully separates out the interlaced narratives, he relies upon visual imagery to link together past, present and future narrative. Through carefully placed visual cues, he is able to link together events in a reader’s mind before they even take place. Malory foreshadows a tournament as King Arthur declares “loke thou be redy armed on horsebakk in the medow besydes Wynchestir,” immediately implanting two visual cues in the mind of the reader: an armed knight and the meadow at Winchester. Here, Malory’s use of specific, visually-attuned language lays the groundwork for an upcoming segue to the tournament itself. With armed knights already jousting in an open meadow somewhere in the back of readers’ minds, Malory sets his tale up for a smooth transition to the tournament itself, though the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* divides the events by several folios.

Indeed, the understanding of *painture* and *parole* mean that the visual and the verbal are closely linked in medieval texts. Malory is constantly cognizant of the power of the visual

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24 For ease of reference, throughout this paper I use Vinaver’s titles of subsections and plotlines within *Le Morte Darthur*

over his readers and the significance of visual elements to the understanding and retention of a text; at the same time, visual components would have played a large role in his own interpretations of the texts he read.

At the close of *The Poisoned Apple*, Malory capitalizes upon the tombstone as a combination of the verbal and the visual. After sir Patryse dies from eating a poisoned apple at Guinevere’s feast, the knights quickly erect a tombstone in Malory’s source, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, that reads “Ici Gist Gaheriz li Blans de Karaheu, li freres Mador de la Porte, que la reine fist morir par venim” [Here lies Gaheriez the white of Karaheu, the brother of Mador de la Porte, whom the queen poisoned to death]. In the *Mort le Roi Artu*, such a tombstone is an instant, yet permanent indictment of Guinevere; the writing will remain on the tombstone as a constant reminder of the Queen’s ties to the knight’s death, despite her eventual exculpation in the *Mort*. Malory, however, reserves the construction of the tombstone until the final pages of the *Poisoned Apple*. Therefore, his tombstone contains a markedly different inscription, exonerating rather than indicting the queen:

“Here lyeth sir Patryse of Irelonde, slayne by Sir Pynell le Saveiage that empoyysnde appellis to have slayne Sir Gawayne, and by mysseffortune Sir Patryse ete one of the applis, and than suddeynly he braste.” Also there was wrytyn uppon the tombe that quene Gwnyvere was appeled of treson of the death of sir Patryse by sir Madore de la Porte, and there was made mencion how sir Launcelot fought with hym for quene Gwnyvere and overcom hym in playne batayle. All thys was wrytyn uppon the tombe of sir Patryse in excusyng of the quene (1059-60).

Rather than emphasizing Guinevere’s initial accusation and creating a permanent reminder of such an event, Malory capitalizes upon the permanence of the tombstone to pardon the Queen. At the same time, the stone and its description provide yet another opportunity for Malory to remind readers what transpired over the past few pages. He places the tombstone

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at the conclusion of *The Poisoned Apple* and just before *The Fair Maid of Ascolat*. Though the Winchester manuscript offers no visible break between these two sections,\(^\text{27}\) the tombstone marks the end of one narrative segment before it begins to describe Lancelot’s exploits with the maid of Ascolat. Therefore, it would have been an especially useful tool for recapping one plot sequence before beginning another, allowing a smooth transition or a convenient place for readers to take a pause. In this way, Malory uses a verbal description of a visual element in order to recreate the function of images within manuscripts. Miniatures give readers a chance to pause and reflect over a passage they just read that may be particularly significant, as well as to take a break before continuing on to the next section. The tombstone provides the opportunity for both. Readers can leave the text and return to this natural pause in the text, and will easily be able to resume a reading because the tombstone offers an efficient synopsis of the previous section.

Malory also uses a similar technique to create a more dramatic and forward-looking romance by evoking powerful visual images to create the threat of future events that may never actually occur. In a detail absent from both the *Stanzaic Morte Arthure* and *La Mort le Roi Artu*, Malory describes “a grete fyre made aboute an iron stake” in preparation for Guinevere’s punishment for treason in case of her accuser Mador’s victory over her defender, Lancelot (1055). The visual appeal of the image sets up a future link to Guinevere’s burning at the stake. While the action never occurs, the looming visual of a smoldering fire adds gravity to the scene and prompts a forward push from the reader. Much like the frequent illustrations of clashing knights that populate *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* manuscripts and alert

readers to upcoming battles, Malory’s insertion of the enflamed stake imagery snaps readers to attention and begs them to press forward.

Malory also relies upon visual linkages to bring together various branches of tales within his *Morte Darthur*. In the process of compressing tales, Malory often adds key details in order to provide a smooth transition between passages that may be hundreds of pages apart in a source. Like written cues that evoke the visual in the text of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* or pictorial reminders of key characters and objects in illuminated manuscripts of source material, Malory binds his tales together with his own visually evocative writing. His use of the visual builds upon the existing “landmark images” in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* to include additional vivid imagery in much the same way that illustrations add in visual links that buttress these landmark images in the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* itself. Malory uses such a technique in *The Poisoned Apple* as he capitalizes on the similar setting of two dinner scenes in the *Mort le Roi Artu* — Guinevere’s fateful feast for her knights and King Arthur’s subsequent dinner at which Sir Mador accuses the Queen of poisoning Sir Patryse. Here, Malory draws together two scenes separated by both interlace and narrative time in the *Lancelot-Grail*; in the original version, Lancelot’s unfolding exploits away from court and Mador’s discovery of his brother Gaheris’s death in the *Mort le Roi Artu* fill the interlude that separates the two events. The scenes’ similarities, however, allow Malory to conflate the two and efficiently stage Patryse’s death and Mador’s accusation in the same scene.

The scenes are similarly linked in illustrated manuscripts. In two codices, illustrators draw upon the similarity of the two scenes to insert a visual cue that provides a smooth segue from the interwoven tale (that will become Malory’s *The Fair Maid of Ascolat*) back to the unfolding action with Guinevere. King Arthur’s table, set for a feast and lacking only the
basket of apples that characterizes Guinevere’s fête a folio earlier, provides a strong visual link to the earlier section of the tale and eases readers into the continuation of the action.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, before the reader begins the text itself, the two events are linked in her mind. She immediately recalls the past action and is ready to continue Guinevere’s story after a short diversionary tale of Lancelot’s wounding that continues a separate narrative thread.

Malory thus takes advantage of miniatures — devices that actually call attention to narrative discontinuity in interlaced narratives — in order to further his own project of a continuous narrative working toward the central purpose of developing Lancelot as a romance hero. The two successive images each announce to the reader a shift in narrative, priming her with images that at once recall past actions (Guinevere’s fateful feast) and foreshadow future events (Guinevere accused of treason at Arthur’s own feast) that occur within the same plot line. Malory utilizes the same technique to further his own narrative goals. He recognizes that the similarity in setting — the same similarity the miniature draws upon to guide the reader of the \textit{Mort le Roi Artu} through the text — allows him to create a smooth-flowing narrative by combining the two scenes.

Malory’s narrative in \textit{The Fair Maid of Ascolat} is especially visually appealing, and simultaneously affirms and undermines readers’ reliance on visual cues for their information about the unfolding narrative. His constant striking descriptions of people, settings and events repeatedly calls attention to the visual and emphasizes the significance of seeing and sight throughout this tale. Malory relies on visual tropes to bind together his narrative and drive plot forward in the same way that illustrations and text in \textit{Lancelot-Grail Cycle} manuscripts help readers to bind events from common plots together in their minds.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{28} MS Addl 10294, fols 63v and 64v; MS Royal 14.E.III, fols 151v and 152v (fig. 2 and 3 in appendix)}
Throughout the *Fair Maid of Ascolat*, characters change appearance—both intentionally and unwillingly—yet remain fundamentally recognizable. At once emphasizing the importance of the visual in this culture dependent upon heraldic devices for identification and questioning the reliability of depending upon such visual evidence, Malory explores the consistency of the visual components of identity throughout this section. Through this treatment, Malory develops his characters and affirms the cohesiveness of the varied group of tales that center around a group of characters that, though constantly shaping themselves, remain consistent throughout *Le Morte Darthur*.

In an effort to avoid recognition by his fellow knights and enable himself to joust against Arthur's entourage in the tournament at Winchester, Lancelot dons white armor and borrows the shield of a newly-minted, wounded knight that will go unrecognized throughout the tournament. Thus begins a diversion in a tale dominated by masquerade, and Malory maintains this thread consistently from Lancelot's first use of disguise until his companions at last discover his identity. Malory relies on visual cues to remind readers that Lancelot remains disguised and in this way continues to pursue questions of character identity through visual recognition.

In addition to his new armor, Lancelot agrees to wear the red sleeve of the Maid of Ascolat, a move so out of character that those closest to him refuse to identify him as Lancelot even as their observations suggest it is in fact their companion. Malory capitalizes on the plot deviation created by Lancelot's disguise to emphasize the diversionary nature of the tale. Lancelot leaves Arthur's court, jousts against Arthur's men and (however unwittingly) attracts the love of a woman other than his beloved Guinevere. Malory's
constant references to disguise reinforce the characterization of this tale as detailing Lancelot’s brief departure from his true character.

Still, Lancelot cannot escape his own legendary status — especially within a narrative that is centered around his character. Gawain first suspects that the strange knight at the tournament is Lancelot after observing “hys rydynge and hys buffetis” — the best knight in the world, it seems, can do little to alter those qualities that define him most as a character (Malory 1071). The visual disjunction, however, between Lancelot’s immediately recognizable riding style and his wholly out-of-character acceptance of a token from a young maiden proves too great for Gawain, who concludes “ever mesemyth hit sholde nat be he” (1071). As Malory asks readers to consider which visual cues are reliable and which are less dependable, he underscores the significance of the visual for this group of characters. The knightly world, celebrated for its strength and chivalry, is still full of deception and uncertainty. Ultimately, misleading cues in the same vein will deal the final blow to the Round Table as a knight draws his sword to kill a snake, touching off King Arthur’s final mortal battle with Mordred at the close of Le Morte Darthur.

For those who are able to read the cues properly, however, Lancelot is readily recognizable. Gravely pale after receiving a hard blow from Sir Bors at Winchester, a hermit who cares for the wounded knight recognizes Lancelot “by a wounde on hys chyeke” (Malory 1075). Later, as Lancelot seeks out Sir Bors, he instructs Sir Lavayne to search for the knight “and told hym by what tokyns he sholde know hym: by a wounde in hys forehede” (1082). Throughout the narrative, Gawain searches for the identity of the mysterious knight of the tournament and learns that it is indeed Lancelot after seeing his shield at the Maid of Ascolot’s house. Malory thus draws upon repeated visual themes to maintain continuity in a
tale composed of discrete narrative events. Lancelot's wounding and Bors' discovery of the knight are linked by their wounds, and Gawain's recognition of Lancelot's shield reminds readers of his disguise.

These links echo the function of many illustrations in illuminated manuscripts while building upon the already visually rich vocabulary of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. Images offer an opportunity for identification — or misidentification — on the part of the reader of a medieval manuscript. Heraldic devices serve as identifiers for knights, but it is just as easy for a knight to bear a stranger's shield in an image as it is for the knight to do so within the text itself. Shields serve as interesting signifiers within images in manuscripts, serving at times as substitutions for actual depictions of knights themselves. For example, a set of twelve shields displayed on the exterior of Terquin's castle in an image in a *Lancelot en Prose* manuscript indicates the twelve knights that are contained within the castle without depicting the knights themselves. Even if each shield is not readily identifiable, readers are aware that twelve individuals are contained within. Further, in complicated battle scenes, shields allow individual knights to manifest their presence within the context of a jumble of people, horses and swords. Finally, illustrations that depict one or two knights with readily identifiable arms encourage readers to focus on the presence of these particular knights while underlining their significance to the narrative — the knights in the image cannot be simply any character, but the presence of a particular person is significant for the pertinent section and, in turn, for the text as a whole.

In addition to reinforcing continuity through visual signs, Malory must rely on verbal techniques to compensate for the shortcomings of purely written narrative. Malory crafts a story that, though rich in visual imagery, succeeds without the aid of illuminations that

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29 MS Addl 10293, fol 320v (fig. 4 in appendix)
frequently accompany many of his source texts. He does so by translating the function of illuminations into his own text, taking advantage of the ways that illustrations work both with and against his own editorial goals.

Naming is integral to *Le Morte Darthur*, and is reinforced visually in the Winchester manuscript: the names of characters are often rubricated. Rubrics also function as text breaks, and so the switch to red ink in the manuscript performs two key functions for Malory: it underlines the significance of names to the narrative and allows a reader to more easily navigate through the text, using rubricated names as "a form of signposting within the text." Illustrations in manuscripts provide a continual reference for readers who constantly view the same heraldic devices that indicate consistent characters, even if those characters remain unnamed. Malory, however, must work harder to cultivate consistency in his narrative. Unable to depend upon images to convey the presence of particular characters, he must rely on naming them, and his repeated lists of names convey the same gravity to a situation as an illustration filled with clashing knights.

He opens the tournament at Winchester with a short list of names, immediately calling readers' attention to the presence of particular significant characters at the tournament:

> thydir cam many good knyghtes, that ys to sey the kyne of North Galis, and kynge Angwysch of Irelonde, and the Kynge with the Hondred Knyghtes, and syr Galahalte the Haute Prynce, and the kynge of Northumbirlonde, and many other noble deukes and erlis of other dyverse contreyes. (1065)

While characters are at times revealed one by one in the *Mort le Roi Artu*, here the reader immediately confronts a list of knights that forms a cohesive unit. His naming

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31 See, for example, Fig. 5 in appendix
simultaneously maintains continuity in the text — Malory repeatedly invokes the same characters throughout *Le Morte Darthur* — and conveys the multitude of knights at the tournament. Without visual aids, he must communicate to the reader the sheer number of knights present at the tournament. Malory’s litany weighs down the reader with the presence of his characters one by one, slowly and effectively building a sizable crowd of knights at the tournament — far more effective than simple hyperbole. Likewise, Malory provides a more detailed account of the tournament itself. After another cadence of knights’ names, Malory touches off the tournament itself and offers a detailed description of the action, which is often missing from *La Mort le Roi Artu*.

Other images can convey the presence of a large number of characters without referencing individuals in the same way. An image in one *Lancelot en Prose* manuscript depicts a group of witnesses as Sir Gawain attests to the truth of his *aventures* before King Arthur.\(^{32}\) The presence of a large group of individuals is important for both the accompanying text and Malory as an editor, since a witnessed oath supports the supposed veracity of the tale itself, and hence the veracity of the “French book” to which Malory constantly refers throughout *Le Morte Darthur*. The function of such an image is different in character than that of the battle images, however. Each figure in the image serves the same function: all are equal witnesses to Gawain’s testimony. In battles, each individual performs feats that distinguish one knight from the next; both Malory and his sources contain detailed descriptions of the individual actions of knights as they work together to attack their opponents. Further, these actions in battle develop each knight’s character, so it is important to identify the particular knights that perform certain functions. However, when the function of a knight is valued for his performance of a more mundane task like witnessing an oath,

\(^{32}\) MS Addl 10293, fol 315 v. (fig 6 in appendix)
individual identification becomes unnecessary and the heraldic devices fall away so that readers can focus upon the significance of the main action in the image. Here, the group of knights serves as an indication of simple number rather than embodying the collective action of independently acting individuals as in battles.

The Maid of Ascolot’s funeral bier that floats toward Camelot presents another example of Malory’s use of the verbal to overcome the shortcomings of a narrative unaccompanied by illustration. While *La Mort le Roi Artu* offers a vague description of the body’s arrival in “une nacele couverte de trop riches draps de soie,” [a boat covered in luxurious silk cloths] giving little more information than the boat is “la plus bele ... que ge onques mes veïse”33 [the most beautiful that I have ever seen] with a bed that is “moult tres bel, apraeillié de toutes les riches choses dont biax liz puet estre apraeilliez,” [very beautiful, ornamented with all of the luxurious things with which a beautiful bed could be ornamented]34 Malory uses the opportunity to create a rich and detailed image of the Maid and her boat in the mind of the reader. He draws upon the Stanzaic *Morte Arthure’s* description of the boat as “richely ... coueryd sanzfayle, / In maner of a voute with clothis I-dighte / Alle shynand as gold”35 and the maid as adorned with “a purse fulle Rich a-Righte, / With gold and perlis pat was I-bent”36 and further amplifies it. The details are specific; she is not simply excessively beautiful or adorned with gold, but “coverde unto her myddyll with many rych clothys, and all was of cloth of golde” (1096). He adds the detail that “she lay as she had smyled” to further concretize the description and allow the reader to visualize the scene herself (1096).

33 *Mort* 70
34 *Mort* 71
36 Ibid 1034-5
Indeed, the Maid’s arrival at Camelot is one of the most compelling scenes in Malory and begs readers to create an image in their minds where one, unlike many illuminated Lancelot-Grail manuscripts, does not exist on the page. Folios 153v of Royal 14.E.III and 65v of Addl 10294 both contain similar images of the funeral bier’s arrival at Camelot. In the images, a brightly decorated cloth covers the Maid’s body, and King Arthur stands back observing the scene as Gawain, dressed in grey, lifts up the cloth to examine the contents of the bier. The girl herself is wearing brightly colored clothing in Addl 10294 (only her face is visible in Royal 14.E.III), further emphasizing the vibrant palette that dominates the funeral vessel. The miniatures solidify the image in the minds of readers and emphasize the stunning visual display of the scene, picked up by Malory and elaborated upon in his own text.

The role of images in illustrated manuscripts is not unlike that of Malory’s as he condenses several French and English sources into Le Morte Darthur. They gesture to important characters and events while reinforcing the structure of the work as a whole. Whether populating historiated initials or serving as visual breaks between sections of text, images guide the reader through her interaction with the work and ensure that specific information is recalled at precise moments within the narrative.

Images in manuscripts are part of the deeply interwoven text itself, and figured heavily in group readings, as Dover observes:

“reading from an illustrated manuscript was an interactive, multimedia affair. As the reader did the reading, the group of listeners were gathered round close enough to be able to see for themselves the illustrations in these very large manuscripts, and they would point, laugh, giggle, sigh at what they saw and heard with ear and eye. What they saw and heard was an interweaving of word (“parole”) and image (“painture”), in which the visual imagination and the sound of the spoken word each have their own prominence. … I will … [suggest] that the [Prose Lancelot’s] illustrated
manuscripts exemplify the weaving process more powerfully than the non-illustrated manuscripts because they show us that the prose *Lancelot* is a complex text.\(^{37}\)

Illuminations thus call attention to the tangled composition of interlaced Old French romance. Beyond simply acting as markers in the narrative in order to help refresh a reader’s memory or guide her interpretation of the passage, miniatures are a physical signifier of the verbal composition of the text. While Malory’s editorial goal may on the surface seem antithetical to the narrative composition of his sources, his work is informed by an understanding of the inner workings of the text facilitated by such explicit consciousness of its narrative composition. Malory works by selecting particular plot lines and converting the circuitous source narrative into a central plot rather than individually developing characters one-by-one in narrative threads that progress individually in short spurts, constantly interrupting one another.

If Malory’s composition depends upon such an understanding, then his work would have been greatly facilitated by the presence of miniatures. When reading an illuminated manuscript, the plot does not simply develop before the reader’s eyes: the miniatures call attention to the physicality of the text itself and thus beg the kind of narrative analysis that Malory performs in his editorial work. Each section is not simply a natural progression from one story to the next, but an explicit interruption to the preceding segment. In facilitating pauses before each miniature — due to the mnemonic function of such devices that allow readers to return to a section after a lengthy break — miniatures lead a reader-editor like Malory to work with the natural rhythm of the text to create a new narrative with a completely different narrative strategy.

Images, however, also perform some basic functions that mirror Malory’s work as editor. Miniatures present themselves, in most instances, before the events in the text they represent — either immediately above them or preceding them by several columns of text. Miniatures range from simple depictions of knights errant — identifiable through heraldic devices — to complex battle scenes in which knights, whole and in pieces, are strewn about all corners of an image in a rendering that passes the confusion of conflict onto the reader. Rubrics accompany many images, offering a short description of the image that lists the major characters and the principal action of the image below. The rubric thus provides a simplified version of important actions that take place within the text, glossing over details that manifest themselves in the image and focusing on the major characters and actions in the miniature.

Images can frame an entire section, emphasizing one key element for a reader to focus on that will serve them throughout a lengthy text. As discussed earlier, Addl. 10294 contains a representation of King Arthur upon the Wheel of Fortune, a vivid image from his ominous dream in the tale. Such an image could help lead readers to a better understanding of the function of Fortune itself in the remainder of the tale as it “assumes the central role, and the characters, with remarkably few exceptions, are simply swept along by the force of events.”

Miniatures have the power to direct a reader’s attention and emphasize crucial textual elements that will facilitate her comprehension. Through his restructuring of the narrative and plot, Malory too achieves a similar goal, picking out major characters like Lancelot as central to the plot in *Le Morte Darthur*.

Each image reinforces the overall structure of the narrative, helping the reader to contextualize passages as images presage actions or recall those just completed. In one example, as Lancelot journeys to Terquin’s castle in the *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot*, an image of a tower decorated with shields recalls Terquin’s role as a captor of King Arthur’s knights.\(^39\) Lancelot’s encounter with Terquin is continuous in *Le Morte Darthur* but takes place across several fragmented episodes in the *Lancelot en Prose*. A miniature in one source text recognizes the gap in narrative as the plot returns to Terquin about 40 folios after the initial description, spurring readers’ memories with a depiction of Terquin’s castle. Readers see multiple shields decorating a tree and a castle wall to form this instantly recognizable image that allows readers to immediately return to the unfolding narrative without pause. Malory recognizes the effectiveness of such images and draws upon their power to create a sense in the reader’s mind that the narrative gap between two such sections is much shorter than their physical separation.

One way Malory reduces the breadth of narrative gaps in his sources is by combining people and events. The technique of *entrelacement* that characterizes French cyclic romances necessitates considerable simplification in order to achieve the linear plot of *Le Morte Darthur*. Though Malory maintains some parallel storylines throughout various tales, they are all related and tend to move forward individually to completion rather than break off to make way for additional stories. Combining characters and maintaining focus on the same group of knights throughout his work allows Malory to progress from the creation to the destruction of the Round Table without the need of *entrelacement* and the continual interruptions in Old French romances that are designed to allow for the introduction of new characters and plot lines that slowly develop the romance from beginning to end. The

\(^{39}\) MS Addl 10293 Fol. 320 Verso (Fig. 4 in appendix)
resulting amalgamations allow Malory to simplify his narrative and cultivate continuity rather than fragmentation. The influence of images that characterize many manuscripts of these romances remains, however, in the editorial techniques he embraces.

The *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot* contains several examples of Malory's combination of characters and plot. At the opening of the *Tale*, Malory immediately faces a problem: in the *Lancelot en Prose*, Hector is out on *aventure*, while he remains at Arthur’s court in *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory easily solves the problem by explaining that Hector “wyste that sir Launcelot was paste out of the courte to seke adventures” and immediately “made hym redy to seke sir Launcelot” (254). With a few simple phrases, Malory's Hector leaves Arthur’s court, solving any potential narrative complications and bringing the plot of the *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot* in line with that of Malory’s preceding *Noble Tale of King Arthur and Lucius*. His addition allows the story to flow from the preceding section in which Arthur and his court travel to Rome to conquer Emperor Lucius; Malory’s Hector reacts to Lancelot’s departure, eliminating the necessity of explaining why Hector is already out on *aventure*. Malory uses a similar technique as he combines other narratives that are separated in the *Lancelot en Prose*. For example, when Lancelot mentions the shields of knights that he sees hanging on Turquin’s tree, (268) Malory combines Lancelot’s testimony in the section from which he works with the later description of the knights he sees in prison. 40

Such combinations are ready examples of Malory’s translation of the visual into the verbal. Miniatures in source texts signal a shift to new characters — an interruption that Malory inverts as he smooths transitions by combining characters. Miniatures also help readers to recall past descriptions of events, and Malory’s combination of similar scenes

draws upon the ability of the visual to bring together scenes that are separated by numerous folios in source texts but have thematic similarities that allow him to effectively combine them. Malory, whether working with or against programs of illustrations, constantly operates under their presence and incorporates frameworks established by images into his own work as editor.

Combining characters allows Malory to eliminate unnecessary description of the transitory characters common to the *Lancelot en Prose* as well as fusing multiple events into a single happening. In the *Noble Tale*, Malory combines the story of a young maiden and King Baudemagus, transforming an anonymous maiden into the daughter of the troubled king. In so doing, he retains the character of the maiden while transforming her into a character subordinate to the King, rather than one with her own accompanying narrative describing her plight as she attempts to avoid the knight to whom she is betrothed (Malory 258).  

A maiden’s plea for help in the *Lancelot en Prose* thus turns into her plea to Lancelot to come to the aid of her father in Malory, creating at once a sensible combination of narratives and an easy transition in Malory’s work.

Where characters are not eliminated for convenience’s sake, Malory can combine characters to strengthen the unity of *Le Morte Darthur*. In the *Queste del Saint Graal*, Lancelot encounters a knight errant and jousts with him; Malory changes the color of the event slightly by replacing the random knight with a character who, a few pages earlier, steals Lancelot’s horse (929). Malory thus takes a simple show of Lancelot’s strength and prowess and changes it into an episode of just revenge. While Lancelot seeks vengeance on the knight who deprived him of his horse, readers are immediately taken back to his first

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41 Sommer, Page 157  
encounter with the knight, creating cohesion and bolstering the sturdy narrative framework of *Le Morte Darthur*.

Throughout his work, Malory must continually work to forge connections among tales culled together from his variety of French sources. To do so, he often recalls characters’ past actions in order to push the plot forward while retaining continuity throughout the work. After Malory’s treatment of the *Sankgreal*, Lancelot briefly recounts his *aventures* to Guinevere, grateful “that [he] saw in that [his] queste as much as ever saw ony synfull man lyvynge, and so was hit tolde [him],” though he is cognizant of the danger of their relationship, for “if that [he] had nat had [his] prevy thoughtis returne to [Guinevere’s] love agayne as [he] [does], [he] had sene as grete mysteryes as ever saw [his] sonne sir Galahad, Percivale, other Sir Bors” (1046). Simultaneously, Malory reminds readers of previous events in his narrative and furthers his characterization of Lancelot as a worthy knight, despite his evident stumbles throughout the *Sankgreal*. In addition, he looks forward to his future narrative in which — starting over the next few pages in *The Poisoned Apple* episode — the Round Table begins to disintegrate, largely due to Lancelot and Guinevere’s problematic relationship. Lancelot reminds Guinevere “that there be many men spekith of oure love in thys courte and have you and me gretely in awayte, as thes sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred,” underlining key plot elements that run throughout Malory and that readers may have forgotten in the course of the *Sankgreal* (1046). Finally, Malory underlines two characters that will figure prominently in the destruction of the Round Table from *Lancelot and Guinevere* forward: Aggravain and Mordred.

The *Sankgreal*, however, is one example of how Malory and programs of illustration work at cross-purposes. Though his adaptation of the *Questa del Saint Graal* remains largely
faithful to the original French, he works to reshape or strip away certain elements that create sharp breaks between his edited version and the rest of *Le Morte Darthur*. Further, by contextualizing the *Sankgreal* within his larger text, Malory downplays many of the religious elements of the text and focuses instead upon the Arthurian framework of the story.\(^{43}\) In so doing, he is able to rescue Lancelot from the shame he encounters in the *Queste*: immediately after the close of Malory’s tale of the Holy Grail, he ensures a quick recovery for Lancelot’s character — Malory adds that, in addition to their joy at being reunited with sir Bors, Guinevere and Arthur are also “passyng gladde ... of sir Launcelot” (1045). Immediately, Malory’s Lancelot “[begins] to resorte unto quene Gwenivere agayne and [forgets] the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste” (1045). Thus Lancelot continues on, having seemingly recovered from his disgrace both in others’ eyes (Arthur and Guinevere) and in his own (in his immediate return to old habits).

While the *Queste* and the *Mort le Roi Artu* can be found alongside one another in many manuscripts (including Addl 10294, Royal 14.E.III and Bodleian MSS Rawl Qb6 and Rawl D899), the separation between the two texts is clear. In each of these manuscripts, the break is highlighted not only by an *explicit* and *incipit*, but by a decoration that indicates the beginning of an entirely new tale that deals with the same set of characters. The decoration ranges from an illumination accompanied by elaborate marginal decorations and drolleries of Royal 14.E.III to a simple historiated letter in Rawl. Qb6 — each of these decorative elements, however, reinforces the clear division created by the editorial comments that describe the activities of the supposed author, Gaultier Map. Though the *Mort le Roi Artu* does fulfill the goal of telling “la fin de ceus dont [Gaultier Map] avoit fet devant mention et comment cil moururent,” [the demise of those of whom Gaultier Map had previously made

\(^{43}\) Vinaver 1535
mention, and how they die)\textsuperscript{44} the tale is a disconnected close to the \textit{Lancelot-Grail Cycle} rather than a conclusion that follows directly on the \textit{Queste}.

The separation between the tales, however, extends far beyond the physical. The \textit{Queste} distinguishes itself from other tales in its highly religious content, which is only further reinforced in programs of illustration that accompany the text. While Malory works to integrate the text with surrounding material and downplay the differences between the \textit{Queste} and the rest of \textit{Le Morte Darthur}, miniatures that accompany \textit{Queste} manuscripts work toward the opposite goal: they celebrate the text for its key motifs — the same motifs that set it apart from the rest of the \textit{Cycle}. One key image that anchors the \textit{Queste} to the rest of the \textit{Lancelot-Grail Cycle} is that of Galahad removing a sword from a stone floating in a river below Arthur's castle. The event, depicted in Royal 14.E.III\textsuperscript{45} is a clear echo of the original sword-in-stone myth that touches off Arthur's reign. At the same time, however, the image subverts this purpose, highlighting Galahad's active removal of the sword before King Arthur's passive gaze. Though Arthur convinces Gawain to attempt removing the sword himself, he is unsuccessful, and the combination of Galahad's success with the failure of Arthur's knights indicates a turning point in the \textit{Cycle} that Malory works against throughout the \textit{Queste}. Malory's Galahad will not succeed in taking over Lancelot's precedence in King Arthur's court, and so the Round Table can continue on to its demise in the pages following the \textit{Sankgreall}.

The introduction of a new character, Galahad, occurs at the beginning of the text, and his arrival is celebrated in images. The first image in Royal 14.E.III, for example, depicts Lancelot as he kneels on the ground affixing a spur to Galahad as he knights him,

\textsuperscript{44} Mort 3
\textsuperscript{45} MS Royal 14.E.III fol 91r (fig 1 in appendix)
immediately establishing the young knight as the centerpiece of the *Queste*.\(^{46}\) Further, religious imagery is prevalent in illustrations. Addl 10294, Royal 14.E.III, Rawl. Qb6 and Bodleian MS Douce 215 each contain illustrations of Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel that explain the origins of three mysterious posts present in a ship that serves as the focal point of much of the tale. An image on fol. 41v of Addl 10294 and its accompanying rubric describe Adam and Eve before the Tree of Knowledge, grasping fruit as a grotesque serpent with a human face curls around the tree; a miniature on fol. 127v of Royal 14.E.III depicts the aftermath as God observes the couple sitting in shame. These images do allow Malory to more explicitly see the characters and events that set the *Queste* apart from his other tales and to adapt or remove these elements accordingly. The *Queste* makes obvious what is true of all programs of illustration for Malory’s source texts: their work is local, rather than global. Malory must work against these programs of illustration, in many instances suppressing rather than emphasizing the elements depicted in such illustrations, all the while drawing upon the functions of such illustrations that aid him in his editorial work. As he works to create the same kind of narrative flow *among* tales that these images foster *within* tales, Malory’s work takes on its characteristic plot and characters that distinguish it from the works that serve as his sources.

Within texts, however, Malory adopts many of the functions of miniatures. Just as images placed at the beginning of sections offer readers information about where to focus their attention, Malory uses foreshadowing to guide readers to specific points within narratives of shorter *aventures* that reduce possible confusion in his source texts. In the *Sankgreal*, for example, a squire instructs Gawain toward “a poore house, and therein ys Nacien [the] ermyte, whych ys the holyeste man in thy contrey” (943). While in the *Queste*

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\(^{46}\) MS Royal 14.E.III fol. 1r
del Saint Graal the hermit remains unnamed until later,\textsuperscript{47} Malory immediately identifies him, rendering the plot easier to follow and ensuring that the names of important minor characters, like Nacien, are easier to keep track of from the outset.

One manuscript, Douce 199, achieves a different kind of foreshadowing as miniatures link together two sections of the same plot line in the \textit{Lancelot en Prose}. The manuscript contains two successive images of a sleeping Lancelot, separated by over 70 folios but without any images in between.\textsuperscript{48} The images link together two distant sections of the same narrative thread surrounding Lancelot’s encounters with Terquin — a thread that Malory himself draws together as he compresses sections of the Prose \textit{Lancelot} in his \textit{Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot}. Folio 70bv depicts a slumbering Lancelot as the Queen of Sorestin approaches; folio 147v depicts a fatigued Lancelot resting on a hill. While the image on folio 70bv accurately depicts Lancelot before his capture by the Queen of Sorestin, the image on folio 140v places Lancelot outdoors, while in the narrative no such rest occurs. The image, however, links together two remarkably similar sections: Lancelot’s rest near 147v should actually occur indoors, but the illustrator undoubtedly sought to link together Lancelot’s two imprisonments by enchantresses in readers’ minds. By altering the setting of Lancelot’s repose on fol 147v, the illuminator forces the reader to recall Lancelot’s encounter with the Queen of Sorestin earlier in the text, offering a hint of the action to follow without actually revealing the plot before it takes place. The illuminator thus frames the event in the reader’s mind before she encounters it in the text, and invites her to recall Lancelot’s previous imprisonment and connect the two in her mind. Therefore, the illustrator succeeds in linking

\textsuperscript{47} Queste 153-154
\textsuperscript{48} MS Douce 199 fols. 70bv and 147v are figures 7 and 8 in appendix
together the two events through foreshadowing without undermining any suspense in the textual narrative.

At the same time, however, the sequence of images works against the text. The image on fol 147bv heads a section that begins in much the same way as that containing Lancelot's encounter with the Queen of Sorestain; Lancelot is severely fatigued. The image suggests that, much like the earlier encounter, Lancelot will take a nap after being overwhelmed by fatigue, and the reader then expects an event that never actually occurs. The framework remains the same, however, and Lancelot's eventual imprisonment reveals the true similarity between the two events. In this way, one potential similarity — a restful Lancelot napping in the open — is replaced with another — Lancelot imprisoned by an enchantress. The connection remains; it is only the nature of the connection that is misleading.

While Malory draws upon narrative similarities to connect the two sections, the Prose Lancelot must instead rely upon the visual connection in order to offer readers a powerful reminder of a narrative thread that began far earlier in the text. Malory's editing is effective at combining the tales and simplifying the entrelacement with which readers of the original must contend. Images that contain such clear echoes of events past would have been especially useful in working through a lengthy text such as the Prose Lancelot.

Some images stand after the events they depict, reminding readers of the key events in a previous passage; such illustrations provide an easy opportunity for audiences to pause in their reading, for a summary of sorts is readily available when they resume reading. In Douce 199, for example, an illustration of Kay and Lancelot fighting off enemy knights
(Malory adapts this scene in his *Noble Talys of Sir Launcelot de Lake*49) depicts the brief conflict after the event takes place in the narrative.50 The image of four fighting knights, placed at the opening of a major section break shortly after the written description of the fight itself, offers an effective reminder of the key event. Further, because the next section begins after a hasty exit on Lancelot’s behalf, the illustration preserves the focus on Lancelot before a shift to a section on Gawain.

Images also indicate where a particular section aims and on what the reader should focus, highlighting the most important characters and suggesting which interaction will lead to the next aventure. A rubric in Addl 10293 describes “j. tornoiement v quel lancelot fist merueilles” [the tournament in which Lancelot performs marvels], in some way removing the element of suspense from the narrative, but at the same time giving the passage direction as readers see a glimpse of the overall framework of the section.51 As the reader views knights engaging in bloody battle, they gain a sense of the magnitude of Lancelot’s actions and can read on with the knowledge that the goal of the passage is ultimately to describe his prowess at arms.

Images can also indicate the importance of a particular passage by presenting a typical scene in a peculiar manner. Battle scenes, as discussed above, are common tropes in *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* manuscripts, and tend to vary little in composition and content.52 Knights engage one another in a tangle of horse, human and weapon; onlookers are present in some images, usually peering down on the scene from castles in the background of the image. For combat between two single knights, onlookers are sometimes present at the

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49 Malory, Page 247
50 MS Douce 199, fol. 231v
51 Ibid, Fol. 284 recto
52 See fig 5, fol. 164 from MS Addl 10292, for an example of a typical battle scene
fringes of the image. The illustrators of Royal 14.E.III and Addl 10294 takes a different approach for one of the key battles of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, in which Sir Lancelot defends the honor of Guinevere against the accusation of treason brought by Sir Mador.\(^{53}\)

The image is composed like no other such scenes within these manuscripts: both knights and onlookers are positioned immediately before the viewer, with the knights fighting at the base of the image as the audience sits on a scaffold directly above the action. The image perfectly captures the significance of the battle that highlights the internal strife of the Arthurian court: the bystanders are drawn into the center of the image, unable to escape either the gaze of the reader or the grave ramifications of the swordfight. The image grabs the attention of the reader with its peculiar composition, which in turn speaks to the unusual nature of the context of the fight itself, as King Arthur must now contend with warring factions within his own court.

Collectively, the program of illustrations can serve as a separate narrative, consisting of the particular characters and events that the rubricator and illuminator have selected as the most compelling or significant. When read in conjunction with the text, they guide the reader, informing his or her interpretation of the text and providing additional information that recalls past events or presages future actions, assisting the reader in his or her approach to an extremely lengthy text complicated by *entrelacement* and other conventions of French cyclical romance. At times, Malory’s composition indicates an approach to editing that mirrors a readers’ understanding of the text through a program of illustration. For example, Malory’s assimilation of characters to achieve cohesion throughout his works reminds readers that generic damsels portrayed from one image to the next can often bleed into one another with little consequence to an understanding of the plot as a whole.

\(^{53}\) MS Royal 14.E.III fol 156v; MS Addl 10294 fol 68r. (Addl 10294 fol. 68r is Fig. 9 in appendix)
The images' location within columns of text necessitates, if not a careful study of the image itself, at least a pause in the reader's activity. In between lengthy sections of text, images provide the reader an opportunity to pause and reflect, carefully considering the actions of characters and the overall structure of the narrative. Images at once elucidate potentially confusing passages and emphasize key characters and events, solidifying any reading and ensuring that the reader has the most complete picture possible of the work as a whole. Paradoxically, images thus bring cohesion to the text by fragmenting it.

Conclusions

In many ways, Malory and manuscript rubricators and illustrators are faced with the same problems. Primarily, they are readers, offering to interpret the text and then provide a means for others to understand and benefit from their interpretations. However, their work is decidedly more complex. Like Malory, the illustrator must select crucial events to in some way break down a complex narrative so that readers can get some of the same effects of the text while reading and observing mere fragments.

Indeed, images within texts perform many of the same tasks visually that Malory does verbally. Most obviously, Malory and programs of illustration are preoccupied with selecting key events and characters to depict, allowing an understanding of basic storylines without the complexities of obscure characters or insignificant actions. Still, the work extends far beyond a simple reduction, and the peculiarities of Old French romance necessitate that much work is done to support the text rather than simply reduce it.

Structural parallels also exist between Malory's work and the function of miniatures. As Malory often toys with the order of events in his source material, so do illustrations — in presaging events, Malory is able to simplify the narrative, while illustrated manuscripts
preserve a forward momentum necessary to guide the reader and encourage progress where the short-term narrative destination may be unclear. Images also provide key transition periods, whether offering a reader the opportunity for reflection or recalling past scenes, events or characters. Miniatures provide a key link between passages that Malory must create in his own written work. In the *Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot*, because Malory crafts a continuous narrative from three distinct sections in the *Lancelot en Prose* — three sections which are in fact out of order — he must provide the reader with character information and add paragraphs that place characters in the proper location, or justify characters’ actions where such actions may seem misdirected or wholly inappropriate. In the same way, images can assist a reader in visually recalling a scene without a distracting re-narration.

In sections where Malory is more faithful to his sources — the *Queste del Saint Graal*, for example — images still function in much the same way as Malory the writer/editor, by drawing on the vast visual material available to the reader and writer in order to create a program of illustrations that binds together the section as a whole, as well as the entirety of *Le Morte Darthur*. Much like Carol Dover’s discussion of “landmark images,” — images that manifest themselves verbally — illustrations act in the same way:

Planted one by one in the readers’ memory, they stretch across the interlace like a beaded thread, as each image reflects back to its predecessor and forward to its successor. In this way they constitute a string of memory hooks the audience can use in order to grasp distant points in the narrative and interrelate them.⁵⁴

If “landmark images” are a “string of memory hooks,” then Malory acts like an architect of these hooks, stretching them apart at times, though often bringing hooks together that allow a reader to skip from one distant point to the next with little notice of the vast swaths of ground in between. Analogously, miniatures separated by hundreds of folios can trigger a readers’

⁵⁴ Dover, “The Book of Lancelot,” Page 91
memory so that she can resume a narrative thread untouched for some time, in this way virtually compressing a narrative to allow for a smooth and effective reading of a long and complex text.

The differences between Malory's editorial work and the function of images in manuscripts that contain his source texts, however, are just as telling as the similarities. Miniatures would have made clear to Malory what he needed to work against, acting as veritable red flags in texts that utilized narrative techniques he sought to completely overhaul. His skill as an editor is evident as he is able to take advantage of some of the very techniques that images use to highlight the peculiarities of interlaced romances and invert their function to create a polished, continuous narrative that develops characters with continually advancing plots rather than successive diversions built upon each other. Further, in the course of underlining the most significant elements of any given text, romances often highlight those characteristics unique to the text, rather than those that link it to similar tales. Again, Malory can take advantage of this function and use it to further his goal of producing a unified text from disparate sources, as images emphasize elements that Malory may want to downplay or omit in his own composition.

The inherently mnemonic function of images also could have helped Malory to retain information from programs of illustration if he did in fact encounter illuminated manuscripts. Busby describes how "miniatures would not only have indicated to a reader what to look out for as they read, but in the case of repeated readings, the miniatures would have reminded the reader of significant, perhaps even emblematic events of the narrative."\(^5\) If Malory was intimately familiar with his sources — to the extent that he could introduce elements from

tales before he began working directly from them — then any knowledge of programs of illustration would have likely remained in his memory, integrated with his recollection of the text itself.

Independent of any familiarity with or knowledge of programs of illustrations in Arthurian manuscripts, the similarities between Malory's editorial technique and the role of images in such manuscripts indicates the challenges medieval readers encountered as they interacted with such texts. The presence of images in manuscripts is a significant aid to any reader, and is especially helpful to those unaccustomed to reading interlaced romances. Malory's sources are long and circuitous, and are characterized by digressions rather than a consistently progressing narrative. Programs of illustration are not simply an adaptation of the tales that they accompany: they assist the reader in working through a complex text, and actually alter the perception of the tale. For every key event depicted in a program of illustration, countless are left without such an emphasis; the result is a strong recollection of certain textual elements in the readers' mind. Ostensibly, images exist to help a reader make her way through the text, but the impact is in fact much greater. Readers will recall specific illustrated events, and connect them with other elements in the text alongside their appearance.

Malory's narrative redaction is significantly more overt. He eliminates entire passages, removes some characters completely and at other times inserts major characters as placeholders for minor characters that would bog down the narrative with unnecessary description or confusing digressions. The result of his work, however, is at its heart the same as a program of illustration: readers are left with one readers' interpretation of the work, with some key elements stripped away, others emphasized, and key passages connected in ways
the editor feels are conducive to understanding the framework of the text as a whole. In assisting the reader through such a difficult text, then, Malory and illuminators alike create whole new texts for readers to explore.

There is still much to learn before we can know exactly what kinds of text Malory worked with. It is still impossible to tell if Malory ever encountered an illuminated text, much less whether he worked directly from a manuscript that contained a program of illustration. The nature of illuminations, however, and some of the characteristics of Malory's text, discussed above, provide a strong indication that Malory was aware of such programs of illustration, and, further, that such iconography influenced the production of his text.
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Texts, Translations and Criticism:


Appendix

Fig. 1. MS Royal 14.E.III, fol 91r*
Fig. 4. MS Addl 10293, fol. 320v* 

Fig. 5 MS Addl 10292 fol. 164r*
Fig. 6 MS Addl 10293 fol. 315v*
Fig. 7. MS Douce 199 fol. 70bv*

Fig. 8 MS Douce 199 fol. 147*

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