

The Future as Eschatological Presence in Juan de Mena's *Laberinto de Fortuna*

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Abstract

A key thematic strand in Juan de Mena's Laberinto de Fortuna (1444) is the role of the future. In the poem, Mena (1411-1456), anticipates the goal of a unified Spain by way of a reinvigorated Reconquest. The pseudo-epic invites the comparison of the expectation of a united Spain with the dynamic theological concept of the kingdom of God. Mena's work does not overtly demonstrate a sophisticated eschatology, but nevertheless appears to have absorbed and recast the background theology in his own terms, combining Augustinian realized eschatology with a general apocalyptic awareness. The "already-not-yet" aspects of the kingdom of God, particularly as expounded by theologian George Ladd, inform the structure of the analysis, showing how the expectation of the kingdom of God colors the proto-nation-founding project in the Laberinto.

A key thematic strand in Juan de Mena's fifteenth-century Spanish masterpiece, the *Laberinto de Fortuna* (1444), is the role of the future. In the poem Mena (1411-1456) anticipates a unified Spain, a dream that would become reenergized under the resolute leadership of the Catholic Kings. The *Laberinto's* importance to Hispanic studies is thus assured as a transition piece to Spain's arguably most important epoch. The honoree, which the poet both goads and praises, is John II (hereafter *Juan II*) of Castile, also famous as the father of the Catholic queen, Isabel I. In their times, the Catholic monarchs were widely revered as Messianic types. They became the consummation of the literary-eschatological prefiguration that is Mena's *Laberinto*. Castro of-

fers Bachiller Palma's *Divina retribución* (1479) wherein it is noted that "[. . .] algo semejante al reino de Dios había descendido a la tierra"(25-26) (something resembling the kingdom of God had descended to earth).

Mena incorporates kingdom ideology by his use of the language of the coming/becoming kingdom of God. The result is that he not only anticipates the *Reyes Católicos*, but also evokes the victorious Christ as a vital emblem in his portrayal of Juan II. When the king is introduced in "el çerco de Mares" (the circle of Mars) (CXLII), it is with a Christ-like panegyric characterization:

Allí sobre todos Fortuna pusiera
al muy prepotente don Juan el segundo;
d'España non sola, mas de todo el mundo
rey se mostrava, segund su manera. (CXLII.1129-1132)¹

There Fortune placed the very powerful Don Juan II over everybody; not only over Spain, but he was showing himself as king of the whole world as is his manner.²

Here Fortune, showing her "providential face," parades the king out comparing him to Roman greatness with a description that is reminiscent of Christ in the Apocalypse.³ Nevertheless, what the poet offers with his right hand he takes away with his left. The king must not become inebriated on delusions of grandeur, but follow the practical and prudent path of Providence, the poet's vision guide. The verses following this acclamation place him among the great Spanish kings: the Alfonsos, the Fernandos, and the Enriques (cf. CXLV).

From these introductory thoughts, I put forward that the two hundred ninety-seven stanza pseudo-epic invites the comparison of the expectation of a united Spain with the dynamic theological concept of the kingdom of God.⁴ As the background metaphorical model *par excellence* of the Middle Ages, the kingdom of God is grounded in the monolithic theological framework of Augustine. His amillennialism, in which the prophetic and the apocalyptic are essentially fulfilled in the Church, nevertheless does not preclude a belief in the final eschatological consummation. Thus Augustine's eschatology may be seen as two-pronged for our purpose here: the continual coming of Christ in his Church (prophetic [more on this later]), and Christ's appearance for judgment (apocalyptic), (Augustine, *The City of God* XX.1.345).

The present study proposes that Augustinian theology and Kingdom theology, represented chiefly in Ladd's idea of "fulfillment without consummation," concretize a model for understanding the role of the future

in Mena's poem. Ladd asserts that "the mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation" (*The Presence* 222). His conclusion resembles the way the Spanish poet incorporates anticipated changes and the future as "expectation" into the *Laberinto*. In Augustinian fashion the future is seen as moving into the present and passing into the past rather than as the present moving forward in linear motion (cf. *Confessions*, Bk.11). The presence of the future, to borrow Ladd's phrase, invades the here and now in various ways in the poem, frequently in a kind of temporal symbiosis. However, the future cannot be properly discussed in the *Laberinto* without considering its paradigmatic dependence on the kingdom of God, which in Christian thinking is perceived as coming or arriving (from *parousia*; "coming," "presence" [*Strong's* "The Greek Testament" 56]).

One aspect of Juan de Mena's many-faceted work which has received critical attention is the structural function of the wheel(s) of Providence (or Fortune) as they relate to the past and the present.⁵ However, the apparently subdued role of the wheel of the future warrants further scrutiny. I believe it exerts a retrospective influence on the labyrinth Mena surveys in his poetic vision journey, governing the sense of expectation in the poem in much the same way that the kingdom of God "reaches back" from the future to impact the present. The poet achieves this in part by the use of Christian imagery where eschatological and apocalyptic allusions color his characterization of Juan II.

In the poem the wheel of the future houses the circle of Saturn, treating the hoped-for restoration as though it were a present reality. A structural picture of this sort in Mena should not be surprising since the notion of the "already-not yet" is present in Biblical eschatology. The proleptic element is frequently used by Paul, who can speak of the wrath of God as being so certain that he considers it as already come (1 Thess. 2.16). In a similar way the threefold expression of the wheel of Fortune grounds its hope for the future in Providence who rules the wheels.

The *Laberinto* also conveys a high level of confidence in the future due to the theological connections glimpsed under the order of Phoebus. Stanzas CXVI-CXVII begin with a salute to theologians of renown, philosophers, musicians, poets, prophets, etc., whose good behavior and wisdom will be sure guides for the future:

Aquí vi grand turba de santos doctores

e contemplativos de aquel buen saber
 que para siempre nos puede valer,
 faziéndonos libres de nuestros errores. (CXVI.921-
 924)

Here I saw a great crowd of holy wise ones and
 contemplatives of that good knowledge—always of value for
 us, liberating us from our errors.

These are followed by negative examples in stanzas CXXIX-CXXXI: wizards, necromancers, and the like. It is probably not coincidental that leaders in art and metaphysics, those who had formed a positive base for medieval literature, culture, and values, are placed under the light of the Sun (Lida de Malkiel, *Juan de Mena* 50). The special attention previously given to *doctores muy santos* (very holy wise authorities) creates artistic antithesis:

estava Gerónimo alçando los cantos,
 Gregorio, Agustino velando respuesta;
 e vimos el santo doctor cuya fiesta [Aquinas]
 nuestro buen çésar jamás⁶ solemniza,
 e otros doctores a quien canoniza
 la silla romana por vida modesta. (CXVII.931-936)

Jerome was there lifting up his songs, Gregory and Augustine
 careful with explanations; and we saw the holy doctor, whose
 feast our good Caesar always solemnizes, and other authori-
 ties that the seat of Rome canonizes for their modest life.

The four saints/doctors of the Church that Mena mentions here form a powerful confraternity in relationship to the deep structures of his world. The phrase “velando respuesta” indicates that they are answer sources for Mena’s theology as guardians of orthodoxy.⁷ “Velar” is defined in the *Tentative Dictionary of Medieval Spanish* as “hacer guardia por la noche” (to stand guard during the night), or “mantenerse vigilante” (remain vigilant.) Both shades of meaning are applicable here in a figurative (guarding against spiritual darkness) as well as literal sense (defense and elucidation of the faith).

Augustine, who along with Aquinas is one of the most authoritative pillars, identifies the confusion of Babel with the *civitas terrene* (city of earth). To the contrary, the *civitas Dei* is God’s ideal reign, which already has (in embryonic form) representatives on earth (Keyes 163). Spain’s civil wars offer an obvious analogy with Babel’s confusion—the true model for Spain

being the Godly society depicted by St. Augustine. The coming kingdom of God and its Spanish mirror image must merge into a unity that displaces spiritual, and the resulting political, fragmentation, since a divided kingdom violates the Christianized archetypal metaphor of the universal Kingdom.

The analogy becomes even more acute when the poet expands the horizons of nationhood to include the whole world—his king will be ruler “d’España non sola, mas de todo el mundo” (CXLII.1131) (not only of Spain, but of the whole world). Based generally on Augustine and on Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, Mena aligns his Spanish kingdom with the ideal reign of God, since for the medieval mind the kingdom of God was not an abstraction so much as an obtainable reality. To this end the king’s Latin secretary converts his verses into an exhortation toward wise government addressed to his sovereign:

Muy claro príncipe, rey escogido
de los que son fuertes por esta manera,
la vuestra corona magnífica quiera
tener con los tales el reino regido;
ca éstos más aman con justo sentido
la recta justicia que non la ganancia,
e rigen y sirven con mucha costancia
e con fortaleza en el tiempo devido. (CCXII.1689-1696)

Most luminous prince, king chosen from among those who are strong in this way, may your magnificent crown desire to have your kingdom governed by such as these; because those who think fairly love true justice more than gain and rule and serve with much constancy and strength at the proper time.

I have alluded to a prophetic intention in the *Laberinto de Fortuna*, based on its involvement with the future as an instructive project that conveys moral and ethical purpose in the present. Behind the highly cultured *arte mayor* poetry, the poet blazons his prophetic theme. Bright’s history of the kingdom of God provides a point of comparison when he notes that the prophets “for all their eschatological hope, focused upon the present—to attack present sins, to plead for present repentance, to announce in presently coming events the judgment of God” (Bright 163). Juan de Mena is prophetic in the Old Testament sense because he looks for pragmatic results and change. Turek also calls our attention to strong prophetic elements in the *Laberinto*: “Juan de Mena se dispone a [. . .] censurar las

incesantes guerras civiles y los orígenes de éstas, expone los vicios de una sociedad desquiciada, dedicada a dividirse y consecuentemente a destruirse a sí misma” (101) (Juan de Mena is prepared to censure the incessant civil wars and their causes; he exposes the vices of a society come unhinged, dedicated to divisions and consequently to its own self destruction).

Thus we can see that the prophetic components of the poem highlight the “presence” of a desired future that both instructs the king and prods him to lead Spain away from the path of feudal civil strife—provided of course that he choose fair-minded officials (see CCXII cited above). Mena differs from the true apocalypticists who believed that the blessings of the Kingdom cannot be experienced in the present age, which has been abandoned to evil and suffering (Ladd, *The Presence* 95). Indeed, he envisions a Spain expedited by the king’s righteous action and not by apocalyptic catapulting.

With that said, however, Juan de Mena’s practical theology and poetic technique did not preclude his use of apocalyptic elements. He depicts the war against the Moors in semi-apocalyptic terms (an in-breaking act of God), perhaps even as a holy war: “la ira, la ira bolved en los moros” (CCLV.2038) (Wrath, turn wrath back against the Moors). Generally in Spanish medieval literature, the Moors are typified as pawns of hell or people of the Antichrist, a commonplace perpetuated by Mena. In Spain, these end-time images had been defined for centuries as a great struggle between good and evil embodied in the Reconquest, and must therefore convey apocalyptic associations,⁸ albeit as part of a larger conception of eschatological hope.

The *Laberinto* also suggests broad similarities to John’s Revelation: both offer a visionary journey (cf. Rev. 4.1) and both are prophetic in Ladd’s usage of the word (“the nature of prophecy is to let light shine from the future upon the present” [*Commentary* 14]). Ladd also points out what for us represents another area of commonality: that the Revelation goes beyond the prophetic perspective and carries an apocalyptic emphasis that is concerned “with the consummation of God’s redemptive purpose and the eschatological end of the age” (*Commentary* 14).⁹ In the *Laberinto* the prophetic, as understood here, is generally balanced with the apocalyptic; the future must be matched with sage present action.

Frye views this process in terms of typology, which is “a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future” (80). Thus while Mena’s ideal Spain is prefigured in the Biblical and Classical past, it simultaneously points toward or prefigures the kingdom of God. However,

typological movement may also be explained in reverse. Not only does the Spain that Mena envisages prefigure the future manifestation of the kingdom of God, but, more importantly for our study, it also is the result (effect) of that same future kingdom (as cause). The kingdom of God as paradigm shapes the unity of his poetic, eschatological, and political expectation.

From here we can see that the past, present, and future aspects of the wheel of Fortune reinforce and give shape to the structural movement of the *figurae* within the poem, since the wheel of the future is always becoming the wheel of the present, the only wheel in motion:

Bolviendo los ojos a do me mandava,
vi más adentro muy grandes tres ruedas:
las dos eran firmes, inmotas e quedas,
mas la de en medio boltar non çesava. (LVI.441-444)

Returning my gaze to where she [Providence] commanded me, looking further in I saw three very large wheels: two were firm, immobile and quiet, but the center one did not stop turning.

The constant “becoming” of the middle wheel carries the authoritative weight of correspondence to the present and coming kingdom of God. It shares, along with the wheels of the past and future, an essential unity since the three wheels represent the totality of time (LVIII). The future, like the past, is viewed as an integral part of the present and is not disassociated in a merely sequential linear mode. The third wheel, while depicted as representing, not a chimera or religious illusion, but a concrete age, is nevertheless paradoxically perceived, appropriated, and in a certain sense, experienced in the present. Its futurity is not intangible because it is already “[. . .] concebido en la divina mente” (LX.479) (conceived in the divine mind)—it is merely beyond mankind’s capability to grasp: “saberse por seso mortal non podiera” (LIX.473) (could not be known by mortal mind), and as in Augustine, it is in constant motion towards and through the present (*Confessions* 269).

The idea of a “substantial futurity” is found directly in Mena’s *simulacras* (roughly “images” (LIX.466 cited below)) of the future. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines *simulacrum* variously as “that which resembles something in appearance [. . .] a likeness [. . .] an image produced by reflection.” *Simulacrum* and its approximate synonym, *figura* ‘form, shape, image, or likeness’ were normative reference points for a poet well versed in Latin like Mena, in part due to the usage of figurative interpretations of the

Bible from the fourth century on (Auerbach 44). For Mena, then, the third wheel has real existence because it contains the forms (*figurae*) and images (*simulacra*) of those who “will be” (they already exist in the Divine mind):

Así que conosco tú que la tercera
 contiene las formas e las simulacras
 de muchas personas profanas e sacras,
 de gente que al mundo será venidera
 e por ende, cubierta de tal velo era
 su faz, aunque formas tú viesses de hombres,
 por que sus vidas aún nin sus nombres
 saberse por seso mortal non podiera. (LIX.465-472)

And so you know that the third one contains the forms and many profane and sacred images of future persons, and therefore they have a veil over their faces. Even if you saw them as human forms, you wouldn't be able to know their lives or their names.

The future is no more unreal than the past since they are both connected by figures. Auerbach's explanation of the chain of prefiguration (58) and Augustine's assurance that the future already has “being” (*Confessions* 268) provide clues to Mena's literary conceptualization of the future. Davis exemplifies this principle citing the poet's praise of the heroic past (and I would add, of a heroic future) as an attempt to arouse a heroic present (156). Once again we see the implied apocalyptic side of the poet as he integrates the figures (both historical and those yet to be) through the three wheels. Bearing in mind that the outside wheels of the past and future are stationary while the middle wheel of the present turns, Kermode's elucidation on the nature of the apocalyptic clarifies the relationship between the wheels:

Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain ‘in the midst.’ Its predictions, though figurative, *can* be taken literally, and as the future moves in on us we may expect it to conform to the figures. (8)

Gericke's terminology, “apocalypse now,” also captures the essence of how Juan de Mena treats his future discourse; that is, “its becoming in the present is the sought out impact” (53).

In this way the poet manipulates the present with imported eschatological imagery applied in the form of optimistic praises for Juan II. These are quickly followed by profuse admiration for Alvaro de Luna, who was the court favorite until his terminal fall from royal grace in 1453, and the subsequent loss of his head (*La crónica del Rey* 684a-691a). Don Alvaro nevertheless resembles a Christ figure in the *Laberinto* and in some of Mena's other poems—a sacrificial Christ-like *exemplum* that the king can learn from by association.¹⁰ Space does not permit a full discussion here, however, and the focus will remain on the king, who as protagonist must determine his own and the nation's destiny. To this end, Providence addresses herself openly to the king's situation. She assuages the narrator's apprehensions about the future with a stirring prophecy of Juan II's triumph that employs the Messianic, apocalyptic accolades evidenced in the following passages:

«Será rey de reyes, señor de señores,
sobrando, vençiendo los títulos todos . . . »
(CCLXXI.2161-2162).

He will be King of kings and Lord of lords, overcoming and defeating all titles.

Note the similarity in structure to the passage compared below, reproduced from memory as the reversal of phrases seems to indicate.

Ellos [the beast and his allies] pelearán contra el
Cordero, y el Cordero los vencerá, porque es el Señor
de los señores, y el Rey de los reyes; y los que están
con él son llamados, y elegidos, y fieles. ([*Spanish for
emphasis*] Rev. 17.14)

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall
overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings:
and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and
faithful.

The Messianic implications of the passage noted here extend even beyond the victorious “King of kings” association. The comparison of Juan II to Christ is echoed in Mena's poetry outside of the *Laberinto* as well:

*Rey virtud, Rey vençedor,
príncipe nunca vençido,
[.]
bien como Judas cualquiera*

que pensare lo contrario. (qtd. in De Nigris, “Nota para la tradición” 139)

Virtuous and conquering king, prince never defeated;
whoever might think differently is just like Judas.

In the *Laberinto* the king’s moment of highest glory, his *claro tiempo*, is the epoch pointed to by his predecessors; all who have come before will pale by comparison:

e tal e tan alto favor de loores
sus fechos ilustres al tu rey darán
qu’en su claro tiempo del todo serán
con él olvidados sus antecesores. (CCLXXI.2165-2168)

And they will give their brilliant deeds and such high favors
of praise to your king, such that in his illustrious time all
who came before will be forgotten.

This is surely an “artistic apocalyptic consummation”—the ultimate answer to those who doubt that the king (and his right-hand man, Alvaro de Luna) can bring the blessings of the future to the political labyrinth that is their contemporary Spain. Juan II is and will be an even greater king, but his kingdom can only approximate the realized kingdom of God and its living metaphor on earth, the Church, in proportion to his will to act in obedience.¹¹ As Aquinas taught: “The greatness of kingly virtue also appears in this, that he bears a special likeness to God, since he does in his kingdom what God does in the world” (*On Kingship* 41.72, n.). In the same spirit of obedience to the model, Juan II’s reign is subordinated to the heavenly kingship:

Sanad vos los reinos de aqueste reçelo,
jo príncipe bueno, o novel Augusto,
o lumbre d’España, o Rey mucho justo,
pues rey de la tierra vos fizo él del çielo!;
(CCXXX.1833-1836).

Heal the kingdoms of this uncertainty, Oh good prince, Oh
new Augustus, Oh flame of Spain, Oh most just king, since
the King of heaven made you king of earth.

The passage carries a number of Messianic allusions: Christ is known as healer, prince of peace, light of the world, one who brings justice, and as a king sent from heaven. The figure of Augustus is also invoked allegorically,

perhaps to remind the king of the goal of the Holy Roman Empire to unite the earthly and heavenly kingdoms under one banner (Figgis 85).

Mena, however, avoids reckless speculation and follows the guarded example of Jesus, who is cautious about spelling out a specific future even though his teachings contain apocalyptic elements: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24.36). Likewise, Providence is reluctant to pry into the details of the future:

e más abaxando su boz sabidora,
representava ya, como callando,
los tiempos futuros de cómo e de cuándo
será vuestra mano jamás vençedora. (CCXCII.2333-2336)

And lowering her wise voice and becoming quiet, she
already was demonstrating how and when your hand will
always be victorious in future times.

The final section of the poem ties off the eschatological implications found in the *Laberinto*. Lida de Malkiel recognizes a classical *topos* in stanzas CCLXVIII-CCLXIX (“Yo, que las señas vi del claro día” [CCLXIX.2145] [I who saw the signs of the illustrious day]); an “*amanecer mitológico*” (mythological dawn) is introduced, which is an “expresión mítica de un hecho natural” (*La tradición clásica en España* 133) (mythical expression of a natural event). She notes that the mythological dawn goes back to Homer (122), and was later Christianized in Prudentius’s poetry (*La tradición clásica* 125). It is conceivable that the *topos* can be interpreted allegorically in relationship to the “vision of the future” that is presented in stanzas CCLXVIII-CCXCVII and complements our notion of the kingdom of God as guiding metaphor.

Stanza CCXCIII of this section has the poet-narrator sounding very much like one of the star-gazing apostles before the assumption of Jesus:

Yo que quisiera ser certificado
d’estas andanças y cómo serían,
e quando los tienpos se nos mudarían
e cuándo veríamos el reino pagado,
iten quisiera ser más informado
de toda la rueda que dixе futura,
e de los fechos que son de ventura
o que se rigen por curso fadado. (2337-2344)

I wanted to be sure of these happenings and when they would be, and when the times would change for us, and when we would see the kingdom at peace; likewise, I desired to be better informed all about the wheel I called future, and concerning the fortunate events or those that are ruled by the course of fate.

Compare Acts 1.6: “When they [the Apostles] were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replies that “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1.7). Providence responds to the poet in much the same way and her image diffuses, leaving him the work at hand but without a specific diagram for the future. Similarly, Jesus is taken up in a cloud, which “received him out of their sight” (Acts 1.9). Perhaps it is not pressing the analogy too far to offer that Providence also promises power for the king (“será vuestra mano jamás vencedora” [CCXCII.2336] [your hand will always be victorious]) much as Jesus promises the coming power of the Holy Spirit to the anxious apostles who are left standing with their inquisitiveness unsatisfied.

The apostolic concern for the coming kingdom of God is also echoed in the following stanza: “e quando veríamos el reino pagado” (CCXCIII.2340) (and when we would see the kingdom pacified). Vasvari Fainberg offers “*tranquilo*” (tranquil), and “*pacífico*” (peaceful), as synonyms for *pagado* (“*apacado*” in her edition) (217). Kerkhof interprets the term as “*pacificado* (pacified,) and “*calmado*” (calm) (252). The notion of a coming peaceful, just dominion borrows heavily from the legendary golden age and from the kingdom of God and its corollary, an earthly millennial reign. The hope of such a kingdom presented to Mena’s sovereign implies a simile: the just, peaceful, future reign of Juan II will be like the kingdom of God—if indeed not indistinguishable from it. He is thus helping to do the work of God—creating the *Kingdom*—even as he seeks the unity of an earthly political kingdom. The details of the future are hidden: “fuyeron las ruedas e cuerpos humanos, / e fueron las causas a mí latitantes” (CCXCV.2359-2360) (The wheels and the human forms vanished, and for me were hidden causes), but the examples represented on the wheels are enough.

The poet then urges the king to do whatever is necessary to make the prophecies happen (notice the final position of “*perfetás*” below, meaning “*cumplidas*, [complete,] and *acabadas*” [finished] [Santibáñez Escobar 88]; from the Latin *perficere* [to bring about, cause, bring to completion]):

Pues si los dichos de grandes profetas
 e los que demuestran las {veras} señales,
 e las entrañas de los animales,
 e todo misterio sutil de planetas,
 e vaticinio de artes secretas
 nos profetizan triunfos de vos,
 fazed verdaderas, señor rey, por Dios,
 las profecías que non son perfetas. (CCXCVI.2361-2368)

If then the sayings of the great prophets, and those that show true signs, and animal entrails, and all of the subtle mysteries of the planets, and the predictions of secret arts all prophesy your triumph, then by God Lord King, make the imperfect prophecies come to pass.

These prophecies will remain incomplete without the king's active participation. As on other occasions, Mena does not deny the pagan antecedents; he merely supercedes them by allegorizing the pagan past. The "por Dios" in the penultimate line should not be taken as a conversational expression, but rather literally—reliance on God's power in addition to his own resolution is what will make the prophecies and even the pagan predictions come to completion—right now they are only unfinished allegories. In the mandate to Juan II in the following verse, "Fazed verdadera la grand Providencia" (CCXCVII.2369) (Make the great Providence true [i.e., don't make a liar out of her]), the poet coyly emphasizes the point that even Providential guidance must be mixed with a good portion of human resolve.

However, in summary, there is more than pragmatics at work; his confidence in the future based on the known ending, in this case the "last things" of the Christian Bible, is also noteworthy. As expressed by Ricoeur, "the recollection of the story governed as a whole by its way of ending" (154), is clearly a surer bet for an orthodox Christian poet than random movement into an unknown future. Expressed differently by Quint: "epic linearity [. . .] becomes a teleology: *all events are led, or dictated, by an end that is their cause*. The parade of history reaches a transhistorical or eschatological finish line" ([italics mine] 33). Similarly, on the fictional level we experience a kind of poetic-political eschatology in the *Laberinto*. Beltrán concludes that: "When we see Juan II in the wheel of the present we see him there not for whatever he may become, but for what he is . . . Within the fictional level the king is a finished product" (330).

When the vision fades (CCXCIV), the king is positioned to take the

first installment on his future glory and strength in an already-not yet paradox typical of eschatological thought in Christianity. To gratify Providence, he must proceed with the Reconquest: “¡Oh virtuosa, magnífica guerra!” (CLII.1209) (Oh virtuous, magnificent war!). He will then move toward his own mini-eschatological victory over the Moors, since it has, in fact, been (pre)ordained “[. . .] por mando divino” (CCXCVII.2371) (by divine command). Mena then puts on the final touch to what has earlier been confirmed: “por que la vuestra real excellencia / aya de moros puxante victoria” (CCXCVII.2373-2376) (in order that your royal Excellency have decisive victory over the Moors). The fame referred to in stanza CLII.1212, “por gloria en los çielos y fama en la tierra” (for glory in the heavens and fame on earth), is closely related to the future proposed by the Cordovan poet: glory and fame take on a timelessness of their own in the “magnífica guerra.” It is assumed that the Reconquest, as opposed to political fratricide, will bring the kingdom of God to Spain and symbolically to the rest of the world.

Mena both advocates a politically reconciled Spain and simultaneously visualizes it as completed—the realized *simulacra* of the third wheel. Though his work does not explicitly demonstrate a sophisticated eschatological system, the Spanish bard nevertheless appears to have absorbed and recast the background theology in his own terms. In this way his masterpiece creates an interface between the theological expectation of God’s kingdom on the one hand, and a budding pre-national kingdom anticipation on the other, enhancing the poem’s accessibility to its Christian audience—Juan II and beyond.

Notes

¹ All quotes are from Kerkhof’s edition of the *Laberinto de Fortuna*. The prose translations from Spanish to English are mine for the *Laberinto* and other Spanish sources.

² Nepaulsingh sees this as a deceptive prophecy of Fortune (119).

³ For further reading on the dual nature of Fortune in the Middle Ages, see Patch, Green, and Salinas in the Works Cited as a point of departure.

⁴ In theological terms, the central meaning of the kingdom of God is controlled by the Greek word *basileia*, meaning reign or rule rather than the concrete idea of realm. For Ladd, “[. . .]it becomes possible to understand how the Kingdom of God can be present and future, inward and outward, spiritual and apocalyptic” (*The Presence* 42).

⁵ Lapesa has demonstrated that the three wheels are not, after all, at the mercy of

Fortune, but are structurally controlled, “para exhibir ejemplaridades merecedoras de imitación o repulsa” (117) (In order to display examples worthy of imitation or rejection), making it possible to use the terminology “wheels of Providence” interchangeably with “wheels of Fortune.”

⁶ Non-specialists may need to be reminded that *jamás* has the value of “siempre” (always) in Mena’s poetic language.

⁷ Strangely, their importance has been overlooked by such as Ramos Suárez, who ventures: “No nos parece casual . . . que los santos se hallen ausentes en la composición del gran poema alegórico” (606) (It does not seem accidental that the Saints are found missing from this great allegorical composition).

⁸ See Nepaulsingh for a wider treatment of the apocalyptic theme in the *Laberinto* and other works of the Spanish Middle Ages, and cf. Gericke for a differing perspective.

⁹ See Ladd’s *Commentary* for a fuller range of interpretive positions on St. John’s *Apocalypse*. Ladd combines the preterist and the futurist methods (10-14).

¹⁰ The poet characterizes Don Alvaro as a virtuous and just conquering warrior: “«Este cavalga sobre la Fortuna / y doma su cuello con ásperas riendas” (CCXXXV.1873-1874 [cf. Rev. 19.11]).

¹¹ Bright observes the conditional nature of covenant promises: “The covenant is not mechanical and in the nature of things; it is a bilateral, moral agreement and can be voided” (65).

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