5-2022

The Control of Morality as Demonstrated Through Allegorical Symbolism in Late Medieval Tapestry and Morality Plays

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by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Art History and Visual Culture
at
Lindenwood University

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Saint Charles, Missouri

May 2022

Abstract

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Kelsey Cook, Master of Fine Art, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Alexis Culotta, PhD

This paper examines the use of allegory in the late medieval tapestry *The Prince of Malice and His Court,* produced between 1470 and 1480, alongside similar allegorical devices used in the contemporary French morality play *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain*. Recent scholarship on late medieval tapestry has included conversations of literary influence, mainly focusing on romance literature in particular. Although these comparisons have laid a foundation for the use of allegory within tapestry, a comparison to other literary examples is lacking. The following research, therefore, will analyze tapestry against morality plays to further extrapolate the visual exchange that occurred between the two mediums. Utilizing a cultural studies approach, this analysis will expose the obsession with morality in French culture at the end of the Middle Ages, and how allegorical devices were used to influence the morality of their audiences.

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Introduction

By the Middle Ages, allegory was well established in visual culture and was increasingly expanding its role. Umberto Eco speaks to the significance of allegory in this era when he says, "It is perhaps its most typical aspect, the one which characterizes the period above all others and which we tend to look upon as uniquely medieval. This is the medieval tendency to understand the world in terms of symbol and allegory." [1] As Eco implies, a proper understanding of medieval art and culture is best attained through the study of medieval allegory, which came to permeate all of medieval cultural production.

Tapestry design often incorporated such uses of allegory, as seen in the subject of this thesis *The Prince of Malice and His Court*, currently located at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington DC (figure 1). This tapestry remains somewhat of a mystery to this day. Although the date of creation has been established, between 1470 and 1480, the tapestry's background, context, patronage, etc. is completely unknown.[2] There has been some research done as far as what workshop may have produced this tapestry, but there has been no conclusive answer.[3] Adding to the mystery, there is a missing section of this tapestry. The left side of the tapestry seems to have been cut at some point, leaving only a remnant of a second scene.[4] Despite this missing

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[1] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 52.

[2] J. Carder, "Prince of Malice and His Court," Prince of Malice and his Court (Dumbarton Oaks), accessed March 24, 2022, http://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/996.

[3] Guy Delmarcel claims it was woven in Brussels, but A. S. Cavallo has claimed it was woven in Tournai.

[4] There is a tapestry fragment housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1926-45-1) that scholar J.P. Asselberghs believes is the missing fragment from the *Prince of Malice and His Court* tapestry, but this assumption has never been corroborated or confirmed by any other historians.

information, the composition itself and the narrative that unfolds within its threads provides valuable visual information. At the center of this tapestry, the devil is seen sumptuously clothed and holding a scepter. Above his elaborate throne, he is clearly labeled as "le pri[n]ce de malice". Surrounding the Prince of Malice, we see several courtiers, each personifications of a different vice. These vices include Avarice, Pride, Falsehood, Discord, Spite, Sin, Wrath, Rumor, Flattery, Gluttony, Fraud, Treason, Envy, Hypocrisy, Luxury, and three other figures who remain unidentified.

The identification of these figures is made obvious through the labels on each, as well as the symbolic items that they hold. Avarice, seen at the left of the throne, is identified by the golden and jeweled chalice in his hand. To the left of Avarice is Pride, who holds a mirror to adore his own reflection. Falsehood, or *malebouche*, is identified by the red plume in his hat. Discord is seen in blue robes, and Spite is shown in red robes. Below these figures is Sin (*peche*) who is speaking in agitation with Wrath and Rumor. Sin is the most elaborately clothed of all the personifications, possibly indicating that he represents the epitome of all of the accompanying vices.

To the left of this entire scene remains a fragment of what appears to be another court. Historians have hypothesized that this fragment depicted the counterpart to the devil's court, which is the court of heaven or the court of virtue.[5] Evidence for this assumption is seen in the few labels that we can see. The female personification of Prudence, shown in a full suit of armor, is seen in the tower pointing a sword toward the Prince of Malice's court. Standing below at the gate is Chastity, Humility, Bounty, and Sobriety. Temperance in red armor and Charity in blue

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[5] Carder, "Prince of Malice and His Court."

armor stand guard at the gate, and a host of angels stand to the left. The portrayal of virtue and vice in symbolic, human form was a common theme throughout medieval art and is an excellent demonstration of the medieval use of allegory.

In order to realize the influence of allegory in late medieval tapestry, and the importance of allegory in *The Prince of Malice and His Court,* it is essential to understand the development of the allegorical tradition in early medieval society. Medieval allegory began as a continuation of the mythological traditions of the Classical period, colored by the new images and concerns of Christian doctrine.[6] The origins of this extreme focus on allegory can be hypothesized as the increased uncertainty of the time.[7] The transition into the year 1000 caused a widespread panic, leading to the popularity of allegory. The fear of the world ending with the new millennium likely inspired authors and artists to provide a new way of coping with and understanding the real and the mystical. This anxiety only seemed to progress throughout the coming years due to constant wars and famine. Additionally, the tragedy of the Black Plague in the late 1300s made death a daily reality to the medieval people.[8] Symbolism and allegory provided hope for these chaotic societies because the world could now be understood in terms of, "God's discourse to man."[9]

Allegory was embedded in the fabric of Christianity from the beginning. Christ himself taught in terms of allegories or parables, and early Christians reduced their imagery to symbols

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[6] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Age*, 53.

[7] Eco, 53.

[8] Eco, 53.

[9] Eco, 54.

in order to avoid persecution. [10] In 1025, theologian Honorius of Autun stated that pictures were the literature of the ordinary man, exposing to what extent the Catholic church relied upon allegory and symbolism to teach its messages. [11] As Robert Worth Frank, Jr. put it, "the Church created a mode of thought which encouraged symbol-allegory." [12] What differentiates the medieval use of allegory from any other culture or tradition is that it directly tied the allegorical significance of natural objects to Scripture. [13] By the end of the Middle Ages, this allegorical tradition had become heavily entrenched in culture and had become closely connected to concepts of morality. Consequently, allegory, and specifically moral allegories, permeated artistic production, especially late medieval tapestries.

Though tapestry was not invented in the Middle Ages, the art form became exceedingly popular in late medieval Europe, with Paris, Arras, Tournai, and Brussels eventually becoming centers for tapestry production by the late 1300s.[14] The influence of these different cities waxed and waned throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In addition, it was rare for a workshop to "sign" their tapestries. These factors together make it extremely difficult for art historians to discover where a tapestry was produced. The few scholars who have researched the *Prince of Malice and His Court* have not concurred on where it was produced, but a Tournai

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[10] Eco, 54.

[11] Eco, 54.

[12] Robert Worth Frank, Jr., "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory," *ELH* 20, no. 4 (1953): 237, https://doi.org/10.2307/2871966.

[13] Eco, 59.

[14] Roger-Armand Weigert, *French Tapestry* (Glasgow: Robert MacLehose & Co. , 1962), 29.

workshop may be likely.[15] This would categorically make the tapestry Flemish; however, this does not mean that the tapestry should be considered within a Flemish context. Roger Weigert warns against these assumptions when he says,

> By virtue of their geographical and historical situation, the Tournai workshops, like those of Arras, must be considered in any study of French tapestry and its evolution. One cannot, on the basis of misleading considerations of nationality, exclude their works and proclaim them Flemish. Still less so, since neither Arras in Artois, nor Tournai in Hainaut, forms part of Flanders… Tournai tapestries prior to 1526, are specifically Flemish, Burgundian by their geographical character, and Franco-Flemish by their adherence to a style which was common to both France and Flanders.[16]

In other words, the cultural exchange that took place between France and Flanders in the 1400s means that "Flemish" tapestries of the same time period should also be considered within a French context. Recent historians have heeded this advice, such as Laura Weigert in her article "Chambres D'amour: Tapestries of Love and the Texturing of Space," where she assumes her tapestry in question was commissioned by a French nobleman, even though it was likely produced in Brussels.[17] The lack of records surrounding tapestry production in the late Middle Ages requires such an approach. As previously mentioned, there is no established patron for *The Prince of Malice and His Court*. Based on the example of aforementioned scholarship and the connection between the tapestry and the morality play *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* that will be examined, this thesis will present a hypothesis of a noble French patron, and thus consider the tapestry within a broader French context.

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[15] Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo, "The Procession of Gula a Flemish Tapestry," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 32, no. 4 (1953): 87, https://doi.org/10.1086/dia41505134.

[16] Weigert, *French Tapestry*, 43.

[17] See a similar instance in James J. Rorimer, "The Unicorn Tapestries Were Made for Anne of Brittany," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (1942): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/3257087.

Throughout all the various workshops, the style of tapestry design experienced a significant shift around the year 1360. Prior to this date, tapestries generally were characterized by simple geometric designs, patterns, and heraldic devices.[18] After 1360, however, workshops were producing tapestries of both religious and secular subject matter, full of flora, fauna, and multiple figural scenes.[19] These tapestries often depicted scenes of courtly activities and romance set against a complex background of plants and animals. This change in style was due, in large part, to the appointment of Charles V to the French throne, ruling from 1364 to 1380, proving the influence that France had over all of tapestry design, even those produced in Flanders.[20] Roger-Armand Weigert summarizes this stylistic transition when he says, "A new wealth and luxury made themselves felt in most fields related to the fine arts. Such an environment could not fail to encourage the development of tapestry, which now, without losing its utilitarian function and character, began to achieve a new refinement of execution." [21] Along with this new style came new messages that are best described as allegorical. These textiles were produced on an extremely large scale, requiring hours of work and a large amount of financial backing. As a result, the patrons of these works were often wealthy aristocrats, rulers, or religious organizations. For these groups, allegorical tapestries provided a visual means of communicating political or moral messages that easily influenced their audience or viewers.

[18] Weigert, 32.

[19] Weigert, 32.

[20] Weigert, 33.

[21] Weigert, 33.

Where tapestry may have spoken to a wealthier audience, morality plays spoke to the layman who equally benefited from allegorical representations. There are many literary examples saturated with allegory, but the most significant category is medieval morality plays. These plays communicated notions of life and morality through narratives that relied heavily on symbolism. Allegorical symbolism, therefore, can be understood through an exchange of visual and literary iconography. Popular during the Middle Ages, morality plays are a sub-category of the broader genre of vernacular plays. [22] These performances were most often religious in nature, as most things were in the Middle Ages. They were extensions of the teachings of the church, translating moral lessons into the common tongue, instead of the Latin used in the Church liturgy. [23] These plays, which show the complexities of religion and culture, provided their audiences with relatable and digestible access to Christian narratives and articles of the faith. [24]

The morality plays themselves were often presented on large wagons constructed specifically for the performances. [25] These wagons were not small wooden structures, but were quite large and featured complex designs, similar to modern day parade floats. Each play or pageant was assigned to a separate trade guild who was responsible for the financing and building the wagon, along with any props and costumes necessary for the show. [26] Although a wagon driven through the city might give the impression that these plays were performed to

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[22] Greg Walker, *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2009), 3.

[23] Walker, *Medieval Drama*, viii.

[24] P. M. King, "The End of the World in Medieval English Religious Drama," *Literature and Theology* 26, no. 4 (2012): 390, https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frs048.

[25] Walker, 3.

[26] Walker, 4.

large audiences, there were hardly ever more than 200 people in attendance.[27] This more intimate setting created a close relationship between the actors and the audience, making the viewers feel like participants in the drama. This was essential to the messages of many morality plays, as will be seen later.

The narratives of these morality plays were focused on the nature of the human condition and the necessity for moral improvement.[28] Essential to the Catholic theology of human identity was the division of man's soul by two forces: the righteous desire to know God and to increasingly imitate him versus the sinful desire to gratify the wants of the flesh.[29] In this way, the medieval person was essentially a divided self. This division was what morality plays focused on the most, fleshing out the ways in which a righteous man might be tempted towards sin, with the hopes of providing an escape for the contemporary viewer.[30] This concept can be sourced in the long literary tradition of virtue and vice, where these two opposing forces fight for man's soul.[31] One of the most famous of these literary works is the fourteenth century *Triumphs of Petrarch*, in which a series of battles is fought against vices and won by virtue.[32] This narrative was turned into the cornerstone of medieval morality plays. The protagonist is often

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[27] Walker, 4.

[28] Walker, 209.

[29] Natalie Crohn Schmitt, "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays," *Comparative Drama* 12, no. 1 (1978): 29, https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.1978.0004.

[30] Schmitt, "The Idea of a Person," 30.

[31] Danielle C. Dubois, "The Virtuous Fall: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Medieval Ethics of Sin," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 43, no. 3 (2015): 440.

[32] Dubois, "The Virtuous Fall," 435.

defined as a universal figure, or an individual who represents and can be related to as a symbol for the entire human race.[33] This character participates in five main stages of the narrative arc, which are innocence, temptation, corruption, repentance, and eventually redemption.[34] The goal of these stories was to inspire the audience to learn from the life of the main character and correct their life before it was too late, before hell and damnation robbed them of their chance for redemption.[35]

The deep connection of allegory with religious practice creates an interesting correlation between tapestry and morality plays. Past scholarship on medieval allegory has focused mainly on literary narratives, manuscript illumination, and architecture.[36] This analysis, however, will expound upon the discussion of allegory in the visual arts by examining a little-known tapestry, *The Prince of Malice and His Court.* Medieval tapestries played a public role for the wealthy and elite, utilizing allegory to promote the agenda of the patron. Morality plays employed allegory in much the same way, speaking to a different category of the public. In many cases, these two artistic genres share exact symbolism and iconography. These commonalities speak to the larger intentions behind the use of allegory in late medieval cultural production, especially when considered within the context of the possible location of their reception, namely France. The

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[33] Walker, 209.

[34] Walker, 209.

[35] Walker, 281.

[36] Examples: Carl C. Curtis, "Biblical Analogy and Secondary Allegory in Chaucer's The Knight's Tale," *Christianity and Literature* 57, no. 2 (2008): 207–22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44313807, and AD Putter, "Personifications of Old Age in Medieval Poetry: Charles d'Orléans and William Langland," *The Review of English Studies* 63, no. 260 (2012): 388–409, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23263670.

entanglement of French politics and culture within the authority of the Church and Christian thought signifies that any religious allegory in the arts has the potential to be politicized. The following discussion will elucidate these issues by presenting an analysis of the tapestry *The Prince of Malice and His Court* along with the allegorical devices used in this tapestry. There will be direct correlations discovered between this tapestry and *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain,* a morality play of the same time period, revealing that these shared allegorical devices were employed as a way to control the morality of the viewer and or audience, whether that audience be the aristocratic owners of tapestries or the common citizen viewing a play.

Literature Review

General Literature on Late Medieval Tapestry

Before turning to scholarship on *The Prince of Malice and His Court* specifically, an overview of the general state of the field in late medieval tapestry is helpful. Within the last twenty years, there has been a resurgence in research of medieval tapestry. In these modern cases, research is moving past basic questions of origin or narrative in an attempt to examine deeper implications. One of the more popular topics amongst contemporary historians is the presence of allegory within late medieval tapestry, focusing mostly on courtly romance narratives. For example, in Laura Weigert's article "Chambres D'amour: Tapestries of Love and the Texturing of Space," the author examines a set of six allegorical tapestries now located in the Musée National du Moyen Age- Thermes de Cluny in Paris.[37] These panels, created around the

[37] Laura Weigert, "Chambres D'amour: Tapestries of Love and the Texturing of Space," *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 3 (2008): 320, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20542848.

year 1500, tell the tale of courtly love and romance, invoking feelings of nostalgia and desire. The author's aim is to prove that the tapestries engaged the medieval viewer in a multi-sensory experience, inviting them to partake in the visual narrative at play. Ultimately, this reveals a deeper meaning to the romantic themes of the tapestries. Using a reception theory methodology, Weigert observes that the placement and imagery of these tapestries would have created an all-consuming visual experience for their viewer.

This visual experience, in Weigert's example, is heavily influenced by the narrative at play. Each of these panels depicts a different courtly activity, such as holding a falcon, spinning wool, and embroidering, ending with a scene of a noblewoman in her bath. Although it is difficult to interpret a direct narrative out of these seemingly disjointed activities, viewing them within the millefleurs garden indicates that these behaviors are romantically inclined. Weigert compares this to contemporary romance literature, specifically focusing on the motivating theme of desire.[38] This desire, and the pursuit of fulfilling said desire, often becomes the main identity of the protagonist and conversely that of the reader as well; therefore, the purpose of this literature is to affect the audience through the main character's emotional state. For example, in *The Book of the Love-Smitten Heart*, travelers enter a banquet hall covered in ten tapestry panels depicting the different aspects of love's passion. The travelers follow these tapestries down the hall, observing each one, until they finally reach the room of Venus.[39] The point made here is that the knights' physical engagement with the tapestries' narrative as well as a reader's tendency

[38] Weigert, 326.

[39] Weigert, 332.

to empathize with a protagonist's emotional state can also be applied to the narrative present in the Cluny series of tapestries

The narrative of the tapestries discussed in this article, however, is not straightforward. This could be attributed to the fact that the courtly love romance was intended to "trigger distinct emotional responses" in the viewer.[40] By presenting an ambiguous narrative, the viewer is able to create their own story, arranging characters and actions in whatever way they want in order to produce the tale that they wish to play a role in. Although the viewer could, in this way, directly interact with the tapestries, they were still inhibited from entering into the garden itself due to the materiality of the object. The author directly relates this to the state of the courts during this time. In short, the appointment of Louis XI to the French throne in 1461 caused the influence of the court to decrease exponentially.[41] The new king caused fear and distrust amongst the French nobles, especially considering that he was known to be a self-sufficient monarch, refusing to surround himself with a court of nobles.[42] The position of the French elite in the political affairs of France, therefore, quickly became tenuous. The unifying of France after the Hundred Years' War, as well as the increased power of the State, subjected nobles to live under the authority of the king in a way that they had never experienced before. The court's influence over politics and culture had been significantly reduced, and there were no longer extensive social connections, or even ancestral requirements, in order to be inducted into noble society.[43] Instead, people could

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[40] Weigert, 333.

[41] Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 180.

[42] Wickham, *Medieval Europe*, 245.

[43] Weigert, 334.

simply purchase aristocratic titles, which shifted the economy towards urban centers and away from noble landowners.[44] Even luxury items, such as tapestries, were becoming more available to a wider population, further reducing the amount of distinctions offered to the aristocratic class.[45] All of this tension can be felt in these panels. The noble owner of these tapestries, upon entering into the garden room, could be surrounded by his own court, arranged in whatever way he pleased. The luxury and exaggerated status of the court can clearly be felt in these six tapestries analyzed here, although, the viewer would have been painfully reminded of their inability to actually enter into that world. These tapestries would have prompted in their viewer a sense of nostalgia for their irredeemable social position within the French court.

In the article's conclusion, Weigert begins to convey her interpretation of these romantic tapestries as evidence for female actions of desire in medieval imagery. Historically, the feelings and actions of desire have been recounted in male terms, leaving the female as simply the object of this desire. Alternatively, Weigert believes that the figures in this tapestry set indicate a focus on the female rather than the male. It is worth noting that this discussion begins to impose modern conceptions of gender politics onto a culture from a different time and location, making this argument somewhat disjointed from a proper analysis of these tapestries. Alternatively, Weigert's emphasis on the viewer's experience of an allegorical narrative, as well as its historical and political context, are extremely important and indicative of the trend in modern-day scholarship on late medieval tapestry.

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[44] Weigert, 334.

[45] Weigert, 334.

Emily C. Francomano also discusses courtly romance narratives in tapestry in her article "Reversing the Tapestry: Prison of Love in Text, Image, Textile". Francomano's research, however, focuses more on the literary sources that influenced the creation of a tapestry series from the year 1500 known as *L'Histoire de Lérian et Lauréolle.* These tapestries are adaptations of the popular romance titled the *Prison of Love*, in which "chivalric prowess, constancy, diplomacy, and eloquence all prove useless" in the pursuit of an ill-fated courtship.[46] The author's goal in this study is to reveal the ways in which text and image overlap through the process of adapting the narrative to the textile medium. To support her thesis, Francomano outlines and describes each similarity and difference between the story and the textile and how text plays a role.

This article goes into great depth concerning the original text and translation of the *Prison of Love* story, but the arguments made regarding iconography and patronage are the most applicable to this discussion. As with many late medieval tapestries, the series discussed by Francomano utilizes a literary courtly romance narrative and turns it into an allegorical message. The discussion of patronage also serves to prove that these allegories were oftentimes politicized, being used by the nobility to communicate intentional messages. Although the author provides an excellent introduction to these issues, the subject of politicized allegory in tapestry deserves much more investigation.

Aside from romance narratives, another allegory often discussed in contemporary scholarship on late medieval tapestry is the *Triumphs of Petrarch*. Thomas P. Campbell

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[46] Emily C. Francomano, "Reversing the Tapestry: Prison of Love in Text, Image, and Textile," *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 1063, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2871966.

discusses this allegory and its representation in tapestry in his article "New Evidence on 'Triumphs of Petrarch' Tapestries in the Early Sixteenth Century. Part I: the French Court."[47] According to the author, the specific tapestry set that he analyzes has received little attention since 1902.[48] Campbell, therefore, seeks to illuminate the importance of these tapestries not only in terms of the communication of Petrarchan allegorical imagery, but also the political circumstances surrounding their production.

The narrative displayed in these textiles is that of Petrarch's triumphs over the personifications of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Divinity. Prior to the creation of these tapestries, there are very few examples of Petrarchan imagery in textiles. There are examples of the personifications standing on top bodies they have killed, but this imagery differs greatly from that seen in the *Triumphs* discussed in this article. In these examples, the personifications are seen triumphantly riding in on chariots, which was the Italian way of visualizing this story.[49] The author traces the source of this depiction to manuscript illuminations seen in Jean Robertet's summary of Petrarch's text.[50] In comparison to other examples of Petrarchan tapestries, the *Triumph of Petrarch* tapestry series analyzed in this article is significantly more elaborate and detailed. In order to follow this Italian model of Petrarchan imagery, full of extravagant chariots and a multitude of animals and figures, it would have been

[47] Thomas P. Campbell, "New Evidence on 'Triumphs of Petrarch' Tapestries in the Early Sixteenth Century. Part I: The French Court," *The Burlington Magazine* 146, no. 1215 (2004): 375, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20073558.

[48] Campbell, "New Evidence," 376.

[49] Campbell, 379.

[50] Campbell, 379.

astronomically expensive.[51] This, of course, implies that this particular set of tapestries would have been a costly investment by a very wealthy patron. Campbell spends the remainder of the article discussing the patronage of these tapestries, ultimately concluding that they were commissioned by Louis XII. Although the author does an excellent job of tracking the patronage of these textiles, which can be helpful for future scholarship, there is little to no investigation into the allegorical message and cultural significance of this tapestry series.

Alternatively, "Urban Politics and Material Culture at the End of the Middle Ages: the Coventry Tapestry in St. Mary's Hall," by Christian D. Liddy, moves beyond a simple discussion of patronage to deliver a well-rounded discourse on the cultural and political message hidden within the tapestry made for St. Mary's Hall.[52] The thesis of this article is focused on the iconography and historical context of the tapestry and what this imagery reveals about the political climate of the region during this time. Although this tapestry is not located in France, it is assumed to have been created either in a French or Flemish workshop and, therefore, fits within the context of this discussion.

The author begins by providing examples of political imagery in town halls across Europe during the Middle Ages. It was common for town halls to be decorated with imagery of the court and/or the arms of rulers.[53] Thus, the author focuses on Coventry's St. Mary's Hall and how the decoration, specifically the large tapestry at the end of the hall, indicates deeper

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[51] Campbell, 380.

[52] Christian D. Liddy, "Urban Politics and Material Culture at the End of the Middle Ages: The Coventry Tapestry in St Mary's Hall," *Urban History* 39, no. 2 (2012): 206, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0963926812000028.

[53] Liddy, "Urban Politics," 206.

concepts of power and authority. The tapestry in question dates to around 1500, a time when Coventry was in deep economic decline.[54] This fact points to a deeper, more important meaning in the tapestry because of the great cost this tapestry would have incurred for the city.

To analyze the tapestry's meaning, the author first discusses previous theories about the purpose of its commission. As has previously been mentioned, tapestries were created from cartoons, which would be used later to reproduce similar designs for different patrons. Conversely, the Coventry tapestry is entirely unique in that there does not exist an identical or even similar tapestry anywhere else.[55] This indicates that the tapestry was made specifically for Coventry and had a poignant meaning for the city itself.

The Coventry tapestry was specifically created for St. Mary's Hall, indicated by the exact dimensions that it occupies and the symmetry between the panels of the tapestry and the three panels of the stained glass above it. The tapestry is divided into six scenes, the bottom left and right depicting a king and queen with their courtiers, and the remaining panels showing several images of saints and martyrs, along with the image of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the center.[56] The separation of the images into two tiers is reflective of the view of the government during this time. The heavenly court above and the terrestrial court below signifies the view of the earthly court being an extension of the heavenly. The author references several instances of this relationship, including the Byzantine concept of *Taxis*, which stated that earthly society

[54] Liddy, 207.

[55] Liddy, 208.

[56] Here, the author briefly mentions an alteration that was made to the tapestry that has not been explained. The personification of Justice has replaced what was most likely the Holy Trinity, a decision that was not recorded and has not been illuminated as of yet.

"should be a mirror of the harmony, equilibrium and hierarchy found in the celestial kingdom".[57] Not only does the Coventry tapestry represent this in theme but also in its balanced and symmetrical composition. Overall, the conclusion is that the imagery here represented the flow of power from God to government and then to the common civilian.

The importance of this message lies in the location at St. Mary's Hall and the political climate of the region during this time. In the early 1400s, Coventry had experienced great favor in England and had been granted a royal charter that put the city on par with larger capitals such as Bristol and York.[58] This resulted in St. Mary's Hall becoming a center for governmental proceedings. By the 1500s this became less common, and the Holy Trinity fraternity was losing its control over the politics of the region. Another significant factor is the riots that took place in the late 1400s, leaving the city in a state of unease and uncertainty.[59] Finally, there was a threat of heresy running rampant in the region in the 1480s from a Lollard community. This group was denying the power of the saints and presenting a threat to Catholic values that the city had been founded upon.[60] All of these events point to the significance of this tapestry. Set in a place of prominence in the town hall, the tapestry attempted to reinforce the political and religious power of an anxious governing system. The political agenda behind this example indicates a precedent for manipulating the perceptions and even the morality of a tapestry's audience. In this case, the authority of the Catholic church had much to gain by reorienting the values of the city's citizens

[57] Liddy, 216.

[58] Liddy, 217.

[59] Liddy, 218.

[60] Liddy, 220.

back towards the doctrine of the church. The product of that motivation was the Coventry tapestry, which promoted the idea of divine authority.

The general corpus of current scholarly literature indicates that there is a mutual attempt to uncover the meanings behind late medieval tapestries. Laura Weigert's article examines the political motivations behind allegorical tapestry designs. Political messages were clearly communicated through textiles, and could have been used to emotionally manipulate the viewer through literary references. This is seen in the *millefleurs* tapestries discussed by Weigert and their relationship to the nobility in France during this time. This fascinating observation, however, is not given enough attention and could benefit from more in-depth research. Similarly, Emily C. Francomano presents an overview of the politicized messages hidden within a given tapestry series, with an emphasis placed on the allegorical nature of the narrative. Both examples provide an excellent starting point for the discussion of medieval tapestries in terms of allegorical messages and literary influence. The research presented here will continue the conversation by exploring allegorical concepts within *The Prince of Malice and His Court* and its correlation to the literary example of morality plays.

Both Thomas P. Campbell and Christian D. Liddy present an alternative, political perspective to the study of late medieval tapestry. Campbell, however, approaches the topic solely from a position of patronage. Although this information is important, it does not present a full picture of the meaning or importance of a given tapestry. The allegorical nature of the *Triumphs of Petrarch* narrative indicates that the tapestry counterpart should be studied in much greater depth. On the other hand, Liddy marries the conversation of patronage with a cultural and political analysis that reveals the true importance of the tapestry in his discussion. The success of this approach is a great model that will be applied to the following analysis. The possible

patronage of *The Prince of Malice and His Court* will be discussed within its cultural and political landscape in order to elucidate the allegorical meaning of the tapestry.

Morality Plays and Tapestry

The above examples demonstrate clearly that contemporary scholarship utilizes literature of courtly romance in its analysis of late medieval tapestry, but there are several other literary genres that have not been given as much attention, one such example being morality plays. Although several scholars have briefly mentioned the visual exchange between morality plays and tapestry, Laura Weigert's book *French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater* is the most in depth modern attempt to bring the two mediums into a well-rounded discussion.[61] In this book, Weigert discusses late medieval art in relationship to medieval theater. Focusing on examples from northern France between 1470 and 1578, the author challenges the assumption that artistic representations of late medieval theater were always literal and straightforward. She argues instead that the modern distinction between visual art and theater has wrongly been imposed upon the late Middle Ages, a period when performance was embodied in a wide range of artistic production, such as manuscript illumination and tapestry.

In the first two chapters, Weigert focuses primarily on examples found in manuscript illuminations, with the first chapter examining the earliest illuminated example of a ceremonial entry. The author argues here that the medieval person did not always distinguish living drama from figural groups in statues, paintings, tapestries, etc., meaning that this particular manuscript may not actually be linked to a live event. Similarly, in chapter two, Weigert discusses another

[61] Laura Weigert, *French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

illuminated manuscript, this one from Arras in 1470.[62] This manuscript has long been considered a representation of a popular passion play; however, Weigert argues that it does not actually commemorate a live staging, but was instead intended to encourage the participation of the viewer with the text, similar to the dynamic of staged plays.

Where the first two chapters serve to disprove assumed connections between manuscript illuminations and medieval plays, chapter three shifts towards the tapestry medium and its most decided correlation to the theater. Of this connection, Weigert states, "Indeed, the history, display, and subject matter of tapestry closely resemble those of performances involving human beings," and, "tapestry nicely suited the demands of depicting the variety of locations, multiple story lines, and considerable number of figures and amount of activity in a large-scale play."[63] Focusing namely on battle scene tapestries, Weigert contends that the monumentality of these tapestries parallels large scale urban dramas, both serving to invite the noble viewer to identify with the hero, while simultaneously emphasizing the artificiality of the scene.[64] Violence was obviously a main theme of these scenes, which communicated to the audience of both tapestry and play that this violence was a by-product of their own environment.

This emphasis on the audience's interpretation of tapestry carries over into the following chapter, where Weigert emphasizes the role tapestry played in the viewer's experience of a drama. Just as an audience member would watch as a plot unfolded before their eyes, the large-scale nature of tapestry encouraged the viewer to walk along the length of a tapestry and fully

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[62] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 76.

[63] Weigert*,* 125-126.

[64] Weigert, 160.

immerse themselves in the narrative. Weigert uses the example of a Vengeance painted cloth series from Reims to demonstrate this point.[65] This particular series, as is most often the case with tapestries, was too costly to be included in any outdoor ceremonial entry or processional, and therefore must have been displayed indoors where the viewer would walk the length of the series to experience the narrative.

The relationship between visual culture and theatricality examined in this book is a welcome conversation. From it, we can establish a connection between visual production and the medieval theater. The shift in focus away from manuscript illumination and towards tapestry in terms of actual representations of medieval performances is astute and worthy of further consideration. The tapestries included in Weigert's discussion are excellent examples for her arguments; however, there are several other late medieval tapestries that have the potential to be included in this conversation that are not mentioned in her book, such as *The Prince of Malice and His Court*.

Although the connection between morality plays and tapestry has been discussed by various other scholars in some depth, the correlation between *The Prince of Malice and His Court* and medieval morality plays has only been assumed, but never fully researched. In Adolfo Cavallo's research on *The Procession of Gula* tapestry, he mentions *The Prince of Malice* tapestry, but it is only in conjunction with the analysis of a separate tapestry. In his examination of the subject matter of *The Procession of Gula* tapestry, Cavallo supposes that the image is "probably derived from one of the morality plays which were so popular at this period", and he mentions *The Prince of Malice and His Court* as another example of morality plays represented

[65] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 162.

in tapestry.[66] This is not the first assertion of this kind. When Dumbarton Oaks purchased the tapestry from French & Company in 1935, the dealer described it as being one of the best examples of morality plays adapted to tapestry. In addition, in his monograph *Flemish Tapestries*, Guy Delmarcel says that the staging of the scene in the tapestry is "reminiscent of a medieval miracle play, or of a moral allegory."[67] These few assertions made by scholars are helpful in supporting the hypothesis that *The Prince of Malice and His Court* is a visual representation of a contemporary morality play; however, there has never been a complete investigation into this assumption. The following thesis, therefore, will attempt to make steps towards a fuller analysis of *The Prince of Malice and His Court* and its connection to morality plays, namely that of *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain*.

The resulting research will combine the scholarly approaches to other late medieval tapestry in a unique way, while filling in the gaps that are missing in the discussion. Building off of the research that has already been conducted in the field, the deeper implications of allegorical messages in *The Prince of Malice and His Court* will be explored. Expanding on the methodologies of art historians such as Laura Weigert and Emily C. Francomano, this tapestry will be placed within the larger picture of literary cultural production. Typically, historians have used poetry and courtly romance literature as cultural comparisons, but this research will utilize a comparison to the morality play *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* instead. The success of such an approach is seen in Laura Weigert's *French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater*; however, the following thesis will be the first time that an entire study has been

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[66] Cavallo, "The Procession of Gula," 87.

[67] Guy Delmarcel, *Flemish Tapestry* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 52.

dedicated to *The Prince of Malice and His Court* and its relation to morality plays. Ultimately, this comparison will solidify the importance of concepts of morality within art production of the late medieval era, as well as the overarching cultural and political obsession with controlling morality.

Methodologies

Although art historians have analyzed moralizing narratives within late medieval tapestry design, the typical approach has not often exceeded a formal analysis. Examples of these moral allegories in tapestry, however, have much more to be discovered, necessitating the employment of more specific methodologies. The following analysis will compare the symbolism in *The Prince of Malice and His Court* alongside symbolism found in the French medieval morality *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain*. Understanding these symbols and their intended meaning requires the use of an iconographic approach, but they cannot be understood apart from their broader cultural context, making cultural studies an equally essential methodology. The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to demonstrate the importance of both iconography and cultural studies within this analysis. These methodologies will be used to compare *The Prince of Malice and His Court* and the morality play *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain*, both created between 1470 and 1480, ultimately revealing the contemporary cultural and political impetus for controlling morality.

Medieval art relies heavily on the use of symbolism to communicate messages, and without employing an iconographic approach, these messages would be entirely lost. Iconography as a research method identifies imagery within a given work as symbols, and then analyzes those symbols for their possible meaning. This methodology is commonly utilized in

the study of medieval art, as seen in Thomas P. Campbell's article "New Evidence on 'Triumphs of Petrarch' Tapestries in the Early Sixteenth Century." Campbell uses an iconographic analysis of the personifications in these tapestries, comparing them to past examples, in order to track down the patronage of the series. Although this analysis will not focus as heavily on issues regarding patronage, it will still strongly rely on an iconographic approach, considering the substantial use of symbolism in tapestry.

The discussion of morality plays in this thesis will also utilize the iconographic approach. The narratives of these plays mainly centered around epic battles of good and evil, fought by the personified armies of virtues and vice. The characters of these plays are often personified abstractions, meaning they represent an abstract or immaterial idea.[68] Traditionally, the main character would also be considered a universal type, as in the play *The Summoning of Everyman,* where the main character is understood to represent and encompass all of mankind.[69] The medieval person hardly ever distinguished between these types of symbols and allegory, and morality plays often utilized both interchangeably within a single work.[70] It is important, therefore, to fully understand the iconography of these morality plays and how it was utilized in adaptations to tapestry. Conversely, deciphering the meaning of iconography in tapestries and its sources can provide a better understanding of its literary foundation. Although iconographic elements are essential in appreciating the meaning of a given work, a full analysis cannot be

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[68] Schmitt, "The Idea of a Person," 25.

[69] Schmitt, 27.

[70] Schmitt, 28.

completed without understanding the larger cultural and political implications. In this way, iconography is a steppingstone to the final methodology of cultural studies.

The goal of cultural studies is to understand how a culture is constructed and develops over time through interdisciplinary comparisons. The success of such an approach is exemplified in the aforementioned analysis by Christian D. Liddy of the tapestry that hangs in St. Mary's Hall in Coventry, England.[71] The author begins his discussion with iconography, determining that it is a representation of the heavenly court and the earthly court meeting together, ultimately conveying the message that human authority is an extension of God's own authority. In order to fully understand the implications of this message, Liddy proves the necessity of shifting to a cultural studies approach. By considering the historical and political context, the author concludes that the tapestry reinforced to the people of Coventry that the authorities placed above them were put in place by God himself, giving them unquestionable wisdom and power. Liddy's scholarship on this tapestry is an excellent example of the importance of a cultural studies methodology when discussing the significance of medieval tapestry to its contemporary audience.

The allegorical nature of artistic production was central to medieval thought and culture at the end of the Middle Ages. Stella Rubinstein summarizes this idea seamlessly when she says, "The Fifteenth Century is preeminently the century of allegory. Not of classical allegory…but allegory whose spirit is moral and religious and full of the mystic symbolism conceived in the Middle Ages. The tapestries of the late fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth centuries are

[71] Liddy, 203-224.

perhaps the most perfect expression of this order of ideas."[72] These moral allegories in tapestry can be best understood through an iconographic and cultural studies approach. As demonstrated in Thomas P. Campbell's examination of the *Triumphs of Petrarch* tapestries, an iconographic examination proves essential in understanding the origins of the tapestries themselves. Additionally, iconography enacts a vital role in the narratives of morality plays, relating the symbolism of the written texts to their visual counterparts.

The full scope of these works cannot be obtained without involving the contemporary cultural and political environment. This thesis will, therefore, apply an iconographic approach to the examination of both tapestry and morality play. Identifying the meaning of the iconography within these mediums will not only illuminate the message behind their allegories, but it will also demonstrate a connection and mutual inspiration between the two art forms. Subsequently, cultural studies will be applied, not simply in comparing the interdisciplinary nature of tapestry and morality plays, but in examining the meaning of their allegories against the cultural and historical moment. The resulting analysis will explain the motivation behind the production of both mediums, which was an overarching obsession to control morality, both culturally and politically.

Analysis

Medieval tapestries were created from cartoons, which means that elements of a composition or the entire scene itself would often be copied and reproduced. Regarding *The Prince of Malice and His Court*, however, no copy has been discovered as of yet, meaning this

[72] Stella Rubinstein, "A French Tapestry of the Late 15th or Beginning of the 16th Century," *Arts & Decoration* 7, no. 4 (1917): 183.

tapestry is entirely unique within the known corpus of late medieval tapestry. Although there are several other courtroom scenes in tapestry, they often depict the historical court of a king or the throne room of heaven.[73] The presence of a full court of vices in a throne room, with no other secondary characters, is extremely unusual. Vices themselves were a common theme in medieval art, harking back to the popularity of narratives such as the *Triumphs of Petrarch*.[74] There are several tapestries that depict such vices, even apart from the Petrarchan model. The major theme across these examples, however, is that the vices are either properly engaged in battle, or they have already been defeated.[75] For example, the *Triumphs of Fame* tapestry (figure 2) shows the personification of Time as it tramples Death under its chariot, a much more violent scene than that of the *Prince of Malice*.[76] Rather than action or defeat, the scene is set in a dignified and elaborate throne room while an intellectual debate takes place. The vices are not depicted as obvious threats, but rather as aristocratic courtesans, enjoying an audience with their king, a rather unique way of showing the vices in the tapestry medium.[77]

Also, the devil, named here as the Prince of Malice, is a rare version. The devil was often shown as a threatening monster, a theme that tapestry borrowed from the long tradition of

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[73] See such examples as *Glorification of Christ* at the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels; *A Lady Making a Presentation to a Queen* from the Burrell Collection at the Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries; and *Solomon and Queen of Sheba* from the *Life of Solomon* tapestries located at the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester.

[74] Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art: From Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 10.

[75] Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices,* 16.

[76] Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries,* 467.

[77] Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries,* 471.

manuscript illumination.[78] For example, in the *Apocalypse* tapestry series at the Château d'Angers, one of the panels entitled *Michael and His Angels Defeating Satan and His Angles* shows Satan as a winged dragon (figure 2). Similar depictions are seen across tapestry design and manuscript illumination, such as the illustration of figure 3.[79] The devil as a dignified king is entirely unique in tapestry and very rare in other artistic traditions.

Additionally, unique to this tapestry is the entirely male representation of the vices. In the virtue and vice tradition, both personifications are shown as distinctly female. Beginning with the Petrarchan model, female characteristics and clothing are always ascribed to virtues and vices. Even in the original description from French & Company, they felt it necessary to note this unique feature: "It is interesting to note that in the Salvation group all of the Virtues and nearly all of the Vices are feminine. In the *Prince of Wickedness* tapestry, the Virtues and Vices are contrasted by the displaying of the Castle of the Prince of Wickedness, in which the Prince is surrounded by his courtiers, all of whom are masculine figures representing Vices and on the left, the Castle of Goodness whose inhabitants are the Virtues, all feminine."[80] In other words, this tapestry goes against the long standing artistic tradition of the gendering of these personifications.

Adding to the unique nature of *The Prince of Malice and His Court* is the expense that this tapestry likely required. In general, the cost of medieval tapestries was directly correlated to

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[78] Morgan A. Matos, "The Satanic Phenomenon: Medieval Representations of Satan" (dissertation, Rollins College, 2011), pp. 1-112.

[79] Cavallo, *Medieval Tapestries,* 46.

[80] French & Company (New York, New York, n.d.).

the quality of the tapestry and the labor required to complete it.[81] Even in workshops with multiple weavers, one square-yard of plain, coarse tapestry would take at least one month to complete.[82] When higher quality materials were used, such as the silk threads used in *The Prince of Malice* tapestry, the process was much slower because of the higher amount of warp and weft threads necessary. In these cases, it would likely take at least one month to produce only half of a square yard.[83] When considering the size of our tapestry, 136 inches by 179 inches, it could have taken at least two years to complete, especially considering there is a whole other scene in the tapestry that has been lost to time.[84] This labor was costly and required a significant amount of financial backing. In addition, the fine silk threads included in this tapestry indicate that it would have cost at least four times more than a tapestry woven with coarse wool.[85] *The Prince of Malice and His Court*, therefore, required a very wealthy patron indeed. Not only does this make the work stand out amongst the corpus of late medieval tapestry, but it also indicates a possible connection to a noble French patron. Although there were other courts commissioning tapestries from the workshops of Tournai and Brussels by the 16th century, the French court was one of the larger financiers of Flemish workshops through the end of the 1400s.[86] Considering the extreme

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[81] Thomas P. Campbell, "European Tapestry Production and Patronage, 1400–1600," Metmuseum.org, October 2002, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/taps/hd_taps.htm.

[82] Campbell, "European Tapestry Production and Patronage."

[83] Campbell, "European Tapestry Production and Patronage."

[84] This estimate could be reduced depending on how many weavers worked on the tapestry, but it does not include the additional time required to create the cartoons and set up the looms.

[85] Campbell, "European Tapestry Production and Patronage."

[86] Weigert, French Tapestry, 43.

cost of this particular tapestry, the patron was likely French nobility or an aristocrat. The cost, combined with the unique nature of the composition itself, also indicates that the patron of this tapestry likely had some sort of agenda behind its production.

It was not uncommon for late medieval tapestries to be commissioned out of political motivation, considering the facts of cost and audience. In order to understand these motivations, it is helpful to examine an established example from the neighboring Burgundian court, who had similar approaches to the commissioning of tapestry as the contemporary French court did. Such a tapestry set is the *History of Gideon* tapestries, which were commissioned by the Duke of Burgundy as an essential component of court ceremonies in 1449.[87] The tapestries were woven with the finest silks, as well as gold and silver threads.[88] Additionally, Philip the Good purchased the original cartoons so as to ensure that they remained an entirely unique set, unable to be reproduced.[89] The tapestries told the biblical story of Gideon within eight individual panels. The story, found in Judges six through eight, begins with Gideon seeking God's support to fight the Midianites who were oppressing the Israelites. He tests God by placing a fleece outside overnight, concluding that, in the morning, if the fleece is dry but the ground around it is wet then God will support him in his efforts. God does indeed perform this miracle, and Gideon immediately selects 300 Israelites to join his army, who successfully overthrow the Midianites. After their victory, the Israelites choose Gideon as their ruler.[90]

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[87] Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Portable Propaganda--Tapestries as Princely Metaphors at the Courts of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold," *Art Journal* 48, no. 2 (1989): 123, https://doi.org/10.2307/776961.

[88] Smith, "Portable Propaganda," 124.

[89] Smith, 124.

[90] Judges 6-8 ESV.

These tapestries were commonly viewed as simply props for Philip the Good's order of knighthood, but it is likely that they served a more significant function, namely to project and reinforce a positive public image for the duke.[91] The correlations between the imagery of this tapestry set and the goals of Philip the Good's reign are important to analyze in order to understand the political agendas possible behind the creation of tapestries. First, Gideon's faith and his favor with God would have communicated that the Burgundian duke's own power was also a gift from God, unquestionable and righteous. The fact that one whole panel of the tapestries was dedicated to Gideon's subsequent defeat of the Midianites also justified Philip's conquest of land as a God-ordained duty. Additionally, the fact that Gideon was chosen by his own people to rule and create a noble dynasty is significant to Philip's own aspirations for his rule. Philip the Good surrounded himself with a court that admired him and supported his authority with the hope that, like Gideon, the approval of these nobles would increase the legitimacy of his power and thus earn him the title of king.[92]

Not only was the subject matter of the tapestries an intentional political message, but Philip the Good deliberately used the tapestries to manipulate his audience. Because these tapestries were essential to court ceremonies, they were intended to be seen by many foreign dignitaries. There are several historical accounts of visiting dignitaries' awe and admiration of the stunning tapestry series seen at the court of Philip the Good.[93] Also, these tapestries were

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[91] Jeffrey Chipps Smith being the first to suggest this interpretation.

[92] Smith, 125.

[93] Smith, 125.

brought with Philip on his trip to Paris for the crowning of Charles VII's successor, Louis XI.[94] Charles VII had been a long-time enemy of Philip the Good; therefore, upon his return to Paris, Philip the Good felt it necessary to present an extravagant image, one to rival even that of the king.[95] Philip the Good ordered that the façade of the Hôtel d'Artois be covered in his *History of Gideon* tapestries during his stay in Paris, communicating to the French people that he was just as powerful as any French ruler.[96] As art historian Jeffrey Smith says, "the adroit use of tapestries here contributed to the public's general admiration of Philip the Good, his magnificence, and, through historical allusions, the accomplishments of his long reign."[97] The use of such "allusions" was clearly successful in communicating Philip the Good's political messages, and similar tactics were commonly applied across tapestry production in France in the late Middle Ages, *The Prince of Malice and His Court* possibly being such an example.

In order to discover the message behind the commissioning of *The Prince of Malice and His Court,* it is necessary to consider the source of the tapestry's narrative. Based on modern scholarship, it is widely accepted that a majority of tapestry designs were sourced from literary allegory.[98] *The Prince of Malice*, however, lacks the necessary imagery to indicate that it was sourced in romance literature, biblical narrative, or even a dramatized historical moment. The

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[94] Smith, 125.

[95] Georges Duby, *Art and Society in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 23.

[96] Smith, 126.

[97] Smith, 126.

[98] As seen in the previously mentioned scholarship of Laura Weigert and Emily Francomano.

motif of an "evil court" set opposite to a "good court" is reminiscent of Italian examples such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, depicting a moralizing metaphor on how to be a good ruler. In France, however, this visual iconography was not established, and relations between France and Italy had yet to allow this imagery to be passed over. This region used, instead, the genre of mirrors of society, which were political treatises written by ministers to secular princes. They often consisted of educational letters to rulers and treatises on moral behavior.[99] Their main objective was educational, and they were rarely written with any narrative or allegorical elements, meaning that a link between these letters and the allegorical imagery of the tapestry is not entirely likely.

A possible literary source for *The Prince of Malice* left to consider is that of morality plays, a suggestion that has been previously made by historians but never investigated in earnest.[100] The general theory of tapestry being motivated by or tied to morality plays is not new. There have been several tapestries that have been conclusively associated with theatrical performances. As previously mentioned, Laura Weigert discusses this connection when she says,

> The increase in the quantity, scale, and complexity of banquet festivities, civic-sponsored plays, and ceremonial entries within the realms of the French kings and Burgundian dukes in the late fourteenth century paralleled an expansion of the tapestry industry. The same noble patrons commissioned tapestries, hosted banquet entertainments, subsidized plays, and were the focus of entry ceremonies. As was the case for such performances, the display of a set of tapestries was site and time specific. Together, woven and living figures adorned banquet halls; the stories both art forms told were referred to interchangeably as *mystères*.[101]

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[99] Silke Schwandt, "Virtus as a Political Concept in the Middle Ages," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 10, no. 2 (January 2015): 75, https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2015.100205.

[100] See A. S. Cavallo, "The Procession of Gula a Flemish Tapestry," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 32, no. 4 (1953): pp. 86-89, https://doi.org/10.1086/dia41505134; Guy Delmarcel, in *Flemish Tapestry* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), pp. 52-56; and French & Company (New York, New York, n.d.).

[101] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 126.

As this quote indicates, it is important to differentiate between the types of performances that tapestries may have imitated. Heroic battle scenes were often acted out at royal banquets, showcasing the patron's power and strength.[102] Based on inventory records, historians have determined that there were certain groups of tapestries categorized as *salles*, meaning banquet halls.[103] These tapestries would have likely been displayed during these royal feasts alongside the performances of the very same battles shown in the tapestries. The previously mentioned *History of Gideon* tapestries are one such tapestry set.[104] Another type of performance is ceremonial entries. These processionals gained major popularity in the late medieval era, adding to the grandiosity of the traditional event.[105] The greatest artists and craftsmen from the area would gather to produce decorations for these grand royal entrances, including tapestries.[106] Although both banquets and ceremonial entries were common forms of medieval performance, the most popular form of medieval drama was morality plays.[107] Adolfo Cavallo's analysis of the *Procession of Gula* tapestry, seen in figure 5, lays a basic groundwork for relating tapestry to morality plays. In this scene, the personification of Greed, labeled as *Gula*, leads a procession of drunken people. In the background, there is a group of virtuous figures listening to an angel warn

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[102] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 126.

[103] Weigert, 128.

[104] Smith, 126.

[105] Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

[106] Weigert, 6.

[107] Walker, 209.

them against participating in the sinful procession. Cavallo argues that since this scene does not mimic the style and subject matter of traditional vice scenes, it is likely an adaptation of a morality play.[108] He briefly relates the scene taking place here to similar events in *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* by stating, "Lucifer, eager to capture the souls of two men, sends the Vices up to earth to lead them astray. Perhaps our tapestry comes from a set based on this theme, each showing one or two Vices proceeding either to influence the victim or, as in a magnificent Tournai tapestry of the late fifteenth century at Dumbarton Oaks, to confer with the *Prince de Malice*."[109] The analysis is extremely brief but supports the possibility of *The Prince of Malice and His Court* also being a version of a morality play.

One morality play that is strikingly similar to the allegorical narrative of *The Prince of Malice and His Court* is *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain*. This play was written by Simon Bougouin and is considered to be the longest morality play of the medieval era.[110] In total, there are eighty-five speaking roles, resulting in the most complete inventory of medieval virtues and vices of any other medieval drama, as well as a comprehensive hierarchy of both heaven and hell.[111] The author, Simon Bougouin, belongs in the category of *rhétoriqueurs* poets, which were a group of Northern French poets working between 1460 and 1520 who focused on unusual and elaborate rhyme schemes, complicated verse forms, and possessed an intense obsession with

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[108] Cavallo, "The Procession of Gula a Flemish Tapestry," 88.

[109] Cavallo, "The Procession of Gula a Flemish Tapestry," 88.

[110] Peter Houle, "Stage and Metaphor in the French Morality: 'L'Homme Juste Et L'Homme Mondain,'" *Penn State University Press* 14, no. 1 (1979): 1, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/25093481.

[111] Houle, "Stage and Metaphor," 1.

allegory and personification.[112] Peter Houle has described Bougouin's *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* as the most important of all French moralities because of the way in which it combines the "narrative techniques of the religious verse narratives and the dramatic techniques of the allegorical theater, on a stage borrowed from the *mystères* but adapted to its own special doctrinal concerns."[113]

These *rhétoriqueurs* characteristics are clearly portrayed in the narrative and structure of this play. The play is divided into two parts, both encompassing the life of Homme Juste, or the Righteous Man, and Homme Mondain, or the Worldly Man. In Part I, the audience is introduced to these two men as babies who then meet the personifications of the World, Fortune, the Church, and Baptism. God decides that the infants will need help navigating the world with integrity, so he sends virtues such as Cognizance, Reason, and the Seven Remedial Virtues (Chastity, Temperance, Charity, Diligence, Patience, Kindness, and Humility) to defend the children. The devil, however, is eager to lead these children astray and sends vices to tempt them into sin. The main body of the play is dedicated to the successful attempts of the vices to win over Mondain and lead him onto the road of Perdition. The vices fail, however, in tempting Juste into sin as he embarks onto the road of Salvation. At the end of his life, Mondain has clearly given himself over to sin, avarice, gluttony, and luxury specifically, and is carried to hell upon his death. Juste, on the other hand, confesses the very few sins of his life on his deathbed, but dies before he is able to complete all of his penance. The devil, therefore, claims the soul of Juste for hell, claiming he still had unforgiven sin. What follows in Part II is a courtroom scene in

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[112] Patrick Edward Charvet and Robert Niklaus, *A Literary History of France* (London: E. Benn, 1970), 43.

[113] Houle, 1.

which Bon Ange, a guardian angel of sorts, defends Juste to the tribunal of heaven.[114] At the end of the play, Juste is finally redeemed and allowed to enter heaven, leaving the audience with a strong message of morality and the purpose of life.

The only documented performance of *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* took place in Tarascon in 1476.[115] The written version of this play, however, was published by Antoine Vérard in 1508 under the patronage of the French king, Louis XII.[116] This patronage indicates that there were members of the French court who were aware of the original production of the play and who were perhaps even in attendance. Consequently, the possibility of a French patron for the tapestry *The Prince of Malice and His Court* is even more likely. The connections between the tapestry and the play that will be discussed in the following pages will only serve to reinforce this possibility of a noble French patron. When considering the time frame of the play, therefore, the original production date of 1476 is the most significant time to consider, as this is the date that the play became known to the French court and to the possible patron of *The Prince of Malice and His Court*, right within the production dates of the tapestry.

Historians have hypothesized, based on the stage directions, that the stage for the performance could have been constructed in the round and set up in the street or a public square of Tarascon.[117] Based on the stage directions for the play, it can be posited that heaven and hell faced each other from opposite ends of the theater. Peter Houle, in his research on the play,

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[114] This courtroom scene is heavily influenced by a previous play Pèlerinage de l'Ame by Guillaume de Deguilleville.

[115] Houle, 2.

[116] Houle, 1.

[117] Houle, 2.

created a theoretical diagram of the lay out of the stage (figure 6), which shows how these opposing locations would face each other.[118] Of the most interest to this analysis is the fact that "Salvation's palace" occupies the left side of the staging area and "Perdition's palace" along with "Lucifer's throne room" appear to the right. To the audience, this separation highlighted the dichotomy between heaven and hell, and thus between morality and immorality.[119] These mansions were elaborately decorated, the palais de Salvation described:

> Icy s'en va Salvation toute suelle en son palais noblemen acoustré qui sera dessoubz de paradis et se sierra en une chaiere. Bon Vouloir, Perseverance, Confession, Contricion, Sactifaction et Penitence seront avec elle.
>
> (Here Salvation alone goes into her nobly decorated palace, which is beneath heaven. She sits in a chair. Good Will, Perseverance, Confession, Contrition, Satisfaction, and Penance are with her.)[120]

Several of the scenes take place in the palais de Perdition, which was placed before the mouth of hell:

> Icy les deux dyables disguisez en faulx anges s'en vont a Perdition qui est en ung palais richement acoustré du costé d'Enfer et tout joingnant. En avecques elle est Orgueil et les sept pechez mortelz, le Monde et plusieurs autres qui seront apres nommez.
>
> (Here the two devils disguised as false angels go to Perdition, who is in a richly decorated palace placed next to hell and joining it. With her is Pride and the Seven Deadly Sins. Also with her are World and many others who will be named afterwards.)[121]

Most of the action of Part I takes place in the space adjacent to the Palace of Perdition, Lucifer's throne room, where he is surrounded by his court of vices.[122]

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[118] Houle, 4.

[119] Houle, 15.

[120] Simon Bougouyn, *Lhomme Juste Et Lhomme Mondain* (Paris: Antoine Vérard, 1508).

[121] Bougouyn, *Lhomme Juste Et Lhomme Mondain.*

[122] Houle, 10.

At first glance, the play's narrative structure does not seem to be blatant in the tapestry; however, closer examination shows that the two have much in common. To begin, the allegorical depiction of the devil and his cohort has a similar emphasis on elaborate dress and ornate architecture. The vices, as previously mentioned, are all elaborately clothed in the tapestry, each one wearing clothes made up of reflective silk threads, making them seem to be made of gold. The personification of Sin, for example, is seen in the bottom middle of the group wearing shining gold robes. This same feeling of over-the-top ornateness is felt in the morality play in the descriptions of Lucifer's throne room, which is described as a "richly decorated palace". In the staging of the play itself, the palaces of both Salvation and Perdition would have been elaborately decorated, most certainly the most extravagant aspect of the production.[123] "The palais de Perdition consisted of two rooms; one was used principally as a throne room for Perdition…During the course of the action the vices go to and from Perdition, who orders and oversees their activities and to whom they frequently return for encouragement or, when they fail, chastisement."[124] Perhaps, this is what is taking place in *The Prince of Malice and His Court*. Perhaps this is the moment of the play in which the vices receive their orders from the Prince of Malice to tempt the two brothers. The elaborate staging of both play and tapestry certainly lend credence to this assumption.

Turning to the portion that remains of the heavenly court in the tapestry, a few similarities between tapestry and morality play become apparent. First, the virtues are all part of a group called the Seven Remedial Virtues, all of whom are main players in the morality. These

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[123] Houle, 5.

[124] Houle, 6.

seven virtues were known as the "cures" for the seven deadly sins.[125] They consisted of Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice.[126] Second, a majority of these virtues are clothed and prepared for some kind of battle. Prudence is shown in full battle attire, and even points a sword towards the opposing court, ready to fend off any potential threat. Both Temperance and Charity seem to be ready for the same battle as they stand guard at the gate in their blue and red armor. Although there is no description of the exact costuming of the characters, this same readiness for action is clearly echoed in the narrative of the play and the performances of the virtues. The virtues do not just lead the two brothers through life, but instead they actively fight their battles so to speak. They defend them against the efforts of the vices.

A third similarity that can be gleaned from the surface of these two products is the overall intellectual mood. Most plays that involved personifications of the virtues and allegories of morality, similar to tapestries, involved actual battle scenes and violence to some degree, Vengeance and Passion plays being such an example.[127] *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain*, however, opts for a more intellectual and ordered mood. Part II takes place entirely in a court room where the worthiness of Juste is determined in an orderly debate. This same intellectual and orderly atmosphere is communicated clearly in the tapestry where the vices are seen whispering and discussing amongst themselves. This emphasis on intellect in both examples

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[125] W L Braekman, "The Seven Virtues as Opposed to the Seven Vices: A Fourteenth-Century Didactic Poem," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74, no. 2 (1973): 248, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/43342821.

[126] Braekman, "The Seven Virtues," 248.

[127] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 131.

points towards the overall message of the allegory at hand, a message that was focused on concepts of morality.

Beyond the more iconographic similarities, there is a strong connecting theme in their allegorical messages. Although there seems to be narrative information missing from the tapestry, the allegorical themes are still apparent; namely, the divide between good and evil, moral and immoral. First, the clothing of both courts gives the viewer clear clues as to how they are to feel about each group. The Prince's court is full of sumptuously clothed courtesans, some of whom are so ornately dressed they could even be described as gaudy or garish. The weaver even used costly silk fibers to weave this section in order to highlight the shiny and expensive nature of these figures' clothing.[128] In comparison, the members of the court of virtue are either simply clothed or armed for battle. This humility and alacrity enforce the divide between the two courts, making the vices seem even more frivolous and worthy of disdain.[129] No art historian has established whether the scene on the left-hand side depicted a full heavenly court or not, but one way or another the divide between these two courts was obviously intended to be highlighted. Adding to this contrast is the divide between male and female as discussed earlier. The unique and intentional choice to represent the cast of vices as male further highlights the differences between the two courts. The viewer is given clear clues as to which court they should favor through these characteristics.

This divide between male and female, luxury and humility, emphasizes the divide between good and evil, communicating an allegorical message on the dualistic nature of

[128] Delmarcel, 54.

[129] Delmarcel, 54.

morality. This message is not only blatant in the contrasting of genders, but also in the composition of the tapestry itself. If we are to agree with past historians and conclude that the missing portion of the tapestry would have shown a full court of virtue, then the positioning of these two courts would mirror that of the staging of the play exactly. Not only would this support the idea that the tapestry is likely an adaptation of the play, but it would also prove that the distinction between morality and immorality was a driving motivation for both. This allegory of moral conflict touches the composition of the tapestry and the narrative of the play equally. The battle attire worn by the virtues indicates that there is indeed a war to be waged against vice, and the intellectual atmosphere is an allegorical device used to demonstrate that the battle is waged within one's own mind.

Although the iconography and allegory of both tapestry and morality play are clearly related, there is one major difference that must be discussed: the audiences. As previously mentioned, tapestries were one of the most expensive works of art that one could commission. Based on their cost and fragility, they would not have been displayed in public, outdoor settings, but rather would have decorated the walls of a rich interior.[130] The conclusion can be made, therefore, that those who would have viewed these tapestries would have been of the same caliber of society as those who commissioned and owned them.[131] As discussed in the example of the *History of Gideon* tapestries, they were often intended to be viewed by foreign dignitaries and nobility.[132] Alternatively, morality plays were open to the public. They were performed in

[130] Weigert, *French Visual Culture,* 185.

[131] Weigert, "Chambres D'amour," 334.

[132] Smith, 126.

city squares and were available to all people from the elite all the way down to the peasant.[133] If Houle's diagram of the staging of *L'homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* is to be believed, then it indicates that there were designated sections for each type of citizen.[134] The audiences for these performances, therefore, were not nearly as limited as that of tapestries and were most likely a majority lower class.

Why, then, do the *Prince of Malice and His Court* and *L'homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* share such similar themes if they were not created or intended for the same audience? Why was the same allegorical message being communicated in both tapestry and play? And, if it is to be believed that the tapestry was commissioned in direct relationship to the play, why would an aristocratic patron find this allegorical message so valuable to their agenda? To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn from a more formal analysis, focused on aesthetic features, towards a more complex analysis of the cultural and historical moment, i.e., France in the late 1400s.

At the end of the 15th century, France was attempting to recover from a tumultuous time period. Charles VI (1380-1422) ruled during the Hundred Years' War, but he did not provide the French people with a strong sense of security or certainty. He suffered from frequent periods of insanity, allowing room for rival political factions to fight for control over France, such as the Burgundians.[135] The dukes of Burgundy became so opposed to the French throne that they even began to align themselves with England during the Hundred Years' War in their ongoing

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[133] Walker, 209.

[134] Houle, 8.

[135] Wickham, 242.

attempts to outdo the French.[136] The Hundred Years' War ended with the expulsion of English forces from France, owed in large part to Joan of Arc and her assistance to the dauphin, Charles VII, who was crowned king in 1429.[137] After his appointment to the throne, Charles VII sought reconciliation with Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and slowly began to reclaim the land that the Burgundians had taken in northern France.[138] The devastation that both the war and Charles VI's mental illness caused on the French monarchy and economy created a great burden for the rule of Charles VII. In his attempts to bolster the economy, Charles VII expanded the noble class to encompass more people, allowing for more tax exemptions with less proof of nobility.[139] Although this may seem counterintuitive, this change in the tax laws granted Charles VII approval from the nobility at court and thus greater success in other areas.

All of this led to a rapidly changing France by the close of the 15th century. A great catalyst of these changes was Louis XI, who succeeded Charles VII in 1461. One of the first agendas of the new king was to reduce the influence of the court to a low that was unprecedented in the history of French politics.[140] This caused fear and distrust amongst the French nobles, especially considering that he was known to be a self-sufficient monarch, refusing to surround himself with a court of nobles.[141] The position of the French elite in the political affairs of

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[136] Wickham, 242.

[137] Wickham, 245.

[138] Wickham, 245.

[139] John Bell Henneman, "Nobility, Privilege and Fiscal Politics in Late Medieval France," *French Historical Studies* 13, no. 1 (1983): 9, https://doi.org/10.2307/286591.

[140] Wickham, 245.

[141] Wickham, 245.

France, therefore, quickly became tenuous. The unifying of France after the Hundred Years' War, as well as the increased power of the State, subjected nobles to live under the authority of the king in a way that they had never experienced before. Anne J. Duggan says that "some historians even speak of a 'domestication' of the nobility" during this time.[142] The feudal lords had anticipated the new rule of Louis XI to further their interests, but they were sadly mistaken. As Jacques Bainville says, "trickery and a lack of scruples were undoubtedly in his (Louis XI's) make-up."[143]

Apart from political uncertainty and change, the religious realm was also slowly unraveling. The Great Western Schism, which took place between 1378 and 1417, saw two popes at odds, both accruing their own followers, which deepened dividing lines and animosity.[144] Considering the upheaval that this caused, the University of Paris took the role as arbitrator of the conflict, and ultimately concluded that the best way to proceed was to no longer obey either pope as an ultimate authority.[145] The decision caused local clergy to take on a much larger role in French politics. By the time of Louis XI, French parliaments, called états-généraux (estates-general), were made up of representatives from all types of states across the country, which included many clerical estates.[146] These parliaments had become extremely powerful,

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[142] Anne J. Duggan, *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002), 270.

[143] Jacques Bainville, Alice Sarah Hussey Gauss, and Christian Frederick Gauss, *History of France* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1926), 94.

[144] Wickham, 241.

[145] Wickham, 241.

[146] Wickham, 238.

initiating and signing off on much of French legislation.[147] Louis XI even took it upon himself to replace the few noble advisors that remained in his court with religious ones.[148]

This extreme mix of church and state was not received well by many people, evidenced in such events as the Council of Basel from 1431 to 1449. During this council, a decree titled *Sacrosancta* was approved, which established the supremacy of a council over the pope, as well as made most of the pope's jurisdiction subject to a king's own authority.[149] The goal of the decision was to move away from church authority in favor of communal law and assent. In 1461, however, Louis XI revoked this decree for France, reinvesting church authority into French government.[150] This pronouncement by the new king, right during the time of both our tapestry and play's production, communicated to an already apprehensive people that Louis was selfishly determined to bolster his own rule apart from the participation of the people or the nobility.

It is no wonder, then, that humanist and reformation ideals had begun to take hold in France during the end of the 1400s.[151] Traditionally, humanism is understood as beginning in Italy, along with the very first breaths of the Renaissance. France, however, was equally in the throes of change during this time. As Johan Huizinga says,

> A general look at the French world of the fifteenth century gives the primary impression of a fundamentally somber mood, a barbarian splendor, bizarre and overloaded forms, an imagination that had become threadbare – all the signs of the medieval spirit in its last gasps. In this instance it is easily forgotten that, here too, the Renaissance was

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[147] Wickham, 238.

[148] Duby, *Art and Society in the Middle Ages,* 25.

[149] Michiel Decaluwe, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson, *A Companion to the Council of Basel* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 12.

[150] Decaluwe, Izbicki, and Christianson, *A Companion to the Council of Basel*, 12.

[151] Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages,* 388.

> approaching from all sides; but here it had not yet become dominant, and had not yet transformed the underlying groundtone.[152]

In other words, there was evidence of an awakening, but France was not going to let the medieval tradition go without a fight. Humanism appears first in France in the 1400s in the realm of literature with the *rhétorique*, *orateur*, and *poésie*, all presenting subtle themes of classicism.[153] In the grand scheme of the international intellectual movement, France epitomized the middle ground between Italy, who fully embraced humanism, and places like the Netherlands who resisted it at all costs.[154]

In addition to humanist ideas, there was a brewing resentment towards the Catholic church, ushered in by the previously mentioned decisions of the Great Western Schism and Louis XI. Many French citizens were disillusioned by the church and its authority. Several church leaders even complained that the youth were beginning to treat the church and its services merely as a place to meet and court a possible mate.[155] The rituals, allegories, and ever-expanding rules of the church were beginning to take its toll on the congregants, and criticism was more common than blind faith.[156] This unrest would later result in the Protestant Reformation of Martin Luther in the 1500s, but early stirrings of opposition were threatening the authority of the Catholic church in France as early as the 1400s.

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[152] Huizinga, 383.

[153] Huizinga, 382.

[154] Huizinga, 388.

[155] Huizinga, 183.

[156] Huizinga, 183.

The church's response to these pressures was to double down on the message of morality and fear mongering.[157] Their fear of losing power over the people is palpable in the extremist language that the church used to describe the plight of the soul. No other theologian contributed more to the late medieval understanding of sin and damnation than Denis the Carthusian (1402-1471). The writings of Denis were extremely popular throughout Europe and were characterized by a preoccupation with death.[158] For example, in his book for the guidance of the nobleman, he says, "when he goes to bed, he should imagine not that he is putting himself to bed, but that others are laying him in his grave."[159] In other words, Denis's teachings were consumed with an urgent approach to life, an approach in which repentance was paramount because death lurked behind every corner.

These teachings encouraged a dualistic view of the world in which there was only death and life, morality and immorality, grief over the eventual loss of souls or great joy in those that were saved. Born out of dualism were theological beliefs such as Denis's twelve errors that lead the sinful soul to hell. First, the sinner deceives himself, then he surrenders to the devil. He gives his life over to sin, he rejects his own virtue, he sells himself to evil for nothing, and he turns away from Jesus. In his sin, he attempts to resist the Almighty, he serves the cause of the devil, and he thus loses all hope for peace. These choices open the path to hell, effectively blocking his path to heaven. Eventually, he will follow that path all the way to hell.[160] These twelve errors

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[157] Huizinga, 250.

[158] Huizinga, 262.

[159] Huizinga, 156.

[160] Huizinga, 251.

exemplify the systematic morality taught by the church at this time, and many can be seen in *L'homme Juste et l'homme Mondain*. Additionally, these errors display how severe immorality was within the teachings of the church. By the late 1400s, sin and hell were treated with more drama and gravity than they ever had been before.[161]

Concepts of morality and the dualistic relationship between good and evil, in the eyes of the church, was not a simple way of thinking: it was a way of life. Living a moral life was not viewed as an option, but as a necessity that applied to every person within French society, rich or poor, educated or not. By emphasizing and enforcing this doctrine, the church was attempting to control the changes that they were witnessing. Humanism and reformation threatened the authority of the church; therefore, the teachings of the church responded by attempting to lead their followers into a greater reliance on the salvation that it offered.[162] This guiding message can clearly be seen in the shared allegorical message of *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* and *The Prince of Malice and His Court*.

In the play, the dualistic nature of heaven and hell is reduced to a basic and personal morality. The war between good and evil is not simply fought by invisible spiritual forces, but in the daily lives of the average person. As Peter Houle says, "Artists and authors visualized the Christian soul as a battlefield where evil continually contends against good, the Christian himself controlling the outcome by a movement of the will favoring one side or the other."[163] This

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[161] Huizinga, 253.

[162] Huizinga, 172.

[163] Houle, 16.

metaphor of moral conflict is established from the play's outset when Juste and Mondain are told by Eglise (the personification of the church) of the conflicts that they may experience in life:

> Car tantost aurez Congnoissance et beaucoup d'amys et aussi d'ennemys qui vous seront plusieurs grans assualx et enseignemens, mais pensez tousjours de croyre Congnoissance.
>
> (For you will soon possess Knowledge and many friends, but also enemies who will attack you severely, but always believe Knowledge.)[164]

There is a clear ranking of the structures of morality, seen in the hierarchies of both heaven and hell, virtue and vice. By the time the two brothers begin their journeys through life, the audience has already been invested in a dualistic perspective. The design of the stage itself "not only reinforced the bifurcated structure of the plot of *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* (i.e. the contrasting lives of two brothers), but also kept before the eyes of the audience the more basic lesson of moral dualism."[165] No matter what scene may be unfolding, the audience was constantly aware of the separation between good and evil.

Although the narrative follows the lives of Juste and Mondain, the focus is not on the simple passing of time, but rather the personal and interior lives of the two brothers; the play's focus is doctrinal and personal rather than narrative.[166] Additionally, the focus on the destruction that Mondain brings to his life indicates the true message behind the allegory. There is a turning point in Mondain's experience when he meets the personification *Larrecin* and turns to theft.[167] Now, not only is Mondain damaging his own internal life and his eternity, but he is also a threat to society. In fact, the play features four separate personifications of greed, *Symonie*, *Usure*,

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[164] Bougouyn, *L'homme Juste Et L'homme Mondain.*

[165] Houle, 14-15.

[166] Houle, 17.

[167] Bougouyn, *L'Homme Juste Et L'Homme Mondain.*

Tromperie, and *Larrecin*, all of which have significant societal impacts and implications. For the commoner who would have attended this play, a message concerning the negative effects of immorality on society would have had a very real impact. The allegory here, therefore, pushes its audience towards a moral life through not only fear of hell and damnation, but also through fear of societal collapse.

The relationship between *L'Homme Juste et l'homme Mondain* and *The Prince of Malice and His Court* indicates that a similar persuasive message was being communicated in both the play and the tapestry, although to different audiences. The tapestry, as discussed earlier, highlights the same dualistic perspective of good and evil as the play does. The emphasis on luxury in the Court of Malice echoes the same personifications of greed that are enacted in the performance. Since the play would have been attended by a variety of people, from commoner to aristocrat, its focus was more intended on reigning in the people, making them reliant on the salvation of the church. The dramatic consequences of immorality, echoing the teaching of Denis, served to coerce the audience back into reliance on the church and its authority. The tapestry, on the other hand, would have been commissioned and seen by nobility alone. Although the allegorical message is still focused on the two realms of morality, its clearly not telling the same story of an average person's plight.

The focus of the tapestry is clearly the two courts. The only indication of any sort of narrative arc is communicated through the armor worn by the virtues. There is some battle that might be waged, but there is no clear movement towards any type of action. What the viewer does notice is the strong divide between the symbolic depictions of these two realms. The allegory still speaks to the dualistic nature of morality, but it is up to the viewer to determine within which court they themselves belong. Instead of observing the inner battle of a character as

a play unfolds, this tapestry invites the viewer to look within themselves and determine where they stand.

When considered within the historical context of the time, this tapestry could have been a very clever way for a wealthy French patron to reinsert themselves back into the good graces of Louis XI. The drastic decline in the court's influence during Louis XI's rule made aristocrats desperate to be reconsidered as important members of French politics.[168] By commissioning such a tapestry, the wealthy aristocrat or nobleman would have demonstrated his value to the court by associating themselves with the church that Louis valued so highly and its heightened concern with morality. By commissioning this tapestry, the patron could have physically pointed to the court that he associated with (virtue) while condemning the one that he opposed (vice), demonstrating his value within the religiously infused French authority structure. The allegory of *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain* attempted to influence its audience to actively living the church's version of a moral life, but *The Prince of Malice and His Court* used this same allegory in order to manipulate the audience into viewing the patron themselves in a moralistic light, whether he truly was moral or not. As seen in the example of the *History of Gideon* series, tapestries such as these were often used to assert a political agenda. In this case, the patron's goal would have been to project a moralistic image that had the potential to allow him reentry into the French court.

Conclusion

Allegory and personification permeated medieval thought and imagery, as exemplified through this study. Although shrouded in mystery, the message of *The Prince of Malice and His*

[168] Weigert, "Chambres D'amour," 334.

Court is easily understood through an analysis of its allegorical devices. The visual representation of the two courts of virtue and vice seen in this tapestry communicate the overall dualistic moral message that was so common in late medieval society, a message that is also clearly taught in the morality play *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain.* Together, the commonalities between the tapestry and play speak to the intentions behind their allegorical campaigns. By now it should be clear that the tapestry was intended to convince an aristocratic audience that the patron was a moral man, and the play used the same devices to direct its low-brow audience towards a moral life centered in the liturgy of the church.

As has been suggested by previous scholars, there are several aspects about *The Prince of Malice and His Court* that imply it was influenced by a morality play. When considered alongside *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain,* similarities between composition structure, costuming, mood, and dualistic symbolism become apparent. The conclusion can be made, therefore, that the tapestry represents the portion of the play in which the vices consult the devil before tempting the two brothers, while the virtues stand guard, ready to defend the young souls. With this new understanding, *The Prince of Malice and His Court* becomes rich with meaning where it was previously lacking in any sort of contextual understanding.

Placing these conclusions within the broader cultural context of its reception, it is apparent that these moral messages held an incredible weight. Throughout France in the late 1400s, inklings of reformation ideology were reaching the general public, leading to a doubling down in the moral teachings of the church. This led to productions such as *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain,* which influenced its audience members to live a moral life that was dependent upon the salvation of the church. At a time when the nobility was losing their place in court proceedings to religious leaders under the rule of Louis XI, commissioning a tapestry based

on the moralistic teachings of theologians such as Denis would have the possibility of gaining the patron great favor. Although the tapestry and the play had two different intended audiences, they both shared a moral allegory with the goal of influencing the thoughts and actions of their viewers.

Regarding the specific tapestry *The Prince of Malice and His Court,* this thesis has laid the preliminary groundwork for future scholarship. With the message and audience established, more research can be performed to answer questions such as the exact patron of the work. Further investigation could also assist in reconstructing the missing portion of the court of virtue. The above research has also clearly demonstrated the success of understanding the visual arts through a comparison to morality plays in late medieval cultural production. This strategy, although utilized by a select few historians such as Laura Weigert, has the promise of being used across a variety of other medieval works such as manuscript illuminations and architectural sculpture. Utilizing this approach in future scholarship also has the potential to delineate the different audiences of late medieval art and how they would have understood and responded to allegorical messages in art. This research exhibits an original approach to understanding a little known late medieval tapestry, demonstrating that not only was tapestry important in communicating moralistic messages in late medieval French society, but also that the tapestry medium has much to offer within the study of the waning Middle Ages.

Figures

Figure 1. *The Prince of Malice and His Court,* 1470-80*,* wool and silk on wool, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/art/hc/HC-T-1935-15-T.JPG/view.

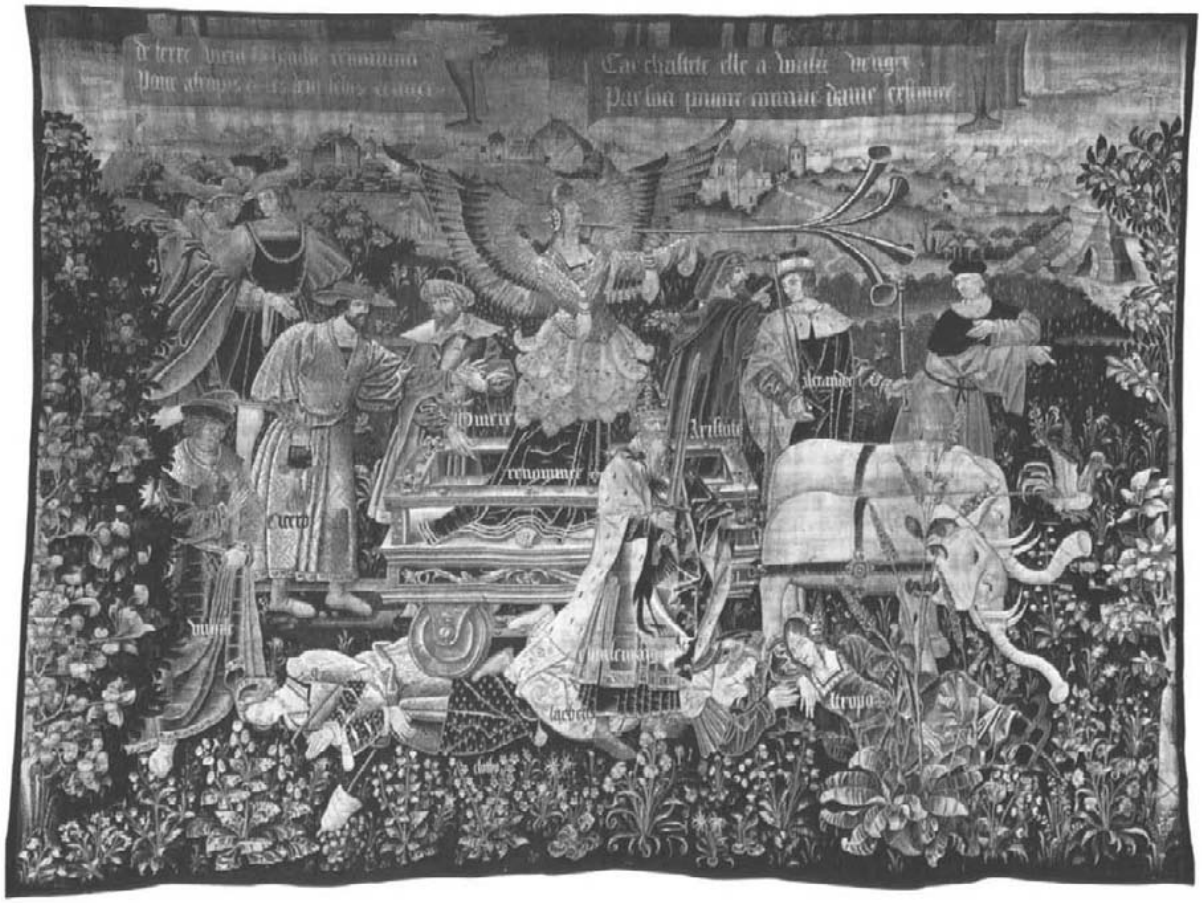


Figure 2. *The Triumph of Fame*, early sixteenth century, tapestry, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

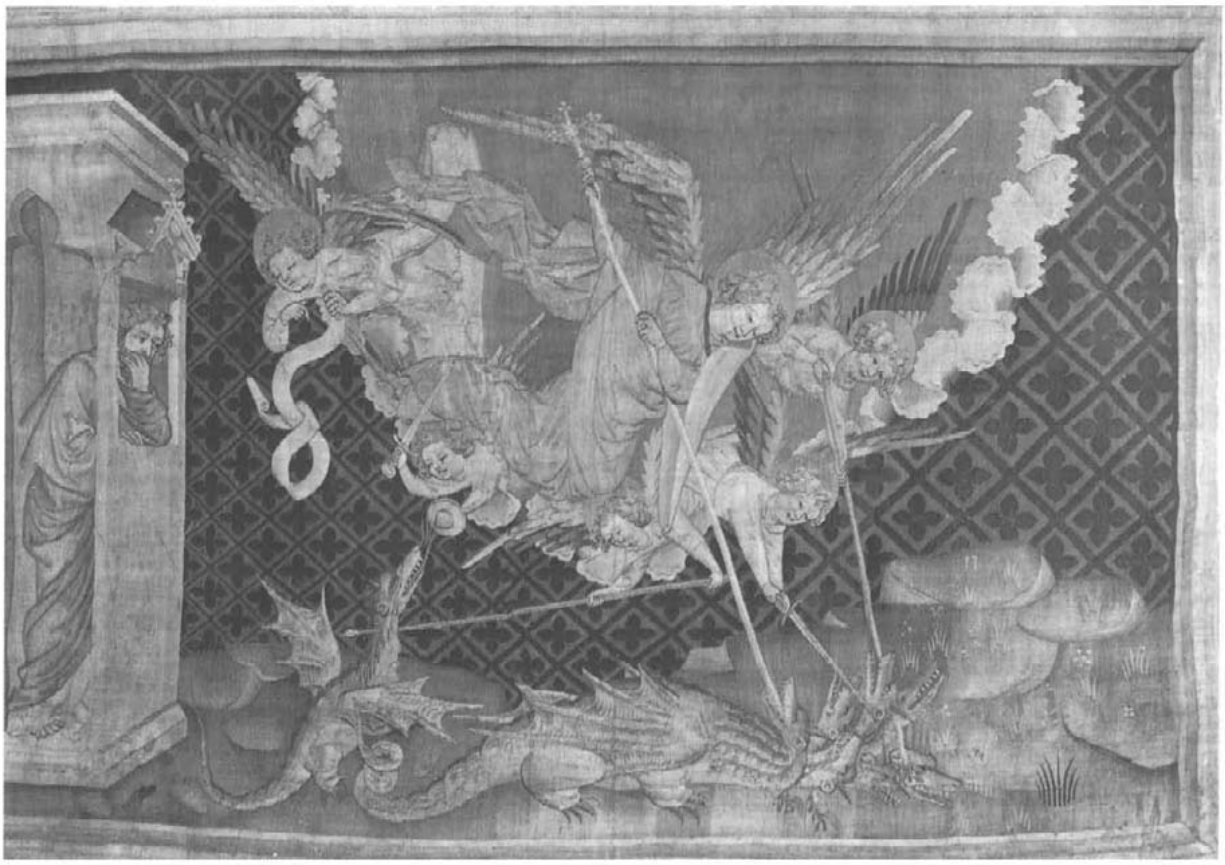
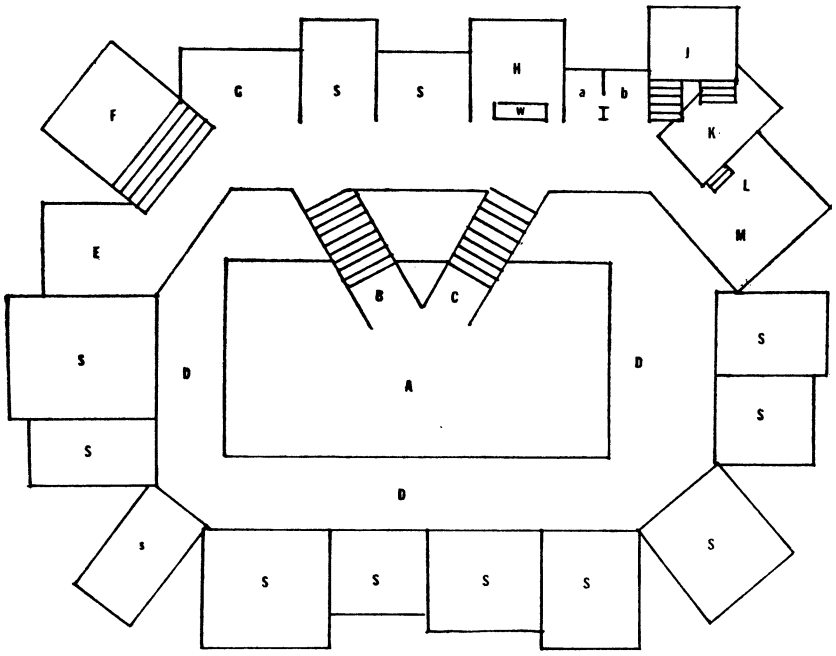


Figure 3. *Michael and His Angels Defeating Satan and His Angels*, 1373-80, tapestry, Musée des Tapisseries, Château d'Angers.

Figure 4. *Michael and His Angels Defeating Satan and His Angels*, first half of the fourteenth century, miniature painting, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Figure 5. *The Procession of Gula*, 1510, tapestry, The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan, http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/photo_study_collection/.



A — *aire de jeu* / playing area
B — *chemin de Salvation* / Salvation's Road
C — *chemin de Perdition* / Perdition's Road
D — *pentes* / bleachers
E — *les cieulx* / the heavens
F — *paradis* / paradise
G — *palais de Salvation* / Salvation's palace
H — Fortune's mansion
w— *roe de Fortune* / Fortune's wheel
I — *palais de Perdition* / Perdition's palace
a— *chambre de Luxure* / Lechery's bedroom
b— Perdition's throne room
J — *parloir d'enfer* / Lucifer's throne room
K—, L—, M— } areas of hell for purgatory, limbo, and hell of damned souls
S — loges for important spectators

Figure 6. Peter Houle, "Stage and Metaphor in the French Morality: *L'Homme Juste et L'Homme Mondain*" (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 8, figure 1

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